

POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE BRITISH MILITARY  
ADMINISTRATION IN PALESTINE: 1917-1920

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## ABSTRACT

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The British Military Administration in Palestine from 1917 through 1920 was characterized by unrest and bitter conflict between Arabs, Zionists, and the British. As the occupying force in Palestine, the British Military Administration was never given any clear policy guidelines from London about how to handle the Arab nationalist movement in the middle east or the Zionist drive for a Jewish national Homeland in Palestine. Instead, the British Military Administration pursued a policy of preserving the status quo, the legacy of the traditional British foreign policy in the middle east--indirect rule. The problems that developed during the tenure of the Military Administration made effective British rule in the subsequent British mandate over Palestine difficult and damaging to British interests.

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## INTRODUCTION

Turkey's affiliation with the Central Powers in October 1914 marked the beginning of a new era in British middle eastern policy. Instead of dealing with an Ottoman Empire, the British had to find new ways of establishing relations with the various nationalities formerly under Turkish domination. The traditional British policy for protecting its interests in the middle east before the war was through indirect rule. By maintaining a strong but subtle hand in the affairs of middle eastern governments, the British could secure both the stability of the region and the security of British trade routes to India. This policy of indirect rule worked for a time until the late nineteenth century in both Egypt and in Constantinople. But the steady decay of authority within the Ottoman Empire forced the British to assume control directly. Eventually, the resentment of British and French direct involvement in Ottoman affairs and the inherent instability of the Ottoman Empire overcame British efforts to keep Turkey out of the first World War.

As the war was coming to an end in late 1917, the British and French had captured sizable amounts of territory in the middle east. Despite the traditional policy of indirect rule in the region, the British instituted direct control over occupied Palestine in the form of a Military Administration. The reason for this change in British policy may be traced to the numerous wartime commitments the

British had made to the French, the Arabs of the middle east, Zionists in Great Britain, and the Americans. In addition, an uncertain world political situation after the revolution in Russia and widespread isolationist sentiment in America prompted the British to commit themselves directly to the determination of Palestine's future.

The function of the direct control instituted in occupied Palestine in late 1917 was the preservation of what already existed. This passive policy of preserving the status quo was clearly a legacy of the traditional British policy of indirect rule in the middle east. Since the Military Administration was not designed to handle the political aspirations of either Arab nationalism or Zionism, both movements rapidly became extreme in character when the Military Administration could not satisfy their demands. By mid-1919, the overt anti-Zionist bias of Military Administrative personnel only added to the problems of a politically polarized society in Palestine.

Throughout the tenure of the Military Administration, the Zionists had recognized the schism between the British government in London, which generally supported the Zionist cause, and the increasingly hostile Military Administration in Palestine. As a result the Zionists concentrated their diplomatic efforts to secure a Zionist presence in the post-military administration of Palestine primarily on the British government in London. At the same time, the overtly political projects of the Zionists in Palestine served to strengthen Arab nationalist resolve and alienate the British

Military Administration. By early 1920, violence between the Arab nationalists and the Zionists had broken out in Jerusalem.

Thus after slightly more than two years, the tenure of a British Military Administration had resulted in an unstable and violent political situation in Palestine. When Britain secured a mandate for Palestine in July 1920, the expectation was that the replacement of an ineffective Military Administration would reduce tensions in Palestine and help secure British influence in the middle east. This hope was belied by the fact that the new British Civil Administration in Palestine had to deal with two active and experienced nationalist groups that were ready to continue their fight against the British and each other for political independence in Palestine. Thus, under the Military Administration, the conditions were established which were to trouble British rule in Palestine throughout the period of the mandate.

## CHAPTER I. INITIAL BRITISH INVOLVEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In the nineteenth century, the British became involved in the middle east primarily to protect their overland trade routes to India through modern day Saudi Arabia and through the Suez region in Egypt. Ever since Napoleon had threatened to invade India by way of the Nile in 1798, the British had maintained a visible presence in those lands adjoining their trade routes. The British government had every reason to show concern for the safety of India. Large quantities of primary goods, including rum, tobacco, sugar, coffee, opium, cotton, silk and wool were imported from India to the manufacturing centers of Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> Finished goods, in turn, were exported from Britain to markets around the world. India itself became a sizeable market for British exports. By 1850, almost one fifth of Britain's exported cotton goods went to India. Additionally, British merchants used India as a base for creating new markets in the far east.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, the British established a powerful Indian army, commanded by British officers, to insure both British administrative control in India and British interests in the east.

Throughout the middle of the nineteenth century, foreign

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<sup>1</sup>  
C. I. E. Romesh Dutt, The Economic History of India In the Victorian Age. Vol. II (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969.), pp. 99-103.

<sup>2</sup>  
Bernard Porter. The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1970. (London, New York, 1975), p. 15.



policy strategists in London wanted to protect the safety of the two British trade routes through indirect action in the middle east. Since both middle eastern trade routes ran through lands controlled by the Ottoman Turks, the British worked to strengthen their influence in Constantinople. Official British emissaries to the Turkish Sultan encouraged administrative and financial reforms, offering the Turks military aid and loans to secure friendly policies towards Great Britain. The French, also involved in international trade through the middle east, became involved in the local government in Egypt, again to promote friendly policies for western trade. By the late 1860s, Britain and France had established a working compromise with the Turkish Sultan that effectively guaranteed both British and French interests in the middle east.<sup>3</sup> The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 marked the height of this British and French success in indirectly preserving their middle eastern interests.

Throughout the 1870s, the disintegration of a corrupt central authority in Constantinople was reflected by unrest and a loss of local government authority in Egypt. By 1881, Egyptian resentment over the extent of Anglo-French financial control resulted in a nationalist uprising. When the French withdrew, the British were left alone to suppress the revolt and protect the Canal. Since Canal traffic was

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Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1961, ), pp. 76-79.

over 80% British, and British officials had jointly controlled Egyptian finances with the French since the 1850s, the transition in August 1882 to an Egyptian government directly controlled by Great Britain was not difficult.<sup>4</sup> The British, however, still viewed such direct action as undesirable. Thus, Prime Minister William Gladstone called for "the withdrawal of the foreign occupation as soon as possible."<sup>5</sup> Within five years, such wishful thinking had given way to Egyptian Consul General Lord Cromer's realization that "... the evacuation policy [appears] to me to be impossible under any conditions."<sup>6</sup> Out of concern for her trade routes to India, Britain had forsaken indirect rule for direct control in Egypt. By 1890, with the Ottoman Empire in serious decline, Egypt and its Suez waterway had become inseparable from British concern for India itself.

The gradual breakdown of the Ottoman imperial structure from 1890 until 1914 occurred despite a variety of British efforts to prop up the "sick man of Asia." By 1914, the combination of British and French commercial exploitation of Turkish dominions, the Sultan's resentment of constant British advice, and successful German approaches to the Sublime Porte all had undermined a strong British effort to

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4 Ibid., pp. 117-120.

5 Ibid., p. 122.

6 Porter, Lion's Share, p. 162.

maintain Turkish neutrality in case of international conflict in Europe. Upon the Turkish declaration of war in November 1914, the British were forced to construct a new foreign policy for the protection of India and the middle east, one which was no longer founded on the continued existence of an Ottoman Empire. Instead, the British began to establish diplomatic contacts with Moslem Arabs living in Arabia who desired independence from the Turks, and Zionist Jews from Europe who wanted a Jewish Homeland in the ancient land of Palestine. For numerous reasons the British made binding commitments to both groups as well as to Britain's European Allies to assure that Britain would indeed have a decisive say in the future of middle eastern affairs. Consistent with their Egyptian policy of the mid-nineteenth century, the British hoped to rule affairs in the middle east indirectly, through the friendly auspices of Arabs and Jews living in the region. Nonetheless, when the Egyptian Expeditionary Forces of the British army entered Jerusalem in December 1917, General Sir Edmund Allenby immediately instituted direct control over Palestine in the form of a military occupation.

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John Marlowe, The Seat of Pilate: An Account of the Palestine Mandate. (London: The Cresset Press, 1959), p. 9.

## CHAPTER II. THE SEARCH FOR A NEW POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The British decision to forego indirect rule and occupy Palestine had come about because of a change in the strategy of War Office planners. The failure of the Allied offensive at Gallipoli and the possible withdrawal of Russia from the war due to internal turmoil had dictated a new direction in British military thinking by mid-1917. The resulting Allied plan to strike at Turkey from the middle east meant that the Egyptian Expeditionary Forces, originally created to safeguard the Suez Canal, would be converted into an offensive unit. Occupation of Palestine was not vital to this overall strategy, but David Lloyd George and his War Cabinet recognized that the capture of Jerusalem as a "Christmas present" for the British people would have a positive effect on British morale at home and abroad.<sup>8</sup> In addition, French and Russian claims on the Ottoman territories early in the war had given the British good reason to consider how Palestine might fit into their own post-war plans. British efforts to win support for their presence in Palestine consisted of an odd combination of non-publicized negotiations with Arab nationalists, semi-official dealings with skilled Zionist diplomats, and secret agreements with European governments. While the British did indeed win acceptance of their responsibility

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<sup>8</sup> Marlowe, Seat of Pilate, p. 10.

for Palestine, the expectations raised among Arabs and Zionists and the obligations incurred to European Allies meant that the problem of military administration in Palestine would partially undermine the security considerations that had initially justified Britain's direct involvement.

#### Early Wartime Diplomatic Efforts

In the fall of 1914, prior to Turkey's joining the Central Powers, Palestine was not a country but a region of Turkish provinces called sanjaks that were ruled locally from Damascus and centrally from Constantinople. Arabs living in the Turkish provinces of the middle east enjoyed religious toleration but were politically dominated by the Turks. In the years before the war, the British had attempted to maintain Turkish neutrality, if only to prevent a "land grab" by European powers should the Ottoman structure collapse. Equally important once the war began was the consideration that a state of war with the Sultan, who was the Grand Caliph of Islam, might pose a threat to British authority among the large Moslem populations in India, Egypt and the Sudan.

The best opportunity for the British to counter the

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<sup>9</sup>  
Christopher Sykes, Crossroads to Israel  
(Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1973),  
p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>  
Ronald Storrs, Memoirs. (New York:  
G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1937), p. 164.

effect of a jihad, or holy war declared by the Caliph in Constantinople, was to win the support of Moslem Arabs, who had been oppressed by their Turkish overlords for years. Friendly relations with the Arabs of the Hejaz--the Turkish province consisting of modern day Saudi Arabia--might limit the effects of the Caliph's hostility among Moslem British subjects in India and elsewhere. In the fall of 1914, Ronald Storrs, then Assistant Consul General of Egypt, received authorization from the War Office to contact the Sherif Hussein of Mecca to see if "the Arabs of the Hejaz would be for us or against us," were Turkey to enter the war against Britain.<sup>11</sup> Following a favorable response, War Secretary Kitchener cabled the Sherif on October 31, 1914 promising that "England will guarantee that no intervention takes place in Arabia and will give the Arabs every assistance against external foreign aggression."<sup>12</sup> As expected, Turkey joined the Central Powers in November 1914. With a contact established in the Arab world, Britain could effectively deal with the Arabs as a distinct entity apart from the Ottoman Empire.

Even as they were establishing a relationship with the Arabian Arabs, however, the British also were beginning to consider the possibility of a pro-British government in Palestine after the war. Thus, in early 1915, the British

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11  
Ibid., p. 163.

12  
Ibid., p. 166.

first began to consider seriously the Zionist movement for a Jewish Homeland in Palestine. Zionism had arisen as an organized nationalist movement in the 1890s when an assimilated Austrian Jew named Theodor Herzl put forth his theory that Jews could never be fully accepted as naturalized citizens in the countries of their birth. Instead, Jews needed a state of their own that would serve as a Homeland for Jews all over the world. Zionism as a political movement quickly gained support among persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe, though it did not gain much popularity among naturalized, established Jews in Western Europe or America.

Despite a small following, Zionist leaders in Great Britain had created a potent Zionist Political Committee that effectively influenced important policymakers in the British government. Foremost among these Zionist leaders was Chaim Weizmann, a distinguished chemist whose work for the Munitions Ministry during the war earned him the gratitude of the Minister of Munitions, David Lloyd George. Also important to the early success of British Zionism was the work of the so-called "Manchester School" of Zionism. Influential journalists C.P. Scott and Herbert Sidebotham of the Manchester Guardian published numerous articles supporting the creation of a Jewish buffer state in Palestine under British protection. Additionally, by late 1915, Sir Mark Sykes, a member of the government, and David Lloyd George, the Minister of Munitions, had been won to the Zionist cause. By early 1916, the growing Zionist movement

in Britain had established an effective propaganda machine to keep Zionist proposals before influential government officials. This work would pay off when the Lloyd George War Cabinet came to see Zionism as an element of cultural renewal for the Jews, and an instrument of British imperial policy.<sup>14</sup>

In 1915, the British also began to work within traditional channels of European diplomacy to win approval of their plans to dominate post-war Palestine. In March 1915, before the ill-fated Dardanelles campaign against Turkey, the Russian Foreign Minister secretly notified the British and the French that the Russians intended to annex Constantinople and the Straits following an Entente victory.<sup>15</sup> French officials were shocked at the bold Russian claims but did not want to risk alienating Russia from the Allied war effort. The French therefore put forth their own claims for Syria, including the land of Palestine. The British, already fearing trouble in Egypt with the threat of an Islamic holy war, had remained hesitant about actively planning for the total breakup of Ottoman territory. But the claims of her allies convinced the British Cabinet to

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Marlowe, Seat of Pilate, p.22.

14

Ibid., p.39.

15

J. C. Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East. Vol. II: A Documentary Record (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1956), pp. 7-11.



create a committee to set forth British war aims and territorial ambitions in the region. This committee, chaired by Sir Maurice deBunsen, submitted its report to the Cabinet on June 30, 1915.<sup>16</sup>

The character of the deBunsen report echoed the traditional British policy of trying to protect established interests in the middle east by means of influence on friendly governments rather than direct rule. It called for "maintenance of the assurances given to the Sherif of Mecca and the Arabs" while maintaining for "Turkey, in Asia, some prospect of a permanent existence."<sup>17</sup> The recommendations of the deBunsen committee were not, in fact, adopted by the British government. Instead, with the setback in the Dardanelles campaign and rising popular opinion against Turkey, the Cabinet actively began to pursue the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. The British soon thereafter approached the French to begin work on an Anglo-French agreement that would satisfy both French and British claims to the middle east. At the same time, however, the British were also further encouraging Arab hopes for independence.

Early in 1915, with the middle east now a strategic priority in its own right, the responsibility for negotiations with the Arabs of the Hejaz was transferred

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Aaron S. Kleiman, Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1978), p. 5.

17

Ibid., pp. 5-6.

from the India Office to the High Commissioner for Egypt. The Commissioner, Sir Henry McMahon, had been appointed only in January 1915, but he was guided by his experienced Oriental Secretary, Ronald Storrs, as well as the Arab Bureau, an office consisting of administrators knowledgeable in Arab affairs, which had been created before the war. In June 1915, McMahon, with the consent of the British Cabinet, publicly proclaimed Britain's readiness to recognize the independence of the Arabs after the war. McMahon still was primarily interested in countering the threat of an Islamic jihād, although it had not really had much effect in Egypt or India by mid-1915. McMahon's offer was answered the following month by the Sherif Hussein of Mecca. The Sherif suggested an Anglo-Arab military alliance in exchange for British recognition of the independence of the Arabs as set forth by a group of leading Arab nationalists in a document known as the Damascus Protocol.<sup>18</sup> McMahon finally agreed on October 24, 1915, to accept Arab independence in "Syria [excluding] the two districts of Mersina and Alexandretta and portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo [which] cannot be said to be purely Arab, and should be excluded from the limits demanded."<sup>19</sup> This exclusion would later become the subject of a major disagreement between the Arabs and the British. What did "west of the districts of Damascus" really mean?

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Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Middle East  
Vol. II, pp. 13-14.

And did the British mean to include Palestine in this area of Arab independence as the Arabs would later claim?

Despite the ambiguities in the text of the McMahon letters, the British had successfully arranged for the protection of their interests in the middle east. Hussein's declaration of a General Arab Revolt against the Turks in June 1916 ended the threat of an Islamic jihad and gave the British the security to begin planning with their Allies how Britain would participate in a post-war middle eastern settlement. The Arab Revolt commenced on June 8, 1916 under the leadership of the Emir Faysal, son of the Sherif of Mecca. While the revolt did not affect the overall direction of the war, it did serve a military purpose by diverting a large number of Turkish troops and supplies to Arabia, and protecting the right flank of the British as they advanced through Palestine.<sup>20</sup> Thus, through the efforts of British administrators in the middle east, a policy of winning the support of the Arabs had been achieved. The cost of the Arab assistance was a British commitment to Arab independence. The British would soon discover that the Arabs were less than willing to compromise their gains to negotiated settlements between Britain and France.

At around the same time McMahon was negotiating with the Sherif Hussein, Zionist leaders in Britain were beginning to

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19

Ibid., p. 15.

20

Fred J. Khouri, The Arab-Israeli Dilemma  
(Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Press, 1980, p. 8.

formulate their own plans for the future of Palestine. The organized Zionist body in Great Britain, though unaware of the McMahon correspondence, was quick to recognize that the British would logically seek to settle European claims to Ottoman territories well before the war was over. Since this meant that the future of Palestine depended on British negotiations with other European nations, Zionist leaders like Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow actively worked to convince British leaders of the many reasons to support Zionist proposals for Palestine. At the same time, in the popular press, Zionist sympathizers emphasized the religious benefits of a Zionist presence in Palestine. Anglo-Saxon politicians readily responded to the idea of a British hand in preserving the holy places. In addition, in February 1916, Herbert Sidebotham submitted a memorandum to the Foreign Office detailing the strategic advantages for Great Britain of a Zionist Homeland in Palestine. As a result of these representations, Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey approached the French and the Russians about a Jewish "arrangement in Palestine" that might "bring over to our side the Jewish forces in America, the East and elsewhere which are now hostile to us."

Grey already had good reason to approach the French about the middle east. In early 1916, in response to the

Russian claims to Constantinople and the Straits, informal talks between the British and the French had crystallized into diplomatic negotiations between Sir Mark Sykes, an Assistant Secretary to Asquith's Cabinet, and M. Georges Picot, a representative of the French government. The Sykes-Picot agreement, as it would later be called, essentially divided the middle east into spheres of influence. Both France and Britain agreed to allow for Arab independence in the Arabian peninsula, while dividing Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Syria into a number of British and French zones of influence. Palestine retained an international status, to be "subjected to a special regime to be determined by agreement between Russia, France and Great Britain."<sup>22</sup> These European arrangements differed somewhat in spirit and in content from the assurances given by Sir Henry McMahon to the Sherif of Mecca several months earlier. The zones of influence in Syria called for by the Sykes-Picot agreement contradicted McMahon's guarantee of Arab independence in specified portions of Syria after the war. Since the status of Palestine was unclear in the McMahon agreements, the internationalization called for by the Sykes-Picot agreement created yet another source of potential conflict.

On April 16, 1916, a draft of the Sykes-Picot agreement

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E. S. C. O. Foundation for Palestine, Inc.  
Palestine: A Study of Jewish, Arab, and British  
Policies. Vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale University  
Press, 1947), p. 60.

was sent to High Commissioner McMahon in Cairo. Despite the apparent inconsistencies between McMahon's letters to Hussein and the Sykes-Picot agreement, neither Sykes nor McMahon raised the question of the potential for future conflict.<sup>23</sup> Thus, on May 16, 1916, the Sykes-Picot agreement<sup>24</sup> was formally signed.

In December 1916, David Lloyd George replaced Asquith as prime minister. Despite numerous Zionist contacts with the British government, Asquith had refused to support the Zionist cause. As a result, British support of the Zionists remained semi-official at best. With a supportive Lloyd George in office, however, the Zionists found the British government more than willing to aid their efforts. Soon after Lloyd George took office, the Zionist Political Committee submitted a six point memorandum to the Foreign Office calling for official British recognition of Jewish rights and autonomy in Palestine.<sup>25</sup>

Consideration for possible Allied claims in the middle east prevented the Foreign Office from actually claiming Palestine for the British, so the Zionists themselves were encouraged to secure the agreement of European powers for British supervision of a Zionist Homeland in Palestine. In the spring of 1917, using British government diplomatic

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Monroe, Britain's Moment, p. 32.

24

Khouri, Arab-Israeli Dilemma, p. 8.

25

Marlowe, Seat of Pilate, pp. 22-23.

channels, Zionist leader Nahum Sokolow went to France, Italy, and the Vatican to get approval for British action supporting Zionist proposals for Palestine.<sup>26</sup> By May, Weizmann felt secure enough about the possibility of British willingness to support the Zionists to tell an assembled convention of Zionist bodies from all over Great Britain that "under the wing of this Great Power, Jews will be able to develop...the administrative assembly that will...enable us to carry out the Zionist scheme." Ever aware of the realities of European diplomacy, however, Weizmann also noted that "a [Jewish state] must be built up slowly, gradually, systematically and patiently."<sup>27</sup> In the early summer of 1917, at the invitation of the the Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, Weizmann and his top associates were preparing their terms for an official statement of British support for Zionism. The ensuing Balfour Declaration called for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."<sup>28</sup> With this declaration of support, Zionists in Britain and around the world had for the first time an official foundation from which to pursue their ultimate goal of a Jewish state in Palestine.

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26

Ibid., p.24.

27

Chaim Weizmann, Trial and Error (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p.201.

28

Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Middle East  
Vol II, p. 25.

Despite its tremendous importance to Zionists all over the world, as well as the problems it caused the British government in the next twenty years, the Balfour Declaration was hardly noticed when it was issued. The main focus of the world's attention in November 1917 was not the middle east, but Russia, where Lenin had seized power on the very day that Britain had issued the Balfour Declaration. On November 23, the Russian Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Leon Trotsky, released copies of all secret agreements signed during the war. Most significant of these now public documents for British policy in the middle east was the Sykes-Picot agreement. The British immediately sent messages to the Arabs reassuring them of British intent to give the "Arab race [a] full opportunity of once again forming a nation in the world."<sup>29</sup> Six months later the "Declaration to the Seven" asserted British support for "the complete and sovereign independence" of liberated Ottoman territories based upon the consent of the governed."<sup>30</sup>

In spite of such grand assurances, the British would find their middle eastern foreign policy a muddle by late 1917 as they began to consolidate their military victories. With the capture of the rest of Palestine in 1918 and the favorable turn of the war for the Allies in Europe, the British could begin to plan a new middle eastern order built

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Zeine M. Zeine, The Struggle for Arab Independence (Beirut: Khayat's, 1960), pp. 22.

30

Ibid., p. 23



around the security of Palestine. As had been the case in the old Ottoman Empire, the British did not want to assume direct control in the region. To this end, the British had hoped to secure friendly relations with the Arabs while supporting the drive for a Jewish Homeland. Unfortunately, the lack of clarity in British promises to the Arabs and the Zionists and Britain's overriding agreement with the French meant that a mutually acceptable settlement for the distribution of middle eastern territories would be difficult to achieve. As both the Zionist and Arab efforts became full-fledged nationalist movements, the British Military Administration in Palestine became more and more important as a representative of the British government. With no clear policy guidelines from London, however, the Military Administration could not control or modify the political aspirations of the Arabs or the Zionists. The failure of the Military Administration in this political sphere precipitated violence and mistrust between Arabs, Zionists, and the British, making indirect rule impossible.

CHAPTER III. THE SEARCH FOR A SETTLEMENT IN THE  
MIDDLE EAST

The Status Quo Policy

Following Allenby's capture of Jerusalem in November 1917, the British brought in personnel for the administration of occupied Palestine. Martial law was declared, strictly in accord with the Law and Usages of War as laid down in the Manual of Military Law. The overriding purpose of the Military Administration was the preservation of the status quo. "We were here merely as a Military Government," wrote the first Military Governor of Jerusalem,<sup>31</sup> "and not as Civil Reformers". The basis for the policy of the British Military Administration in Palestine was elucidated by General Allenby in his first public proclamation after entering Jerusalem:

"...since your city is regarded with affection by the adherents of three of the great religions of mankind...every sacred...site...of [whatever] form of the three religions, will be maintained and protected according to existing customs and beliefs of those to whose faiths they are sacred."<sup>32</sup>

While this status quo policy may have been a logical starting point for any honest military occupation, the inability of the British government in London to define more clearly the role of the Military Administration in resolving

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<sup>31</sup> Storrs, Memoirs, p. 317.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

the conflicts between Arabs and Jews was a source of the difficulties the British encountered from 1918 until the end of the military occupation in 1920.

The military administrative structure set up by the British was called Occupied Enemy Territory Administration South, or O.E.T.A.-S. (pronounced O-EE-TA South). After the Turkish Armistice in October 1918, O.E.T.A.-S. would include northern and southern Palestine, essentially the "Brown" region of British influence set forth in the Sykes-Picot agreement. French administration along the coast of Syria and in Lebanon would comprise O.E.T.A. North, while Arab administration, under the Emir Feisel, over Transjordan and the interior of Syria would make up O.E.T.A.-East. The overall authority of all occupied territories lay with British General Allenby's general headquarters in Cairo. <sup>33</sup> The immediate head of O.E.T.A.-S. was the Chief Political Officer of Palestine, a post based in Cairo and filled in late 1917 by General Gilbert Clayton. While technically in charge of the administration of Palestine, the Chief Political Officer "was far too busy to interfere in detail". <sup>34</sup> Occupied Palestine was therefore divided into a number of military governates, each with a military governor. Working directly under Clayton as the Military Governor of Jerusalem was Lieutenant Colonel Ronald

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33  
Ibid., p. 306.

34  
Ibid.

Storrs. As Military Governor of a large governate populated by Arabs, Jews and Christians, Storrs had the direct responsibility for putting life in occupied Jerusalem back in order.

As Military, and after 1920 Civil, Governor of Jerusalem, Ronald Storrs was active in the internal politics of administration in Palestine for over eight years. While efficient and highly capable as an administrator, the problems Storrs encountered as the administrative head of Jerusalem directly reflected the overall dilemma the British themselves faced in trying to create a workable administration in post-war Palestine. Ronald Storrs had begun his career working for the British government in the middle east in 1909 as Oriental Secretary of the British residency in Cairo. Serving first under under Lord Kitchener, and then under Sir Henry McMahon, Storrs, along with General Clayton, had laid the groundwork for High Commissioner McMahon's correspondence with Sherif Hussein in 1915 and 1916. He also had been instrumental in the formation of the Arab Bureau in Cairo, a group of British officers with special knowledge of the current affairs of the Arab world.

In December 1917, Storrs accompanied General Clayton to Jerusalem, where Allenby had just made his formal entrance into the city. <sup>35</sup> On December 28, after his return to Cairo,

Storrs was summoned back to Jerusalem to serve as the Military Governor. Reflecting upon his appointment, Storrs later noted that "I possessed no military competence whatever, and very little administrative experience, but I did have an inside knowledge of the process of Government and the interactions of Oriental communities, combined with a deep enthusiasm for the task...".<sup>36</sup> As the most visible British authority in Jerusalem, Storrs became, for the local population, the main advocate, if not originator, of the British policy for Palestine. A cultured man, Storrs soon found himself the object of intense hatred from both the Arab and the Jewish communities, who resented both British efforts to uphold a policy of fairness and Storrs' good<sup>37</sup> manners in imposing that philosophy on his administration. An astute observer, Storrs recognized early in his tenure that the political goals of Zionists in Palestine would inevitably conflict with both the Arab desires for an independent state and the goals of his own administration to maintain the status quo. Despite this realization, the limits placed on Storrs' powers by the D.E.T.A. guidelines prevented him from taking any action to deflect Arab and<sup>38</sup> Zionist hostilities.

Storrs soon discovered that the practical necessities of

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Ibid., p. 300.

37

Sykes, Crossroads, p. 25.

38

Storrs, Memoirs, p. 317.

administration often could not be reconciled with the policy of preserving the status quo. The employment of Hebrew speaking personnel for staff positions in the Administration in numbers exceeding the percentage of Jews in the local population, and the use of Hebrew in public and departmental notices, constituted "deliberate and vital infractions of military practice"<sup>39</sup>. The justification for the participation of European-educated Zionists in the Military Administration was the British government's endorsement of the Balfour Declaration, which suggested that the eventual government of Palestine would in some way contain a national home for the Jewish people. Under the scope of martial law, however, such a practice immediately aroused the suspicions of local Arab leaders who already distrusted the British for issuing the Balfour Declaration. Storrs' O. E. T. A. staff had little experience in facing modern political nationalism. As a result, the actions of the military administrative personnel often added to the tensions between the Arab and Jewish communities.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the potential for such political difficulties within the structure of his administration, Storrs was able to accomplish much in the early days of his rule in Jerusalem. Throughout the spring of 1918, neither Arab nor Jew had much time for political agitation. Neither

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39  
Ibid., p. 312.

40  
Ibid., p. 317.

community had the necessary organization nor the leadership to display a true political consciousness. "So long as I enjoyed the friendly understanding of Clayton and the confidence of my Commander in Chief," wrote Storrs, "my word was law. As there were no lawyers, judges or courts, it was the only law".<sup>41</sup> With such power, Storrs was able to organize several projects utilizing combined Arab and Jewish resources for a common cause. Foremost among these non-political accomplishments was the Pro-Jerusalem Society, which Storrs formed in early 1918 to promote civic awareness in restoring the aesthetic beauty of Jerusalem. Among the achievements of the Pro-Jerusalem Society was the repair of war-damaged religious monuments, local art shows, and the creation of a self-supporting weaving business that employed local artisans.<sup>42</sup> The true success of Storrs' efforts was the creation of community goodwill between Moslem and Jew. This mutual cooperation between the Arabs and the Jews in Jerusalem contrasted markedly with the violence and mistrust among Arabs and Zionists after the spring of 1918. The main problem then was the British Administration's continued reliance on the philosophy of status quo, despite the growth of political awareness by the Palestinian Arabs and especially by the Zionist community in Palestine.

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41

Ibid., p. 334.

42

Ibid., pp. 327-329

### The Arrival of a Zionist Commission

By the early spring of 1918, after a hard winter, the British Administration over occupied Palestine was firmly settled into place. Allenby's armies to the north of Jerusalem were advancing successfully against the Turks, thereby removing much of the immediate danger from the inhabitants of the city. In March, Chief Political Officer Clayton received word from the Foreign Office in London to expect the arrival of a Zionist Commission. The purpose of this commission was to serve as a liaison between O.E.T.A.-S. and the Zionist community in Palestine. Storrs, with his background in British-Arab politics, recognized immediately that the presence of an organized Zionist executive in Palestine would have important political implications. Noting that "the [Balfour Declaration] had been violently repudiated by the Arab journal al-Carmel as well as officially rejected by the Sultan Abd al Hamid in deference to strong Moslem feeling," he saw that the Zionist Commission would be a "practical threat" to the Arabs. In addition, the community of religious Jews that had lived in Palestine for many generations had also rejected the Zionists' idea of a Jewish Homeland and thus any official activity by the British government to bring one about.

When created by the British government in early 1918,



the Zionist Commission was authorized to represent the Jews of the principal Allied countries as well as the few Zionist immigrants living in Palestine. For "political reasons," neither the Russians nor the Americans sent representatives to the Commission. As a result, the seven-member Commission consisted of French, Italian, and English Jews. The leader was the Russian born, naturalized British subject Chaim Weizmann. The purpose of the Zionist Commission was stated by the Foreign Office in rather general terms, as an authorization to "investigate...and to ...supervise" the organization and restoration of "Zionist colonies during the war in so far as circumstances will permit." More importantly, the Commission was authorized to "represent the Zionist Organization in Palestine and act as an advisory body to the British authorities in all matters relating to Jews or which may effect the establishment of a National Home for the Jewish people" in accordance with the Balfour Declaration.

Even before the end of the war, when the Zionist Commission began to concentrate on the second part of its mission, D. E. T. A. -S. officials noted the cohesiveness and determination that it had imparted to Zionist settlers. Strict adherence to the Hebrew language was demanded, Jewish national flags were distributed and flown over houses and

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Marlowe, Seat of Pilate, pp. 67-68.

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Ibid., p. 68.

parades, and the Zionist national anthem "Hatikva" was played at public gatherings.<sup>46</sup> The reason for the success of the Commission in sensitizing the Zionist community in Palestine, even in the early days of the Commission's existence, can be traced in a great degree to the Eastern European origins of the the Zionist community in Palestine. Zionism, it should be remembered, had its earliest support in Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century, where persecuted Jews dreamed of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine as the hope for the survival of the Jewish people.

Though appreciative of the British government for supporting this idea in the Balfour Declaration, these Russian immigrant Zionists in Palestine could not understand why the British Military Administration did not actively encourage their cause. Part of the misunderstanding was due to an absence of specific guidelines for either the Zionist Commission or D.E.T.A.-S. in reference to how the Balfour Declaration should be interpreted. As a result, any attempt by the British administration to restrict an ambitious project of the Zionist Commission was met with numerous accusations from the Zionist communities in Palestine of unfairness and anti-Zionist bias in D.E.T.A.-S. The military staff of D.E.T.A.-S., in turn, saw their duty as the maintenance of internal security in Palestine. In practical terms, the status quo policy meant that the

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Storrs, Memoirs, pp. 364-367.

British Military Administration could not allow the Zionist Commission to effect changes in the administration of the territory. At the same time, the Zionist Commission fully intended to carry out its authorization from the Foreign Office to "prepare [administrative] plans in the spirit of the Balfour Declaration." <sup>47</sup> Thus, as early as the spring of 1918, the division of authority between London and Jerusalem was already causing problems in the relationship between the Zionist Commission and the British Military Administration.

In spite of the potential conflict between the Zionist Commission and the Military Administration, the Zionists had not yet come into open conflict with the Sherif Hussein of Mecca. In May 1918, Weizmann met the Emir Faysal, son of the Sherif Hussein, in Amman, Transjordan. Weizmann realized that Faysal could be an important ally to the Zionist movement since Faysal's Army of the Hejaz had joined with Allenby for the push to liberate northern Palestine and Syria. <sup>48</sup> Faysal and Weizmann met on cordial terms. Weizmann explained the Zionist philosophy to an interested Faysal and both agreed that the Arabs of Palestine (including Transjordan) would benefit economically from a Zionist presence in the area. <sup>49</sup> Despite the friendly relations between these two moderates, the Arab concern on a local

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<sup>47</sup> Weizmann, Trial and Error, p. 212.

<sup>48</sup> Marlowe, Seat of Pilate, p. 63.

<sup>49</sup> Weizmann, Trial and Error, pp. 233-234.

level about the British hesitation to declare publically its policy about the future of Syria was already eroding the foundation of Arab-Zionist common interests.

#### Resolving Conflicting Claims

In September of 1918, following a series of brilliant victories, Allenby's armies liberated the northern regions of Palestine from the Turks. Aided by Feisel's Hejaz Army on the east of the Jordan River, the combined Anglo-Arab forces took Damascus on September 30. One month later the Turks surrendered at Mudros. All of Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia fell under the jurisdiction of O.E.T.A. Mesopotamia and Palestine came under strictly British supervision. O.E.T.A.-S., now comprising all of Palestine, had doubled its territory, thus requiring the creation of new administrative districts called Military Governates, each under a military governor.

Following the reorganization of the enlarged O.E.T.A.-S., Arabs in Palestine and Syria began to question the delay in British initiative towards the creation of a Greater Syrian state. All during the war, the Arabs had expected that after the fighting stopped, Britain would set up an administration for Greater Syria similar to the administration they had set up in Egypt. Such a system seemed attractive to Syrian and Palestinean Arabs in 1918 because of the prosperity and relative local autonomy given to the Egyptians under British rule. But the activities of the Zionist Commission in Palestine seemed to signal a new

direction for British policy. To the Arabs in Palestine, the Zionist Commission was "the thin edge of a wedge, the beginning of a government within a government."<sup>51</sup>

The basis of the Zionist Commission, the Balfour Declaration--not officially published by the British in Palestine but well known to Arab leaders--was no less troublesome in its implications. In the draft of the Declaration, the Jews, only some 10% of the population of Palestine, were called by name, while the remaining 90%--Arabs, both Moslems and Christians--were simply lumped together as "non-Jewish communities."<sup>52</sup> More importantly, while the political right of the Jews for a Homeland was affirmed in the Declaration, only the civil and religious rights of the other inhabitants merited safeguarding, with no mention of political rights.<sup>53</sup> Thus, without opposing the Zionist movement per se, Arab leaders in Palestine and Syria were beginning to wonder by October 1918 how the British support of a Zionist Homeland in Palestine would affect their chances for building a Greater Syrian state encompassing Syria and Palestine. The activities of the Zionist Commission in organizing the Zionist community in Palestine and the apparent tacit approval of the Military

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Storrs, Memoirs, p. 370.

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Ibid., p. 373.

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Neil Caplan, Palestine Jewry and the Arab Question, 1917-1925 (London: Frank Cass, 1978), p. 6.

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Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Middle East, II, p. 26.

Administration made astute Arabs realize that a Greater Syrian state was by no means a certainty.

At the end of the war in November 1918, the British and French jointly issued a statement which at first glance seemed to relieve the fears of the Arabs. The primary assertion of this Anglo-French Declaration was that Britain and France stood together in "encouraging and assisting the establishment of indigenous Governments and Administrations in Syria and Mesopotamia."<sup>54</sup> The primary purpose of the Anglo-French Declaration, however, was not to soothe the worries of the Arab people in Syria. Instead, Britain and France sought to support the war aims of the United States, as elucidated in President Wilson's Fourteen Points. Point twelve called for "an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development" for the non-Turkish nationalities in liberated Ottoman territories.<sup>55</sup> In addition, President Wilson had warned that "self determination is not a mere phrase. It is an imperative principle of action which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their own peril."<sup>56</sup> At the peace conference in Paris in early 1919, Wilson suggested the creation of an Allied Commission to investigate conditions in Syria and Palestine to determine exactly how the local

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Ibid., p. 30.

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Marlowe, Seat of Pilate, p. 56.

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Zeine, Struggle for Arab Independence, p. 46.

inhabitants felt about administrative and governmental assistance from Britain, the United States or France. Though Britain and France declined to participate in this King-Crane Commission, the immediate result of the Commission's investigations in the summer of 1919 was to raise further the Arabs' expectations for a Greater Syrian state.

With the release of the Anglo-French Declaration, British policy statements to both the Arab and the Zionists had become essentially irreconcilable. Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, noted that "...so far as Palestine is concerned, the powers have made no statement of fact that is not admittedly wrong, and no declaration of policy, which, at least in the letter, they have not always intended to violate." <sup>57</sup> Now as the Arabs and the Zionists living in Palestine sought to force the British government to fulfill the conflicting promises it had made, the British Military Administration became the focus of more intensive pressures. Due to a lack of clear political guidelines from London, however, apart from maintaining security, the Military Administration was not equipped to handle the spontaneous growth of an Arab nationalist movement in Palestine or the intensification of Zionist efforts to insure the inclusion of the Balfour Declaration in any British Mandate for

Palestine.

When the Allied powers met in Paris in January 1919 to decide the fate of the vanquished Central Powers, Britain and France were in possession of all former Ottoman territories in the middle east.<sup>58</sup> By April 1919, the idea of a mandate system for governing former possessions of enemy empires had been agreed upon by the Allies. Under such a system, as delineated in the covenant of the new League of Nations, the victorious Allies could reconcile their European notions of annexation for strategic gain with the Wilsonian principle of self-determination. Negotiations for the allocation of mandates in the middle east took place at San Remo during the autumn of 1919, where representatives of the governments of Britain, France and Italy met to determine territorial boundaries to be approved by the League of Nations.<sup>59</sup>

The negotiations for the creation of mandates for Syria and Palestine were characterized by bitter conflict between France and Britain. The British, as has been seen, were bound to mutually conflicting obligations for the future administration of Syrian territories. In the McMahon letters to Hussein in early 1916, the British had promised the Arabs an independent government with British supervision only. Several months later, the British had promised the

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Ibid., p. 497.

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Marlowe, Seat of Pilate, pp. 58-59.



French a sphere of influence over most of Syria (excluding Palestine) in the Sykes-Picot agreement. To complicate negotiations further, Faysal, with widespread Arab support, had set up a provisional government in Damascus, and was bitterly opposed to any French participation in a mandate for Syria. Besides a personal dislike of the French, Faysal believed that the British stood behind his interests in a Greater Syrian state with the McMahon promises and Anglo-Arab military comradeship.<sup>60</sup> Wilson's suggestion for the creation of the King-Crane Commission to determine the preferences of the inhabitants in the middle east merely increased the tension between France and Britain, for it inevitably would conclude that the Arabs were hostile to a French mandate in Syria. Yet the British realized that an open break with the French over the creation of a French mandate for Syria would jeopardize British claims for a mandate in Palestine and Mesopotamia.

By August, the British had decided to sacrifice Arab goodwill in favor of a rapprochement with the French. For despite local antipathy for the French in Syria, the British felt it was in their best strategic interest to give the French a role there. The British simply could not afford to lose a chance for a mandate in Palestine. The rise of the Japanese navy during the war meant that all of the British empire lying east of the Suez, including India, was

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Gooch and Temperley, Documents IV, p. 543.

vulnerable to a foreign naval power. In addition, the unsettled nature of the Russian Revolution gave the British even more reason to show concern for the safety of the Canal. With the Americans in full retreat to an isolationist foreign policy in August 1919, and the damaging King-Crane mandate inquiry revealing Arab hatred of France safely stored away, the British and French agreed to a British mandate in Palestine and a French mandate in Syria.

#### CHAPTER IV POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN PALESTINE

All during the year-long period of Britain's negotiations with France over the Syrian problem, Arab nationalist feelings in Palestine had been on the rise. Originally this nationalist movement had been organized to support Faysal's quest for a greater Syrian state. During his travels throughout Syria and Palestine in late 1918 and early 1919, Faysal had succeeded in sensitizing Arabs to a secular Arab nationalism built upon this idea of a unified Syria.<sup>62</sup> With Faysal remaining in Paris after the spring of 1919, however, the Arab nationalist movement in both Syria and Palestine took on a much more radical character. In Palestine, the leadership of political Arab nationalism was split among several Arab nationalist factions, all of whom saw Zionism as an impediment to British approval of an Arab state in Greater Syria.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the very real growth of Arab nationalist feelings in Palestine, almost none of the leading British military authorities understood the intensity of a comparable nationalist sentiment for a Syrian state. Even Military Governor Storrs, long associated with Arab attempts to win independence from foreign domination, did not recognize the region-wide strength of the Arab desire for

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<sup>62</sup>

Zeine, Struggle for Arab Independence, p. 49.

<sup>63</sup>

Gooch and Temperley, Documents IV, pp. 360-365.

statehood. "Arabism does not exist...as a world movement," wrote Storrs. "Although...a knowledge of Arabic will take you from India to Atlantic,...Arab...rights and grievances are essentially local in character."<sup>64</sup> Weizmann also failed to recognize the strength of Arab nationalism. In his frequent telegrams to Faysal in 1918 and 1919, Weizmann constantly tried to dispel Arab fears about possible Jewish economic domination over the Arabs. The inhabitants of Palestine and Syria, however, were not interested in Zionist guarantees for the future of Palestine. With the moderate and sophisticated Faysal remaining in Paris for the peace talks through most of 1919, the British Military Administration of Palestine was left to deal with a loal Arab community increasingly unwilling to accept British and French bargains over their future.

Arab nationalist sentiment in Palestine was given its greatest stimulation from its opposition to Zionism.<sup>65</sup> Like the Arab nationalist movement for a Syrian state, the Zionist movement had become much more radical in its effort to define a Jewish Homeland. Strong support in London coupled with a passive Military Administration led the Zionist Commission to believe that the shape of the Jewish National Home in Palestine would depend primarily upon the

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Storrs, Memoirs, p. 379.

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Meyer Weisgal, gen. ed. The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann, Vol. IX (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1977), pp. xxix-xxx.

amount of energy displayed by the Zionists in pursuing their goals.<sup>66</sup> Practical considerations also encouraged a high level of activity by the Zionists. A disappointing immigration of less than two thousand Jews in 1919 forced the Zionists to work harder to sustain the political gains they had already made in the administration of Palestine. Additionally, a fundamental change in the character of the Zionist Commission led to increased tension with the British military authorities. In October 1919, Menachem Ussishken assumed the leadership of the Zionist Commission when Weizmann decided to work for the Zionist movement in London.<sup>67</sup> In contrast to the diplomatic Weizmann, Ussishken was abrupt and dogmatic. He was described in late 1919 by the new Chief Political Officer of Palestine, Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, as having an attitude of "overbearing intolerance with a contempt for compromise."<sup>68</sup> Another influential leader of the Zionist Commission in late 1919 was Vladimir Jabotinsky, described by Weizmann as being "...devoid of poise and balance and ...that mature judgement so urgently required in that small but very complex world."<sup>69</sup> The influence of such extremists was already evident by the middle of 1919, when the Zionist Commission

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<sup>66</sup> Marlowe, Seat of Pilate, p.75.

<sup>67</sup> Weisgal, Weizmann Letters IX, p. xxii.

<sup>68</sup> Gooch and Temperley, Documents IV, p. 525.

<sup>69</sup> Weizmann, Trial and Error, p.227.

decided as a matter of policy to to avoid any semblance of local political discussions with the Arabs.<sup>70</sup> Thus, after only a year in Palestine, the leadership of the Zionist Commission had become convinced that any real political breakthroughs for the Zionist cause would only come about if the Zionist Commission maintained an aggressive position.

The Zionists' disillusion with the British Military Administration soon resulted in direct political challenges to O.E.T.A.-S. In October 1919, for example, Ussishken reorganized the Zionist Commission into Departments corresponding to the Departments of the Military Administration.<sup>71</sup> In addition, the Zionists formulated numerous political programs calling for the development of a civil government for Palestine built around Zionist ideals. Typical of such plans was a program formulated at a Zionist conference in Jaffa which called for "a Jewish majority [in a] Jewish Homeland" under British trusteeship.<sup>72</sup>

#### The Polarization of Arab and Zionist Communities in Palestine

In the face of such overt political action by the Zionists, coupled with the disquieting habit of the Zionist

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Neil Caplan "Arab-Jewish Contacts in Palestine After the First World War," Journal of Contemporary History 12 (October 1977), pp. 635-668.

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Marlowe, Seat of Pilate, p. 68.

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E. S. C. O Foundation for Palestine, Inc., Palestine: A Study of Jewish, Arab, and British Policies. Vol. 1, pp. 152-153.

Commission to refer important matters directly to London without consulting O.E.T.A.-S. first, it is not difficult to see why O.E.T.A.-S. officers and staff grew resentful of the Zionists by early 1919. In many cases O.E.T.A.-S. workers, especially junior officers and staff personnel, had no real experience in handling politically active nationalists like the Zionists. Their inexperience often led to direct confrontation between Briton and Zionist. Reflecting on the difficulties of military administration, Storrs noted the lack of trained people in his staff at Jerusalem, the largest governate in Palestine.

What was O.E.T.A.? It was the remnant of the small staff originally chosen for the purpose with accretions of officers placed by the Army in temporary charge of newly conquered areas... And who were these officers? What had they been before the war? There were a few professional soldiers. Apart from these our administrative and technical staff... included a cashier from a Bank in Rangoon, an actor manager, two assistants from Thos. Cook, a furniture dealer, an Army coach, a clown, a land valuer, a bo'sun from the Niger, a Glasgow distiller, an organist, an Alexandria cotton broker, an architect... a junior service London postal official, a taxi driver from Egypt, two schoolmasters and a missionary... 73

The anti-Zionist bias of the British Military Administration is best documented in an interesting series of telegrams exchanged in the spring of 1919 between Chief Political Officer of O.E.T.A.-S. Clayton, the Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon, and Balfour, now a representative of the British

government at the Paris peace conference. Clayton, in his dispatches to the Foreign Office, had repeatedly suggested that British support of the Balfour Declaration would seriously hinder Palestinian Arab acceptance of the British as a mandatory power. Clayton's assertion in a May 2nd dispatch that "no mandatory Power can carry through the Zionist Programme except by force" typified the growing dissatisfaction within the Military Administration for continued British support of the Zionists.<sup>74</sup> Clayton's position was immediately noticed by Balfour in Paris, who suggested that Curzon remind "General Clayton that the French, United States, and Italian governments had approved the policy set forth in my letter to Lord Rothschild of November 2nd, 1917."<sup>75</sup>

The immediate result within Palestine of this growing anti-Zionist attitude among D.E.T.A.-S. personnel was a polarization of both Arab and Zionist opinion towards the British Administration. The Arabs came to believe that the British government's support of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine was still very much an open question. With the obvious disapproval of Zionist Commission projects in all levels of D.E.T.A.-S., it seemed to the Arabs that the Balfour Declaration was not as binding on the future of Palestine as the Zionists had asserted.<sup>76</sup> For the Zionists

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Gooch and Temperley, Documents IV, p. 272.

75

Ibid., p. 281.



themselves, problems with the members of the British Military Administration meant that the Zionist Commission needed to concentrate even more on working in Europe to gain approval of their plans for Palestine. At the same time, the Zionist Commission in Palestine redoubled its efforts at enlarging its own role in influencing administrative policy, even if it meant friction with the military authorities. By late 1919, the Zionists did succeed in prompting the Foreign Office to send a strongly worded general order to D.E.T.A.-S. stating that the "terms of the Mandate will embody the substance of [the Balfour] Declaration." This statement was not immediately published in Palestine.<sup>77</sup>

By the winter of 1919-1920, the British Military Administration was clearly not physically nor philosophically prepared to handle the two nationalist movements that dominated political life in Palestine. Even the reduced tensions brought on by the temporary return of Weizmann in October 1919 and the appointment of a new Chief Political Officer, Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, did not last far into the new year.<sup>78</sup> Another important source of political tension among Arabs in Palestine and in Syria was the diplomatic stalemate that characterized the negotiations between the British, French, and Faysal over the boundaries

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76  
Ibid., p. 284.

77  
Ibid., p. 329.

78  
Weisgal, Weizmann Letters IX, p. 238.

of the proposed mandates for the middle east. Faysal was in an especially delicate position because Arab nationalists in Syria and in Palestine were becoming more uncompromising, refusing by early 1920 to allow either the French or the British any role in a trusteeship over Greater Syria.

In the meantime, the Zionist Commission continued to implant itself into the daily life of Palestine. Due to its enlarged size, the Commission could actively work to acquire land for Zionist settlements, invest in the Palestinian economy, and most importantly, increase Zionist immigration. <sup>79</sup> Such activities by the Zionist Commission within Palestine served to frustrate and infuriate Arab nationalists who saw the Zionists as an element of European intervention that was preventing the creation of a Syrian state.

On March 1, following an announcement by the Chief Political Officer that the Balfour Declaration would be incorporated into a British mandate for Palestine, Arab extremists attacked a Zionist settlement at Tel Hai in the north of Palestine, killing several Jewish settlers. This move to violence may be explained by a combination of factors, including Arab frustrations, and the successful use of violence by Egyptian Arabs in a nationalist revolt in late 1919 against the British. In addition, the anti-Zionist attitude of the Military Administration led the

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Khouri, Arab-Israeli Dilemma, p. 162.

Arabs to "believe that the Administration has their  
sympathy."<sup>80</sup>

Arab nationalist sentiment was given another powerful boost in early March of 1920 when Faysal proclaimed himself king over Syria, Palestine and Transjordan, the long awaited Greater Syrian state. Arab nationalists in Palestine now saw the Zionists as intruders in an Arab state, and in early April, serious rioting against the Zionists broke out in Jerusalem. O.E.T.A.-S. officials were not prepared to handle the violence, and several Zionists and Arabs were killed or wounded. The Zionist Commission charged that the anti-Zionist bias of the Military Administration had supported the Arab position. The leadership of the Military Administration responded by recommending to the Foreign Office that the Zionist Commission be abolished.<sup>81</sup>

News of the violence and the problems of the Military Administration had been duly noted by Curzon at the Foreign Office and in the Cabinet. When the Allies reconvened at San Remo in April, Faysal's kingship was repudiated and the decision was made to expedite the creation of mandates for the middle east. As expected, the French were given the mandate for Syria, excluding several cities in the interior which were to remain in Arab hands. The British took the mandate for Palestine, incorporating the Balfour Declaration

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Marlowe, Seat of Pilate, p.80.

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Sykes, Crossroads to Israel, p.23.

directly into their mandate. Immediately thereafter, the Chief Political Officer of D. E. T. A. -S was notified that the Military Administration was to be eliminated as of July 1, 1920.<sup>82</sup> After some two and a half years of attempting to preserve the status quo, the British Military Administration in Palestine was formally coming to an end.

#### Epilogue

By July 1920, the Arab nationalists and the Zionists in Palestine were violently opposed to each other, both physically and philosophically. The new Civil Administration had to face the political problems that had developed during the tenure of the Military Administration. The change in administrative structure and the corresponding transfer of responsibility for Palestine from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office did little to resolve the political polarization of the Arab and Zionist communities. Though the High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, did attempt to incorporate both the Zionists and the Arabs into the political structure of the Civil Administration, the two communities could not peacefully work together in Palestine.

Consistent with their claim that the British had betrayed Arab plans for a Syrian state, Arab nationalists in Palestine refused to participate in a bipartisan legislative

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<sup>82</sup>

Storrs, Memoirs, pp. 351-352.

council that Samuel proposed. The Arabs also refused to acknowledge the Balfour Declaration or any claims of the Zionists for Palestine. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Arab resentment and violence towards the Zionists became more intense, but the inability of Arabs in the middle east to unify politically precluded any success in removing the Zionists or the British.

The Zionists also discovered new difficulties within the Civil Administration. In the face of inconsistent support from London after 1922, and continued intransigence from the Arabs in Palestine, the Zionists began to pursue the creation of an independent Jewish state in Palestine. By 1930, the Zionists and the British had come to open confrontation over the issue of Jewish immigration, the key to Zionist aspirations.

Thus, like the Military Administration, the Civil Administration had to deal with extreme demands from two committed nationalist groups in Palestine. From 1920 until the end of the mandate in 1948, both the Arabs and the Zionists were committed to separate and irreconcilable paths of action. As a foreign occupying power in Palestine, the British could only hope to avoid open conflict with the two nationalist forces that both claimed Palestine as their own.

## Conclusion

The traditional British middle eastern policy in the nineteenth century involved the preservation of British interests through indirect involvement. In the 1870s and 1880s, the British found it difficult to avoid direct involvement in the Ottoman Empire, because the central authority in Constantinople was weak and corrupt. Despite the difficulties involved in dealing with the Ottomans, the British felt it was in their best interest to keep the Ottoman Empire whole, if only to avoid foreign intervention by France and Russia. As late as the spring of 1914, British agents in Turkey were working to maintain Turkish neutrality.

The declaration of international war in 1914 and Turkey's alignment with the Central Powers signalled a new direction for British middle eastern policy. No longer committed to maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, the British began to directly consider different ways to insure a British say about the political alignment of the post-war middle east. In 1916, the British concluded an agreement with the Arabs of Arabia, promising British support for Arab independence in parts of Syria in exchange for Arab military assistance against Turkey. In May of 1916, the British signed the Sykes-Picot agreement, which divided the middle east into zones of influence to be distributed between France and Britain. And finally, in late 1917, with the Balfour Declaration, the British

signalled their intention to support the Zionist drive for a Homeland. All of these commitments were made to strengthen the British position by allowing for indirect British control in the middle east. Unfortunately, the absence of a clear theme for British middle eastern policy during the war resulted in conflicting obligations for the British.

When the British set up a Military Administration over occupied Palestine near the end of the war, there was still time for the British to set forth a definitive policy on the middle east. Instead, the British government in London allowed the French to claim most of Syria, and the Zionists to organize an executive in Palestine designed to expedite the creation of a Jewish Homeland. At the same time, the British Military Administration in Palestine was intent on avoiding direct control. The status quo policy of the Military Administration seemed strong evidence to Palestinean Arabs that the British had betrayed Arab aspirations for an Arab state in Syria. In addition, the political activities of the Zionist Commission appeared to be a direct challenge to Arab nationalists, who considered Palestine a part of a hoped-for Greater Syrian State.

By the end of the tenure of the D.E.T.A.-S. Administration of Palestine, there was a significant degree of political polarization between the Arabs and Zionists in Palestine. Throughout 1919 and 1920, the Zionists had grown more politically active, bypassing the Military Administration whenever possible by relying on the support of Zionist sympathizers within the Lloyd George government.

While the British had committed themselves to the direct rule of Palestine through a Military Administration and later in a mandate, the administrative structure was not equipped to handle the growth of Arab nationalism or political Zionism.

The leaders of the Zionist Commission recognized the important difference in policy between the British government in London and the Military Administration in Palestine. In London, Weizmann and other Zionist advocates worked to sustain support for the Zionists in the British government, while the Zionist Commission in Palestine, confident of support in London, moved to practically incorporate Zionist political goals into the actual administration of Palestine.

The leaders of Arab nationalism in the middle east also recognized that the British did not have a clear policy regarding the future of the middle east. With no real organization to state their case internationally, and with no understanding that D.E.T.A.-S. did not necessarily express the views of the British government, the Arabs were at an enormous disadvantage in their struggle with the Zionists. The Arabs rallied behind Faysal in a drive to achieve a Greater Syrian state. When, however, the British came to terms with the French over French participation in the middle east, Arab nationalism grew extreme in character, identifying the Zionists as foreigners in Arab lands.

In Palestine, this split between the two communities was enhanced by the inability of the Military Administration to



set out a political framework for at least the partial resolution of conflicting Arab and Zionist goals. By constantly remaining committed to preserving the status quo, the British Military Administration silently encouraged an ideological division between Arabs and Jews in Palestine.

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