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UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

Extract from Mr. Bevin's Statement in the Debate on Foreign
Affairs in the House of Commons, 4 May 1948.

From THE TIMES, London, 5 May 1948

"... The position in the Middle East (he went on) was overshadowed by events in Palestine, and it was difficult to discuss the peaceful settlement of that area until the Palestine problem was solved. In view of the misinformation and misrepresentation flying around recently about our intentions in Palestine, he thought it would be useful to make a short statement on the present position.

First, they did not depart from their decision to retain the mandate until May 15 only. (Ministerial cheers.) They accepted the obligation within their resources to maintain law and order and prevent aggression until that date. They had every intention of using their military resources to that end, and after May 15 to cover the withdrawal of their remaining forces.

Events in Palestine had called for more military action due to acts of aggression. Jaffa, for instance, was an Arab city and there had been indiscriminate attacks and firing there by the Jews. Innocent people were suffering, and they had, therefore, to use their forces to compel a truce. That was a correct action to take.

In Jerusalem the United Nations, together with all the churches and religious bodies, were pressing for a truce to be established there (Mr. Bevin said), but we found that attacks were being made, particularly on one of the Arab quarters. We stepped in and indicated that fighting would have to cease or we should have to take military action. On the other hand we have used all our influence to prevent invasion of Palestine by Arab countries, although the excitement in those countries, owing to events in Palestine, is causing great difficulties. Stories of invasion by them are not borne out by the reports from our military representatives. Therefore, our attitude has been to give clear warnings to both sides that while we remain responsible up to May 15 we cannot tolerate aggression.

It has been our policy not to force a decision which was disagreed by the two parties by means of military or oppressive measures. But we have always made it clear that if there was agreement between Jews and Arabs for a cease fire order or a temporary truce or some other kind of interim government working towards a final settlement, and if we were approached by all concerned to render assistance in conjunction with others-- I repeat "in conjunction with others" -- this would create a new situation and we should have to consider it most carefully. But I repeat that there is no question of using our resources after May 15 to enforce any kind of settlement against the wishes of either party.

Praiseworthy efforts have been made by the United Nations to avert the worst consequences. We have given support to the idea of a 'cease fire' either in Jerusalem itself or for the whole country, but we feel that things have gone too far for any more theoretical debates on long-term solutions. The vital requirement now is that the shooting should be stopped and some machinery established of which the two parties can make use and so provide an opportunity for wise counsel to prevail. At this eleventh hour I say to those working in the direction of a settlement, let them not spare their efforts; with a crisis upon us there is still time for moderation and reason to win, but in a few days it may be too late..."