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At midnight on 14 May 1948, the British high commissioner for Palestine left Palestine with all his staff, and twenty-eight years of British responsibility for Palestine came to an end. The story began with the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 followed in April 1920 by the San Remo conference's entrusting of Britain with the Mandate for Palestine, so that it would be administered according to the terms of the Balfour Declaration and prepared for self-government. The way in which the mandate was established left a terrible blot on Britain's entire record as the great power responsible for governing the country. And there was, to say the least, something unusual about the way in which Britain retreated from the mandate. As Rees Williams, undersecretary of state for the colonies, told the House of Commons: "On the 14th May, 1949, the withdrawal of the British Administration took place without handing over to a responsible authority any of the assets, property or liabilities of the Mandatory Power. The manner in which the withdrawal took place is unprecedented in the history of our Empire."[1]

What were the reasons behind the inexcusably abrupt and reckless fashion in which the British government chose to divest itself of the

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Mandate for Palestine? Very different answers are given to this question by the two nations most directly affected by the British decision. On the Jewish side the predominant view is that Britain departed with full knowledge that the surrounding Arab countries would immediately attack and in the expectation that the Jewish population of Palestine would be massacred or driven into the sea. Zionist historiography is riddled with suspicions of dark plots hatched during the twilight of British rule in Palestine. A typical example is Jon Kimche's claim that the Foreign Office, the chiefs of staff, and the Palestine administration wanted to see the physical destruction of the Jewish national home and encouraged the Arabs to carry it out: "These men were determined, if the British had to leave Palestine, to put no obstacles in the way of the Arabs driving the Jews into the sea."[2] Richard Crossman lent his authority to this Zionist charge and explained the Labor government's Palestine policy largely in terms of the allegedly anti-Jewish bias of its foreign secretary:

> Once it has been decided . . . to end the mandate, Bevin's aim, apparently, was to ensure that Abdullah's Arab Legion should over-run most of Palestine, leaving a rump Jewish state, so weak that it would throw itself at the mercy of the British Government.[3]

The Palestine Arabs, on the other hand, believed that Britain's sympathies lay with the Zionists and saw the creation of the state of Israel as the culmination of the process that had begun with the Balfour Declaration. Particularly sinister in the eyes of the Palestinians was the combination of the United Nations partition resolution of 29 November 1947 and the British withdrawal six months later. As Walid Khalidi pointed out:

> Since the UN had not provided for an international force to implement its resolution, the British decision to withdraw was an invitation to both sides to fight it out. Given the balance of power inside Palestine, which was crushingly in favour of the Zionists—a fact of which all parties were well aware—the British withdrawal was an open invitation for a Zionist military take-over of the country.

Moreover, British presence in the remaining six months of the mandate "acted virtually as a shield against external Arab help behind which the Zionist military forces could conduct their business." Another feature of the British withdrawal plan, according to Khalidi, played into Zionist hands, as it was expected to do: "the pattern of British withdrawal, even when it affected the areas of Arab concentration, merely *increased* the fragmentation

of the Arab scene while it furthered the cumulative consolidation and extension of Jewish power."[4]

On 14 May 1948, the last day of the mandate, the chief secretary of the British administration called a press conference in his office in Jerusalem. After listening to Sir Henry Gurney's account of the achievements of His Majesty's government in the country and the unhappy circumstances that led to the termination of the mandate, one of the assembled journalists asked: "And to whom do you intend to give the keys to your office?" "I shall leave them under the mat," was the chief secretary's reply—"a fitting epitaph," says Khalidi, "to perhaps the shabbiest regime in British colonial history."[5]

The Zionist and the Palestinian versions of Britain's policy during the final phase of the mandate are clearly poles apart. What they have in common is the assumption that the manner in which Britain chose to terminate the mandate inevitably led to an armed clash between the local parties. But whereas the Zionists believed that the British were bent on their destruction, the Palestinians were no less convinced that the British were behind the Zionist drive to capture most of Palestine and turn it into a Jewish state. Another feature which these two conflicting versions have in common is that they cannot be sustained in the face of the official British documents that have been declassified under the thirty-year rule. It is not that the truth lies somewhere between these two extreme points of view. Nor is falling between two stools proof of impartiality, as British officials are wont to claim. Rather, as will be argued here, the motives and aims of Britain's policymakers in 1948 were utterly different from those attributed to them in either Zionist or Palestinian historiography. The truth of the matter is that in 1948 Britain did not pursue either an anti-Zionist policy or an anti-Arab policy but a pro-British one. The controlling consideration behind British policy was how to limit the damage to the interests of the British Empire that was bound to result from relinquishing direct control over Palestine. In other words, Britain's policy during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war was essentially an exercise in damage control.

In the Middle East as a whole there were vital strategic and economic interests at stake. As Ernest Bevin put it in one of his many papers to the cabinet: "In peace and war the Middle East is an area of cardinal importance to the United Kingdom, second only to the United Kingdom itself. Strategically the Middle East is a focal point of communications, a source of oil, a shield of Africa and the Indian Ocean, and an irreplaceable offensive base."[6] The retention of Britain's position and influence in the Middle East was considered by the chiefs of staff in January 1947 as one of the three vital props of their entire defense structure, alongside the

protection of the United Kingdom itself and the maintenance of sea communications. Palestine was of crucial importance in this general scheme of imperial defense. It was deemed essential to hold it as a screen for the defense of Egypt, which would have been Britain's key position in the Middle East in time of war. In peace, since Britain had undertaken to withdraw from Egypt, it was imperative to be able to use Palestine as a base for the mobile reserve of troops kept to meet emergencies throughout the Middle East. The chiefs of staff did not express preference for any of the political solutions under consideration, except to point out that if one of the two communities had to be antagonized then, from the strictly military angle, it was preferable that a solution be found that did not involve the continuing hostility of the Arabs; for in that event Britain's difficulties would not have been confined to Palestine but would have extended throughout the Middle East and the Islamic world.[7]

While everybody was agreed upon the need to retain Britain's paramount position in the Middle East, very different solutions were canvassed with regard to the future of Palestine. Prime Minister Clement Attlee was of the opinion that the sensible course was simply to relinquish the mandate and leave Palestine. Like Churchill at the end of the war, he wanted to rid Britain of the costly, painful, and thankless task of maintaining law and order in Palestine. Attlee thought that the chiefs of staff exaggerated the importance of Palestine as a link in the defenses of the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal and in safeguarding Britain's oil supplies. He also profoundly disagreed with the contention of Chief of the Imperial Staff Field-Marshal Montgomery that Pax Britannica could be maintained in Palestine by British bayonets. To a much greater extent than Bevin, Attlee recognized that the diminution of British power made it necessary to cut their losses in Palestine, as they had done in India.

The other possible course would have been to accept the principle of partitioning Palestine into two independent states, one Jewish and one Arab. This course enjoyed considerable support in the cabinet and the Labor party and was favored by the Colonial Office and the last high commissioner for Palestine, Sir Alan Cunningham. It was also the solution that was eventually endorsed by the United Nations in November 1947 and accepted with alacrity by the Zionists.

Bevin, however, was opposed to partition, believing that it would run counter to Britain's wider international aim of containing Soviet expansion without settling the local dispute between Arabs and Jews. Like the chiefs of staff, Bevin considered the retention of Arab goodwill essential if Britain was to be able to protect the eastern approaches to the Mediterranean

against the threat of Soviet expansion. And like most of his political advisers at the Foreign Office, he tended to assume that a Jewish state in this part of the world would be inimical to British interests because it would eventually become communist, a breeding ground for the spread of communism in the region, and an instrument in furthering Moscow's subversive designs. Just before the UN pronounced its verdict in favor of partition, Bevin confided his fears in a highly revealing personal letter to Minister of State Hector McNeil:

> I was not surprised when the Russians supported partition. . . . There are two things operating in the Russian mind. First of all, Palestine. I am sure they are convinced that by immigration they can pour in sufficient indoctrinated Jews to turn it into a Communist state in a very short time. The New York Jews have been doing their work for them.
>
> Secondly, I shall not be surprised if Russia, to consolidate her position in Eastern Europe, does not break up all her satellite States into smaller provinces, reaching down to the Adriatic. Thus partition would suit them as a principle. . . . You must study very carefully Stalin's work on nationalities to realise how his mind works, and then you will learn that he would have no compunction at all in exploiting these nationalities to achieve his object by means of a whole series which Russia could control.[8]

Partition was only accepted by Bevin reluctantly, as a second best, a desperate remedy, after the failure of the "Bevin plan" for self-governing institutions. The Arab rejection of his plan in February 1947 was for Bevin "the decisive turning-point," in the words of his principal adviser on Palestine. Even then Bevin never accepted the case for creating a separate Palestinian Arab state. Time and again he returned to the idea that, if Palestine was partitioned, the Arab area could not be left to stand on its own but should be united with Transjordan.[9]

British hostility to the leader of the Palestinian Arabs, Mufti al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, and resistance to the idea of an independent Palestinian state under his leadership, were constant and important features of British policy during the period 1947–49. The reasons for this hostility were elaborated by B. A. B. Burrows, the head of the Eastern Department, during the 1948 war. A separate Arab state under the mufti, wrote Burrows, "would be a hotbed of ineffectual Arab fanaticism and after causing maximum disturbance to our relations with the Arabs would very likely fall in the end under Jewish influence and be finally absorbed in the Jewish state, thereby increasing the area of possible Russian influence and excluding the possibility of our obtaining strategic requirements in any part of Palestine."[10]

Britain steadily resisted the attempt by the United Nations to partition Palestine into two independent states. The key to British policy during the last few months of the mandate and the war that followed may be summed up in two words: greater Transjordan.[11] Instead of facilitating the establishment of two new states, Britain preferred to incorporate in Transjordan the area that had not been allotted to the Jewish state. Some of the Arabists in the Foreign Office felt that Egypt should be the mainstay of Britain's position in the Middle East and warned that by siding openly with King 'Abdallah, who was suspected and disliked in Arab circles, Britain would end up by exacerbating the resentment of the other Arab states both against 'Abdallah and against itself. Nevertheless, in the absence of a more promising alternative, Bevin began to encourage King 'Abdallah to carry out his plan of incorporating into his kingdom as much as possible of the territory allocated to the Arabs in the UN partition resolution.[12]

King 'Abdallah, nicknamed "Mr. Bevin's little King" by the officials at the Foreign Office, now assumed the kind of importance within the framework of British strategy in the Middle East that had always been denied him in the past. On Saturday, 7 February 1948, 'Abdallah's prime minister, Tawfiq Abu al-Huda, accompanied by Sir John Bagot Glubb, the renowned British commander of the British-trained and British-financed Arab Legion, paid a secret visit to Bevin at the Foreign Office to discuss Palestine. Abu al-Huda outlined the plan to send the Arab Legion across the Jordan when the mandate ended and to occupy that part of Palestine awarded by the UN to the Arabs that was contiguous with the frontier of Transjordan. When Glubb finished translating, Bevin said, "It seems the obvious thing to do," and then repeated, "It seems the obvious thing to do, but do not go and invade the areas allotted to the Jews."[13] The keystone of British policy swung into place. Up to the meeting with Abu al-Huda, Britain had declined to enforce the UN partition plan but had not firmly settled on an alternative strategy. From now on Britain worked in close cooperation with King 'Abdallah to secure the expansion of his kingdom over most of Arab Palestine.

The theory that Bevin conspired to use the Arab Legion to reduce the Jewish part of Palestine to a "rump state" that would in desperation be forced to appeal to Britain to return on her own terms, finds no support in British records. On the contrary, he repeatedly warned Abu al-Huda and his royal master against any thought of crossing the borders of the Jewish state. If Bevin was guilty of conspiring to unleash the Arab Legion, it was not in order to reduce the Jewish state to an unviable enclave along the coast but to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state. But since the

Palestine Arabs had done so little to prepare the way for a state of their own, it is at least possible to argue in defense of Bevin, as one of his lieutenants later did, that what he had done was to salvage what could be salvaged from "the dismal wreck of Arab Palestine."[14]

The fall of Haifa on 22 April was a setback to the British strategy of preventing a Zionist military takeover of Palestine before the expiration of the mandate. It also accelerated the mass exodus of the Arabs of Palestine that had been set in motion by the massacre of Dayr Yasin. Bevin's charge that he had been "let down by the Army" led to bitter recriminations between him and Field-Marshal Montgomery.[15] To Arthur Creech-Jones, the colonial secretary, Bevin confided that although he had always assumed that the Jews might win the first battles, he now feared that the fighting would spread and intensify: "The real bloodshed might not come for some time but I felt pretty certain that it would come and would create a very dangerous situation."[16] With the Haganah going from strength to strength, just as the British forces were preparing for the final withdrawal from Palestine, one danger was that the Jews would invade Transjordan, to which Britain was bound by a treaty of alliance. If Transjordan suffered a defeat at the hands of the Jews, Britain's prestige in the Middle East would have been destroyed, with calamitous consequences for the British Empire.[17]

A defeat of Britain's ally was unacceptable for strategic as well as political reasons. A private directive from the chiefs of staff to the British members of the Anglo-Transjordan Joint Defense Board described Transjordan as being of considerable importance to British strategy in the Middle East for the following reasons:

a) it lay astride one of the main lines of approach from the Caucasus and the Caspian to the Suez Canal and the Delta;
b) it covered the direct route from the head of the Gulf to Aqaba and thence to the Suez Canal and Delta;
c) it flanked the possible British defensive position across Palestine;
d) it was potentially an area in which forward air bases could be established;
e) the Arab Legion was the only properly organized, trained, and equipped force in the Middle East.[18]

The commander of the Arab Legion fully shared the apprehensions of the experts in Whitehall on the eve of the Arab-Israeli war. In an effort to avert a head-on collision between his tiny force and the Haganah, Glubb Pasha sent one of his senior British officers, Colonel Desmond Goldie, on

a highly secret as well as dangerous mission to liaise with the Haganah. At the meeting with General Shlomo Shamir, only two weeks before the end of the mandate, Goldie explained that the British did not want to clash with the Haganah; however they could not afford to appear to be blocking and betraying the Arab cause, and he proposed to establish a regular channel of communication to enable the two armies to coordinate military plans.[19] According to Colonel Goldie, Glubb's prime concern was to protect the Arab Legion; "He did not want his little army to get a bloody nose." But in approaching the Haganah, he was also carrying out his duty as a British servant. He had to do what Sir Alec Kirkbride, the ambassador to Amman, told him, "because Kirkbride was the chap who was getting the policy from the British government."[20]

The British government also communicated its peaceful intentions to the Jews at the political level. Arthur Creech-Jones, whose sympathies were known to lie with the moderate Zionists, told Moshe Sharett, the foreign minister designate of the Jewish state, on 1 May at Lake Success that he knew that the Jews thought the British were full of sinister designs and were inciting the Arab states to swoop down on the Jews after the termination of the mandate, but he wanted to assure Sharett that they had in mind nothing of the sort; on the contrary, they were exerting their influence in Arab capitals to the utmost to prevent anything of that kind happening. Creech-Jones stated that he and his colleagues, including Bevin, were anxious to localize the trouble and prevent it from spreading into a major conflagration. That was why they were trying to keep the Arab states out of the fray. As for 'Abdallah and the Arab Legion, the colonial secretary was sure that despite his belligerent rhetoric, he actually intended to get hold of only the Arab part of Palestine, and it was not part of his design to attack the Jews.[21]

A more specific assurance regarding the limited objectives of the Arab Legion was given by Hector McNeil to Dr. Nahum Goldmann at the Foreign Office on 11 May. McNeil stated that he was convinced that 'Abdallah would not attack the Jews and, if he did, Britain would withdraw all its officers who were serving in the Arab Legion. McNeil thought that if 'Abdallah stopped at the border, or returned to the border after some token forays, there would be a possibility of a truce between the Jews and 'Abdallah. The principal objective, said McNeil, was to work out an arrangement which would permit Britain to develop relations with both sides.[22]

Not only in words but also in deeds, most notably by trying to arrange a truce for Jerusalem, Britain showed that she agreed to a Jewish state and

that she was doing her best to curb Arab militancy. Bevin was not only resigned to the establishment of a Jewish state but took steps to ensure that it would not be attacked by Transjordan. He attached great importance to the report from Kirkbride about the recent contacts between the Arab Legion and the Haganah whose objective was "to define the areas of Palestine to be occupied by the two forces." The mounting pressure to end Britain's subsidy to the Arab Legion and to withdraw the British officers who served with the Legion, were resisted by Bevin. "I am reluctant to do anything," he wrote to the minister of defense, "which might prejudice the success of these negotiations which appear to aim at avoiding actual hostilities between the Arabs and the Jews. Since their conduct, and no doubt also their implementation, seem to depend to a considerable extent on British officers serving with the Arab Legion, I feel we ought not to withdraw the latter prematurely."[23] Bevin's motives for deciding to keep the British officers at their posts and allowing them to accompany their units into the Arab parts of Palestine were thus the exact reverse of the motives attributed to him by his Zionist and pro-Zionist detractors. It was not in order to lead the Transjordanian forces into battle that Bevin needed the British officers but in order to restrain them and, more particularly, in order to reach and enforce an accord with the Haganah. If there was no follow-up to Colonel Goldie's approach to the Haganah, it was not due to lack of interest on the part of Bevin or Glubb but to ineptitude or indifference on the part of the Haganah.

Glubb for his part left none of his troops in Palestine, except in those areas allotted to the Arabs by the United Nations. He even refused to make any serious preparations for the defense of Jerusalem, for which an international regime was envisaged in the UN plan. Colonel 'Abdallah al-Tall's impassioned appeals fell on deaf ears; Glubb refused to leave even one company to help the Palestinian irregulars defend the city against Jewish attacks. It should therefore come as no surprise that Arab nationalists like Colonel al-Tall or General Salih Sa'ib al-Juburi, the chief of staff of the Iraqi army, saw the Arab Legion as "a British division stationed in the heart of the Arab world" and Glubb not as *A Soldier with the Arabs*, as he modestly described himself in the title of his book, but as an imperial proconsul who was foisted on the Arabs from above to enforce London's scheme of partitioning Palestine and giving one-half to the Jews and the other half to Britain's client, King 'Abdallah.[24]

Whereas Palestinian and Arab nationalist suspicions that Britain's design was to enforce a partition favorable to Transjordan were justified, the Zionist suspicions of Britain were groundless. Zionist leaders, and Ben-

Gurion in particular, persisted in misreading and misrepresenting British intentions. They believed that there was a British plot against the Jews, that 'Abdallah was a mere tool in Britain's hands, and that even if he wanted to come to terms with them, his British masters would not let him. All the signals pointing to Britain's acceptance of partition and support for military coordination between Transjordan and the Jews were not sufficient to overcome Ben-Gurion's suspicions or allay his fears. In view of the poisoned relations between the mandatory power and the Jewish community it is possible to understand these suspicions. Nevertheless, as one senior Zionist official conceded with hindsight:

> There is a misrepresentation in Zionist historiography concerning the intentions of the British between November 1947 and May 1948. The claim that the British wanted to stay in Palestine and hoped that the Jews would be beaten, and beg Britain on their knees to stay, is without foundation. They did not want to stay; they wanted to rid themselves of the whole Palestine affair. It is not that they greeted partition with joy or wanted a Jewish state. All of them, even Attlee, thought that the Balfour Declaration had been a terrible mistake. Most of the officials here were anti-Jewish. But they did not try, nor was it their policy in principle, to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state by force. And it does not change the fact that the Zionist portrayal of their intentions is incorrect.[25]

In relation to Bevin there has been more than misunderstanding and mistrust in Zionist circles; there has been a campaign of vilification, exceptional in its ferocity, accusing him of inciting the Arab states to attack the Jews and of supplying them with arms specifically for that purpose. Bevin denied the charge with some vehemence, as well he might, since it was the opposite of what he had actually done. He usually based policy on long-term strategic considerations rather than emotions. In the summer of 1948, with the crisis in Berlin coming to a boil and threatening to plunge the Western allies into war with the Soviet Union, it would have been sheer madness on Bevin's part to provoke a general conflagration in the Middle East.[26]

At midnight on 14 May the British Mandate over Palestine expired and the state of Israel was proclaimed. The next day, following a decision by the Arab League, the regular armies of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Transjordan marched into Palestine. Britain had three principal levers for regulating the course of the subsequent Arab-Israeli war: its position as a permanent member of the Security Council, its position as the major arms supplier to the Arab states, and its indirect but highly effective control of the Arab Legion. By the end of the first week of fighting King 'Abdallah,

nominally the supreme commander of all the invading armies, had achieved most of his objectives by occupying the Arab areas of central Palestine. He strenuously resisted the attempts by his partners to invade the territory allotted to the Jewish state.[27] The main clash between the Arab Legion and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) occurred outside Israeli territory, in and around Jerusalem. Here it was the IDF's occupation of the Arab quarters of the city and the attempt to capture the Old City that compelled the Arab Legion to intervene in the fighting and culminated in the surrender of the Jewish Quarter inside the Old City to the Arab Legion on 28 May.

Britain then took the lead in calling for a cease-fire and in putting pressure on all the members of the Arab League to accept it. On 29 May the Security Council passed a British-sponsored resolution ordering a four-week cease-fire. The threat of sanctions induced the other Arab states to follow Transjordan's lead in accepting the cease-fire.

The first truce went into force on 11 June and was greeted by the Israelis like "dew from heaven." Long before that date the British government had started curbing arms supplies to Palestine. The Americans had imposed an arms embargo in December 1947 and kept it in force until the end of the Arab-Israeli war. Both the British and the Americans feared a repetition of the Spanish Civil War during which both sides were supplied with arms by different sets of outside powers.[28] Britain could not, therefore, renew the flow of arms to her Arab allies without running the risk that America would life her embargo on arms supplies to Israel. To avert the risk of a serious rift with America, whose support was so crucial in Europe and elsewhere, Britain placed a complete embargo on the supply of military material to Palestine and to all the Arab countries despite the fact that this embargo involved the suspension of important obligations arising out of her treaties with Egypt, Iraq, and Transjordan. For these three countries Britain was in fact the only source of military equipment. Yet, although Israel imported vast quantities of military hardware from the Eastern bloc, and particularly from Czechoslovakia, in blatant contravention of the UN-decreed cease-fire, and although these imports tipped the balance decisively in its favor, Britain strictly adhered to the policy of denying supplies to its allies until the end of the war.

In defiance of Britain's insistent advice, 'Abdallah's wishes, and military experts' warnings about depleted arsenals, the politicians of the Arab League, led by Egypt, decided to renew the fighting. During the second round of fighting, 8–18 July, all the Arab participants suffered major setbacks and lost more territory to the Israelis. Israel's position improved immeasurably as a result of the ten days of fighting. During this period the

IDF seized the initiative and retained it until the end of the war. The truce was re-established by the Security Council on 18 July, this time for an indefinite period. Britain supported the resolution and brought strong pressure to bear on the Arab states in order to secure their acquiescence. Hostilities ceased and were not in fact renewed until the middle of October. By supporting the American call for sanctions, however, and by threatening the Arabs with serious political and military consequences if they defied the Security Council, Britain presented itself as a convenient scapegoat for the frustrated Arab politicians. Britain had reversed its policy, it was claimed, and joined the U.S. and the Jews against the Arabs. The fact that the Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi armies had all suffered reverses was brushed aside; and as for the Arab Legion, which had shown itself to be superior to all of them, extremists claimed that such an army was of no value to an Arab state because its operations were controlled from London and not by its Arab chiefs.[29]

The line that the Arab Legion was being prevented from using its full strength against the Jews, both through the treachery of its British officers and the withholding of supplies by the British government, was propagated actively by the Syrian and Iraqi authorities and by 'Azzam Pasha, the secretary general of the Arab League. The Iraqi officers operating in Transjordan were particularly hostile to both the British and the Arab Legion, and they practically ceased to have any relations with the latter.[30] Some of the disaffected Iraqi officers began to talk about the need to clear out the old gang that served Britain's interests in Baghdad and Amman and averred that the principles involved in the Palestine question meant so much to them that they would throw in their lot with any major power willing to lend support to the Arab cause.[31]

In the general atmosphere of ill-will and recriminations that developed in the wake of the Arab military setbacks in Palestine, Sir Alec Kirkbride, the British ambassador to Amman and the real power behind the throne, could not help feeling that many Arab leaders would rejoice in the downfall of Transjordan. The Syrians regarded Transjordan as a potential danger to their regime and wanted to be able to point to the object lesson of the uselessness of depending on Britain and to the fact that Transjordan's long history of loyalty to Great Britain had counted for little in the end. Arguments about international obligations failed to counter the effects of such propaganda in the rest of the Arab world. "I have a growing feeling," warned Kirkbride, "that if a disaster overtakes Transjordan whilst we are withholding supplies and ammunition, we might as well abandon the present policy of building defensive alliances in the Middle East."[32]

In the first week in August talks were held in Amman between Iraqi ministers and King 'Abdallah on the subject of withdrawing the British officers and placing the two Hashemite armies under a unified command. It was rumored that the purpose of the talks was to break British control over the Arab Legion by replacing the British subsidy with an Iraqi subsidy and by requiring all the British officers of the Arab Legion to take long leaves or resign. The withdrawal of British personnel, it was said, would remove the brakes that had hitherto checked the effectiveness of the Arab Legion and enable that force to operate under Iraqi command, free from foreign interference. 'Abdallah, however, lost interest in the idea when it was made clear to him that Iraq was in no position to help Transjordan financially. The upshot of the discussions was that both sides adhered, in principle, to a unified operational command but decided that both armies would act as independent units. In short, the earlier arrangement, which left each force free to act as it saw fit, remained undisturbed.[33]

To clip Glubb's power, a new Ministry of Defense was formed, with executive authority concentrated in the hands of the minister, Fawzi al-Mulqi, and Glubb was granted a month's leave. From the British point of view the advantage of the new arrangement was that it made it more difficult for the Transjordanian government to avoid responsibility in the eyes of the Arab world for the actions of the Arab Legion.[34] On arrival in England Glubb delivered a letter from King 'Abdallah to Bevin. A gentle reminder of the foreign secretary's complicity in the Transjordanian design to partition Palestine was followed by the claim that behind the Jewish movement lay a wider Soviet design and a request for material assistance to help Transjordan resist Soviet expansion.[35]

During his month-long stay in Britain, Glubb did a good deal of lobbying on behalf of Transjordan in Whitehall. Part of his case was that the Transjordanian government had never intended to involve itself in any serious military operations and that it was fully aware from the start that partition was inevitable. It was the acceptance of partition and its loyalty to Britain that fed the suspicion and hatred of the politicians in other Arab countries. If the Arab Legion dissolved in Palestine as a result of the suspension of the British subsidy, Glubb forecast that 20,000 Arab soldiers of doubtful loyalty and discipline would invade Transjordan and total collapse into anarchy would ensue. The collapse of Transjordan would inflict irreparable damage on the policy of Anglo-Arab friendship and allow the Jews to get the whole of Palestine. On the other hand: "If we hang on a little longer, Trans-Jordan may receive a substantial increase in territory, which will make her a more valuable ally. If we abandon her now and she

collapses, the solution to the Palestine problem itself will be rendered more difficult."[36]

In another alarmist report Glubb dwelt on the danger of revolution and on the gains to Russia that might flow from the defeat of Britain's allies in Palestine. If the Jews broke the truce to capture the whole of Jerusalem and cut the road between Jerusalem and Transjordan east of the city, it would be the Iraqi army as well as the Arab Legion that would be cut off: "This will either mean a disorganized and demoralized retreat into Transjordan by 12,000 undisciplined Iraqi soldiers, which would mean very serious disorders in Transjordan, or else the Iraqi army would be surrounded and destroyed in Palestine, in which case a revolution would probably take place in Iraq, probably resulting in a republican regime allied to Russia." The Jews, said Glubb, were playing power politics as crudely as the Russians on a smaller scale. But since they depended entirely on trade and supplies from overseas and on funds from America, economic sanctions would be more quickly fatal to them than to the Arabs. Glubb recommended that the Security Council issue a warning against aggression; that the Transjordanian government be reassured that Britain would fulfill its treaty obligations in the event of Transjordanian territory being attacked; and that shipping of military supplies to the Arab Legion be resumed.[37]

The chiefs of staff, who had already been alerted by Kirkbride to the repercussions that a military reverse in Transjordan might have on Britain's position in the Middle East, were very receptive to Glubb's suggestions. They felt that it was not only the goodwill of the Arab states but of the whole Muslim world that was at stake. In their report to Minister of Defense A. V. Alexander, they pointed out that the treaty with Transjordan seemed to be unequivocal and that if Israel attacked Transjordan, Britain would be bound to be at war with the Jews. They suggested that a clear statement to this effect might forestall such an attack. They also emphasized the urgency of sending the necessary equipment and ammunition to RAF stations in Transjordan and Iraq. A more tentative suggestion made by the chiefs of staff was that Britain offer to guarantee the frontiers of the Arab states in general against Jewish aggression.[38]

Bevin was not prepared to go as far as the chiefs of staff because he also had to bear in mind Britain's obligations to the United Nations and her relations with the United States. To Glubb, who came to plead Transjordan's case, Bevin fulminated about the Arabs who rewarded his many attempts to assist them with abuse and ingratitude. He admitted, however, that the Transjordanians were not as bad as some of the others, and he promised to continue the subsidy to the Arab Legion and to keep

supplies ready in the Canal Zone in preparation for an emergency. He also sent a message to King 'Abdallah to assure him that "we continue to attach great importance to the existence and integrity of Transjordan, to the maintenance and development of our close relations with Transjordan and to the continued existence of the Arab Legion as an effective fighting force in close relations with the British Army."[39]

'Abdallah also became Britain's trump card in the search for a political settlement of the Palestine conflict in the summer of 1948. The UN mediator, Count Bernadotte, having presented a first set of suggestions that were rejected by both sides, was now more amenable to guidance from the great powers. And the advice he received from Britain firmly steered him in the direction of a "greater Transjordan" solution. The cabinet had been told by the minister of defense that such a solution would greatly ease the defense of the Commonwealth, and it was agreed to throw Britain's weight behind the mediator if he followed this advice. Bernadotte did, and although his second plan carried a "made in Sweden" tag, it was essentially an Anglo-American plan. It proposed the inclusion of the whole of Galilee in the Jewish state in exchange for the allocation of the Negev to the Arabs. This solution would have restored direct land communications between Egypt on the one hand and Transjordan and Iraq on the other. Given the presence of British bases and military links with the three Arab countries, it would have been of considerable strategic advantage to Britain. The British experts also argued that a Jewish wedge between Egypt and the Arab countries would facilitate Soviet encroachment and exploitation of Arab disillusionment with the West arising out of the Palestine fiasco. Conversely, Anglo-American containment of militant Zionism could also keep Arab irredentism at bay.[40]

Following a prearranged plan, Secretary of State Marshall declared the support of the U.S. government for the Bernadotte plan and recommended its adoption by the General Assembly "in its entirety." In his speech in the House of Commons, Bevin extolled the virtues of Bernadotte's proposals and explained why, in the opinion of His Majesty's government, the Arab parts of Palestine should be incorporated into Transjordan. The alternative solution of an independent Arab state was dismissed on the grounds that the Arab parts of Palestine being an "infertile area" could never form the basis of "a viable state" by themselves. In short, as Bevin had maintained from the beginning, union with Transjordan offered the only viable and secure future to Arab Palestine.[41]

Britain's efforts to persuade the General Assembly to endorse Bernadotte's plan, however, encountered not only the determined opposi-

tion of the Arabs and the Jews but also a sudden change in the American position from lining up behind the Bernadotte plan to championing the Israeli claim to the Negev. To rally the Jewish vote in his campaign for reelection, President Truman undertook not to support any modifications of the UN's original partition plan unless they were acceptable to Israel, thereby pulling the rug from underneath General Marshall and the State Department. Britain's elaborate diplomatic strategy for adding central Palestine and the Negev to Transjordan was thus defeated by Arab defiance, unexpectedly effective Jewish resistance, and the peculiarities of the American political system. Nothing was more calculated to outrage Bevin and his lieutenants than a unilateral move by President Truman over Palestine in pursuit of domestic electoral advantage. The Middle East experts at the Foreign Office had been savagely critical of the White House all along for its disregard for Arab rights and blatantly pro-Israeli stand. Sir John Troutbeck, the head of the British Middle East Office, to give one extreme example, held the Americans responsible for the creation of a gangster state headed by "an utterly unscrupulous set of leaders."[42] Bevin himself had spared no effort to develop a common approach with the Americans on Palestine because Anglo-American cooperation was the cornerstone of his entire foreign policy. On this occasion, however, he and all his colleagues, not for the first time, felt that they had been double-crossed by the American president.

In mid-October, in contravention of the truce, the Israelis launched an offensive against the Egyptian forces in order to take the Negev before the UN could decide that they could not have it. Substantial gains were made in the south and the Israelis resisted all the UN injunctions, mostly sponsored by Britain, to withdraw. In a second offensive at the end of the month the IDF ejected all Arab forces from the Galilee and in doing so finally defeated the plan for exchanging the Galilee for the Negev. In Whitehall the reaction to this new wave of Israeli military victories and expansion was one of utter dismay and alarm. The chiefs of staff had come to regard the Negev, or at least the southern half of it, as part of greater Transjordan. They had even considered the possibility of turning the Negev and Gaza, instead of Cyrenaica, into the main British military installation in the Middle East outside Egypt.[43] Now they were faced, not just with the defeat of the Egyptian army and the loss of a large slice of the Negev, but with the prospect that the Arab Legion would be next in the line of fire.

Bevin made clear to Marshall that Britain could not stand by and see the Arab Legion annihilated: if the Israeli forces attacked Transjordan proper, the Anglo-Transjordanian Treaty would immediately become operative.[44]

On 12 November the cabinet took precautions to ensure that treaty obligations to Transjordan could indeed be met in the event Transjordan was attacked. On the advice of the chiefs of staff, it ordered reinforcements and supplies to be sent by air to the RAF detachment at Amman and naval dispositions to ensure that Aqaba could be defended against attack. On the other hand, there was great reluctance to consider the dispatch of British troops to support the Transjordanian forces operating in Palestine. It was recalled that when it was decided to withdraw from Palestine, the general understanding had been that British troops would not again be called upon to operate there except as part of a United Nations force engaged in carrying out an international settlement, and it was felt that there should be no departure from that policy. The cabinet also considered the suggestion of encouraging direct talks between Transjordan and Israel as a means of securing a settlement but rejected it on the grounds that the difference in the military strength of the two sides precluded the possibility of equitable negotiations quite apart from the damage to the prestige of the United Nations.[45] The Americans were informed of the cabinet's decisions by Attlee, who also underlined the dangers of further Israeli advances and affirmed Britain's determination to uphold her treaty obligations to Transjordan because otherwise the whole British and perhaps Western position might be lost.[46]

Sir Orme Sargent, the permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office, even invoked the lessons of Munich when discussing with the American ambassador the prospects of direct negotiations. To enjoin negotiations, argued Sir Orme, would be tantamount to holding the ring and telling the contestants, between whom military equilibrium had been destroyed by the preponderance of Israeli arms, to thrash out their problems in their own way. He feared that another Munich would be in the making if the great powers were to ask Britain to tell 'Abdallah that if he refused to settle with Israel, the Anglo-Transjordan Treaty would no longer be operative. To sell 'Abdallah down the river for the sake of a spurious peace and easy conscience in Sir Orme's view would have been a reenactment of the Czech tragedy.[47] The Americans rejected this historical analogy which cast Israel in the unlikely role of Hitlerite Germany and Transjordan in that of Czechoslovakia. The Americans had no intention of putting pressure on Transjordan or turning her into the victim of a Near Eastern Munich. But they saw no reason why they and the British should not consult with the parties to try and bring about a meeting of the minds. In essence, the Israelis wanted direct negotiations and no Bernadotte plan while the British wanted

the Bernadotte plan and no negotiations between the parties. American policy was to try to bridge the gap between these two extreme positions.[48]

While the great powers deliberated, Israel acted. At the end of November Israeli forces that had been pushing eastwards and southwards from Beersheba set up a post between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea and sent patrols into Transjordanian territory. Britain protested at the Security Council and drew attention to her own treaty obligations in an effort to deter the Israelis. Meanwhile talks got under way between the Israeli and Transjordanian military commanders in Jerusalem, leading to the conclusion of "a complete and sincere cease-fire" for the city. Having effectively neutralized the Arab Legion by their threat to Aqaba and the conversations in Jerusalem, the Israelis resumed their buccaneering course on 22 December with a lightning offensive against the Egyptian army in the south that carried them across the Egyptian frontier to the outskirts of al-'Arish.

At this point Britain issued a strong threat of military intervention under the terms of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty (although the Egyptians had repudiated this treaty) unless Israel withdrew her troops from Egypt's territory. At the same time, an urgent message was sent to the American government informing it of the critical and potentially destabilizing situation and requesting its assistance in reigning in the Israelis. President Truman responded by sending Ben-Gurion a strongly-worded warning that fell just short of an ultimatum. Under this combined Anglo-American pressure, Ben-Gurion caved in and issued the order recalling the Israeli forces from al-'Arish. On 7 January 1949 the UN-decreed cease-fire went into effect, marking the formal end of the first Arab-Israeli war.[49]

A few hours before the cease-fire became effective, an incident took place which carried Britain to the verge of war with Israel. Bevin, assuming personal control of the situation, and without even informing the secretary of state for air, ordered a reconnaissance mission to check whether the Israeli troops had really pulled back across the international frontier. The mission ended in disaster. Five RAF Spitfires were shot down over Egyptian territory by Israeli aircraft and ground fire, though on Ben-Gurion's orders the remains of one were dragged to the Israeli side of the border in an attempt to prove that Israel had acted in self-defense against British provocations.

President Truman intervened to urge restraint by the British government and prevent the crisis from escalating into war. The government, and particularly Bevin, also came under strong attack in the media and in Parliament for taking perilous and needless risks in the Middle East. For a Labor government it was not easy to explain why Britain should get

involved in hostilities against the Jews in support of a dubious ally like Egypt. What must have been particularly galling to Bevin was that over this issue even the Conservative back-benchers, who had been the staunchest supporters of his foreign policy, came out against him. The government survived the vote of censure in Parliament, but some of Bevin's colleagues in the cabinet, led by Sir Stafford Cripps, Herbert Morrison, and Aneurin Bevan, remained critical of his handling of the affair. Bevin himself, shaken by the international and domestic consequences of his action, accepted a political defeat and agreed to de facto recognition of the state of Israel.[50]

The relations between Britain and Transjordan emerged unscathed from the crisis and controversy that marked the end of the Arab-Israeli war. The war had shown Transjordan to be Britain's only reliable ally in the Middle East and the Arab Legion the only competent army on the Arab side. "Mr. Bevin's little King" stood head and shoulders above the broken reeds who ruled the other Arab countries. By force of circumstances and in recognition of King 'Abdallah's loyalty, Britain based its policy in Palestine and in the Middle East generally on an enlarged Transjordan. "It is sometimes suggested," wrote Bernard Burrows to Sir Alec Kirkbride, "that we are putting all our eggs into one basket and leaning too heavily on one individual, and a very old one at that."[51] Kirkbride did not deny that they were using the Transjordan basket almost exclusively. "But what else are we to do," he asked rhetorically, "when the other baskets available seem to be unwilling to accommodate our eggs?"[52]

The grounds for supporting 'Abdallah during the Israeli offensive against Egypt went beyond his particular virtues and involved British interests that were perceived to be significant. Brigadier Clayton pointed out in an alarmist cable from the British Middle East Office in Cairo that the Jewish drive toward the Red Sea could deprive Britain of the means of giving Transjordan physical assistance from the Canal Zone even if the will was there.[53] Intensive contingency planning therefore got underway at the Ministry of Defense.[54] An Israeli presence on the Red Sea was regarded as a threat to the lines of communication between Egypt and Transjordan, which were not just an Arab interest but a British interest. In view of the Israeli invasion of Egypt, the defense committee decided on 3 January to carry out the cabinet decisions of 12 November so as to put Britain in a position to go to Transjordan's rescue. Supplies and equipment were flown to Amman, and, after 'Abdallah requested British assistance under the treaty, a British force was sent to Aqabah to protect the port against possible threat from Israel.[55]

The real British aim throughout was to wrest the Negev from Israel. All British territorial solutions for the Palestine problem from the Peel Plan of 1937 onward had one feature in common: exclusion of the Jews from the Negev.[56] Since Britain could not control the Negev directly, it wanted to control it indirectly through one or more of its Arab allies. The trouble was that while the Negev was of strategic value to Britain, it was of little value to the Arabs. To 'Abdallah, the ruler of a desert kingdom, the arid Negev could only be of use if he were to have an outlet to the Mediterranean Sea at Gaza. If he could not get Gaza, he might have been content, as the British realized, to let the Israelis have the Negev and might indeed have seen advantage in having a wedge of neutral territory between him and Egypt. This was one of the reasons behind Britain's reluctance to encourage direct negotiations between 'Abdallah and Israel.[57]

Britain's reluctance to resume the supply of arms to Iraq is also explained, at least in part, by the fact that the Iraqi army operated in central Palestine where no direct British interests were involved. The contrast between the positive response to Transjordan's defense needs and the short shrift given to the Iraqis was very pronounced. In a blunt and ascerbic minute Sir Orme Sargent suggested that the best thing that the tiresome Iraqis could do was to go home:

> We must turn down at once the specious argument that "any attack on Iraqi forces in Palestine is in fact an attack on Iraqi territory." In no circumstances can we supply arms for the use of the Iraqi Army in Palestine nor indeed do we wish to do anything to encourage the Iraqi Army to remain in Palestine. The sooner they clear out and leave the whole of Central Palestine to Abdullah the better, for we don't want the Iraqis mixed up in any Arab/Jew negotiations. For this reason, while I am in favour of sending material to be held for the Iraqi Army at Amman, I would not send any at present to be held in Iraq itself.
>
> We naturally do not want the Iraqi Army to meet with a catastrophic defeat, for as we have repeatedly told the Americans, if the Arab Governments and Armies are entirely discredited and openly defeated, the existing regimes may well collapse, and be replaced by local dictators carried to power on a wave of anti-British and anti-American feeling, in which case these dictators would be practically forced to reinsure themselves with Russia.
>
> For this reason we ought, I am sure, to do all we can to persuade the Iraqi Government to withdraw its troops from Palestine before it is too late, and to discourage any wild ideas they may have of continuing the fight in Palestine.

Bevin simply wrote at the end of this minute: "I agree with Sargent."[58]

The war was lost and the forfeits had to be exacted. Britain, too, had to accommodate itself to the new reality of a strong and vibrant Jewish state, with effective control of the entire Negev and the capacity to defend all its

frontiers and even to threaten its Arab neighbors. In defense of his Palestine policy, Bevin submitted a paper to the cabinet on 15 January to which he attached a long historical memorandum. The key to Bevin's defense was that "we have not opposed the creation of a Jewish state and, by supporting the Bernadotte proposals, we have recognized that the existence of such a state was an accomplished fact. . . . We have sought a settlement including the existence of a Jewish state in which the Arabs could reasonably acquiesce and which they would not bend all their energies to undo."[59] This was undoubtedly the best possible construction that could be placed on Britain's Palestine policy, and one that overlooked the self-serving aspects of that policy. While the need for Britain to retain its paramount position in the Middle East was not questioned, its association with the reactionary Arab states was, notably by Aneurin Bevan, who represented the left wing of the Labor party. "We would have done better," argued Bevan, "to base our position in the Middle East on the friendship of the Jews, who would have been glad to give us all the facilities needed to establish strong military bases in Palestine." This suggestion that the Labor government had been misled by the military experts into backing the wrong horse was met with a counterargument which underlined the importance of the Commonwealth link with the Muslim world. Nevertheless, the cabinet decision to extend de facto recognition to the state of Israel represented the beginning of the process by which Britain accommodated itself to the new reality in the Middle East.[60]

The key factor in bringing about this adaptation, apart from inherent British pragmatism, was American support for Israel. The same demonstration of Israel's devastatingly effective military strength that gave rise to such deep British fears during the final phase of the Arab-Israeli war had the reverse effect on the other side of the Atlantic: it increased American admiration for Israel and underscored her value as a potential ally. Through their support for Israel, the Americans hoped to gain strategic advantages in the Middle East that would offset the effects of the decline of British power in the area.[61] So when Attlee and Bevin made a final attempt, just before the cabinet meeting, to get American support for a political settlement that would secure the overland route between Egypt and Transjordan by giving the Arabs control of the southern Negev, Truman's response was negative. The general view within his administration was that the British had backed the wrong horse and that the wisest course now would be not to curb and contain the Israelis but "to win them over into the Anglo-American camp and not alienate them permanently." Robert Lovett, the undersecretary of state who made this point, also added that "the state of Israel would be the

most dynamic, efficient and vigorous Government in the Near East in the future."[62]

Hector McNeil spelled out for his chief the implications of this new American policy and in particular the necessity for cutting British losses in Palestine and accommodating Israel on its own terms. Britain no longer had the means nor the military resources to command the whole Middle East by itself. Tempting as it might be to act unilaterally, Britain had to bear in mind the overriding importance of retaining American goodwill and American cooperation in the Middle East and in the rest of the world. "It is important even when the Jews are most wicked and the Americans most exasperating not to lose sight of this point." Exasperating as President Truman's habit of double-crossing Britain was, the fact remained that "as long as America is a major power and as long as she is free of major war, anyone taking on the Jews would be indirectly taking on America." Given Truman's refusal to cooperate in detaching the Negev from the Jewish state, the only alternative was for Britain to fight for the Negev itself. This, however, was not a real alternative because "Our public would not stand for it."[63] In short, Britain's traditional policy had led to a dead end and was no longer useful in the era that began in the Middle East after the guns fell silent.

Bevin could not easily be made to accept these unpalatable facts. Although he had always stressed the need for Anglo-American cooperation in Palestine and elsewhere, by cooperation he really meant uncritical American acceptance of the British point of view. And he was in a truculent mood after the events of the last week in 1948 and the first week of 1949. In a draft letter to the ambassador in Washington he wrote that the American attitude appeared to be not only "let there be an Israel and to hell with the consequences," but also "peace at any price and Jewish expansion whatever the consequences."[64]

But more moderate counsels prevailed on the British side. Bevin still maintained that the Russian chances of establishing influence in the Jewish state were considerable because of the strong international support that Russia had given, the dependence of Israel on arms supplies from the Eastern bloc, and the large number of Jews who flocked to the new state from Eastern Europe. But he recognized that there was a strong American influence pulling the other way and he made no attempt to frustrate America's efforts to draw Israel into closer relations with the West.[65]

The relations between Britain and the Arab states was also reassessed in light of their recent military and political record. The main conclusion was that Britain could not afford to abandon them because, for better or worse,

they were the mainstay of her influence in the Middle East. This conclusion was underscored by Sir Orme Sargent when he wrote, "We must in spite of all their shortcomings do what we can to maintain the present regimes in the Arab states since with their disappearance we should almost inevitably be faced with petty dictatorship which would be violently anti-British and be forced to re-insure themselves with Russia."[66] In the wake of the Palestine war, the radical, anti-Western current in Arab politics gained in strength and threatened to sweep from power the old regimes allied to France and to Britain. Whether deliberately or inadvertently, Israel had an acutely destabilizing influence on the region, and this forced Britain to redouble its efforts to shore up the old order and look for a new framework, outside the bankrupt Arab League, for defense against internal subversion and Soviet encroachment.[67]

The British not only resigned themselves to the emergence of a Jewish state as a permanent feature on the Middle East landscape but also urged their Arab allies to face up to the new reality. Having rejected the 1947 partition resolution and having waged an unsuccessful war to prevent it, most Arab leaders now wanted that plan to serve as the basis for the post-war territorial settlement. Iraq manifested this tendency to try to turn the clock back to a greater extent than the other Arab states when armistice negotiations under United Nations auspices got under way in Rhodes in January 1949, and the British did their best to discourage the Iraqis.[68] In the end the Iraqis stayed away while Egypt, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Syria negotiated and signed armistice agreements with Israel. Britain hoped to gain two things from these negotiations: an end to military hostilities in Palestine and the allocation of the lion's share of Arab Palestine to Transjordan.

In early March 1949, while the armistice talks were in progress, two Israeli brigades began to move south toward Eilat, one from Beersheba and the other along the border with Transjordan, in order to secure Israel's hold over the southern Negev and outlet to the Red Sea. Britain sent a note of protest to the Israeli government only to be told that the troop movement had taken place inside Israeli territory and that the Transjordan government had no *locus standi* whatever in this area of the Negev triangle.[69] The British reinforced their garrison in Aqabah but took no action to stop the Israeli occupation of the Negev. In a personal message to Kirkbride, Bevin wrote that he might feel that they had not reacted strongly enough to this latest Israeli aggression but that nothing short of an actual British intervention in force inside Palestine could have stopped the Israelis from reaching the Gulf of Aqabah and they could not have carried the

Americans, the Commonwealth, or the country with them in such a move.[70]

Many Israeli politicians and pro-Israeli writers persist in believing that some Arab states, and notably Transjordan, were willing to make peace with them in 1949 but were discouraged from doing so by Britain. British policymakers, it is argued, were afraid that an Arab-Israeli peace might lead the Arab states to be less pro-Western and they therefore urged Arab leaders not to make peace. Some writers go further in claiming that British policymakers played on the Arab-Israeli rivalry to advance British military and economic interests from Suez to the Gulf.[71]

The official documents, however, reveal no opposition in principle to the direct talks between 'Abdallah and Israel but only a concern to ensure that any agreement between them took account of Britain's interests as the preeminent power in the region. Moreover, the British feared that Israel would exploit its military superiority and the vulnerability of the Arab Legion to dictate its terms to 'Abdallah and that is indeed what happened in the armistice negotiations. It is true that when the negotiations started Britain still hoped to exclude the Israelis from the Negev by political means and to attach all or part of it to 'Abdallah's kingdom, preferably with Egypt's agreement. But as we have seen, by mid-March the British government had, for all intents and purposes, given up that hope. The threat of an Israeli attack on the Arab Legion did not disappear with the signing of the armistice agreement between Israel and Transjordan on 3 April. Yet, Britain steadfastly refused to supply arms to the Arab Legion in contravention of the Security Council resolution of 29 May 1948 and declined Transjordan's requests to extend the application of the Anglo-Transjordan Treaty to the areas occupied by Transjordan in central Palestine. The fact was that Britain did not have the capability on the ground to back Transjordan in a major military confrontation with Israel even if the political will had been there. In any case, by this time Britain had lost the will to fight and accordingly made no attempt to obstruct 'Abdallah's quest for a peace settlement with Israel. The claim that Britain blocked Arab-Israeli peace in 1948 is thus only slightly less unjustified than the claim that it had deliberately instigated the war in 1948.

By May 1949 a distinct change had taken place in British policy, heralding a gradual improvement in Anglo-Israeli relations. There were several reasons for the change. First was the risk of involvement in military hostilities with Israel under the terms of the Anglo-Transjordan Treaty. To eliminate, or at least reduce, this risk Britain gave its qualified endorsement to the peace talks between 'Abdallah and Israel. Second, free of the

entanglement with the Jewish national home promised by Lord Balfour, the British were anxious to consolidate their position in the Arab world—a position that in the aftermath of the Palestine war was in urgent need of reinforcement. They wanted to take advantage of their disengagement from Palestine to concentrate on cultivating their own political, economic, and strategic interests. Third, since Israel had emerged as the strongest military force in the Middle East, the British concluded that Israel's cooperation would be necessary in order to contain Soviet advances in the area.

The new policy was explained by Bevin in a long letter to British representatives in Arab capitals. "Our general objective must be," he wrote, "to have cordial and intimate relations with all the States of the Middle East, including the Arab States and Israel, to see them formally joined to the Western group of States opposed to Soviet aggression and infiltration and co-operating among themselves so as to promote stability and prosperity of the Middle East as a whole."[72]

Britain's relations with Israel continued to improve in the aftermath of the first Arab-Israeli war while Britain's relations with Egypt—formerly the linchpin of the British Empire in the Middle East—gradually deteriorated. Six years later Britain participated, not in a purported plot with the Arabs against the Jews, but in a real war—with Israel against Egypt. The wheel of British policy had turned full circle.

1. House of Commons, 24 February 1949.
2. Jon Kimche, *Seven Fallen Pillars* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1950), 190.
3. Richard Crossman in the *New Statesman*, 23 July 1960.
4. Walid Khalidi, ed., *From Haven to Conquest* (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1971), Introduction, lxxv–lxxvi.
5. *Ibid.*, lxxxiii.
6. "Middle East Policy," CP (49) 183, 25 August 1949.
7. C.M. (47) 6th conclusion, minute 3, confidential annex, 15 January 1947.
8. 15 October 1947, FO 800/509, quoted by Wm. Roger Louis in Wm. Roger Louis and Robert W. Stookey, eds., *The End of the Palestine Mandate* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1986), 23. Bevin asked McNeil to burn this letter after reading it but the carbon copy survived.
9. Sir Harold Beeley, "Ernest Bevin and Palestine" (unpublished text of the George Antonius lecture, St. Antony's College, Oxford, 14 June 1983), 6 and 9.
10. Muhammad Amin al-Husayni, *Haqa'iq 'an Qadiyyat Filastin* [The Truth About the Palestine Question] (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1957), 65–66, 73–76, and

163–65; Walid Khalidi, "The Arab Perspective," in Louis and Stookey, *The End of the Palestine Mandate*, 112; and minute by B. A. B. Burrows, 17 August 1948, FO 371/68822.

11. This is the main thesis developed in Ilan Pappé, *British Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East 1948–1951: Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (D.Phil. thesis: Oxford University, 1984).
12. FO to Amman, 11 January 1948, FO 371/62226; and Beeley, "Bevin and Palestine," 12.
13. Sir John Bagot Glubb, *A Soldier with the Arabs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957), 63–66; Bevin to Kirkbride, 9 February 1948, FO 371/688366; and Sir Alec Kirkbride, *From the Wings: Amman Memoirs, 1947–1951* (London: Frank Cass, 1976), 11–12.
14. Michael Wright to Ronald Campbell, 30 March 1949, FO 371/75064.
15. Louis in Louis and Stookey, *The End of the Palestine Mandate*, 25, and *The Memoirs of Field-Marshall Montgomery of Alamein* (London: Collins, 1958), 473–75.
16. Bevin to Creech-Jones, 22 April 1948, Papers of Arthur Creech-Jones, Rhodes House, Oxford.
17. Harold Beeley to Bernard Burrows, 30 April 1948, FO 371/68554.
18. Draft dated 19 April 1948, FO 371/68821.
19. Report on a meeting with representatives of the Arab Legion, 3 May 1948, 2413/2, Israel State Archives (ISA), Jerusalem; *David Ben-Gurion's Diary*, 2 May 1948, The Ben-Gurion Archive, Sde Boker; and Kirkbride to FO, 8 May 1948, FO 371/68852.
20. Interview with Colonel Desmond Goldie, Wallingford, 11 November 1985.
21. *Political and Diplomatic Documents, December 1947–May 1948* (Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 1979), 712–13 and 755–69.
22. *Ibid.*, 780–81.
23. Bevin to the secretary of defense, 13 May 1948, FO 800/477.
24. 'Abdallah al-Tall, *Karithat Filastin* [The Palestine Tragedy] (Cairo: Dar al-Qalam, 1959), 35–36; and Salih Sa'ib al-Jubury, *Mihnat Filastin wa-Asraruha al-Siyasiyyah w-al-'Askariyyah* [The Palestine Misfortune and its Political and Military Secrets] (Beirut: Dar al-Kulub, 1970), especially 170–78, 234–35, 274–75, and 281–83.
25. Interview with Gershon Avner, Jerusalem, 6 September 1983. Avner had served in the Political Department of the Jewish Agency and in 1948 became the head of the Western Europe Department in the Israeli Foreign Ministry.
26. Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945–1951* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 594; and Avi Shlaim, "Britain, the Berlin Blockade and the Cold War," *International Affairs* 60, no. 1, Winter 1983–84.
27. Kirkbride to FO, 22 May 1948, FO 371/68873; al-Tall, *Karithat Filastin*, 190–92; al-Jubury, *Mihnat Filastin*, 177–79; and Taha al-Hashimi, *Mudhakkirat, 1942–1955* [Memoirs, 1942–1955], vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1978), 221–24.
28. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948, vol. 5, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1976), 1047–50. (Henceforth this series will be referred to as FRUS.)
29. Brigadier Glubb, "The Trans-Jordan Situation," 12 August 1948, FO 371/68822.
30. Kirkbride to FO, 6 August 1948, FO 371/68830.
31. G. C. Littler, acting consul general, Basrah, to the chargé d'affaires, British Embassy, Baghdad, 26 August 1948, FO 371/68451.
32. Kirkbride to FO, 6 August 1948, FO 371/68830.
33. Kirkbride to Bevin, 24 August 1949, FO 371/68376.
34. Kirkbride to Bevin, 24 August 1948, FO 371/68832.
35. FO to Amman, 21 August 1948, FO 800/477.
36. Brigadier Glubb, "The Trans-Jordan Situation," 12 August 1948, FO 371/68822.
37. Note by Brigadier Glubb, 19 August 1948, FO 371/68822.
38. Copy of a minute dated 12 August 1948, to the minister of defense from the secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee, FO 371/68822; and A. V. Alexander to Ernest Bevin, 13 August 1948, FO 371/68830.
39. Kirkbride, *From the Wings*, 53; and Bevin to Kirkbride, 21 August 1948, FO 800/477.

40. "Historical Memorandum on the Situation in Palestine since 1945," 15 January 1949, CAB 129/32; Pappé, *British Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East*, 80–85; Beeley, "Bevin and Palestine," 12; and Louis in Louis and Stookey, *The End of the Palestine Mandate*, 26.
41. House of Commons, 22 September 1948, col. 899; and Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, 596.
42. Troutbeck to Bevin, 2 June 1948, FO 371/68559; and Louis in Louis and Stookey, *The End of the Palestine Mandate*, 26.
43. Burrows to Price (Ministry of Defense), 25 September 1948, FO 371/68860.
44. FRUS, 1948, vol. 5, 1520–22.
45. C.M. 71(48) 61st conclusion, 12 November 1948, CAB 128/13.
46. FRUS, 1948, vol. 5, 1585–89.
47. *Ibid.*, 1602–3.
48. *Ibid.*, 1621–23.
49. "Historical Memorandum on the Situation in Palestine Since 1945," C.P.(49)10, 15 January 1949, CAB 129/32; FRUS, 1948, vol. 5, 1699–1704; and Ben-Gurion's diary, 31 December 1948.
50. Minutes by J. G. S. Beith and Bernard Burrows, 3 February 1949, FO 371/75402; Ben-Gurion's diary, 7 and 8 January 1949; and Elizabeth Monroe's interview with Richard Crossman, 19 October 1958, Papers of Elizabeth Monroe, Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, Oxford.
51. Burrows to Kirkbride, 8 October 1948, FO 371/68364.
52. Kirkbride to Burrows, 21 October 1948, FO 371/68364. For a detailed study of the relations between Britain and 'Abdallah see Mary Christina Wilson, *King Abdullah of Jordan: A Political Biography* (D.Phil thesis, Oxford University, 1984).
53. Clayton to FO, 12 December 1948, FO 371/68601.
54. A. V. Alexander to Ernest Bevin, 21 December 1948, FO 371/68603.
55. DO(49) Minutes of 1st meeting, 3 January 1949.
56. "British Policy Towards Israel, November 1947–May 1949," 2412/26, ISA.
57. Sir H. Dow (Jerusalem) to FO, 21 December 1949, FO 371/68603.
58. Minute by O. G. Sargent, 4 January 1949, FO 371/75164.
59. "Palestine," Memorandum by the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 15 January 1949, C.P. (49)10, CAB 129/32.
60. C.M. 3(49), 16 January 1949.
61. Kenneth W. Condit, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, Vol. 2, 1947–1949 (Washington D.C.: Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1976), 108–9. Record Group 218, Records of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Archives, Washington D.C.
62. Oliver Franks to Bevin, 13 January 1949, FO 371/65334; Franks to Bevin, 13 January 1949, FO 371/75337; and Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, 651.
63. Minute by Hector McNeil, 14 January 1949, FO 371/75337.
64. Bevin to Franks (draft), 3 February 1949, FO 371/75337.
65. "Palestine," Memorandum by the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 15 January 1949, 1949 C.P. (49)10, CAB 129/32. On Anglo-American relations and Palestine see also Wm. Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), especially part IV, chapter 9.
66. Minute by O. G. Sargent, 17 January 1949, FO 371/75336.
67. Reuven Shiloah to Moshe Sharett, 7 August 1949, 2441/2, ISA.
68. FO to Baghdad, 10 February 1949, FO 371/75331.
69. Bevin to the British consulate general, Haifa, 9 March 1949 and Walter Eytan to C. H. A. Marriott (British Consulate General, Haifa), 11 March 1949, 2412/26, ISA.
70. Bevin to Kirkbride, 10 March 1949, FO 800/477.
71. *The Times*, 24 January 1983; and Jon Kimche, letter to *The Times*, 2 February 1983.
72. Bevin to Troutbeck, "Policy Towards Israel," 20 May 1949, FO 371/75056.