

UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

RECENT BRITISH EDITORIAL COMMENT
on the
PALESTINE QUESTION

1. In an article entitled "Palestine Poker", the NEW STATESMAN AND NATION of 17 January 1948 emphasizes that Britain remains vitally interested in the fate of Palestine despite the termination of the Mandate and that "so long as we remain dependent on Middle Eastern oil we cannot disregard a danger spot from which chaos might spread through all the Arab States".

In spite of the Government's apparent unconcern for the future of Palestine after the withdrawal of British forces, the article points out, British diplomacy in the Middle East is "as active as ever", and the so-called neutrality being displayed is "not an end in itself but a sleight-of-hand in a game of poker".

This maneuver has not succeeded in inducing the United States to assist in the implementation of partition, and the Mufti and the Arab Higher Committee are confident "that they have got the Americans where they want them, talking Zionism at home and practising in Palestine a non-intervention which works against the Jews".

It is probable, the article continues, that Russia has calculated on this American attitude, hoping either for an anti-Western flare-up throughout the Middle East, or an opportunity to intervene with the Red Army to enforce the authority of the United Nations. Bevin, a step ahead of the Russians, hopes that "by playing the Russian Menace to the full", it might be possible "to bring the Arab League to its senses and to negotiate a last-minute settlement which would prevent Russian intervention".

The Jews, who will choose war rather than capitulation, will not, unlike the Arab League, be unduly alarmed by the threat of Russian intervention which might in fact be of direct assistance to them.

This gives them a diplomatic strength which partly compensates for their military weakness as they too can exploit fear of Russia and so bring pressure on Britain and America, and through them on the Arab League.

"If the Government really desires, as it must," concludes the article, "to prevent a conflagration in the Middle East, it would do well to ponder carefully the real balance of forces, and not to be misled once again by those Arab experts who have under-estimated so often in the past the strength and the will-power of the Jews. It is Mr. Bevin's duty to work for an agreed settlement before 15 May, and he will be wise to reckon in advance that that settlement must involve the liquidation of the Mufti and the establishment of a Jewish State, though the boundaries of that State may well be a subject for negotiation. We must use all the great influence which we still possess to persuade the Arab League that, if it wants to avoid Russian intervention, it must induce the Arabs of Palestine to accept the UNO decision".

2. An editorial in the MANCHESTER GUARDIAN of 21 January 1948 calls attention to the "confusion" revealed by the recent debate on Palestine in the House of Lords. That the British Government still insists that its forces cannot be used to impose any plan "not freely accepted by both parties in Palestine", means in practice that "we are carrying on as if the United Nations had taken no decision at all". The Government defends Jews against Arabs and Arabs against Jews, but it refuses to recognize the rights of either to hold arms or to organize for the defense of their allotted areas. The Commission's only hope, according to the editorial, unless the Security Council provides it with an international force before 15 May, is that it will find the proposed Jewish and Arab States sufficiently far advanced in organization and defense to look after themselves. "At present", concludes the editorial, "the British Government and the United Nations are still acting at cross purposes."

3. The decision of the Palestine Commission to encourage the early formation of a Jewish militia is termed "undeniably right" in an editorial in the MANCHESTER GUARDIAN of 31 January 1948. If the Security Council cannot provide an international force, the Jews must be given the chance to defend their own State.

"At present", continues the editorial, "we are still treating Jews and Arabs on the same footing, though the Jews are fighting to defend a decision of the United Nations and the Arabs are fighting to defeat it." The editorial advocates that the British Government accept the advice of the Commission and allow a Jewish militia to hold arms and train openly for its own defense.

4. An editorial in the London TIMES of 2 February 1948 states that Sir Alexander Cadogan's statements to the Commission "may help to clear the air at a time when the Commission itself seems hesitant and uncertain how to approach its work in Palestine and when many in the United Nations are still half expecting this country to carry the main burden".

The editorial says that the repeated warnings of British representatives regarding the risk of a partition decision without providing means of enforcement were ignored, partly because of a hope that Britain could be persuaded to use the machinery of the Mandatory Government to impose partition by force and partly because representatives of the Jewish Agency dismissed the danger of Arab resistance as "a figment of British imagination". Now that the structure of public security in Palestine is breaking down even more quickly than Britain had expected, Jewish Agency spokesmen "seek to blame Britain for the consequences of their own miscalculations". Refuting the accusations of the Jewish Agency that the Palestine Government favors the Arabs and prevents the Jews from defending themselves, the editorial asserts that the government has everywhere taken strong action against Arab aggression and that Jewish organizations of self-defense have not been obstructed so long as they acted defensively.

The editorial goes on to say that "the sooner the Palestine Commission goes to Palestine the better" and that while the Government rightly refuses "to allow their authority to be undermined, their reluctance to let the small Commission arrive in good time is perhaps less easy to defend". Asserting that the Commission "could begin assessing the needs on the spot", The editorial concludes by saying that "the members of the United Nations responsible for the decision on partition have exposed the Jews in Palestine to difficulties and dangers and they cannot leave them in the lurch".

5. An article in the NEW STATESMAN AND NATION of 7 February 1948 titled "The Second Front in the Cold War" criticizes the British Government's policy in the Middle East as having abandoned socialist principles to "appease" the Arabs and "connive at the Arab League's defiance of UEO". The article states that: "Mr. Bevin's realism about Palestine has done nothing to improve the situation. It has made war certain in Palestine, without winning Arab friendship. The Arab feels not gratitude but contempt for a great Power which abdicates and remains neutral on an issue of principle. Sensing weakness, he raises his demands for Danegeld..."

6. An editorial in the MANCHESTER GUARDIAN of 16 February 1948 (quoted in the NEW YORK TIMES of 17 February) states that while it is probably too late for the British Government to change its mind on the question of any international force, it would be of great assistance if Britain should offer troops to guard Jerusalem and give the Palestine Commission a refuge in which to work.

Britain's attitude of doing nothing to advance partition "has turned heavily against the Jews", who cannot arm or train their soldiers as the Arabs have been able to do in the States bordering Palestine. As it is the Arabs who are attacking Jews and challenging the United Nations' authority, the editorial continues, "the duty of every member of the Security Council is plain: it must be to enforce the authority of the United Nations". This applies especially to the United States but also to Britain, "which has an interest in the success of the United Nations outweighing its interest in the goodwill of the Arab States".