We have seen from the previous volume in this series how support for the partition of Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish states, with substantial portions retained under the Mandate, had waned in the British Cabinet during 1938. Chaim Weizmann had struggled throughout that year to keep the scheme alive, but to no avail. The Technical Commission under Sir John Woodhead, which had been in Palestine ostensibly to produce a detailed plan, pronounced the scheme unworkable in any form. Thus, as 1939 dawned, the Zionist leader faced the unwelcome prospect of a conference at which Arabs and Jews would meet with British representatives to seek a compromise solution to the problem based upon a unitary Palestine.

Weizmann was under no illusions that a solution imposed upon both parties in the event of disagreement could be anything but inimical to the Jewish National Home. He knew that his long and, on the whole, fruitful partnership with Great Britain was about to enter its most critical phase.

It was common knowledge that the Palestine Arabs were quarrelling among themselves as to the composition of their delegation. Without their active participation the conference was doomed to failure, and this seemed to Weizmann to be the most convenient outcome. For a brief period he had doubts that the gathering would materialise at all, doubts that were strengthened by persistent rumours of an imminent German attack in the West. However, Malcolm MacDonald, the Colonial Secretary, exerted all efforts to ensure the presence of the Palestinians, though he was unable to achieve this until after the conference had actually begun. The war scare worked very much to the detriment of the Zionists. The Chiefs-of-Staff issued a persuasive memorandum urging, for high strategic reasons, an agreement favourable to the Arabs. MacDonald pursued the same theme with his Cabinet colleagues. By the end of January
the Government had before it a fairly detailed plan which later blossomed to full growth as the May White Paper.

The tripartite conference opened in London at St. James's Palace on 7 February; in fact two conferences opened, for the Arab delegations refused to sit at the same table with the Jews. There was something inherently false about the entire situation. The magnificent setting of the Royal Palace, the punctiliousness of the opening ceremonies, the stiff formality of the occasion, all served to mask the distasteful fact that the main decisions had already been taken, in Principle if not in detail.

By 20 February the Government had outlined its main proposals: minority status for the yishuv (the Jewish community of Palestine) which was to constitute under 40 per cent of the total population; restrictions in land sales; and a constitutional settlement which envisaged, after a cooling-off period of ten years, neither an Arab nor a Jewish state but one independent Palestine. These proposals had yet to be formulated precisely, but Weizmann felt compelled to write to MacDonald: 'These provisions are clearly calculated to crystallise [i.e., to arrest the development of] the Jewish National Home both numerically and territorially. The Jewish delegation could not acquiesce in them without being unfaithful to their prime responsibility to the Jewish people of seeing the continued growth of the National Home.'

He now produced a programme of his own as providing a basis for further discussion. This, parity in legislative-constitutional bodies, and a comprehensive development scheme for Palestine, had been frequently ventilated in earlier battles with the Government. A unitary, independent state, Weizmann argued, was conceivable only on the condition that both sides were in full agreement. Failing this, two alternatives remained: partition, or some kind of federal scheme.

The gap between the two sides was too wide to bridge. The deepening international crisis convinced the Government that it had no alternative but to propose a formula favourable to the Arabs, and one which was acceptable to the whole Moslem world. Two days before the conference was formally brought to an end, on 15 March, the Germans marched into Prague. Some weeks later the Italians annexed Albania. The Zionists had no argument against such punishing blows. In the face of mounting German and Italian aggression in Europe, it was clear that the Government would seek to rid itself
of embarrassing obligations elsewhere. Weizmann sought the intercession of eminent personalities, notably Jan Smuts in South Africa and President Roosevelt in the U.S.A. It availed him nothing. They showed sympathy, but were unable to prevail on the British Government. Roosevelt's submission before the authority of the British case proved a special disappointment.

While the conference proceeded, it was of vital importance to Weizmann that the Zionist movement, indeed the whole Jewish world, should appear united in the struggle. He pleaded with Menahem Ussishkin, the veteran Palestinian leader who long opposed his policies, to take part in the talks. Even the Revisionists were not excluded as potential partners in the debate, though predictably enough nothing came of the negotiations with them. Further, Weizmann insisted on including some of the grandees of Anglo-Jewry in his delegation, however repellent this might be to a number of Zionist ideologues. Altogether he managed to contrive an impressive display of unity.

An emphatic demonstration of Jewish solidarity came from across the Atlantic. At the opening of the New York World's Fair, the Palestine Pavilion attracted 100,000 visitors (over two million visited it in total). Weizmann telephoned a message: 'In these days of Jewish trial what we have built in Palestine will have to be given fair and just consideration.' The power of American Jewry, financial and political, had yet to be tapped to the full. It had proved a potent factor in the First World War. Could it not be utilised to greater effect in the crisis-laden months of the spring and summer of 1939? It was a pertinent reminder to the British Government.

Neither Weizmann nor David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency and second in the Zionist hierarchy, attended the final session of the conference when it took place on 15 March. The nature of the Government's proposals was such as to make their presence inappropriate. In any case Weizmann's relations with MacDonald were virtually non-existent. The time for politeness had passed. Weizmann wrote: 'The Jewish delegation, having carefully considered the proposals communicated to them by His Majesty's Government on March 15th, 1939, regret that they are unable to accept them as a basis for agreement, and decide, accordingly, to dissolve.'

The previous few weeks had been among the most disagreeable of his life, though unfortunately there are few letters recording the period, as he had little time for writing.
Weizmann had sustained a considerable political set-back, and was convinced that worse was to follow. Exhausted, all his energy spent in barren discussions, he prepared to leave for his home, and his institute of science, at Rehovot. He made one last appeal to the Prime Minister: 'In times so deeply disturbed, could we not avoid adding to the turmoil? For such would be the result of putting forward a policy which only raises further questions and provokes further demands, and satisfies no-one. If the announcement of the decision is postponed, I do not mean to leave the time unused. Every effort will be made, and every contact used to explore the possibility of Jewish-Arab agreement or rapprochement. While I cannot promise any success, I would suggest that lapse of time may open possibilities in this direction.'

But Chamberlain had more urgent preoccupations, resulting from the collapse of the Munich settlement of September, 1938. Contrasted with the need to stiffen Britain's bargaining position in Europe, and the strengthening of the diplomatic front through accelerated defence plans, the Zionist question was of little moment, and could in any event be safely left to those who held departmental responsibility for it. Indeed, the Big Four of British politics—Chamberlain, Lord Halifax, Sir John Simon and Sir Samuel Hoare—intervened in the Zionist question only to ratify the policy of the Colonial Office, never to countermand it. Halifax was naturally guided by his Foreign Office advisers, and they consistently pointed in the direction of an accommodation with the Arab-Moslem world.

Having promised a further attempt to attain a Jewish-Arab rapprochement, Weizmann had meetings on his way to Palestine with leaders of the Arab countries, Egypt and Iraq in particular; with the Palestinian leadership he found no common ground. Paradoxically, the British were also engaged in semi-official talks with the Arabs. But the British aim was to convince them to accept the main decisions taken at St. James's, the opposite of Weizmann's intention. Small wonder that nothing resulted from either of these sets of negotiations except confusion.

The Jewish leader now turned his complete attention towards securing a postponement of the Government's statement of policy, in the hope of achieving some modification of the contemplated measures. Towards this end he canvassed support on the widest possible scale. The gist of his argument was embodied in a letter to his staunch
supporter Leo Amery: 'It is the consensus of Jewish opinion that by abandoning its obligation to promote the development of the Jewish National Home for which essentially, as is patent from the contemporary evidence, the Mandate was entrusted to the British Government, the latter would divest itself of its moral and legal right to govern Palestine. They will have to rule the Jews with force and not by the consent of the people.'

He made a desperate last-minute attempt to stay the Government's hand with a flight to London to meet both Chamberlain and MacDonald. The Prime Minister was unyielding, while the interview with MacDonald left Weizmann shattered, and destroyed whatever had survived of their past relationship.

The White Paper was published on 17 May. A faithful replica of the Government's final proposals at St. James's, it fulfilled all of Weizmann's worst expectations. The blow had fallen, and in this perhaps there was some relief. Now the Zionists could proceed to harry the Government in public. All previous inhibitions about breaching the protocol of confidential debate were thrust aside. The first confrontation took place in Parliament, both in the Commons and the Lords.

These proved to be victories for the Zionists. The more crucial Commons debate occupied two days, with the House dividing on a three-line whip. The result was one of acute disappointment for the Government, for it emerged from the fray with a mere 89 majority, in place of the customary 250, and virtually a vote of non-confidence.' Yet the Government, despite the damage done to its moral authority, showed no inclination to budge from its declared policy. For the Zionists the question still remained: what now?

Weizmann believed that he had found a chink in the Government's armour; it remained only for him to prise it open, thereby destroying the White Paper policy forever. He began to espouse the cause of federalism. Indeed this was a solution not specifically excluded by the Government, as Weizmann reminded MacDonald immediately No. 38 after the conclusion of the conference. Of course, the acceptability of a federal scheme depended entirely on safeguards allowing 'for the, adequate growth of the Jewish National Home.' The precise meaning of this phrase had already been the chief bone of contention between the Zionists and the Government. Nevertheless, Weizmann believed that he, together with his friends, could hammer out some kind of agreed formula. By late
June a fairly comprehensive plan had been worked out, inspired mainly by Professor Coupland, author of the original partition plan of the Peel Commission, and Lord Lothian, who as Philip Kerr had been Lloyd George's Private Secretary at the time of the issuance of the Balfour Declaration. For Weizmann it was 'the first faint ray of light which has pierced the fog of the White Paper'.

Another hope lay in exploiting the legal loopholes in the White 1939) Paper. It was a basic contention of the Zionists that the Government's new policy was incompatible with the letter and spirit of the Mandate, the legal instrument by which Great Britain administered Palestine. Hence great emphasis was laid on the forthcoming debates of the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, where Weizmann could count on friendly support. In the event, the Permanent Mandates Commission also fell short of expectations. Its verdict was far from clear-cut, and left much room for manoeuvre on the part of the Government.

Regarding federalism, there is some evidence to support the claim that by the summer of 1939 it was the leading contender to oust the White Paper policy. It had powerful adherents outside the Government, and at least one Cabinet minister, Walter Elliot, made no secret of his view that federalism would be an equitable compromise.

It must remain a matter for speculation whether or not the federalists might have gathered enough momentum to sweep the field. Time, however, was not on their side. All their hopes were dashed by the approach of war. In truth, Weizmann had few factors in his favour, and none of sufficient weight to tip the scales his way.

The White Paper policy remains among the most controversial events in Zionist history. Even today it is scarcely possible to discuss it in dispassionate terms. It brought the Anglo-Zionist partnership into complete disarray, and from it sprang the struggle which led ultimately to the establishment of the State of Israel.

It may truly be said that Weizmann never fully recovered from the blow. His correspondence for those months graphically lays bare the depth of his disillusionment with the Government. No Zionist could accept the White Paper. What was at stake was not so much the future of the National Home—the Zionist leadership was confident that the yishuv could look after itself—but the fate of European Jewry, the source of Zionist inspiration. Weizmann's prophetic words before the Peel Commission were turning into a
horrible reality. The movement he led was in effect being emptied of its raison d'être; and this at a time when, as he said, 'the Jews were drowning in their own blood'. The moralrightness of the Zionist case was overwhelming; but it made little headway against 'administrative necessity'.

Yet however much the Zionists railed against the White Paper, its provisions could not have taken them by surprise. There had been unmistakable signs of the new course in British policy since the summer of 1938; while even in the much-praised, perhaps overpraised, Peel Report, one can detect in embryo form the May White Paper. Early in the proceedings of the St. James's Conference Weizmann had received, by error, a clear indication of the Government's intention; He was convinced that the new policy was a temporary deviation, 'a sort of mental and moral aberration' as he put it. Once the international crisis had passed, the Zionist movement and the British Government would resume their traditional relationship. Perhaps; but the international crisis did not pass, it deepened; and the crisis in Anglo-Zionist relations remained to torment Weizmann until his retirement from active politics.

Although practically all of Weizmann's time was spent in haute politque, he returned whenever possible to science, a world with which he was absolutely familiar, and mercifully free from the vagaries of political life. He could devote himself to the Sieff Institute at Rehovot only for the briefest of periods. Reluctantly, he had to delegate his authority to subordinates, an arrangement that did not suit his temperament. His letters about the Institute discuss finances, personnel and research projects, but he was directing affairs by remote control. Misunderstandings were inevitable, and were multiplied by the capriciousness of the postal service, a factor which worsened considerably with the outbreak of war.

In Weizmann's eyes the Institute constituted an important counter in his bargaining with the Government. For in the event of war he envisaged Palestine as the great supply base of the British armies in the Near East; and within this grand design the Institute, as a scientific reservoir, would fulfil an indispensable role. Valid though the argument might be on purely scientific grounds, the Government never ceased to remind Weizmann of the political objections. Nevertheless, the war period gave a tremendous boost to the Institute's development. Exploitation of surplus citrus yields, food
substitutes, a new pharmaceutical industry, and the development of high octane petrol, were among the many projects planned and put into effect. Weizmann himself was appointed Honorary Chemical Adviser to the Director of Scientific Research in the British Ministry of Supply in June 1940.

And throughout, there was no respite from the question of the fate of European Jewry. The gigantic scale of the tragedy, and the helplessness of the onlooker to avert it, gave the Zionist movement its terrible sense of urgency during these years. Little could be done, but no effort was too great. Much of Weizmann's time was spent in raising money and devising schemes to alleviate the condition of European Jewry, and in interceding for individual Jews, old friends who now found themselves the victims of Nazi terror. The problem overshadowed all else when the Twenty-First Zionist Congress opened in August, 1939, at Geneva.

Congress convened in an atmosphere of unreality, even irrelevance. On 22 August the delegates learned of the Nazi-Soviet accord, which, the Germans hoped, would enable them to settle the Polish question without interference from the West. War was imminent. Congress hurriedly completed its business, and Weizmann wrote to Chamberlain pledging that 'the Jews stand by Great Britain and will fight on the side of the democracies'. Past political differences would be put aside: ' [We] place ourselves, in matters big and small, under the coordinating direction of His Majesty's Government. The Jewish Agency is ready to enter into immediate arrangements for utilising Jewish manpower, technical ability, resources, etc.' Three days later German mechanized units crossed the Polish frontier. Chamberlain replied to Weizmann on 2 September in a manner which did not augur well for the future. He thanked Weizmann for his offer of help. But 'You will not expect me to say more at this stage than that your public-spirited assurances are welcome and will be kept in mind.' At 11 a.m. on 3 September, after dramatic scenes in the House of Commons, Great Britain declared that a state of war existed with Germany; six hours later France followed suit.

Weizmann's offer to utilise Jewish manpower and technical ability in the general war effort met with an icy response from the outset. Even before the war had begun he put his case to General Pownall, Director of Military Operations and Intelligence. Initially, he requested facilities to enable the Jewish Agency to maintain regular
communications with Jerusalem and other centres of Zionist activity. Without this elementary condition there was little chance that the Zionists would be able to keep their promise. There was a precedent for this request from the First World War; and arrangements were soon made whereby letters were to be transferred through the Foreign Office.

Far more problematic was the question of a Jewish fighting force. Controversy surrounding this demand persisted until almost the end of the war. But already, during its preliminary stages in late August–September 1939, one can distinguish the component elements in the debate. Pownall told Weizmann that the army was short of equipment, and that there were financial difficulties. Although Weizmann "Pt was inclined to accept this argument, most Zionists dismissed it as yet another manifestation of British Yet Pownall's argument had some validity. Great Britain was now paying dearly for those long years of lack of preparation.

But there were other, more telling, considerations. The political implications of forming a Jewish fighting force under its own flag, and commanded by its own officer corps, were too far-reaching. It was General Barker, commander of the British forces in Palestine, who voiced the most violent expression of this attitude. He told BenGurion that the Haganah (the Jewish defence force) 'were preparing for rebellion against Great Britain,' and that 'he felt it his duty to smash that organization.'

On the face of it, the Zionist proposal to raise a Jewish fighting force held a strong attraction. It would have freed tens of thousands of British soldiers for duty elsewhere. (It was estimated that during the first two years of the war, 22,244 Palestinians volunteered for the armed services; and that by October 1939, 136,000 Jewish men and women in Palestine had registered for some kind of essential national service.) High-ranking British officers in London supported the scheme. At every new twist in the military misfortunes of the Allies, as for example the May-June crisis of 1940, the generals and the Zionists hoped that military expediency would prevail over political calculation, and urged their case with renewed vigour. But they failed to persuade the over-cautious officials. By June 1940, Lord Lloyd, the new Colonial Secretary, informed Weizmann that a Jewish force might be raised if the Jewish Agency agreed that it be integrated fully in the British Army and be liable for service anywhere. But he warned that the War Office perceived difficulties in forming 'purely Jewish units of the British army'. There the matter stood at
the conclusion of this volume.

Despite Weizmann's promise of cooperation, the White Paper continued to poison relations between the Government and the Jewish Agency. The Government made no gesture of conciliation. If anything, the reverse was true. Immigration, always the surest indication of the Government's intention, was drastically reduced. The schedule for October 1939–March 1940 was cancelled owing to an unprecedented influx of 'illegal' immigrants.' For the following six-month period, only 9,000 certificates were issued. These draconian measures were enacted at a time when European Jewry was desperately searching for any refuge from Nazi persecution.

Yet it was the Government's decision to forge ahead with the land regulations of the White Paper which aroused the greatest Jewish fury towards the Chamberlain administration. On the eve of his pertinent questions: 'Is the land law to be promulgated, or is it for No. 173 the time being to remain in abeyance? Are the Jews in Palestine to be treated as suspects, or as people whose loyalty and readiness to serve deserve to be encouraged? Are political considerations rooted in the White Paper policy to be allowed to defeat schemes of practical assistance in the conduct of the war, or are British war interests to prevail? I feel that owe it to my colleagues whom I am leaving here in charge, as well as to my friends in America, to whom I shall have to report on the situation, to do my utmost now to achieve clarity on these fundamental points.'

Halifax clarified the Government's attitude in no uncertain manner. He replied on 19 December: 'In the circumstances it seems clear to me that it is not possible to modify or postpone the application of the White Paper policy in favour of one community without doing an injustice to the other . . . Neither before the war nor since has the Government said or done anything to justify the assumption that the implementation of the policy would be deferred either because it has not yet been approved by the League Council, or on account of the war situation.' He closed his letter with words which graphically portrayed the cleft stick in which the Jewish Agency was trapped: 'But, highly as His Majesty's Government appreciated Jewish offers of assistance on the outbreak of war, it must not be overlooked that those offers were made unconditionally and were welcomed on that footing. So far as this country is concerned, we are putting our whole energy into a life-and-death struggle with Nazi Germany, the persecutor of
Jewry in Central Europe, and by ridding Europe of the present German regime we hope to render a supreme service to the Jewish people.' This authoritative letter signalled the collapse of all of Weizmann's exertions to cooperate with the Government on a basis of mutual understanding.

Preparations regarding the land regulations went ahead. There was a brief moment of hope at the beginning of January 1940 when it appeared as though Winston Churchill had intervened decisively against the Colonial Office. But the hope was illusory. Not even Churchill could prevail against the combined strength of the officials. It was a portent of things to come.

The Land Transfer Regulations were promulgated on 28 February 1940. Out of an estimated total of 10,429 square miles only 519 were set aside for unrestricted Jewish land purchases, and these included the large urban areas of Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. Jews protested in Palestine at demonstrations which often brought violence in their wake; while in the Arab quarters there was dancing and rejoicing. These events unfolded while Weizmann was in the United States on the first of his wartime visits. He had been contemplating a visit since the spring of 1939, but the continuing crisis in the political situation had compelled postponement. He now journeyed to the United States with four major tasks: to negotiate a substantial loan for the Jewish Agency which would enable it to carry through its multifarious activities relatively free from financial worries; to prepare the Zionist case before world, in effect American, public opinion; to place the financial future of the Sieff Institute on firm foundations now that European sources of support were much diminished; and lastly, to ensure the unity of American Jewry in the current crisis.

Though not totally crowned with success, his mission gave a substantial fillip to American Zionism. He succeeded in getting his financial projects started, and it remained for others to ensure that these efforts were sustained. More problematic for the future was the divided state of American Jewry: interminable personal rivalries within the Zionist Organization of America, and almost non-existent relations between the Zionists and the non-Zionists in the Jewish Agency. Here Weizmann had to exert all his unparalleled diplomatic ability to heal the wounds and attain a satisfactory working arrangement. But it was difficult to hold the Americans in tight rein. And although by the time Weizmann
left the United States the situation had vastly improved, it was still far from satisfactory.

At a meeting with President Roosevelt—their first—on 8 February he spoke of his conviction that only an independent Jewish State, as recommended by the Peel Commission in 1937, could make any real contribution to a solution of the Jewish problem. According to Weizmann's record of the interview the Zionist leader told the President: 'There must be one place in the world which the Jews could call their own, and in which they should become masters of their own fate.' Later he wrote to Dr. Solomon Goldman, Z.O.A. President, 'there is a gleam of light on the horizon to guide us to No. 201 our goal. The establishment of a free and sovereign Jewish National Home after the war is an objective that should be fixed in our mind.'

Soon after Weizmann's arrival back in London, determined on an early return to the United States to complete his work, German forces made their swift conquest of Denmark and Norway. A month later, on 10 May, the invasion of the Low Countries and France began. These tumultuous events raised Churchill to the premiership of a new wartime coalition that was confronted with the severest crisis in Great Britain's history. As the German armies swept forward, Weizmann gave expression to his darkest thoughts in a letter to Meyer Weisgal, whom he had appointed his personal representative in America: 'I can only trust that you and our friends No. 272 in America will take counsel together, bearing in mind the terrible and indisputable fact that European Jewry, with very few exceptions has been practically blotted out . . . The foundations of everything May in which we believe, and for which we live and work, are rocking, and unless the onslaught of the German hordes is stopped in time, we shall all go under. I am confident that it will be stopped in the end; but when and at what cost, and what havoc may have been wrought meanwhile, no one can say. It is such thoughts as these that govern one's life at present, and everything else seems to have receded into the background.'

In the space of six weeks the German panzer divisions had cut through France and stood poised to strike across the English Channel. By mid-June the remnants of the Allied forces had been evacuated. France had fallen. German armies were masters of the Continent from the Atlantic to the Vistula. A new Dark Age had descended on Europe. And those six million Jews, whose fate Weizmann had prophetically foretold, found
themselves in the grip of a barbarism more terrible than any known in recorded history. It is on this tragic theme that this volume.

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