

**Anglo-American Relations in Palestine 1919-1925:  
An Experiment in *Realpolitik***

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Sometime before 11 November 1918, the Ottoman Empire expired. Happily, Europe's "sick man" did not die unattended; a host of kin survived to divide the legacy. Among the prospective inheritors were two giants, the United States and Great Britain. For Britain, her driving force was the maintenance of Empire. For the United States, mixed motives of idealism, business enterprise and preservation of historic isolationist prerogatives resulted in the development of a policy that was often hesitant and myopic. A spirit of internationalism did not prevail in the case of either nation and, as a result, Middle East problems were exacerbated, as is demonstrated in this article.

During the incipient stages of the Versailles negotiations, one American writer assessed his country's future role in the Near and Middle East in glowing terms. He spoke of the United States as "an ideal custodian of the Dardanelles, a preserver of autonomy for ... Arabia and Persia. Her [America's] vast Jewish population preeminently fits her to protect Palestine" ("Part of the United States" 305-306). ([Note 1](#)) Ostensibly, this was the impression Woodrow Wilson was attempting to create, but seeds of discontent, already sewn in the war, indicated a poor harvest for American idealism.

Wilson, the idealist, revealed a pragmatic bent during the 1916 Presidential election campaign when his attitude on Palestine changed from disinterest to vocal pro-Zionism (Eisner 1). The change of heart was a maneuver calculated to please a numerically small but active circle of Democratic Zionists led by Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, who was ably assisted by Harvard lawyer Felix Frankfurter, Judge Julian Mack and social justice activist Rabbi Stephen S. Wise (Safran 38). The promulgation of the Balfour Declaration, a British statement of 2 November 1917 which ostensibly looked with favor upon the creation of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, stirred the recently founded American Jewish Congress to greater cooperation with the European-led World Zionist Organization on the issue of supporting an English trusteeship in Palestine ("American Jews" 392).

Wilson gave his blessing to the Balfour Declaration (Campbell 30) because it demonstrated the principle of self-determination he so ardently desired to see

fulfilled in his proposed world organization. What did the President's acclamation really mean? Truthfully, it merely obligated the United States to refrain from objecting to British policy; it did not commit America to support British objectives or the Zionist position (Evans 129). As can be said of much of Wilson's rhetoric, it was difficult to realize. Nevertheless, returning the wanderers to their home and establishing them as constructive members of society was a part of Wilson's unique vision of a contented, integrated and productive world community.

The "realists" of American diplomacy considered Wilson's paeans rash and ill-advised. While the British pressed him for a commitment, his friend and adviser, Colonel Edward M. House, cautioned the President of the danger lurking for him, as well as for the United States, if he succumbed. Secretary of State Robert Lansing couched his argument in stronger terms. The Secretary was irritated because he had not been consulted as to the course of action that should be taken subsequent to the announcement of the Balfour formula (Eisner 4-5). On 13 December 1917, he returned an acrid appraisal to Wilson. Lansing did not favor announcing sympathy for Zionism because America was not at war with Turkey; the Jewish people, themselves, were not united in their desire to reestablish their race as an independent people; and the Christian sects would resent surrendering the Holy Land to "Christ killers" (*FRUS Lansing 2*: 71). The feelings of House and Lansing were not isolated phenomena. Through the next decade, a characteristic of American foreign relations in Palestine was to be "a divided executive policy with the Presidency and the State Department ... pulling in different directions" (Manuel 167).

Allied with the State Department were a number of interest groups who were to shape Anglo-American relations in Palestine until the Convention of 1924, and even after. Colonel House was publicly amenable to Zionism but was "chary" about the issuance of the Balfour Declaration. Secretary Lansing was already using his "powerful office to curb Wilson's enthusiasm" (Manuel 216). Also on hand were James Barton of Boston and John Houston Finley of New York. Barton was a minister with a "grand design" for economic control of the Near East by the United States and domination of the spiritual and educational life of the area by missionaries; he also founded the American Committee for Relief in the Near East (A.C.R.N.E.). Finley, though not a minister, was a man with a Christian mission. A Presbyterian, and a friend and colleague of Barton, he was a well-known figure in New York State affairs. From 1908 to 1909, he was President of the City College of New York. From 1918 to 1919, Finley served in Palestine as Commissioner for the American Red Cross. Subsequently, he held the post of Commissioner of Education for the State of New York, and from 1921 to 1940, was associate editor of the *New York Times*.

In the case of both men, their organizations and those institutions succeeding them, namely the Y.M.C.A. and the philanthropic Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the justification for American presence in Palestine linked Christianity, investments, oil and the American policy of the Open Door. These groups placed

little credence in Jewish or Arab nationalism. With thinly veiled cynicism, not for his own country's ambition but for Britain's, Lansing viewed the mandate system as a transparent disguise for European annexation. How he would view a later statement by Barton colleague Dr. Caleb Gates is unknown. On 24 January 1924, Gates was quoted by then Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes to the effect that "smart leaders of American religious-philanthropic organizations in the Near East have a tendency to combine religious, educational and medical services with business investments" (Gregg; Wright 695). ([Note 2](#)) In any event, if one seeks an explanation for Woodrow Wilson's failure in the Middle East, one need look no further than compromised humanitarianism and cross purposes. Ironically, then, a state of mind which encourages peace was conspicuously absent among the peacemakers.

In general, and because it required no commitment, the position of Presidents Wilson, Harding and Coolidge toward Zionism was one of sympathetic neutrality (Hall 14). The American and British Zionists collaborated briefly and then fell out over the movement's objectives (Eisner 8), thus weakening their total impact. At Versailles, Brandeis eloquently defended the Zionist position on boundaries, attempting to ensure that a Middle Eastern settlement would not be concluded on the basis of the Sykes-Picot Agreement (Evans 263). Signed secretly in 1916 and representative of a victor's peace, this agreement foresaw the territory of a defeated Ottoman Empire being parceled out among France, Russia, and Britain. Wilson detested the secret diplomacy of the war and supported Brandeis in his representations. When given his day in court, Chaim Weizmann, the acknowledged leader of European Zionism, defended the concept of a Jewish national home before the Council of Ten and the skeptical Lansing (*PPC* 4: 169). The President's commitment, however, was far from inspired. On the side of the State Department were the anti-Zionists, whose numbers included prominent American Jews, among them Henry Morgenthau, Adolph Ochs, David Belasco, E.R.A. Seligman and Congressman Julius Kahn of California ("Cross-Currents" 314-315). Sentiment even among American Jews was divided and Wilson was compelled to tread cautiously, lest his actions polarize the American Jewish community. He received a Zionist delegation led by Judge Julian Mack, raised its hopes concerning the establishment of a Jewish homeland, but failed to mention this conversation to his group in Paris until months afterward (Eisner 9).

The Arab dilemma was equally compelling. The story of British vows made and broken need not be repeated. There can be no gainsaying the fact that the Arabs had a moral case against England buttressed by two written contradictory promises, the McMahon correspondence (Speiser 75; Bickerton and Klausner 37) of 1915, which made ambiguous references to Palestine as an inclusion within an independent Arab state, and the Sykes-Picot Agreement of the following year. Doubtless, Arab nationalism was justifiably outraged with the Balfour Declaration and was seeking revision at Versailles. The Arab peoples desired that Palestine be connected to Syria in a federation and articulated this thought before the Council of Ten in

February 1919 (*PPC* 3: 712, 766). A further complication lay in the character of Emir Feisal, chief Arab spokesman. Indeed, Feisal did not enjoy the confidence of his people. He was a hireling of the British, receiving in the neighborhood of two hundred thousand dollars a month for “personal” expenses and seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars monthly for the support of this government (*PPC* 12: 858) If a single word could express Arab feelings in the light of all this perfidy, it was betrayal. Under the influence of Lloyd-George and Wilson, Feisal resignedly swayed to a pro-Weizmann, Jewish sovereignty position, but realized that the Arabs would neither accept nor condone the erection of a Zionist state (Meinertzhagen 15). Stripped of all power and having abjured the trust of his fellow Arab leaders, Feisal sank into insignificance at the peace convocation.

President Wilson then proceeded to prove the converse of what he had intended, and his misguided notions further endangered the Jewish dream of a national home. As applied to the Middle East, the Wilsonian concept of self-determination was wholly impractical because the divisive political and economic forces had done their work well among the agrarian peasantry. Rational arguments and intellectual disquisitions on cooperation and harmony left no impression on these uncomplicated minds. Also, as disastrous and contradictory as the wartime secret diplomacy had proved to be, the European powers were unwilling to scrap the sub rosa philosophy; it was familiar to them, it had functioned well in that part of the world for centuries and Wilson offered little except a hazy righteousness to replace it (Spielman 18; Meinertzhagen 25). With the hope that a referendum in the Middle East would win a resounding victory for Zionism (and hence, for national self-determination) and crush the treachery of secret diplomacy for all time, Wilson appealed to France and Britain to join him in establishing a commission which would be sent to Palestine and charged with evaluating the entire Middle Eastern situation. First France, then Great Britain declined (Royal Institute 12); as a result, an American commission acted independently and began sending back reports in July. Henry C. King and Charles R. Crane spoke of the intense desire of the populace for a union of Syria and Palestine; the well-known anti-Zionist predilections of Crane colored the testimony further and made its credibility somewhat doubtful. In their opinion, extreme Zionism was pernicious, fusion was the best solution and Jewish immigration ought to be restricted. Finally, they recommended that Feisal be installed as head of “unified” Syria (*PPC* 12: 749-750,785,792,859). The King-Crane Commission discovered that, barring the Jews (who favored an English mandate) and Roman Catholics (who were for a French mandate), the vast majority of Palestinians, aware that America had no territorial ambitions, desired a United States mandate. Only failing this would they consider British control (Storrs 375). A minority report was returned by William Yale, resident agent for the Standard Oil Company, now living in Palestine and employed as an observer for the State Department. In effect, Yale denied the findings of the King-Crane Commission. He felt that Arab nationalism had been manufactured by anti-Zionist zealots, and that the Balfour Declaration ought to be adhered to “because of the many advantages Jewish enterprise would bring to the Middle

East.” Strangely, on the day Yale’s paper arrived in America, Wilson collapsed and the brief was kept secret until 1922 (Knee 22-53).

Meanwhile, Lloyd-George was pursuing a single-minded policy in the Middle East which, abortive as it might have appeared in 1919, was to bear fruit in the twenties. The British objective at Versailles and after was to bring the United States into the Middle East as a replacement for disqualified Russia. The Prime Minister hoped that America would accept some mandates but on this score Wilson could do nothing except hint, although he was probably inclined to do so (DeNovo 115; Manuel 271).

The outlook for Britain, in this respect, was bleak. Precipitating the entire King-Crane incident was a remark of Wilson’s, made in March, that no secret agreements were binding on him or his country; as a result, the suggestion was made that the people of Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia determine their own destiny. In the wake of King-Crane’s dismal tidings, Wilson reiterated his pledge (Evans 263). The President resented Lloyd-George’s earlier approaches to him on the subject of British sovereignty in the Sinai, reasoning that such a proposal ran counter to the Fourteen Points and, more important, fearing the accretion of British strength in the Middle East (Meinertzhagen 19). What really undermined an Anglo-American consensus, however, was Article Twenty-two of the Covenant, which raised more questions than it solved. This article dealt with the structure and apportionment of conquered territory; in no way did it resemble a precise legal instrument. Rather, it reflected the spirit of Wilson; that is to say, it was a statement of ethical and political principles, adorned with fine language and opaque sentiments. As applied to Palestine, it was a constant source of friction and recrimination (Bentwich 96-98).

The decisive issues dividing Great Britain and America were, however, economic. American policy makers operated on three basic assumptions: first, national oil reserves, depleted by the war and a necessity for supplying the needs of the navy, merchant marine and home market, must be replenished (Murray 356-358); secondly, Middle Eastern oil, even if not exploited, must remain available to the United States (Earle 355-357; “oil” 18-19); and last, the implementation of the second precept depended on America’s ability to keep competition alive in the area by maintaining the viability of the “Open Door” policy (Hall 7; Campbell 30). From the actions of the United States, it is apparent that “oil was the major consideration dictating American interests at the Paris peace conference.” The United States had no desire to “concern itself either with the administration of the mandate or its general purposes as outlined in the Jewish homeland provision of the preamble” (Manuel 271).

Highlighting the conflict between the two Anglo-Saxon powers was the SOCONY controversy, ramifications of which were still being felt in the Harding Administration. Before the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, the United States

purchased full concessionary rights from the Ottoman Empire to seven tracts of land located in Palestine. While the mandate system was debated in the Hall of Mirrors, British officials refused to permit engineers and surveyors of SOCONY, an independent unit of the former Rockefeller Standard Oil trust, onto the land in question. From this originated the thought in many American minds that Britain was murdering the embryonic mandate apparatus, before it could be born, in favor of the old protectorate system. William Yale, the aforementioned agent, discovered that British officials, among them Colonel Ronald Storrs and General Arthur Money, had endeavored to ascertain the location of oil concessions from Palestinian notables associated with the Standard Oil Company of New York (SOCONY) and had even questioned Yale himself. The State Department wilted in the face of British recalcitrance. Lord Curzon, British Foreign Affairs Minister, replied that his government was not discriminating against the United States but had enforced a non-discriminatory ban on operations of all foreign corporations in the area, believing that the “occupying authorities would do nothing to compromise the freedom of future authorities in developing mineral resources.” America’s Ambassador to England, Davis, wrote that the United States had no legal grounds for protesting the decision. SOCONY was nonplused. United States passivity resulted in a growing Anglophobia (DeNovo 169-176), with an uncomfortable new aspect of Anglo-American diplomacy gradually materializing: for the present, postwar Palestine-American relations hardened over the British refusal to allow SOCONY to prospect for oil under the military occupation. Furthermore, Americans were still convinced that the British were discriminating against its businessmen. This led the State Department to invoke the Open Door policy and to associate it with general legal and economic principles governing mandates (DeNovo 338).

As one decade and an era slipped into the next and more turbulent one, the British attitude hardened at first. On 8 November 1919, a consular report arrived in Washington, stating that British objectives in Palestine and the rest of the Middle East were to restrict petroleum activities of foreign governments (*FRUS 1920*, 1: 365). If such a policy mirrors a retreat from cooperation, the same can be said of the treatment of American nationals. A number of them were engaged in missionary, philanthropic, commercial and educational projects in Palestine “which the United States sought to protect through the continuation of capitulatory rights as ensured by treaty during the Ottoman regime.” During the early 1920s, the State Department claimed that American consular courts had jurisdiction over Americans, while British officials permitted the trial of American nationals by local courts (DeNovo 338). In an official statement, Mark L. Bristol, American High Commissioner in Turkey, declared that occupation statutes were to be adhered to until the United States and Britain had reached a new agreement. Fortunately, the British stand, having lost some of its stiffness, was continually modified in an undisguised effort to avoid arousing enmity in Washington. An American motorist in Palestine, accused on 9 December 1920 of running over a Jewish woman, owed

his speedy release to the protestations of Secretary of State Colby (*FRUS 1920*, 2: 675-678).

In the early part of the year, the ailing Wilson was visited by a Zionist delegation; it was given an audience, politely listened to, but the ensuing silence was deafening. Individuals such as the Chief Executive may have evinced a certain sympathy but his underlings, speaking for the war-weary multitudes, were committed to no policy. The United States remained neutral, allying herself with neither interested Jewish nor Arab groups (Evans 263; Manuel 256). ([Note 3](#))

The San Remo Conference recognized Great Britain as mandatory for Palestine, but of greater moment was what it offered England in terms of oil exploitation possibilities. The State Department did not have to be convinced, for it was busily hatching European plots, supposedly aimed at dividing the oil-rich areas between France and England. The American tendency to adopt the conspiratorial approach to events was equally evident in the unreasoned accusations of national magazines (“*Were*” 300). Because the United States had rejected the League, the Covenant and hence, in effect, the mandate system, American arguments had little if any basis. If Britain was prejudiced against American individuals and enterprise, the United States had no recourse to League action. A diluted claim of equal rights based on the American contribution to the overall Allied victory against the Central Powers had to be substituted (DeNovo 174), as well as the moral argument of Britain’s “blatant” disregard of the equality principle embodied by the mandate in favor of an imperialist restoration (Stoyanovsky 28). The British turned the protests against the United States by expressing sympathy with its position but holding fast to the principle that terms of the mandate could be discussed only at the League Council “by signatories of the Covenant” (DeNovo 179).

Representations made to Secretary Colby by American oil concerns in the latter part of the year no doubt contributed to the formulation, at this juncture, of a definitive foreign policy statement which was to act as a guideline for American action in the Middle East until a comprehensive settlement was reached. In a message to the British government, Colby objected strenuously to the inferior status of Americans in Palestine, and demanded that the obligations accepted by Britain in the mandate clause of the Covenant be carried out. Colby plainly feared that the San Remo Conference had given the right of oil “exploitation” to any company under permanent British control, and that, consequently, American interests would be violated. The Secretary of State offered no feasible way out of the impasse because there was none. Perhaps the rights of individual Americans could be fought for, but, outside the League, America was in no position to press the issue of equal economic opportunity and the Open Door. The Senate had closed the door on cooperation and had thrown away the key.

As soon as word of the San Remo Conference was publicized, the Arabs rioted in Jerusalem; a few months into 1921, they took the sanguine path in Jaffa (Speiser

80; Eisner 11). Violence was the sole means available to the frustrated Palestinian nationalists who viewed the terms of the settlement as Zionist-inspired, and a stab in the back by the British. Americans, on the other hand, confined themselves to strict neutrality, limiting their concerns to preserving the safety of their own nationals and property.

Keenly aware that the death of Wilson had removed an internationally known Zionist sympathizer from the scene, Stephen Wise, leader of Reformed Jewry in America, organizer of the American Jewish Congress and an ardent Zionist, wrote despondently to his wife: “[Harding] is so little fitted to cope with the problems that press ... he represents such a decline from Wilson” (Polier and Wise 187). A great deal of perspicacity must have accompanied this letter. The stuff of which great men are made was manifestly missing in Harding. Unlike Wilson, a molder of foreign policy, the Republican was manipulated by his associates whose doctrinaire attitudes of non-involvement succeeded in gaining a preeminence not to be forfeited for nearly two decades.

Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes quickly divorced himself from the Zionist issue. The thrust of his policy was in the direction of securing the economic Open Door in Palestine. His argumentative powers received full play when the Standard Oil Company of New York renewed its campaign for economic equality. In response, Hughes carried on a heated correspondence with the American ambassador to England, Harvey, until Curzon silenced both men. What he offered, however, was conciliation rather than recrimination, an indication of the soft line Britain was now to pursue until its relations with the United States were regularized in 1924-25. Curzon assented to allow SOCONY to conduct researches within the confines of the territory on which the company had concessionary rights. Nevertheless, certain restrictions were to be laid upon these activities, namely that no permission to exploit the area would be given until the treaty of peace with Turkey entered into force and the terms of the Palestine mandate absolutely settled. In addition, SOCONY was required to furnish the British government with a full and complete dossier of its findings. Though the Standard Oil representative was horrified, Hughes accepted the terms outlined (*FRUS 1921*, 1: 923-924; 2: 95, 97, 99-105), regarding this confrontation as a moral victory for his government.

All this is not to say that America had not already made economic inroads. The Harding Administration continued its protest against exclusive grants of oil rights to foreign companies in those Middle Eastern areas where American firms had a stake (Murray 356). These protests were probably not without some justification, the State department being aware of European propensities, even within the framework of the League, to reinitiate nineteenth century methods of territorial division. In March 1921, the American-Palestine Company was established to undertake large scale industrial development in the Holy Land (DeNovo 339).



1922 was revealing, as it emphasized the critical division existing between the President, Congress and policy makers. Preparatory to the arrival at a general understanding between America and Britain, some basis for negotiation had to be reached. Feelers were extended in late January when Arthur James Balfour was in Washington as his country's delegate to the Naval Disarmament Conference. In an important sense, the Hughes-Balfour correspondence set the standard for Anglo-American relations in Palestine. The Secretary of State narrowly confined himself to those legal questions involved in protecting American interests; significantly, he did not "request," but "demanded" British cooperation as a condition for America's eventual consent to the mandate. Hughes' rather persuasive suggestions to Balfour included the restoration of capitulatory rights to the United States upon the termination of British control, the enjoyment by the United States of Palestinian privileges equal to those of League members, and the requirement of United States consent as a prerequisite before altering in any way the form or text of the mandate. The United States continued the discussion into June via diplomatic correspondence (*FRUS 1922*, 1:130; 2: 270-277, 280).

In parallel, favorable action was being taken in Congress, much to the dismay of both Allen Dulles, isolationist chief of the State Department's Near Eastern Division, and Charles Evans Hughes, who had declined to meet with a Zionist committee in March (Manuel 276). At about the same time, Hamilton Fish in the House and Henry Cabot Lodge in the Senate introduced resolutions countenancing the reestablishment of the Jewish homeland (Adler and Margalith 82-83; Safran 38). Lodge's defection from isolationism is most glaring and can only be explained by the fact that the Massachusetts Senator, a political isolationist in terms of Europe, saw nothing amiss with pursuing a policy of economic internationalism in the Middle East, where United States interests would be benefited by the encouragement of enlightened Jewish industry and commerce. Furthermore, missionaries were attempting to overcome the resistance of Arabs to American enterprise by either befriending or converting them, while petroleum groups were pressuring policy makers to defend their financial interests in Palestine. So, the time was right for an expedient demonstration by the United States Congress. With strong backing, then, the resolution was pushed through the House on May 3, and the Senate a little more than a month later (Gregg; *Congressional Record* May/June 1922: 10210). Harding signed it in September (Hull 148). Fundamentally, the joint resolution approved by Harding was no less than a restatement of the Balfour Declaration (Manuel 282), and was an academic expression of a feeling rather than a clarion call to action. The Zionist sympathizers had won a pyrrhic victory, for the 1922 resolution was typical of the great body of watered-down foreign legislation passed in the decade: there were no legal obligations appended; in their stead was a generous helping of moral support. Still, it placed the State Department in a precarious position because its appraisal was that the sole, official, concern of the United States should be (and actually was) the protection of American nationals and interests. Since neither Zionism nor Arab nationalism played a part in achieving these objectives, pursuing either of these courses would compromise

America's traditional neutrality. In brief, the official line of the State Department was always that America had no authority for administering the Palestine mandate or implementing the Balfour Declaration (DeNovo 340, 344).

Secretary Hughes' position was that he had no objection to the adoption of the Congressional bill, although he personally disapproved of it. The House Committee on Foreign Affairs exulted because the resolution "committed us to no foreign obligations or entanglements"; the State Department objected to it because it seemed to imply an intervention into affairs from which the United States had withdrawn (Evans 265). Earlier, Allen Dulles had urged Harding to steer clear of Mid-East squabbles, but was ignored by both the President (Manuel 278) and by Congress. Helpless in the face of such disregard, the Near Eastern expert was forced to content himself with a petty utterance on Palestine as "an annoying interference that might lead to entanglement" (Eisner 16).

A further blow was dealt to the "non-involvers" (this term is preferable to isolationists, as the latter might mean those who favor European withdrawal but economic nationalism in other parts of the globe, e.g. Lodge) with the provisional approval, on 5 July 1922, of the mandate by the United States. A glance at the document rapidly dispels any preconceived notion of British intractability. Included in the United States-Great Britain agreement were many pro-American stipulations insisted upon by Hughes in January. It appeared as if Britain was prepared to confer a "favored nation" status upon America in order to receive a United States blessing for the mandate ("American Rights" 53-54). Article 8 of the mandate, concerning rights and immunities of foreigners, was actually changed at the behest of the United States to include a sentence stating that the old jurisdictions and protections enjoyed by nations under the Ottoman Empire should be reinstated immediately following the expiration of the mandate (Adler and Margalith 82). Britain was anxious to gain United States approval of a Balfour-like preamble to the mandate and the inclusion of American representatives on a Palestinian commission to oversee the Holy Places. Hughes was reluctant, however, to commit himself even to these harmless proposals, proscribing his government to the acceptance of precisely what was necessary (*FRUS 1922*, 2: 286, 292-300, 303-305).

The battle between the president and Congress in opposition to the Secretary of State and the State Department grew more relentless. In the light of British flexibility, Hughes' attitude appears unreasonably harsh. The split at the decision-making level indicates, however, that isolation in its extreme form had not yet gripped the country, and that a succession of Presidents, appealing to an activist minority of Jewish constituents, did not as yet wish to forsake an opportunistic empathy with Zionism. The next two years illustrate a residual willingness on the part of non-interventionists and isolationists to achieve some sort of understanding with Britain on the Middle East question, although it is increasingly easy to detect an ebbing of British strength and a concomitant rise in the negotiating powers and intransigence of America.

By a separate Turco-American agreement, the United States secured the same rights as the Allies had in the Lausanne Treaty with respect to the maintenance of the Open Door. If one evaluates the Harding Administration in terms of Palestinian accomplishment, success is the term to employ. From the humanitarian, nationalist preoccupations of Wilson there evolved a new emphasis on economic considerations. This trend established a pattern for later contacts with the entire Middle East. By following the path of political non-involvement, maximum benefit accrued (Murray 359-360), but at the high cost of a moral, justifiable policy toward the inhabitants themselves.

“The American consul in Jerusalem refused to be bound by the mandate ... He was still holding consular courts in his office” (Andrews, *Holy Land* 1: 259-260). Consul Cobb was not acting independently; at every turn, he was proffered the confident support of Hughes. The Chief Secretary for the Palestinian government, in a moment of gay abandon, consented to allow Americans, heretofore tried in local courts for criminal and civil offenses, the option of seeking a verdict in American consular courts. The British Chief Justice in Palestine and the Attorney General countermanded the order, and Curzon, appealing to Hughes, claimed that Britain could not possibly single out the United States for special treatment which would be understood neither by the native Palestinians nor by League members. Curzon agreed to regularizing Anglo-American relations by signing a new convention with the United States but until such a pact materialized, he emphasized, America would have to abide by the 1922 instrument, the Palestine Order in Council (*FRUS 1923*, 2: 218-228). Hughes accepted the English rebuttal, perhaps realizing that a meeting of the minds was imminent.

In May 1924, an American citizen, Israel Hanovich, was sentenced to pay a fine by a local court in Palestine but was released upon the discovery of his American citizenship. America's ambassador to Britain, Kellogg, could scarcely hide his pleasure in a 13 May missive to Hughes (*FRUS 1924* 2: 197-199). Preparatory to additional British retreat was a statement made by President Coolidge on 13 June 1924, regarding his favorable view of the reestablishment of Palestine as a Jewish homeland (Hull 148). The United States was now bowing to the long-standing British plea by acknowledging the validity of the Balfour Declaration. When the issue of customs duties arose in August, Acting Secretary Grew claimed United States citizens to be exempt from their payment under the old capitulatory rights. British Foreign Affairs Minister Chamberlain refused to aggravate the issue, knowing that the signing of a definitive settlement would soon calm the troubled waters (*FRUS 1924*, 2: 199-201, 212-222).

The convention of 3 December 1924 was to stand unchanged until 1948. Briefly, the provisions were the following: (1) the United States tendered official approval to and recognition of the British mandate; (2) United States nationals shall enjoy the privileges of the mandate; (3) a guarantee to protect American property rights is given by the Civil Government of Occupation; (4) a duplicate of the annual

mandatory report, furnished to the League, will be sent to the United States; (5) nationals of the United States may maintain educational, philanthropic and religious institutions in the mandated territory; (6) assent by the United States must be obtained to changes in the mandate before they may be effected (Andrews, *Holy Land 2*: 393-394; Safran 38).

What were the implications of the convention? Suffice it to say, most of them were negative, the treaty itself defining no clear course of action or any sort of machinery whereby such action could be implemented. The extent of American responsibility was left purposely vague, especially in terms of the American veto, acceptance of the annual report and American participation in mandate changes (Eisner 16). The United States, then, had no wish for commitment; official policy, as exemplified by the 1924 agreement, was neutrality. Oil investments, protecting American citizens including businessmen and missionaries, were primary factors in the demand that the mandate contain a clause pertaining to the Open Door. As to political involvement, it is clear that 1924 was the year “America washed its hands of the Middle East settlement” (Hurewitz 118).

Although the treaty was signed in 1924, ratifications were not exchanged for a year. In the interim, the United States further displayed its insensitivity toward Middle Eastern problems by creating an immigration crisis in Palestine. The institution of a new quota law in America drastically curtailed the number of Jewish immigrants from fifty thousand in 1924 to ten thousand the following year. The wave of people spilling into Palestine became so huge and unmanageable as to precipitate widespread unemployment and economic depression which persisted until 1928 (Yale 394). The Convention of 1924 was ratified by the Senate on 20 February 1925 (Research Committee 5); the delay in disposing of the matter after this date is attributable to United States obstinacy.

Frank B. Kellogg, Hughes’ replacement as State Secretary, requested that cases and suits already adjudicated by Palestinian courts be dropped along with one pending action and six judgments rendered but not yet executed. No compromiser, Kellogg made these conditions to exchanging ratifications and would brook no hesitation from Britain.

A *cause célèbre* was Elimelech Sacks, an American citizen who imported large shipments of matches and was constrained to pay a duty, under the new import law, of fifteen thousand dollars. This the intrepid match entrepreneur refused to do, thus compelling the Palestine government to detain his shipment at a port in Jaffa. Kellogg pushed Britain to indemnify Sacks, and on 13 October Chamberlain promised that as soon as ratifications were exchanged and the convention became effective, the complainant would be remunerated. Making every effort to maintain its fairness and flexibility, His Majesty’s government offered just compensation to United States citizens “as an act of diplomatic courtesy not affecting the principle involved.” Plainly, the British were burying their pride and had overstepped the

bounds of dignified compromise in order to appease the State Department. The greatest concession was yet to come. Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs Laurence Oliphant, acknowledged the verity that American and British views on capitulatory rights were irreconcilable. Nevertheless, the English government was prepared to take formal note of the “correctness” of the American position that these rights had never been abandoned by the United States government (*FRUS 1925*, 2: 219,222-224, 227-228). Thus Britain, until now unwilling to recognize any other but the postwar system instituted in Palestine with regard to foreign nationals, made the United States an exception. In so doing, America, in effect, handcuffed British machinery in this sector and set a precedent for further United States incursions, turned Palestine into a football to be kicked back and forth as the occasion demanded and bankrupted all possibilities of attaining a uniform, hopeful settlement which would encourage stability and economic growth in that Middle Eastern country, while assuring social equality and political autonomy for its inhabitants.

After having received definite British assurances, Kellogg decided to complete the negotiations in as peremptory a fashion as possible. On 3 December 1925, one year to the day after the convention was signed the ratifications, binding the dubious allies, were formally exchanged.

## **Conclusions**

To the detriment of ethnic groups resident in Palestine, the United States attempted, unsuccessfully, to pursue a course of *Realpolitik* after the death of Woodrow Wilson. Some American businessmen, petroleum groups and missionaries benefited immediately, but the policy of protecting the traditional Open Door was expedient and short-sighted, as most of American diplomacy was during the inter-war period.

Clearly, a shift from humanitarian-collective concerns to purely self-interested ones occurred during the Republican ascendancy of the 1920s, and fulfilled the promise of isolationist rhetoric. Economic nationalism and political irresponsibility on a global scale were its objectives. In no place was the feat accomplished so fully than in Palestine. In retrospect, schisms in United States leadership, the submerging of idealism, belligerence toward Great Britain and the preeminence of the business motive contributed to what may be termed a vague and contradictory policy. In truth, it was neither vague nor contradictory; it was, at times, very well focused, but it was not a formula for either conciliation or peace. That is why it was replaced in the years after 1945.

## **Notes**

1 See the following for recent views of the Great Powers and Palestine at the end of World War I and during the mandatory period: Doreen Ingrams, ed., *Palestine Papers 1917-1922: Seeds of Conflict*. New York: George Braziller, 1973; Jon Kimche, *There Could Have Been Peace*. New York: Dial, 1973; Isaiah Friedman, *The Question of Palestine, 1914-1918: British-Jewish-Arab Relations*. 2. expanded ed. New Brunswick,: Transaction Books, 1992; David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East 1914-1922*. New York: Henry Holt, 1989; Ann M. Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine 1917-1939: The Frustration of a Nationalist Movement*. Ithaca, NY, Cornell UP, 1979; Walid Khalidi, ed., *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem Until 1948*. 2. ed. (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987; Kenneth Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine 1917-1939*. Chapel Hill, UP of North Carolina, 1984; Ronald Sanders, *The High Walls of Jerusalem: A History of the Balfour Declaration and the Birth of the British Mandate for Palestine*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1983.

2 For background on James Barton, his associations and his beliefs with regard to the Middle East, see Donald M. Love, *Henry Churchill King of Oberlin*. New Haven, Yale UP, 1956, pp. 214-15, 224; Aaron Aaronsohn to Provisional Executive Committee of General Zionist Affairs, 1 November 1918 and unsigned memorandum to Stephen Wise, 3 February 1919, Louis D. Brandeis Papers, Zionist Archives, NYC. John Huston Finley's evangelical tendencies, his association with Barton's A.C.R.N.E. and the activities of the American Red Cross with regard to Jews and Arabs in postwar Palestine are available in the following sources: John Huston Finley, *A Pilgrim in Palestine*. New York, Scribner's, 1919, p. 55 and the John Huston Finley Papers, New York Public Library, NYC, especially Boxes 73-75 but see also Boxes 76-77, 79-80. For the role of the Y.M.C.A. which, by 1932, had become a fixture in Jerusalem and a center of missionary activity in the Middle East, see, for example, Robert D. Kesselman to Louis D. Brandeis, 30 August 1932 and Joseph Baratz to Brandeis, 12 August 1932, Brandeis Papers; "'Y' in Jerusalem," *The Evening Mail* September 1923: 2 and Sherwood Eddy, "Politics in Palestine" *The Christian Century* , 28 June 1923: 813-16.

Finally a very interesting anti-Zionist chapter could be written on the Carnegie Foundation's association with Palestine in the first post-World War I decade. See all of the following: Henry S. Pritchett to the President of the Endowment, 29 Apr. 1926, Vol. I. A. 2. b, Report no. 459, Box 6; Henry S. Pritchett, *A Report to the President Concerning the Situation in the Near East* 18 Nov. 1926, Vol I. A. 2. B, Report no. 478, Box 7; Nicholas Murray Butler to Henry S. Pritchett, 9 Nov. 1925 and 15 Oct. 1926; Pritchett to Butler, 10 November 1925, Vol. I. A. 4 Trustees no. 3192, Box 29, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Manuscript Collection, Columbia University, NYC; Henry S. Pritchett, "Observations in Egypt, Palestine and Greece," *International Conciliation* no. 225 December 1926: 517-20; "Pritchett Reports Zionism Will Fail," *New York Times*, 29 Nov. 1926: 1, 3 and "Pritchett Defends Report,:" *New York Times*, 5 Dec. 1926: sec. 2, p. 1.

**3** In the last twenty-five years, but primarily in the last fifteen or so, Jews and Arabs in mandatory Palestine have been scrutinized by a growing list of historians, among them Walter Laqueur, David Vital, Dalia Ofer, Dina Porat, Henry Near, Anita Shapira, Jehuda Reinharz, Gideon Shimoni, Zachary Lockman and Michael Brown.

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