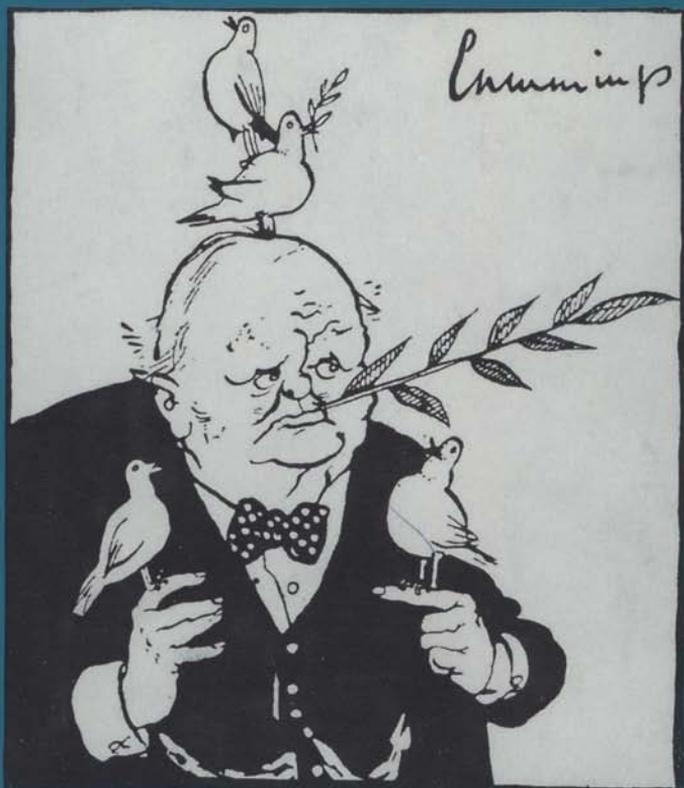


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PEACEMAKER



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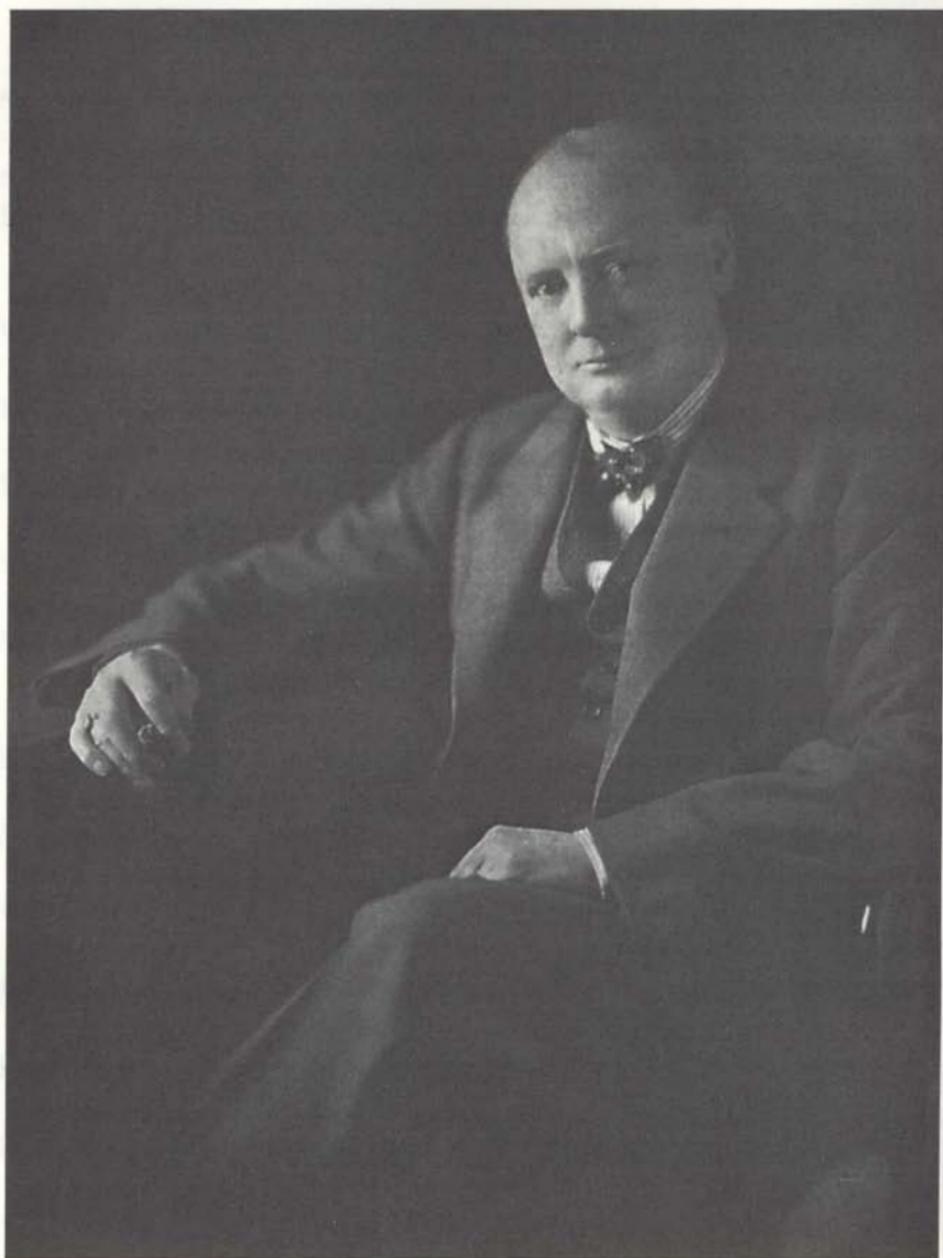
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WOODROW WILSON CENTER PRESS

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CAMBRIDGE
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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

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First published 1997

Printed in the United States of America

Typeset in Sabon

*A catalog record for this book is available from
the British Library*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Churchill as peacemaker / edited by James W. Muller.

p. cm. — (Woodrow Wilson Center series)

Papers of the first Nation's Capital Churchill Symposium, held at
the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Wash., D.C.,
on Oct. 28 and 29, 1994.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-521-58314-4 (hardback)

1. Churchill, Winston, 1874-1965—Contributions in peace
—Congresses. 2. Peace movements—Great Britain—History
—Congresses. I. Muller, James W., 1953- . II. Nation's Capital
Churchill Symposium (1st : 1994 : Washington, D.C.) III. Series.

DA566.9.C5C4763 1997

941.084'092—dc21 97-3851

ISBN 0-521-58314-4 hardback

Palestine and Zionism, 1904–1922

DOUGLAS J. FEITH

In the Great War's transformation of the Near East, Britain's pro-Zionist policy combined strategy and idealism, advancement of Britain's imperial interests, and fulfillment of a religious and romantic vision to restore a great and despised ancient people to the decayed land of their former glory. Local Arabs fought the policy, as did officials in Britain's Palestine administration, who denounced it as strategically misguided, morally indefensible, extravagantly costly, and impossible to implement. In the war's aftermath, Arab resistance to Zionism was a cause and an effect of the opposition that British officials in the Palestine administration directed against their own government's policy.

As colonial secretary in 1921 and 1922, Winston Churchill took responsibility for a series of fateful decisions on Zionism and Palestine. He created a record that defies simple categorization as pro-Zionist or anti-Zionist. On these issues, his tenure at the colonial office was marked not by the kind of pugnacity and doggedness that are commonly described as "Churchillian" traits, but rather by irresolution.

The Jews and the Zionist cause had engaged Churchill's imagination and sympathy since his early days in Parliament. He did not serve in the war cabinet that promulgated the Balfour Declaration, but he defended the document as a matter of sound policy and solemn obligation and was instrumental in defeating the postwar parliamentary effort to undo it. Yet, when his subordinates promoted measures that diluted the declaration's promise, he continually acquiesced. He banned Jewish settlement in three-quarters of mandate Palestine and approved the principle of restricting Jewish immigration into Palestine. Although he criticized the Palestine administration's efforts to mollify the local Arabs as more likely to encourage than to reduce anti-Jewish violence, he allowed policy on Palestine—

its formulation as well as its implementation—to remain largely within the administration’s control. He refused to replace administration officials who were “publicly and confessedly opposed” to the Balfour Declaration.

Churchill’s mixed record on Palestine in this period reflected the difficulties of his bureaucratic setting. He could not single-handedly promulgate policy, and if he did, he could not necessarily make it stick. His maneuver was constrained. The prime minister was pro-Zionist; the military leadership was ardently on the other side; the Middle East department of the colonial office was split; the Palestine administration—cagey, but distinctly anti-Zionist—had effectively captured its chief, Sir Herbert Samuel, who could use his Jewish and pro-Zionist credentials to discredit the Zionist leadership as “extremist.” Churchill might have developed more options for himself if he had given deeper thought to the nature of Arab opposition to Zionism. But he assumed without skeptical analysis that economic blandishments would in time moderate the Arab stand. In any event, the amount of intellectual effort and bureaucratic exertion that would have been required to develop an alternative policy of his own and to attempt to impose it on the government and the Palestine administration was more than Churchill was willing to expend, especially as Palestine occupied but a small, relatively dim zone of his broad, bright, and busy mind.

THE JEWISH QUESTION

Victorian England—the time, place, and frame of mind that produced Winston Churchill—was fascinated with the Jewish question. Throughout the nineteenth century, what to do about the Jews was what is nowadays called an international human rights problem, and one of compelling dimensions. In the “East”—that is, mainly Rumania and the Russian Empire—Jews were officially oppressed, physically abused, and periodically murdered in what were by nineteenth-century standards large numbers. In the West, limitations imposed by law and society constrained Jews in most spheres of life. Though not free of anti-Jewish laws and practices, Britain was relatively tolerant.¹

¹ There even developed a tradition of outspoken sympathy for the Jews among British literary and political figures. Byron’s *Hebrew Melodies* (1815) included, for example, “The Wild Gazelle,” in which the Jewish persona talks of “Judah’s hills”:

More blest each palm that shades those plains
Than Israel’s scattered race;
For, taking root, it there remains

In the last quarter of the century, intensified violence against Eastern Jews impelled millions of refugees westward, aggravating the Jewish problem in the West. More than 2 million Jews moved out of Russia alone in the period between the Russian pogroms of 1881–2, which devastated the Jewish Pale of Settlement, and the beginning of the Great War. In the mid-1890s, the Dreyfus affair spawned large-scale antisemitic street demonstrations in France and French Algeria, leading to rampages against Jewish-owned property and the beating and occasional random killing of Jews.

These attacks, particularly those in Paris, inspired the Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl to write his pamphlet *The Jewish State* (1896), which advocated a guaranteed refuge for persecuted Jews. Herzl in 1897 organized the first World Zionist Congress, which declared: “The aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law.”²

In solitary grace:
It cannot quit its place of birth,
It will not live in other earth.
But we must wander witheringly
In other lands to die;
And where our fathers' ashes be,
Our own may never lie:
Our temple hath not left a stone,
And Mockery sits on Salem's throne.

George Eliot gave passionate expression to her Christian Zionism in the 1876 novel *Daniel Deronda*, in which one of the Jewish characters declares, “There is store of wisdom among us to found a new Jewish polity. . . . Then our race shall have an organic centre . . . ; the outraged Jew shall have a defence in the court of nations, as the outraged Englishman or American. And the world will gain as Israel gains. For there will be a community in the van of the East which carries the culture and the sympathies of every great nation in its bosom. . . .

“Let the reason of Israel disclose itself in a great outward deed, and let there be another great migration, another choosing of Israel to be a nationality whose members may still stretch to the ends of the earth, even as the sons of England and Germany, whom enterprise carries afar, but who still have a national hearth and a tribunal of national opinion. . . . Who says that the history and literature of our race are dead? Are they not as living as the history and literature of Greece and Rome, which have inspired revolutions, enkindled the thought of Europe, and made the unrighteous powers tremble? These were an inheritance dug from the tomb. Ours is an inheritance that has never ceased to quiver in millions of human frames.” George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers, 1888), 492–3, 495–6 (bk. VI, ch. 42). Echoes of Eliot are distinctly detectable more than three decades later in the comments on Zionism of its most important Gentile sympathizers, including Balfour, Lloyd George, and Churchill.

² John Norton Moore, ed., *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), vol. 3, 4 (hereafter *Documents*). The Congress chose the term “home” rather than “state,” despite the title of Herzl’s historic pamphlet, hoping Ottoman officials would not view Zionist settlement as a threat to Turkish sovereignty in Palestine. See Christopher Sykes, *Two Studies in Virtue* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 160 n. 1.

Refugees, mainly from Russia, having nearly tripled the population of Jews in Britain since 1880, the government of Prime Minister Arthur Balfour proposed in 1904 the first legislative initiative in British history to restrict immigration. Known as the Aliens Bill, its acknowledged purpose was to stem the influx of East European Jews.³ Most Jews opposed the legislation. Various outspoken antisemites endorsed it. A young member of Parliament at the time, Churchill assumed a leading role against the bill, stressing Britain's humanitarian tradition of welcoming refugees. For this, he received praise from Jewish political constituents. Other friends of the Jews, however, most prominently Balfour himself, supported the bill. They spoke sympathetically of Jewish suffering but contended that various economic and social factors limited Britain's capacity to absorb foreign refugees. Jews, moreover, posed special problems, for they prided themselves in maintaining their national distinctiveness—for example, by discouraging intermarriage.

In explaining—and demonstrating—that even a hospitable nation like Britain must at times limit its hospitality to aliens, Balfour vindicated Zionist warnings of the stateless Jew's vulnerability. His government grasped that this analysis meshed with that of Zionist theorists who had asked, "Where is the refugee to whom a refuge may not be refused?"⁴ Accordingly, it was Balfour's colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, who first engaged Herzl in negotiations to establish a haven for Jews somewhere in Britain's colonial possessions, so long as the land of Israel remained under Ottoman control.⁵

³ Balfour spoke in Parliament of "the undoubted evils that had fallen upon the country from an immigration which was largely Jewish." See Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), 79. From 1880 to 1905, the Jewish population of Britain rose approximately from 60,000 to 160,000. Contrary to predictions at the time, the Aliens Bill, as finally adopted in 1905, did not severely curtail Jewish immigration. By 1914, the Jewish population in Britain grew to approximately 300,000. *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴ Leo Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation: An Appeal to His People by a Russian Jew* (1882), reproduced in Arthur Herzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 187.

⁵ On October 22, 1902, in his first meeting with Chamberlain, Herzl discussed Zionist plans for settlement of El Arish in the Sinai Peninsula: "[Chamberlain] said, 'In Egypt, you know, we should have the same difficulties with the native inhabitants [as in Cyprus].'"

"'No,' said I, 'we will not go to Egypt. We have been there.'"

"He laughed again, still bent deep over the [atlas]. For the first time he got the full drift of what I wanted: an assemblage center for the Jewish people in the neighborhood of Palestine. In El Arish and Sinai, there is empty land. England can give us that. In return she would gain an increase of her power and the gratitude of ten million Jews. All these factors . . . impressed him. . . . The most extraordinary thing was his ignorance of British possessions . . . under his supervision. It was like a big second-hand store whose proprietor didn't know exactly where a particular article might be." Marvin Lowenthal, ed., *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl* (New York: Dial Press, 1956), 376–7.

Even after Herzl died (1904) and Balfour resigned the premiership (1905), these negotiations continued for a time. In 1906, while serving as under secretary of state for the colonies, Churchill commented on them in a reply to an inquiring constituent:

I recognise the supreme attraction to a scattered & persecuted people of a safe & settled home under the flag of tolerance & freedom. . . . There should be room within the world-wide limits of the British Empire, & within the generous scope of Liberal institutions for the self-development & peculiar growth of many races.⁶

Chaim Weizmann, a Russian Jew active in the Zionist Organization, immigrated to Manchester in 1904 and obtained interviews with leading British political figures, including Balfour and Churchill.⁷ His principal message was that Palestine alone could serve as the Jewish people's true home and refuge. He persuaded Balfour on this point at their first meeting in 1905 when he said, "Mr. Balfour, supposing I were to offer you Paris instead of London, would you take it?" Balfour answered, "But Dr. Weizmann, we have London." "That is true," Weizmann countered, "[b]ut we had Jerusalem when London was a marsh." When Weizmann then added, "I believe I speak the mind of millions of Jews whom you will never see and who cannot speak for themselves," Balfour commented: "If that is so, you will one day be a force." As Weizmann was preparing to depart, Balfour remarked: "It is curious. The Jews I meet are quite different." Weizmann answered: "Mr. Balfour, you meet the wrong Jews."⁸

In 1908, still under secretary for the colonies, Churchill prepared greetings for a conference of the English Zionist Federation. Churchill considered offering an enthusiastic endorsement not only of a Jewish refuge, but specifically of a Jewish state in Palestine. The precise language was recommended by Dr. Moses Gaster, the head of England's Sephardic community and a Zionist colleague of Weizmann:

Jerusalem must be the only ultimate goal. *When* it will be achieved it is vain to prophesy: but that it *will* some day be achieved is one of the few certainties of the

⁶ WSC II C 495-6.

⁷ See Oskar K. Rabinowicz, *Winston Churchill on Jewish Problems* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 36.

⁸ Chaim Weizmann, *Illustrated Edition of Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann* (Great Britain: Harper and Brothers for East and West Library, c. 1949), 144. The prime minister confirmed to his niece and biographer Weizmann's account of the meeting and the decisive effect it had on his appreciation of Zionism. Blanche Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour, First Earl of Balfour, K. G., O. M., F. R. S., Etc., 1848-1906*, 2 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1937), vol. 1, 324-6.

future. And the establishment of a strong, free Jewish state astride of the bridge between Europe and Africa, flanking the land roads to the East, would not be only an immense advantage to the British Empire, but a notable step towards the harmonious disposition of the world among its peoples.⁹

Churchill, however, dropped this paragraph from the final draft. His secretary apologized to Rabbi Gaster: “To his great disappointment and regret, he [Churchill] finds that he must postpone the expression of the opinions set out in [this paragraph] . . . until he returns to a position of greater freedom and less responsibility.”¹⁰

IMPERIAL CALCULATIONS

Whatever their differences on specific questions of policy, upholders of the British Empire like Balfour and Churchill shared a general outlook on Britain’s role as a liberal imperial power in world affairs. Their conviction was that a great power had responsibilities in the world, a high calling to rule less advanced peoples and to assist them to achieve progress. According to this view, a great power extended civilization, improving the government and the material well-being of lands that the natives had failed to develop. Treasuring its credibility, it made commitments cautiously and appreciated the price to be paid for not keeping them. A great power’s moral confidence and self-respect—the conviction that it acted rightfully, fairly, and from virtuous motives—were chief elements of its national power. To be sure, not everyone in Britain embraced this outlook and not everyone who did applied it consistently. But this Kiplingesque sense of imperial duty, honor, and opportunity was a potent factor in British foreign policy debates in the period.

In the Victorian era, as in all previous eras, statesmen generally assumed the inevitability of future war. It was not common, as it is today, to think of diplomacy as a means to ensure perpetual peace or to create a permanently stable balance of military power. Diplomacy’s purpose was to maneuver one’s country into a good position for the next war. Wars were understood to have consequences; losers lost, without a right of return to the *status quo ante*, and victors gained, without apology. This reflected the immutable reality of power politics. And, when the defeated parties

⁹ Martin Gilbert, *Exile and Return: The Struggle for a Jewish Homeland* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1978), 69, emphasis in original.

¹⁰ Michael J. Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews* (London: Frank Cass, 1985), 34.

were those who provoked the war in the first place, it also served the cause of justice. Pieties along the lines of “nothing ever gets resolved by force” and “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” had little resonance in the thinking of men of affairs in that period. (It is not that political leaders then were actually less pious or less moral in action than those in our own era. Rather, as respectable Victorians avoided blunt talk about sex, respectable persons today avoid blunt talk about war.)

WARTIME PLEDGES TO THE ARABS

Soon after the Great War got under way, the western front deteriorated into an exasperating stalemate. Britain therefore resolved to outflank Germany by opening a front against the Ottoman Empire. The Gallipoli campaign of 1915 was launched to clear a path for a head-on attack against Constantinople. Presided over by Winston Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, that nine-month campaign failed at high cost. Britain then sought to outflank the flank. It resolved to hit the Ottomans not in their empire’s capital but in their Asiatic provinces: the Hejaz (the western coastal region of the Arabian peninsula containing the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina), Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia (today’s Iraq).

British officials thought they could engineer an Arab uprising throughout the Near East. Britain’s Egypt administration, which Field Marshal Lord Kitchener had headed immediately before moving to London to take over the war office in August 1914, reported that Arab nationalist officers in the Ottoman army were numerous and ready to rise against the Turks as soon as Britain endorsed Arab independence and provided financial and military assistance. The prime candidate to lead the revolt was Sherif Hussein ibn Ali, the head of the Hashemite clan, who as amir of Mecca was the principal figure in the Hejaz and was thought to command deference from the other Arabian notables. In the oft-dissected correspondence between Hussein and Henry McMahon, Britain’s high commissioner in Egypt, the Hashemites were offered in return for their help sweeping but always vaguely formulated promises of British support for an independent Arab kingdom from Syria to the Indian Ocean.

The strategy failed to achieve its purpose, for the major premises were incorrect. There was no broad-based Arab nationalist movement in Ottoman army ranks. Regarding the popularity of the Arab nationalist cause, Britain’s experts in Cairo were longer on preconceptions than actual

evidence. Moreover, Arabia's tribal chiefs were not willing to subordinate themselves to Hussein. The guerrilla exploits of T. E. Lawrence ("of Arabia") and Hussein's sons, Abdullah and Feisal, represented a small return on Britain's large wartime material and political investment in the Hashemites.¹¹ The Hejaz forces enjoyed a few successes, but Hussein was never able to deliver more than a few thousand men at any one time. Lawrence wrote after the war: "I have never seen more than 11,000 of them together, and more often we had only a few hundreds."¹² No popular uprising of Arabs against Turks ever occurred in Palestine, Syria, or Mesopotamia; the Arabs there, with few exceptions, fought loyally for their fellow Muslim Ottomans. Not a single Arab unit defected from the Ottoman army.

Having paid for it richly—financially and politically—cabinet-level British leaders tended to speak approvingly of the Hashemites' wartime cooperation. But the Arab contribution overall was far greater on the side of the Turks than of the Allies.

THE ZIONISTS MAKE THEMSELVES USEFUL

Zionist contributions to Britain's war effort took various forms—technology, field intelligence, combat manpower, and political propaganda. Capitalizing on their own farsighted cultivation of political contacts and uncanny good fortune, the Zionists were able to win for these contributions high visibility and warm gratitude at the upper rungs of His Majesty's government. Until the war, Herbert Samuel had had no association with the Zionist movement. As the first practicing Jew to sit in a British cabinet, however, he said he felt "a special obligation" to study Zionism and

¹¹ Owing to Lawrence's gift for self-promotion, the Arab revolt had far more popular fame than military consequence. Hussein sent his first letter to McMahon in July 1915 and the latter's positive response reflected eagerness for Arab forces to relieve Turkish pressure on the British forces at Gallipoli. Hussein delayed action against the Turks, however, until June 1916, months after the British (in January 1916) were forced to abandon Gallipoli.

Though he often overstated the Arab revolt's accomplishments, Lawrence candidly related the assessment of General Edmund Allenby, commander of the Egyptian expeditionary force: "[Allenby in late 1917] asked what our railway efforts meant; or rather if they meant anything beyond the melo-dramatic advertisement they gave Feisal's cause." T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1936), 380. Writing of Allenby's views as of the final weeks of the war: "The truth was, he cared nothing for our fighting power, and did not reckon us part of his tactical strength." *Ibid.*, 539.

¹² Jeremy Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia: The Authorized Biography of T. E. Lawrence* (New York: Atheneum, 1990), 1061 n. 10.

Palestine.¹³ In the war's early months, in conversations and by memoranda, he advocated to his cabinet colleagues British support for creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. David Lloyd George, then chancellor of the Exchequer, responded favorably. Sir Edward Grey, the foreign minister, voiced sympathy for Zionism, but, characteristically sensitive to French concerns, noted that France would want a voice in Palestine's future and, in any event, Britain should be wary of the responsibilities of establishing a new protectorate.¹⁴ The prime minister, Henry Herbert Asquith, on the other hand, dismissed Samuel's proposal outright, invoking Lord Kitchener, the war secretary, to belittle Palestine's importance:

Kitchener, who "surveyed" Palestine when he was a young Engineer, has a very poor opinion of the place, wh[ich] even Samuel admits to be "not larger than Wales, much of it barren mountains, & part of it waterless" &c, what is more to the point, without a single decent harbour. So he (K[it]chener) is all for Alexandretta, and leaving the Jews & the Holy Places to look after themselves.¹⁵

Meanwhile, Zionists strove to render themselves valuable to Britain's war effort, making friends along the way whose goodwill and gratitude would in time become Zionism's most effective political asset. In 1915, both Winston Churchill, as first lord of the Admiralty, and Lloyd George, as minister of munitions, personally met with Weizmann, who was a prominent research chemist as well as a Zionist activist, to exhort him to remedy the acetone shortage that was crimping Britain's munitions production.¹⁶ Weizmann did it. In his memoirs, Lloyd George called the Balfour Declaration the quid pro quo plain and simple for Weizmann's success in the laboratory.¹⁷ Though extravagantly inaccurate, the remark reflects the deep impression Weizmann's breakthrough made on Lloyd George, Churchill, and others.

Personnel is policy. In 1916, Kitchener died and Lloyd George later

¹³ Stein, *Balfour Declaration*, 107.

¹⁴ See Elie Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 55-6.

¹⁵ H. H. Asquith, *Letters to Venetia Stanley*, Stanley Michael and Eleanor Brock, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 477-8. This letter, dated March 13, 1915, was sarcastic about Samuel and Jews in general: "H[erbert] Samuel had written an almost dithyrambic memorandum urging that in the carving up of the Turks' Asiatic dominions, we should take Palestine, into which the scattered Jews [could] in time swarm back from all the quarters of the globe, and in due course obtain Home Rule. (What an attractive community!)"

¹⁶ See Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, 222.

¹⁷ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, 6 vols. (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934), vol. 2, 586.

replaced Asquith as prime minister. Balfour took Grey's place at the foreign office. Britain's war strategy and official attitude toward the Near East changed radically. The new government assigned high priority to an Eastern strategy, and, in particular, to the liberation of Palestine. The military, however, generally stuck with Kitchener's view. With little interest in Palestine and even less in the Jews, it remained reluctant to invest men and materiel in the Near East, though it hoped to cultivate the Arabs as potential allies.

The Zionist cause appealed to Lloyd George both as a device and as an end in itself. He wanted to discard the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement by which France and Britain had fixed postwar spheres of influence for themselves in Turkey's Asiatic provinces.¹⁸ Under Sykes-Picot, most of the Holy Land was to be internationalized. Britain could more easily assert exclusive control, however, if it conquered the land for the declared purpose of restoring it to the Jews. Moreover, that purpose—allowing downtrodden Jews to realize their millennial yearning to revive Zion—engaged Lloyd George's sense of historic justice and gratified his romantic religious and nationalist sensibilities. Lloyd George had a passion for the Holy Land and enthusiasm for Zionism. He had received intense instruction in the Bible as a child and saw parallels between his own beloved people, the Welsh, and the Jewish people, both with tiny homelands. Lord Curzon once wrote to Balfour that Lloyd George "clings to Palestine for its sentimental and traditional value, and talks about Jerusalem with almost the same enthusiasm as about his native hills."¹⁹

Soon after Lloyd George formed his war cabinet, Sir Mark Sykes of the cabinet secretariat engaged Britain's Zionist leaders in talks to clarify Zionism's aims and the government's attitude toward them. These talks had a lively backdrop. In March 1917, Russian revolutionaries, with Jews prominent in the front ranks, overthrew the tsar. British officials feared Russia's abandoning the Allied camp. In April, the United States entered the war, after long delay and with distinctly mixed emotions. Britain had alienated the sympathies of American Jews by allying with the antisemitic regime of the tsar. Might not a pro-Zionist declaration help Britain win favor with influential Jews in Russia and America?

¹⁸ Lloyd George described the Anglo-French agreement as "a fatuous arrangement, judged from any and every point of view." Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. 4, 1825–6.

¹⁹ Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 131. When Herzl and Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain negotiated the abortive plan for a Jewish refuge in British East Africa, Lloyd George, then a junior member of Parliament, was retained by Herzl's representative as the project's attorney. Stein, *Balfour Declaration*, 28.

Also in April, the British government approved the invasion of Palestine.²⁰ Lloyd George bade adieu to General Edmund Allenby, the newly appointed commander for the Palestine campaign, with the exhortation: "Jerusalem before Christmas."²¹ The war plans relied heavily on information and recommendations from a Palestinian Jewish scientist named Aharon Aaronsohn and his espionage network, called NILI (a Hebrew acronym for the biblical passage "the strength of Israel will not deceive"), which Palestinian Jews on their own initiative had created to feed British intelligence. Aaronsohn maintained liaison with Captain William Ormsby-Gore and Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, both of whom became his grateful admirers. In 1917, Ormsby-Gore was transferred to London to serve with Sykes as assistant secretary within the intimate and influential war cabinet secretariat just as the issue of an official pro-Zionist declaration was under consideration.²² Largely under Aaronsohn's influence, Meinertzhagen became a fervent pro-Zionist who, after the war, played a unique role as a wholehearted champion of Zionism in Allenby's Cairo headquarters and then in Churchill's colonial office.²³

In the summer of 1917, after protracted debate, the British war office consented to create a Jewish legion to fight for the liberation of Palestine. This too was a Zionist initiative, conceived and realized by Vladimir

²⁰ "[T]he War Cabinet . . . realised the moral and political advantages to be expected from an advance on this front, and particularly from the occupation of Jerusalem." Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. 4, 1829. Regarding the conquest of Jerusalem, the prime minister wrote, "The achievement was of immense importance, alike on military and on sentimental grounds. . . . Our 600,000 casualties in the fiascos on the Western Front had so depleted our resources in men that we could no longer exploit victory on any front, but the moral effect of the victory was tremendously important. It cheered our own people at a critical time, when defeatist elements were making their influence felt among us. It greatly encouraged our American Allies. And among that great international fraternity, the Jewish race, it was an earnest of the fulfillment of the Balfour Declaration." *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 1838-9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1835.

²² Others in the Aaronsohn family also were active in NILI. In October 1917, Aharon's sister Sarah, who led the group in his absence, was captured and committed suicide while in custody, following several days of torture. Ormsby-Gore reported to the foreign office on the Aaronsohns' contributions, noting that they "were admittedly the most valuable nucleus of our intelligence in Palestine during the war." He concluded: "In my opinion nothing we can do for the Aaronsohn family will repay the work they have done and what they have suffered for us." See Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 102-3.

²³ "My first introduction to Zionism was in 1917 when I met the Aaronsohn family and visited the Zionist colonies of South Palestine." Colonel R. Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary: 1917-1956* (London: The Cresset Press, 1959), 50. Because of his name and his pro-Zionist views, Meinertzhagen was often mistakenly labeled a Jew. See also Stein, *Balfour Declaration*, 294 n. 37.

Jabotinsky, a journalist and Zionist leader from Odessa.²⁴ The command of the Egyptian expeditionary force responsible for the Palestine campaign did not want a “fancy” Jewish unit and affirmatively impeded recruitment.²⁵ But in London important officials respected Jabotinsky’s intrepidity and appreciated the Zionists’ desire to soldier in the Allied cause. Among Jabotinsky’s key allies in bringing the Jewish legion into being was Leopold Amery, the third of the war cabinet assistant secretaries, who soon thereafter became a prime author of the Balfour Declaration.²⁶

Hence, among the officials who decided whether and how the British government should publicly announce sympathy with Zionism, a remarkable number had worked hand in hand with gifted Zionists who contributed eagerly to Britain’s cause. A number—such as Lloyd George, Balfour, and Sykes²⁷—were also moved by what they intensely believed, for religious or humanitarian reasons, was the moral rightness of the Zionist prescription for the Jewish problem. Such men were thus primed to accept other—pragmatic—arguments for a pro-Zionist declaration. In autumn 1917, when the war cabinet finally decided the issue, the

²⁴ In 1915 in Egypt, Jabotinsky broached the Jewish legion proposal to a minor British official in Cairo named Ronald Graham. British military authorities reacted coolly, but agreed to form the volunteers into a transport unit for use outside Palestine. This became the Zion Mule Corps, which won distinction at Gallipoli but was soon after disbanded. General Ian Hamilton, commander of the Gallipoli expeditionary force, praised the courage of the Zion Mule Corps: Vladimir Jabotinsky, *The Story of the Jewish Legion* (New York: Bernard Ackerman, 1945), 44. It happened that, by 1917, Graham was transferred to London. He became a Near East department official in the foreign office, whence he enthusiastically supported the Balfour Declaration. See also Shmuel Katz, *Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky*, 2 vols. (New York: Barricade Books, 1996), vol. 1, 155–238.

²⁵ They objected, first of all, to the idea of a foreign legion within the British army. Colonel John Henry Patterson, who led both the Zion Mule Corps and the Jewish legion, has written that no precedent existed for such a unit within the British army. They also doubted the practical value of a fighting force of Jews. Certain officers opposed the legion because they disliked Jews, as Patterson states: “From the moment of debarkation it was made plain by the Army staff that our arrival was deeply resented. The anti-Jewish chief of staff, General Louis Jean Bols, did his best to destroy us.” See the foreword by Colonel John Henry Patterson in Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, 20; see also 16–17. Regarding impediments to recruitment, see *ibid.*, 112.

²⁶ Amery was a close friend of Colonel John Henry Patterson, the Irish-born Protestant and world-famous lion hunter who had commanded the Zion Mule Corps and was later given command of the Jewish legion. Patterson introduced Amery to Jabotinsky. *Ibid.*, 68–70.

²⁷ According to his son, the historian Christopher Sykes: “[Sir Mark] was a man of ardent character and he took no decision either of a public or private kind without considering his duty as a member of his [Roman Catholic] Church. This is the first point to recognise for an understanding of the part he played in the history of the Jewish people.” Sykes, *Two Studies in Virtue*, 175.

immediate practical considerations that received greatest attention were, first of all, cultivating support for Britain among influential pro-Zionist Jews in Russia and the United States and, second, preempting an anticipated (but illusory) pro-Zionist declaration by Germany.²⁸

THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

In July 1917, the Zionists proposed to His Majesty's government a draft declaration proclaiming acceptance of "the principle that Palestine should be reconstituted as the national home of the Jewish people."²⁹ The word "home" in the Zionists' draft echoed the resolution, quoted above, of Herzl's 1897 Zionist Congress. No one knew how Palestine would develop under British control. Would Jews immigrate in numbers large enough to create a Jewish majority? And how long would this take? Until that time, talk of a Jewish state was deemed premature.

Anti-Zionist Jews, who predominated in the higher reaches of Anglo-Jewish society, asserted that Zionist aims were "inconsistent with British citizenship."³⁰ Edwin Montagu, the prominent Jewish Liberal politician newly appointed secretary of state for India, stated the case to the government in intensely personal terms: "If you make a statement about Palestine as the National Home for Jews, every anti-Semitic organisation and newspaper will ask what right a Jewish Englishman, with the status at best of a naturalised foreigner, has to take a foremost part in the government of the British Empire."³¹ Lloyd George told Weizmann: "I know that with the issue of this Declaration I shall please one group of Jews and

²⁸ Lloyd George's private secretary wrote on May 5, 1917, to a foreign office senior official that "the raising of a Jewish unit for use in Palestine, if coupled with assurances from the British Government of their sympathy with the desire of many Jews to settle in Palestine and build up a community within it, might produce a very beneficial effect in making the Jews in America and Russia much keener on helping to see the war through." Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 96. See also war cabinet minutes from an October 31, 1917, meeting, quoted in C. J. Lowe and M. L. Dockrill, eds., *The Mirage of Power: British Foreign Policy, 1902-22*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), vol. 3, 550: "The vast majority of Jews in Russia and America, as, indeed, all over the world, now appeared to be favourable 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." See also Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 105: urging quick action on the pro-Zionist declaration, Ronald Graham of the foreign office minuted on October 24, 1917, "We might at any moment be confronted by a German move on the Zionist question."

²⁹ Stein, *Balfour Declaration*, 664 [appendix]. ³⁰ Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 99.

³¹ Montagu to Lloyd George, October 4, 1917, quoted in Stein, *Balfour Declaration*, 500.

displease another. I have decided to please your group because you stand for a great idea.”³²

Lord Curzon, a member of the war cabinet, doubted whether Palestine, so long neglected and so poor in natural resources, could sustain a substantial increase in population, especially if the immigrants were to be Jews, who were not “a people inured to agriculture.”³³ Aggravating these practical difficulties was the presence in Palestine already of a half-million Arabs, who “will not be content either to be expropriated for Jewish immigrants, or to act merely as hewers of wood and drawers of water to the latter.”³⁴ Balfour disputed Curzon’s analysis. Convinced that Zionist industriousness would bring prosperity to the Arabs as well as the Jews, Balfour told the cabinet that “if Palestine were scientifically developed, a very much larger population could be sustained than had existed during the period of Turkish misrule.”³⁵

Although Curzon called attention to local Arab discontents, neither he nor anyone else in the cabinet anticipated that Arab political opposition to Zionism would become a major problem for Britain. The rights of the Arabs in Palestine were discussed entirely in the context of protection of personal rights—civil liberties (including protection of private property) and religious freedom. The Arabs were destined eventually to be a minority in the Jewish national home, but they would retain their individual civil and religious rights. There was no thought of giving Arabs collective political rights—national rights—in Palestine to compete there with those of the Jews. This would defeat the purpose of the Jewish national

³² Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, 200–1.

³³ Curzon memorandum to war cabinet, October 26, 1917, quoted in Stein, *Balfour Declaration*, 545. Regarding Curzon’s doubts as to “whether the land could support any population,” see Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 105. Curzon retained the ideas he developed when he visited Palestine as a young man in 1883: “Palestine is a country to see once, not to revisit,” he wrote to a friend, adding: “There is much greater need of cultivation than in Greece and much less chance of making it pay. For the surface in many places is all rocks and stones. No Jew with his eyes open (and you never saw one with them shut) would think of going back: and if the Millennium is only to arrive when they have returned, our descendants will still be expecting it in 3000 A.D.” Kenneth Rose, *Superior Person: A Portrait of Curzon and His Circle in Late Victorian England* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969), 89.

³⁴ Earl of Ronaldshay, *The Life of Lord Curzon: Being the Authorized Biography of George Nathaniel, Marquess Curzon of Kedleston*, K. G., 3 vols. (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1928), vol. 3, 157–8.

³⁵ October 31, 1917, war cabinet minutes, quoted in Lowe and Dockrill, *Mirage of Power*, vol. 3, 550. The land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea had a population at the time of the declaration of approximately 700,000. Today, the population is approximately ten times that figure and the country succeeds in exporting food.

home policy.³⁶ It was anticipated that the Arab people would receive their reward upon victory in the form of “independence” in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Arabia.

Montagu’s objections played a greater role in delaying action on the pro-Zionist declaration than did Curzon’s. At all events, the pro-Zionists decided to mollify their critics by diluting the declaration’s language. Amery was asked to “go a reasonable distance to meeting the objections both Jewish and pro-Arab without impairing the substance of the proposed declaration.”³⁷ He added provisos dealing with Jews remaining outside Palestine and with “non-Jewish communities in Palestine,” which could apply both to the local Arabs and to non-Arab representatives of Western and Orthodox churches.³⁸ With minor modification, Amery’s draft received the war cabinet’s approval. On 2 November, the declaration was issued over the signature of the foreign secretary:

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 non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.³⁹

The 31 October war cabinet minutes report on Balfour’s interpretation:

As to the meaning of the words “national home,” to which the Zionists attach so much importance, he understood it to mean some form of British, American, or other protectorate, under which full facilities would be given to the Jews to work out their own salvation and to build up, by means of education, agriculture, and industry, a real centre of national culture and focus of national life. It did not necessarily involve the early establishment of an independent Jewish State, which

³⁶ A December 19, 1917, memorandum by Arnold Toynbee and Lewis Namier of the foreign office answered the objection that the declaration was antidemocratic: “The objection raised against the Jews being given exclusive political rights in Palestine on a basis that would be undemocratic with regard to the local Christian and Mohammedan population is certainly the most important which the anti-Zionists have hitherto raised, but the difficulty is imaginary. Palestine might be held in trust by Great Britain or America until there was a sufficient population in the country fit to govern it on European lines. Then no democratic restrictions of the kind indicated in the memorandum would be required any longer.” Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 111–12.

³⁷ Stein, *Balfour Declaration*, 520.

³⁸ In opposing cabinet endorsement of a Jewish national home in Palestine, Curzon stressed that Christians “are vitally interested in the churches and in the country as the scene of the most sacred events in history.” He cited the active engagement in Palestine activities of the Protestant, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Russian Orthodox churches. See Ronaldshay, *Lord Curzon*, vol. 3, 158.

³⁹ Moore, *Documents*, 32.

was a matter for gradual development in accordance with the ordinary laws of political evolution.⁴⁰

Lloyd George later clarified that the essence of the Jewish national home policy was a commitment to hold Palestine open to Jewish immigration. This would create the secure refuge under great power protection that Herzl had sought in his 1903 negotiations with Joseph Chamberlain. It would also give the Jews an opportunity to become a majority in Palestine. If they did, the protecting power could then transfer political authority to “representative institutions,” which could evolve into the government of a Jewish state or commonwealth.⁴¹

In February 1918, Balfour dined in a small group with Colonel Meinertzhagen and discussed the declaration. The latter recorded the meeting in his diary:

It is an ambiguous document. . . . I cannot see how a Jewish State can ever be established which would not prejudice the civil and religious rights of the Arabs. . . . I put a straight question to Balfour. Is this a reward or bribe to the Jews for past services and given in the hope of full support during the war?

[Balfour and certain others present] were indignant. Balfour at once said, “Certainly not; both the Prime Minister and myself have been influenced by a desire to give the Jews their rightful place in the world; a great nation without a home is not right.” . . . I then asked, “At the back of your mind do you regard this declaration as a charter for ultimate Jewish sovereignty in Palestine or are you trying to graft a Jewish population on to an Arab Palestine?” Balfour waited some time before he replied, choosing his words carefully, “My personal hope is that the Jews will make good in Palestine and eventually found a Jewish State. It is up to them now; we have given them their great opportunity.” . . . I remarked that if this declaration did in the end found a Jewish State, it would be the only good thing which came out of this miserable war. . . . But I am not happy about the dubious wording of the document. Anti-semites, and God knows the world is full of them, will use the document against the Jews.⁴²

⁴⁰ Lowe and Dockrill, *Mirage of Power*, vol. 3, 550–1.

⁴¹ In testimony before a royal commission on Palestine in 1937, Lloyd George commented: “There could be no doubt as to what the cabinet then had in their minds. It was not their idea that a Jewish State should be set up immediately by the peace treaty. . . . On the other hand, it was contemplated that, when the time arrived for according representative institutions to Palestine, if the Jews had meanwhile responded to the opportunity afforded them . . . and had become a definite majority of the inhabitants, then Palestine would thus become a Jewish commonwealth.

“The notion that Jewish immigration would have to be artificially restricted in order to ensure that the Jews should be a permanent minority never entered into the head of anyone engaged in framing the policy. That would have been regarded as unjust and as a fraud on the people to whom we were appealing.” Meron Medzini, *Israel's Foreign Relations: Selected Documents, 1947–1974*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 1976), vol. 1, 27.

⁴² Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 8–9 (February 7, 1918, entry).

Meinertzhagen had an impressive ability to sense how the document would be interpreted by non- or anti-Zionist British officials—such as his colleagues at British headquarters in Cairo—as opposed to how the cabinet intended it to read. He grasped that the distinction between Jewish national rights and Arab civil rights was too fine, given the lack of official support in the field for the Jewish national home. The “pro-Arab” proviso ensured that the British military authorities in Palestine and Egypt could denounce the declaration as self-contradictory and impossible to carry out.

AFTER THE WAR: CUTTING COSTS, HOLDING PALESTINE

Churchill was not in the war cabinet as the Balfour Declaration was debated. He had left the Asquith cabinet in November 1915. In 1919, he became secretary for war and air and returned to the government’s inner circle. During his period as war secretary, civil war was under way in Russia. In the brutal clash of Whites and Reds, more than a hundred thousand Jews were massacred.⁴³ Greek and Turkish armies battled over possession of western Anatolia, while Constantinople remained under Allied occupation. And Britain and France were trying to cooperate, despite mutual suspicions, on issues of grand import ranging from German war reparations to the partition of the Ottoman Empire.

The war secretary’s urgent responsibility was to demobilize millions of soldiers and cut millions of pounds sterling from daily military spending.⁴⁴ The trick was to do this while preserving Britain’s bargaining position in the upcoming peace negotiations and maintaining law and order in the newly acquired territories. A victor’s usual interest in preserving the fruits of war was magnified for Britain because the Great War had been a catastrophe of unprecedented proportions. Its new Middle Eastern possessions, especially the Holy Land, were among the few consolations Britain could carry away from more than four years of horrific struggle. But could the Empire afford to keep them?

In the process of netting out the imperial costs and benefits of retaining Palestine, the starting point was the Allies’ agreement at Versailles not

⁴³ See WSC IV 342 n. 2.

⁴⁴ An October 17, 1919, report to the cabinet finance committee states: “The average number of discharges from the Army was 10,000 men per diem since the Armistice, while the expenditure had fallen from 4 1/8 millions sterling per day to 1 1/4 millions sterling per day. . . . The Secretary of State for War was of opinion that . . . the Army had melted away as rapidly as available shipping and political conditions had permitted.” WSC IV C 925.

to annex outright the imperial territories captured from their enemies. Hence, Palestine could not be incorporated into the British Empire. Rather, it would have to be governed under an as-yet-unwritten mandate or trust instrument.

Holding Palestine would allow Britain to control lines of communication connecting British Mesopotamia (and the Persian Gulf) in the East with British Egypt (and the Mediterranean Sea) in the West.⁴⁵ This was roundly considered strategically valuable. Furthermore, from the British government's point of view, the list of acceptable candidates to govern Palestine was short. If the United States were unwilling to play the role, Britain would have to, for London would not countenance France's sitting next door to Egypt and the Suez Canal. Considerations of Zionism aside, it was not conceivable that Palestine would be turned over to the local Arabs, for they had no experience in self-government, no suitable governmental institutions existed and, in any event, Britain could not simply forfeit Christianity's holy places to Muslim rule after those sacred sites had been liberated through the glorious sacrifices of General Allenby and his men.

The Zionist leadership advocated a British Palestine. Weizmann made a point of disclaiming any intention to move immediately to Jewish statehood, lest Britain lack incentive to invest resources in the country.⁴⁶ When he testified before the Allies' supreme council in February 1919, the American secretary of state asked him whether "Jewish national home" meant an autonomous Jewish government.

Weizmann replied in the negative. The Zionist Organization [wanted] merely to establish in Palestine, under a Mandatory Power, an administration, not necessarily Jewish, which would render it possible to send into Palestine 70,000 to 80,000 Jews annually. The Organization would require to have permission at the same time to build Jewish schools, where Hebrew would be taught, and to develop institutions of every kind. Thus it would build up gradually a nationality, and so make Palestine as Jewish as America is American or England English.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ The prevailing view among British officials at Cairo came to be that Palestine would have "considerable" value "as a bridge in peace time to Mesopotamia." Kedourie, *Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*, 85, 88.

⁴⁶ During a stroll with Weizmann at the Paris peace talks in February 1919, Meinertzhagen, then a member of the British delegation, "advised him to go all out for Jewish Sovereignty in Palestine," but "Weizmann thinks the time inopportune and might wreck the whole idea of Mandatory Zionism." Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 15 (February 12, 1919, entry).

⁴⁷ Proceedings of the Allied supreme council (February 27, 1919), quoted in Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 117.

This last remark was to reverberate problematically over the years.

Within the British government, not all the pro-Zionists favored Britain's accepting the mandate for Palestine. And not all the anti-Zionists favored Britain's renouncing Palestine. The military administration there, which reported to Allenby in Egypt, desired by and large to keep the territory but discard the Balfour Declaration. Some officials said it was morally wrong for Britain to create a Jewish national home contrary to the will of the Arab inhabitants. Some worried, as the Russian civil war raged, about the Jews infecting Palestine with Bolshevik ideology. Some described Zionism (à la Curzon) as unworkable. One of the pillars of anti-Zionism was the belief that the Jews could never succeed in defending themselves physically against the Arabs. In January 1919, Curzon spoke with Sir Alfred Money, chief of the Palestine administration, and reported approvingly:

His main point, and that of Allenby, is that we should go slow about the Zionist aspirations and the Zionist State. Otherwise we might jeopardise all that we have won. A Jewish Government in any form would mean an Arab rising, and the nine-tenths of the population who are not Jews would make short shrift with the Hebrews.⁴⁸

Setting up a Jewish national home was a daunting responsibility. Even if practicable, it would be difficult and costly to implement. Discussions of this problem within the Palestine military administration, however, were not entirely a matter of unprejudiced analysis. Although some administration officials undoubtedly were loyal and open-minded, others were simply unwilling to give the government's pro-Zionist policy a fair chance of success. These latter officials resolved to oppose their government's pro-Zionist policy, building a case on their own predictions of inflexible Arab opposition to the Balfour Declaration. They then applied themselves to vindicating these predictions.

The Palestine administration did not use suasion or power to encourage the Arabs to accept the inevitability of a Jewish national home and reach a *modus vivendi* with the Jews. Allenby, in fact, barred publication of the Balfour Declaration in Palestine. In May 1919, General Gilbert

⁴⁸ Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 119. Two and a half years later, on July 26, 1921, the chief of the imperial general staff, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, met with Cuthbert Evans, a brigadier general then serving in Palestine. Wilson noted in his diary: "[Evans] is convinced that the Arabs will cut the throats of the Jews & that our force is quite insufficient to prevent this." Evans also said it was "preposterous that Sir Herbert Samuel, a Jew, should be High Commissioner." WSC IV 622.

Clayton, Allenby's chief political officer (who had been among Cairo's chief Arab revolt strategists during the war and later became chief of staff to the Palestine high commissioner), conveyed to London a report from General Money urging the government to abandon the Balfour Declaration; Clayton concurred.⁴⁹ Soon thereafter, Meinertzhagen reported that British officials in Palestine "are encouraging the Arabs to oppose Zionism" and that "the Jews regard the Administration as half-hearted regarding the National Home." Meinertzhagen concluded that Palestine's "political state . . . is unhappy . . . due to lack of a clear policy" and "failure to make it abundantly clear that the National Home is the declared policy of H. M. G." He urged that the local administration "be purged of those elements hostile to Zionism."⁵⁰

In early August, having received counsel from Herbert Samuel and Meinertzhagen,⁵¹ Balfour responded to Clayton and Money, cabling Cairo to instruct the Palestine administration to tell the Arab leaders that the government's pro-Zionist declaration was a "*chose jugée*" (decided policy) and that continued agitation against it would harm the country without affecting the policy.⁵² Cairo did not act on the foreign office cable.

Later that month, the cabinet considered whether to accept the mandate for Palestine. Lloyd George prevailed. One participant noted: "The

⁴⁹ Stein *Balfour Declaration*, 645.

⁵⁰ Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 22 (June 14, 1919, entry).

⁵¹ At the end of July, Balfour met with Meinertzhagen: "[Balfour's] reasons for being a Zionist were complex, but were mainly based on the unsatisfactory position of the Jews in the world. There were many and powerful opponents to Zionism, headed by several rich and influential Jews. Their main argument was that a race which had for so long been parasites on other nations was not likely to succeed in an enterprise which was entirely Jewish. . . .

"Balfour went on to say that he himself was not in favour of a British Mandate over Palestine, but that he would not oppose it. The Prime Minister was very anxious to secure a British Mandate for purely sentimental reasons.

"He defined the policy of H. M. G. as follows: All development, industrial schemes of all kinds, and financial assistance must be based on the principle that Zionists are the Most-favoured Nation in Palestine. . . .

"To those who argued that the fate of Palestine should be decided by a Plebiscite, in which case the Arabs would have an overwhelming majority, he would reply that in any Palestine Plebiscite, the Jews of the world must be consulted; in which case he sincerely believed that an overwhelming majority would declare for Zionism under a British Mandate.

"I said I did not think that Arab opposition to Zionism would last for an instant in any obstructive form, if we once made it clear that Palestine was to be the National Home of the Jews and that H. M. G. was determined to see its policy through. Arab opposition would therefore be futile and would not be tolerated. He promised to dispatch a telegram in this sense to General Allenby." Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 24–6 (July 30, 1919, entry).

⁵² Stein, *Balfour Declaration*, 646–7.

PM very vehement about our keeping Palestine. The Biblical associations. Immense prestige attaching to Jerusalem. We have conquered it. The French did practically nothing."⁵³

In January 1920, having recently been transferred to Cairo to replace Clayton as chief political officer, Meinertzhagen cabled to London that he was still "advocat[ing] the publication of the Declaration on Zionism." He said he was "all the more anxious" to press for publication, as it will "once and for all dispel the anti-Zionist attitude" of those "who still doubt the permanency of Zionism."⁵⁴

BOLSHEVIKS, TURKS, JEWS, AND ARABS

With the prime minister continually complaining that demobilization was proceeding too slowly, Churchill's resentment of Lloyd George's foreign policies brimmed. To the war secretary they appeared a hash of inconsistent sympathies and notions, all of which tended to increase demands on his office for more men and money. Lloyd George was soft on the Bolsheviks and hard on the Turkish nationalists, the opposite of Churchill's preferences. Churchill pressed for more aid to the Whites in Russia. Lloyd George, condemning his colleague's "obsession" with Russia,⁵⁵ responded that the Whites were carrying out murderous pogroms and that Churchill should inquire "about this treatment of the Jews by your friends."⁵⁶ Churchill pressed for a peace settlement with Turkey. Lloyd George, whose philhellenism was worthy of Lord Byron, chose instead to support Greek designs on Anatolia that, in Churchill's view, precluded the peace settlement with Turkey required to secure Britain's position in the Middle East. Without such a settlement, Churchill feared, Turkey might move to retake its Middle Eastern provinces.

Venting frustration in a 25 October 1919 memorandum on the Turkish situation, Churchill wrote that the "French are about to over-run Syria" and will soon be fighting the Arabs, who will increasingly command British sympathies. Serious injury to Anglo-French relations will result.

⁵³ Diary of H. A. L. Fisher, quoted in Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 123.

⁵⁴ Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 69 (dispatch dated January 13, 1920).

⁵⁵ WSC IV 331.

⁵⁶ WSC IV 342. Churchill replied to Lloyd George by noting that there is "a very bitter feeling throughout Russia against the Jews, who are regarded as being the main instigators of the ruin of the Empire, and who, certainly have played a leading part in Bolshevik atrocities." Churchill then wrote to General Denikin of "the vital importance . . . of preventing by every possible means the ill-treatment of the innocent Jewish population." WSC IV 342-3.

Then “there are the Jews, whom we are pledged to introduce into Palestine and who take it for granted that the local population will be cleared out to suit their convenience.” All of this, Churchill argued, will react on “our position as the greatest Mahommedan Power.” India, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Palestine “are all affected prejudicially.” The cost of the Middle Eastern military establishments are gravely burdensome and “a strong force” must be maintained in and around Constantinople “for an indefinite period.” Churchill “reluctantly” concluded that partitioning the Turkish Empire among the Allies “is a mistake” that will involve Britain in “abetting . . . the conquest of the Arabs by the Turks; . . . deserting and, it will be alleged, betraying those Arabs who fought so bravely with us in the war”; and spending immense sums for military forces and development work “far exceeding any possibility of return.” He knew that it would be “very hard to relinquish the satisfaction of those dreams of conquest and aggrandisement which are gratified by the retention of Palestine and Mesopotamia,” but the British Empire has “far more territory . . . than we shall be able to develop for many generations.”⁵⁷ (As Churchill later entered more deeply into Near Eastern affairs, his comments about the Jews became, in general, less barbed and, about the Arabs, less grateful.)

Zionist leaders knew that the Arabs would not be “cleared out to suit [the Jews’] convenience.” Accordingly, they were exploring possibilities for peace. Hopes for a mutual accommodation were not so fantastic as they seemed in later years. Britain had formidable leverage. It controlled vast Arab lands. The Arabs wanted much from Britain, but were owed little, given that the vast majority had fought against Britain in the war. As for Britain’s Hashemite allies, they were willing to make a deal with the Zionists if this would secure British support for an independent Arab kingdom in the lands surrounding Palestine.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ WSC IV C 937–9. It was a theme of Churchill’s that the British colonies of long standing in Africa were a better investment than the newly acquired possessions in the Middle East. In a July 14, 1921, speech to the House of Commons, he drew the contrast amusingly: “In the Middle East you have arid countries. In East Africa you have dripping countries. There is the greatest difficulty to get anything to grow in the one place, and the greatest difficulty to prevent things smothering and choking you by their hurried growth in the other.

“In the African colonies you have a docile, tractable population, who only require to be well and wisely treated to develop great economic capacity and utility; whereas the regions of the Middle East are unduly stocked with peppery, pugnacious, proud politicians and theologians, who happen to be at the same time extremely well armed and extremely hard up.” Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews*, 112.

⁵⁸ In January 1919, at the Paris peace conference, Hussein’s son Feisal signed an agreement with Weizmann by which the Arab side endorsed the Balfour Declaration and “large scale”

With London holding such a strong hand, some British officials saw an opportunity to incorporate the Jewish national home into a grand bargain, a sweeping Arab-Jewish-British land-for-peace deal extending from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. Balfour expounded the vision, reminding the Arabs that Britain freed them from centuries of Ottoman rule, “established the independent Arab sovereignty of the Hejaz,” and desired to make Mesopotamia “a self-governing, autonomous Arab state.” Balfour voiced hope that

remembering all that, they [the Arabs] will not grudge that small notch—for it is not more geographically, whatever it may be historically— . . . in what are now Arab territories being given to the people who for all these hundreds of years have been separated from it—but surely have a title to develop on their own lines in the land of their forefathers, which ought to appeal to the sympathy of the Arab people as it, I am convinced, appeals to the great mass of my own Christian fellow-countrymen.⁵⁹

The British Palestine administration, however, evinced less interest in moving the Arabs toward compromise with the Zionists than in proving to London that the Arabs were unmovable. It offered evidence in the form of Arab violence. For two days beginning on 4 April 1920, Arab rioters attacked Jews and Jewish-owned property in Jerusalem. In the rioting 5 Jews and 4 Arabs were killed, 211 Jews and 21 Arabs were wounded, and 2 Jewish girls were raped. For some weeks before the riot, Jabotinsky had

Jewish immigration into Palestine in return for Zionist technical assistance for Arab economic development: Moore, *Documents*, 401. It was fundamental to the thinking of Churchill that Arab opposition to Zionism would someday soften as Jewish brains, capital, and assiduity spread prosperity to all of Palestine’s inhabitants, Arab and Jewish, and to the neighboring lands. The nature of the Feisal-Weizmann deal—economic assistance in return for peace—reinforced that hope.

But one of Feisal’s key constituencies, the General Syrian Congress, comprising notables from prominent Arab families in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, opposed his deal with Weizmann and resolved to fight both the Balfour Declaration and any French mandate for Syria. On July 2, 1919, the Congress resolved:

“1. We desire full and absolute political independence for Syria. . . .

“6. We do not recognise to the French Government any right to any part of Syria, and we reject all proposals that France should give us assistance or exercise authority in any portion of the country.

“7. We reject the claims of the Zionists for the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in that part of southern Syria which is known as Palestine, and we are opposed to Jewish immigration. . . . We do not acknowledge that they have a title, and we regard their claims as a grave menace to our national, political and economic life. . . .

“8. We desire that there should be no dismemberment of Syria, and no separation of Palestine or the coastal regions in the west or the Lebanon from the mother country.” George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938), 440–2 [appendix G].

⁵⁹ Israel Cohen, ed., *Speeches on Zionism by the Right Hon. The Earl of Balfour*, K. G., O. M., F. R. S. (London: Arrowsmith, 1928), 23–5.

openly been training a Jewish self-defense corps, which went into action when the riot began. Immediately thereafter, the authorities arrested defense corps personnel, including Jabotinsky. His trial was under way by 13 April and, less than a week later, this founder of Britain's Jewish legion, who fought in the Great War as a lieutenant in the Royal Fusiliers, was sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude (for possession of a revolver; providing arms "with the evil intent of bringing about rapine, pillage, devastation"; and conspiracy).⁶⁰ Jabotinsky's treatment was protested in the House of Commons; Lord Cecil disapproved in particular that the Zionist leader's sentence was the same as that for the two Arabs who had raped the Jewish girls.⁶¹

On 26 April, Meinertzhagen added a stunning entry to his diary:

It gave me a shock when I found that officers of the British Administration were actively implicated and plotting against their own government. I warned both Allenby and [Major General Sir Louis] Bols [who had replaced Money as the chief of the Palestine administration] but they preferred silence to exposure; I wrote a private and secret letter to [foreign secretary] Lord Curzon just before the Jerusalem riots at Easter, setting out the following information. . . .

[Colonel] Waters-Taylor [chief of staff to Bols] saw Haj al Amin [who later became grand mufti] on the Wednesday before Easter and told him that he had a great opportunity at Easter to show the world that the Arabs of Palestine would not tolerate Jewish domination in Palestine; that Zionism was unpopular not only with the Palestine Administration but in Whitehall and if disturbances of sufficient violence occurred in Jerusalem at Easter, both General Bols and General Allenby would advocate the abandonment of the Jewish Home. Waters-Taylor explained that freedom could only be attained through violence.

On the day of the rioting the following notice was displayed all over Jerusalem: "The Government is with us, Allenby is with us, kill the Jews; there is no punishment for killing Jews." . . .

On the day of the rioting Waters-Taylor absented himself in Jericho for the day. Two days after the rioting he sent for the Mayor of Jerusalem—Moussa Kasim Pasha—and said "I gave you a fine opportunity; for five hours Jerusalem was without military protection; I had hoped you would avail yourself of the opportunity but you have failed." This conversation was confirmed from two sources.⁶²

Responding to Meinertzhagen's criticism, Lieutenant General William Congreve, the Cairo-based commander of British forces in Egypt and Palestine, wrote to Allenby, by way of explanation, that "the majority of Englishmen have an inherited feeling against the Jew" and "a sympathy with the possessor of the soil." Allenby, in turn, wrote to Curzon: "A

⁶⁰ Joseph B. Schechtman, *Rebel and Statesman: The Early Years—The Life and Times of Vladimir Jabotinsky* (Silver Spring, Maryland: Eshel Books, 1986), 337–8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 350. ⁶² Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 81–2.

large section of Moslem and Christian opinion in Palestine, coherent and powerful, views Zionist aspirations with deep suspicion. It is useless for Meinertzhagen or Weizmann to avoid the issue by throwing blame on the military administration."⁶³ Allenby then fired Meinertzhagen and sent him back to London.

The Jerusalem riots, presumably not by coincidence, occurred a few weeks before the Allies' supreme council convened at San Remo, Italy, to draft the peace treaty (including ancillary mandates) for imposition on the Ottoman Empire. It was decided there that France would become mandatory for Syria. Britain would receive two mandates, for Mesopotamia and Palestine respectively. Though the precise boundary between Syria and Palestine remained to be delineated, Britain was able to secure for itself unbroken lines of communication from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean, for eastern Palestine was made contiguous with Mesopotamia.

The Palestine mandate quoted the Balfour Declaration in its entirety and mandated that Britain was responsible for putting that declaration into effect. "[R]ecognition has thereby been given," the mandate stated, "to the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and to the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country."⁶⁴ The mandate acknowledged no Arab national rights in Palestine.

As war secretary, Churchill supervised the military forces running the Palestine military government. He did not in official channels challenge their opposition to the government's pro-Zionist policy, but he did at the time publish a newspaper commentary extolling Zionism as advantageous for Britain as well as the Jews. Implicitly endorsing both large-scale Jewish immigration into Palestine and the goal of a Jewish majority there, he wrote:

If, as may well happen, there should be created in our own lifetime by the banks of the Jordan a Jewish State under the protection of the British Crown which might comprise three or four millions of Jews, an event will have occurred in the history of the world which would from every point of view be beneficial, and would be especially in harmony with the truest interests of the British Empire.

In that article, entitled "Zionism versus Bolshevism," Churchill observed: "Some people like Jews and some do not, but no thoughtful man can

⁶³ Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 129–30. Both letters were dated April 19, 1920.

⁶⁴ Moore, *Documents*, 74–83. While nowhere referring to Arabs or the Arab people, the mandate did provide, in Article 22, that Arabic, together with Hebrew and English, was to be an official language of Palestine.

doubt the fact that they are beyond all doubt the most formidable and the most remarkable race which has ever appeared in the world.” He distinguished between the Jews who were assimilated into their countries of residency and those who were not. Among the latter, there was a great divide between the Jews who organize themselves in “a world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation” and for the promotion of Bolshevism and those who labor constructively for a national Jewish center in Palestine to serve as a refuge, “a symbol of Jewish unity and the temple of Jewish glory.” “The struggle which is now beginning between the Zionist and the Bolshevik Jews,” Churchill wrote, “is little less than a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people.”⁶⁵ Typically, Churchill insisted that Zionism be viewed from a broad perspective. The issue was not local and administrative; rather, it was an element of world politics with transcendent moral implications.

In July 1920, Britain replaced its military government in Palestine with a civil administration. Sir Herbert Samuel became Palestine’s first high commissioner. Though the chief had changed, the administration’s collective frame of mind—its prevailing lack of sympathy with the government’s pro-Zionist policy—remained intact. Like many political appointees before and since, Samuel quickly came under the influence of his professional military and civilian subordinates. He supervised, but they led.

Within days of Samuel’s arrival in Jerusalem, French forces expelled Feisal from Damascus.⁶⁶ Britain had to acquiesce in the humiliation of its Hashemite client. Meanwhile, Turkish nationalist forces threatened Allied forces in Constantinople, Ireland was in revolt, and violent Egyptian nationalists had extracted from British negotiators a pledge of independence that “bewildered”⁶⁷ Churchill, who had not been consulted. Throughout the summer, British forces in Mesopotamia strained to suppress a large-scale rebellion. In deference to the prime minister, Churchill doggedly pursued his demobilization and expenditure reduction plans, but demand for troops was rising. Mesopotamia was being reinforced with men from India, Palestine, Constantinople, Egypt, and Europe. “We

⁶⁵ *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, February 8, 1920, quoted in Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 127–8. Meinertzhagen had earlier used the term “constructive Bolshevism” to describe Zionism in contrast to the destructive variety then gaining ground in Russia; he reported that Weizmann approved the characterization. Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 14 (January 30, 1919, entry).

⁶⁶ The blow that ended the Hashemite kingdom of Syria also negated Feisal’s agreement with Weizmann. See Antonius, *Arab Awakening*, 439 [appendix F].

⁶⁷ Cabinet memorandum dated August 24, 1920, in WSC IV C 1179.

are at our wits' end to find a single soldier," Churchill exclaimed to the foreign secretary.⁶⁸

In November, General Congreve warned Churchill that, unless the garrison for eastern Palestine were increased, British forces would not be able to maintain order there. Congreve recommended as an economy measure that Britain exclude from the mandate all of Palestine east of the Jordan River.⁶⁹

A few weeks later, Churchill wrote Lloyd George yet again to complain about the impossibility of reconciling the prime minister's demands for economy with his commitment to retain the new Middle Eastern mandates and his antagonism to Turkey:

It seems to me a most injurious thing that we, the greatest Mohammedan Empire in the world, sh[oul]d be the leading Anti-Turk power. . . . I deeply regret & *resent* being forced to ask Parl[iamen]t for these appalling sums of money for new Provinces—all the more when the pursuance of the Anti-Turk policy complicates and aggravates the situation in every one of them, & renders cheapers [*sic*] solutions impossible.⁷⁰

CHURCHILL AND THE MIDDLE EAST DEPARTMENT

War secretary Churchill quarreled with the foreign secretary over Turkey, the colonial secretary over Egypt, the India secretary over Mesopotamia, and the prime minister over all of the above. Substantive and jurisdictional disputes among the offices of these ministers were depriving British Middle East policy of even the semblance of coherence. Since the grim days of the previous summer, Churchill had been recommending creation of a new Middle East department within the government. On 31 December 1920, the cabinet agreed. It located the new department within the colonial office. Lloyd George then offered his fractious friend Churchill the job of colonial secretary. The latter agreed. Among his earliest

⁶⁸ See WSC IV 495. In a November 23, 1920, cabinet memorandum, Churchill wrote, "The burden of carrying out the present policy at Constantinople, in Palestine, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Persia is beyond the strength of the British Army and is producing most formidable reactions upon the Indian Army, upon which we are compelled to rely. I see the very greatest difficulty in maintaining that situation through the new financial year unless our military measures are aided by a policy of reconciliation and co-operation with the Turks and the Moslem world. It is far better to do this than to give up a province like Egypt, where we have been honourable [*sic*] established for so many years." WSC IV C 1250.

⁶⁹ See WSC IV 502–3. The population of eastern Palestine was 250,000 in 1920: WSC IV C 1260 n. 1.

⁷⁰ Churchill to Lloyd George, December 4, 1920, in WSC IV C 1260–1 (emphasis in original).

personnel decisions was to recruit as advisers both T. E. Lawrence and Meinertzhagen.⁷¹

Churchill was pleased to relinquish the war office, where he had labored to cut and shift military resources to serve policies that he had neither made nor approved. In the colonial office, he could actually make policy. But though Mesopotamia and Palestine in 1921 lay before Churchill like so much unformed clay, there was limited satisfaction, indeed inherent frustration, in his new responsibilities because he did not view the Middle East as an imperial concern of the first rank. Unlike many officials, Churchill did not believe that a matter achieved paramount importance because he was put in charge of it. Churchill found it hard to concentrate—to focus narrowly—on his assigned area. His natural perspective was the strategic overview and, from that perspective, the central field was dominated by Turkey, Russia, and the Rhine. The Middle East was in the periphery. In March 1920, Churchill had written to Lloyd George: “Compared to Germany, Russia is minor; compared to Russia, Turkey is petty.”⁷² How then, in the grand strategic scheme of things, to evaluate the Middle East? What is less than petty?

The Middle East had some importance, at least, because it could disturb Britain’s relationship with France, a point highlighted in Churchill’s 11 January 1921 meeting in Paris with French president Alexandre Millerand. Churchill, according to his own report, “pointed out the absolute need . . . of appeasing Arab sentiment,” lest garrison expenses force the Allies to evacuate the Middle East.

[Millerand] then instanced Zionism in Palestine as a cause of disturbing the Arab world. While in favour of it in principle, he feared that the Jews would be very high-handed when they got together there. In reply I 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 do.⁷³

The foreign office had for months been contemplating a throne for Feisal in Baghdad. By transferring to him responsibility for keeping peace domestically, Britain could reduce the size of its Mesopotamian garrison. Likewise, Abdullah was deemed suitable to relieve Britain of law enforcement duties in Transjordan. Major Hubert Young, a foreign office official

⁷¹ See WSC IV 510 (regarding Lawrence); WSC IV C 1296 (regarding Meinertzhagen).

⁷² Lowe and Dockrill, *Mirage of Power*, vol. 3, 730.

⁷³ Churchill to Lloyd George, Curzon, D’Abernon, and Hardinge, January 12, 1921, in WSC IV C 1304.

who soon transferred into the new Middle East department, endorsed these proposals in a 25 January 1921 memorandum to Churchill that advised a deal: the Hashemites would get their kingdoms in return for renouncing revenge against the French in Syria.⁷⁴

Immediately after taking up the colonial office seals in February 1921, Churchill decided to visit Cairo to confer with the government's leading Middle East experts on Mesopotamia and Palestine. In preparation, John Evelyn Shuckburgh, the new head of the Middle East department, coauthored a memorandum with Young and Lawrence that recommended turning eastern Palestine over to the Arabs and expediting the Jews' economic development of western Palestine. The Jewish national home would be confined to western Palestine, an Arab-led administration under the Palestine mandate would be established for Transjordan (consistent with Young's 25 January memorandum), and Britain would move immediately (rather than continue to await confirmation of the mandate by the League of Nations) to grant applications from Jews for economic development plans in western Palestine, such as the hydroelectric power project being promoted by Pinhas Rutenberg, a Russian Jewish engineer who had helped Jabotinsky launch the Jewish legion.⁷⁵ Such an approach, Shuckburgh et al. contended, would harmonize Britain's various wartime promises to the Arabs and the Jews.

In light of that memorandum, it is noteworthy that high officials responsible for Britain's wartime promises to the Hashemites had repeatedly asserted that Palestine was excluded from the area envisioned for Arab "independence."⁷⁶ They also, in any event, had conditioned those promises on a broad-based Arab uprising that had not occurred.⁷⁷ Yet

⁷⁴ See WSC IV 519.

⁷⁵ Rutenberg held high office in the Russian provisional government headed by Alexander Kerensky following the tsar's overthrow in February 1917. He was present in the Winter Palace when it fell to Bolshevik forces the following November. After a half-year of imprisonment by the Bolsheviks, he eventually (November 1919) emigrated to Palestine, where he helped Jabotinsky organize the Jewish self-defense corps that was active in the April 1920 anti-Jewish riots. See "Rutenberg, Pinhas," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 16 vols. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1973), vol. 14, 516–17.

⁷⁶ Sir Henry McMahon to Shuckburgh, March 12, 1922, in WSC IV C 1805: "It was . . . fully my intention to exclude Palestine. . . . I did not make use of the Jordan to define the limits of the southern area, because I thought it might be considered desirable at some later stage of negotiations to . . . find some suitable frontier line east of the Jordan." See also Kedourie, *Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*, 142: "Another point which the [British and French] negotiators [in December 1915] assumed was that Palestine—however delimited—had not been committed in the negotiations with the Sharif [Hussein]." See also *ibid.*, 161, 189–95, 222.

⁷⁷ See Kedourie, *Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*, 108–9: "McMahon's offer had been conditional not only on the separation between the Arabs and the Turks, but on the immediate active

here those promises were said to oblige the government to bar the Zionists from more than three-quarters of mandate Palestine. Shuckburgh, Young, and Lawrence recognized that some “interpretation” would be required to square this proposal with the mandate’s Jewish national home provisions, so they cited the proviso (derived from the Balfour Declaration) on the “civil and religious rights” of Palestine’s “non-Jewish communities” and the mandate provision (Article 3) on encouraging “local autonomy”: “We consider that these two clauses, taken in conjunction, afford adequate justification for setting up in Transjordan a political system somewhat different from that in force on the other side of the river. If British promises are to stand, this system must be Arab in character.”⁷⁸ This memorandum, as Meinertzhagen foresaw would happen, takes the phrase “civil and religious rights,” which the Balfour Declaration used to protect the personal rights of individuals, and interprets it as a reference to collective and political rights of the Arabs of Palestine.

Alarmed at the prospect of losing all of eastern Palestine, Weizmann wrote Churchill on 1 March that “Trans-Jordania has from earliest times been an integral and vital part of Palestine.” He asserted that western Palestine’s economic progress depends upon Transjordan, for it forms “the natural granary of all Palestine.” Weizmann acknowledged that the British government must consider its pledges to the Arabs and should satisfy their “legitimate aspirations,” but, he argued, “the taking from Palestine of a few thousand square miles, scarcely inhabited and long derelict, would be scant satisfaction to Arab Nationalism, while it would go far to frustrate the entire policy of His Majesty’s Government regarding the Jewish National Home.”⁷⁹

At the Cairo Conference from 12–22 March, Churchill’s decisions followed the general lines of his staff’s recommendations. In Mesopotamia, Feisal was to be king. Transjordan would remain within the Palestine mandate, but without the Jewish national home. Abdullah would be asked to establish an administration there. As the conference minutes relate, Lawrence urged Abdullah’s appointment:

[Lawrence] trusted that in four or five years, under the influence of a just policy, the opposition to Zionism would have decreased, if it had not entirely disappeared,

co-operation of the Arabs against the Turks.” See also *ibid.*, 122 (quoting an India office official): “If they [the Hashemites] fail to carry out their side of the agreement, they cannot hereafter complain if we should say it was off.”

⁷⁸ WSC IV 538.

⁷⁹ Aaron S. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 287 [Appendix G].

and it was his view that it would be preferable to use Trans-Jordania as a safety valve, by appointing a ruler on whom he could bring pressure to bear, to check anti-Zionism.⁸⁰

Questions arose as to the legality of taking Transjordan out of the Jewish national home. Not satisfied with the Shuckburgh-Young-Lawrence analysis, Churchill cabled home on 21 March to ask if an amendment to the Palestine mandate were necessary. He signaled that he hoped not, but if it were, "it would be better to specify areas affected without referring in detail to proposed difference in treatment."⁸¹ Colonial office and foreign office lawyers jointly recommended a new provision, which became Article 25 of the mandate and which satisfied Churchill's desire for obscure phrasing:

In the territories lying between the Jordan and the eastern boundary of Palestine as ultimately determined, the Mandatory shall be entitled, with the consent of the Council of the League of Nations, to postpone or withhold application of such provisions of this mandate as he may consider inapplicable to the existing local conditions.

The colonial office explained that this language would allow Britain, in Transjordan, "to withhold indefinitely the application of those clauses of the mandate which relate to the establishment of the National Home for the Jews."⁸²

In Jerusalem, Churchill interviewed Abdullah and explained to him the plans for Transjordan, highlighting that "the Zionist clauses of the mandate would not apply" there.⁸³ Abdullah suggested, but did not insist, that eastern and western Palestine be combined under an Arab amir. Samuel intervened to assure Abdullah that Britain would act in good faith toward the Arabs of western Palestine. The high commissioner pressed his point with an argument that was low-key in tone but radical in its implications for British policy: "The Mandate embodied the terms of the Balfour Declaration in which two distinct promises were made—one to the Jews and the other to the Arabs." The government was "determined to fulfil both these promises."⁸⁴

After a few hours of talk, Abdullah acceded to Churchill's proposal for Transjordan. He agreed to remain in Amman for six months to help select an Arab governor to serve under the high commissioner for

⁸⁰ WSC IV 553. ⁸¹ Klieman, *Foundations*, 123.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 123 n. 20. ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁸⁴ WSC IV 562.

Palestine.⁸⁵ Meinertzhagen, who did not accompany Churchill to Cairo and Jerusalem and did not begin service as Middle East department military adviser until May, commented acidly when he learned what was done with Transjordan. He recorded in his diary that he “exploded” on hearing that Churchill had separated Transjordan from western Palestine:

Abdullah was placated at the expense of the Jewish National Home. . . . Lawrence was of course with Churchill and influenced him. . . . This reduces the Jewish National Home to one-third of Biblical Palestine. The Colonial Office and the Palestine Administration have now declared that the articles of the mandate relating to the Jewish Home are not applicable to Transjordan. . . . This discovery was not made until it became necessary to appease an Arab Emir. . . .

I told [Churchill] it was grossly unfair to the Jews, that it was yet another promise broken and that it was a most dishonest act, that the Balfour Declaration was being torn up by degrees and that the official policy of H. M. G. to establish a Home for the Jews in Biblical Palestine was being sabotaged. . . . Churchill listened and said he saw the force of my argument and would consider the question.⁸⁶

While still in Jerusalem, Churchill met with a delegation from the Arab Palestine Congress, which presented a memorandum that condemned the “unnatural partitioning” of Syria and Palestine, which it said were a single country. It rejected the Balfour Declaration, stating that the Arabs “resent and fight” against “transforming Palestine into a home for the Jews,” who lack national rights for they have “no separate political or lingual existence.” Attributing to the Jews “pernicious motives . . . towards the Powers that be and towards civilisation,” the memorandum says that “everyone” should read *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. It asks: “If Russia and Poland, with their spacious countries, were unable to tolerate [the Jews], how could Europe expect Palestine to welcome them?”⁸⁷

Churchill replied bluntly to the call for repudiating the Balfour Declaration and ending Jewish immigration: “It is not in my power to do so, nor, if it were in my power, would it be my wish.” The declaration was “made while the war was still in progress, while victory and defeat hung

⁸⁵ As it happened, Abdullah remained longer than planned—viz., until he was assassinated in 1951. Meanwhile, he became king of an independent Transjordan in 1946. The kingdom’s name was changed from Transjordan, which means “across the Jordan,” to plain Jordan after the 1948–49 war against Israel, in which Abdullah’s forces conquered the region west of the Jordan River that became known as the kingdom’s “West Bank.”

Before that conquest, the West Bank—as attested by General Allenby’s campaign maps, the 1947 United Nations partition plan, and innumerable history and geography books by Arabs, Jews, and others—had universally been called “Judea and Samaria.”

⁸⁶ Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 99–100 (June 21, 1921, entry).

⁸⁷ Klieman, *Foundations*, 259–67 [Appendix B].

in the balance" so it "must therefore be regarded as one of the facts definitely established by the triumphant conclusion of the Great War." Churchill noted cuttingly: "I thought when listening to your statements, that . . . the Arabs of Palestine had overthrown the Turkish Government. That is the reverse of the true facts. . . . You had only to look on your road here . . . to see the graveyard of 2,000 British soldiers. . . . The position of Great Britain in Palestine is one of trust, but it is also one of right." Modulating his tone, Churchill explained that creation of the Jewish national home "does not mean that [Palestine] will cease to be the National Home of other people, or that a Jewish Government will be set up to dominate the Arab people." The Arabs can see "with [their] own eyes" how the Jews have increased Palestine's prosperity, which is one of the reasons the Arabs should "take a wise and tolerant view" of Zionism. Palestine "has been very much neglected" and there is "no reason why [it] should not support a larger number of people . . . , and all of those in a higher condition of prosperity."⁸⁸

Before a largely Jewish audience at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, Churchill invoked the Balfour Declaration and announced: "Great Britain always keeps her promises. . . . Personally, my heart is full of sympathy for Zionism. This sympathy has existed for a long time, since twelve years ago, when I was in contact with the Manchester Jews." Reflecting Samuel's influence, he offered a loose characterization of the Balfour Declaration that worried attentive Zionists: "Our promise was a double one . . . to give our help to Zionism, and . . . [to assure] the non-Jewish inhabitants that they should not suffer in consequence."⁸⁹

Churchill cut his Palestine visit short because the Chancellor of the Exchequer resigned. Frustrated to be abroad at such a moment, Churchill hoped that with a speedy return to London he might land the post for himself. (Lloyd George soured his relations with Churchill by giving the post to someone else.) In this and many other ways, Churchill was continually demonstrating that he considered the Middle East too small and inessential an arena for his interests and ambitions.⁹⁰ Another such

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 269–73 [Appendix C].

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 283–4 [Appendix F].

⁹⁰ On July 4, 1921, after Churchill presented to the cabinet a memorandum on Anglo-Japanese relations, Curzon, the foreign secretary, voiced another in a long series of protests against the colonial secretary's meddling in foreign office affairs. Curzon passed a note to Churchill: "My dear Winston, I wonder what you would say if on a Colonial Office [question] I felt myself at liberty to make a speech . . . quite independent of the Colonial Office and critical of the attitude adopted by its chief." Churchill replied with

sign was the degree to which Churchill deferred to Samuel in the formulation of the major premises for British policy in Palestine. Even though the colonial secretary doubted Samuel's judgment and resolve, he allowed himself to be guided by Samuel, who was in turn guided by his own subordinates.

HERBERT SAMUEL AND THE DUAL PROMISE

In his nine months as high commissioner, through intercourse with his staff and the local Arab community, Samuel grew increasingly solicitous of Arab fears about Jewish immigration and an eventual Jewish majority in Palestine. As an official in London, his thinking about Palestine had focused on facilitating Zionism. As an official in Jerusalem, he concentrated on preserving domestic tranquillity, which meant, in essence, trying to pacify the Arab population. He did not view it as his purpose to press on Arab minds the harsh reality that his government's national home policy intended to encourage Jewish immigration so that the Jews could transform their homeland into a country where they could enjoy majority status. On the contrary, he sought to assuage Arab opposition to British policy by obscuring that policy's goals and by asserting that the Balfour Declaration was a dual promise to the Jewish people and the Arab people. Both peoples, he said, must be deemed prime beneficiaries of the mandate, not just with respect to mandate Palestine as a whole (in which more than three-quarters of the territory was already reserved exclusively for the Arabs), but even in western Palestine.

Samuel's reading of the Balfour Declaration was more convenient than true. As originally promulgated and incorporated in the mandate, the declaration was for and about "the Jewish people." Neither the language regarding the "civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities," nor the relevant war cabinet debate, nor the San Remo decision, supports the notion that the declaration was addressing the Jewish people and the Arab people equally or about the same things. The word "Arab" appears nowhere in it (and nowhere in the mandate, for that matter). The declaration was not a promise that Palestine—much less western Palestine

a note that revealed his low estimate of the importance of his own Middle Eastern and other responsibilities: "You may say anything you like about the Colonial Office that is sincerely meant; but there is no comparison between these vital foreign matters wh[ich] affect the whole future of the world and the mere departmental topics with wh[ich] the Colonial Office is concerned." WSC IV C 1543.

—would be divided politically between the Jews and the Arabs. It was not a promise that Britain would ensure that political power in Palestine be balanced between the Jewish people and the Arab people. It was not a dual promise, but rather a “declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations,”⁹¹ with a proviso to protect the individual “civil and religious” rights of non-Jews.⁹²

The British and Allied statesmen who endorsed the Balfour Declaration envisioned eventual Jewish self-determination in Palestine and Arab self-determination in the expanses of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Arabia. This seemed not only fair to the Arabs, but generous, given that they in general fought for the enemy in the war. Samuel, from his post in Jerusalem’s Government House, however, did not view the Arab-Jewish fairness issue in the broad context of all the Middle Eastern lands liberated by the Allies from the Ottomans. He now accepted the idea that fairness required the balancing of the political interests of the Arabs and the Jews within the cramped confines of western Palestine. It is evident that Samuel intended to be just and to do right. But he effectively rewrote the Balfour Declaration to create a promise—or dual promise—that was impossible to fulfill.

GIVING APPEASEMENT A CHANCE

Palestine administration officials argued that the best way to win the Arabs’ consent to the Jewish national home was to assure them that it would not be imposed against their will. Immediately after the war, anti-Zionist British officials had urged the government to renounce the Balfour

⁹¹ This phrase appears in the opening paragraph of the letter from Foreign Secretary Balfour to Lord Rothschild which formally transmitted the declaration: Moore, *Documents*, 32.

⁹² The distinction between “political rights” and “civil rights” was drawn sharply by Churchill himself when the Palestine Arab delegation visited the colonial office in August 1921. The delegation secretary asserted that “our rights have not been safeguarded.” Churchill denied this and then said: “If you mean by that political rights, I say show me in what way you can safeguard the execution of our promises to the Jews, and we will consider how the political rights should be extended.” The secretary pressed his point: “You promised us self-government.” Churchill answered: “No. When was that promised? Never. We promised you should not be turned off your land.” WSC IV C 1594. (Regarding the issue of the precise date of this meeting, see Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews*, 118 n. 129.) In a subsequent meeting with this delegation, on August 22, 1921, Churchill stated: “They [the Jews] cannot take any man’s lands. They cannot dispossess any man of his rights. . . . If they like to buy people’s land, and people like to sell it to them, and if they like to develop and cultivate regions now barren and make them fertile, then they have the right, and we are obliged to secure their right to come into the country and to settle” (WSC IV C 1611).

Declaration because the local Arabs would never acquiesce in the policy. Now, having failed to get the renunciation, these intrepid officials inconsistently asserted that the Arab community could be appeased after all, if Britain would limit Zionist activity—for example, restrict immigration and withhold approvals for development projects—and institutionalize Arab political power.

Samuel and Churchill approved such measures because they believed in appeasement. They were convinced that, if Zionism progressed slowly enough to keep Arab resentments in check, Arab attitudes toward the Jews would soften. Inclined to seek economic explanations of Arab actions and attitudes toward Zionism, Samuel and Churchill both tended to depreciate the religious and cultural sources of anti-Zionism, which considered the Jewish national movement an aggression against Arab land and the Arab people and, as such, unacceptable in principle. Arabs who held that conviction would not be satisfied with slower rates of Jewish immigration or higher rates of economic growth. Such persons, furthermore, dominated the religious and political leadership of the Arab community of Palestine. And they did so, somewhat ironically and somewhat on purpose, because the British administration in Palestine gave them authority.

Following the death in March 1921 of the mufti of Jerusalem, whom the British administration treated as the head of the Muslim community, Muslim leaders convened, in line with Ottoman law and tradition, to elect the three candidates from among whom the high commissioner could appoint the new mufti. Ernest Richmond, a member of Samuel's secretariat and a "declared enemy of the Zionist policy,"⁹³ favored the selection of Haj Amin el-Husseini, who had led the anti-Jewish riots in Jerusalem in April 1920, for which he had received a ten-year prison sentence and then, from Samuel, a pardon. Haj Amin placed fourth in the voting, which disqualified him, but Samuel appointed him anyway.⁹⁴ Meinertzhagen promptly recorded in his diary that Haj Amin "hates both Jews and British" and his appointment "is sheer madness":

I am particularly annoyed about this as . . . I left a memorandum with Samuel warning him of appointing the man . . . and also warning him that [Ronald]

⁹³ Ernest T. Richmond, assistant secretary (political) in Samuel's administration, was so described by Gerard Clauson, a colonial office official. Elie Kedourie, *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle-Eastern Studies* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 65.

⁹⁴ See Norman and Helen Bentwich, *Mandate Memories: 1918–1948* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1965), 191–2. Norman Bentwich was attorney general for Palestine throughout the 1920s.

Storrs [British governor of Jerusalem] would press for his appointment purely on the grounds of hostility to Zionism.

. . . [S]ooner or later his appointment will be bitterly regretted by us. I spoke to Churchill about it today, but he did not seem to be much interested and in any case said he could do nothing about it.⁹⁵

(Haj Amin over the coming decades instigated a series of anti-Jewish and anti-British riots and murders and terrorized his Arab opponents. During the Second World War, having engineered the pro-Nazi coup in Iraq in 1941, which Britain suppressed, he fled to Berlin and aided Hitler's efforts against the Allies and the Jews.)

In early May, soon after Churchill departed Palestine, several days of fatal attacks on Jews by Arabs began in Jaffa. Samuel promptly sought to placate the Arabs. He suspended Jewish immigration into Palestine, explaining to Churchill that the Arab rioters were distressed by the two hundred Jewish Bolshevik immigrants who had recently arrived, though he also noted that there was some Arab opposition to any Jewish immigration, "no matter what might be its character, on grounds of principle."⁹⁶ Samuel also proposed immediate establishment of "representative institutions," which Arab leaders had been demanding so that the current Arab majority could block Jewish immigration. Churchill ratified Samuel's immigration ban, though his reply cable observed: "The present agitation is doubtless engineered in the hope of frightening us out of our Zionist policy. . . . We must firmly maintain law and order and make concessions on their merits and not under duress."⁹⁷ On 23 May, General Congreve advised Churchill: "[I]f we are to continue our Zionist policy you must be prepared to pay for British troops to the full 5,000 effectives for a long time to come, or else risk a general Jew baiting and killing . . . and even with the 5,000 I think we take a risk in the event of an organised attack."⁹⁸

Churchill understood that "representative institutions" was a slogan connoting the end of Jewish immigration.⁹⁹ He advised Samuel not to use it, but tried to mollify the high commissioner by saying he would not

⁹⁵ Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 97–8 (April 27, 1921, entry).

⁹⁶ WSC IV 585–6.

⁹⁷ Churchill to Samuel, telegram, May 14, 1921, in WSC IV C 1466–7.

⁹⁸ WSC IV C 1473.

⁹⁹ Regarding a report by Churchill on Palestine, the May 31, 1921, cabinet minutes state that "development of representative institutions . . . was at present suspended owing to the fact that any elected body would undoubtedly prohibit further immigration of Jews." WSC IV C 1484.

oppose “step by step establishment of elective institutions.” The “morrow of the Jaffa riots” was not, as Churchill put it, “the best moment for making such a concession.”¹⁰⁰ A few weeks later, Churchill commented on the subject to his private secretary: There was great folly in “going out of our way to procure a hungry lion and then walking up to him with a plate of raw beef to see how much he would like to take.”¹⁰¹

Samuel prepared a major policy speech for delivery on the king’s birthday, 3 June. Churchill reviewed the text in advance and approved it, though he warned Samuel against “paraphrasing” the term “national home,” which Samuel wanted to define as a “spiritual centre.”¹⁰² In the speech, as delivered, Samuel announced that conditions in Palestine precluded “anything in the nature of mass immigration.”¹⁰³ While lifting the immigration ban he had imposed during the Jaffa riots, Samuel declared that the administration would henceforth restrict Jewish immigration to keep within the “economic capacity” of the country to absorb new arrivals.¹⁰⁴ Samuel stressed that Britain would “never agree to a Jewish Government being set up to rule over the Moslem and Christian majority.”¹⁰⁵

Zionist leaders protested. They promoted immigration so that the Jews could become a majority and then establish a democratic government in what would be a predominantly Jewish state. It was infuriating that Samuel would, on the one hand, imply that the Jews wanted to rule as a minority over the Arabs and, on the other hand, impose immigration restrictions and suggest that Britain would preserve the Arab majority.

In a speech to the House of Commons on 14 June, Churchill endorsed Samuel’s absorptive capacity standard. But he stressed that “the country is greatly under-populated.” He also praised the Zionist settlers for bringing about the general economic betterment of Palestine,¹⁰⁶ though he criticized the “ardour” of Zionist declarations, “which alarm the Arabs.”

¹⁰⁰ Churchill to Samuel, telegram, June 4, 1921, in WSC IV C 1493.

¹⁰¹ Churchill to Archibald Sinclair, message, June 18, 1921, in WSC IV 615–16.

¹⁰² Klieman, *Foundations*, 182. In a June 20, 1921, memorandum, General Congreve wrote, “In Palestine we are attempting to reconcile two ideals, extreme Zionism and extreme pan-Arabism, both equally undesirable and to a great extent artificial. . . . The Arabs wish to find definite expression for their national sentiments—the Jews wish to found a cultural centre. It is practically impossible to find a policy which will satisfy the extremists of both parties.” Note that Congreve here implies that any Jews who aspire to something more than a Jewish “cultural center” in Palestine are extremists whom Britain should not even try to satisfy: WSC IV C 1517.

¹⁰³ Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews*, 105. ¹⁰⁴ WSC IV 589.

¹⁰⁵ Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews*, 104.

¹⁰⁶ On his recent Palestine visit, Churchill had taken a tour, under Rutenberg’s guidance, of some Jewish settlements, which had given him confidence that the new immigrants

Addressing Britain's wartime pledges to Arabs and Jews and its new mandates, Churchill said that the "paramount object" of the Middle East department was large-scale reduction of civil and military expenditures. Notwithstanding the costs, however,

we cannot repudiate light-heartedly these undertakings. We cannot . . . leave the inhabitants, for whose safety and well-being we have made ourselves responsible in the most public and solemn manner, a prey to anarchy and confusion of the worst description. We cannot . . . leave the Jews in Palestine to be maltreated by the Arabs who have been inflamed against them.

This would not accord with Britain's "duty," nor would it "be in accordance with the reputation that our country has frequently made exertions to deserve and maintain."¹⁰⁷

Two days later, the *Times* editorialized that, if he had "carried his analysis of the present difficulties a little further," Churchill

might have discovered that one of the chief obstacles to peace is a fixed scepticism amongst many of the agents of the Government in Palestine about Zionism and the Jewish national home; and Sir Herbert Samuel, in prohibiting Jewish immigration after the Jaffa riots, may have been the unwilling victim of his agents. The embargo on immigration (now removed) was a profound mistake of policy.¹⁰⁸

Churchill concurred with Samuel that it was undesirable to expound plainly the goals of the Jewish national home policy. Whereas Meinertzhagen believed that vagueness on this point encouraged the anti-Zionists,¹⁰⁹

were not Bolsheviks and that their achievements were yielding material benefits to both themselves and their Arab neighbors. He had declared there: "I defy anybody after seeing work of this kind, achieved by so much labour, effort and skill, to say that the British Government, having taken up the position it has, could cast it all aside and leave it to be rudely and brutally overturned by the incursion of a fanatical attack by the Arab population from outside" (WSC IV 574).

¹⁰⁷ WSC IV 594–8. Though Churchill insisted that Britain must fulfill its obligations in the Middle East, he would have supported assigning these obligations to the United States if the latter were willing to accept them. On June 9, 1921, he enthusiastically endorsed what he thought was a suggestion to this effect from Lloyd George: WSC IV C 1498–9. The next day, Lloyd George disclaimed and dismissed the idea: WSC IV C 1500.

¹⁰⁸ Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews*, 111 (June 16, 1921, editorial).

¹⁰⁹ He wrote in his diary, "Both in Palestine and in the Colonial Office great weakness has been manifest as a result of the recent anti-Jewish riots in Jaffa. The anti-Zionists have used the occasion to demonstrate the futility and unfairness of the movement and its inevitable failure. . . . Sir Herbert Samuel has been weak. The moment the Jaffa rioting broke out, he and his staff seem to have been hypnotized by the danger and everything was done to placate the Arab . . . whereas what the Arab wanted was a good sound punishment for breaking the peace and killing Jews. The Arab is fast learning that he can intimidate a British Administration. Samuel has not been able to stand up to the solid block of anti-Zionist feeling among his military advisers and civil subordinates.

"Surely it is time we stood by our policy and told the Arab we shall not be intimidated

Churchill and Samuel thought they could avert needless provocation of the Arabs by dispensing with talk of a future Jewish majority. Churchill was continually pressed to explain what “national home” meant, and he was nearly always careful to keep the illumination dim. A rare occasion when he revealed his true expectation was the 22 June meeting of the imperial cabinet, at which he described the Balfour Declaration as an obligation incurred in wartime “to enlist the aid of Jews all over the world” and warned that Britain must be “very careful and punctilious” in discharging its obligations.¹¹⁰ Churchill was asked by the Canadian prime minister whether the phrase “national home” meant giving the Jews “control of the Government.” He replied, “If, in the course of many years, they become a majority in the country, they naturally would take it over.”¹¹¹ No Arab or Jewish delegation ever received so direct an answer on this point from Churchill.¹¹²

Fearful that Samuel’s 3 June speech portended the undoing of the Jewish national home policy, Weizmann traveled to London in early July. He met with Churchill and told him that the Palestine administration and the government had placed the Jews in “a vicious circle”:

On the one hand, they complain about Zionism being the burden of the British tax-payer, and when we desire to lighten this burden by developing Palestine and so increasing the wealth and productiveness of the country, they refuse to let us go on with our work because they are fearing an Arab outburst.¹¹³

The two men met again on 22 July at Balfour’s home together with Balfour, Lloyd George, and the secretary to the cabinet. According to the minutes of the meeting, Weizmann condemned Samuel’s 3 June speech as the “negation of the Balfour Declaration” because the latter meant a Jewish majority but “this speech would never permit such a majority to eventuate.” Churchill “demurred at this interpretation of the speech.”

or tolerate interference. It is absurd to talk of injustice to the Arab and eviction of the original landowners. Those arguments show a complete lack of appreciation of the Zionist movement. Zionism will injure none, on the contrary it will benefit the whole community. It is not going to dispossess the Arab or interfere with his political or religious susceptibilities.” Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 101–2 (July 5, 1921, entry).

¹¹⁰ Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, 135. ¹¹¹ WSC IV 617.

¹¹² At the August 1921 colonial office meeting with the Palestine Arab delegation, the delegation secretary asked Churchill: “Did you promise that you will help them [the Jews] to make Palestine a Jewish State, a Jewish Kingdom?” Churchill gave his typically evasive answer: “[Samuel] has expressed very very clearly what is his interpretation of Mr Balfour’s pledge. It undoubtedly is intended [that] the Jews shall be allowed to come freely into Palestine in proportion as there is room, and there is a good livelihood, provided of course they develop the resources of the country.” WSC IV C 1599.

¹¹³ WSC IV 619.

Lloyd George and Balfour “both said that by the Declaration they always meant an eventual Jewish State.” Churchill discussed the difficult situation arising from the declaration “which was opposed by the Arabs, 9/10ths of the British officials on the spot, and some of the Jews in Palestine . . . a poor country in which destitute emigrants could not be dumped.” Weizmann criticized the “representative Government project.” Lloyd George then spoke directly to Churchill: “You mustn’t give representative Government to Palestine.” Churchill replied that “questions affecting the JNH [Jewish national home] would be eliminated from the purview of the representative Government.” Weizmann said this was impossible. After some additional comments, Lloyd George noted that Weizmann wanted to know “whether we are going to keep our pledges.” Weizmann said, “yes,” Balfour then nodded, and Lloyd George told Weizmann: “You must do a lot of propaganda. Samuel is rather weak.”¹¹⁴

BALFOUR DECLARATION:
REVIEWED, REDEFINED, REAFFIRMED

Thus, the prime minister, who harassed Churchill continually to cut garrison expenses, catered to Weizmann and sympathized not at all with Churchill’s desire to keep Palestine quiet through cooperation with the local authorities. By supporting Samuel, a Jew who early in the Great War had established pro-Zionist credentials, Churchill antagonized the Zionist leadership. Yet, as the Balfour Declaration’s chief official defender, the colonial secretary suffered imprecations from the Arabs and their camp, which comprised the bulk of the British military and the Palestine administration and important voices in Parliament and the press.¹¹⁵ Under the circumstances, Churchill concluded that he needed political cover and demanded a cabinet review of Palestine policy.

In preparation for that review, Major Young, stimulated by Meinertzhagen,¹¹⁶ proposed a package deal. As a concession to the Arabs, the high commissioner’s advisory council would be established on an elective (i.e., “representative”) rather than appointive basis. The measures to satisfy Zionist concerns were several. Most important: “Any officials, whether

¹¹⁴ WSC IV C 1559–60.

¹¹⁵ For example, in October 1921, General Congreve told Major Young that “he and all his officers” thought that the government was “in the hands of the Zionist Organization” and the Middle East department was “pursuing an unfair policy in favour of the Jews.” WSC IV 636.

¹¹⁶ See Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 106–9 (August 2 and 4, 1921, entries).

civil or military, who are publicly and confessedly opposed to the declared policy of His Majesty's Government should be replaced." This would permit release of officials "who do not feel that they can conscientiously carry out what some of them regard as an unfair and unpopular measure," namely, the Balfour Declaration. It was further proposed that the military forces in Palestine report directly to the war office and not to the notoriously anti-Zionist British authorities in Egypt. Also recommended was early approval of pending public utility concessions for "Jewish enterprise," which included the Rutenberg hydroelectric proposal. In defense of the expropriation provision in these concessions, Young stated: "This cannot be regarded as conflicting in any way with the second clause of the Balfour Declaration, which was clearly not intended to protect individuals who are determined to thwart the execution of the main policy."¹¹⁷

Had His Majesty's government adopted this package, the history of Palestine and the Jews might have taken an altogether different course. Churchill distributed Young's paper to the cabinet under his own grim cover memorandum, which said that the Palestine situation "causes me perplexity and anxiety," Arabs and Jews "are ready to spring at each other's throats," and war office estimates for the Palestine garrison for 1922–3 exceed £3.3 million, an expense "almost wholly due to our Zionist policy."¹¹⁸ Churchill's memorandum, however, did not discuss or even refer to Young's specific recommendations.

When the cabinet took up Palestine on 18 August, Churchill did not ask approval for Young's recommendations. Rather, the minutes report, the alternatives before the cabinet were: withdraw the Balfour Declaration, reject the mandate, establish an Arab government, and curb or halt Jewish immigration; or "carry out the present policy with greater vigour and encourage the arming of the Jews." Without attributing comments to specific ministers, the minutes highlight certain points from the discussion: the Balfour Declaration involved the government's honor and "to go back on our pledge would seriously reduce the prestige of this country in the eyes of Jews throughout the world." The inconsistency between setting up a Jewish national home and "respecting the rights of the Arab population" must result in "estrang[ing] both Arabs and Jews, while involving us in futile military expenditure." "Against this position

¹¹⁷ August 11, 1921, memorandum, in WSC IV C 1588–90. See also WSC IV 624. As Weizmann was still in London, Young was able to obtain his consent in advance to this package deal: see Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews*, 116–17.

¹¹⁸ Churchill's August 11, 1921, cabinet memorandum, in WSC IV C 1585–6.

it was argued that the Arabs had no prescriptive right to a country which they had failed to develop to the best advantage."¹¹⁹ The cabinet took no decisions. While the coming months saw some of Young's recommendations implemented, Palestine administration officials "publicly and confessedly opposed" to the government's pro-Zionist policy remained securely in place.

The closing days of August were hard on the colonial secretary. The Palestine Arab delegation then visiting London grated on him by insisting that the Balfour Declaration be scrapped and refusing his plea that they meet informally with Weizmann. Two days after his final, prolonged, and fruitless meeting with the Arab delegates, Churchill suffered a debilitating blow: his three-and-a-half-year-old daughter Marigold, his beloved "Duckadilly," died suddenly of illness. As his mother had died just two months before, Churchill's sense of loss must have been overwhelming. Such personal trauma undoubtedly diminished his already limited patience for the bloody attacks on Jews by Arabs and the inky bickering between pro- and anti-Zionist British bureaucrats.

Samuel wrote Churchill in October to recommend a new official declaration of policy for Palestine that might facilitate Arab-Jewish "accommodation." The Zionists should agree "that their purpose is not the establishment of a State in which Jews would enjoy a position of political privilege, but a Commonwealth built upon a democratic foundation," and Britain should explicitly repudiate Weizmann's old remark that Palestine should become as Jewish as England is English.¹²⁰ Samuel thus took a personal swipe at his influential detractor while bolstering the long-standing argument that Arab hostility to British policy was largely the result of aggressive rhetoric from Zionist "extremists."¹²¹

This letter's main themes resurfaced in an extraordinary document distributed on 29 October as a circular "to all troops" from General Congreve. Purporting to clarify British policy for the puzzled men in uniform, Congreve declared:

Whilst the Army officially is supposed to have no politics, it is recognised there are certain problems . . . in which the sympathies of the Army are on one side

¹¹⁹ WSC IV C 1606. Regarding the last point, it bears noting that in his August 22, 1921, meeting with the Palestine Arab delegation Churchill remarked: "There was a time when it [Palestine] was three or four times as numerous as at present, and it is a great pity that there are not more people dwelling there and more wealth there instead of being occupied by a few people who are not making any great use of it." WSC IV C 1612.

¹²⁰ See note 47 above and accompanying text. ¹²¹ WSC IV C 1650-4.

or the other. . . . In the case of Palestine these sympathies are rather obviously with the Arabs, who have hitherto appeared to the disinterested observer to have been the victims of the unjust policy forced upon them by the British Government.

He assured his troops that the government “would never give any support to the more grasping policy of the Zionist Extremist, which aims at the Establishment of a Jewish Palestine in which Arabs would be merely tolerated” and “would certainly not countenance a policy which made Palestine for the Jews what England is for the Englishmen.”¹²²

Three days later, on the fourth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, Arab attacks on Jews in Jerusalem resulted in the death of four Jews and one Arab. Samuel meanwhile had decided not to enforce the fines imposed on the Arabs responsible for the May riots in Jaffa. That this was likelier to encourage than prevent additional violence was clear to the Middle East department, and not just to Meinertzhagen. Department head Shuckburgh wrote on October 28 that Samuel was “afraid,” but it is an “intolerable” doctrine that “offenders may defy us with impunity.” On 17 November, Churchill noted: “Samuel should be held stiffly up to the enforcement of the fines on Jaffa” for “[w]e cannot allow expediency to govern the administration of justice.”¹²³

At this time, however, Churchill was generally disinclined to engage in Palestine affairs.¹²⁴ His official attention focused chiefly on the Irish settlement, in which he had a major hand.¹²⁵ With Churchill’s mind elsewhere, Palestine policy became an arena of active domestic political combat

¹²² WSC IV C 1659–60. ¹²³ WSC IV 636–7.

¹²⁴ Churchill organized a conference in London to bring Arab and Zionist delegations together in November, but then canceled it. When it was rescheduled, he decided not to attend and sent Shuckburgh in his stead. Though he received protests about the unprofessionalism, bigotry, and disloyalty exhibited in the Congreve circular, Churchill let it pass without rebuke, marking the file on the subject: “no action required.” WSC IV C 1659 n. 1; see also WSC IV 641. On November 16, 1921, Meinertzhagen wrote in his diary, “Obstruction to Zionism is no longer impelled by Arab ideas and Arab pressure. [It] is now captained by British Officials, who have constituted themselves as advisers to the Arab delegation here in London, and who are working against Zionism in Palestine. It is political sabotage of the worst kind. At the present moment it is impossible for the Arab delegation to voice the views of the People of Palestine. They are instead voicing the view of the handful of ex-Palestine Officials in London. This makes negotiations between the Arab Delegation and the Zionists manifestly impossible. . . . Winston does not care two pins. . . . He is reconciled to a policy of drift. He is too wrapped up in Home Politics” (Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 112).

¹²⁵ Diplomacy was freeing up the services of the fearsome Black and Tans—“a pretty tough lot” (Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, 114 [December 19, 1921, entry])—the force that Churchill as war secretary had originally dispatched to suppress the Irish revolt. Now, as a cost-saving measure that did not require reliance on Jewish gendarmes, Churchill arranged to use Black and Tans, including the commanding general, to keep the peace

in Britain. The anti-Zionists, led by certain prominent peers and journalists, denounced Zionism as immoral to the Arabs and costly to the British. They wanted Parliament to reject the mandate. In the meantime, the pro-Zionists—those professing to support the Balfour Declaration—were divided into opposing camps of Weizmannites and Samuelites. These skirmished continually, in particular over whether “national home” connoted a Jewish majority and a Jewish state. Samuel’s 3 June 1921 “birthday” speech had hit the Weizmannites hard. Weizmann then countered impressively at Balfour’s home by lining up big guns—Lloyd George and Balfour—against the high commissioner. Samuel was determined that Churchill should function as artillery for the Palestine administration. He exhorted Churchill to launch a major policy statement to vindicate the “birthday” speech and put Weizmann and the other (in Samuel’s view) immoderate Zionists in their place.

Shuckburgh and Samuel worked throughout the winter of 1921–2 planning a constitution for Palestine that would incorporate measures—such as Jewish immigration limitations and an elective “Legislative Council” (albeit with restricted authority)—that Samuel believed should win the cooperation of “well-disposed” Arab leaders. When consulted about these measures, the Palestine Arab delegation in London angered Shuckburgh by reiterating its comprehensive rejection of Britain’s “Zionist policy” and leaking to anti-Zionist journalists the constitutional plans it had received for comment. A delegation leader, in a 3 March speech, was reported by Shuckburgh to have spoken “about the necessity of killing Jews if the Arabs did not get their way.”¹²⁶

On 9 March Samuel wrote Churchill that it was again necessary to suspend Jewish immigration, this time because many recent immigrants were unemployed. Samuel declared that the country’s economic absorptive capacity “remains at present small.”¹²⁷ Zionist leaders did not object in principle to regulating immigration for economic reasons, but they feared that a suspension would shore up a bad precedent. Shuckburgh noted that the Arab delegation had demanded a halt to immigration and

in Palestine. Churchill decided to take the Palestine force out from under Congreve’s Egyptian command.

Meinertzhagen observed: “Winston is inclined to pay more attention to reconstituting the Palestine Garrison than to remedying the political situation, which is, I think, an unsound policy.” Meinertzhagen drafted a new policy declaration on Zionism, which Churchill rejected “flatly . . . as a stupid proposition,” but Churchill “suggests no alternative beyond asking the Zionists to come to some amicable arrangement with the Arabs.” *Ibid.*, 110–11 (November 16, 1921, entry).

¹²⁶ WSC IV 645. ¹²⁷ WSC IV 645.

regretted that they “may now boast that they have bullied us into doing what they want.”¹²⁸ He nevertheless recommended approving Samuel’s action, and Churchill, as usual, took Shuckburgh’s advice.

The best-known document from Churchill’s tenure as colonial secretary was the 3 June 1922 statement on British policy in Palestine, the core of what became known as the Churchill white paper. In fact, Churchill neither wrote the statement nor proposed any changes in the draft written by Samuel and submitted to the colonial secretary by Shuckburgh on 24 May.¹²⁹ The white paper sounded all of Samuel’s favorite themes, including his rebuke of Weizmann’s “as Jewish as England is English” remark. Samuel calculated correctly, however, that the Zionists would accept the document. He included for their gratification a passage on Jewish rights in Palestine resting “upon ancient historic connection.” With the League of Nations soon to decide whether to confirm the mandate, he knew the Zionists would not run the risk of openly breaking with Britain.

The white paper’s premise was that tension in Palestine arose from Arab fears rooted in “exaggerated interpretations” of the Balfour Declaration. The government, it said, does not intend that Palestine become “as Jewish as England is English.” The Balfour Declaration does not contemplate that all of Palestine “be converted into a Jewish National Home, but that such a Home should be founded *in Palestine*.”

The statement then assures the Jews that their fears that Britain may abandon the declaration “are unfounded.” The term “Jewish National Home” does not mean “imposition of Jewish nationality” upon all the inhabitants but “the further development of the existing Jewish community . . . in order that it may become a centre in which the Jewish people as a whole may take . . . an interest and a pride.” For the Jewish community to have the best prospect for development, “it is essential that it should know that it is in Palestine as of right and not by sufferance” and “[t]hat is the reason why it is necessary that the existence of a Jewish National Home in Palestine should be internationally guaranteed, and that it should be formally recognised to rest upon ancient historic connection.” The Jewish community “should be able to increase its numbers by immigration” but cannot exceed the country’s economic absorptive capacity.

¹²⁸ Shuckburgh to Masterton Smith, March 11, 1922, quoted in WSC IV 646.

¹²⁹ See Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews*, 142–3.

Answering claims of entitlement that the Palestine Arab delegation had asserted, the white paper notes that "Palestine west of the Jordan" was excluded from the area designated for Arab independence in McMahon's 1915 promise to Sherif Hussein. As a step toward self-government, however, a partly elected, partly appointed legislative council was to be established. The colonial secretary, it concluded, believed that a policy along these lines "cannot but commend itself to the various sections of the population" and foster "that spirit of cooperation upon which the future progress and prosperity of the Holy Land must largely depend."¹³⁰

The statement took pains to preserve the obscurity of the term "national home." Lloyd George, Balfour, and Churchill himself had all at one point or another acknowledged that it envisioned an eventual Jewish majority and Jewish state. Having convinced himself, however, that Palestine's limited "absorptive capacity" would preclude a Jewish majority,¹³¹ Samuel saw no point in riling the Arabs with explicit talk of unrealistic notions.

Churchill, on the other hand, was confident that the Jews could enlarge Palestine's economy many times over. In choosing to play "hide the ball" regarding the actual aims of the national home policy, Churchill appears to have reasoned that, if no one ignited the Arabs with scary rhetoric, the Jews could continue to enter and build Palestine. Anti-Zionist hostility would then eventually wane as general appreciation grew that Zionism served Arab as well as Jewish economic interests.

It was (and remains) characteristic of the liberal imperialist frame of mind to minimize the seriousness of conflicts among the colonials. In Palestine, this meant overinflated hopes of Arab-Jewish conciliation and a refusal to recognize that deep and principled convictions underlay the rejection of Zionism and the pledge to eradicate it on the part of the Arab community. Churchill was not the first statesman who thought that Arab opposition to Zionism—that is, insistence that Palestine is an Arab land to which the Jews have no valid political claim—could be bought off. He was by no means the last, either.

Less than three weeks after the white paper appeared, Lord Islington, a Liberal baron, asked the Lords in Parliament to declare that the Palestine mandate "is unacceptable to this House" on the grounds that it

¹³⁰ Moore, *Documents*, 64–70.

¹³¹ On June 12, a statistician working for the Palestine administration wrote: "Sir H. Samuel told me that he thought the country could not support economically more than 6,000 immigrants per annum. If that be so then there is no conceivable chance that the Jews will ever be a majority in Palestine." WSC IV 648.

violated Britain's wartime pledges to Sherif Hussein and contradicted the "wishes of the great majority of the people of Palestine."¹³²

Balfour, newly created earl, rose to oppose the motion. In this, his maiden speech in the House of Lords, he explained that the ground that "chiefly moves me" to support Zionism is not "materialistic" but rather a desire to help solve "the great and abiding Jewish problem."¹³³ As for the purported injustice to the Arabs of Palestine, he stated: "Of all the charges made against this country . . . the charge that we have been unjust to the Arab race seems to me the strangest." He noted that it was British troops, British generals, and British blood that freed the Arab people from Turkish rule, and it was Britain that established Arab kings in Mesopotamia and the Hejaz:

And that we . . . who have . . . done more than has been done for centuries past to put the Arab race in the position to which they have attained . . . should be charged with . . . having taken a mean advantage of the course of international negotiations, seems to me not only most unjust to the policy of this country, but almost fantastic in its extravagance.¹³⁴

Balfour's heated eloquence notwithstanding, however, the Lords voted overwhelmingly—sixty to twenty-nine—that Britain should reject the mandate.

The issue of British responsibility for Palestine came to a head in the House of Commons on 4 July. As in the Lords, the anti-Zionists attacked Zionism in principle and the Rutenberg hydroelectric power concession in particular. (Churchill had approved the concession the previous September.) They protested that the Palestine administration was dominated by Jews who had "Zionised" the country.¹³⁵

¹³² Christopher Sykes, *Cross Roads to Israel* (London: Collins, 1965), 90.

¹³³ Cohen, *Speeches by Balfour*, 59, 64–5: "Surely, it is in order that we may send a message to every land where the Jewish race has been scattered . . . that Christendom is not oblivious of their faith, is not unmindful of the service they have rendered to the great religions of the world, and, most of all, to the religion that the majority of your Lordships' House profess, and that we desire . . . to give them that opportunity of developing, in peace and quietness under British rule, those great gifts which hitherto they have been compelled . . . only to bring to fruition in countries which know not their language and belong not to their race."

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 57–8. In his memoirs, Lloyd George made essentially the same point: "No race has done better out of the fidelity with which the Allies redeemed their promises to the oppressed races than the Arabs. Owing to the tremendous sacrifices of the Allied Nations . . . the Arabs have already won independence in Iraq, Arabia, Syria, and Transjordan, although most of the Arab races fought [for Turkey]. . . . The Palestinian Arabs fought for Turkish rule." David Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), vol. 2, 723–4.

¹³⁵ WSC IV 651.

Churchill led the defense of the government's policy. His emphasis was not so much on the wisdom and morality of the Balfour Declaration as on the solemnity of the commitment, which implicated the government's credibility and honor.

Pledges and promises were made during the War . . . not only on the merits, though I think the merits are considerable . . . because it was considered they would be of value to us in our struggle to win the War. It was considered that the support which the Jews could give us all over the world, and particularly in the United States, and also in Russia, would be a definite palpable advantage.

Churchill regaled the House by quoting passionately pro-Zionist speeches that his current critics in Parliament had made when the Balfour Declaration was first issued. He then drew "the moral" that these members "have no right to support public declarations made in the name of your country in the crisis and heat of War, and then afterwards, when all is cold and prosaic, to turn round and attack the Minister . . . faithfully and laboriously endeavouring to translate these perfervid enthusiasms into the sober, concrete facts of day-to-day administration." He appealed to the House to uphold Britain's undertakings "faithfully" and to "interpret in an honourable and earnest way the promise that Britain will do her best to fulfil her undertakings to the Zionists."

In defending the Kutenberg concession against the charge that it was unjust to the Arabs, Churchill stressed that such projects would benefit everyone in Palestine: "[W]as not this a good gift that would impress more than anything else on the Arab population that the Zionists were their friends and helpers, not their expellers and expropriators, and that . . . Palestine had before it a bright future, and that there was enough for all?" He added:

I am told that the Arabs would have done it [i.e., hydroelectric development] themselves. Who is going to believe that? Left to themselves, the Arabs of Palestine would not in a thousand years have taken effective steps towards the irrigation and electrification of Palestine. They would have been quite content to dwell—a handful of philosophic people—in the wasted sun-scorched plains, letting the waters of the Jordan continue to flow unbridled and unharnessed into the Dead Sea.¹³⁶

Churchill's speech was as persuasive as it was entertaining. The division that followed produced 292 votes in support of the government's Palestine policy and 35 votes in opposition.

¹³⁶ WSC IV 652-6.

With this endorsement in hand, the government finally sought confirmation of the mandate from the council of the League of Nations, which it obtained on 24 July. Through a League resolution invoking Article 25, which Churchill had added to the mandate for this purpose back in 1921, Britain then formalized the exclusion of Transjordan from the Jewish national home.¹³⁷ When the Conservatives brought down the Lloyd George coalition government in October, Churchill lost his job as colonial secretary.

CONCLUSION

The term “appeasement” in international affairs acquired a disreputable ring largely through Winston Churchill’s prescient excoriation in the 1930s of the Neville Chamberlain government’s policy toward Nazi Germany. Before the Second World War, however, proponents of appeasement proudly embraced the term. Churchill himself often employed it favorably.

Appeasement can be a sensible and honorable method of terminating a quarrel, as any parent of small children or any government official who must resolve differences with independent-minded foreign friends will attest. Britain’s appeasement policy of the 1930s failed not because of any inherent flaw in the methodology, but because the other side was not appeasable. Chamberlain is judged harshly for failing to recognize that Hitler’s ambitions were neither limited nor manageable and that Nazi grievances could not be assuaged through reasonable accommodation; Churchill receives credit for apprehending that appeasement would not work with the German regime.

As colonial secretary in 1921 and 1922, however, Churchill refused to see or admit that Arab opposition to Zionism was beyond appeasement. In a historical review prepared after the Second World War by the British administration in Palestine, the failure of appeasement in the early days of the Palestine mandate was explained with impressive directness: “It had become obvious that the Arab objection was, not to the way in which the Mandate might be worked, but to the whole policy of the Mandatory and that by no concession, however liberal, were the Arabs

¹³⁷ Memorandum by the British representative on Article 25 of the Palestine mandate, approved by the council of the League of Nations, September 16, 1922, in Moore, *Documents*, 83–4.

prepared to be reconciled to a regime which recognised the implications of the Balfour Declaration.”¹³⁸

In 1939, just before the Second World War began, Churchill explicitly linked the Chamberlain government’s efforts to appease, respectively, the Arabs in Palestine and the Germans in Europe. Both efforts, he said, were dishonorable and doomed to fail. Both undermined British influence and endangered international security because they signaled that Britain could not be counted on to fulfill its commitments. The government’s white paper on Palestine of May 1939 had given the Arabs a veto over future Jewish immigration into Palestine, thereby ensuring permanent minority status for the Jews. Churchill voiced blistering indignation: “Now, there is the breach; there is the violation of the pledge; there is the abandonment of the Balfour Declaration.” He asked what Britain’s potential enemies will think of this “act of abjection,” this “lamentable act of default”: “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,’ and be the more stimulated in their aggression?”¹³⁹

But the white paper anticipated such criticism. It asserted that, in promising a Jewish national home, Britain had never committed itself to a Jewish majority or a Jewish state in Palestine. As evidence, it offered a lengthy quotation from the Churchill white paper of 1922, in which the then colonial secretary had played “hide the ball” regarding the aims of Britain’s Zionist policy. Churchill played this game with such care that the new colonial secretary in 1939 could claim, plausibly if disingenuously, that the ball never existed in the first place.

History is not a controlled experiment. We cannot know whether a candid, forceful, and unapologetic implementation of the Jewish national home policy would have compelled the Arab world to resign itself to the inevitability of a Jewish state in western Palestine. We do know, however, that the British government’s purposeful vagueness about its aims in Palestine, its severing of Transjordan from the Jewish national home, its restrictions on Jewish immigration, its courting of Arab extremists, and its other similar efforts to contain and defuse anti-Zionism did not have that effect. Rather, they persuaded anti-Zionists in the Arab community,

¹³⁸ Government of Palestine, *A Survey of Palestine: Prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry*, 2 vols. (Palestine: Government Printer, 1945–6), vol. 1, 22.

¹³⁹ WSC V 1070–1.

the Palestine administration, and back home in Britain that the government lacked the resolve to maintain its pro-Zionist policy in the face of persistent, vocal, and violent opposition. Such measures in fact engendered such opposition. This is hardly amazing and did not become obvious only in hindsight, as the writings of that contemporary Cassandra, Colonel Meinertzhagen, demonstrate.

Why did Churchill consent to this policy?

Regarding Palestine and many other subjects, Churchill exhibited a liberal optimism rooted in confidence that people would act “rationally” to seek peace and material betterment for themselves and their communities. Churchill showed limited appreciation of the potency of outraged Muslim religious sentiment among the Arabs. And owing to his imperialist worldview, he was not attuned to the Arabs’ increasingly intense nationalism, which both reflected and fed hostility toward the Zionists (and toward Britain and the West in general). So Churchill convinced himself that prospects for Arab-Jewish conciliation were brighter than was in fact the case. He convinced himself further that the way to realize those prospects was to dilute (though not, as he saw it, betray) the Balfour Declaration. Churchill experienced firsthand on several occasions the refusal of Palestine Arab delegations to compromise their anti-Zionist principles. This vexed him but did not cause him to repudiate appeasement as impracticable.

Such a repudiation would, in any event, have been hard to impose on the bureaucracy. Numerous civilian and military officials in Palestine and London were committed to placating Palestine’s Arabs to the detriment of the Zionists. Replacing these officials with pro-Zionists would have required a Herculean clean-out. Even then, it might not have been possible. And there was no hope of actually changing the policy on the ground without changing personnel. The bureaucratic impediments to implementing an unwaveringly pro-Zionist policy surely reinforced Churchill’s philosophical predisposition to seek peace in Palestine by appealing to the Arabs’ moderate instincts and economic self-interest.

Churchill sympathized with Zionism, believed in the justice of the cause, and judged that a Jewish national home in Palestine would serve the interests of the British Empire. But he did not rank Palestine among the top priorities of British foreign policy. Indeed, he viewed the entire Middle East as a strategic sideshow. When he moved to the colonial office, he was given primary responsibility for an area he deemed of secondary importance. So he tended to flow with the recommendations of his principal

subordinates in Middle Eastern affairs, rather than bucking the current or endeavoring to change its direction.

By any sensible measure, Churchill was a good friend of the Jews, one of their best in high government circles anywhere. But the Jews' national cause never was, and never could be, the highest priority of Churchill or his government. This rudimentary reality caused difficulties but no surprises for thoughtful Zionists. Zionism aimed to create a Jewish state, after all, precisely because otherwise there would be none in the world whose highest priority is the interest of the Jewish people.