**CHRONOLOGY**

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This chapter examines the deepening of the conflict between the Arabs and Jews of Palestine between the two World Wars. During those years Palestine was ruled by Great Britain as a mandated territory. Fierce battles had taken place in Palestine during the Great War, and parts of the country were devastated and badly in need of reconstruction. The population had declined to around 560,000-500,000 Arabs and 60,000 Jews—in 1918. Not surprisingly, the British government's primary concern was preserving and extending British strategic and economic interests in the Middle East and India. Palestine occupied a relatively minor role in the British imperial scheme of things. Also not surprisingly, the policies pursued and actions taken by British government representatives, both in Palestine and in London, created considerable resentment among the inhabitants of Palestine, both Jews and Arabs. Initially, the Arabs and Jews of Palestine had reason to believe that Britain would favor their clearly different national aspirations. However, within a few years, as events unfolded and violence between them intensified, both sides felt betrayed by Britain, and they turned their forces against the mandatory power in an effort to throw off the colonial yoke. This caused irreparable damage to the Arab cause. The Zionist cause, however, benefitted greatly as a result.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, Palestine was the southern part of what was known as geographical Syria. This area, situated between the Suez Canal to the west and the Persian Gulf and India to the east, was of strategic importance especially for the British and was considered vital to their geopolitical and economic interests. When the Ottoman Empire, the "sick man of Europe," joined Germany against the Allied powers of England, France, and Russia, Britain took the opportunity to secure allies and influence in the region by appealing to the aspirations of the empire's subject peoples. Many of these groups were eager to achieve self-determination. The British, quick to see the advantages of the situation, held discussions with Arabs and Jews about support for Allied war aims in return for pledges to support the goals of both communities in the region after the war. The trouble for Britain was that both Arabs and Jews had equally persuasive claims to the same piece of territory. In 1914, that territory was under the control of a third party, the Turks. During the war, and after, the great powers manipulated the situation primarily in their own interests.

The British had to coordinate policy with their allies, and planned the partition of the Ottoman Empire with France, Russia, and Italy even while the war was in progress. During and
immediately following the hostilities, secret agreements were signed and public declarations were made resulting in misunderstandings and confusions that have plagued the Middle East ever since. With regard to the Fertile Crescent area generally, and to Palestine in particular, three such sets of agreements and statements enormously complicated the postwar situation, as they appeared to contain contradictory or conflicting promises. These were the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence of 1915-1916; the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916; and the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

THE HUSSEIN-MCMAHON CORRESPONDENCE

Sherif Hussein of Mecca, ruler of the Hejaz, was perhaps the Arab figure at that time with the greatest prestige and potential power. As a Hashemite, and therefore a member of the Prophet Muhammad's house, and as guardian of the Holy Places of Islam, he was the natural spokesperson for the Arabs. After the war broke out, Sherif Hussein and the British high commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, exchanged a series of letters that discussed the conditions for an Arab uprising against the Turks in return for the independence of the Arabs and perhaps the reestablishment of an Arab Caliphate under Hussein, a pressing concern of the sherif. In the letters, the British expressed sympathy for Arab claims to the Arabic-speaking parts of the western Asian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, excluding Egypt and Aden, which Hussein recognized as areas of British hegemony. (See Documents 2-1 through 2-3.) McMahon also excluded from consideration the southern parts of Iraq from Basra to Baghdad, in which he asked the Arabs to recognize Britain's "established position and interest," and the vilayets of Aleppo and Beirut, because of the connection of Britain's ally France with the predominantly Maronite Christian population in those areas and its territorial claims in Syria-Lebanon. Further, he excepted from any proposed Arab states or states the districts of Mersin and Alexandretta in northern Syria, because of their sizable Turkish populations, and "portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo," which, he added, "cannot be said to be purely Arab."

For the purposes of our discussion the central question is whether the Hussein-McMahon correspondence viewed Palestine as part of an Arab state or states. "Palestine" in the nineteenth century was not an Ottoman province, and its boundaries would not be defined precisely until after World War I. What we now think of as Palestine consisted of the sanjak of Jerusalem and part of the vilayet of Beirut. The correspondence between Hussein and McMahon, the full text of which was not published until 1939, was in Arabic. Subsequently, disagreement arose over the meaning of the word vilayet (Arabic: wilayah), which Hussein and McMahon had used interchangeably to refer generally to a district and to an Ottoman administrative unit. The British later claimed that in excluding certain parts of the Levant, they had meant the area west of the districts of the three towns of Aleppo, Hama, and Homs, and of the Ottoman administrative division of Syria (of which Damascus was the capital), in which case Palestine would have been excluded. (See Map 1-1 in Chapter 1.) The Arabs later argued that they had understood British use of the word vilayet to mean the districts of the four towns mentioned and that Palestine, therefore, was to have been included in an Arab state. The Arab interpretation, in the opinion of most observers, appeared more credible.

Looking closely at their correspondence, it can be seen that Hussein wrote McMahon that although he was prepared to await a definite decision until an Allied victory was assured, he
considered all the territory of the eastern Mediterranean to be purely Arab and was opposed to its being surrendered to France or any other power. It should also be noted that while care was taken to name various Ottoman administrative divisions, including the vilayet of Beirut, which included part of northern Palestine, nowhere in the Hussein-McMahon letters did McMahon mention the sanjak of Jerusalem, in which lay most of the rest of Palestine. Therefore, the Arabs later argued, Palestine was never specifically excluded from the territory to be granted Arab independence.

The Hussein-McMahon correspondence was not a formal agreement, but Hussein and those Arab notables who had been made privy to it assumed that the British would honor their wartime promises and would support Arab claims to independence after the war. In June 1916, therefore, the Arab Revolt began, led by Feisal, son of Sherif Hussein, and eventually aided by the colorful British colonel T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), whose involvement was subsequently publicized by the American broadcaster Lowell Thomas and chronicled in Lawrence's own books, Seven Pillars of Wisdom and Revolt in the Desert, its popular abridgement.

The Arab Revolt, fueled by British gold, aided the Allied effort by diverting and harassing the Turkish forces, both in Arabia and later in Syria. It began in western Arabia and succeeded by September 1916 in capturing the principal towns of the Hejaz with the important exception of Medina. While one group of Arabs remained in Arabia to lay siege to Medina, another column under Feisal marched north to aid British general Allenby's main expeditionary force heading east and north out of Egypt. As Allenby pushed up the Mediterranean coast, capturing Gaza and then marching inland to take Jerusalem by December 1917, Feisal proceeded on a parallel course east of the Jordan River. Before launching the final offensive against the Turks by an attack on Damascus and northern Syria, Allenby planned to sever vital Turkish communications between Damascus and the south. The Arabs cooperated with the British by blowing up part of the Hejaz railroad linking Damascus and the holy places of Mecca and Medina, first between Deraa and Amman, and then at points to the north and west of Deraa. The way was clear for a sweep to Damascus, which the Arab armies reached just ahead of an Australian force at the beginning of October 1918. By the end of October, Aleppo and the rest of Syria had been occupied, with the Arabs playing a considerable role in the advance from Damascus through Homs and Hama to Aleppo. On October 30, 1918, the Ottoman Empire signed the Mudros Armistice.

Although significant, the Arab Revolt did not involve large numbers of men; the majority of the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire remained loyal subjects of the Ottoman sultan, who had in the nineteenth century revived and appropriated the title of caliph in order to appeal to his Muslim subjects. Furthermore, the sultan had co-opted many Arabs by appointing them to high positions. The British later claimed that Hussein and his sons were acting in their own behalf in their negotiations with the British. However, there was an Arab nationalist movement in Syria, with which Feisal had made contact even before the initiation of the Hussein-McMahon correspondence.

Al-Fatat and al-Ahd were two secret societies that had been formed before the war to work for Arab independence from the Ottomans. Founded in 1911 in Paris by seven young Arabs, al-Fatat was basically a civilian group. It shifted its activities to the Middle East in 1914, and its numbers grew to around 200. Al-Ahd was an association of army officers whose program at first called for a kind of dual monarchy. In early 1914, its leader was arrested and tried by the
Turkish authorities on a number of unrelated and trumped-up charges, which infuriated his supporters and encouraged the members of al-Ahd to broaden their goals. In May 1915, al Fatat and al-Ahd established contact and produced a document called the Damascus Protocol, which outlined their own conditions for cooperation with the British and an Arab revolt against the Turks. The provisions of the Damascus Protocol were remarkably similar to those presented by Hussein later that summer to the British and indicated an Arab nationalist sentiment that was quite real, even if limited in its constituency.

To buttress their arguments that the British intended to satisfy their aspirations, the Arabs also pointed to a later public statement issued in June 1918, when the British Foreign Office replied to seven Arab notables who had asked for a clarification of British policy. The "Declaration to the Seven" stated that with regard to the future government of territories liberated by the Allies, the principle of the consent of the governed should apply. In a Fourth of July speech that same year, President Woodrow Wilson of the United States enunciated his famous Fourteen Points, one of which was the principle that a postwar settlement must be acceptable to the people immediately concerned. The twelfth point explicitly mentioned the Ottoman Empire. These British and American statements may have helped allay Arab doubts and fears raised in the meantime by two other documents that had become known to them. These documents, containing provisions that appeared to contradict pledges made to the Arabs, were the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration.

**THE SYKES-PICOT AGREEMENT**

At the same time that Hussein and McMahon were exchanging letters, the British were also holding secret discussions with their allies about the future partition of the Ottoman Empire. With regard to Palestine, the relevant document is the Sykes-Picot Agreement, named after the chief negotiators, Sir Mark Sykes, an Arabist and member of Parliament, for the British, and diplomat Charles Francois George-Picot for the French. In this agreement the two powers divided the Levant and Iraq areas into zones in which they would exercise either direct or indirect influence. (See Map 2-1.)

In the areas of indirect British or French control, semi-independent Arab states or a state might be established. Regarding Palestine, the territory west of the Jordan River and including Jerusalem but excluding the Negev would be placed under international administration. Interestingly, British and French discussions referred obliquely to the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, with the British indicating that in return for cooperating with the Allies, the Arabs would obtain the towns of Homs, Hama, Damascus, and Aleppo, but under French supervision. Russia approved the Sykes-Picot Agreement in return for recognition by Britain and France of Russian rights to control parts of eastern Anatolia from Trebizond to the Caucasus. The Russians had previously gained Allied support of their claim on the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. Initiated in May 1916, the Sykes-Picot Agreement contained provisions that to some later interpreters contradicted the terms of the Hussein-McMahon correspondence that had preceded it.
A third document dealing specifically with Palestine further complicated the situation and lends credence to the saying that Palestine was "the much promised land." The Balfour Declaration, issued on November 2, 1917, was a public statement of the British government in the form of a letter from the foreign secretary, Arthur J. Balfour, to Lord Rothschild, head of the
British Zionist Organization. (See Document 2-4.) The declaration stated first that the British government "viewed with favor" the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. It then declared that in facilitating this objective, nothing should be done that might prejudice the "civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities" in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in other countries.

A number of drafts were prepared, and the final version was attenuated and ambiguous. This was due primarily to opposition in the British cabinet of, ironically, its one Jewish member, Sir Edwin Montagu, who feared that an endorsement of Jewish nationality would lead to a charge of dual loyalty. (See Document 2-5.) The phrases "in Palestine" and "a national home" left the proposed entity vague and without defined borders. Moreover, the section relating to the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities, while accurately reflecting the profusion of religious groups and the predominantly religious and cultural basis of identity among the Arabs at that time, mentioned nothing about their economic, political, and national rights. The last part of the declaration clearly attempted to emphasize that Jews could be and were patriotic citizens of countries in which they already resided, and that their rights and political status should not be harmed by the enthusiasm of Zionist co-religionists.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect surrounding the declaration is why it was issued at all. Certainly, it made Britain's administration of the postwar mandate immensely more complicated and burdensome, and British postwar aims in the region would have been realized with far less difficulty had no such statement been made. Yet there were several cogent reasons why the British government was prepared to issue the Balfour Declaration. The most important involved the immediate progress of the war and Britain's domestic politics.

The immediate wartime situation pushed British policymakers to endorse Zionist goals. For one thing, issuing such a declaration might well persuade the new revolutionary leaders of Russia, many of whom were Jews, not to leave the war. It might also influence American Jews to press the U.S. government, which had just entered the war, to prosecute it with greater vigor. The British also wished to forestall a similar declaration by either the German or the Ottoman government, which might appeal to Jews to help achieve a similar purpose. Furthermore, supporting a Jewish national home in Palestine might strengthen British efforts to establish a protectorate or at least continue to exert influence in a strategic area on the eastern flank of the Suez Canal after the war. Palestine was a vital link on the land routes to India. The growing importance of oil and of air transport also necessitated the continuance of British hegemony over the important communications lanes of the Middle East.

Jews generally supported the Allied war effort. In Palestine, a Jewish spy ring known as NILI (Netzach Yisrael Lo Y'shaker—The Strength of Israel Will Not Deceive) operated between 1916 and September 1917 when it was uncovered by the Turks. It supplied the British with vital information that greatly aided the Allied effort and facilitated Allenby's successful march to Jerusalem.

Chaim Weizmann, a Russian-born chemist at the University of Manchester who made an important contribution to the British war effort, was a link between the Zionist cause and British pro-Zionist sympathizers. Weizmann was called to London to devise a process for synthesizing acetone, a chemical needed to produce the explosive cordite. An avid Zionist, and then president of the World Zionist Organization, Weizmann took the opportunity to make contact with many British leaders whom he swayed to the Zionist cause. Some, influenced already by a romantic, back-to-the-Bible, strain in English literature of the previous century, or by the idea that the
Second Coming of Christ would be hastened by the restoration of the Jews in the land of Israel, needed little urging to support the idea of a Jewish national home. Others were compelled by Weizmann's brilliant mind, dignified bearing, and personal charm and charisma. Thus, David Lloyd George, who would become British prime minister in 1916, Winston Churchill, who would become colonial secretary, Henry Wickham Steed, editor of the London Times, C. P. Scott, editor of the Manchester Guardian, Mark Sykes, chief secretary of the War Cabinet, Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, who had served to the Near East, Balfour himself, and many others were willing to lend a sympathetic ear to those ideas that resulted in issuance of the Balfour Declaration.

Some also thought a Jewish national home in Palestine would attract Jewish immigrants, especially from Eastern Europe, who were not always welcomed with open arms in the British Isles. Balfour himself, as prime minister, had introduced a bill in 1905 to limit Jewish immigration into Britain. A Jewish homeland, as Herzl had recognized, could serve the needs of Jews and anti-Semites alike.

POSTWAR SETTLEMENT

Once the war ended and the peace conference got underway in Paris, problems regarding the postwar settlement of Palestine rapidly surfaced. The Arabs in particular were confused about British policy, especially since the new government in Russia had published the wartime secret arrangements, including the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Contradictions were apparent between British commitments to the Jews in the Balfour Declaration and the Arab interpretation of British pledges in the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, as well as in public statements like the "Declaration to the Seven." Meanwhile, France, because of its commercial interests and traditional religious connection with the Maronite Christians in the region, was laying claim to most of the Levant coast, which would surely restrict Arab independence elsewhere in the area. Hussein and Feisal, inexperienced in dealing with the European powers, seemed to be even more wary of French ambitions in the Levant than of the British and the Zionists. Because the British and the French distrusted each other, they encouraged these Arab concerns. Although the British seemed to be firm in their support of the Balfour Declaration, they also indicated their readiness, albeit vaguely, to honor Arab aspirations. Therefore, at the suggestion of the British, Feisal and Weizmann met, first at Aqaba in the spring of 1918 and later in the year in London, to discuss matters of mutual concern.

In January 1919, Feisal made a provisional agreement with Weizmann in which they alluded to the common ancestry of the two groups and the hope that they could work together in the Near East. (See Document 2-6.) They agreed that, provided the rights of the Arab peasant and tenant farmers were protected and that there were no restrictions on religious freedom, the Arabs would work with the Jews to implement the Balfour Declaration. The document clearly envisaged a Jewish state in Palestine alongside an Arab state and spoke about Jewish help in surveying the economic possibilities of the Arab state and assisting in its development. However, in 1919, the fate of both Arab and Jewish nationalists was in the hands of the victorious Allies. Feisal, therefore, appended a proviso that he would not honor the agreement with Weizmann in any way unless the Arabs received their independence. Nevertheless, Feisal seemed clear in his own mind. A few months later he wrote Felix Frankfurter, the American Zionist leader, that it was a "happy coincidence" that Arabs and Jews who are "cousins in race" were taking the first
steps toward the attainment of their national ideals together, and that there was room in "Syria" for both national movements. (See Document 2-7.) Both the British and the Zionists ignored or failed to appreciate the views of the indigenous Arab population. This was due not only to the fact that they were concerned primarily with their own interests, but also to the fact that there were few Arabs except Feisal in a position to speak authoritatively on behalf of the Arab people, and that there were internal divisions and rivalries among the Arabs themselves. However, Feisal was not as much a free agent as he had believed, nor were the Arabs altogether mute. Feisal's right to represent "the Arab people" was open to question, and an Arab congress at Damascus repudiated his dealings with the Zionists. This action reflected growing local opposition to the Balfour Declaration and fear of unlimited Jewish immigration, with its probable economic, cultural, and political consequences. This negative attitude was observed by the King-Crane Commission, dispatched to Syria and Palestine by President Wilson during the peace conference to gauge the sentiment of the local population regarding the future of the region. (See Document 2-8.) The commission confirmed the Arab rejection of Zionist goals, as well as Arab opposition to the possible imposition of French rule. If independence were unattainable, and if they had to accept a form of temporary outside control, then the Arabs preferred American or, secondarily, British supervision. Nobody, however, took any serious notice of the King-Crane report. In any event, the British and French were unwilling to let the Arabs rule themselves. The United States under the ailing President Wilson withdrew from the peace negotiations, and the postwar settlement regarding the Middle East was left in the hands of the British and French.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the actual postwar settlement in the Levant area came close to the provisions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The arrangements were agreed upon at San Remo in April 1920. They were incorporated into the Treaty of Sèvres of August 1920 and were ratified by the League of Nations in 1922. Instead of zones of British or French direct or indirect influence and internationalized areas, as the British and French had proposed, the League of Nations divided the territory into new entities, called mandates. The mandates would be administered like trusts by the British and French, under supervision of the League, until such time as the inhabitants were believed by League members to be ready for independence and self-government. The mandate idea was a kind of compromise between the principle of self-determination stressed in Wilson's Fourteen Points and the desire of the colonial powers to maintain control in the region at the same time that they attempted to neutralize each other's potential power. Wartime pledges and promises to Arabs and Jews alike were postponed, if not altogether negated, by these arrangements.

THE MANDATES

The mandate territories were Syria and Lebanon, awarded to France; Iraq, awarded to Britain; and a new entity called Palestine, which was also placed under British control. Palestine, as defined for the first time in modern history at San Remo, included the land on both sides of the Jordan River and encompassed the present-day countries of Israel and Jordan. However, boundary changes were soon made. As the British and French moved in to assume their new responsibilities, Arab nationalists rebelled in Iraq and Syria. Feisal, who in March 1920 had been proclaimed king of Greater Syria by a nationalist congress in Damascus, was summarily expelled from Syria by the French, who ruled it virtually as a colony until 1943.
Abdullah, Feisal's brother, appeared east of the Jordan at Ma'an and was said to be recruiting a force to reclaim Syria for Feisal. In order to protect British interests, Winston Churchill, then British colonial secretary, convened a conference of British officials and soldiers in Cairo in March 1921. There, the British decided to install Feisal as constitutional monarch in Iraq and to carve out of the Palestine mandate a new entity east of the Jordan River. This would be administered as a separate emirate ruled over by Abdullah as emir, or prince.

Transjordan, as the new territory came to be known, consisted in 1921 of about 300,000 inhabitants, mostly Bedouin, and was heavily fractionated by tribe and clan loyalties. It is significant that most Palestinian notables had thrown in their lot with Feisal after the war. Now, however, with Feisal king of Iraq, politically inclined Palestinians began to focus on Palestine as a discrete political entity, although some continued to dream of Palestine within a reconstituted, independent Greater Syria.

In July 1922, the League of Nations ratified the mandate arrangements, including the changes that had been made since 1920. (See Map 2-2.) The preamble of the Palestine mandate included the Balfour Declaration, thus elevating it to the status of international law. It recognized "the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine" and referred to their justification for "reconstituting their national home in that country." Article 4 suggested that the British recognize the Zionist Organization as a Jewish agency to cooperate with the mandatory government in establishing the national home and to represent the interests of the Jewish population. Article 6 instructed the British to "facilitate Jewish immigration under suitable conditions" and to encourage "close settlement by the Jews on the land" while ensuring "that the rights and position of other sections of the population are not prejudiced." Presumably, the latter statement referred to the Arabs, then 85 to 90 percent of the population. The mandate instrument never mentioned the Arabs by name, however, and members of the League of Nations were evidently thinking of the various religious communities that then existed in Palestine rather than a national group as such other than the Jews.

Only in Article 25, which referred to "the territories lying between the Jordan and the eastern boundary of Palestine as ultimately determined" (that is, Transjordan), were there statements about the possibility of postponing or withholding implementation of the provisions of the mandate should they be "inapplicable to the existing local conditions." In September 1922, because of disturbances caused by continuing Arab nationalist frustration and growing hostility to Jewish immigration into Palestine, the British officially stated that the Balfour Declaration would not apply to Transjordan, which would be closed to Jewish immigration. With regard to Jewish hopes, it was therefore clear that if there were to be a Jewish homeland in Palestine, it would emerge somewhere west of the Jordan River. This book will now call only the land west of the river (Cisjordan) "Palestine," keeping in mind that Transjordan, the area east of the Jordan River, was still technically part of Britain's mandatory obligations.
But what kind of state would emerge if and when the mandate ended? Did a national home for the Jews imply eventual political sovereignty? Would Palestine, even if restricted to land west of the Jordan River, become a Jewish state? And how were the provisions of the Balfour Declaration consistent with the rights of the existing non-Jewish communities, that is, the majority Arab population? What would the relationship be between Arabs and Jews in Palestine during the mandate? Both communities realized, of course, that the eventual outcome would be determined by numbers and ownership of land. Therefore, the issues of immigration and land purchase became crucial in the mandate period, with the Jews attempting to increase both, and the Arabs trying to slow down or halt Jewish immigration and land purchases. Very often these issues spawned violence, and the British were forced to respond, a lesson not lost on either community. When we examine the mandate period in Palestine, therefore, it must be from three different perspectives: the Jewish, the Arab, and the British.

**The Jews and the Mandate**
At the beginning of the mandate period, the Jews of Palestine thought it served their best interests to work closely with the British. This was facilitated greatly by that provision of the mandate instrument suggesting that a Jewish agency be established to take care of the needs of the population and to cooperate with the mandatory administration. The World Zionist Organization (WZO) was recognized as the Jewish Agency, but its president, Chaim Weizmann, remained in London to be close to British centers of power. David Ben-Gurion headed the standing executive committee of the WZO in Palestine. Being on the spot, the executive committee, for all intents and purposes, became the Jewish Agency and, for the most part, accommodated itself to the mandate arrangements and to cooperation with the British.

The Jewish community in Palestine, or Yishuv, elected its own assembly, the Vaad Leumi, which contained political parties representing all viewpoints on the Zionist spectrum. The Histadrut, an originally apolitical federation of labor and trade union organizations, established a system of universal medical coverage, set up an extensive network of schools, and controlled several industries. Because of Arab attacks on Jewish settlements, the Jews also formed clandestine defense organization called the Haganah in 1921. As for education, the Haifa Technion had been operating since 1912, and in 1925 the Hebrew University opened on Mount Scopus, capping a Jewish school system that produced high literacy rates among the Jewish population. The Yishuv had its own courts and tax collection. And the kibbutzim and moshavim, as well as growing urban and industrial enterprises, provided an economic base. There was a high degree of organization and cooperation within the Jewish community, which was creating the institutions of national life.

This does not mean, however, that the Jewish community was united internally. Serious differences existed among the myriad groups over ideology, relations with the Arabs, and the degree of cooperation with the authorities. The majority of the Labor Zionists who controlled the Jewish Agency were socialists who ardently desired good relations with the Arabs and myopically believed that Zionism was good for the Arabs as well as the Jews. Many of them hearkened back to the ideals of Achad Ha-Am. Although all the activities of the Jewish Agency were geared to the development of an eventual state, this political goal remained unarticulated throughout most of the mandate period.

On the other hand, the Revisionist Zionists, founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky, never accepted what they called the first partition of Palestine in 1921 and explicitly demanded a Jewish state, not merely a homeland, on both sides of the Jordan River. They sought a political entity with an army and all the other trappings of national life, and they viewed the leaders of the Jewish Agency as accommodationist, weak willed, and cowardly. The Revisionists fully realized that their goals were inconsistent with those of the Arabs, but for Jabotinsky (and especially later, when the situation of the Jews in Europe became desperate) the moral claim of the Jews to Palestine outweighed that of the Arabs. In 1937, in testimony before the Palestine Royal Commission, Jabotinsky stated that given the fact the Arabs already had several states and the Jews had such great need for just one safe refuge, Arab claims on Palestine were like the claims of appetite versus the claims of starvation. Although the Revisionists were a minority representing particularly urban, nonsocialist, property-owning Jews, they were a vocal and ideologically consistent group throughout the mandate period. In 1931, they formed their own military arm, called at first Haganah Bet, later renamed the Irgun Zvai Leumi (ETZEL), or national military group, which actively retaliated against Arab marauders. During World War II, and with the death of Jabotinsky in 1940, the Irgun ceased its activities. In 1942, however, the
Irgun was revitalized when a deserter from General Anders's refugee-recruited Polish army-in-exile arrived in Palestine. This was **Menachem Begin**, who later led the maximalist Herut party and became prime minister of Israel as head of the Likud coalition between 1977 and 1983. The **Likud continues to espouse elements of Revisionist ideology that deny Palestinian sovereignty in any part of Eretz Yisrael**.

At the other end of the Zionist spectrum were individuals and groups who perceived the incompatibility of Jewish and Arab goals and who cared about the relationship between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. Judah Magnes, an American-born Reform rabbi who became chancellor of Hebrew University in 1925, as well as important intellectuals like **Martin Buber**, advocated this kind of solution. A more politically active group was HaShomer HaZair, or "Young Guard," a left-wing party that advocated equality between the Jewish and Arab working classes in a binational state.

**The Yishuv, despite its internal differences, however, was creating the institutions of statehood while building up the national home. Moreover, ideological discussions became academic as World War II broke out and as details of the Holocaust in Europe became known.**

In 1942, at the Biltmore Hotel in New York, the World Zionist Organization for the first time unequivocally called for a Jewish state in all of Palestine that was under mandate.

### The Arabs and the Mandate

For the most part, the roughly 500,000-strong Arab community within Palestine remained opposed to the mandate and to Zionism. They saw the Balfour Declaration as encouraging the Jews to establish a politically sovereign state in Palestine, which they were determined to resist. **They were hampered throughout the mandate period, however, by their lack of organization and by the maximalist position that many of their leaders adopted.** This often prevented them from reacting in ways that could have achieved their aims and thwarted those of the Zionists.

**There was no Arab agency like the Jewish one,** although the British proposed such a body in 1923. The Arabs believed that since the mandate instrument specifically mentioned a Jewish agency to cooperate with the British in facilitating Zionist objectives, **it would signal their acquiescence to the Balfour Declaration and to Zionism were they to cooperate in any way with the British. Therefore, the Arab community failed to form a representative body.**

Moreover, the British retained the previous Ottoman millet system, which recognized the division of the population into fairly self-governing autonomous confessional units. This tended to reinforce religious, cultural, and economic differences between Muslims and Christians. Educationally, too, although the mandate did provide some funds for public education, for the most part the various religious groups ran their own schools. Thus, while literacy among the Arabs (especially Christians) rose overall during the mandate period, public schools did not suffice to serve the Arab population, and **their literacy lagged behind that of the Jews.**

Politically, the Arabs were also divided. Disagreements were particularly acute between the two most influential Jerusalemite Arab Muslim families, the **Husseinis** and the **Nashashibis**. In 1921, the British high commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, named **Hajj Amin al-Husseini** grand mufti of Jerusalem and appointed him head of the **Supreme Muslim Council**, which controlled the Muslim courts and schools and much of the revenue generated by religious
charitable endowments. The mufti was supposed to be chosen from three candidates who received the greatest number of votes from a convocation of Islamic scholars and notables. Samuel appointed Hajj Amin despite the fact that he had received fewer votes than the top three candidates. Although a lower-ranking British civil servant evidently pushed the idea of co-opting a strong Arab nationalist, it is sometimes argued that Samuel, a Jew himself, bent over backward to illustrate his impartiality by choosing the violently anti-Zionist Hajj Amin as mufti. Because the high commissioner was committed to facilitating Jewish immigration in accordance with British mandatory obligations, it is possible that he appointed Hajj Amin to placate the Arabs. Unfortunately, the mufti and the Husseinis remained implacably opposed to the mandate, the British, and the Jews. The Nashashibis were also opposed to Zionism but were somewhat more inclined to cooperate with the British to achieve Arab aims. The two groups fought against and sometimes murdered each other in their jockeying for power and influence.

The Arabs were constrained not only by their maximalist position but also by lack of organization. An Arab executive existed between 1920 and 1934. Headed by Musa Kazem al Hussein, a relative of the mufti, it presented Arab views to the high commissioner, called political strikes, and convened Palestine Arab congresses. When it dissolved after the death of Musa Kazem in 1934, several political "parties" appeared, usually organized around a powerful personality and representing family or parochial interests. In 1936, leaders of five of the six parties (that of the Nashashibi family remained aloof) formed a body called the Arab Higher Committee, with Hajj Amin al-Husseini as its president. This move had been catalyzed largely by independently organized "national committees," which had begun a general strike (discussed later in the chapter). Escalating violence and political murders led the British to ban the Arab Higher Committee and to issue a warrant for the arrest of Hajj Amin. He escaped, however, and orchestrated Arab resistance to the British and the Jews from various capitals, including Berlin, during World War II.

Economically, there were many advances in the Arab sector during the mandate, especially in construction, agriculture, and citriculture. However, in terms of services, industrial growth, and the development of agricultural land, there was never enough capital to support the Arab population, which doubled during the mandate period. Owing largely to efforts by the British, the Arab death rate declined, infant mortality decreased, and thousands of Arabs immigrated into Palestine. These newcomers, it seems, were attracted by the generally higher living standard than in the surrounding areas and by opportunities opened up by developments in the Jewish sector. Nevertheless, the Arabs remained hostile to Zionism, and their hostility manifested itself over issues of land purchase and immigration as we shall see. It was abundantly clear that the more land the Jews purchased and the more Jews who arrived, the more chance the Arabs would one day find themselves in the minority.

The British during the Mandate

British colonial rule was in general conscientious, efficient, and responsible. In India and Iraq, for example, the British attracted capable people who did a creditable job in training lower-echelon administrators and providing some opportunities for local populations to gain experience in self-government. The British had a good record in Palestine, too, in terms of developing administrative institutions, municipal services, public works, and communications. The mandate government laid water pipelines, extended railroad lines, and completed port facilities at Haifa.
An electric power grid was begun by a Russian Jewish engineer, Pinchas Rutenberg, who obtained a concession from the mandate government. But Palestine was a special case, and the British were caught in a web of their own making by the contradictions inherent in the mandate instrument and the conflicting claims of Arabs and Jews. Policy was shaped by a series of "white papers" issued usually in response to outbreaks of violence over land or immigration issues. As many observers have noted, the British seemed to be muddling through, while trying to keep the peace.

The aims and aspirations of the three protagonists appeared incompatible. The Arabs feared, and especially after the rise of Nazism in Germany, that continuing Jewish immigration would result in a Jewish majority that would claim all of Palestine. The Jews sought to build a viable base, both in numbers and in land, that would make feasible a national home. The British wished to retain their influence and keep the peace, while, in accordance with the obligations imposed upon them by the mandate, they tried simultaneously to implement the Balfour Declaration, safeguard the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants, and develop self-governing institutions. Lacking a clear policy on how to proceed, the British responded to the sporadic violence by dispatching commissions of inquiry and then issuing white papers based on the findings of the commissions.

**LAND, IMMIGRATION, AND WHITE PAPERS**

In 1920, the British reopened the Land Registry, which had been closed since 1918 because of the war and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Jews immediately began to buy land, some from the British, who had taken over the former state lands of the Ottoman Empire, but mostly from Arab landowners. Zionist purchases from Arabs were facilitated by the fact that the Ottoman system of land registration had been fairly chaotic, and that most land had not been registered by the peasants working it, but by wealthy city merchants or absentee landowners willing to sell it at vastly inflated prices. Zionist agencies like the Jewish National Fund (JNF) utilized contributions of Jews all over the world to purchase land on behalf of the Jewish people and to coordinate its development. In 1917, the JNF possessed only about 160,000 dunams (1 dunam equals approximately ¼ acre) in Palestine. The first major purchase after the war was of about 80,000 dunams, containing some twenty-two villages, in the Jezreel Valley. The land was purchased in 1921 from the Sursuk family of Lebanon for £726,000. (Sursuk himself had purchased the land from the Ottoman government in 1872 for about £20,000.)

Because of the predominantly socialist ideology of the Yishuv, and the preponderance of Labor Zionists in important leadership positions both in Palestine and in the World Zionist Organization, land acquired during the mandate was usually made into kibbutzim or moshavim. The Jews hoped to avoid the creation of a Jewish landlord class exploiting a landless Arab peasantry, but land purchases often led to the eviction of Arab peasants. This occurred in the Jezreel Valley, where about twenty collective settlements were founded on the principle of Jews performing their own labor. It is important to remember that all the land purchased in the mandate period was legally purchased, and much of it was swamp or marshland or was otherwise uninhabited. Nevertheless, some Arabs lost land that they had worked and that had been in the hands of their families for centuries. Moreover, socialist idealism notwithstanding, the almost total lack of contact and exchange between Jews and Arabs engaged in agriculture resulted in lost opportunities for Jewish and Arab cooperation on the land.
While land purchases continued in the 1920s, there were also spurts of Jewish immigration, although the number of Jews leaving Palestine exceeded the number entering for many years of the decade. Not surprisingly, Jewish immigration was viewed with suspicion by the Arabs.

As the mandate arrangements were being worked out in 1920 and 1921, Arab sentiment became inflamed against the British and the incoming Jews.

The White Paper of 1922

In 1920, Palestinian Arabs attacked Tel Chai and other Jewish settlements in the Galilee region, and anti-Jewish riots broke out in Jerusalem. In 1921, Jaffa was subjected to violence, which spread to Petach Tikvah, Hadera, and other Jewish communities. Forty-seven Jews were killed and 140 wounded. Forty-eight Arabs were killed and scores were wounded, mostly by British troops trying to keep the peace.

The chief justice of Palestine, Sir Thomas Haycraft, headed a commission of inquiry into the disturbances. He concluded that, whereas the Arabs had been responsible for the violence, Arab resentment had a legitimate basis in the Arab fear of economic danger posed by Jewish immigrants and the perceived political influence of the Jews on the mandatory government. In a pattern that repeated itself throughout the mandate period, immigration was temporarily suspended and then resumed, as the colonial secretary, Winston Churchill, attempted to clarify his government's policy. The Churchill White Paper reaffirmed Britain's commitment to the Balfour Declaration and stated that the Jews were in Palestine "by right and not on sufferance," but that all citizens of Palestine were Palestinians. (See Document 2-9.) It went on to say that the document meant what it said—there would be a Jewish home in Palestine—and that Jewish immigration should not exceed the economic absorptive capacity of the country, a principle extrapolated from the mandate instrument and enunciated at the time of the first immigration ordinance in 1920. The explicit reference to economic absorptive capacity in the 1922 White Paper, however, highlighted this consideration and raised new questions and doubts about its meaning.

What, in fact, did "economic absorptive capacity" mean? The 1922 White Paper provided no definition, but the Jews interpreted the phrase as an incentive for further economic development. In their view, economic growth and opportunities would justify continued Jewish immigration. Indeed, there was general economic growth in Palestine, in both the Arab and the Jewish sectors, most notably in agriculture and citiculture. The mandatory authorities were responsible for great strides in basic administration, public works, and expansion of infrastructure. Compared to the surrounding Arab areas, the economic situation of Palestine was sufficiently favorable, and the living standard notably enough higher, to attract Arabs from outside Palestine, particularly to the cities and urban areas.

Historians have debated whether changes in the Arab economy and increases in the Arab population were due to developments in the Jewish sector. The third wave of Jewish immigration, or aliya, between 1919 and 1923 brought into Palestine about 35,000 young Jews primarily from Russia and Eastern Europe who had already attended agricultural training programs and were enthusiastic and experienced "pioneers" on the land. The fourth aliya (1924-1928) of 78,000 consisted mainly of middle-class shopkeepers and artisans fleeing from economic depression and anti-Semitic outbreaks in Poland. These arrivals tended to settle in the
towns and cities. The fifth *aliyah* (1932-38) brought many well-educated German immigrants who also settled mainly in urban areas and who arrived with capital that contributed greatly to growth in construction and industry as well as agriculture. Zionist proponents stress that development in the Jewish sector created new and attractive work opportunities for Arabs as well as Jews, and that the rapid growth of the Arab population owing to natural increase resulted from the introduction by the Jews of improved health and sanitary conditions. Arab population changes within the country caused a relative decrease of the rural population and an increase of Arabs in cities and areas where there were large numbers of Jews. This urbanization of the Arabs, some observers claim, resulted from increased opportunities caused by Jewish development.

Others point out, however, that the economy grew not only because of Jewish development but also because of efforts by the mandatory government and changes in the Arab sector. The British established a framework through administrative institutions and infrastructure. The awareness of the Arab population of Palestine was stimulated not only by developments within Palestine but also by strides being made by Arabs in the surrounding countries. These historians point out, too, that while there may have been mutual influence and interchange between Jews and Arabs in the urban centers, the effect, positively or negatively, was still limited because the two groups seldom interacted. Rural populations, especially peasants and farmers, almost never had contact with each other. The resources of Palestine were limited, and although there was general economic growth, Jews and Arabs were basically in conflict in the economic sphere.

**The Political Situation**

Politically, Palestine took a very different course from the other mandate areas. In Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, even after delays and false starts, constituent assemblies, parliaments, constitutions, and other institutions of self-government that were supposed to be modeled on those of the Western democracies eventually emerged. *In Palestine, the Jewish and Arab communities rarely cooperated, except at the local and sometimes municipal level.* In order to encourage the development of self-governing institutions at a "national" level, in 1922, and again in 1923, the high commissioner attempted to establish a legislative council, which would have reflected the Arab majority. *The Arabs rejected the idea of a council, however, partly because they suspected British manipulation, but largely because to join such a council would mean to acquiesce in the imposition of the mandate and the Balfour Declaration.* The Arabs did not wish to legitimize a situation that they rejected in principle.

**The White Paper of 1930**

Personal relationships between Jews and Arabs could be friendly at times, even if they competed economically and politically at the national level. This was especially true in the 1920s as Jewish immigration leveled off and indeed fell below emigration in some years. In 1929, however, *as a result of the worldwide economic depression and anti-Semitic outbreaks in Europe, Jewish immigration to Palestine began to rise once again, engendering fear and anger among the Arabs.* An incident around the *Western (or Wailing) Wall* in August 1929 inflamed Arab mobs and set off riots that resulted in the death of Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Safed, and
Hebron. The riots left nearly 250 Arabs and Jews dead with more than 500 wounded. The massacre of more than sixty Jews in Hebron was especially traumatic; Hebron was the burial place of the Patriarchs, and Jews had lived there from the time of Abraham.

The British responded by sending an investigative commission, headed by Sir Walter Shaw, which conducted hearings and issued a report on March 31, 1930. While blaming the Arabs for the violence, it went on to say that the disappointment of Arab political and national aspirations and fear for their economic future were the fundamental causes of the disturbances. It further recommended that a study be made of land and immigration issues. Sir John Hope-Simpson was dispatched to conduct this inquiry, and Jewish immigration was temporarily suspended. On the basis of Hope-Simpson's report in 1930, the British issued another statement, the Passfield White Paper, which called for a halt to Jewish immigration. It recommended that government land be sold only to landless Arabs, and that determination of "economic absorptive capacity" be based on levels of Arab as well as Jewish unemployment. The outcry from Palestine Jews and Zionists in London and throughout the world caused Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald to issue an explanatory letter the following year that in effect nullified the provisions of the Passfield White Paper. The Arabs referred to MacDonald's statement as the Black Letter, and various Arab groups began to boycott government activities and to subvert its functioning whenever possible.

By this time, the early 1930s, events in Europe once again began to influence the situation in Palestine. Government-sponsored anti-Semitism led to Jewish emigration from Poland, Hungary, and Romania. The rise to power in Germany of Adolf Hitler, the Nuremberg racial laws, and subsequent legislation directed against the Jews, and the deliberate encouragement of Jews to leave the country, led to new waves of Jewish immigration into Palestine. Between 1933 and 1936 approximately 165,000 Jews entered Palestine, and by 1936 the Jewish population of Palestine stood at almost 400,000 or 30 percent of the total. For the first time, there seemed a real possibility that the Jews might eventually outnumber the Arabs. There were serious outbreaks of violence against Jews in 1933 and again in 1935 in reaction to these new waves of immigration.

At the end of 1935, the British broached the idea of a Palestinian constitution and a legislative council, but both the Arabs and the Jews rejected the proposal. The Arabs would have had a majority on the council, but the British would have maintained control through their selection of nonelected representatives and a provision that no legislation could abrogate or supersede the authority of the mandatory government. The mufti and his followers rejected the proposal anyway, because the Jews would have been represented. The Jews rejected it because they were still a minority and because the British proposed restrictions on land purchases. In Britain the program was attacked for one reason or another by both houses of Parliament. It was in this situation of tension that the great Arab rebellion began, reflecting an Arab nationalist sentiment that had grown along with, and partly in response to, Jewish nationalism. This rebellion persisted for three years until 1939 and the outbreak of World War II.

Arab Rebellion, 1936-1939

The Arab rebellion of 1936-1939 began with rather spontaneous acts of violence by a religiously and nationally motivated group inspired by Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, a preacher in a Haifa mosque, who urged his several hundred followers to take up arms against the
British. Before he could do much, however, he was killed by the British in 1935. *Qassamite* groups had already achieved some notoriety in the previous few years, but their robbery and murder of three Jews in April 1936, followed by retaliation against two Arabs, quickly degenerated into widespread chaos. Arab groups in Jaffa and Nablus initiated a general strike. This was taken up by "national committees" in other towns, and the first stage of the rebellion was under way. It was at this point that five of the Arab political parties put aside their differences to form the **Arab Higher Committee**, under the leadership of the mufti. The Arab Higher Committee loosely coordinated various Arab organizations, sports clubs, Boy Scouts, women's committees, a labor organization, the Jaffa Boatmen's Association, and others participating in the strike. The committee held a congress that called for civil disobedience, nonpayment of taxes, and shutting down the municipal governments. Thousands of Arabs mobilized in towns and villages across the country. Violence continued against the British military and in some instances, against Jews. The British poured in 20,000 troops to contain the upheaval. Arabs reluctant to participate were intimidated and some times even murdered by the mufti's followers.

**Peel Commission Report**

Another Royal Commission, this one headed by Lord Robert Peel, was sent to investigate. The **Peel Commission Report**, issued in 1937, was significant in that it proposed for the first time that the territory be partitioned into separate Jewish and Arab states. It recommended a small Jewish state of approximately 5,000 square kilometers and an Arab state that would be merged with Transjordan under Emir Abdullah. (See Document 2-10 and Map 2-3.) The idea of a link between a Palestinian Arab state and Transjordan, which Abdullah had nursed since the beginning of the mandate as part of his desire for a Greater Syrian state, persisted through the subsequent decades.
Arson, bombings, and assassinations continued, and in 1937 the strike moved into a second more violent stage. The murder, in September 1937, of the British district commissioner for the Galilee led the British to dissolve the Arab Higher Committee and the Supreme Muslim
Council. Most of the members of the Higher Committee were arrested and deported to the Seychelles, thus depriving the Arabs of their leadership. Hajj Amin, however, escaped to Lebanon and eventually made his way, via Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, to Rome and eventually to Berlin.

Far from defusing the Arab national movement, however, the British acts seemed to inflame it, and by 1938 they seemed unable to control much of the Arab rural population. Arabs inside Palestine were aided by those outside. Fawzi al-Qawuqji, a guerrilla leader in Syria, for example, entered Palestine and with Syrians, Iraqis, and Palestinian Arabs attacked British installations in the northern part of the country. There was, however, little centralized control of the Arab resistance. By the end of the rebellion in 1939, it is estimated that around 5000 Arabs had been killed, 15,000 wounded, and 5,600 arrested and detained. An indication of the disunity and lack of control among the Arab population can be seen by the fact that as many as one quarter of the casualties were inflicted by other Arabs. By 1939 the British garrison had been increased to nearly 25,000 men.

One result of the Arab Revolt was a temporary collaboration between the British and Jews against the Arabs to suppress the rebellion. The British recognized the Haganah for the first time as a legitimate Jewish defense force and agreed to its receiving arms and training legally. The principle of Havlagah, or restraint—that is, defending the Jewish community without retaliation, which the Haganah had adopted largely in order to maintain the goodwill of the British—now gave way to the "active defense" concept of Yitzhak Sadeh, the Haganah field commander. Haganah members were trained as uniformed auxiliary guards authorized by the British; by the end of the Arab rebellion nearly 15,000 Jews were under arms. An important figure in their training was Orde Wingate, another colorful British personality like T. E. Lawrence. Wingate, a fundamentalist Christian, believed the Jews must be in Palestine in order for the biblical prophecies to be fulfilled, and he became a passionate Zionist. Placing an emphasis on night patrols and mobile units to counter the Arab guerrilla tactics, Wingate developed Jewish special night squads and provided invaluable training for a whole generation of later leaders of Israel's army, including Moshe Dayan and Yigal Allon. In 1937 the Irgun, a Revisionist splinter group, had also taken up arms and began terrorist operations against Arabs with little British opposition.

At the same time, all the parties were debating partition. Arabs continued to insist that Palestine was indissolubly Arab. Jews, however, tended to regard the idea more favorably and reluctantly accepted the Peel plan. An international conference on refugees at Evian les-Bains, France, in 1938 made dramatically clear the increasingly perilous position of the Jews in Europe. Only one of the thirty-one countries represented at Evian, the Dominican Republic, was prepared to lift or alter immigration quotas. Jews who could still leave Germany in 1938, to say nothing of those who managed to escape the Nazi net once the war started, were severely restricted in the number of places they could go. To the Jewish Agency, therefore, a partitioned Palestine became increasingly acceptable as a possible asylum for the beleaguered Jews of Europe.

In 1938, the British established yet another commission of inquiry under the chairmanship of Sir John Woodhead to determine whether or not partition was practical and, if so, what the boundaries of the two states should be. Woodhead's report concluded that the Peel partition plan was not feasible and suggested boundaries that enraged the Jewish leaders, since many Jewish settlements and developed areas were excluded from the proposed Jewish
entity. The arrangement was also absolutely unacceptable to the Arabs; they rejected all attempts to give any part of Palestine over to Jewish sovereignty.

As it happened, the British themselves were not prepared to implement the scheme. Shortly after Woodhead's report was issued, the British government rejected any partition of Palestine as impractical. To dampen the conflict, the British resumed the curtailing of Jewish immigration and land purchases, even rejecting a request in 1938 for the admission of 10,000 Jewish children from Central Europe, although the government eventually admitted the children into Great Britain.

Still attempting to find a solution acceptable to both parties, the British government announced it would convene a meeting in London of representatives of the Zionists, Palestinian Arabs, and Arabs from the surrounding countries to try to work out an agreement. If this attempt failed, the British government stated it would make a policy decision itself. Significantly, the British accepted the request of the mufti, at this time still in Lebanon, that members of the Arab Higher Committee interned in the Seychelles be released and allowed to represent the Palestine Arabs. Other Arab delegates included Emir Abdullah of Transjordan, Nuri al-Said of Iraq, Prince Feisal of Saudi Arabia, and representatives from Egypt and Yemen. The Jewish delegation included Chaim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion, the American Zionist Rabbi Stephen Wise, and others. Except for one session, the talks, which began in February 1939, were conducted by the British with the Jews and the Arabs separately, since the Arabs would not sit in the same room with the Jews. It was obviously not going to be possible to achieve an agreement acceptable to both groups at the "Roundtable Conference"; therefore, the colonial secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, proposed a new formula, which was embodied in an official White Paper on Palestine in May 1939. (See Document 2-11.)

The 1939 White Paper

The 1939 White Paper declared that Palestine would become an independent state allied to the British Empire within ten years. This would obviously be an Arab state, since Jewish immigration was limited to 75,000 over the next five years, with Arab consent being necessary thereafter. Land sales to Jews were severely reduced by being prohibited or restricted to certain parts of the territory at the discretion of the high commissioner. This new white paper in essence repudiated the Balfour Declaration and reversed British policy in Palestine of the previous twenty years. By 1939, as a global conflict again appeared imminent, the British were concerned about having reliable bases in the Middle East and could not afford to risk alienating the Arabs or their Muslim co-religionists in India. The Arabs, however, with their leadership destroyed, were in no position to act on the recommendations of the White Paper.

The Yishuv was shocked and enraged by the 1939 White Paper, coming as it did at a desperate time for European Jewry, and the Jewish community refused to cooperate further with the mandate authorities. Ben-Gurion later declared: "We shall fight the war as if there were no White Paper; we shall fight the White Paper as if there were no war!" Both Jews and Arabs for the most part supported the British war effort against the Germans. Once the immediate threat to the British receded after the Allied success at el-Alamein in 1942, however, both communities resumed the war in Palestine, and the British position became increasingly untenable, as we shall see in the next chapter.
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING


DOCUMENT 2-1