

Should the British Government be praised or blamed for its handling of the Mandate in Palestine?

The British Government should be blamed:

1. Before the British Mandate, the historic Jewish community had good relations with other religious communities in Palestine. Britain left Palestine with a Civil War between Arabs and Jews. So, it failed its League of Nations mandate to safeguard all inhabitants of Palestine and develop self-government.
2. In practice, British policy in Palestine always favoured the Jews. The British only paid lip service to Arab aspirations for their own state.
3. Instead of dealing with the causes of unrest in Palestine, Britain brutally suppressed the inhabitants of Palestine, a tactic it had perfected in its various colonies.
4. Britain gave up on finding a solution and just handed the problem of Palestine to the UN.
5. Britain's policy on Palestine always prioritised British interests. As a result, Britain broke promises to Arabs in 1920s and failed to develop an effective response to the Holocaust in 1940s.

QUESTION OF PALESTINE
ARTICLE 22 OF THE COVENANT OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant.

[...]

Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized. subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.

Article 22 was the basis for the Mandate.

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-185531/>

'On the strength of our word the Jews have come to Palestine and established their national home there: it would surely be one of the greatest betrayals in history to abandon them now to their fate as a minority in an independent Arab state. Nor is it to be expected that the Jews, whose strength is already one third in population and predominant in wealth, will ever agree to subordinate their progressive modern "European" community to the domination of a relatively backward Arab majority whom (in some respects justly) they despise.'

John Martin, Assistant Under-Secretary at Colonial Office writing to Sir Henry Gurney, Chief Secretary in Jerusalem, January 1947, The National Archives CO967/102

Translation.

"H"
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Telegram to the General Peace Conference in Paris.

All the inhabitants of Palestine consisting of the Arab Districts of Jerusalem, Nablus and Acre, both Moslems and Christians, have assembled together and selected their delegates, who came and held a general meeting in Jerusalem to discuss the form of the Government suitable to their country.

They have decided before entering into any discussion on the subject, first of all to submit to your Supreme Conference their strong protest owing to what they have heard that the Zionists have been promised to have our own country as their own National one; that they intend to immigrate to this country and to colonize it.

Therefore we the assembled Moslems and Christians as delegates for an alive Arab Nation, included amongst the weak Nations liberated by the Allies, do hereby utterly refuse every decision which may be given in this connexion before taking our opinion.

We are submitting to the Conference a detailed statement of the prejudice which will be caused to the interests of the inhabitants of this country, both Moslem and Christian, who form the absolute majority, owing to the Zionists immigration and colonization in this country, and their making it their National abode.

We request your Supreme Conference not to give any decision regarding this country except after receiving our wishes and aspirations which shall be submitted.

Jerusalem,

3rd February, 1919.

Signatures:

Aref el Dahoudi el Dejani, President of the Assembly.	}	Jerusalem, District.
Shukri Karmi, Ahmed Ragheb Abou el Sioud,		
Yusef el Issa, Ahmad Seif el-Din,		
Mohammed Baidas, Hajj Said El Shawa, Ahmed el-Surani.		

Reshid el Hajj Ibrahim, Iskander Manassa, Hussein el Zaully, Jubran Kazma, Mahmud Tabari, Elias Kewar, Mahmud el Heen, Saleh ed-Din Hajj Yusef, Mouhy ed-Din, Issa.	}	Acre District.

Said el Karmi, Tewfik el Tiby, Haidar Abdul Hadi, Nafei, Iboushy, Kemal ed-Din Arafat, Mohammed Izzet, Darwazah, Ibrahim Abdul Hadi, Ramez el-Nimer.	}	Nablus District.

Telegram of protest against Zionism from Jaffa Muslim Christian Committee to Lloyd George at the Paris Peace Conference, 24 March 1919

Anglo French Declaration

November 7, 1918

The Anglo-French Declaration was signed between France and Great Britain on November 7, 1918, four days before the armistice agreement that ended World War I, and issued in Syria, Palestine and Iraq. Copies were posted on the public notice boards in all towns and villages in the Arab territories then occupied by the Allied forces.

'The goal envisaged by France and Great Britain in prosecuting in the East the War let loose by German ambition is the complete and final liberation of the peoples who have for so long been oppressed by the Turks, and the setting up of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the free exercise of the initiative and choice of the indigenous populations.

In pursuit of those intentions, France and Great Britain agree to further and assist in the establishment of indigenous Governments and administrations in Syria (1) and Mesopotamia (2) which have already been liberated by the Allies, as well as in those territories which they are endeavouring to liberate, and to recognise them as soon as they are actually set up..

Far from wishing to impose any particular institutions on the populations of those regions, their [ie France and Great Britain's] only concern is to offer such support and efficacious help as will ensure the smooth working of the governments and administrations which those populations will have elected of their own free will to have; to facilitate the economic development of the country by promoting and encouraging local initiative; to foster the spread of education; and to put an end to the dissensions which Turkish policy has for so long exploited. Such is the task which the two Allied Powers wish to undertake in the liberated territories.'

(1) This name was officially used to denote the whole of geographic Syria from the Taurus mountains to the Egyptian frontier.

(2) Denoted the region made up of the former Ottoman vilayets of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, which is today's Iraq.

From *The Arab Awakening*, George Antonius, Capricorn Books Edition, 1965.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS PERMANENT MANDATES COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTEENTH (Extraordinary) SESSION held at Geneva from June 3rd to 21st, 1930.

'GENERAL STATEMENT BY M. VAN REES (member of the Commission).

In January 1919, the fate of the Arab provinces taken from the Turkish Empire was decided. These provinces were recognised in accordance with the fourth paragraph of Article 22 of the Covenant as provisionally independent on the understanding that the advice and assistance of a Mandatory would be at the disposal of the administration until the provinces were able to stand alone.

That was the first surprise and the first disappointment suffered by the Arabs, who had imagined that their political future had been finally settled by the negotiations which had taken place between the High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry MacMahon, and the Sherif Hussein.

Shortly afterwards, the Allies concluded the first Treaty of Peace with Turkey. Article 95 of that Treaty drew an essential distinction between the status of Mesopotamia and Syria and the status of Palestine. The first two countries were provisionally recognised as independent States, whereas, in regard to Palestine, no mention was made of independence nor was there any reference to the assistance and advice of a Mandatory. The article referred only to the administration of the country by a Mandatory chosen by the Principal Allied and Associated Powers, without making any reservation in regard to the character of the administration.

That had been the second surprise and disappointment suffered by the Arabs, who thus saw their national and political hopes vanishing. This disappointment had been all the more keen as Article 1 of the Mandate for Palestine provided for the institution in this territory, in contrast with the other Asiatic territories under mandate, of a direct system of administration, the British Government being furnished with full legislative and administrative powers.

The Arabs, from the outset, had not ceased to protest against this treatment. They had felt that their confidence in Great Britain had been misplaced and they had reproached Great Britain with a dual violation -- with violating promises formally given during the war and with a subsequent violation of the terms and spirit of Article 22 of the Covenant.'...

<https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/5F21F8A1CA578A57052566120067F658>

Blamed

PARALLEL HISTORIES

The Manchester Regiment force Arabs to run the gauntlet during a village search in 1938.
Imperial War Museum Ref: HU 51759



Blamed

PARALLEL HISTORIES

THE ARAB CENTRE

554-558 GRAND BUILDING, TRAFALGAR SQUARE,
LONDON, W.C.2.

PHONE
NIGHT

6 JAN 1939

January 5th, 1939.

Sir,

I enclose herewith a copy of a telegram which this Office received from Cairo yesterday.

Appalling reports on the Military atrocities are constantly being received from Palestine. They are a disgrace to humanity and to the civilized traditions of Great Britain.

Haifa has reported that the representatives of the Arab Railway Trade Union are being used as land miners, i.e., they are carried in a car before military patrols so that in case a land mine explodes they will be the victims.

I request that immediate steps should be taken to check these brutal and inhuman measures.

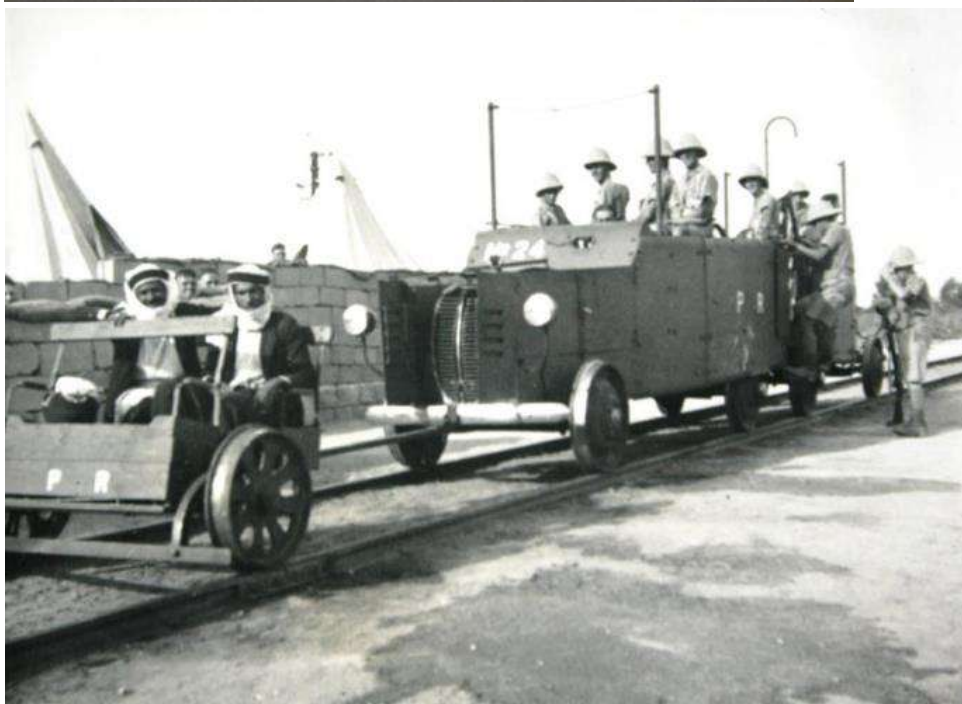
Yours faithfully,

George Mansur

George Mansur,
Former Secretary, Arab Labour Federation.

The Secretary,
The Labour Party,
London, S. W. 1.

During the Great Arab Revolt (1936-1939) British forces used a number of techniques later outlawed under the Geneva convention. These included collective punishment, and the use of civilian hostages as human shields.



Deteriorating relations between Arabs and Jews

Musa recalls that the child who became his own foster-brother was the son of the Jewish grocer down the street, and that for the next thirty years the two families used to visit each other, to exchange presents on each other's feast days, and to proffer congratulations or condolences as occasions demanded.'

Geoffrey Furlonge, 'Palestine is my Country – the Story of Musa Alami', New York, 1969.

"At some stage, people here took to picketing workplaces in order to get rid of any Arabs working there. The pickets were organised because this was Arab labour, while the official slogan was "Hebrew labour". I was just a schoolboy then but I asked: ""Why should the Arabs not be allowed to work? Don't they also need to eat?" I was contrary even then."

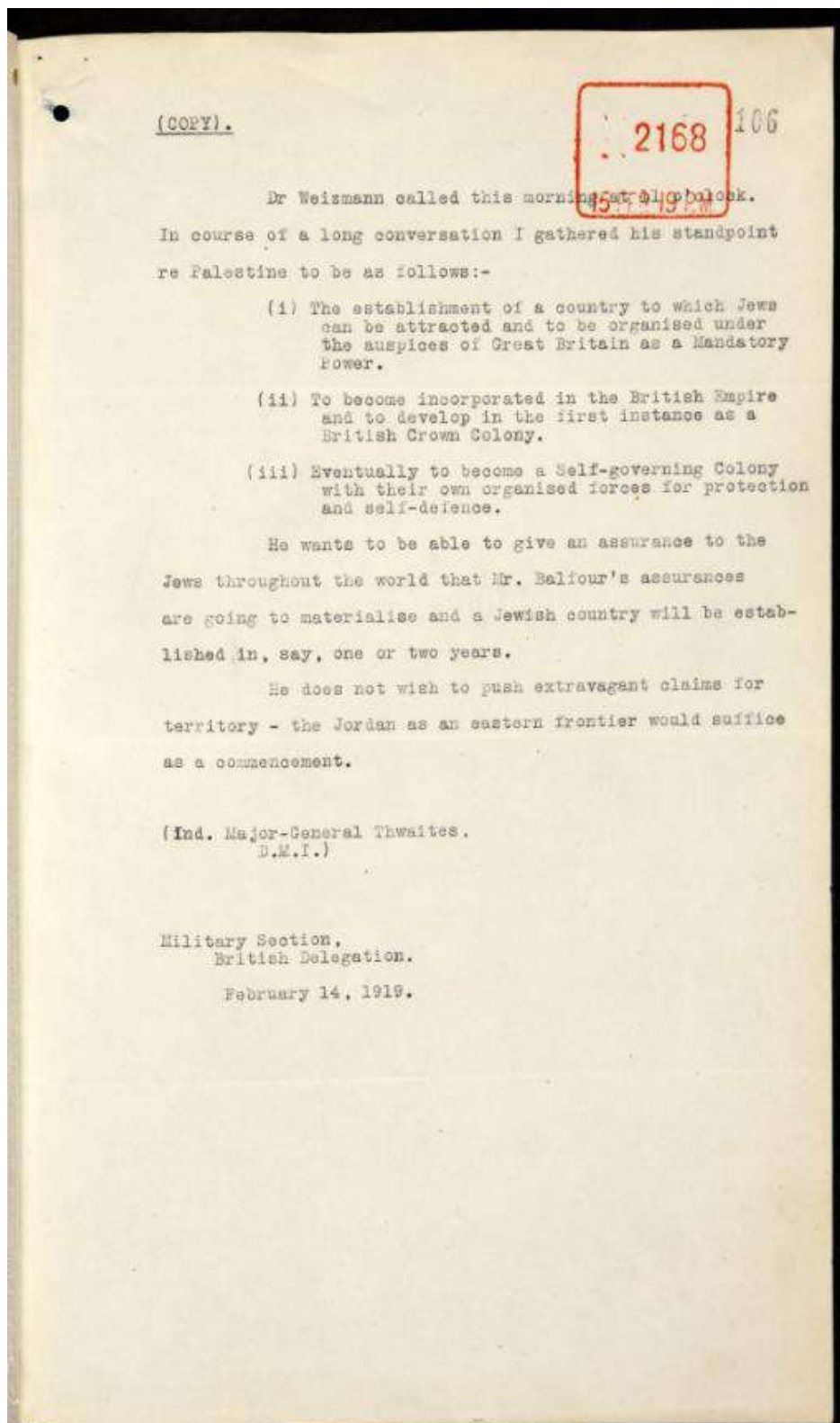
Shmuel Segal, born in Minsk, Russia, his family immigrated to Palestine in 1926. He joined the Communist youth movement and fought in Spain with the International Brigades. Interview in Hebrew with Elfi Pallis.

'We consider every Jew to be armed...no Jewish individual, or home or settlement is free from such arms which are intended to fight the Arabs and destroy them. This situation suggests to every Arab that he must be ready to defend himself and should arm himself, and should not remain defenceless before his armed opponent.'

Resolution of a meeting at Nablus on the 18th Anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, 2nd November, 1935. Institute of Palestine Studies.

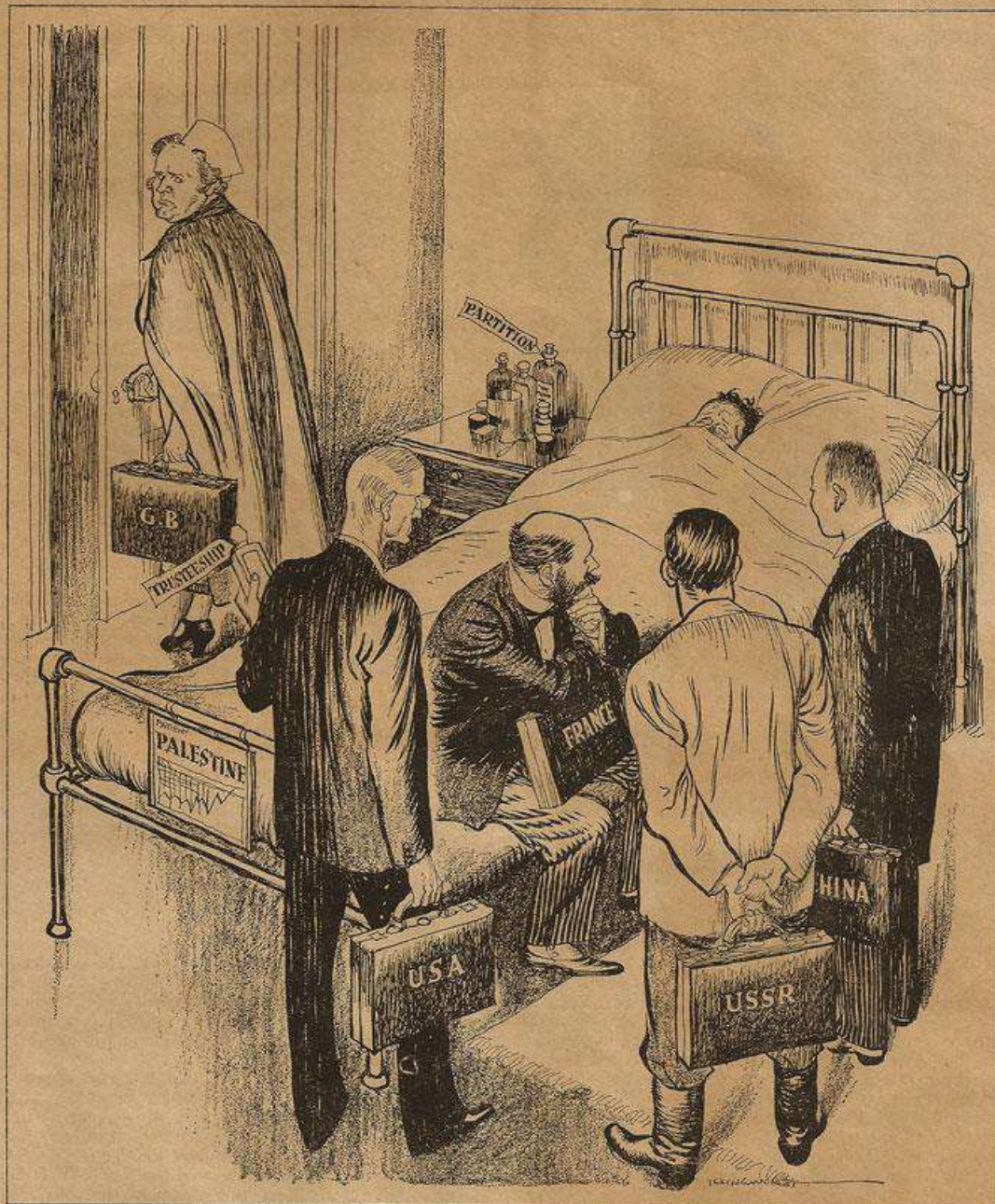
'The Commander states the Irgun Zvai Leumi means 'national military organisation'. It was organised some ten years ago. Its object is to bring about the liberation of the country from the foreign yoke, the attainment of freedom for the Jewish people and the restoration of Jewish rule in Eretz Israel.'

Report of Conference between representatives of the United Nations Special Committee for Palestine and the commander and two other Representatives of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, 24 June 1947.



Letter from Major-General Thwaites reporting a conversation he had with Chaim Weizmann, in which Weizmann expressed his aims in Palestine.

Punch, March 31 1948



NURSE GIVES NOTICE.

"And now, gentlemen, we shall have to get something done ourselves, instead of telling *her* what to do."

"Nurse Gives Notice" Cartoon from Punch magazine, depicting the British withdrawal from Palestine forcing the other United Nations powers to decide Palestine's fate.



Demonstration in New York City in 1947 - photographer unknown



Damage to a Jewish synagogue (left) and to Muslim graves (below) The Arab riots in 1929 protesting Jewish immigration in provoked Jewish retaliation.



Should the British Government be praised or blamed for its handling of the Mandate in Palestine?

The British Government should be praised:

1. Britain opened the Mandate's borders so Jews fleeing persecution could be safe in their historic homeland. The British government calculated how many people Palestine could absorb and kept Jewish immigration within those limits.
2. Neither the Arabs nor the Jews were willing to compromise. Given this, there was little Britain could do to keep the peace.
3. The sacrifices made by British forces were the only thing that prevented civil war between Jews and Arabs during the Mandate. It is not a coincidence that civil war broke out as soon as the British departed.
4. The British were forced to leave Palestine when the US government withdrew its support and insisted on increasing Jewish immigration. The British knew this was a mistake but had to concede because they had enormous war debts to the USA.
5. Britain was not the villain, as it was portrayed at the time. It lost troops and spent money on keeping the peace in Palestine. The USA and the USSR enjoyed seeing the British empire humiliated but neither country wanted to accept post war Jewish refugees.



"I think we could establish a case that we have carried out what the Mandate originally intended, provided that the problem had not been accentuated by the Hitler regime. [...] What we have not been able to do is to meet, with this Mandate, the accentuated position created by the Hitler regime and the persecution in Germany. That is my view. I believe that throughout British Governments have done their best all the way through..."

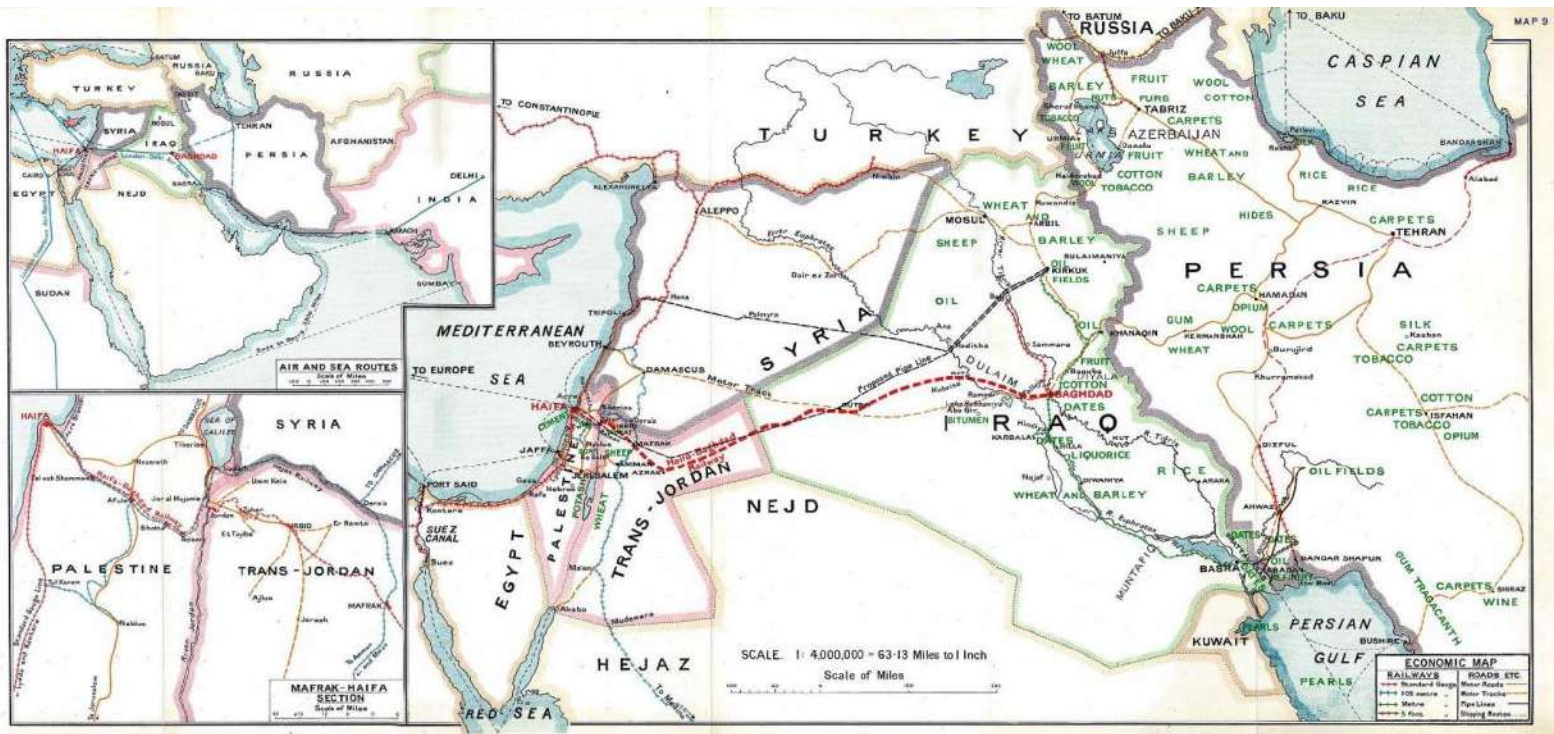
The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Mr. Ernest Bevin) speaking in the House of Commons on 25 February 1947 explaining government policy on Palestine.

"One cold and foggy dawn my crew and I were on our way to repair telephone cables damaged by gunfire along the road. I thought it would be a sensible precaution to tell the mukhtar of the Palestinian village on the side of the road and the head of the Jewish settlement some hundreds of metres down the road on the other side what we would be up to for the next hour or so and to request them to be good enough, should they be inclined to open up upon each other, to hold their fire for a while. Well, they clearly had a better plan - after an hour one group opened fire on my little gang and than the other did likewise. We left."

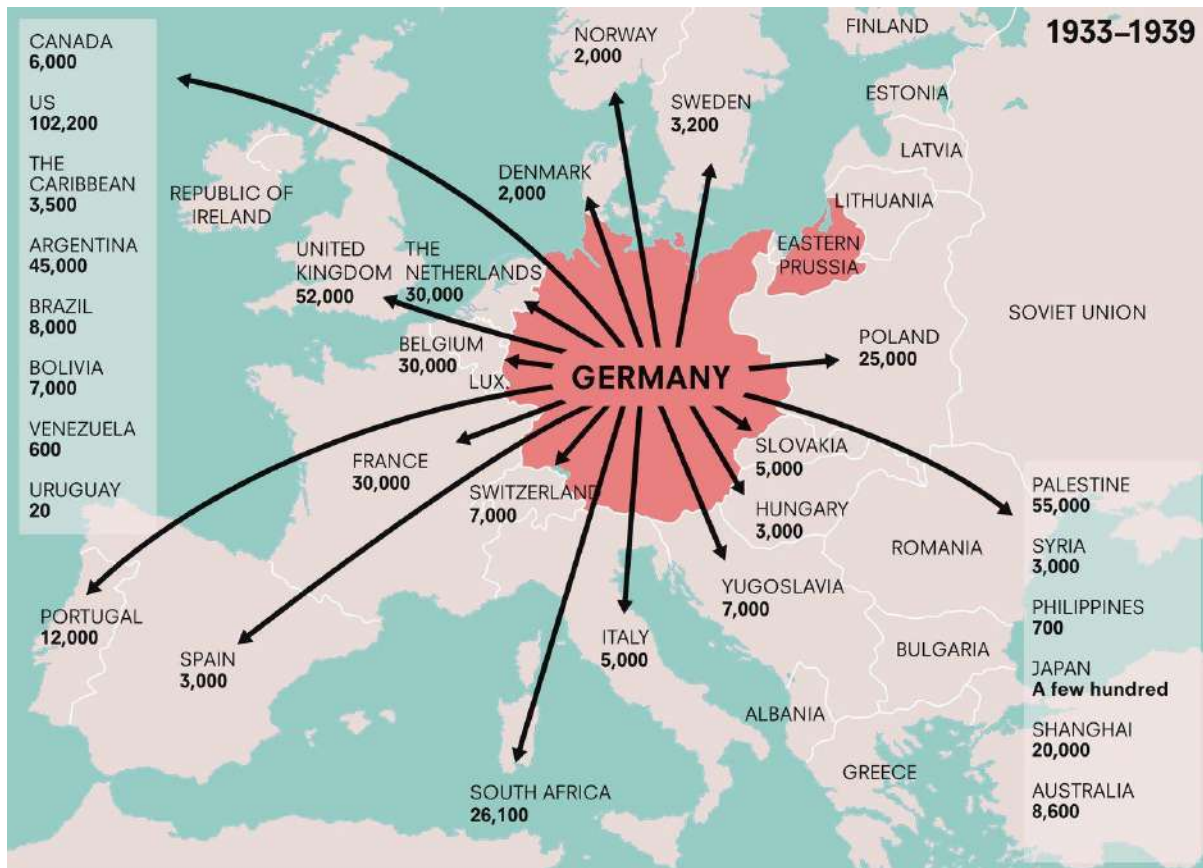
Prof Peter Davies (14th July 1927 - 19th March 2020) gave this interview in 2000 about his national service in Palestine with the Royal Army Service Corps



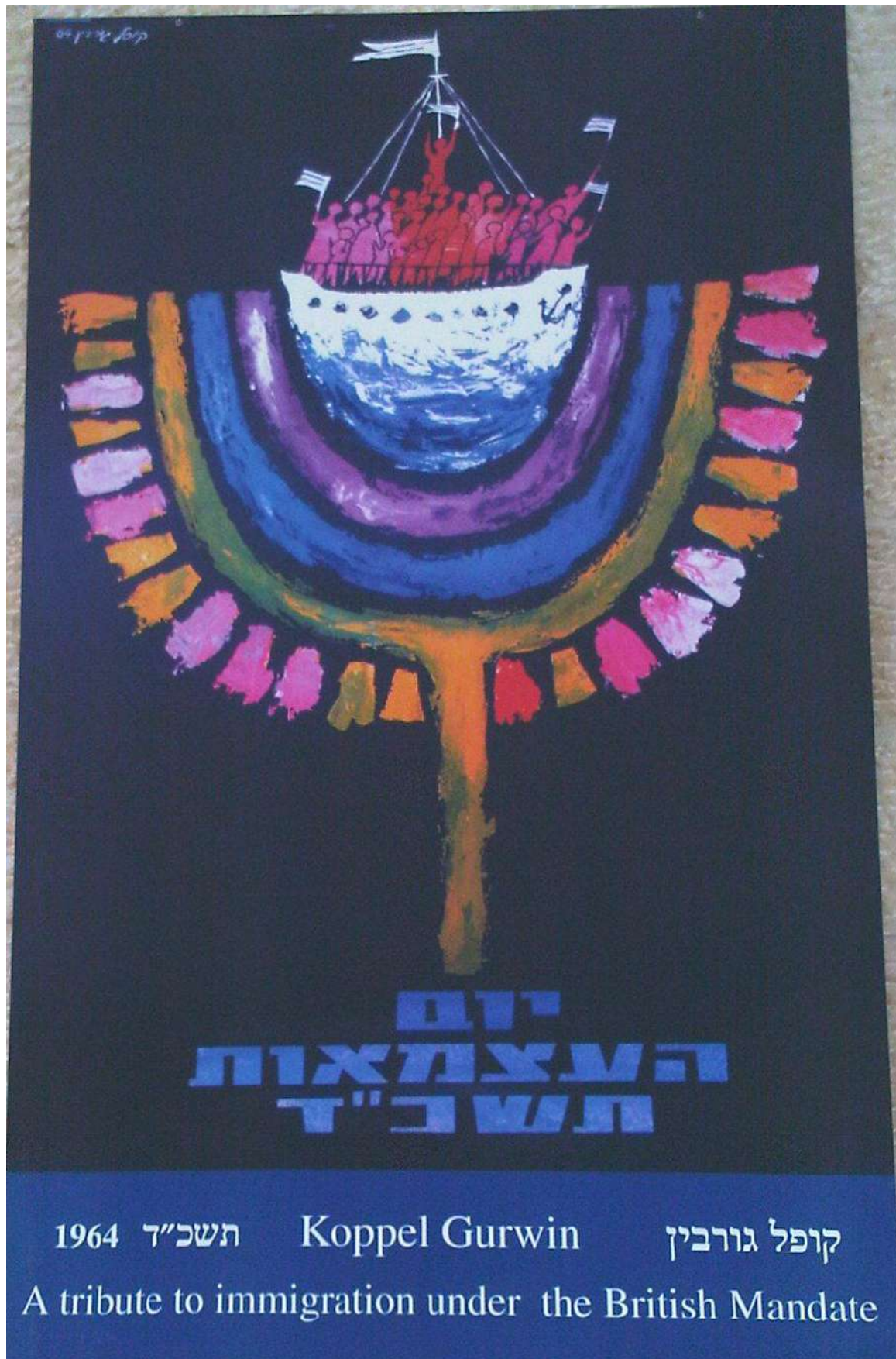
By Illingworth, 'The Daily Mail', October 13, 1947



Map of South-Western Asia showing the Mandate boundaries of Syria, Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine. The overland transport benefits of Britain's corridor of territory are illustrated by the route of the proposed Haifa to Baghdad railway. This line was never built as road and air transport became more important.



Map showing the migration and exodus of Jews from Nazi Germany across Europe and the world during 1933-39 before the outbreak of World War II. This includes 55,000 Jews who fled to Palestine during this time period.



Poster by Israeli artist Koppel Gurwin (1923-1990) for Independence Day 1964, commemorating the migration of Jews.

The Palestine Police

1929 was a particularly tense year in Palestine, with feelings running high in the Arab and Jewish communities in defence of the Muslim and Jewish holy sites in Jerusalem. British Constable Percy Drew described having to confront an angry funeral procession for a Jewish boy who had been stabbed in a violent incident.

'We prepared ourselves outside the Jaffa gate in Post Office Square with batons only. No shields but we did have steel helmets. When the procession arrived we could hear some Jewish leaders, or self-appointed spokesmen, shouting in English as well as Hebrew to their supporters. They said such things as 'They are British and will not harm you.' They seemed to have no idea of the determination of our people although we were but a handful.... As they advanced they seemed equally determined to get through. I noticed lots of Arabs watching in silence, they seemed ready and anxious to join in if we lost control. Jim Munro was our senior officer present and I heard him say calmly 'Chin straps down.' Then after a moment he ordered 'Draw batons'. He then called upon the procession to obey the law and turn about, which they refused to do. It was very hot in the sun and we were sweltering and although grimly determined, most of us dreaded our job at that moment and wished we were somewhere else. We could see it was going to be a hell of a battle and I felt sick. Yet not one of us hesitated to obey an order, so we advanced and pressed into the crowd firmly but with considerable restraint. Not one officer used his baton at that stage, just gently pushing, like dealing with a London crowd. But scuffles developed in which a lot of us got hurt, so Munro then ordered a vigorous charge and led the way forward. I broke my baton on the very first head I ever hit in my life and was left defenceless. I found afterwards that this occurred to other officers too. But the mob was successfully restrained from entering the Old City that day.'

From a 'A Job Well Done: a history of the Palestine Police Force 1920-1948' by Edward Horne (The Book Guild, Lewes, 2002).

'What right have our sons who went bravely to fight for their Country, having been taken from their studies, their homes, and everything that was dear to them, and suffered without complaint, be murdered now in such a cause, for this is murder and nothing else.'

Letter to Arthur Creech Jones, Colonial Secretary, from the mother of a British soldier, concerning British deaths from Palestine, 1 December 1946. The National Archives, London. Ref: CO 733/456/11.

Extracts from the Shaw Commission Report, 1930

'Mr. Sacher, in evidence before the Commission, expressed in the following statement his views as to the policy of the Zionist movement in the matter of Jewish immigration to Palestine :— " I say that what we are concerned with is the establishment of the Jewish National Home 'What we are concerned with is that we shall have, as I said before, immigration to which there shall be no artificial restrictions, that we shall be enabled as a Jewish people to put all our energies into making what is to be made of this country so as to enable Jews to come here and create this civilisation. We expect and demand under the Mandate of the Government that it shall do its part in facilitating that Work. It may be, and I say frankly hope that one day as a result of this process there will be a Jewish majority in this country " ... In answer to questions put to him Mr Sacher stated that in his view the regulation of immigration ought to be a matter between the Government of Palestine and the Jews and that the Palestine Administration is perfectly capable of ensuring that, as is required by Article 6 of the Mandate, the rights and position of other sections of the population of Palestine are not prejudiced by Jewish immigration. '...'

Conclusions of the report:

'It is also true that, had there not been persistent refusal by the Arab political leaders to co-operate in the development of self-government in Palestine along the lines laid down in 1922, the affairs of that country might to-day have been controlled in a large measure by a Legislative Council a majority of whose members would have been elected representatives of the people. But the Arab political leaders urge that, even if they had accepted and given full effect to the Constitution of 1922, it is improbable that the elected representatives of the people could by now have obtained a share of authority in the Government that they would regard as the equivalent of that measure of self-government which they possessed under the Turkish regime. ... It is our very definite impression, after hearing the evidence of leading representatives of both Arabs and Jews, that neither side appreciates the dual nature of the policy which the Palestine Government have to administer. On both sides the political leaders are pursuing different aims with single-minded vigour. Their activities are directed to one aspect of the question only and obstacles which bar the way to the fulfilment of their aims either are totally ignored or are brushed aside as being of no account. The idea of compromise scarcely exists. In the atmosphere which thus prevails all sight is lost of the difficulties of the Administration and every important decision of the Government is hailed by one side or the other as a failure to carry out the principles of the Mandate.

... We recognize that this position is to some extent the inevitable result of the dual nature of the task with which His Majesty's Government have charged themselves in Palestine but its ill-effects would at least be mitigated if, among the leaders of both peoples in Palestine, there were a better appreciation of the difficulties of that task and in consequence a greater readiness to compromise. ...

In any analysis of the factors that have brought about this change of relationship between the two races some regard must be had to the meaning which from the beginning has been attached by various persons to the promises made, on the one hand,

in the Balfour Declaration and, on the other hand, to the Sherif Hussein during the War. Many of the leaders at either race placed the widest possible construction upon these promises. A National Home for the Jews, in the sense in which it was widely understood, was inconsistent with the demands of Arab national while the claims of Arab nationalism, if admitted, would have rendered impossible the fulfilment of the pledge to the Jews. ...'

Notes:

The Shaw Commission, led by Sir Walter Shaw, was a British Commission of Inquiry appointed to investigate the 1929 Palestine riots and their origins. The Commission report was published in 1930.

Harry Sacher was a British-born businessman, journalist and a member of the Executive of the World Zionist Organisation.

'It is nine years since the Peel Commission made its report. The recommendations were unfulfilled, but the analysis of political conditions remains valid and impressive. The gulf between the Arabs of Palestine and the Arab world on the one side, and the Jews of Palestine and elsewhere on the other has widened still further. Neither side seems at all disposed at the present to make any sincere effort to reconcile either their superficial or their fundamental differences. The Arabs view the Mandatory Government with misgivings and anger. It is not only condemned verbally, but attacked with bombs and firearms by organized bands of Jewish terrorists. The Palestine Administration appears to be powerless to keep the situation under control except by the use of very large forces...'

Extract from the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, April 1946

'...the average American supported immigration to Palestine simply because he did not want more Jews in America.....By shouting for a Jewish state, Americans satisfy many motives. They are attacking the Empire and British protectionism, they are espousing a moral cause, for whose fulfilment they will take no responsibility, and most important of all, they are diverting attention from the fact that their own immigration laws are one of the causes of the problem'

British Labour MP Richard Crossman, member of the Anglo-American committee on Palestine, 1946, *Palestine Mission. A Personal Record* 1947 pp46-47

The Anglo-American Committee of enquiry was created to examine the problem of Palestine and how this related to the large numbers of Jewish displaced persons (DPs) in Europe after the war. The committee visited DP camps in Europe, and Palestine. Their report of April 1946 recommended that 100,000 Jewish refugees be allowed into Palestine immediately.