THE FALL OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, THE MISMANAGEMENT OF PALESTINE AND SUBSEQUENT LAND GRAB

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The fall of the Ottoman Empire was heavily anticipated and watched by numerous European nations eager to gain authority. The 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain and France pre-maturely divvied up the Ottoman Empire in the event of a collapse. Mandatory Palestine, as promised, would fall to the British. The nation quickly became a mangle of commitments to the Arab and Jewish community. The acquisition of Palestine was imperative to the introduction of a Jewish state, proximity to the burgeoning supply of Oil and the defence of India. Ultimately, the misconduct by the British led to many deadly riots and the land grab of Palestine.

The decline of the Ottoman Empire was eagerly observed by many European nations, earning it the title "The Sick Man of Europe."[1] Like vultures surrounding the carcass of a dead animal, Europe and France carved and divvied up the empire among them. Prior to the 1923 dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement has established. The Sykes-Picot Agreement promised Britain and France spheres of influence if the empire was to fall. The French would gain mandates in Syria and Lebanon, on the other hand, Britain would gain mandates in Iraq, Palestine and Transjordan. Britain, at this time, had many colonial acquisitions and taking control over the falling Ottoman Empire would prove to be essential in protecting them. The end of the First World War saw the Middle East become "a tangle of promises which Britain had made to the Arabs, to the Jews, to France and to herself."[2] The mismanagement of Mandatory Palestine by the British by frequently suspending and re-introducing policies would ultimately lead to a deadly land grab that claimed the lives of many. The British extended their reach into the

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[1] Üyesi Fahriye Begüm Yildizeli, "The Expansion of the British Empire in the Middle East After the Ottoman Heritage (1882-1923)." *History Studies* 10, no. 6 (2018): 215-221.
[2] Ibid.

Middle East for imperialist gains, which provoked religious disputes in Palestine and led to the on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Firstly, the fall of the Ottoman Empire resulted from intervention by the Entente Powers during the Great War and, ultimately, led to the British Empire becoming the "Heir of the Middle East"[3]. During the Great War, the Allies presented the Ottoman Empire with "a defence pact,"[4] which ensured the Empire would survive if they stayed neutral. Instead of joining the Allied powers, the Ottoman Empire sided with the Central powers. The country's rejection of the defence pact by the Allies meant they became "a target in the Entente powers strategies."[5] In order to destabilize and disrupt the Ottoman Empire, the Entente powers "us[ed] the nationalistic and independence rebellions."[6] For example, the first Arab Revolt of 1916 against the Turks was "led by the British-backed Sherif Hussein of Mecca."[7] Furthermore, propaganda was published within the Middle East and the West about the "fight for national liberation with Britain"[8] to reinforce the ideology introduced by the British. Britain portrayed its "eastern campaign"[9] into the Ottoman Empire as a fight for the repressed minority within the 'Middle East', a term used mainly by the British during the Great War to separate its geographical proximity to the East. Britain depicted itself as the "natural protector of small, oppressed nations and the guarantor of national self-determination."[10] In this reimagined version of the Middle East spearheaded by Britain, "Jews played a central role."[11] An example of British propaganda in the Middle East is the introduction of the "Arab national flag"[12] by Mark Sykes, a British diplomat, and was used to showcase the "Arab awakening under British protection."[13] Additionally, British interest in the Middle East came as a result of the regions significant supply of oil and "to maintain British Supremacy in an area considered vital to the defence of India."[14] There was a general knowledge that a perceived destabilization of the Ottoman Empire by the Central Powers could "see the [Suez] Canal fall into the hands of a hostile power, bringing Russia into the Persian Gulf in force."[15] The possibility of Russian

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[3] Yildizeli, 224.

[4] Ibid, 221.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] James Renton, "Changing Languages of Empire and the Orient: Britain and the Invention of the Middle East, 1917-1918." *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 3 (2007): 654.

[8] Ibid, 655.

[9] Ibid, 647.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid, 655.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Yildizeli, 220.

[15] Geoffrey Hamm, "British Intelligence in the Middle East, 1898–1906." *Intelligence and National Security* 29, no. 6 (2014): 893.

enlargement threatened the "corridor linking Britain to India."[16] Britain's interest in the Ottoman Empire was further reinforced with the emersion of oil, which could be used for military purposes. In order to acquire more oil, it became apparent that Britain would need to secure "control of the Middle East's burgeoning oil industry."[17]

Secondly, Britain introduced the Balfour Declaration for imperialist gains in Palestine. Following World War 1, the League of Nations provided Britain with a mandate over Iraq and Palestine. Britain was to report to the Permanent Mandates Commission, which was created by the League of Nations. Britain would then go on to present the Balfour Declaration in 1917, which promised the introduction of a "Jewish national home"[18] in Palestine. The League of Nations accepted the proposal and was to oversee the mandate to "protect the population as a whole."[19] Sir Mark Sykes, who helped negotiate the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, believed that the annexation of Palestine was deemed necessary "in the defence of the Suez Canal against attack from the North and as a station on the future air-routes to the east."[20] In response to this potential threat to Britain's colonial possessions, the idea of a Jewish buffer state in Palestine was introduced. Although the proposed Jewish buffer state would be weak, it would be beneficial to Britain as long as it did not disturb "Mohammedan sentiment."[21] The proposed Jewish buffer state in Palestine would "become home to a new, self-sustaining European settler community,"[22] which would add to Britain's imperialist gains. Moreover, in the annual reports filed to the Permanent Mandates Commission, Britain advised they were achieving their goals to protect the Arab population while promoting a Jewish national home in Palestine, which was not accurate. Before the introduction of the Balfour Declaration, the Jewish population in Palestine was 10%. The 90% Arab majority was firmly against the introduction of an "outside population… that would threaten the[ir] status"[23] and took up arms to stop the mandate. In a 1921 visit to London, the Palestine Arab Congress delegation requested the introduction of a national government in Palestine and the renouncement of the Balfour Declaration. The British Cabinet in 1923 decided to re-assess the project and concluded that they could not confidently establish a Jewish national home and protect the "Arab

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Anand Toprani, "An Anglo-American 'Petroleum Entente'?: The First Attempt to Reach an Anglo-American Oil Agreement, 1921." *Historian* 79 no. 1 (2017): 56–79.

[18] John Quigley, "Britain's Secret Re-Assessment of the Balfour Declaration - The Perfidy of Albion." *Journal of the History of International Law* 13, no. 2 (2011): 249–84.

[19] Ibid, 250.

[20] William Mathew, "The Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate, 1917–1923: British Imperialist Imperatives." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 3 (2013).

[21] Ibid, 243.

[22] Ibid, 247.

[23] Quigley, 251.

population"[24] as Palestine moved towards independence. In an attempt to appease the Arab population in Palestine, the cabinet "proposed the creation of an Arab Agency."[25] For example, the Arab Agency consulted in immigration. The Arab agency was only promised if the Anti-Balfour Declaration sentiment was to end in Palestine. The Cabinet did not notify the League of Nations of their findings "for reasons relating to its own interests"[26] and continued its "promot[ion] [of]a Jewish national home."[27] Additionally, in 1924, the Colonial Office prepared a "confidential government memorandum"[28] that stated that the Balfour Declaration was introduced as an attempt to gain "the sympathy of influential Jews and Jewish organizations all over the world… at a time of acute national danger."[29]

Thirdly, intervention in Palestine from western powers provoked religious disputes between co-existing religions. Before the promise of a Jewish national home in Palestine, the major religions co-existed. 'Alami, A Muslim Arab, recalls a time in the "beginning of the Mandate Era"[30] where "Jews were peaceful… and cooperation with them was common."[31] 'Alami then goes on to discuss the stark difference in Muslim-Arab relations during the 1929 riots "when the Jewish community which had lived there peacefully since the earliest of times, was literally decimated within two hours."[32] The 1929 riots, also referred to as the Western Wall riots, took place from August 23rd to the 29th, wounded many, and claimed hundreds of lives. Although the deadly riots were indirectly affected by the policies introduced by the British, the cause for the riots was the fight for "custody over the Western Wall/al-Buraq of the Temple Mount/ Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem."[33] The struggle for control over the Western Wall and other religious sites in Jerusalem erupted due to challenges brought on by Zionists to gain dominance from the Muslims since the induction of the Mandate. The riot started in Jerusalem but extended into Hebron and Safad, which has been home to "Palestine's oldest Jewish communities."[34] The Jewish inhabitants of the old communities were long-time members of the "Palestinian Arab Society… [and] were largely disconnected from the growing Zionist presence in Palestine."[35] The unparalleled violence that spawned the last week of August forced the "British Mandate authorities to re-

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[24] Quigley, 250.
[25] Ibid, 278.
[26] Ibid, 250.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid, 257.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Alex Winder, "The "Western Wall" Riots of 1929: Religious Boundaries and Communal Violence." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, no. 1 (2012): 6-23.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid, 6.
[34] Ibid, 7.
[35] Winder.

evaluate and temporarily suspend their policies."[36] Moreover, as a result of the Western Wall Riots, the British authorities concluded that it was necessary to uphold their influence in the region by constructing and enforcing new boundaries that ultimately benefited the Zionist community. The geographical separation of Arabs and Jews was backed by "British state violence."[37] Violence from both sides was used in an attempt "to reinforce, redefine or re-establish boundaries"[38] of the Balfour Declaration. As a result, this fueled Zionist movements among the Jewish population and increased nationalism among the Arab community in Palestine. Ultimately the rise of Zionism and the growing feeling of nationalism in Palestine is directly related to the British government's inability to control the region and its inhabitants.

Lastly, tensions brought on by the introduction of British policies in the Middle East led to the on-going land dispute between the Jewish and Palestinian people even after the policy was suspended. The 1929 riots in Palestine came as a result of increased frustration from the Arab community in response to the "Mandate's Jewish National Home policy."[39] Furthermore, increased immigration from Jewish people across Europe and "Zionist land purchases"[40] applied economic pressure on and exasperated the Arab community. The purchase of land by newly immigrated Jews meant the creation of "a landless and discontented class"[41] of Palestinians. A year later, in 1930, in response to the unforeseen violence of the 1929 riots, the British government released the "Passfield White Paper"[42], which restricted Jewish immigration into Palestine. The purpose of the white paper was to temporarily halt the creation of a Jewish national home to prevent further violence from erupting. The white paper shortly after its induction was reversed. Some believe the reversal was due to Zionist lobbying in the British Government. Furthermore, the lack of meaningful interjection or policy changes by the British government led to further violent revolts. The Arab Revolt of 1936 was a nationalist uprising by the Palestinians that lasted until 1939. The revolt saw a "British counter-insurgency campaign"[43] that ultimately crushed the rebellion with "violence, torture, collective punishment, mass detention and diplomacy."[44] Also, the British army and Jews in Palestine supported local "peace bands"—militia— which was operated by the

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[36] Ibid, 6.
[37] Ibid, 20.
[38] Ibid, 8.
[39] Ibid, 6.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Carly Beckerman-Boys, "The Reversal of the Passfield White Paper, 1930–1: A Reassessment." *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 2 (2016): 213-33.
[42] Ibid, 214.
[43] Matthew Hughes, "Palestinian Collaboration with the British: The Peace Bands and the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–9." *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 2 (2016): 291-315.
[44] Ibid, 292.

"pro-Government Nashashibi family."[45] Additionally, in 1937, the Peel Commission introduced the idea of a two-state solution, which would split Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews. The report was submitted and approved by the League of Nations. Although Jewish leaders wanted to enlarge the area, they ultimately agreed to the solution. On the other hand, Arab leaders disagreed with the arrangement and believed that "the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine will be a strong attack on the Arabs and a threat to peace."[46] Ultimately, the two-state solution was not accepted by either parties, which resulted in another war breaking out in the region. The Jewish victory in the war meant the proposed "Jewish State [was] much bigger than any proposed partition plan."[47]

British mismanagement of Mandatory Palestine led to the on-going land dispute between the Arab and Jewish community, which has taken many lives and left countless people displaced. Intervention by the Entente Powers through destabilization methods like the support of rebellions within the crumbling Ottoman Empire ultimately played a crucial part in its fall. British interest in the Middle East came as a result of the regions supply of oil and its proximity to their colonial asset—India. Furthermore, British imperialists introduced the Balfour Declaration for reasons relating to their interests. The declaration promised a "Jewish national home"[48] and Arab independence. Although the achievements of both objectives were not within reach, Britain continued. Also, intervention from Western powers, specifically Britain, provoked violent religious disputes between once co-existing religions. Increased immigration from European Jews and the fight for control over land ultimately led to many violent riots, which claimed the lives of many. Increased violence within Palestine fueled the rise of Zionism and Arab Nationalism. The results of the Arab Revolt of 1936 saw the introduction of a two-state solution, which was not mutually agreed upon and incited another war. In the end, Britain withdrew from the region, but its negligence is still felt in Palestine today.

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[45] Ibid, 292.
[46] Shaul Bartal, "The Peel Commission Report of 1937 and the Origins of the Partition Concept." *Jewish Political Studies Review* 28, no. 1/2 (2017): 64.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Quigley, 249.

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