

## CHAPTER V THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

### PALESTINE JEWRY AND THE WAR

For all its impressive progress, the Yishuv itself remained the most vulnerable component in the Zionist movement after the outbreak of the World War. Since the nineteenth century, we recall, Palestine's Ashkenazic Jews had learned to rely upon the European consuls to ensure their elementary physical security. Now, with the rescission of the Capitulations and Turkey's entrance into the war, that assurance was gone. Even after hostilities began, few European Jews were inclined at first to seek the dubious advantages of Ottoman citizenship, with all this entailed in arbitrary taxation and capricious justice. It was simple government brutality that changed their minds. On December 17, 1914, Beha-a-Din, the aged and irascible Turkish governor of Jaffa, ordered the immediate expulsion of the 6,000 Russian Jews living in his port city. The same day, then, the police rounded up their first 700 victims, loaded them on an Italian steamer, and shipped them off to Alexandria. Aghast at this development, Jews throughout the Yishuv hurriedly began packing for departure. Within one month, 7,000 of them had fled the country. The rest—the majority—unable to pull up stakes at short notice, remained paralyzed in uncertainty of their future course. Guidance at this juncture, therefore, was provided by the Jewish religious and communal leaders themselves, who urged their coreligionists to apply immediately for Ottoman citizenship as the only alternative to disaster. Within several weeks, 12,000 Jews followed the suggestion. The number doubled in the ensuing year. Gradually the threat of large-scale expulsion declined.

Other dangers remained. Before the war it had been the tradition for Christians and Jews to buy exemption from military conscription by paying special taxes. That alternative was out of the question now. The best non-Moslems could hope for, as members of an educated elite, was privileged "labor" service on the home front close to their families. Yet by the winter of 1915 even this opportunity was foreclosed. Indeed, labor service became all but penal. Young men and old were drafted, set to work paving roads or quarrying stone, consigned to verminous barracks and starvation rations. Those who fell ill were imprisoned for malingering. Others died. Punitive as the treatment was, it failed at first to discourage the Labor Zionist leaders. Many welcomed the opportunity of proving their loyalty to the Ottoman regime. Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi, for example, were among those who petitioned the Turkish authorities for a Jewish militia to share in the defense of the country. And in fact Djemal Pasha, commander of

the Ottoman Fourth Army and military governor of Palestine, favored the idea. He was dissuaded from accepting it only at the last moment by Beha-a-Din, who was irredeemably hostile to the non-Turkish minorities. Undaunted, nevertheless, other young Jews volunteered for regular armed service. In the early months of the war, some were accepted. Moshe Shertok and Dov Hoz—both, in later years, prominent figures in the life of the Yishuv—were among those sent to officers' training schools and eventually assigned to Turkish battlefronts.

The initial ambiguity of Turkish policy toward the Zionists was soon resolved by Djemal Pasha. In February 1915, Djemal returned from a disastrous military expedition against the Suez Canal. In a black mood, determined to reduce the country's non-Turkish population to a state of terrorized submission, he appointed Beha-a-Din as his "secretary for Jewish affairs." At the latter's orders, the Anglo-Palestine Bank was closed, together with Zionist newspapers, schools, and political offices. All Zionist public activities were banned. More ominously yet, Jewish land titles were called into question, and Arabs were encouraged to pillage Jewish villages. When Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi ventured to protest these measures, they and other Zionist leaders were summarily exiled. The circumstances of the Jewish "labor battalions" became increasingly grim. Many hundreds of young men were marched off in chains to prisons in Damascus, others exiled to Brusa and Constantinople, yet others sentenced to a living death in the granite pits of Tarsus.

It was not Djemal's hostility alone that threatened the survival of Palestine Jewry. The "normal" hardships of war were painful enough. The British naval blockade choked off food imports and philanthropic remittances from abroad. The citrus crop withered and died on the trees. Crushing war taxes were levied on Jewish and Arab farms. Livestock and foodstuffs were confiscated, reducing many thousands of Jewish and Arab families to maize grits as their basic staple. During the first two years of the war, some 35,000 inhabitants of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine died of starvation or hunger-induced disease; perhaps 8,000 of these were Jews. If even more widespread hunger was avoided in the Yishuv, Jewish self-discipline was one factor. An emergency committee of Jewish organizations distributed food among the poor and unemployed, even assumed the quasi-legal responsibility of "taxing" Jews in Jaffa and Tel Aviv for improvised public works projects and soup kitchens.

The intercession of strategically located Western Jews also proved timely. One of these was Arthur Ruppin. As a German citizen who was known to enjoy the esteem of Foreign Minister Arthur von Zimmermann, a pro-Zionist, he was allowed to distribute funds received from German Jewish sources. Even more important was the solicitude of the United States ambassador in Constantinople, Henry Morgenthau. A Jew himself, Morgenthau inclined at first toward studied restraint in his dealings with Ottoman officials. Yet as the representative of a powerful neutral government, he was bound to be taken seriously in his concern for Jewish and other minorities. It was principally in deference to Morgenthau that Djemal eased the worst of his repressive measures in the spring of 1915 and called a halt to the wave of expulsions and arrests. Morgenthau secured permission, too, for American naval vessels to bring occasional relief shipments

and money to the Holy Land. Until diplomatic relations between Washington and Constantinople were ruptured in April 1917, it was this uncertain trickle of supplies and funds from abroad that enabled the Yishuv barely to hold out.

Nevertheless, Ottoman brutality was not forgiven by those who had been driven into exile. By March 1915 some 10,000 Palestine Jews had found asylum in Egypt. Half of them were lodged in refugee camps at Gabbari and Mafruza, where they were sustained by Jewish communal funds. In their hurried exit from Palestine they had left homes, farms, and families behind. Vegetating now in enforced and bitter idleness, they gave close attention to circulated accounts and rumors of Allied operations in the Middle East. It was among these restive young émigrés, moreover, that the first efforts were launched to recruit a Jewish legion for battle service against the Turks in Palestine. Initiated by Vladimir Jabotinsky, a Russian Jewish journalist ([this page](#)), the appeal aroused a mixed response. On the one hand, Britain was an ally of the hated tsar. On the other, if the Palestinians refused to take up arms, they feared the alternative of deportation to Russia and conscription into the tsarist army (although the British in fact turned down this Russian request).

Notable among these Palestinians was Joseph Trumpeldor, one of the most attractive and charismatic personalities in Zionist history. A handsome six-footer, Trumpeldor originally had been trained as a dentist. As a volunteer officer in the Russian army, he had lost an arm and had been decorated for heroism in the Russo-Japanese War. In more recent years he had been serving as a farmer-pioneer on a kvutza in Galilee. After the war began, Trumpeldor was one of those deported by the Turks. Immediately, then, he made his way to Alexandria to volunteer for the British army. There he met Jabotinsky in the Mafruza camp, and the two promptly collaborated in the effort to recruit a Jewish legion. While the British authorities in Egypt were not unreceptive to the notion, they preferred to limit it to a Jewish transport unit for service in an alternative Allied war theater. Despite Jabotinsky's initial misgivings, Trumpeldor favored the scheme. As long as the enemy was the Turk, the latter insisted, "any front leads to Zion." Thus, in March and April of 1915, some five hundred Jews were accepted for enlistment in a special transportation unit, the Zion Mule Corps, and allowed to wear their own shoulder flashes bearing the Shield of David. Their assignment was the impending Dardanelles campaign. A British officer, Lieutenant Colonel John Patterson, was placed in charge of the force, but its animating spirit was Trumpeldor, now commissioned a captain in the British army.

Upon disembarkation at the beaches of Gallipoli, the Zion Mule Corps performed creditably enough, the men leading their supply mules to the front trenches through heavy fire. Eight of the troops were killed, fifty-five others wounded, among them Trumpeldor. Another 150 young Jews from Egypt promptly volunteered as replacements. With the subsequent evacuation of Gallipoli in the winter of 1915, the Mule Corps was among the last of the units to be withdrawn. Its reputation by then had spread throughout the Zionist world. Yet for the Jews remaining in Palestine itself, news of this military enterprise was a source of concern; the Turks might be tempted to retaliate against the Yishuv. Indeed, to forestall that threat, bands of Jewish loyalists

marched through the streets of Jerusalem and Jaffa, shouting their contempt of the “traitors.” The muleteers’ performance failed in any case to influence the British command, which dissolved the unit once the Gallipoli campaign ended. Nevertheless, unrecognized at the time by British and Jews alike, the episode of the Zion Mule Corps represented the first tentative step in a developing Anglo-Zionist collaboration.

#### THE MIDDLE EAST AND BRITISH WAR POLICY

It was the outbreak of the World War that suddenly invested Palestine with a new importance in Allied military calculations. From then on, England based its Near Eastern policy on a central and immutable criterion, the security of the Suez Canal. This vital passageway for British commerce, the artery of transport for the military manpower reserves of the overseas empire, was threatened twice in the course of hostilities by Ottoman invasion expeditions of January 1915 and August 1916. Although repelled each time, the Turkish offensives fixated British attention on the vulnerability of Suez to assault from neighboring Palestine. To cope with the threat, military headquarters in Cairo devoted increasing attention to a new political strategy. It was to mobilize the Ottoman Empire’s restive subject peoples in a joint military effort against the Turks. In fact, the idea initially had been mooted by a distinguished Arab personality, the Emir Abdullah, eldest son of Hussein, the Hashemite sherif of Mecca and Medina. Even before the war Abdullah had visited General Kitchener in Cairo to request British help in protecting his father’s dynasty against its suspicious Ottoman overlords. Negotiations were resumed by the British later in the year, and then were continued upon the outbreak of war, in direct correspondence between Hussein himself and Sir Henry McMahon, Britain’s high commissioner in Egypt.

Following an exchange of several letters, a bargain was worked out between McMahon and the sherif in the autumn of 1915. The crucial letter, from the high commissioner to Hussein on October 24, stated that Britain was prepared “to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sherif [namely, the entire Arab rectangle, including Syria, Arabia, and Mesopotamia],” with the exception of those “portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo....” In return for British support, so the understanding went, the Hashemite Arabs would join the Allied war effort against Turkey. Moreover, after the war, the newly established Arab government would “seek the advice and guidance of Great Britain only....” On this basis the Arab revolt finally began in June of 1916, under the leadership of Hussein’s second son, the Emir Feisal, and later with the help of such British liaison officers as T. E. Lawrence. During the subsequent year and a half, the uprising of between 10,000 and 20,000 Arab irregulars played a not inconsiderable role in the British military effort against Turkish forces in Arabia and eastern Palestine.

Yet if the British made a commitment to the Hashemites, they scrupulously protected not only their own postwar interests but also those of France. The Ottoman Empire, after all, was more than a source of danger to the Suez Canal; with its untutored Moslem

populace, it also provided a far likelier terrain than Europe for Western imperial aggrandizement. In recognition, then, of this territorial opportunity, Britain dutifully apprised the French and Russian governments of its impending compact with Sherif Hussein. And at the same time, even as McMahon was preempting for Britain the key “advisory” role over a future Arab government within the Fertile Crescent, he also made clear to Hussein in the letter of October 24, 1915, that western Syria was being reserved by implication for a special French relationship.

Indeed, during the winter of 1915–16 this implication was confirmed in a series of negotiations among the British, French, and Russian governments themselves. It was in January 1916 that Sir Mark Sykes, the British representative, and Charles François Georges-Picot, the French emissary, reached a meeting of minds on the allocation of postwar spheres of influence in the Arab world. Britain would be invested with supervision over Arab territories encompassing the largest part of Mesopotamia, most of Transjordan, and southern Palestine. The agreement seemingly was not inconsistent with the understanding reached earlier between McMahon and Hussein. Neither did it violate the provisions currently worked out on behalf of France. These authorized the French to exercise varying degrees of ascendancy over southern Turkey, Syria, northern Palestine, and the Mosul area of upper Mesopotamia.

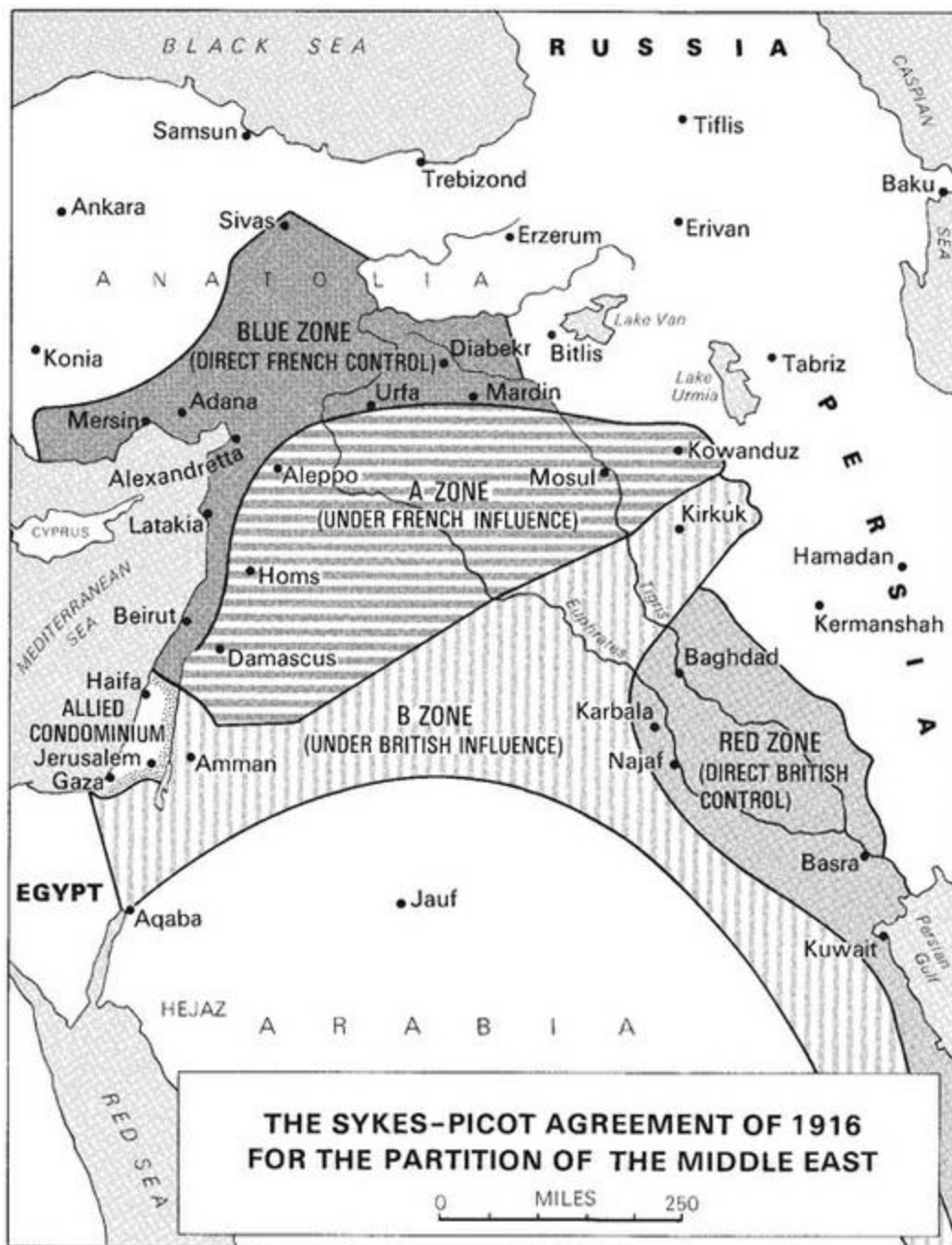
What was the fate of Palestine under this arrangement? If, over the years, France had carved out for itself preemptive economic and cultural rights in Syria—interests now given territorial formulation in the Sykes-Picot agreement—it was the not illogical view of Paris that those rights applied to the Holy Land as well. The largest sector of Palestine (except for the Jerusalem sanjak) was an integral part of the Ottoman-Syrian administration, after all. Nevertheless, as early as January 1915, the tsarist government began expressing its own grave concern about rumored French ambitions for Palestine. St. Petersburg surely was not unaware that the Franciscan Order had been a principal European religious influence in the Holy Land, operating a wide network of churches, convents, monasteries, and hospices. Yet Russian Orthodox interests hardly were less extensive or jealously guarded than those of the Roman Catholics, and notably in the Jerusalem-Bethlehem area. Nor was Britain’s preoccupation with the Holy Land, finally, less extensive than that of France or of Russia; although here the concern admittedly was dictated less by religious than by military considerations. From London’s viewpoint, terrain of this strategic proximity to the Canal simply could not be allowed to fall into the grasp of another power. To be sure, Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey was too astute a statesman to offend his allies by demanding unilateral control for Britain. He came up rather with a compromise formula that in the end proved acceptable to Paris and St. Petersburg. It was for a joint Allied condominium over the largest part of the Holy Land.

In their January 1916 agreement, therefore (later endorsed by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov), Sykes and Georges-Picot reached an understanding for the promulgation of a Franco-Russian-British condominium in a “Brown Zone” that would include, essentially, central Palestine. Under these terms, neither France nor England fully abandoned its respective interests in the Holy Land. Skirting the central zone, for

example, Britain would control Acre and Haifa Bay; a British railroad would connect Haifa and Baghdad, with a right of easement through French Syria. Additionally, Britain's sphere of influence embraced southern Palestine and the country's Transjordanian hinterland, thus assuring that the "Brown Zone" would be surrounded on three sides by territory under British domination. To the French sphere of influence would be allocated northwestern Palestine, including all of upper Galilee, with its fertile wheat fields, water sources, and venerated religious shrines. Later, by the terms of the Treaty of St. Jean de Maurienne of September 1917, Italy too was permitted to share in the condominium area of Palestine (see map, [this page](#)).

Meanwhile, from the summer of 1916 onward, Sinai and Palestine were to function increasingly as Britain's chosen battlefield against the Turks. Early British expeditions in the Middle East, in the Dardanelles and Mesopotamia, had turned out to be sanguinary failures. By contrast, the Sinai Peninsula offered a possibly more direct and manageable invasion route toward the Ottoman Levant. Once this consensus was reached by the imperial general command, in June of 1916, British military headquarters in Cairo set about organizing and equipping a 150,000-man "Egyptian Expeditionary Force" in anticipation of a straight-line plunge into Palestine. On December 22, 1916, the massive army ventured out against the Ottoman post of al-Arish and captured it. Early in January 1917, Rafa was overrun. Finally, in March, the expeditionary force moved against Gaza, the gateway to Palestine. And here it was stopped twice in the next three weeks by a formidable Turkish defense. The British commander was replaced forthwith. His successor, General Sir Edmund Allenby, an energetic, hard-bitten cavalry officer, immediately set about reorganizing his divisions and making plans for a climactic breakthrough toward the north of Palestine's Negev Desert.

Even as Allenby's troops were preparing for their thrust into the Holy Land, however, British Foreign Office and military officials shared growing misgivings about the prize their diplomacy seemingly had forfeited. The compromise of quasi-internationalization may have been inevitable at a time when the British were hurled back onto the defensive in the Middle East, licking their wounds after Gallipoli and Kut. It was also the period when the French were carrying the heaviest burden of the struggle on the Western front. Nevertheless, as the months passed, the prospect of a French military enclave in Palestine, even linked to an Allied condominium, became increasingly unpalatable to London; and all the more so, in the spring of 1917, when Allenby was marshaling tens of thousands of imperial troops for the offensive into the Holy Land. It was as a consequence of these misgivings that the War Cabinet had summarily vetoed repeated French demands to participate in the operation.



On April 19 a special Committee on Territorial Terms of Peace, under the chairmanship of Lord Curzon, unanimously emphasized the importance of British postwar control in Palestine. Two days later, Lloyd George informed Lord Bertie, his ambassador in Paris, that “the French will have to accept our Protectorate over Palestine.” The prime minister noted subsequently that an international regime in the Holy Land “would be quite intolerable to ourselves.... Palestine is really the strategic buffer of Egypt.” Even so, for the Lloyd George government, the fact of Britain’s military predominance was less than an appropriate basis for dealings between wartime allies or for staking any kind of postwar claim to the Holy Land. At the least, it would have violated the principle of non-acquisition of territories by war enunciated by President Woodrow Wilson and by the newly established Provisional Government in Russia. A more “idealistic” rationale would still have been preferred at a time when Sir Mark Sykes’s signature was not yet dry on the 1916 agreement with Georges-Picot. Initially, Whitehall failed to grasp that such a rationale already existed. It had been

provided by a rather unlikely source, the Jews.

#### THE ORIGINS OF THE ANGLO-ZIONIST ALLIANCE

The Zionist Organization hardly was in its strongest bargaining position at the outbreak of the war. The fact was that in no part of the world, not excluding eastern Europe, had Zionism yet won overwhelming support even within the Jewish community. In Russia, the Bund vigorously contested for the loyalty of the Jewish working classes, while Orthodox Jews by and large remained suspicious of Zionism. In the Western nations, the acculturated Jewish “establishment” opposed Zionism with vigor and spleen. The war itself, finally, ruptured the precarious unity of the Zionist movement. In the hope of preserving at least a functional contact between its members throughout Europe, the Zionist Organization in 1914 established a special “Bureau for Zionist Affairs” in neutral Copenhagen. The device was notably ineffective. The principal Zionist leaders remained in their native countries. As a result, the movement suffered a diffusion of centralized authority.

Not less critically, the Zionists shared the general patriotic enthusiasm of their fellow countrymen. In Austria the Zionist Federation announced that it expected all its young members to volunteer for military service. In Germany the official Zionist weekly “recognize[d] that our [Jewish] interest is exclusively on the side of Germany.” Throughout Europe, in fact, efforts were mounted not simply to identify all Jews with the various national causes, but to identify the Zionist movement itself with the war aims of the respective governments. This was particularly true in Germany, where Arthur Hantke and Richard Lichtheim courted officials in Berlin, urging them to take the initiative in establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine—which then surely would form a “bastion” of German influence in the Levant. In the event, the Wilhelmstrasse rejected these overtures; it was not prepared to alienate its Turkish ally.

Other foreign ministries shared a widespread indifference, even hostility, to Zionism. The government of France, as an example, was aware that Herzl, Nordau, Wolffsohn, and other early Zionist leaders were central European Jews by training and culture, and it therefore suspected Jewish nationalism as “the advance guard of German influence.” In St. Petersburg, the tsarist regime hardly was likely to evince sympathy for Jewish nationalism at a time when it was driving half a million Jews like cattle into the Russian interior. England, finally, appeared an even less promising source of help for the Zionist cause. Although its quarter of a million Jews consisted largely of Russian immigrants, most of these were too poor or harassed to exert a significant influence in public or communal affairs; while Britain’s acculturated Jewish families generally rejected the idea of Jewish nationalism altogether. Meanwhile, the British government remained as indifferent as any other Great Power to the Zionist renaissance.

Yet, in the eyes of at least some British politicians and statesmen, Zionism was no longer either unknown or suspect. Articles on Zionism had appeared in British periodicals for several years even before Herzl’s negotiations with Chamberlain. In August 1902, the Fourth Zionist Congress was held in London, and its sessions were



given considerable publicity. Afterward, the al-Arish and East Africa schemes were raised and debated in a parliament that included Lloyd George and Balfour. Lord Milner was high commissioner in South Africa during Herzl's negotiations with Chamberlain, and was well familiar with the Zionist idea from then on; eventually he became a great friend of the movement. Henry Wickham Steed, later editor of the *Times*, had met Herzl twice, in 1896 and 1902, and had been impressed by the Zionist leader and his views.

If the earlier Anglo-Zionist connection revived and developed with unanticipated warmth after 1914, one of the explanations was the quality of new Zionist activists who by chance were living in England at the outbreak of war. Their acknowledged spokesman was Dr. Chaim Weizmann, then forty years old, a chemistry instructor at the University of Manchester. Russian-born, university-trained in Germany and Switzerland, Weizmann proved to be as lucid and convincing a propagandist in England as in his youthful leadership of the "Fraction" during the early Zionist Congresses ([Chapter III](#)). He soon won a loyal following for Zionism among a number of distinguished personalities in the Anglo-Jewish community. The most influential of these after Weizmann himself was Herbert Samuel, president of the Local Government Board, and afterward home secretary in the Asquith government. In fact, Samuel had taken a mild interest in Zionism even before the war. Once hostilities broke out, and well before meeting Weizmann, Samuel already was contemplating the likely diplomatic advantages of a British protectorate over a Palestine Jewish homeland. On this basis of unalloyed national self-interest, he mooted the idea to Asquith and Sir Edward Grey, both of whom initially expressed reservations.

Samuel persisted, however. Upon meeting Weizmann (through the auspices of Charles P. Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*), Samuel and the brilliant Anglo-Jewish lawyer Harry Sacher made it their business to introduce him to several eminent public figures. One of these was Steed of the *Times*, whose interest in Zionism was now rekindled. Through Scott and Steed, in turn, Weizmann made the acquaintance of the nation's political leaders, including Lloyd George, Winston Churchill, and Lord Robert Cecil. His relationship with these men was further strengthened by a vital service he performed for the British Admiralty. In March of 1916, Weizmann was summoned to London to help solve the shortage of acetone, an ingredient in the naval explosive cordite. After two years of laboratory research, he accomplished the task by devising a special fermentation process.

During this period, too, the friendships Weizmann had made earlier were cemented at the highest level. Indeed, the Zionist leader's extraordinary gift for friendship was a not inconsiderable factor in the unfolding diplomatic triumph of the next half-decade. His sheer physical presence was arresting, for one thing. The brow of his massive bald head was finely etched with veins, his eyes were piercing, his mustache and goatee elegant, his clothing always superbly tailored. A slight Russian accent lent a touch of exoticism to his perfect command of English. More important, he possessed a rare, inner charisma. Years later Sir Ronald Storrs described Weizmann as

a brilliant talker with an unrivaled gift for lucid exposition.... As a speaker almost frighteningly convincing, even in

English ... in Hebrew, and even more in Russian, overwhelming, with all that dynamic persuasiveness which Slavs usually devote to love and Jews to business, nourished, trained, and concentrated upon the accomplishment of Zion.

Sir Charles Webster, who first met Weizmann at the War Office in 1917, considered him the greatest statesman of his time. "With unerring skill," wrote Webster,

he adapted his arguments to the special circumstances of each statesman. To the British and Americans he could use biblical language and awake a deep emotional undertone; to other nationalities he more often talked in terms of interest. Mr. Lloyd George was told that Palestine was a little mountainous country not unlike Wales; with Lord Balfour the philosophical background of Zionism could be surveyed; for Lord Cecil the problem was placed in the setting of a new world organization; while to Lord Milner the extension of imperial power could be vividly portrayed.

As Webster intimated, Weizmann's efforts were buttressed by other advantages. One was the mystical veneration with which many devout Anglo-Saxon (or Welsh or Scottish) Protestants regarded the Old Testament traditions, the Children of Israel, and particularly the Holy Land itself. Lloyd George wrote later that in his first meeting with Weizmann, in December 1914, historic sites in Palestine were mentioned that were "more familiar to me than those of the Western front." Balfour, too, had evinced a lifelong interest in the Holy Land and its traditions, as had Jan Christiaan Smuts, the South African member of the War Cabinet. These men felt deeply Christianity's historic obligation to the Jews. That debt was compounded not merely by Weizmann's personal services to the Allied war effort, but also by his uncompromising devotion to Britain, his repeated insistence that the fate of Zionism was inexorably linked to that of the Allies. Thus, a letter written by Weizmann in 1916, terminating relations with the "neutralist" Zionist Bureau in Copenhagen, was kept by Scotland Yard (unknown to Weizmann) and further influenced the authorities in his favor.

Against this background of Anglo-Zionist cordiality, Weizmann's allusions to a "British protectorate over a Jewish homeland" struck an increasingly responsive chord among government officials. The moment of decisive reappraisal in Middle Eastern policy came in the last weeks of 1916, when Lloyd George and Balfour became prime minister and foreign secretary, respectively. As the new government recognized, the Sykes-Picot Agreement no longer was a sufficiently watertight guarantee for British interests in Palestine. Perhaps, then, the Jews as a client people might be as useful an opening wedge for British domination as were the Arabs? Since the beginning of the war, in fact, Lloyd George had proposed annexing the Holy Land. In his eyes, British rule over a Jewish Palestine would have represented a logical and climactic tour de force of imperial diplomacy. He had had no part anyway in making the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which he regarded as a "fatuous document" based on erroneous calculations. The Zionists might open new possibilities of revision. A partnership with the Zionists similarly was advocated now by Lord Milner, Lloyd George's closest friend in the War Cabinet; by Lord Robert Cecil, undersecretary of foreign affairs; by Philip Kerr, the prime minister's adviser on foreign policy; and most importantly, by the War Cabinet's three young undersecretaries for Middle Eastern Affairs: Sir Mark Sykes, Leopold Amery,

and William Ormsby-Gore.

#### A CRUCIAL INTERMEDIARY

Sykes was the most influential of this group, the official who served as “marriage broker” in the progressively intimate relationship between the government and the Zionist leadership. The role was an unusual one for the cabinet undersecretary, for he had never really cared much for Jews, particularly the “diluted” Jews who were beginning to make their way in British society. It was only during his travels in Palestine that Sykes had come to admire the Zionist colonies and to sense their potential rejuvenating influence among the Jewish people. Plainly more than concern for the future of the Jews animated his emerging Zionism, however. Although initially hesitant to upset the 1916 agreement with France, during ensuing months Sykes came to share his colleagues’ interest in a revised approach to a Middle Eastern settlement. Thus, the chain of liberated national groups—Armenians, Arabs, Greeks—whom Sykes envisaged as Britain’s logical Middle Eastern clients against the Turks, necessarily would include the Zionist Jews. The idea did not spring full-blown from his own mind. It was suggested to him in October 1916 by Dr. Moses Gaster, Sephardic Chief Rabbi of London, by the Zionist agronomist Aaron Aaronsohn ([this page](#)), and by James Malcolm, a Persian-born Armenian who had been raised in England. Malcolm attached himself to the Zionist cause early, partly out of conviction and partly in the hope “that Jewish *haute finance* will help the Armenians....” Through Malcolm and Gaster, Sykes met Weizmann on February 7, 1917. By then, it had become Sykes’s mission in life to wed Zionist and British interests. “From the purely British point of view,” he told Amery, “a prosperous Jewish population in Palestine, owing its inception and its opportunity of development to British policy, might be an invaluable asset as a defense of the Suez Canal against attack from the north and as a station on the future air routes to the East.”

Speed now became decisive, for by the opening days of 1917 the British military offensive in Palestine already had been launched. In the meeting of February 7, therefore, Sykes hinted to the Zionist leaders that the government might be prepared to favor a Jewish national entity in the Holy Land. He could not yet reveal the existence of the agreement he had signed with Georges-Picot and the restrictions this treaty placed on the War Cabinet’s liberty of action, although he hinted that Britain was not yet a free agent in the Middle East. He observed simply that the Zionists themselves would have to take the initiative in persuading the Allied governments to endorse the notion of a Jewish national home in Palestine. Once this thesis was accepted, the corollary of a British protectorate would be easier to negotiate. Weizmann and the others agreed and set about immediately presenting their case in Paris and Rome.

Sykes, in the background, carefully stage-managed the negotiations. Nachum Sokolow, Weizmann’s most intimate collaborator in these Allied discussions, wrote later:

As I was crossing the Quai d’Orsay [in Paris] on my return from the Foreign Ministry I came across Sykes. He had not had the patience to wait. We walked on together, and I gave him an outline of the proceedings. This did not satisfy him;

he studied every detail; I had to give him full notes and he drew up a minute report. "That's a good day's work," he said with shining eyes. The second [meeting] was a day in April, 1917, in Rome. Sykes had been there before me and could not await my arrival.... I put up at the hotel; Sykes had ordered rooms for me. I went to the British Embassy; letters and instructions from Sykes were waiting for me there. I went to the Italian Government Offices; Sykes had been there, too; then to the Vatican, where Sykes again prepared my way.

These efforts were not unsuccessful. Although the French Foreign Ministry left no doubt of its opposition to any change in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, it expressed a friendly interest in the Jewish homeland. Apparently it had little choice, for rumors of an impending pro-Zionist statement by Berlin (which turned out to be false) convinced Paris that in Jewish nationalism it was "up against a big thing." On June 4, the Quai d'Orsay dispatched a letter to Sokolow assuring him that "the French Government ... can but feel sympathy to your cause, the triumph of which is bound up with that of the Allies." In Rome, Pope Benedict XV evinced a similar cordiality. In the pontiff's case, friendship was as tactical as it was atypical: a British-sponsored Jewish enclave in Palestine at least would forestall a Russian Orthodox presence.

In truth, none of the Allies was obtuse in discerning Britain's purpose in fostering Zionism. As early as April 6, 1917, Sykes frankly informed Georges-Picot that Britain's military efforts in Palestine would have to be taken into account at the peace conference. "[Picot] is convinced," President Poincaré of France wrote in his diary on April 17, "that in London our agreements are now considered null and void." Neither were the Zionists ignorant of their function as an extension of British policy. On the contrary, they welcomed the role; for the support and friendship of this mighty imperial power was now all but official. Specifically for that reason, Weizmann and the others, impatient for a public declaration from the War Cabinet, were mystified that support continually fell just short of open commitment. They knew nothing of the prior understanding with France, of course. "It was *not* from [Sykes] that we learned of the existence of the agreement," Weizmann recalled, "and months passed before we understood what it was that blocked our progress." C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian* was the first to uncover the details of the Sykes-Picot understanding. Inadvertently, he let the information slip to Weizmann, who was appalled. When Weizmann in turn confronted Lord Robert Cecil with the information, the undersecretary neither confirmed nor denied it. Cecil intimated, on the other hand, that conceivably more yet could be done in persuading the government officially to declare the identity of British and Zionist goals. It would be helpful, the undersecretary observed, if Jews not simply in England but in other lands should express themselves openly in favor of a British protectorate in the Holy Land. The hint was plain, too, that the government's benevolent interest in Zionism merited the fullest Jewish loyalty, worldwide, to the Entente cause.

#### THE QUID PRO QUO OF JEWISH FRIENDSHIP

The hoary myth of the power and wealth of international Jewry could be traced to the

Baroque era, when Jewish court bankers functioned as reliable supporters of central European dynasties. It was taken with equal seriousness in the nineteenth century, the heyday of the Rothschilds, when, as we recall, Palmerston importuned the Ottoman government to allow large-scale Jewish settlement in Palestine “because the wealth they would bring with them would increase the resources of the Sultan’s dominions...” Nor was it regarded with less solemnity in the twentieth century. In February 1917, Sykes wrote Georges-Picot: “If the great force of Judaism feels that its aspirations are ... in a fair way to realization, then there is hope for an ordered and developed Arabia and Middle East.” Nearly all the major belligerent governments shared this awe for the—essentially legendary—power of world Jewry. It was significant that both Germany and France included Jewish “advisers” among their wartime missions to the United States, individuals capable, it was hoped, of mobilizing American Jewish support for their respective causes. Until the United States entered the war, moreover, it appeared for a while as if that support inclined toward Germany. The American Jewish “establishment” was largely of German origin. The eminent financier Jacob Schiff and others like him made no secret of their pro-German sentiments. Neither did the Russian Jewish immigrant community, with its bitter memories of tsarist persecution.

Lloyd George, too, expressed the prevailing conviction concerning Jewish “influence” in other lands. If the notion was entirely spurious, this was less important than what the prime minister believed. And Lloyd George’s beliefs in 1917 were conditioned by the worst crisis of the war: Russia virtually *hors de combat*; France exhausted, its troops mutinying; Italy demoralized after Caporetto; German submarines taking a fearful toll of Allied shipping; not a single American division yet in the trenches. The need to exploit America’s resources, to keep Russia in the war, was overpowering. “In the solution of these two problems,” Lloyd George wrote, “public opinion in Russia and America played a great part, and we [believed] ... that in both countries the friendliness or hostility of the Jewish race might make a considerable difference.” Actually, the potential hostility or friendship of American Jewry was a negligible factor once the United States entered the war. The Russian Zionist attitude toward the Entente, on the other hand, seemed hopelessly poisoned by hatred of the tsarist regime. This became evident in June 1917, when Ussishkin and other Russian Zionist leaders sent word to Louis Brandeis ([this page](#)) and Weizmann that they were unprepared to identify the cause of Zionism with one or another of the combatant powers. Their animus toward the Russian Entente partnership was barely disguised.

Vladimir Jabotinsky discovered this opposition the hard way. A Russian Jewish writer, orator, poet, and linguist of remarkable virtuosity, thirty-four years old when the war began, he served as correspondent on the Western front for the liberal Russian newspaper *Russkiye Vedomosti*. The moment the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers, Jabotinsky sensed the unique opportunity that would accrue to Zionism if the Turks could be driven from Palestine. To emphasize the Zionist commitment to the Allied cause, therefore, Jabotinsky hurled himself into the endeavor to organize a Jewish legion for “the liberation of the Holy Land.” The first fruit of that effort, it is remembered, the Zion Mule Corps, was sent to Gallipoli instead and afterward

disbanded. Early in 1915, Jabotinsky paid a return visit to Russia. There he found himself ostracized by the Zionists, who regarded any military effort on behalf of the Entente as simply another attempt at succoring the despised Romanov government. In his hometown of Odessa, Jabotinsky was branded as a traitor from the synagogue pulpit. His mother was accosted in the street by Ussishkin, who remarked that “your son should be hanged.”

From then on, Jabotinsky concentrated his recruiting efforts in London. There also he nearly met disaster. Addressing crowds of Russian Jewish immigrants in the ghetto of the East End, he was furiously hooted and shouted off the platform. It was evident that in England, as in Russia, the Jews wanted no part of a legion or of any other unit dedicated to fighting the enemies of the tsar. Most of the leaders of British Zionism, too, except for Weizmann, were equally cold to Jabotinsky’s scheme, although for different reasons. They recognized that the Jewish settlement in Palestine was an Ottoman hostage. If it became known that Jews abroad were mobilizing specifically to liberate the Holy Land, the Yishuv conceivably might suffer the fate of the Armenians, whom the Turks recently had all but annihilated as potential traitors.

This analogy was by no means farfetched. In 1916 the same tragic result was almost provoked by a small group of Palestine Jews engaged in transmitting military data to the British. A certain Aaron Aaronsohn was the driving force behind the clandestine operation. The son of a Zionist farmer, Aaronsohn was an agronomist of recognized genius. In 1906 he won international acclaim for discovering a weather-resistant primeval wheat. Four years later, encouraged by the United States Department of Agriculture and funded by a wealthy American Jew, Aaronsohn set up an experimental station in Atlit, a coastal village at the tip of the Carmel range. There, in succeeding years, he carried out extensive research on dry-farming techniques. Even as he explored methods of reviving Palestine’s soil, however, Aaronsohn and his associate, Avshalom Feinberg, were driven to the conclusion that neither the Land of Israel nor the Jewish settlement there had a future under the slothful, brutish Ottoman regime. The outbreak of the war, the expulsions and sequestrations carried out against Jews and Arabs alike, the horror visited upon the Armenians, whose pathetic refugees straggled in dying bands through the countryside, appeared to confirm this premonition. The Jews’ best hope, Feinberg and Aaronsohn were convinced, was simply to wrest Palestine away for themselves. This view was shared by a small group of associates, including Aaronsohn’s father, brothers, and sisters, and, besides Feinberg, several other young Palestinians who worked in the research station.

Aaronsohn and his companions had anticipated a British invasion once the war began. When the landings occurred instead at Gallipoli, the Atlit research team decided on its own to establish communications with the British and to offer the Allies systematic information on Ottoman troop movements in Palestine. Aaronsohn and his co-workers were in a unique position to supply this intelligence. They were veteran settlers, known and respected for their agronomical work, and generally permitted freedom of movement throughout Palestine in organizing antilocust campaigns. As a result, Feinberg and Aaronsohn’s brother Alexander managed to pass successfully through the

Turkish lines and reach Egypt. At first British officials in Cairo showed little enthusiasm for dealing with the Jewish spies. In the autumn of 1916, however, Aaron Aaronsohn received ominous information that the Turks were concentrating large numbers of troops for a second invasion attempt against the Suez Canal. Somehow the British had to be warned. It was vital, too, that they appreciate another danger: unless Palestine were swiftly liberated, its inhabitants might not survive the famine that was penetrating into every corner of the land. Aaronsohn's problem was to find a way of getting to England and speaking directly there with the appropriate British officials.

An invasion of another kind—of locusts—gave him his chance. In a meeting with Djemal Pasha, he persuaded the Fourth Army commander to let him depart for Germany in order to carry out “research on a variety of sesame rich in oil.” But once in Germany, Aaronsohn traveled on to neutral Copenhagen, and through the Zionist Bureau there worked out a plan to reach England without appearing to defect. He set sail for the United States in October 1916. En route, by prearrangement, a British destroyer intercepted the ship, “arrested” Aaronsohn as an Ottoman citizen, and carried him back to England. Within hours of his arrival in London, he was pouring out his information to Sir Basil Thomson, chief of Scotland Yard. The agronomist offered compelling evidence of Turkish vulnerability to an invasion through Palestine. Thomson was impressed, and in late November sent Aaronsohn on to Egypt for discussions with the military commanders there. The latter were as intrigued as Thomson had been, and this time promised active collaboration with the Jewish spy ring. Aaronsohn remained in Cairo as liaison between the British and the Atlit group. It is worth noting, too, that during the first weeks of Aaronsohn's earlier sojourn in London, others who met him—among them Sykes, Amery, and Ormsby-Gore—were profoundly stirred by his Zionist idealism and his dream of a British protectorate over a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Indeed, from then on, virtually all Ormsby-Gore's memoranda dealing with Palestine bore the stamp of Aaronsohn's ideas.

The NILI organization, meanwhile, as the Jewish spy network was called (from the initials of its Hebrew password, “Nezach Yisrael Lo Y'shaker”—The Eternal One of Israel Will Not Lie), worked for the next eight months under the very noses of the Turks. Aaronsohn's sister Sarah, and an associate, Joseph Lishanski, directed the effort, collecting extensive information on Ottoman military bases and army movements and transmitting it to a British frigate that anchored off the Atlit coast every two weeks at nightfall. The intelligence was of critical importance to the British. When Allenby assumed command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in the spring of 1917, he asked the NILI spies for particulars on Turkish defenses around Beersheba, the site of his intended offensive. Sarah Aaronsohn and her associates at once set about fulfilling the assignment. Their dispatches included vital data on the weather, on the location of water sources and malarial swamps, on the precise condition of every known route to Beersheba from the Negev. “It was very largely the daring work of the young spies ...,” wrote Captain Raymond Savage, Allenby's deputy military secretary, “which enabled the brilliant Field-Marshal to accomplish his undertaking so effectively.”

The espionage came to an end in September 1917, when one of the NILI carrier

pigeons fell into the hands of the Turks. Two weeks later, a member of the group, Na'aman Belkind, was caught trying to reach Egypt. Eventually the police traced the spy network back to Atlit. Most of the ring was seized, including nearly all of Aaronsohn's family. Their fate was predictable. Sarah Aaronsohn turned herself in to spare her aged father additional beatings. She, in turn, was tortured to divulge her information. On the third day of her ordeal she seized a revolver from a drawer and shot herself; paralyzed, she lingered for several days before dying. Other members of the organization were similarly tortured. One of them, Reuven Schwartz, committed suicide. Belkind and Lishanski were hanged in Damascus. Although the merest handful of Palestine Jews were aware of the NILI plot, it was only the imminent British capture of Jerusalem that saved the Yishuv from mass arrests and possibly mass hangings and deportations. Under these conditions, most of Palestine's Zionist settlers took an ambiguous, even hostile, attitude toward the espionage. They had always disliked Aaronsohn anyway for his known antipathy to socialism. Many of the Poalei Zion, too, we recall, had gone to considerable lengths to affirm their loyalty to the Ottoman regime. The Yishuv accordingly refused to give aid or comfort to the NILI survivors. There were few enough of these, in any case. Aaron Aaronsohn himself, living in Cairo, managed to survive the war. With a certain classic inexorability, however, the NILI story ended in May 1919, when Aaronsohn's plane crashed into the English Channel en route from London to the Paris Peace Conference.

#### A DECLARATION IS ISSUED

The fate of the NILI spies unquestionably was one of the dangers the British Zionist leadership had in mind when it hesitated at first to endorse Jabotinsky's plans for a Jewish legion. The vulnerability of the Yishuv might also have inhibited Weizmann and his colleagues in their attempt to extract a pro-Zionist declaration from the British government. But their discovery of the Sykes-Picot Agreement convinced them that any risk was worth taking now to avoid the dismemberment of Palestine, and its Jewish settlement, into isolated zones of conflicting sovereignties. With Allenby's Palestine offensive imminent, too, both Weizmann and the War Cabinet sensed the urgent need for a government declaration that would imply future unilateral British control over the Holy Land.

The remote possibility also existed that the Turks still might extricate themselves from the war, and thus avoid losing Palestine or the rest of their empire. Indeed, Washington was convinced that such a possibility might usefully be explored with Henry Morgenthau's "reliable" Ottoman sources. In May 1917, therefore, the State Department requested the former ambassador (who had left his post in April, following the severance of United States-Turkish relations) to embark upon negotiations with certain "intermediaries" in Switzerland. Morgenthau accepted the task with enthusiasm. At first London concurred in the mission, but shortly afterward Whitehall began to have second thoughts as it contemplated Morgenthau's German background and connections. The eve of Allenby's offensive in any case was hardly the moment to give the Turks an



opportunity to defect. The Zionists shared these misgivings. Thus, at the behest of the Foreign Office, Weizmann agreed to intercept Morgenthau and his traveling companion, Felix Frankfurter, in Gibraltar. The extraordinary meeting took place on July 4. During the course of a lengthy interview, the Zionist leader explained to Morgenthau and Frankfurter the unlikelihood of Turkish agreement to a separate peace that would end Ottoman rule over Armenia, Syria, or Palestine; and the Allies were committed to the freedom of these lands. As Weizmann recalled: “It was no job to persuade Mr. Morgenthau to drop the project. He simply persuaded himself.”

By then it was quite evident both to Weizmann and to Balfour and his staff that the risks of delay were mounting, and that an official declaration of governmental support for a Jewish homeland no longer could be postponed. Sykes and Ormsby-Gore were convinced (wrongly, as it turned out) that Berlin was about to steal a march on the Allies by issuing a pro-Zionist declaration of its own. In May, too, the “Conjoint Committee,” a body representing the nativized Anglo-Jewish “establishment,” had issued a sharply anti-Zionist statement to the *Times*—thereby revealing an embarrassing ambivalence of Jewish attitude toward the Holy Land, and a seeming uncertainty of British footing on the Palestine question. Balfour, therefore, did not have to be convinced that Zionism now required an official imprimatur. As it happened, the foreign secretary’s interest in Jewish nationalism was neither recent nor altogether opportunistic. As early as 1906, at his Manchester constituency, he had been the first of England’s public figures to meet Weizmann. “It was from that talk with Weizmann that I saw that the Jewish form of patriotism was unique,” he stated later. “Their love of country refused to be satisfied by the Uganda scheme. It was Weizmann’s absolute refusal even to look at it that impressed me.” The friendship between the two men was renewed in 1917, and Balfour’s sympathy for Zionism evidently had not waned. Like Smuts and Lloyd George himself, the foreign secretary had been nurtured on the Old Testament, and his extensive study of Jewish history had filled him with inner remorse about Christendom’s treatment of the Jews. “They have been exiled, scattered and oppressed,” he told Harold Nicolson in 1917. “If we can find them an asylum, a safe home, in their native land, then the full flowering of their genius will burst forth and propagate.” Imperial self-interest obviously was paramount in the government’s calculations. Yet, in Balfour’s case, a genuine vein of Zionist mysticism unquestionably strengthened commitment to the Jewish national home. In response, then, to an urgent appeal by Weizmann on June 17, 1917, the British statesman urged the Zionists themselves to formulate an appropriate declaration. He would submit it to the War Cabinet with his endorsement.

Weizmann’s closest associates, Sacher and Sokolow, immediately launched into the preparation of a suitable text. With the War Cabinet anxious to legitimize its tenure in Palestine, the moment was ripe for a maximalist document. For his part, Sacher favored governmental recognition of Palestine as “a Jewish State and the National Home of the Jewish People.” Sokolow, more cautious, would have limited the government’s approbation to Palestine as the “National Home of the Jewish People.” The compromise draft eventually reflected Sokolow’s approach. Numerous consultations with Ormsby-

Gore further modified the text. Yet even the final version, submitted on July 18, did not lack forthrightness. “His Majesty’s Government,” it stated, “accepts the principle that Palestine should be reconstituted as the National Home of the Jewish People. His Majesty’s Government will use its best endeavours to secure achievement of this object and will discuss the necessary methods and means with the Zionist Organization.” When the letter was formally discussed in a cabinet conference of September 3, it elicited the ministers’ warm approval.

Ironically, the only forceful opposition came from the one Jew in the Lloyd George government, Edwin Montagu, secretary of state for India—and a cousin of Herbert Samuel. Although reared in affluence (his father was Lord Swaythling), Montagu had fought an uphill battle to escape his Orthodox Jewish origins and to win acceptance in the privileged circles of government. In this case, a “national home” for the Jews seemed to raise for him embarrassing questions of dual loyalty. “I view with horror the aspiration for a national entity,” he had written Sir Eric Drummond on August 8, 1916. “Did I accept it, as a patriotic Englishman, I should resign my position on the Cabinet and declare myself neutral....” Now, on September 3, 1917, Montagu insisted that a pro-Zionist statement would at once alarm the Moslems of India and embarrass the Jews of England. The vehemence of his opposition to Zionism as “a mischievous political creed” persuaded the cabinet to leave the matter unresolved for the time being.

Neither the Zionists nor their supporters in the government accepted the setback as more than temporary. Lloyd George confidently put the matter of the declaration on the agenda for the next cabinet session. Yet when the meeting took place on October 4, Montagu opposed the draft with even more intensity than before. “I understand the man almost wept,” Weizmann wrote later. Montagu’s opposition and that of his supporters, Lord Curzon and Gertrude Bell, had the effect not of changing the minds of Balfour, Smuts, Lloyd George, or other Zionist sympathizers, but of persuading them that a milder text was needed simply to dispose of the question. Even as Weizmann and his colleagues maintained their pressure on the government, therefore, Amery and Milner labored over a compromise formula—one that became the essential draft of the Balfour Declaration. The earlier phrase, “that Palestine should be reconstituted as the National Home” of the Jews, was dropped in favor of a somewhat more equivocal statement ([this page](#)). The Zionists were deeply chagrined by the alteration. Nevertheless, they were fearful of tampering with it.

Lloyd George was prepared at last to force the issue through. Before taking the final step, however, the prime minister was determined to win a firm commitment of diplomatic support for Zionist aspirations. It was by then open knowledge in Western circles that the very notion of a Jewish national home was wedded to the corollary of a British protectorate. Lloyd George accordingly required assurance that a declaration implying such a protectorate would not encounter serious opposition at the peace conference later. Ultimately, it was the prestige and influence of the American government that resolved the matter. Washington had not declared war on the Ottoman Empire, to be sure. Even so, the United States unquestionably would exert a major impact on all phases of the peace settlement, including the future of the Holy Land.

President Wilson could not have been ignorant of American Jewish sentiment by then; for in the United States, too, Jewish opinion was veering increasingly toward Zionism. Moreover, as it adopted this orientation, American Jewry was influenced by its new role as host to the Zionist movement's de facto headquarters "in exile." When the war first began in August 1914, a member of the Zionist Executive, Shmaryahu Levin, was en route from the United States to Europe. His ship turned back immediately and Levin remained in New York to establish a "Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs." It was this committee's vigilant liaison that ultimately helped save the Yishuv. Its intercession with the State Department fortified Morgenthau's humanitarian efforts on behalf of Palestine Jewry. Additionally, the committee's president, Louis D. Brandeis, was a man of national prominence in American life; in 1916 he became the first Jewish appointee to the United States Supreme Court. It was at Weizmann's suggestion, then, and with Balfour's full concurrence, that Brandeis was asked to use his influence with the president on behalf of London's impending pro-Zionist statement. At first the jurist's efforts were unsuccessful. When the original draft declaration was brought to Wilson's attention on September 11, the president opposed it as too extensive a commitment. But the British persisted, and on October 6 London cabled Washington the more pallid Amery-Milner version. Wilson then dropped his objections. "I find in my pocket the memorandum you gave me about the Zionist movement," Wilson wrote Colonel House, his closest adviser, on October 13. "I am afraid I did not say to you that I concurred in the formula suggested [by London].... I do, and would be obliged if you would let them know it." The moment House's cable arrived in London, on October 16, the pro-Zionist faction had what it needed.

The War Cabinet voted for the declaration on October 31, over Montagu's and Curzon's last forlorn objections. Significantly, the principal rationale by then was no longer the need to avert French participation in a Palestine condominium—Allenby's army was on the verge of conquering the Holy Land, and the issue unquestionably would be decided by the substantial presence of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. Rather, it was the obsessive desire to win the friendship of world Jewry that influenced the War Cabinet's decision. Lloyd George was counting on this support. "The Zionist leaders," he wrote later, "gave us a definite promise that, if the Allies committed themselves to ... a National Home for the Jews in Palestine, they would do their best to rally to the Allied cause ... Jewish sentiment and support throughout the world. They kept their word in letter and spirit...." Other factors similarly determined the cabinet's vote. One was the genuine personal affinity of Balfour (and Smuts and Lloyd George) for the Holy Land and the Jewish people. "Near the end of his days," wrote Lady Dugdale, Balfour's niece, "he said to me that on the whole he felt that what he had been able to do for the Jews had been the thing he looked back upon as the most worth doing." Others in the cabinet may have been animated by even more complex motives—for example, Protestant millennialism, an uneasy conscience about Jewish suffering, conceivably the need to endorse a humane and productive act in the midst of the holocaust of war.

The declaration itself seemed curiously bland, however, and devoid of religious or

mystical overtones of any kind. It took the form of a letter on November 2 to Lord Rothschild, president of the British Zionist Federation, and stated:

Dear Lord Rothschild, I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country." I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

The original Zionist draft of the declaration had called for the reconstitution of Palestine "as [italics added] the National Home of the Jewish people." The phrase "national home," employed in both versions, actually was unknown in international usage. The Zionists had coined the expression at the 1897 Congress, to avoid the term "Jewish state," which the Turks might have found provocative, and Sokolow's draft in 1917 had followed this circumspect approach. Now, however, the Balfour version dispensed with the need for outlining the boundaries of a Jewish settlement *in* Palestine. The "national home" might be no more than a small enclave within the country. Only five years later, as shall be seen, the broad uplands of Transjordan were cut away, and fifteen years after that yet a further amputation would be proposed by a Royal Commission—all without violating the letter of the declaration. Moreover, the need to protect "the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine" could, and ultimately would, be interpreted as justification for limiting, even foreclosing, Jewish immigration in order to placate Arab nationalism.

The eventual fate of the declaration was not necessarily consonant with the original intention of its authors, however. "My personal hope," Balfour told a friend in 1918, "is that the Jews will make good in Palestine and eventually found a Jewish State." That same year Lord Robert Cecil declared: "Our wish is that Arabian countries shall be for the Arabs, Armenia for the Armenians, and Judea for the Jews." In 1920, Churchill, who had served as minister of munitions when the Balfour Declaration was issued, spoke of "a Jewish State by the banks of the Jordan ... which might comprise three or four million Jews." And in 1919, Smuts, also a former member of the War Cabinet, envisaged the rise of "a great Jewish State." Lloyd George was quite explicit in his description of the cabinet's proposal:

It was contemplated that when the time arrived for according representative institutions in Palestine, if the Jews had meanwhile responded to the opportunity afforded them by the idea of a National Home and had become a definite majority of the inhabitants, then Palestine would thus become a Jewish Commonwealth. The notion that Jewish immigration would have to be artificially restricted in order to ensure that the Jews should be a permanent minority never entered into the heads of anyone engaged in framing the policy. That would have been regarded as unjust and as a fraud on the people to whom we were appealing.

It is worth assessing the effectiveness of the appeal to “world Jewry.” The Jews of England were thrilled and grateful, as their public meetings throughout the country and their innumerable resolutions of thanks made evident. Heartened by this response, in turn, and intent upon duplicating it in other countries, the government established a special Jewish section within the department of information, staffing it primarily with Zionists. The department’s task was to prepare literature for distribution in Jewish communities throughout the world. Copies of the British statement were circulated by the millions, including leaflets dropped from the air over German and Austrian towns. When news of the declaration reached Russia three weeks later, it evoked wild rejoicing. Huge, cheering crowds gathered outside the British consulates in the larger cities. Petitions and cables of gratitude flooded in on Balfour from Jewish communities as far removed as Shanghai, Alexandria, and Capetown.

If the War Cabinet’s major objective was to swing “neutral” Jewish opinion toward Britain, it succeeded beyond all expectations. It was a hopeful omen, for example, that Salonica Jewry, formerly regarded as the “brain and nerve center” of the Young Turk movement, applauded the British gesture warmly. Indeed, so fearful were Britain’s enemies of the propaganda value to be reaped by the declaration that belated efforts were launched to match it. In Constantinople, Talaat Pasha, the powerful minister of the interior, announced his intention of canceling restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine. In January 1918, at the suggestion of Emmanuel Carasso, a Jewish deputy in the Ottoman parliament, Talaat approved the establishment of a chartered company to foster Jewish settlement in Palestine on an autonomous basis. In Berlin, two days later, Undersecretary of State von dem Busschi-Haddenhausen formally endorsed the Turkish proposal. To sustain the momentum, meanwhile, Talaat invited leading German and Austrian Jews to Constantinople to discuss Jewish land colonization and autonomy in Palestine. In August, the Turks sent Chief Rabbi Chaim Nahum on a tour of the Netherlands and Sweden to recruit Jewish support for Turkey.

Yet it is doubtful if these matching offers significantly influenced the commitment of Jews living within the various belligerent nations. One of London’s expectations was that the Balfour Declaration, through its impact on Jews abroad, would meaningfully enhance the Allied cause. Thus, embarking on a redoubled effort to mobilize Jewish support against the Central Powers, Weizmann and Brandeis cabled friends in Russia, entreating them to intercede with the new Bolshevik government on behalf of the common Entente war effort. Ultimately, this was wasted effort. The War Cabinet’s notion that Russian Jewry could exert meaningful pressure on the emergent Soviet regime was totally naïve; the fifteen or twenty Jewish Bolsheviks possessed of any real influence were entirely hostile to Jewish nationalism. The Jews of Germany and the Dual Monarchy, meanwhile, remained steadfastly loyal to their countries. The Zionists among them (Bodenheimer, Warburg, Hantke, Franz Oppenheimer) sought only to persuade their governments to match Britain’s offer—and in this they were unsuccessful. The Jews of France, more limited in number than their British counterparts, responded to news of Balfour’s declaration with a certain mild enthusiasm. Henri Bergson, Edmond Fleg, and other eminent French Jewish figures expressed their satisfaction. But the

official Consistoire Central des Juifs Français maintained an ambiguous posture on the subject of Jewish nationalism.

There was nothing equivocal about the reaction of American Jewry, to be sure. Its members hardly were less exhilarated by news of the declaration than were the Jews of Britain and Russia. Among them, too, public expressions and demonstrations of gratitude were evoked in the same full measure, with large parades in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other major cities. But the United States was already at war. The hated Russian tsar had fallen. Nothing remained to inhibit the enthusiastic participation of American Jews in their war effort, and nothing further was required to stimulate it. The sum of Jewish reaction was well described by Sir Ronald Storrs in 1937: "The American loan [to Britain] went much as had been expected; no sympathies for Britain accrued from the Soviet (which shortly denounced Zionism as a capitalist contrivance); and the loyalty of German Jewry remained unshaken—with the subsequent reward that the world is now contemplating."

#### THE JEWISH LEGION AND THE LIBERATION OF THE YISHUV

Perhaps the one tangible military result of the declaration was Jabotinsky's belated success in organizing a Jewish legion. With the overthrow of the tsar in March 1917, Jewish opposition to the plan began to weaken. Moreover, in late spring, the imminence of a British offensive in Palestine largely dispelled fears of Turkish reprisals. In the interval, Jabotinsky had persuaded Lord Derby, the war secretary, that Zionist and British interests would equally be served by a Jewish military unit entrenched in Palestine. In August, therefore, Lloyd George and Balfour officially confirmed the decision to establish a special Jewish infantry regiment, which would be assigned for combat exclusively on the Palestine front.

At this juncture the task of organizing the regiment's first unit, the Thirty-eighth Battalion of Royal Fusiliers, was given to Colonel John Patterson, former commander of the Zion Mule Corps. Patterson was an Irish Protestant. The millennial purpose he discerned in his special relationship with the Jews was not unlike Balfour's. "Indeed," he wrote later, "by many it is held that the British people are none other than some of the lost tribes; moreover, we have taken so much of Jewish national life for our own, [due] to our strong Biblical leanings, that the Jews can never feel while with us that they are among entire strangers." Predictably, the colonel's first recruits were some 120 veterans of the original Mule Corps. This time, too, with the active proselytizing efforts of Jabotinsky, who had volunteered as a private but later was promoted to lieutenant and Patterson's aide-de-camp, the unit's members were supplemented from the immigrant Jewry of London's East End. The volunteers—stunted, ill-nourished, ghetto-bred—were less than impressive fighting material at first. Yet basic training had its effect. When at last, in February 1918, the Thirty-eighth Royal Fusiliers marched with gleaming bayonets through the City of London and Whitechapel, even those who initially had opposed the Legion were consumed with joy and pride. The Lord Mayor took the unit's salute in front of the Mansion House.

The recruitment effort was not limited to England. Patterson and Jabotinsky ensured that circulars were distributed among Jewish communities in North and South America. The Balfour Declaration had been issued by then, the tsar had abdicated, the Labor Zionist parties no longer actively opposed the Legion, and in the United States and Canada volunteers soon began registering at British consular and recruitment offices. Among the first of 6,500 to enlist were Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi, whom Djemal Pasha had exiled from Palestine in 1915 and who had traveled halfway around the world to New York. They were sent on now with the others to basic training camp in Nova Scotia, and by August 1918 were on their way across the Atlantic as members of the Thirty-ninth and Fortieth battalions of the Royal Fusiliers. After further preparation in England, the troops were loaded on transports and escorted across the Mediterranean by Japanese destroyers. The initial vanguard of the Thirty-eighth Royal Fusiliers disembarked at Alexandria as early as March 1918 and received training outside Cairo.

Their arrival was hardly premature. During 1917 the circumstances of the Yishuv in Palestine had become critical. In late March of that year, with the British offensive anticipated at any time, Djemal Pasha ordered the evacuation of all remaining Jewish inhabitants of Jaffa and Tel Aviv. Even Jews who had applied for Ottoman citizenship earlier were suspect as potential traitors. Driven out of their lodgings, they crowded now onto wagons or donkeys and fled toward the Judean settlements for temporary shelter. Later the refugees were obliged to move even farther north, toward the Jewish farm colonies of Galilee. Employment and food were in desperately short supply well before this influx from the coast. The newcomers rapidly faced starvation. Many hundreds were compelled to forage for roots. Not a few Jewish girls remained alive by selling themselves to Turkish and German soldiers quartered in the Galilee.

It was in October 1917, too, that Allenby launched his invasion of Palestine. The initial phase of the campaign was successful beyond the general's highest expectations. Augmented by tens of thousands of Commonwealth troops, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force struck quickly into the interior of the country, overrunning Beersheba, capturing Jaffa on November 16, and finally taking Jerusalem three weeks later. On December 11, 1917, Allenby himself marched bareheaded into the historic capital to address a gathering of Moslem, Christian, and Jewish notables which had been convened on the steps of the Tower of David. "We have come," he declared, "not as conquerors, but as deliverers. It is our intention to open a new era of brotherhood and peace in the Holy Land." It was the anniversary of Chanukkah, commemorating the Maccabean triumph that had liberated ancient Palestine and opened a renewed era of Jewish national glory. Now, in December 1917, as menorah candles gleamed in Jerusalem and in Jewish homes throughout the world, observant Jews everywhere uttered prayers of gratitude for an astonishing coincidence.

The rejoicing was premature. With the winter rains, Allenby's campaign stalled, and Jews in northern Palestine remained hostages under Turkish military rule. Their last remnants of security were gone by then, for Ottoman troops began indiscriminately confiscating Jewish farms, and army deserters by the thousands ran amok, terrorizing Jewish settlements, looting property, even killing. It was during this final rictus of

Turkish occupation in Palestine that the Yishuv endured its worst torment. By the time the British resumed their offensive in the spring, and ultimately overran the last of the enemy's forces in September 1918, the Jewish population had been reduced from its prewar figure of 85,000 to less than 55,000. Of those lost, between 8,000 and 10,000 had perished of hunger, illness, or exposure.

The Jewish Legion shared in the 1918 campaign. The moment its troops set foot in the Holy Land, Jabotinsky urgently set about recruiting younger Palestinian Jews who had escaped the exodus or the Turkish press gangs. Only a few hundred of these survivors were fit for action, but they were among the Legion's most enthusiastic members. In the spring of 1918 the Jewish units initially were assigned to patrol the Jordan Valley against a threatened Turkish counterattack. Later, after repeated appeals by Patterson, the Legion was permitted to join Allenby's climactic autumn offensive. At this point, its ranks numbered 5,000, a sixth of the British army of occupation, and half the size of Feisal's Arab irregulars at their median strength in 1918. It was distinctly more than a token or symbolic force. In truth, its role in the conquest of Palestine eventually signified as much as the ordeal of the early Zionist pioneers, and hardly less than the Balfour Declaration itself, in reinforcing the Jews' claims to their national home. Once achieved under British patronage and the flag of liberation, that armed, self-proclaimed, and militant Jewish bridgehead would not easily be foreclosed.



