

*To the Cherished Memory of*  
*Yael Goodman Penkower (1945–2016)*

“Most blessed of women be Yael” (*Judges* 5:24)

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## 6. To the United Nations

The continuing deterioration of law and order in Palestine found the Colonial Civil and War Offices at loggerheads in the Defence Committee's meeting on New Year's Day 1947. Creech Jones cautioned that the adoption of more aggressive tactics against terrorism would upset the political balance, weaken the Jewish moderates, and make achieving a settlement more difficult. Montgomery, echoing Secretary of State for War A. V. Alexander, charged *per contra* that the country was "in the grip of lawlessness," and he called for mobile columns of troops to deal swiftly with outrages. The retention of Palestine was strategically essential to HMG's position in the Middle East, Bevin argued, a region without whose oil and other resources the British domestic standard of living they were aiming for could not be achieved. Moreover, he stressed, the government had to realize that any solution it was going to impose would be met with opposition from both Jews and Arabs. "To continue the present policy placed the Armed Forces in an impossible position," Attlee concluded. Alexander received a green light to prepare a revised directive, working in conjunction with Creech Jones and Cunningham, for submission to the committee and the Cabinet. Montgomery's draft two days later authorized the High Commissioner to take "all possible steps" by the police and the military against law breakers "to ensure that the initiative lies with the forces of the Crown."<sup>1</sup>

In Bevin's view, Great Britain's great economic difficulties necessitated a Palestine policy that favored the Arabs. Three weeks earlier, he and the Chiefs of Staff Committee had both advised Attlee that the 84,000 troops in Egypt had to be completely evacuated by September 1949, with General Headquarters moved to the Canal Zone as soon as possible. "Nothing to bargain with—no credits, coal or goods," his memorandum to the Cabinet read on January 1, and Anglo-American negotiations were pending as to British sterling balances. The Mediterranean

problem would have been easier, he asserted, if HMG had claimed Cyrenaica by conquest “and let Egypt and Palestine go.” One hope lay in the protection by recent postwar treaties regarding Jewish property in Rumania and Hungary, which he thought would help the Palestine problem. Most important, he and Minister of Fuel and Power Shinwell advised the Cabinet in a joint paper on the 7th, the Middle East was likely to provide “a greater proportion of the total world increase of production than any other oil-producing region,” Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Iraq becoming the world’s major oil producers by 1950. Offending the Arabs, they emphasized, “by appearing to encourage Jewish settlement and to endorse the Jewish aspiration for a separate State,” would entail grave risks. An analysis signed by Beeley on January 2 for Attlee, advocating a unitary state in Palestine as called for in the Arab plan, reflected Bevin’s preference. Yet the Foreign Secretary also had to satisfy the primary concern of the Chiefs of Staff: might the Mandate be surrendered and at the same time allow for safeguarding Britain’s strategic needs in Palestine and wider interests in the region? Any Palestine solution, the Joint Planning Staffs’ memorandum of the 5th stated, “must ensure the retention of the goodwill of the Arab world.”<sup>2</sup>

Cunningham had no desire to hand over matters to the military, he told Fishman just before leaving for consultations in London, but he worried what might happen if the terrorist outbreaks continued. (To Creech Jones, he described Zionism as a movement where “the forces of nationalism are accompanied by the psychology of the Jew, which it is important to recognize as something quite abnormal and unresponsive to rational treatment.”) At a conference in the Colonial Office on the 3rd, he dissented from Montgomery’s offer of the “whole strength of the British Army” if necessary to mount thorough searches throughout Palestine, “turning the place upside down,” without waiting for evidence. The Army had not been unduly restricted there, he claimed, and general searches would merely disturb innocent people and mean “a general conflagration.” It would probably lead to the evacuation of British women and children, as well as warfare throughout the country, thus destroying the hope of a political settlement. He agreed to Montgomery’s draft that “all possible steps” would be taken to establish and maintain law and order, but he was not prepared to give the military commander in Palestine a free hand, since as High Commissioner he had to “take into account the political aspect.” The decision as to how

the revised directive would most effectively be carried out now rested with the Cabinet.<sup>3</sup>

Backing Cunningham, Creech Jones pointed out that there had recently been a stiffening of the *yishuv* moderates and the growth of a hatred of terrorism. In the Colonial Secretary's interview with Ben-Gurion the previous day, the newly reelected Agency Executive chairman had denounced terrorism and so had the recent World Zionist Congress in Basle. Explaining to Creech Jones that Weizmann had been defeated at the Congress because of his "blind trust" in Britain, Ben-Gurion had asked for free immigration to Palestine and cultivation of the soil, together with the *yishuv*'s right to shape its own life as freely as any other free people. He proposed that so long as no change occurred in British policy, informal talks with the Agency could be held instead of attendance at the resumed London Conference. The Executive was not bound to any formula, not even to the idea of a Jewish commonwealth. The Congress had ruled out a trusteeship, Ben-Gurion explained, and if HMG could not be bound by the Mandate in ruling Palestine, then "there must be a Jewish State." Martin, present along with Gater, noted that Ben-Gurion's attitude throughout was one of "marked cordiality." The Zionist leader had referred several times to the natural sympathy between the Jews and the British people, and expressed his belief that, if only the British government would trust the Jews, there would be a growth of confidence on both sides and hope of a settlement.<sup>4</sup>

The Foreign Secretary's initial suggestions for a long-term policy surfaced when meeting Cunningham the next day, Creech Jones also in attendance. Hearing the High Commissioner explain his differences with Montgomery and his claim that only a definitive political settlement would finally end terrorism, Bevin suggested that provincial autonomy should be carried out as an interim arrangement designed to lead to partition within a reasonably short period. The Jewish and Arab provinces, each responsible for law and order in their specific area, would have a right to "secede" after some such period as five years. HMG would have difficulty at the UN in proposing immediate partition, he explained, but if the conclusion were reached that it should be put into effect immediately, London should try to induce Washington to make the proposal in the first instance. Discussion which followed of steps to make partition more palatable to certain of the Arab states included the port of Aqaba to be ceded to Ibn

Saud; Abdullah relinquishing some of south Jordan to the Wahhabi monarch in return for getting parts of Palestine; and the cession to Syria of the northeastern corner of Palestine including the Huleh Basin, with the Jews being compensated for the loss of the Huleh by incorporating in their area parts of western Galilee. Hearing that Ben-Gurion and Executive colleagues were prepared to enter unconditionally into exploratory talks, Bevin declared that it was essential to open discussions with the Jews. He thought it of no consequence if this took place within the framework of the conference or on some other footing, and asked Creech Jones to make sure that the Jewish Agency delegation would be available in London at the time of the conference.<sup>5</sup>

In Palestine, British all-day curfews in Tel Aviv and Rehovot on January 1–2 and the screening there of more than 4,000 men did nothing to check the storm clouds gathering again across that troubled landscape. Concerted attacks by the Irgun and the Stern Group took place against military installations in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, Tiberias, and Hadera. One British officer and a Jewish constable were killed, and many people wounded. A police mobile truck and a troop-carrier were blown up by road-mines. Another whole-day search in Tel Aviv screened 3,000 people; 62 were detained. Gurney warned Fishman and Ben-Zvi that he could not hold back the Army for long, and asked Myerson and Remez on the 7th for a halt to “refugee ships.” The *yishuv* understood that terror damaged its cause from a political and moral point of view, she responded, but the emotion of a “Jewish heart” after the dispatch of a boat of refugees was greater than political instinct. Those in the DP camps could not wait; their arrival posed no danger to any Palestinian Arab, but for the Jew “this is a question of life.” Time worked in the Arabs’ favor, Myerson added, whereas we lacked power to insure that in a short time there would truly be a good solution. Gurney repeated that he understood the Jewish needs and views, but their demands were beyond his powers.<sup>6</sup>

As for the death sentence passed on January 1 by the Jerusalem Military Court on Dov Gruner, a former lance corporal in the British Army’s Italian campaign who had been badly wounded while taking part in the Irgun attack on the Ramat Gan police station in April 1946, the final word rested with G. O. C. Barker. The accused had refused to recognize the court’s authority, and only made a brief statement, concluding thus: “There is no force in the world that can break the link between the

people of Israel and its one and only country. He who attempts it—his hand will be cut off and the curse of God will fall on him for ever and ever.”<sup>7</sup>

Remarkably, at this very moment Attlee challenged the basic assumptions of the Chiefs of Staff and the Imperial Defence College regarding HMG’s Near Eastern policy. One month earlier, he had advised “my dear Ernest” that he disagreed with the Chiefs’ wish to keep British forces in Greece for at least another year, and considered that the strategic importance of communications through the Mediterranean in terms of modern warfare were very much overrated by his military advisers. Continuing to maintain heavy military commitments in the region with large sums of money against a possible Russian attack, the endeavor to keep British influence over “weak, backward and reactionary states,” he now deemed “a strategy of despair.” This included keeping two divisions in Palestine, his TOP SECRET memorandum observed on January 5, where Britain had either to offend the Arab states and possibly Turkey and Persia as well, or offend world Jewry “with its powerful influence in the USA.” He wished to explore the possibility of negotiations with Stalin, seeking to discover if it were possible to persuade the USSR that Britain had no offensive intentions against it; if an easing of Russia’s internal economic situation would cause this country to be less ready to “throw away what she has gained”; and if Moscow could be convinced that war with the United States was not inevitable. If satisfactory answers could be given to these questions, Attlee concluded, perhaps HMG could secure an agreement as to oil rights in Persia, settle the Dardanelles Straits question on principles applicable to all major international waterways, and get some degree of unity and economic cooperation in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

Without dealing with the strategic side of the question, Bevin replied at length in a “top secret” response four days later after his leading officials had met to discuss the matter, asserting that the political arguments against these proposals seemed to him “overwhelming.” Attlee’s memorandum reversed the whole policy that the Foreign Secretary had been pursuing in the Middle East with the Cabinet’s consent, a program aimed at strengthening that region’s economic development on the basis of independent states and at taking the lead in any UN regional defense scheme. When London had resolved issues with Egypt and Iraq “and if we settle Palestine,” very little British manpower would

be involved. HMG had to be able to mount a counter-offensive against Russia if required; evacuation of the area would gift the manpower and oil of the region to Moscow, making a difference of “100 millions in the government’s balance sheet” and possibly a great difference in HMG’s future dollar earnings. Help to the countries in that area could make them once again economically prosperous and a valuable market for Britain. It would be as idle to place reliance on gaining British security by large-scale, one-sided concessions to Russia as it was with Hitler, while improvements in that dictatorship’s internal situation would make Moscow more aggressive. Only the Americans could perhaps dissuade the Russian leaders that war with the United States was not inevitable.

Many further objections arose regarding a British withdrawal from the Middle East, Bevin went on. It would be “Munich over again, only on a world scale,” with Greece, Turkey, and Persia as the first victims in place of Czechoslovakia. The United States, on which Britain was dependent economically and militarily, would “write us off entirely.” India would gravitate toward Russia; the UN would be imperiled; Egypt and all of Africa might fall under Communist control; the effect on the Dominions would be “incalculable.” HMG was withdrawing from Egypt, soon would be doing so in Greece, “and then we shall only have troops in Palestine.” In proportion as the Americans realized the importance to them of this area, we could expect them to bear a greater part of the burden. Rather than “leading from weakness,” negotiating with Stalin could take place once the British economy and that of Europe were revived, and Moscow finally realized that it could not drive a wedge between Washington and London. “There is no hurry,” Bevin concluded. Everything suggested that the Russians were “drawing in their horns” and had no immediate aggressive intentions. Great Britain should focus on restoring its strength, and, with American help as necessary, meanwhile hold on to essential positions and concentrate on building up the UN organization.<sup>9</sup>

That very afternoon, Attlee, Bevin, and Alexander met to discuss the Middle East. No other officials were present and no minutes were taken, but the Foreign Secretary confided in his Principal Private Secretary Pierson Dixon, who had drafted the earlier reply to the Prime Minister, its conclusions. There would be no withdrawals of British forces from the Middle East in excess of the programs already contemplated, the policy regarding oil should be reviewed with particular reference to the building up of underground stocks in crude oil in Great Britain, and Alexander



would examine the position in consultation with the Oil Committee. Attlee was, however, “still not satisfied” that HMG’s overall defense plans required continuance of the government’s policy in the Middle East, and it was agreed that the discussion would be continued with the Chiefs of Staff present. A meeting of Attlee, Bevin, and Alexander with the Chiefs on January 13 endorsed the military’s view of the Middle East and its defense requirements, Chief of the Air Staff Lord Tedder again emphasizing the need not to alienate the Arab states whatever the final policy arrived at. Attlee suggested that a provisional autonomy scheme might secure British military rights if satisfactory treaties (as hoped for after India’s imminent reception of independence) could be negotiated with the successor states.<sup>10</sup>

In Palestine, a hoped-for truce from terrorist attacks lasted but a brief time. The Hagana’s warning on the 4th that the *yishuv*’s patience with the “separatist bodies” was nearly at an end, as well as Silver’s strong speech in like vein after meeting with the sympathetic Inverchapel, had led to a general belief that the dissidents would again agree to await the outcome of the London negotiations. Gurney’s cancelling the sentence of flogging passed by a military court on an Irgun youth of 17 indicated, according to an editorial in *HaAretz*, that “civilian flexibility and insight have smoothed military stubbornness.” Returning briefly to Palestine after a second talk with Creech Jones on the 8th, Ben-Gurion declared over the mandatory’s radio broadcast system in Tel Aviv that informal talks with HMG would continue, that the political struggle now included the UN, and that unity was called for in order to achieve the Basle Congress’s resolutions as conducted by the nation’s “elected representatives.” This respite abruptly changed on January 12, when a powerful LEHI bomb concealed in an RAF van blew up in the District Police Security Compound in Haifa, killing two British and two Arab policemen and wounding more than 100. Two days later, a military court sentenced another seventeen-year-old Irgun fighter to life imprisonment and eighteen strokes for firing at employees of the Ottoman Bank the previous September; the whipping was revoked because of his poor health, and only his age saved Yehuda Katz from the death penalty.<sup>11</sup>

The continued assaults united a Cabinet otherwise still divided over a long-range solution for Palestine. With Montgomery leading the charge on January 15, it unanimously agreed that any terrorist convinced of capital offense would be put to death. Searches could be

conducted at any time with, as the CIGS put it, “more robust action” and patrols increased in dangerous areas, although supreme control still rested in Cunningham’s hands. Bevin’s championing a bi-national unitary State found in Creech Jones a strong voice for partition on the grounds that otherwise illegal Jewish immigration and tension would not subside. (A recent British conference in Paris to check that traffic, Fierst confided to Epstein, had found the French in agreement, but State’s George Warren insisted that the Americans’ responsibility lay only in their German zone.) Dalton and Shinwell supported a Jewish state “however small it might be,” while Bevan warned of “a general outbreak” of antisemitism in Great Britain if the mandatory had to resort to repressive force, and of the likely rise of extremist leadership within the *yishuv* if this opportunity for “a compromise solution” were lost. A friendly Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, he added, would give HMG a safer military base, whereas an Arab Palestine might pass to Russian influence. Alexander disagreed, repeating his department’s view that “the goodwill of the Arab world” had to be retained from a defense point of view. One day later, the Colonial Secretary’s memorandum argued that adoption of Bevin’s plan would lead to “disorder and bloodshed on a scale which we could never contemplate”; be “a gross betrayal” of the Jews, who would be “handed over to the mercy” of an Arab state run by the former Mufti; poison relations with the United States; and betray past Labour Party pledges to the Jews. If the UN rejected what was the one solution which possessed “an element of finality,” he closed, it would have the obligation to find an alternative.<sup>12</sup>

Since the legal advisors of the Foreign and Colonial Offices, with the approval of the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General, had just concluded that a discussion of Palestine would take place in the UN whatever course the government adopted, Bevin raised the question of the possible result of reference to that world organization. In his view, partition would not get the required two-thirds majority vote in the General Assembly for passage. The “whole temper” of the GA opposed creating religious states, and “Jewry is a religion,” while “apart from Hitler persecution” no kinship existed between a Polish and a French Jew. A Palestine state with equal rights for Arab and Jew, save that Jews should not have uncontrolled right of immigration, could gain approval. Difficulties with the UN, Creech Jones responded, would exist no matter the solution HMG put forward. Noel-Baker thought that partition might

go through, as did Shinwell, but Attlee observed that the Arabs and India would object, and probably the Slavs, too. The Slav nations would oppose partition because they wished Arab oil, Bevin opined, and, personally doubting that the United States could control the Philippines or China, he judged that the two-thirds majority could not be obtained. No conclusion was drawn, although a memorandum prepared by Beeley the next day, in consultation with the Colonial Office, observed that probable negative votes among the 55 member states for partition (17), a unitary state (16), or provisional autonomy (17), with a number of abstentions, would see any of these British proposals defeated. The calculation assumed that Washington would oppose the second proposal, but if it opposed the first or third, the number of adverse votes would be considerably larger. Conversely, if the United States were to abstain from voting against the second, the opposition to a unitary state would be appreciably reduced.<sup>13</sup>

The State Department did not wish to intervene at this stage, hewing to Byrnes's advice to Silver on January 6th that the Jews should attend the London Conference. The Secretary did not press HMG, as the Zionist leader had requested, to announce their inclination toward partition, but did inform a receptive Inverchapel that he supported Silver's other suggestion that Britain release a substantial number of immigrants currently in Cyprus detention camps. The Arab Office in Washington protested the mandatory's expenditures for the refugees held on that island, bringing Epstein's rejoinder that the *yishuv* was paying 75–80 percent of the total taxes in Palestine to the government. Shertok's personal appeal to Acheson on the 15th to intercede with London to reach a solution favorable to the Jews at this "critical time" and effect the immediate transfer of 100,000 Jews to Palestine met with a refusal as well. The Under Secretary, whose "decidedly reserved attitude" surprised his guest, was convinced that Britain was "sincere" in reaching a solution at this time, and so it would serve "no useful purpose" for Washington to approach the Attlee government.<sup>14</sup>

Told by Emir Feisal two days later that the Arab world opposed Zionism because it had certain connections with communism, was anti-democratic, aggressive, and totalitarian, and was anti-God, Byrnes replied that he knew from personal experience that by means of frank discussions it was "frequently possible" for parties with different views to find solutions for problems "which on their face appeared insoluble."

When the prince retorted that the Arabs would not sit down with the Zionists and “merely” asked that the British halt Jewish immigration, Byrnes noted that the Jews would not attend the conference unless a Jewish state was to be established in Palestine. He still felt that no matter how divergent their opposing views, it would be “helpful to talk the matter over.” He concluded that because Palestine represented one of the most difficult of international problems in the world today, it should be approached “with moderation and a conciliatory spirit.”<sup>15</sup>

On January 21, the same day that General George C. Marshall, the highly regarded former U. S. Army Chief of Staff whom Frankfurter was certain would handle every problem “on its merits,” succeeded Byrnes, Inverchapel heard from Acheson how the United States would vote in the General Assembly. He was sure that Washington would consider partition the “easiest” to put into effect and therefore the easiest to back. Washington would equally support a bi-national state “looking to eventual partition” if this state failed in its dual task of satisfying Jew and Arab alike. One of these two solutions should emerge from the coming talks in London, because failure would prolong the present state of affairs, which would be “disastrous” for the entire region. The adoption of either plan would cause “commotion and violent denunciations,” but eventual acquiescence “might safely be counted upon.” The entry of 100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine “in a comparatively short time,” and some reasonable immigration thereafter, was essential to any possible solution. Despite Arab fears, they already had a substantial majority in the country and their birth rate was considerably higher than the Jewish. In his view, for Britain to surrender the Mandate to the Assembly without recommendations almost amounted to a confession that a solution was not possible, and presented an invitation to “a great deal of confusion.” Acheson could go no further than that, confessed to ignorance of the new Secretary of State’s views about Palestine, and agreed to consult his superior and Truman at once.<sup>16</sup>

When the Cabinet discussion resumed on January 22, Bevin and Creech Jones consented to try in their talks with the Arabs and Jews to move each side from their present “irreconcilable” positions. The Foreign Secretary expressed himself not opposed to partition on its merits, but was impressed by the difficulty of imposing any solution against the active opposition of either rival Palestinian community, envisaging “first class difficulty whichever way it goes.” The Colonial

Secretary still backed a solution along the lines of partition, which Shinwell favored with the argument that recent British experiences in Egypt and India had indicated that, unlike a Jewish state, a unitary state with an Arab majority would not necessarily remain friendly to HMG or allow it to maintain a strategic base in Palestine and the vital oil port at Haifa. Attlee cautioned not to rely on the continuing friendship of Palestine's Jews, who were "mainly European and may well turn to Russia." Bevin: "These U.S. Jews are hostile and disloyal." Shinwell: "In two wars Jews were on our side. Could you rely as much on Arabs?" The Cabinet ultimately agreed that, failing an agreed settlement at the London talks, "any solution would have to come before the United Nations." Given "the internal situation" in Palestine, it was likely that the issue would call for a special session before the GA was due to meet next in September.<sup>17</sup>

Truman continued to believe that regardless of which group might be in the numerical majority at any given time in Palestine, "one of the most difficult problems" currently faced by the world, all living there should have similar opportunities and freedoms. Disagreeing with Ibn Saud's further accusation that the Zionists wished to use their state in Palestine as a base for aggression against the neighboring Arab countries, he replied at length on January 24 that "no people has suffered more than the Jews during recent years from aggression and intolerance" or "stands more in need of world sympathy and support at the present time." It was therefore "inconceivable" that responsible Jewish leaders would contemplate acts of aggression against Arabs, which would certainly provoke indignation throughout the world. The terrorist acts by "certain irresponsible groups" in Palestine were by no means indicative of the temper of world Jewry or symbolic of Jewish aspirations respecting Palestine. His own various statements, including that at least 100,000 European Jewish refugees should be admitted there, were not inconsistent with the U.S. Government's commitment to consult both Arabs and Jews before a change occurred in the basic situation in Palestine. Past attempts that had failed in this regard only served to emphasize the urgency of the problem, as well as the necessity for a solution without protracted delay. Truman ended with the assurance that the people of the United States desired to maintain and strengthen their feelings of friendship toward the monarch, the peoples of Saudi Arabia, and the rulers and peoples of all Arab lands.<sup>18</sup>

Cunningham informed Ben-Gurion that his stance in London had averted the imposition of martial law, and the Va'ad HaLeumi announced on the 20th that force would be used against those terrorizing the *yishuv*, but two kidnappings on January 25–26 brought Palestine to the brink. After Barker confirmed Gruner's death sentence on the 24th, with execution set for the 28th, the Irgun snatched retired Major H.A.I. Collins and then Judge Ralph Windham in a plan to thwart Gruner's hanging. The High Commissioner convoked Myerson, Kaplan, and Tel Aviv's Mayor Israel Rokach to deliver an ultimatum that unless the two men were returned unharmed within forty-eight hours, martial law would be introduced in Tel Aviv, Petah Tikva, and Ramat Gan, an unprecedented step in the Mandate's history. The Jewish Agency Executive and Rokach immediately issued unequivocal condemnations of the "demented desperadoes" responsible, and called for the captives' release without delay. Both men were freed after it was announced on the 27th that Barker had granted a stay of execution, intimating that Gruner could appeal to the Privy Council in London. Convinced of the Irgun's threat to "turn Palestine into a bloodbath" if Gruner were hanged, Cunningham proposed to Creech Jones on the 27th that all British women, children, and nonessential personnel be evacuated from Palestine and the remainder concentrated behind barbed-wire enclaves. The *yishuv* would derisively call these "Bevingrads." Montgomery railed in a letter to Creech Jones against Cunningham's response to the Gruner case and the kidnappings; a polite reply followed. The CIGS only agreed to retract both missives in response to Attlee's argument that they could impact adversely on the London talks and a critical debate in the House that was about to take place.<sup>19</sup>

The Arabs' first meeting with Bevin, Creech Jones, and Brook on January 27 yielded no results. Informed by the Foreign Secretary that HMG still suspended a final decision until it had heard the views of Palestine's Arabs and Jews, Husseini expressed his people's desire for self-government and their "inflexible" opposition to partition. Al-Khouri noted that the Arab delegation had already given its views last September, and did not wish to have further discussions until receiving the British government's response. If the "usual democratic principles" were denied to the people of Palestine and the situation deteriorated still further, he warned, the people would be compelled "to resort to their own means to defend themselves." The Arab mood was generally gloomy, Beeley reported to Gallman; Azzam and some of the



other leaders had not come because they did not like the prospect of being associated with a conference which they felt was bound to fail. In private conversations, the delegates indicated that if Gruner were not executed, it would be a sign of British appeasement to Jewish terrorism and Zionist demands for partition, and the Arabs “will know what to do.” Bevin’s statement that the best solution lay in Morrison-Grady, but if the London talks failed HMG would transfer the Palestine problem to the UN, did not deter the delegation. They considered that possible referral to be to their advantage, al-Khoury told Sasson. The Syrian diplomat saw no prospect of a compromise between the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine, he added, and the Arabs had not given up the option of using violence and a Palestinian Arab uprising to exert pressure on the UN and on Great Britain.<sup>20</sup>

Ben-Gurion opened the Jews’ first meeting of exploratory talks two days later with a call for 100,000 immediately and a large-scale immigration from Europe and the oriental countries of 1.2 million, Palestine’s full development to benefit the entire area, and statehood for the one people whose “whole fate and existence” were bound up in that country. When told that all the lights had gone out due to a fuel shortage during Britain’s coldest winter in decades, Bevin said “Except the Israelites,” then fell into a paroxysm of husky laughter in which no one else joined. He countered Ben-Gurion by claiming that two viable states could not be created there; partition would never receive UN approval; the Arab states would object “intensely”; Zionist schemes to increase absorptive capacity were impractical; and the 1.2 million figure “was out of the question.” He favored a variant of Morrison-Grady, and tried unsuccessfully to have the Agency submit a partition scheme “without prejudice.”

Deeming the present state of affairs “intolerable,” Creech Jones vehemently rejected Ben-Gurion’s suggestion to return to the pre-White Paper regime, saying that HMG was no longer prepared to maintain an administration in Palestine which had no roots in the country’s people and thus operate contrary to democratic principles. Reiterating that his reputation was staked on finding a solution for Palestine and his opinion that the Balfour Declaration’s promising “the same thing to two peoples” was “a disastrous policy,” Bevin remarked that he would have been prepared to accept the entire Anglo-American Commission report, but Washington chose to endorse only the 100,000 recommendation. What guarantees could the Jews offer, he wondered, that they

would not use their wealth in America to buy up the Arabs and create a “landless proletariat”? Reporting soon thereafter to Gallman, Shertok and Neumann thought that with Bevin clearly “the boss” and HMG “apparently” planning to reject both Mandate and partition, the time might soon arrive for US intervention.<sup>21</sup>

At their second meeting on January 30, Bevin told the Arabs that their plan would meet with immediate Jewish resistance, similar to the Arabs’ response to any Jewish expansion such as partition. HMG was therefore faced with the unwelcome prospect of imposing some solution; any decision would have to be referred to the UN. Would they consider, just as he had asked the Jews, a bi-national central government combined with a large measure of local autonomy for the two communities? Any solution would be difficult so long as the Jews were armed, Husseini responded, to which Creech Jones commented that it was almost impossible to disarm the Jews. Taking up this point, the AHC official wondered if the government was sincerely endeavoring to find a solution on the basis of the basis of right and justice, or whether it was following an appeasement policy under Jewish armed threats. The Arab representatives reserved comment on Bevin’s statement, and at the meeting’s end it was agreed that they would prepare a reply for early the next week. The delegates from Syria and Iraq, Beeley thought, seemed especially depressed, but all were gloomy. Until all avenues were explored, he told Gallman, the Cabinet continued to keep an open mind and suspend final judgment.<sup>22</sup>

Ben-Gurion detailed the Zionists’ objections to the unitary state proposal when the two sides met on February 3, and reverted to his earlier criteria of large-scale immigration, development, and sovereignty. If this were not accepted, the Jews, who had a special status in Palestine, would welcome a return to the Mandate “for a few years,” with full rights in the country “without exception.” This was “aggression,” Bevin responded, just like the white men driving out the Red Indians in the United States. (His courteous guests did not counter by noting HMG’s occupying and colonizing significant parts of the globe, and particularly the British massacre of indigenous Aboriginal Australians in Tasmania.) Partition itself, which went “far beyond” the terms of the Mandate, he considered a “counsel of despair,” and London would not impose a solution requiring the mandatory to take up arms against Arabs.



When Creech Jones remarked that the Jewish zone in a unitary state would have a large measure of freedom for immigration, Bevin objected that there should be specific limits just as in the present White Paper. He also quickly disagreed with the Colonial Secretary's thought that if either community wished to secede after a trial period of five to ten years this might be possible. Britain did not need Palestine strategically, Bevin declared (thereby disagreeing with the Chiefs of Staff), and was prepared to throw the problem into the UN without recommendations because that body would be entitled to re-examine the question afresh. Ben-Gurion's ending appeal as one Socialist Laborite to another failed to move the Foreign Secretary, concerned as he was with the "practical politics" of the situation. Reference to the UN might involve very serious delay, Creech Jones noted, and in the present deteriorating position HMG had been "left to carry the baby." "The trouble," Bevin added, "was the baby was twins—by different fathers."<sup>23</sup>

The Arabs stood their ground when replying formally to Bevin on February 4. Al-Khoury set the tone by stating that their September proposals represented the "only just and equitable settlement." Delegates from Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt elaborated on some of his points. Husseini claimed that, even if no more immigrants were admitted, the present congestion on Arab farm land in Palestine would get worse in the next twenty years due to high Arab fertility. Did not the mandatory under a Socialist government, he asked, feel responsible for this social problem? One Arab member's stating that "partition means war" drew applause from his colleagues. Bevin appealed for a more yielding attitude on the part of the delegation, noting that British public opinion believed that further Jewish immigration should take place. He was determined to evolve a proposal for a solution which would commend itself "to all reasonable people." Within a few days and after consulting the Cabinet, he would present British proposals "in some form" to them. (To the Jews, Bevin had spoken of presenting a "personal paper" without commitment, but had now changed his mind.) Whitehall's draft, Beeley confided in Gallman the next day, envisaged a bi-national unitary state with early increased Jewish immigration. The proposals would not satisfy either side, he thought, but they represented "a fair and just approach." With the first phase of the conference over, the Cabinet now had to agree on final proposals for presentation to the two contesting parties.<sup>24</sup>

The government's prolonged delay in announcing a long-term policy had drawn heavy criticism in the Parliamentary debate on January 31. Four days after the London *Times* came out for partition in light of the continuing danger faced by British troops and police, Crossman charged that if by procrastination "we let Palestine go down in ruins it is a poor sort of humanity and democracy that we are practicing." From the other side of the aisle, Manningham-Buller agreed that the Mandate was no longer tenable. Having "broken our pledges to the Jews," Churchill, echoing Stanley, again urged the MPs to give definite notice that if the United States refused to take a half share of "the bloodshed, odium, trouble, expense and worry," HMG should lay the Mandate at the feet of the UN within six months.<sup>25</sup>

That afternoon, Palestine radio announced the evacuation which Cunningham had requested of Creech Jones four days earlier, "so that the Government and armed forces will not be hampered in their task of maintaining order." Evacuees joked that this Operation Polly really was an acronym for "Panic Over Lots of Lousy Yids," but Robert W. Hamilton, the mandatory's director of antiquities, privately excoriated the policy of "scuttle," which could only bring HMG and the British people "into contempt" and convince the Arabs to protect themselves, as before, by armed rebellion. *Al-Difa'a* termed it "a great defeat" for the local administration. Concurrently, launching Operation Cantonment, troops set up barbed wire fences enclosing extensive residential areas in Jerusalem. "It is our business to see that the King's writ runs in this country," Cunningham declared to Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Isaac Herzog. A sense once more of alarmed uncertainty pervaded the *yishuv*.<sup>26</sup>

In a press statement on February 2, Myerson worried that the Jewish community found itself threatened with possible martial law, but they could not "all become informers" at the government's request to cooperate against terrorism. The Chief Rabbinate appealed to the dissidents to halt the spilling of innocent blood and placing the *yishuv* "in danger of ruin and destruction." Gurney's communication the next day with the High Commissioner's approval, asking the Agency and the Va'ad HaLeumi to "state categorically" whether they were prepared "within seven days" to publicly call on the Jewish community to aid in "locating and bringing to justice" the members of the terrorist groups, understandably sounded like an ultimatum. Alerted to the Agency's fear that both operations were preparatory moves to an action against

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