

MICHAEL J. COHEN

Palestine and the Great Powers, 1945-1948



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Michael J. Cohen

PALESTINE
AND THE
GREAT POWERS

1945-1948

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For Elissa, Ilan, and Natalie

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For permission to reprint Maps 1 and 2, which also appeared in my first book, I am grateful to Granada Publishing Limited. For permission to base them on maps in J. C. Hurewitz's *The Struggle for Palestine*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950 and Schocken Books, 1976), I am grateful to Professor Hurewitz. Map 3 is reprinted from George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs*, fourth edition, copyright © 1980 by Cornell University and is used by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.

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Note on the Use of Sources

Every historian is limited by his own predilections, biases, and finite capacity. I have endeavored to make a serious examination of those archives accessible to me in England, the United States, and Israel. But two comments need to be made at the outset.

First, my treatment of the Arab side in this memoir has been limited, not only by my personal shortcomings, but also by the following factors: how many Palestinian documents were written at the time, and of those, how many were retained for posterity, remains uncertain. The PLO Research Centre at Beirut was not accessible to me personally, and the bulk of the material is in dozens of private collections, whose owners are usually most reticent to show their documents. As I try to explain below, the Palestinian Arabs failed to realize any appreciable diplomatic or military potential during the period under discussion here. Therefore their role was relatively marginal, and it is for *this* reason, rather than because of any personal sympathies of the author, that the Palestinians are accorded less space than other participants in this drama.

Last, a note about my use of the documents at the National Archives in Washington. I initially made a preliminary study of the volumes of documents published by the State Department Historical Office (the *FRUS* series). These documents are a commendable collection, accessible to everyone. I next visited the National Archives to see for myself which, if any, documents had been omitted by the editors of *FRUS*. When quoting from or referring to these documents, I have preferred to keep to the *FRUS* reference when possible, thus allowing the reader to check it out himself in his local library. Documents available only in the National Archives are given the file reference.

Abbreviations

AJC	American Jewish Committee
AZEC	American Zionist Emergency Council
BGA	Ben-Gurion Archives, Israel
CZA	Central Zionist Archives, Israel
FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i> series
HAC	Higher Arab Committee
HST	Harry S Truman Library, United States
ID	<i>Israel Documents</i>
ISA	Israel State Archives, Israel
IZL	Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization)
LEHI	Lohamei Herut Israel (Israel Freedom Fighters, also known as the Stern gang)
MEC	Middle East Centre, Oxford, England
NA	National Archives, United States
PRO	Public Record Office, England
WA	Weizmann Archives, Israel
ZOA	Zionist Organization of America

Palestine and the Great Powers, 1945-1948

INTRODUCTION

At San Remo, in April, 1920, after more than a year of haggling and recurrent crises, Britain and France agreed finally to share between themselves the Middle Eastern spoils of the Great War. Considerable modifications were made to the notorious Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916. Palestine, which according to that agreement was supposed to become an area of international administration, was now recognized as a zone of outright British interest. In return, Britain forsook the Hashemite cause in Syria and gave France *carte blanche* in that country. During the proceedings, the American ambassador whiled away his time reading his newspaper in the pleasant gardens. In 1922, prior to the signing of a final peace treaty with the new Turkish regime of Attaturk, the League of Nations sanctified the San Remo arrangements by handing out mandates over Palestine and Transjordan, and Iraq, to Britain, and over Syria to France.¹

In April 1920 Palestine was still officially designated occupied enemy territory and was ruled by a British military administration. Its population consisted of approximately 570,000 Arabs and 66,000 Jews. Both elements had attached exaggerated importance to the Balfour Declaration, which in 1917 had assured the Jews of British support for the establishment of a "National Home" in Palestine. Arabs feared and Jews hoped that the British were about to create a Jewish state in Palestine. These expectations were soon dashed.

¹ For general background reading on the Middle East during World War I, see E. Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, London, 1956; H. Sachar, *The Emergence of the Middle East*, New York, 1969; and C. Sykes, *Crossroads to Israel*, Bloomington, 1973.

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Yet for as long as Britain held the Mandate as international trustee, there remained the possibility that it would transform the National Home into a state, as indeed the Peel Commission recommended in 1937.

But the Balfour Declaration, enshrined among the articles of the Mandate, did have immediate tangible effect. It transformed the Jewish community in Palestine itself from a vulnerable society, most of whose members were aliens living under the capitulation protection of foreign powers, especially Russia, into a protected national minority, whose language, religion, and communal institutions received the legal recognition and protection of the British regime.

As a community, the Palestinian Arabs never accepted or welcomed the Jews back to their ancient homeland—even if Feisal, the Beduin leader of the Arab Revolt (1916-1918), prompted by T. E. Lawrence, had conducted perfunctory negotiations with Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the Zionist leader, prior to the peace conference. The Palestinian Arabs protested violently against British support for Zionism, in 1920, and again in 1921, in a vain attempt to dissuade London from ratifying the Mandate, and with it, the Balfour Declaration.

Following the bloody riots of May 1921, the first British high commissioner to Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel, a practicing Jew, pressed on London a go-slow policy in regard to Zionism, one that would not arouse the Arabs, but appease them, thus affording them the time necessary to appreciate the benefits of liberal English rule. In a White Paper issued in June 1922, an attempt was made to inject some meaning into the vague and ambiguous Balfour Declaration. The Arabs were reassured that although the Jews were to be accepted in Palestine as of right and not on sufferance, it was not the intention of the government to impose over the indigenous population either Jewish majority rule or a Jewish state (the latter option had been explicitly dangled before the Jews as an ultimate prospect by the architects of the Balfour Declaration).²

During the early years of the Mandate, all the parties involved became aware that life in Palestine would be difficult, if not violent. The Lloyd George government had adhered to the Balfour Declaration as much for reasons of prestige, and because it legitimized a presence required for strategic purposes, as for any other reason. The 1922 White Paper, issued shortly before the demise of Lloyd

² The 1922 White Paper, Cmd. 1700, is well worth study. Two basic studies of the mandatorial period are *ESCO Foundation for Palestine*, 2 vols., New Haven, 1947; and J. C. Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine*, New York, 1950.

George's government, was in many respects an attempt to buy time and put off a final showdown between Jews and Arabs.

The Jews were distraught at the implications of the 1922 White Paper, which for the first time introduced restrictions on Jewish immigration. The new regulations, limiting immigration to those who could be usefully absorbed into the economy, reflected the economic weakness of the Zionist movement in the 1920s. However, when the 1930s ushered in a new era of mass migration, in which a significant portion of the immigrants brought with them capital to create employment, the 1922 regulations came to be manipulated, by both British and Jews, for political purposes. But during the 1920s, the Zionists failed to attain their anticipated potential, both in the field of finance (investment) and in that of human resources (immigration). There were mass migrations to Palestine, especially in 1924, but these brought on economic recession and migration in the opposite direction. In 1928, there was a net emigration of Jews out of Palestine.

Zionist strategy too became one of biding time, building up gradually while putting off further constitutional or political change until the National Home in Palestine had been consolidated into a viable economic and military entity. Ironically, it was the enemies of the Jews in Europe who, by persecuting and driving out their Jews, brought to maturity the process of consolidation in Palestine.

The Arabs of Palestine had never enjoyed autonomy. In 1918, the British armies brought to an end just over 400 years of oppressive Ottoman tyranny, eased perhaps by the common bonds of the Islamic faith. In 1922, the British set up in Jerusalem a Supreme Moslem Council to direct and supervise the Arabs' communal and religious affairs, which had been previously controlled direct from Constantinople. Control of this new institution, and of the vast patronage at its disposal (appointment of teachers and religious dignitaries, and control over religious foundations or *waqfs*) was handed over to a relative newcomer, though scion of the leading Arab family, Amin el-Husayni. Appointed by the British to the office of mufti of Jerusalem (soon to be restyled as the "Grand Mufti") only the year before, Amin el-Husayni was within the span of a single year elevated to preeminence over the Arab community—much to the chagrin and frustration of the Husaynis' rivals, the Nashashibi family, headed by Ragheb bey, an engineer who had represented Jerusalem in the Turkish parliament.³

³ For a detailed authoritative history of the Palestinian Arabs, see Y. Porat, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement*, vol. 1, 1918-1929, and vol. 2, 1929-1939, London, 1974, 1977.

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The elevation of Amin el-Husayni was contrived by the British with two objectives in mind: first, to compensate the Husayni family after its leader was deprived of the mayoralty of Jerusalem, in punishment for inciting to riot in 1920 (Ragheb bey infuriated the Husaynis by accepting the post in their stead); and second, to moderate Amin's radicalism (he too had incited the 1920 riots, but had fled Palestine under threat of arrest) and damp his revolutionary ardor with the perquisites of power.

High Commissioner Samuel's tactics produced valuable dividends in the medium term, but proved disastrous in the long term, for all parties concerned. Amin became moderate and kept the peace during the 1920s, while he built up a position of unchallengeable power and promoted Jerusalem's importance as a Holy City to Islam. The British, buying ephemeral peace, winked at their own regulations prescribing regular elections of all members of the Supreme Moslem Council—and were duly proscribed for doing so by the Peel Commission in 1937. When that same commission proposed an orderly compromise by surgically partitioning Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, Amin el-Husayni not only vetoed any form of territorial compromise, but began a campaign of terror and violence against those moderates within the Arab community who were weighing the relative merits of a compromise under the British against the prospect of an independent Arab Palestine under Husayni hegemony. The second phase of the Arab Rebellion against the Mandate (1936-1939), which began at the end of 1937, left behind more Arab victims of internecine terror than either Jewish or British.

The Arab Rebellion, which began with sporadic acts of terror in April 1936, took place against a backcloth of significant demographic change in Palestine itself, and of critical political and military change in Europe and the Middle East, with which the reader will be familiar already.⁴

The march of anti-Semitism in Central Europe that began in the early 1930s led to an ever-increasing volume of Jewish immigration into Palestine. Whereas some 4,000 Jews arrived in 1931, a record number of nearly 62,000 arrived in 1935. The percentage of Jews in the total population rose from 17 (170,000) in 1929, to 31 (400,000) by 1936. The Arabs suspected and feared that many more had entered illegally. It seemed to them that the day was not far off

⁴ For the 1936-1945 period, see my *Palestine: Retreat from the Mandate*, London and New York, 1978.

when, at the then current rate of immigration, the Jews would overhaul the Arabs and become the majority. Arab anxieties, and the general movement (in Egypt and Syria) to exact concessions from the Western powers, sparked off the revolt in Palestine. This occurred precisely at that juncture when the British began to conserve and marshal their resources and forces for what would be World War II.

The British rationalized their strategic need to appease the Arabs (in effect the Arab states, which had rallied to, or seized upon the Palestinians' cause) with the claim that they had already fulfilled their commitment under the Balfour Declaration, and that Jewish immigration could no longer be regarded as a purely economic matter, but had to be seen in the political context of Arab nationalism. The outcome was the White Paper of May 1939. This document laid down a new policy which for the first time put finite limits on the Jewish National Home. No more than 75,000 Jews would be admitted into Palestine over the next five years, after which Jewish immigration would require Arab consent; the various government departments were to be transferred gradually to Palestinians, and an independent Palestinian state established within ten years; during this period, Jewish economic expansion would be curtailed by a prohibition on land purchases outside those areas in which they were already settled.

Britain had from the beginning sought to legitimize its rule in Palestine by mobilizing the support of both communities. When the Arabs refused to accept the Balfour Declaration or endorse the 1922 White Paper, the administration tried to woo them with administrative appointments and perquisites. This policy could not succeed so long as the British remained committed to the Jews, and it received its *coup de grâce* in 1936 when Haj Amin el-Husayni himself led the Arab Revolt. The breakdown was given fitting expression in October 1937, when the Supreme Moslem Council was proscribed by the British, and Haj Amin fled the country, narrowly escaping the fate of his colleagues who headed the council, most of whom were arrested and deported to the Seychelles. On the other side, the 1939 White Paper, while failing to satisfy the Palestinian Arabs, did alienate the Jews. Henceforth, the British were held by them to be ruling Palestine illegally (the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations had refused to ratify the White Paper), and thus British regulations (on immigration and land sales) might be infringed with a clear conscience.

The 1939 White Paper, while intended to serve British interests

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on the eve of the great conflict, was inflicted on the Jews at the time of their greatest need. As desperate Jewish refugees fled Nazi Europe, trying to circumvent official British regulations, the Colonial Office seemed at times to be obsessed with covert Nazi conspiracies to infiltrate agents into the Middle East, and in retaliation for "excessive" illegal immigration, withheld the biannual legal quota of immigration certificates twice during the first year of the war.⁵

Just as the British felt unable to adhere any longer to the spirit of the Balfour Declaration following the changes of the 1930s, so the changes resulting from World War II made it equally obvious that the 1939 White Paper would not meet with the moral or political approbation of the international community after the peace—in 1939, Prime Minister Chamberlain had in fact admitted in the cabinet that the White Paper was a wartime measure.

Thus the British dilemma became progressively more acute. On the one hand, once the nature of Hitler's final solution to the Jewish problem became known and fully appreciated during the course of 1942, it became unthinkable, and impolitic, to contemplate the cessation of Jewish immigration into Palestine at the end of the time limit prescribed by the 1939 White Paper, that is March 1944. The Zionists also forced the pace when, despairing of the British, they adopted a new program in May 1942 that called for the establishment after the war of a Jewish state in Palestine that would stretch from the river Jordan to the Mediterranean (the Biltmore program). The presence in the United States of a politically influential Jewish community, which in 1943 adopted the Biltmore program, made it difficult, if not impossible, for London to pursue any policy that might be construed as anti-Zionist.

On the other side, the Arab world achieved further political cohesion during the course of the war, culminating in the foundation of the Arab League, in Cairo, in March 1945. The League's preliminary platform, which emerged from the Arabs' first conference in Alexandria in September 1944, referred to the terms of the 1939 White Paper as the "natural rights" of the Palestinian Arabs, notwithstanding the fact that the Palestinians' own leaders had rejected that document in 1939, and Amin el-Husayni had collaborated with the Nazis since 1941.

⁵ For British policies toward the Jews of Europe during World War II, see B. Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945*, Oxford, 1979. The Germans *did* in fact help European Jews flee to Palestine during the first years of the war, but the British never did uncover any agents among the Jewish immigrants.

Although in 1944 a British cabinet committee had, under Churchill's direction, again proposed the eventual partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, the scheduled discussion in the full cabinet had been put off following the assassination in Cairo of the British minister of state, Lord Moyne. Churchill never returned to the Zionist cause, and the Palestine problem was inherited by the Labour government, along with a welter of would-be panaceas.

The options of the Labour government were restricted severely, given Britain's increasing awareness of her own vulnerability as possessor of an empire that she no longer had sufficient resources, or will, to hold on to, and growing anxieties about anticipated competition and challenge from her wartime allies, the United States and the Soviet Union. Britain was unable to create the state the Jews demanded, for fear the Arab League would succumb to the wooings of one of her Great Power rivals; yet she was equally unable to redeem the White Paper pledges and create an independent Arab state in Palestine, thereby closing the doors of Palestine to all further Jewish immigration.

The story told in this memoir is of the attempt made by each of the various parties now involved with the Palestine problem—Britain, the United States, the Jews, and the Arabs—to impose its own solution to the problem. Britain quickly realized that the United States held the key to the solution and therefore persuaded President Truman to join a joint Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry in 1945. When all Anglo-American negotiation and discussion failed to produce a consensus between the two allies, Britain's resolve to hang on to Palestine (at a time when the heart of the British Empire was relinquished) was broken. American policy, torn between the conflicting pressures of "national interests" in the Middle East, and the "electoral interests" of the president, was inconsistent, vacillating, even bungling. Eugene Rostow has compared and contrasted the determined response expressed in the Truman Doctrine regarding the northern tier of the Middle East, with that in the Palestine imbroglio: "While the British quandary in Greece triggered an American response of remarkable dimensions, the British quandary in Palestine resulted only in American hand-wringing, dithering, ineffectiveness, and indeed irresponsibility."⁶

⁶ Eugene V. Rostow, "Israel in the Evolution of American Foreign Policy," p. 58, paper delivered to joint session of the American Historical Association and the American Jewish Historical Society on December 28, 1976, published in *The Palestine Question in American History*, New York, 1978.

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The Jews and the Arabs, each in their own ways, tried to influence events from the peripheries and, once Britain began evacuation in 1947, abandoned diplomacy for another form of politics. At the United Nations, the Zionist lobby won the crucial battles, notwithstanding a sustained Arab campaign that included threats to desert to the Soviets and to curtail Western oil concessions. In Palestine itself, the Arab forces maintained the upper hand during the hostilities from November 1947 until April 1948, when a series of successful Jewish operations laid the infrastructure of the state allotted them by the November 1947 UN resolution.

THE PALESTINE LEGACY

CHURCHILL AND ZIONISM

As prime minister, Churchill had taken a pro-Zionist stand on every issue connected with Palestine during the war—from the Land Transfers Bill promulgated in February 1940, to the various schemes for a Jewish fighting force, to the renewed discussion of partition itself from 1943. Yet apart from his success in pushing through the decision to raise a Jewish brigade in September 1944 (this was a belated emasculated version of the Jewish division plan agreed to by Churchill's cabinet in October 1940), Churchill did not press to a positive conclusion any pro-Zionist measure. Neither did he seriously contemplate the dismissal of any cabinet appointee because of differences over Zionism.¹

During the war, Churchill's solemn commitments to the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann had retained for Britain the support of the "moderate" Zionists, valuable in that that support had blunted the anti-British campaigns waged by some sections of American Jewry. Yet Churchill ended his historic ministry "with the White Paper unabrogated, no commitment on record and Weizmann left high and dry, standing before the Jewish people baffled, enraged, undermined and empty-handed."² It is not easy to reconcile all this with the accepted view of Churchill as a pro-Zionist.

Occasional references in Churchill's war memoirs hint at controversies between him and his colleagues regarding the Holocaust,

¹ Michael J. Cohen, "Direction of Policy in Palestine, 1936-1945," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 11/3, October 1975, pp. 237-261.

² Abba Eban, "Tragedy and Triumph," in *Chaim Weizmann, a Biography by Several Hands*, ed. M. Weisgal and J. Carmichael, London, 1962, p. 278.

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both before and after the scale of the slaughter became generally known. They show that he was trying to live up to his sympathies for the Jewish people. But no contemporary statement of his can be found either to justify his stand or to explain his attitude to what for European Jewry was quite literally a matter of life and death.³ As prime minister during the war, Churchill must take the major blame for British inaction in the face of Nazi crimes.

After 1944, Jewish terrorism seems to have alienated Churchill from Zionism permanently. The assassination of Lord Moyne (a close friend) in November 1944, not only brought a strong warning from him in the Commons to the Zionist movement as a whole, but caused him also to shelve the new partition scheme which had already been placed on the cabinet's agenda.⁴ On August 1, 1946, nine days after the King David Hotel tragedy (see Chapter Four) Churchill endorsed the Labour Party doctrine which divorced Palestine from the Jewish refugee problem: "No one can imagine that there is room in Palestine for the great masses of Jews who wish to leave Europe, or that they could be absorbed in any period which it is now useful to contemplate." Referring to the King David Hotel explosion, he added: "It is perfectly clear that Jewish warfare directed against the British in Palestine will, if protracted, automatically release us from all obligations to persevere, as well as destroy the inclination to make further efforts in British hearts."⁵

WARTIME PROPOSALS FOR A SOLUTION

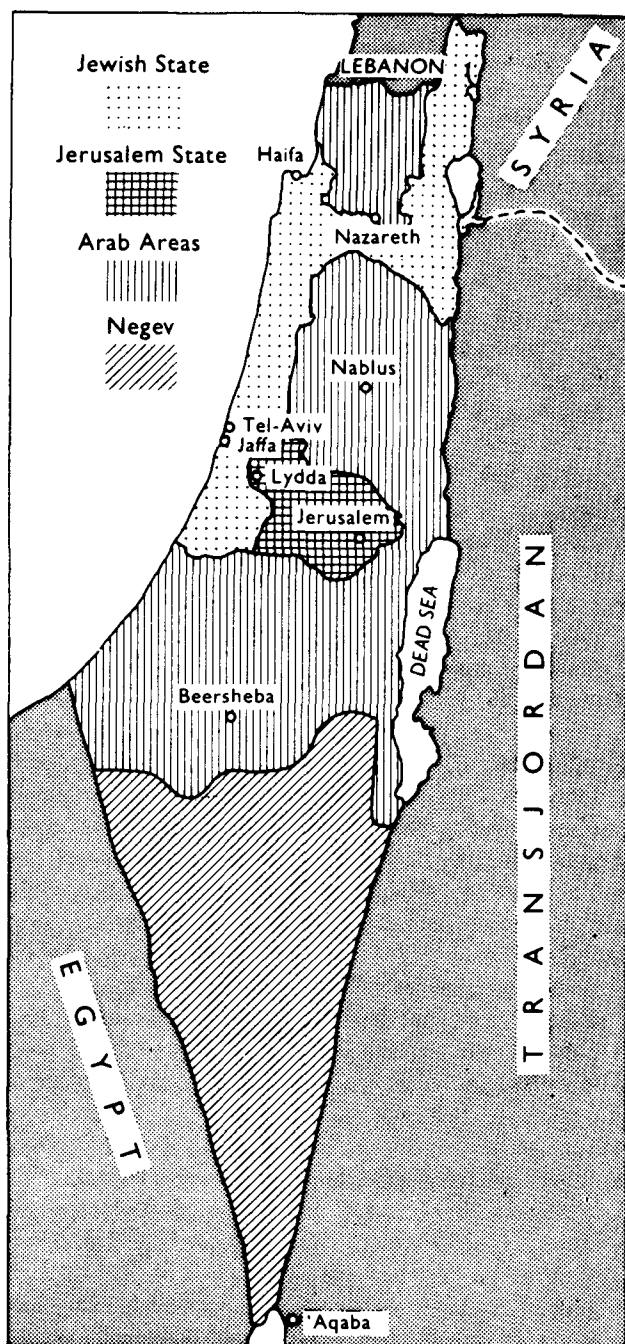
From the spring of 1945, two long-term proposals had held the field. The first was the partition plan proposed by the Cabinet Committee on Palestine in September 1944.⁶ At the time of its inception, it had enjoyed the support of High Commissioner Harold MacMichael, and of the minister of state resident in the Middle East, Lord Moyne, who together with the greater part of Churchill's cabinet had overcome the opposition of the Foreign Office and the Middle Eastern ambassadors. This balance had been broken when the successors to these two keys offices (Lord Gort in Palestine, from September 1944, and Sir Edward Grigg in Cairo, from No-

³ Oskar K. Rabinowicz, *Winston Churchill on Jewish Problems*, London, 1956, New York, 1960, pp. 119 ff.

⁴ Cohen, *Retreat*, pp. 179, 190.

⁵ Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons (hereafter *H. C. Deb.*), vol. 426, cols. 1253-1257.

⁶ Cohen, *Retreat*, pp. 178-179.



Map 1. The British cabinet committee's partition proposal, 1944

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vember 1944) went on record against partition. A conference of Middle East diplomatic and military personnel held in Cairo in April 1945 unanimously condemned and buried the idea.⁷

The second proposal was put forward by Grigg himself, in April 1945. His scheme, for an international trusteeship over Palestine, would have ended Britain's exclusive responsibility for the thorny problem of Jewish immigration; instead, immigration quotas would have been determined by an international body composed of representatives from the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and Britain herself, together with two Jews and two Arabs; the functions and status of the Jewish Agency would have been curtailed drastically, and a legislative council, in which neither community disposed of a majority, would have been established.⁸

But Grigg's scheme, while disposing admirably of some of the anomalies inherent in the Palestine Mandate, itself suffered from obvious defects. It conceded to others the final decision on immigration (perhaps against British advice) while leaving British troops alone to face the consequences; the constitutional proposals, while maintaining parity between the two peoples, would in practice have led to paralysis of the administration; and last, the scheme would have provoked Arab opposition, since it represented a serious regression from the 1939 White Paper, which had stipulated an Arab veto on Jewish immigration after 1944, the appointment of Palestinian ministers, and the establishment of an independent Palestine state by 1949 at the latest.

Among the Middle Eastern ambassadors there was a general consensus that the White Paper policy presented the only feasible course for the short term. However, it was appreciated that the plight of the Jewish refugees in Europe necessitated a breach in the White Paper immigration regulations. It was felt that conflict in Palestine might be averted if Jews and Arabs alike were informed that the continuation of immigration at the present rate was intended only as an interim arrangement, in order to facilitate proper discussion of Palestine's future under the new trusteeship clauses of the UN Charter.⁹

From Washington, Ambassador Halifax reported on the widely held opinion that Britain, by its strict adherence to the White Paper

⁷ Joint Colonial/Foreign Office memorandum, June 11, 1945, E3975, FO 371/45377.

⁸ WP(45) 214, Cab 66/64, April 4, 1945.

⁹ Grigg to FO, June 29, 1945, and Killearn (Cairo) to FO, June 18, 1945, in E4775, E4718, FO 371/45378. The trusteeship agreements were discussed at San Francisco from April to June 1945.

during the war, had impeded the salvation of many more Jews from Nazi persecution.¹⁰ Thus the Jews, who in any case could exert considerable pressure on the administration, in Congress, and through the mass media, would also be able to carry with them both liberal humanitarians and many anti-Jews on this issue. Halifax made an assertion that some months later would receive a public airing from Bevin himself: "The average citizen does not want them [the Jews] in the United States, and salves his conscience by advocating their admission into Palestine." Whereas the State Department, mindful of American economic interests in the Middle East, might be more favorable to the Arab than to the Zionist cause, there was of course no Arab constituency in the United States to counter the Jewish vote there.

Halifax proposed that London offer the United States a share in its mandatorial responsibility, or at least attempt to associate another great power with Palestine, on the lines suggested by Grigg. Failing this, the next best, though much less acceptable course, would be the continuation of immigration with Arab consent. Halifax summed up wryly: "For the Americans to be able thus to criticise and influence without responsibility is the most favourable and agreeable situation for them, and, I must suppose, the exact converse for us."¹¹

Churchill took Halifax's proposal in all seriousness, writing to the Colonial Office and to the Chiefs of Staff: "I do not think that we should take the responsibility upon ourselves of managing this very difficult place while the Americans sit back and criticize. . . . I am not aware of the slightest advantage which has ever accrued to Great Britain from this painful and thankless task. Somebody else should have their turn now."¹²

These were revealing thoughts from one who yet enjoyed the universal reputation of being a fervent supporter of Zionism. Those to whom the query was put were evidently still laboring under the conviction that Britain had fought the war (successfully) in order to maintain and continue in its great-power status. Oliver Stanley, colonial secretary for the previous two and a half years, concurred with Churchill's profit and loss account, but he stressed the wider political and military importance of the country: "From the Colonial Office point of view it is hard to see what advantage has ever accrued to Great Britain from the Palestine Mandate which has

¹⁰ Halifax to FO, July 1, 1945, E4849, FO 371/45378.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Churchill minute, July 6, 1945, E4939, FO 371/45378.

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proved a continual drain on resources of material and manpower. I realise, however, that the effects both upon the Arab world and upon our strategic position in the Middle East might be serious, but these matters are more for the Foreign Office and the Chiefs of Staff."¹³

But it was precisely those "wider" British interests, rather than any sense of obligation to either community in Palestine itself, that were of concern to Britain at the end of the war. Harold Beeley, soon to be appointed a secretary to the Anglo-American committee on Palestine, wrote that Churchill's proposal would be but the thin edge of the wedge: "Abdication in Palestine would be regarded in the Middle East as symptomatic of our abdication as a Great Power, and might set in motion a process which would result in the crumbling away of our influence throughout this region."¹⁴

The military were still further behind the politicians in their assessment of the new world order that would emerge after the war. The Chief of Staffs' rejection of Churchill's trial balloon might have been written ten or even twenty years before:

The abandonment in favour of the Americans of our present position in Palestine will adversely affect our position, not in that country only, but throughout the Moslem world . . . main advantage . . . [would be that the United States] will be directly concerned in the maintenance of peace in the Middle East and thus more concerned in the peace of Europe. . . . On the other hand, this area will remain of prime importance to the British Empire and we should become dependent to a considerable extent, on another country for our security in an area in which we have the major interest. . . . Handing over the mandate [would lead to a loss of] our predominant position in the Middle East. The psychological effects of this on world opinion are incalculable.¹⁵

BEVIN AND ZIONISM

During Ernest Bevin's tenure at the Foreign Office, the Palestine problem often baffled and absorbed the attention of the cabinet, and on occasion even threw that normally harmonious body into

¹³ Stanley to Churchill, July 13, 1945, 75872/131, CO 733/463, pt. 1.

¹⁴ Beeley minute, July 10, 1945, E4939, FO 371/45378.

¹⁵ JP(45) 167, July 10, 1945, E5141, FO 371/45378 (my emphasis).

discord and argument.¹⁶ "But at no point did Palestine constitute a matter of life and death for the United Kingdom balance of payments or standard of living, or for British military security or Commonwealth relations, as did, in 1947, the convertibility crisis" or the siege of Berlin in 1948. Palestine's principal, vital impact was in its influence on Anglo-American relations "at a time when Britain could not survive without American financial and strategic support."¹⁷

Ernest Bevin was without doubt the dominant figure in Attlee's cabinet, and the one who most influenced its Palestine policy. However, his place in history, as British foreign secretary from 1945 to 1951, will stand or fall not on the Palestine issue, but on the grand design to which he devoted himself as soon as it became clear to him, at the Potsdam conference in August 1945, that Soviet hostility to the West must for the time being be accepted as *the* major factor in international relations. Bevin sought, in full partnership with the United States, the means with which to ensure world stability, in view of the clear indications of Soviet ambitions to dominate Europe.

Bevin had emerged from the wartime coalition (in which he had sat as minister of labor in the inner war cabinet with an uninterrupted membership equaled only by Churchill, Eden, and Anderson) with a reputation second only to that of Churchill himself, and a standing as a national leader accepted by all. Churchill had at once recognized in Bevin a toughness of mind, self-confidence, and strength of will to match his own. Like Churchill himself, Bevin had the temperament of a born fighter, one who would not crack, whose power of decision would not falter in the storms that lay ahead. In short, Bevin could be relied upon.

Reversing the normal course of events, Bevin had made his name as a minister before establishing himself in Parliament. Bevin had none of Churchill's magnetic qualities, his power of captivating men, or his literary talents. His power was that of an earthly common sense. Yet in Churchill's cabinet, Bevin was the one man (as Churchill himself realized) who could stand up to him on equal

¹⁶ Where not otherwise stated, the paragraphs on Bevin are based on Sir Alan Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, 2 vols., London, 1960, 1967; Francis Williams, *Ernest Bevin*, London, 1952; and C. R. Attlee, *As It Happened*, London, 1954.

¹⁷ E. Monroe, "Mr. Bevin's 'Arab' Policy," *Middle East Affairs*, no. 2, ed. A. Hourani, St. Antony's Papers, no. 11, London, 1961, p. 22. Elizabeth Monroe was director of the Middle East division at the Ministry of Information during the war.

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terms. However different the expression of their qualities, both were men of determination and temperament, self-educated, pragmatic, proceeding by intuition rather than by logic, with strong pugnacious instincts, strong prejudices, and equally strong loyalties.

The often-voiced assertion that Bevin's Middle East policies were imposed upon him by his officials does not hold up under close examination. No minister who fails to come to terms with his civil servants is likely to run his department successfully. If mutual confidence was established at the Foreign Office, there was accommodation on both sides, and no one ever doubted that Bevin was master in his own house. Bevin quickly grasped the proper division of functions between a minister and his officials. They were there to brief him, to advise and if necessary to warn him before a decision was taken. Once a decision was made, Bevin could rely on them to carry it out not only efficiently but loyally. What they wanted from him was the decision itself, which suited Bevin well. A man with none of the subordinate virtues, Bevin worked best at the top, a location for which he was suited by temperament as well as ability.

Foreign Office officials who had viewed his appointment with misgivings came virtually to idolize him.¹⁸ They soon discovered that he was quick to read and comprehend what was significant in the immense documentation, firm in his judgment, and of a strength and integrity upon which they knew they could rely absolutely. The highly trained, experienced professionals at the Foreign Office saw the weaknesses that emanated from Bevin's lack of that type of formal education they themselves had received. But they never doubted the quality or originality of his mind. Bevin's weaknesses showed up most in Parliament, where he rarely succeeded in making the most of his case. But what impressed his officials far more was his ability to get their policies through the cabinet and its committees, the acid test of a minister in the eyes of the civil service.

Bevin was not in fact a stranger to foreign affairs when he arrived at the Foreign Office in August 1945. Since the 1930s, in his capacity as an executive of the International Labor Organization at Geneva, and of the International Transport Workers' Federation, his many trips abroad had afforded him a grasp of international, in particular

¹⁸ Author's interviews with Sir Harold Beeley (Bevin's principal adviser on Palestine), February 22, 1978, and with Sir John Beith (seconded to deal with illegal immigration, from 1947), June 28, 1978.

European, affairs that was unusual in a trade union official. During the war, he had befriended the aristocratic Eden, whom he sat next to in the cabinet. Eden had chosen Bevin as the man to whom he might confide his problems. At the end of the war, Eden was eager to see Bevin succeed him at the Foreign Office, in the event of a Labour election victory. Throughout Bevin's tenure as foreign secretary, he worked closely with Eden in the implementation of a bipartisan foreign policy.¹⁹

Bevin was a sick man when he arrived at the Foreign Office, suffering "alarming attacks of heart-block, in which he would lose consciousness." He was admired by those who worked closely with him, for his "guts and determination."²⁰ But he suffered recurrent heart attacks and was often reduced by the constant international conferences to a state of complete exhaustion.²¹ The great strains imposed on Bevin's infirm health go a long way to explain his frequent outbursts of pith and anger, especially, but not only, on the Zionist issue.

Bevin combined to an unusual degree an unlimited self-confidence with a great sensitivity to criticism, which he was inclined to treat as a personal attack. This would erect a brick wall between him and anyone he took against, such as the Zionists. Bevin would make no effort to placate his critics. Whenever he felt strongly on an issue, he expressed himself forcefully and refused to abide by the parliamentary tradition of separating what was said in debate from the everyday civilities of social intercourse. Even those who agreed with him or at least admired his independence and integrity often found him difficult to approach. He was reserved in private life, suspicious and slow to give his trust or admit anyone as a friend. He was respected or feared rather than loved. His position in the Labour movement, although powerful, left him personally isolated.

His spontaneous cruelty at times obscured the kindly side of his character.²² His occasional outbursts against the Jews have come to overshadow the totality of his Middle East policy, even the obvious respect and awe in which Zionist leaders held him at the time. His quasi-anti-Semitic outbursts were the results of extempore departures from prepared texts, the off-the-cuff reactions of

¹⁹ Piers Dixon, *Double Diploma*, London, 1968, p. 179. This is the biography of Sir Pierson Dixon, Bevin's principal private secretary, written by his son.

²⁰ Churchill, *Taken from the Diaries of Lord Moran*, Boston, 1966, p. 266.

²¹ Dixon, *Double Diploma*, pp. 234 ff.

²² E. Shinwell, *Conflict without Malice*, London, 1955, pp. 210 ff.

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a man not given to the diplomatic double talk of the well-polished intellect. His fault was to repeat in public what others (including the Americans) reserved for closed circles. Most of his associates suffered from his temper—but when he attacked Jewish actions, it was labeled anti-Semitism. If anything, Bevin was guilty of gross insensitivity and an inability to comprehend the trauma of the Holocaust—but *not* anti-Semitism.

Arthur Creech-Jones, the last colonial secretary to deal with the Palestine Mandate, and one whose own Zionist sympathies have never been questioned, has left the following character sketch of Bevin, in the unpublished private notes prepared for his memoirs: "His frustrations and irritations over the Palestine problem led him at times to make uncomplimentary and hurtful remarks about the Jews generally. These indiscretions were not confined only to the Jews, although it must be said that his prejudices were sharpened by aggressive Jewish attitudes, subterfuge and pressures in these post-war years, by the distortions in Jewish publicity and assertions of what appeared to him to be disproportionate claims. . . . I found however that when he discussed Palestine problems with me he invariably threw aside his prejudices and surmounted his human frailties."²³ As one authoritative observer has noted, "Mr. Bevin's name for pro-Arab leanings was . . . earned for a policy that was never pro-Arab in Arab eyes."²⁴

THE ATTLEE GOVERNMENT

On July 26, 1945, the Labour Party was for the first time in its history voted into office with a commanding majority over its opponents. In a landslide victory, the party gained 393 seats (previously 154), as against 213 seats (previously 432) won by the Conservatives and their supporters. The Liberal Party's representation was reduced from 21 to 12 seats. The swing from Conservative to the left was on a scale seen only twice before in British parliamentary history, in 1832 and in 1906.

But the euphoria of victory concealed the unpleasant fact that the party's arrival in office, replete with ambitious schemes for social reform, coincided with the lowest point in British national wealth and power since the Napoleonic wars. Faced with the stark realities of national weakness and economic collapse in Europe,

²³ Creech-Jones papers, box 33/1, Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

²⁴ Monroe, "Bevin's 'Arab' Policy," p. 23.

the Labour government had to assuage a self-deluding population, which had given the party its mandate for the purpose of implementing its well-publicized program of social reform. Labour's chairman, Harold Laski, believed that the party would need some fifteen to twenty years to secure itself in power, that is, to win three to four successive elections. To achieve that, the party would have to keep faith with its electoral promises, and for that, the country must have peace and remain free from international complications. The British people, in innocence of the international situation, expected easier times. They believed that the prewar difficulties of Anglo-Russian relations had now been erased by the comradeship of war. Their hopes were swollen by a genuine emotional admiration for Russian wartime valor.

It was not easy to accept the fact that this time victory would not open the way to the exercise of a regained authority on the admired model of the past, when Britain had been master of Europe and a strong guardian of liberalism and order, and when her huge colonial empire was shaded in large red areas across the globe. At the end of the nineteenth century, the public in the great states of Europe had taken for granted the right and indeed the duty of Europeans to rule the less-developed territories of the rest of the world. The most striking change in the position of Europe after World War II, in the view of one diplomatic historian, was the surprising rapidity with which the great colonial empires of Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium disappeared. By 1947, the Labour government had relinquished the larger part of the British Empire. Whatever psychological effect this process may have had on the British people, it did not for the most part arouse passionate political debate. Indeed, Foreign Secretary Bevin enjoyed an all-party consensus on the major issues of his policy. The surrender of empire was made easier by the fact that there were very few parts of it where the British had settled permanently.²⁵

The Labour Party had entered office committed to granting independence to India. Constitutional reform in India had also been the ostensible policy of the Conservatives, who in the 1930s had introduced measures of self-government—though never enough to satisfy Ghandi and the other Indian leaders. In August 1947, the British government withdrew from India, "from a mixture of genuine political idealism and a practical sense of the impossibility of finding the resources, or the popular support in Britain, to main-

²⁵ James Joll, *Europe since 1870*, London, 1973, pp. 469-470.

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tain control over an increasingly restless sub-continent. . . . The British withdrawal from India was perhaps the grandest and most significant of all the gestures of retreat from empire, both because of the size and long historical traditions of the area involved and because of the importance of the link with India over the past two centuries for so many aspects of British life." But in fact, the granting of independence to India, "while of some emotional and political importance, had comparatively little practical effect in Britain. Much of the capital invested in Indian industry had already passed into Indian hands, [although] . . . the Indian and Pakistan governments still needed foreign investment for industrial and military development." Financial links with Britain remained so long "as sterling was still a world currency, and as long as successive British governments made it difficult to convert it into any other money."²⁶

Some Zionist leaders entertained initial hopes that the Labour government would adhere to its election pledges to support the establishment of a Jewish state in all of Western Palestine. But Zionist leaders in London, the so-called Weizmann court, had derived much of their influence and information from successive Tory governments, and with an establishment with whom they had developed intimate ties over the years. Blanche Dugdale ("Baffy"),²⁷ a confidante of Weizmann's for a generation, warned that the new ministers might prove a poor match for their permanent officials: "New government announced today . . . Colonial Secretary is that old fool George Hall, which is bad. C[reech] J[ones] is Under-Secretary and has let Berl [Locker] know that he stipulated he should be consulted on all Palestine matters. Very good—if it works: But unless the Cabinet takes a very firm line on Palestine, I fear Sir George Gater and the permanent officials will just make rings round both these little men. It takes a long time to make a governing class."²⁸ Her assessment was undoubtedly shrewd, if tinged with not a little of her own class prejudice. And it is evident that she, like most of her colleagues, underestimated Bevin.

Within three days of his arrival at Downing Street, Bevin had

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Blanche Dugdale was a niece of Arthur Balfour, whose biography she wrote, and political adviser to the Zionists in London. In the 1930s she obtained early, secret information on cabinet proceedings; see Baffy, *The Diaries of Blanche Dugdale, 1936-47*, ed. N. A. Rose, London, 1973.

²⁸ Dugdale Diary (hereafter D. D.), August 3, 1945, in Weizmann Archives (hereafter WA). Sir George Gater: Permanent Under-Secretary, Colonial Office, 1940, 1942-1947.

under consideration a concise summary of the standing options on Palestine. Both the long-term proposals were too beset with objections to be considered seriously any longer—Grigg's scheme for a trusteeship involving the Soviets now seemed quite anachronistic, in view of the emerging cold war pattern. To continue with the White Paper in the short term—provided the Arabs could be persuaded to acquiesce in further Jewish immigration—remained the sole policy likely to meet both Arab and American objections. If the Arabs did not agree to further immigration, the government might inform them that it had decided to refer the matter to the Big Five, as an appropriate procedure pending the implementation of new UN trusteeships.²⁹

The Foreign Office view received support from India, whose viceroy, Field Marshal Wavell had fallen out with Churchill back in 1940-1941 because of his pro-Arab leanings.³⁰ In response to a Foreign Office inquiry, Wavell warned that adherence to the White Paper would be the only policy to prevent criticism and agitation in India. The option of discussing immigration with the Arabs was acceptable only if it was intended to give their opinion full weight and not override them arbitrarily. The step of allowing further Jewish immigration without consulting the Arabs would be interpreted as bad faith and was only slightly less dangerous than partition itself.³¹

The possibly adverse reaction of Moslem opinion in India on the Palestine question had always served the Foreign Office as a useful prop in the cabinet, especially during the war, when the department had to face the "pro-Zionist" combination of Churchill, Leo Amery, and the Liberal and Labour ministers. However, Indian opinion was never regarded as sufficiently interested in Palestine to warrant a reversal of cabinet policy. Indian opinion was merely one more voice to be added to the chorus of the Middle Eastern ambassadors, as the India Office itself well appreciated: "Though the apprehended reactions of Indian opinion to whatever decision on the Palestine question may be taken *have never been regarded as a decisive factor in that decision*, we have always been at pains to react to any decision which would be regarded as unfair to the Arabs."³²

²⁹ Appreciation, July 1945, E5539, FO 371/45378.

³⁰ Cohen, *Retreat*, p. 111; also W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 3, *The Grand Alliance*, Boston, 1951, p. 742.

³¹ Wavell memorandum, July 2, 1945, in L/P and S/12/3358, India Office Archive (hereafter IO).

³² Minute of October 5, 1945, in S/12/5358, IO (my emphasis).

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The rejection of the two “coalition proposals” spurred the Colonial and Foreign offices to new heights of ingenuity. The Colonial Office scheme, propounded by Sir Douglas Harris,³³ was brought before the Labour cabinet’s Palestine committee in September 1945.³⁴ Called the “provincial autonomy plan,” it was but the revival, in another form, of the cantonization scheme considered and rejected by the Peel Commission in 1937. Harris proposed the division of Palestine into Arab and Jewish provinces, to be delimited according to the demographic preponderance of each race; a central regime under a high commissioner would exercise powers of superintendence and control directly all matters of “national” importance, such as foreign relations, defense, customs, communications, posts, and the like; Jerusalem would remain inside a mandatory enclave, and likewise, the “provincial” divisions would approximate the boundaries proposed by the ministerial committee in 1944.³⁵ The main advantage claimed by Harris for his scheme was tactical: since in essence it continued the mandatorial regime, no reference to the United Nations would be necessary until such time as both races decided to end it and presented “an agreed scheme to ensure future stability.”

But Harris’s scheme was rejected conclusively by Lord Gort, the high commissioner. He felt that it created artificial boundaries, which would give rise to geographic and economic difficulties, and above all, would “perpetuate the insidious segregation of Jews and Arabs into two separate camps.” But the Colonial Office itself had no ready alternatives.³⁶ At least one senior official favored transferring the whole business to the Foreign Office:

The more I think of this Palestine question, the more it seems to me that it is assuming proportions which are quite outside the proper scope of the Colonial Office. . . . The problem involves a network of considerations which covers almost the whole sphere of present world politics. America, Russia, India, the Arab world all come into it; and the result is a tangled skein of international and strategical considerations. All these matters are quite outside the departmental functions of the Colonial Office; and the fundamental considerations on which any solution must depend are

³³ Irrigation adviser to Palestine administration, 1935–1944; seconded as special adviser to the Colonial Office, 1944–1947.

³⁴ P (M)(45) 11, September 1, 1945, E8047, FO 371/45382.

³⁵ Cohen, *Retreat*, chapter 9.

³⁶ Meeting at Colonial Office, September 19, 1945, 75872/132, CO 733/463.

those which fall within the sphere of the Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Office.³⁷

For its part, the Foreign Office put forward a scheme for the "federal union" of Palestine and Transjordan, to come under the rule of an Arab king, presumably Abdullah. There would be three federal units: a Jewish one, similar in area to the 1944 partition plan; an Arab area of Palestine, to be joined to the third unit, Transjordan itself. The scheme ignored so many cherished Foreign Office tenets that it seems to have originated with Bevin himself, rather than with his officials. Fortunately for the latter, the Colonial Office readily indicated the plan's obvious defects; the candidate for the monarchy, the Hashemite Abdullah, would on no account be acceptable to the Wahhabi Ibn Saud; yet Britain could not conceivably replace or promote another over Abdullah's faithful head; the Arabs would most likely suspect the plan as a ruse to open the way to future Jewish penetration across the Jordan; and last, but not least, the Jews (and their supporters) would not accept the rule of an Arab king over their National Home.³⁸

The newly constituted Cabinet Committee on Palestine met to draw up draft proposals for the consideration of the conference of the Middle Eastern ambassadors due to meet in London. The committee's report dealt only with the interim policy between the date when the White Paper immigration quotas were expected to run out (October 1945) and that by when a new long-term policy might be promulgated.³⁹ The committee recommended that the government adhere to the White Paper stricture that no further Jewish immigration be then permitted without Arab consent (with of course every effort being made to secure that consent), perhaps to the extent of the current rate of 1,500 per month. Somewhat cynically (and in effect confirming the substance of Zionist protests against the 1,500 monthly quota), the committee agreed that this course was "of more importance when viewed as a measure designed to appease Jewish sentiment than as a genuine contribution to the solution of the real problem of world Jewry."

But if only on grounds of military exigency, the committee decided that the balance of advantage lay in continuing temporarily with the White Paper policy: "We have, in effect, to choose between

³⁷ Minute by Sir Arthur Dawe (deputy undersecretary), July 12, 1945, 75872, pt. 2, CO 733/461.

³⁸ CO minute, September 7, 1945, E8047, FO 371/45382.

³⁹ CP(45) 156, September 8, 1945, in Cab 129/2.

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the possibility of localised trouble with the Jews in Palestine and the virtual certainty of widespread disturbances among the Arabs throughout the Middle East and possibly among the Muslims in India. . . . *the latter represents a military commitment twice or three times as great as does the former.*"⁴⁰

If the Arabs did not consent to further Jewish immigration, and the government then halted it, the Jews could be expected to resort to violence, with attendant repercussions in the United States. The Chiefs of Staff considered that the immediate military commitment arising out of such a situation would necessitate reinforcements of two divisions and some 9,000 administrative troops. These could be transported to Palestine by the end of 1945. On the other hand, the continuance of Jewish immigration, against the Arabs' will, would involve a much heavier military commitment, which could not be met prior to *the spring of 1946*.⁴¹

The conference of Middle Eastern ambassadors debated the Palestine issue on September 6 and 10, 1945.⁴² The first meeting adopted the Palestine committee's proposals regarding the short term—continuation with the White Paper. The ambassadors believed that the good effect produced by a reaffirmation of the White Paper would induce the Arabs to acquiesce in further immigration beyond the White Paper quotas.

As for long-term policy, Bevin's federal plan was attacked from all sides. Gort called it partition in another guise, which would be rejected by both Jews and Arabs; Lawrence Graffey-Smith, the ambassador to Saudi Arabia, claimed that Ibn Saud would find it provocative; Lord Killearn, at Cairo, and Terrence Shone, at Beirut, averred that the extension of Abdullah's authority would provoke trouble in Egypt and the Levant. Not to be put off so quickly, Bevin suggested they might find another candidate for the monarchy, and stressed again their need for a plan that was "constructive," one that would divert the Arabs' attention away from the narrow Palestine issue and at the same time be presentable to the United Nations.

J. M. Martin of the Colonial Office put forward the provincial autonomy plan, explaining that it did not exclude evolution into a federal solution at a later date. It was agreed that the two schemes should be examined further and that notes should be sent to the

⁴⁰ Ibid. (my emphasis).

⁴¹ Ibid. (my emphasis).

⁴² E6954, E6955, FO 371/45379; among those participating were the ambassadors from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt; Sir Walter Smart (Oriental secretary at the Cairo embassy since 1926), the high commissioner for Palestine, Harris, and Bevin himself.

Arab states, suggesting that immigration continue, as an interim measure, pending the formulation of long-term policy.

At their next meeting on Palestine, the ambassadors ruled out Bevin's federal plan. The latter accepted defeat reluctantly, while insisting that the union of Palestine and Transjordan might still yield advantages; that is it might provide a good training ground for British forces. The Colonial Office scheme met with a similar reception. Gort himself spearheaded the attack, asserting that the plan suffered from the same defects as partition itself; he was concerned in particular about the 300,000 Arabs destined to remain in the Jewish province.

Mounting agitation in the United States, fueled by presidential statements, made it necessary to compose some interim official policy statement before the imminent exhaustion of the White Paper immigration quotas. On the next day, September 11, the cabinet decided that the existing quota of 1,500 per month should remain in effect during any interval between the exhaustion of remaining quotas and the formation of a new policy, with every effort being made to secure Arab consent.⁴³ The ambassadors' recommendation that any announcement on immigration be held over until after the Mecca pilgrimage in November (thus avoiding possible grounds for incitement) was rejected. There followed a long but inconclusive discussion about whether and when to announce Britain's intention to refer the issue finally to the United Nations. It was observed also that "if the need to garrison Palestine were to result in further serious delays in demobilisation and still more deaths of British soldiers, the reaction both at home and among the troops might be very unfortunate."

Herbert Morrison (again chairman of the Palestine committee), Bevin, and Colonial Secretary Hall formulated the following draft statement: "During the interval which must elapse pending the coming into force of a Trusteeship agreement, His Majesty's Government will continue to conform to the existing arrangements as prescribed in the White Paper of 1939, in respect of Jewish immigration into Palestine. In accordance with those arrangements, they are now seeking Arab acquiescence in a continuance of Jewish immigration beyond the prescribed quota at the monthly rate at present permissible. They trust that such acquiescence will be readily forthcoming."⁴⁴

At the same time, the cabinet Palestine committee would debate

⁴³ Confidential annexe, Cab 128/3.

⁴⁴ Hall to Bevin, September 14, 1945, E6966, FO 371/45380; see also Chapter Five.

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and decide on long-term policy. It was evident that no panaceas were waiting to be discovered, even if Whitehall did not lack for ingenious minds. The government would have to choose from the by now familiar options. We can now only speculate as to which option would ultimately have been selected. For American interventions in the Palestine issue reached a climax, and precipitated a new turn in British policy. But before crossing the Atlantic, we must first place the Labour government's Palestine policy in its global economic, political, and strategic context.

THE ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND STRATEGIC BACKCLOTH

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

When the Labour government took office, the cabinet was united on three major policy principles: "the maintenance of full employment; the transfer to public ownership at least of the 'commanding heights of the economy'; and the enactment by public action of the egalitarian welfare state."¹ However, it became immediately apparent that financial and political problems would not only severely hamper the government's social policies, but would indeed claim a major proportion of the cabinet's time and energy.

On August 14, 1945, the new chancellor of the exchequer, Hugh Dalton, circulated to the cabinet a memorandum written by Lord Keynes, which painted Britain's overseas financial prospects in grim terms. Three days later, Keynes followed this up with a proposal that talks be opened at once with the United States on the need for continued financial assistance from that country.² The need proved yet more urgent than Keynes had anticipated. Four days later, on August 21, following Japan's surrender and the end of the war in the Far East, Truman signed an order ending all lend-lease deliveries to Britain.

Without substantial aid from the United States on acceptable terms, the Labour government would have to resign itself to a regime of much greater austerity than that imposed even in war-

¹ D. C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, London, 1965, p. 59.

² Hugh Dalton, *Memoirs: High Tide and After*, London, 1967, pp. 69-70, quoted in Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, p. 64.