

## HMG White Paper: Statement of Policy, the Churchill Memorandum and the Jewish and Arab Replies (July 1922)

Hurewitz, J.C. *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics, A Documentary Record*. 2nd, Revised and Enlarged ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. 301-5. Print. Vol. 2 of British-French Supremacy.



Figure 1 Sir Herbert Samuel (L) and Winston Churchill (R) planting a tree on Mt. Scopus in Mandatory Palestine, c. 1921. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, no known restrictions)

*In September 1920, the first High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel, gave effect to the implementation of the Balfour Declaration with the issuance of an immigration ordinance law. It authorized the admission of 16,500 Jewish immigrants to Palestine. Immediately, Arab leaders in Palestine expressed alarm. It was perceived that the British were about to expropriate Arab held land for the purpose of Jewish settlement. Jewish land acquisition and immigration would make Palestine overwhelmingly Jewish. That fear was not realized; no land was expropriated for Jewish settlement. However, such Arab fears expressed themselves in May 1921 with the outbreak of anti-Jewish disturbances in Jaffa. Jewish immigration was temporarily suspended. A British investigatory commission ruled that Arab fears were due to concerns about Jewish demographic growth. To reassure the Arab population of Palestine of Britain's aim to be even-handed in managing the Mandate for Palestine, Winston Churchill – the Colonial Secretary – published a*

*White Paper, or policy statement, giving a precise interpretation of how the Balfour Declaration would be applied to Palestine's future. The White Paper asserted Britain's goal not to make Palestine wholly Jewish or subordinate to the Arab population. And significantly, the White Paper tied the rate of Jewish immigration to the "economic absorptive capacity of the country" to absorb immigrants.*

*In terms of governance, the British opted to retain full executive, legislative, and judicial control over Palestine's administration; they were willing to see a Legislative Council established that would be an interim stage toward genuine self-rule. The caveat was that Britain, in establishing the proposed Legislative Council (to be composed of Arabs, Jews, and British officials), was never willing to allow the number of Arabs to be great enough to overrule either British or British-Jewish interests. In a broader context the Arab Middle East in general: self-determination of peoples was not practiced. Those who could vote had to be property owners, and women were rarely provided suffrage. And Britain's actions in Palestine had ramifications for her presence in Egypt and Iraq. Allowing real self-determination offered the proponents of shortening Britain's tenure*



**Figure 2 Winston Churchill (L), T.E. Lawrence (C,) and Emir Abdullah of Jordan (then Trans-Jordan), c. 1921. Lawrence's views were representative of those of many British officials who, unlike Churchill, were more sympathetic to the Arab cause than that of the Zionists. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, no known restrictions)**

*wherever British colonial officers ruled. As for the Arab community in Palestine in the early 1920s it rejected any official participation with British rule in Palestine, a precedent that Palestinian Arabs maintained for the remainder of the British Mandate. This Arab boycott of the mandate, while sustaining opposition to the development of the Jewish national home, became the single greatest Arab policy error for the remainder of the mandate. Many British officials wanted to help the Arab population overcome the promises made to the Zionists in the Balfour Declaration, but these officials in Palestine and London could not affect the change that the Arabs themselves could have, had they accepted initially the even-handed policy that the Churchill White Paper proposed. In 1939 and again in 1947 the clear Arab choice to boycott British and UN overtures, ruined the Palestinian Arab political future. Zionists, therefore, were able to manage the Mandate to suit their purposes, leaving Palestinian interests almost always on the sidelines. Thereafter, the Mandate's operation repeatedly became a struggle between the British, who wanted to be the umpire between Arab and Jew, and the Zionists, who plodded systematically forward in building a national home. The die was cast for the two communities to grow apart and for the Zionists to move at a much faster pace in setting the stage for controlling their own destiny and ultimately setting up a state apparatus for eventual self-determination.*

–Ken Stein, January 2010

The Secretary of State for the Colonies has given renewed consideration to the existing political situation in Palestine, with a very earnest desire to arrive at a settlement of the outstanding questions which have given rise to uncertainty and unrest among certain sections of the population. After consultation with the High Commissioner for Palestine, the following statement has been drawn up. It summarizes the essential parts of the correspondence that has already taken place between the Secretary of State and a Delegation from the Moslem Christian Society of Palestine, which has been for some time in England, and it states the further conclusions which have since been reached.

The tension which has prevailed from time to time in Palestine is mainly due to apprehensions, which are entertained both by sections of the Arab and by sections of the Jewish population. These apprehensions, so far as the Arabs are concerned, are partly based upon exaggerated interpretations of the meaning of the Declaration favoring the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, made on behalf of His Majesty's Government on 2 November 1917. Unauthorized statements have been made to the effect that the purpose in view is to create a wholly Jewish Palestine. Phrases have been used such as that Palestine is to become "as Jewish as England is English." His Majesty's Government regard any such expectation as impracticable and have no such aim in view. Nor have they at any time contemplated, as appears

to be feared by the Arab Delegation, the disappearance or the subordination of the Arabic population, language, or culture in Palestine. They would draw attention to the fact that the terms of the Declaration referred to do not contemplate that Palestine as a whole should be converted into a Jewish National Home, but that such a Home should be founded *in Palestine*. In this connection, it has been observed with satisfaction that at the meeting of the Zionist Congress, the supreme governing body of the Zionist Organization, held at Carlsbad in September 1921, a resolution was passed expressing as the official statement of Zionist aims, "the determination of the Jewish people to live with the Arab people on terms of unity and mutual respect, and together with them to make the common home into a flourishing community, the upbuilding of which may assure to each of its peoples an undisturbed national development."

It is also necessary to point out that the Zionist Commission in Palestine, now termed the Palestine Zionist Executive, has not desired to possess, and does not possess, any share in the

general administration of the country. Nor does the special position assigned to the Zionist Organization in Article IV of the Draft Mandate

for Palestine imply any such functions. That special position relates to the measures to be taken in Palestine affecting the Jewish population, and contemplates that the Organization may assist in



Figure 3 Chaim Weizmann was the head of the Zionist Commission in Palestine at the time. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, no known restrictions)

the general development of the country, but does not entitle it to share in any degree in its Government.

Further, it is contemplated that the status of all citizens of Palestine in the eyes of the law shall be Palestinian, and it has never been intended that they, or any section of them, should possess any other juridical status.

So far as the Jewish population of Palestine are concerned, it appears that some among them are apprehensive that His Majesty's Government may depart from the policy embodied in the Declaration of 1917. It is necessary, therefore, once more to affirm that these fears are unfounded, and that that Declaration, reaffirmed by the Conference of the Principal Allied Powers at San Remo and again in the Treaty of Sevres, is not susceptible of change.

During the last two or three generations, the Jews have recreated in Palestine a community, now numbering 80,000, of whom about one-fourth are farmers or workers upon the land. This community has its own political organs; an elected assembly for the direction of its domestic concerns; elected councils in the towns; and an organization for the control of its schools. It has its elected Chief Rabbinate and Rabbinical Council for the direction of its religious affairs. Its business is conducted in Hebrew as a vernacular language, and a Hebrew Press serves its needs. It has its distinctive intellectual life and displays considerable economic activity. This community, then, with its town and country population, its political, religious, and social organizations, its own language, its own customs, its own life, has in fact "national" characteristics. When it is asked what is meant by the development of the Jewish National Home in Palestine, it may be answered that it is not the impression of a Jewish nationality upon the inhabitants of Palestine as a whole, but the further development of the existing Jewish community, with the assistance of Jews in other parts of the world, in order that it may become a center in which the Jewish people as a whole may take, on grounds of religion and race, an interest, and a pride. But in order that this community should have the best prospect of free development and provide a full opportunity for the Jewish people to display its capacities, it is essential that it should know that it is in Palestine as of right and not on sufferance. That is the reason why it is necessary that the existence of a Jewish National Home in Palestine should be internationally guaranteed, and that it should be formally recognized to rest upon ancient historic connection.

This, then, is the interpretation which His Majesty's Government place upon the Declaration of 1917, and, so understood, the Secretary of State is of the opinion that it does not contain or imply anything which need cause alarm to the Arab population of Palestine or disappointment to the Jews.

For the fulfillment of this policy, it is necessary that the Jewish community in Palestine should be able to increase its numbers by immigration. This immigration cannot be so great in volume as to exceed whatever may be the economic capacity of the country at the time to absorb new arrivals. It is essential to ensure that the immigrants should not be a burden upon the people of Palestine as a whole, and that they should deprive any section of the present population of their employment. Hitherto, the immigration has fulfilled these conditions. The number of immigrants since the British occupation has been almost 25,000.

It is necessary also to ensure that persons who are politically undesirable are excluded from Palestine, and every precaution has been and will be taken by the Administration to that end.

It is intended that a special committee should be established in Palestine, consisting entirely of members of the new Legislative Council elected by the people, to confer with the

Administration upon matters relating to the regulation of immigration. Should any difference of opinion arise between this committee and the Administration, the matter will be referred to His Majesty's Government, who will give it special consideration. In addition, under Article 81 of the draft Palestine Order in Council, any religious community or considerable section of the population of Palestine will have a general right to appeal, through the High Commissioner and the Secretary of State, to the League of Nations on any matter on which they may consider that the terms of the Mandate are not being fulfilled by the Government of Palestine.

With reference to the Constitution which it is now intended to establish in Palestine, the draft of which has already been published, it is desirable to make certain points clear. In the first place, it is not the case, as has been represented by the Arab Delegation, that during the War, His Majesty's Government gave an undertaking that an independent national Government should be at once established in Palestine. This representation mainly rests upon a letter dated 24 October 1915, from Sir Henry McMahon, then His Majesty's High Commissioner in Egypt, to the Sherif of Mecca, now King Hussein of the Kingdom of the Hejaz. That letter is quoted as conveying the promise to the Sherif of Mecca to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs within the territories proposed by him. But this promise was given subject to a reservation made in the same letter, which excluded from its scope, among other territories, the portions of Syria lying to the west of the district of Damascus. This reservation has always been regarded by His Majesty's Government as covering the *Vilayet* of Beirut and the independent Sanjak of Jerusalem. The whole of Palestine west of the Jordan was thus excluded from Sir H. McMahon's pledge.

Nevertheless, it is the intention of His Majesty's Government to foster the establishment of a full measure of self-government in Palestine. But they are of opinion that, in the special circumstances of that country, this should be accomplished by gradual stages and not suddenly. The first step was taken when, on the institution of a civil Administration, the nominated Advisory Council, which now exists, was established. It was stated at the time by the High Commissioner that this was the first step in the development of self-governing institutions, and it is now proposed to take a second step by the establishment of a Legislative Council containing a large proportion of members elected on a wide franchise. It was proposed in the published draft that three of the members of this Council should be non-official persons nominated by the High Commissioner, but representations having been made in opposition to this provision, based on cogent considerations, the Secretary of State is prepared to omit it. The Legislative Council would then consist of the High Commissioner as President and twelve elected and ten official members. The Secretary of State is of the opinion that before a further measure of self-government is extended to Palestine and the Assembly placed in control over the Executive, it would be wise to allow some time to elapse. During this period, the institutions of the country will have become well established; its financial credit will be based on firm foundations; and the Palestinian officials will have been enabled to gain experience of sound methods of government. After a few years, the situation will be again reviewed, and if the experience of the working of the Constitution now to be established so warranted, a larger share of authority would then be extended to the elected representatives of the people.

The Secretary of State would point out that already the present Administration has transferred to a Supreme Council elected by the Moslem community of Palestine the entire control of Moslem religious endowments (*Waqfs*), and of the Moslem religious Courts. To this Council, the Administration has also voluntarily restored considerable revenues derived from ancient endowments which had been sequestered by the Turkish Government. The Education Department is also advised by a committee representative of all sections of the population, and

the Department of Commerce and Industry has the benefit of the cooperation of the Chambers of Commerce which have been established in the principal centers. It is the intention of the Administration to associate in an increased degree similar representative committees with the various Departments of the Government.

The Secretary of State believes that a policy upon these lines, coupled with the maintenance of the fullest religious liberty in Palestine and with scrupulous regard for the rights of each community with reference to its Holy Places, cannot but commend itself to the various sections of the population, and that upon this basis may be built up that spirit of cooperation upon which the future progress and prosperity of the Holy Land must largely depend.

### *The Jewish Reply*

The Executive of the Zionist Organization, having taken note of the statement relative to British policy, transmitted to them by the Colonial Office under date 3 June 1922, assure His Majesty's Government that the activities of the Zionist Organization will be conducted in conformity with the policy therein set forth.

### *Extracts from the Arab Reply*

...2. We wish to point out here that the Jewish population of Palestine who lived there before the War never had any trouble with their Arab neighbors. They enjoyed the same rights and privileges as their fellow Ottoman citizens, and never agitated for the Declaration of November 1917. It is the Zionists outside Palestine who worked for the Balfour Declaration, and who, now that the world sees its impracticability, are apprehensive of its abolishment...

...4. The Memorandum goes on to discuss the existing Jewish community in Palestine, which it says possess "national characteristics" because it has "its own political organs, an elected assembly for the direction of its own domestic concerns, elected councils in the towns, an organization for the control of its schools, an elected Chief Rabbinate and Rabbinical Council for the direction of its religious affairs, business which is conducted in Hebrew as a vernacular language, a Hebrew Press to serve its needs, etc., etc."

We would here remark that all these outward signs of a "national" existence are also possessed by the other communities in



Figure 4 Haj Amin Al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem—a Palestinian leader who led the rejectionist policy towards the Mandate. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, no known restrictions)

Palestine, and if these are to be considered as a reason why the Jews outside Palestine should be allowed into Palestine “as of right and not on sufferance,” it is the more reason why the Arabs should be confirmed in their national home as against all intruders and immigration placed in their control...

We have shown over and over again that the supposed historic connection of the Jews with Palestine rests upon very slender historic data. The historic rights of the Arabs are far stronger than those of the Jews. Palestine had a native population before the Jews even went there, and this population has persisted all down the ages and never assimilated with the Jewish tribes, who were always a people to themselves. The Arabs, on the other hand, have been settled on the land for more than 1,500 years, and are the present owners of the soil...

...6. Nothing will safeguard the interests of the Arabs against the dangers of immigration except the creation of a Representative National Government, which shall have complete control of immigration.

...7. The Memorandum then raises the question of the pledges given to the King of Hejaz, and states that “this promise [to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs] was given subject to a reservation made in the same letter, which excluded from its scope the country lying to the west of the *Vilayet* of Damascus. That *Vilayet* included the whole of the territory of Transjordan, but neither the independent Sanjak of Jerusalem, nor those parts of the then *Vilayet* of Beyrout which are now included in Palestine. The whole of Palestine west of the Jordan was thus excluded from Sir H. McMahon’s pledge.”

To this we reply:

In the first place, the word “district” and not *Vilayet* was used. In the second place, the word “district” and not *Vilayet* was also *meant* since the letter says “the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo.” Now since Homs and Hama were districts included in the *Vilayet* of Syria, it would be superfluous to mention “Homs” and “Hama” specifically if the “*Vilayet*” of Damascus as against the “district” of Damascus were meant.

Moreover, the “*Vilayet*” said to have been meant was called “*Vilayet* of Syria” and not “*Vilayet* of Damascus,” as there was no *Vilayet* of Damascus.

Palestine thus comes within the scope of the promise...

...8. Speaking of self-government, the Memorandum says: “It is the intention of His Majesty’s Government to foster the establishment of a full measure of self-government in Palestine. But they are of the opinion that in the special circumstances of that country this should be accomplished by gradual stages and not suddenly...”

We are to understand, then, that self-government will be granted as soon as the Jewish people in Palestine are sufficiently able through numbers and powers to benefit to the full by self-government, and not before. We fail to see any other reason.

We, therefore, here once again repeat that nothing will safeguard Arab interests in Palestine but the immediate creation of a national government which shall be responsible to a Parliament of all whose members are elected by the people of the country – Moslems, Christians, and Jews.

...10. The hope is finally expressed in the Memorandum that “a policy upon these lines cannot but commend itself to the various sections of the population.”

We would heartily wish this were so. But what do we see as the result of this policy? Discontent of 93 percent of the population, dislike of the Zionist policy, a strong feeling against those who enter Palestine through the sheer might of England.

At last, the Memorandum proceeds to explain that “this policy will serve to establish a

spirit of association on which depends the development and prosperity of the country in future.”

Whereas, we see division and tension between Arabs and Zionists increasing day by day and resulting in general retrogression. Because the immigrants dumped upon the country from different parts of the world are ignorant of the language, customs and character of the Arabs, and enter Palestine by the might of England against the will of the people who are convinced that these have come to strangle them. Nature does not allow the creation of a spirit of cooperation between two peoples so different, and it is not to be expected that the Arabs would bow to such a great injustice, or that the Zionists would so easily succeed in realizing their dreams.

The fact is that His Majesty’s Government has placed itself in the position of a partisan in Palestine of a certain policy which the Arabs cannot accept because it means his extinction sooner or later. Promises avail nothing when they are not supported by actions, and until we see a real practical change in the policy of His Majesty’s Government, we must harbor the fears that the intention is to create a Jewish National Home to the “disappearance or subordination of the Arabic population, language and culture in Palestine.”



Figure 5 Division and tension between Arabs and Jews did, indeed, continue to increase; eventually, a relatively large British military contingent (such as these soldiers guarding against the outbreak of rioting in 1929) was required to maintain peace between the two groups. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, no known restrictions)