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A PROJECT OF THE AMERICAN-ISRAELI COOPERATIVE ENTERPRISE

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(April 1920)

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The San Remo Conference was an international meeting held following the conclusion of [World War I](#) that determined the precise boundaries for territories captured by the Allies.

The conference, attended by [Great Britain](#), [France](#), [Italy](#), and [Japan](#)- with the [United States](#) as a neutral observer, was held in San Remo, Italy, in April 1920. The conference was a continuation of a previous meeting between these Allied powers that had been held in [London](#) in February 1920, where it was decided, among other things, to put [Palestine](#) under [British Mandatory](#) rule. At San Remo, the Allies confirmed the pledge contained in the [Balfour Declaration](#) concerning the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine.

The British delegation to San Remo was headed by Prime Minister David Lloyd George and Lord Curzon, who had replaced [Lord Balfour](#) as foreign minister in 1919. Balfour, however, was also present at the conference as a consultant for final settlement issues. At both meetings the French expressed many reservations about the inclusion of the [Balfour Declaration](#) in the peace treaty, and it was only after the exertion of British pressure that they were gradually persuaded to agree to it.

The Conference was also attended by [Chaim Weizmann](#), [Nahum Sokolow](#), and [Herbert Samuel](#), who presented a memorandum to the British delegation on the final settlement in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The article concerning Palestine was debated on April 24 and the next day it was finally resolved to incorporate the [Balfour Declaration](#) in Britain's mandate in Palestine. Thus Britain was made responsible "for putting into effect the declaration made on the 8th [sic.] November 1917 by the British Government and adopted by the other Allied Powers, in favor of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people; it being clearly understood that nothing should be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

The resolution at San Remo was celebrated by mass rallies throughout the Jewish world.

Palestine Arab Revolt 1936-39

What happened during the Arab Revolt of 1936-39?

In more than a century, the world saw Palestinian Arabs carrying out a violent uprising which was named in the history as 'the Great Arab Revolt of 1936-39'. The uprising mobilized thousands of Palestinians belonging to all classes to take part in the revolt and patriotism was fanned among the masses through the mediums of press, media, schools and literary circles. British were taken aback by the intensity of the uprising and the extent to which it reached. They shipped over 20,000 troops in Palestine while the Zionists also had some 15,000 Jews prepared for their own nationalist faction by 1939.

The revolt initiated in the form of unprompted acts of violence after Sheikh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam was killed in 1935 by the British troops. The violence was escalated after two Jews were killed in April 1936 and a general strike was initiated in Nablus and Jaffa. It was at this time that the Arab political groups established an Arab Higher Committee and the presidency was given to Amin al-Husayni, the mufti of Jerusalem.

The committee declared a general strike, forbade Arabs to pay taxes and called for the closing of municipal governments. Moreover, it demanded that a ban should be put on Jewish immigration and the sale of land to Jews. One of the purposes of the strike was to ask for national independence. Along with the strike, Palestinian Arabs were joined by Arabs from neighboring countries who then targeted the British troops and Jewish settlements installed in the northern parts. By the end of the year, this movement had taken the form of a national revolt where its main strength was the Arab peasantry.

A royal commission was sent over to Palestine, presided by Lord Robert Peel who scrutinized the ongoing situation of the revolt and prepared a report stating the root cause of the uprising as Arab desire for independence. Peel Commission was formed which declared the mandate unsuccessful and decided that the land should be partitioned. Arabs were horrified after knowing that the commission has given more land to Jews than their existing landholding. Resultantly, the revolt became more intense during 1937 and 1938.

The British declared a martial law in September 1937. As a result, the Arab Higher Committee was dissolved and many members of the Palestinian organizations were arrested. Mufti al-Husayn fled from the country, never to return. The revolt lasted till 1939 with high casualty rates. An estimated 5000 Arabs were killed in the revolt, 15000 got wounded and another 5600 were imprisoned.

Although the revolt was unsuccessful in achieving its goals, it gave birth to a national identity. Most of the leaders of the revolt were either killed or they fled, leaving a demoralized Arab population behind them who were unable to recover from the after effects of the revolt. Nevertheless, it proved to be significant event in the history of Palestine as it signaled the involvement of other Arab countries in the Palestinian cause.

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THE EVIAN CONFERENCE

Between 1933 and 1941, the Nazis aimed to make Germany *judenrein* (cleansed of Jews) by making life so difficult for them that they would be forced to leave the country. By 1938, about 150,000 German Jews, one in four, had already fled the country. After Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, however, an additional 185,000 Jews were brought under Nazi rule. Many Jews were unable to find countries willing to take them in.

Many German and Austrian Jews tried to go to the United States but could not obtain the visas needed to enter. Even though news of the violent pogroms of November 1938 was widely reported, Americans remained reluctant to welcome Jewish refugees. In the midst of the Great Depression, many Americans believed that refugees would compete with them for jobs and overburden social programs set up to assist the needy.

Congress had set up immigration quotas in 1924 that limited the number of immigrants and discriminated against groups considered racially and ethnically undesirable. These quotas remained in place even after President Franklin D. Roosevelt, responding to mounting political pressure, called for an international conference to address the refugee problem.

In the summer of 1938, delegates from thirty-two countries met at the French resort of Evian. Roosevelt chose not to send a high-level official, such as the secretary of state, to Evian; instead, Myron C. Taylor, a businessman and close friend of Roosevelt's, represented the US at the conference. During the nine-day meeting, delegate after delegate rose to express sympathy for the refugees. But most countries, including the United States and Britain, offered excuses for not letting in more refugees.

Responding to Evian, the German government was able to state with great pleasure how "astounding" it was that foreign countries criticized Germany for their treatment of the Jews, but none of them wanted to open the doors to them when "the opportunity offer[ed]."

Even efforts by some Americans to rescue children failed: the Wagner-Rogers bill, an effort to admit 20,000 endangered Jewish refugee children, was not supported by the Senate in 1939 and 1940. Widespread racial prejudices among Americans—including antisemitic attitudes held by the US State Department officials—played a part in the failure to admit more refugees.

Key Dates

JULY 6-15, 1938
REFUGEE CONFERENCE IN EVIAN



The Hotel Royal, site of the Evian Conference on Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. Evian-les-Bains, France, July 1938.

— *National Archives and Records Administration, Coll. Park, Md.*

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Delegates from 32 countries and representatives from relief organizations meet in Evian-les-Bains, a spa town in France, to discuss the German-Jewish refugees. The United States encourages all countries to find a long-term solution to the problem. However, the United States and other countries are unwilling to ease their immigration restrictions. Most countries fear that an increase of refugees will cause further economic hardships. The conference ends a week later. With the exception of the tiny Dominican Republic, no country is willing to accept more refugees. One result of the conference is the establishment of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (ICR), which will continue to work on the refugee problem.



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FEBRUARY 9, 1939

LIMITED REFUGEE BILL PROPOSED IN US CONGRESS

The Wagner-Rogers refugee aid bill is introduced in the United States Senate by Senator Robert F. Wagner (D-New York). This bill calls for the admission to the United States of 20,000 German refugee children under the age of 14 over the next two years, in addition to immigration normally permitted. The bill will be introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Edith Nourse Rogers (R-Massachusetts) five days later. Charity organizations across the country publicize the plight of German refugee children in an attempt to gain support for the bill. However, organizations favoring restrictive immigration strongly oppose the bill and claim that the refugee children would deprive American children of aid. After several months of debate, the bill is defeated in committee. The bill would have provided refuge for thousands of German Jewish children.

MAY 1939

BRITISH GOVERNMENT RESTRICTS IMMIGRATION INTO PALESTINE

An Arab-Palestinian revolt against the British mandate in Palestine in 1936 and continuing Arab unrest, especially regarding the status of Jews in Palestine, leads to a decisive change in British policy in the Middle East. In the White Paper of 1939, the British government announces its policies on the future status of Palestine. The British reject the establishment of an independent Jewish state and severely restrict future Jewish immigration to Palestine. In response to the British policy, illegal immigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine increases. The British intercept the illegal immigrants and intern them in camps. During the war, there is no attempt to relax the immigration policy. Restrictions on Jewish immigration remain in force until the establishment of Israel in 1948.

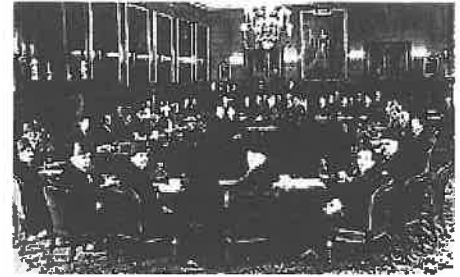
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White Paper of 1939

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **White Paper of 1939**, also known as the *MacDonald White Paper* after Malcolm MacDonald, the British Colonial Secretary who presided over it, was a policy paper issued by the British government under Neville Chamberlain in which the idea of partitioning the Mandate for Palestine, as recommended in the Peel Commission Report of 1937, was abandoned in favour of creating an independent Palestine governed by Palestinian Arabs and Jews in proportion to their numbers in the population by 1939 (section I). A limit of 75,000 Jewish immigrants was set for the five-year period 1940-1944, consisting of a regular yearly quota of 10,000, and a supplementary quota of 25,000, spread out over the same period, to cover refugee emergencies. After this cut-off date, further immigration would depend on the permission of the Arab majority (section II). Restrictions were also placed on the rights of Jews to buy land from Arabs (section III).

The White Paper was published as Cmd 6019. It was approved by the House of Commons on 23 May 1939 by 268 votes to 179.^{[1][2]}



London Conference, St. James's Palace, February 1939. Arab Palestinian delegates (foreground), Left to right: Fu'ad Saba, Yaqub Al-Ghusein, Musa Al-Alami, Amin Tamimi, Jamal Al-Husseini, Awni Abdul Hadi, George Antonious, and Alfred Roch. Facing the Arab Palestinians are the British, with Sir Neville Chamberlain presiding. To his right is Lord Halifax, and to his left, Malcolm MacDonald

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Background

Further information: British Mandate of Palestine

During World War I, the British had made two promises regarding territory in the Middle East. Britain had promised the Hashemite governors of Arabia, through Lawrence of Arabia and the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, independence for a united Arab country covering Syria in exchange for their supporting the British against the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Caliphate had declared a military jihad in support of the Germans and it was hoped that an alliance with the Arabs would quell the chances of a general Muslim uprising in British-held territories in Africa, India, and the Far East.^[3] Great Britain had also negotiated the Sykes-Picot Agreement, agreeing to partition the Middle East between Britain and France.

A variety of strategic factors, such as securing Jewish support in Eastern Europe as the Russian front

collapsed, culminated in the Balfour Declaration, 1917, with Britain promising to create and foster a Jewish national home in Palestine. These broad delineations of territory and goals for both the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and Arab self-determination was approved in the San Remo conference.

In June 1922 the League of Nations approved the Palestine Mandate with effect from September 1923. The Palestine Mandate was an explicit document regarding Britain's responsibilities and powers of administration in Palestine including 'secur[ing] the establishment of the Jewish national home', and 'safeguarding the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine'. In September 1922, the British government presented a memorandum to the League of Nations stating that Transjordan would be excluded from all the provisions dealing with Jewish settlement, in accordance with Article 25 of the Mandate, and this memorandum was approved on 23 September. Due to stiff Arab opposition and pressure against Jewish immigration, Britain redefined Jewish immigration by restricting its flow according to the country's economic capacity to absorb the immigrants. In effect annual quotas were put in place as to how many Jews could immigrate, while Jews possessing a large sum of money (500 Pounds) were allowed to enter the country freely.

Following the Adolf Hitler's rise to power, a growing number of European Jews were prepared to spend the money necessary to enter Palestine. The 1936 Nuremberg Laws stripped the 500,000 German Jews of their citizenship. Jewish migration was impeded by Nazi restrictions on the transfer of finances abroad (departing Jews had to abandon their property), but the Jewish Agency was able to negotiate an agreement allowing Jews resident in Germany to buy German goods for export to Palestine thus circumventing the restrictions.

The large numbers of Jews entering Palestine led to the 1936–1939 Arab revolt in Palestine. Britain responded to the Arab revolt by appointing a Royal Commission, known as the Peel Commission which traveled out to Palestine and undertook a thorough study of the issues. The Peel Commission recommended in 1937 that Palestine be partitioned into two states, one Arab the other Jewish. In January 1938, the Woodhead Commission explored the practicalities of partition, proposing that the Jewish state be substantially smaller and include only the coastal plain. In July 1938, an international conference convened by the USA, failed to find a solution to the rapidly growing Jewish refugee problem.

In February 1939, the British held a conference in London to negotiate an agreement between the Arabs and the Zionists. The Palestinian Arab delegates would only attend on condition that there were no direct meetings with Zionist representatives since this would be recognition of the legitimacy of Zionists claims over Palestine. So the British government held separate meetings with the two sides. The conference ended in failure on March 17.

The British now believed that in the event of war, Jewish support was guaranteed or unimportant. However they feared that the Arab world might turn against them. This geopolitical consideration was, in Raul Hilberg's words, 'decisive'.^[4] Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia were independent and allied with Britain.

Content

The main points of the White Paper were:

- **Section I. The Constitution:** It stated that with over 450,000 Jews having now settled in the mandate, the Balfour Declaration about "a national home for the Jewish people" had been met and called for an independent Palestine established within 10 years, governed jointly by Arabs and Jews:

"His Majesty's Government believe that the framers of the Mandate in which the Balfour Declaration was embodied could not have intended that Palestine should be converted into a Jewish State against the will of the Arab population of the country. [...] His Majesty's Government therefore now declare unequivocally that it is not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish State. They would indeed regard it as contrary to their obligations to the Arabs under the Mandate, as well as to the assurances which have been given to the Arab people in the past, that the Arab population of Palestine should be made the subjects of a Jewish State against their will."

'The objective of His Majesty's Government is the establishment within 10 years of an independent Palestine State in such treaty relations with the United Kingdom as will provide satisfactorily for the commercial and strategic requirements of both countries in the future. [...] The independent State should be one in which Arabs and Jews share government in such a way as to ensure that the essential interests of each community are safeguarded.'

- **Section II. Immigration:** Jewish immigration to Palestine under the British Mandate was to be limited to 75,000 over the next five years, after which it would depend on Arab consent:

'His Majesty's Government do not [...] find anything in the Mandate or in subsequent Statements of Policy to support the view that the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine cannot be effected unless immigration is allowed to continue indefinitely. If immigration has an adverse effect on the economic position in the country, it should clearly be restricted; and equally, if it has a seriously damaging effect on the political position in the country, that is a factor that should not be ignored. Although it is not difficult to contend that the large number of Jewish immigrants who have been admitted so far have been absorbed economically, the fear of the Arabs that this influx will continue indefinitely until the Jewish population is in a position to dominate them has produced consequences which are extremely grave for Jews and Arabs alike and for the peace and prosperity of Palestine. The lamentable disturbances of the past three years are only the latest and most sustained manifestation of this intense Arab apprehension [...] it cannot be denied that fear of indefinite Jewish immigration is widespread amongst the Arab population and that this fear has made possible disturbances which have given a serious setback to economic progress, depleted the Palestine exchequer, rendered life and property insecure, and produced a bitterness between the Arab and Jewish populations which is deplorable between citizens of the same country. If in these circumstances immigration is continued up to the economic absorptive capacity of the country, regardless of all other considerations, a fatal enmity between the two peoples will be perpetuated, and the situation in Palestine may become a permanent source of friction amongst all peoples in the Near and Middle East.'

"Jewish immigration during the next five years will be at a rate which, if economic absorptive capacity permits, will bring the Jewish population up to approximately one third of the total population of the country. Taking into account the expected natural increase of the Arab and Jewish populations, and the number of illegal Jewish immigrants now in the country, this would allow of the admission, as from the beginning of April this year, of some 75,000 immigrants over the next four years. These immigrants would, subject to the criterion of economic absorptive capacity, be admitted as follows: For each of the next five years a quota of 10,000 Jewish immigrants will be allowed on the understanding that a shortage one year may be

added to the quotas for subsequent years, within the five-year period, if economic absorptive capacity permits. In addition, as a contribution towards the solution of the Jewish refugee problem, 25,000 refugees will be admitted as soon as the High Commissioner is satisfied that adequate provision for their maintenance is ensured, special consideration being given to refugee children and dependents. The existing machinery for ascertaining economic absorptive capacity will be retained, and the High Commissioner will have the ultimate responsibility for deciding the limits of economic capacity. Before each periodic decision is taken, Jewish and Arab representatives will be consulted. After the period of five years, no further Jewish immigration will be permitted unless the Arabs of Palestine are prepared to acquiesce in it."

- **Section III. Land:** Previously no restriction had been imposed on the transfer of land from Arabs to Jews, while now the *White Paper* stated:

"The Reports of several expert Commissions have indicated that, owing to the natural growth of the Arab population and the steady sale in recent years of Arab land to Jews, there is now in certain areas no room for further transfers of Arab land, whilst in some other areas such transfers of land must be restricted if Arab cultivators are to maintain their existing standard of life and a considerable landless Arab population is not soon to be created. In these circumstances, the High Commissioner will be given general powers to prohibit and regulate transfers of land.'

On 22 May 1939 the House of Commons debated a motion that the White Paper was inconsistent with the terms of the Mandate. It was defeated by 268 votes to 179. The following day the House of Lords accepted the new policy without a vote.^[5]

In March 1940, the British High Commissioner for Palestine issued an edict dividing Palestine into three zones.

In Zone A, consisting of about 63 percent of the country including the stony hills, land transfers save to a Palestinian Arab were in general forbidden. In Zone B, consisting of about 32 percent of the country, transfers from a Palestinian Arab save to another Palestinian Arab were severely restricted at the discretion of the High Commissioner. In the remainder of Palestine, consisting of about five percent of the country-which, however, includes the most fertile areas- land sales remained unrestricted.^[6]

Reactions and effects

The Zionists responded by organizing illegal migration which the British countered by blockading Palestine. This resulted in some famous incidents (*See: Struma (ship), Patria disaster, and Exodus (ship)*.) Illegal Jewish immigrants captured before the war were imprisoned on Mauritius.

During the Parliamentary debate, Lloyd George described the White Paper as an act of perfidy while Winston Churchill voted against the government in which he was a minister.^[7] In a leader the Manchester Guardian described it as 'a death sentence on tens of thousands of Central European Jews'^[8] The Liberal MP James Rothschild stated during the parliamentary debate that 'for the majority of the Jews who go to Palestine it is a question of migration or of physical extinction.'^[9]

The supervising authority of the League of Nations, the Permanent Mandates Commission abstained unanimously from endorsing the White Paper, though four members thought the new policy was

inconsistent with that mandate.^[10]

Some supporters of the National Government were opposed to the policy on the grounds that it appeared in their view to contradict the Balfour Declaration. Several government MPs either voted against the proposals or abstained, including Cabinet Ministers such as Leslie Hore-Belisha, as well as Winston Churchill.

The provisions of the *White Paper* were opposed both by the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine.

The Arab Higher Committee argued that the independence of a future Palestine Government would prove to be illusory, as the Jews could prevent its functioning by withholding participation, and in any case real authority would still be in the hands of British officials. The limitations on Jewish immigration were also held to be insufficient, as there was no guarantee immigration would not resume after five years. In place of the policy enunciated in the White Paper, the Arab Higher Committee called for 'a complete and final prohibition' of Jewish immigration and a repudiation of the Jewish national home policy altogether.^[citation needed] Hajj Amin al-Husayni "astonished" the other members of the *Arab Higher Committee* by turning down the *White Paper*. Al-Husayni, according to Benny Morris, turned the advantageous proposal down for the entirely selfish reason that "it did not place him at the helm of the future Palestinian state."^[11] In 1940, following two weeks of meetings with a British representative, the leader of the Palestinian Arab delegates to the London Conference, Jamal al-Husseini and fellow delegate Musa al-Alami, agreed to the terms of the White Paper and both signed a copy of it in the presence of the Prime Minister of Iraq, Nuri as-Said.^[12]

On 27 February 1939, in response to enthusiastic Arab demonstrations following reports that the British were proposing to allow Palestine independence on the same terms as Iraq, a coordinated bombing campaign across the country killed 38 Arabs and wounded 44.^[13]

Zionist groups in Palestine immediately rejected the White Paper and began a campaign of attacks on government property and Arab civilians which lasted for several months. On 18 May a Jewish general strike was called.^[14]

On 13 July the authorities announced the suspension of all Jewish immigration into Palestine until March 1940. The reason given for this decision was the increase in illegal immigrants arriving.^[15]

After the outbreak of war in September 1939, the head of the Jewish Agency for Palestine David Ben-Gurion declared: 'We will fight the White Paper as if there is no war, and fight the war as if there is no White Paper.'^[16]

In December 1942, when extermination of the Jews became public knowledge, there were 34,000 immigration certificates remaining. In February 1943, the British government announced that the remaining certificates could be used as soon as practicable to rescue Jewish children from southeastern Europe, particularly Bulgaria. This plan was partly successful but many people who received certificates were not able to emigrate (but those in Bulgaria survived).^[17] In July it was announced that any Jewish refugee who reached a neutral country in transit would be given clearance for Palestine.^[18] During 1943 about half the remaining certificates were distributed,^[19] and by the end of the war there were 3,000 certificates left.^[20]

At the end of World War II, the British Labour Party conference voted to rescind the White Paper and establish a Jewish state in Palestine, however the Labour Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin persisted with the policy and it remained in effect until the British departed Palestine in May 1948.

After the war, the determination of Holocaust survivors to reach Palestine led to large scale illegal Jewish migration to Palestine. British efforts to block the migration led to violent resistance by the Zionist underground.

Illegal immigrants detained by the British Government were imprisoned in camps on Cyprus. The immigrants had no citizenship and could not be returned to any country. Those imprisoned included a large number of children and orphans.

From October 1946, the British Government, under the 'severest pressure' from the USA, relented and allowed 1,500 Jewish migrants a month into Palestine.^[21] The gesture was in deference to the recommendations of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry.^[22] Half of those admitted came from the prison camps for illegal immigrants in Cyprus due to fears that a growing Jewish presence in Cyprus would lead to an uprising there.^[23]

The Provisional Council of Israel's first constitutional act was a Proclamation that "All legislation resulting from the British Government's White Paper of May, 1939, will at midnight tonight become null and void. This includes the immigration provisions as well as the land transfer regulations of February, 1940."^[24]

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- [^] *Survey*. p.56.
- [^] The Brigade by Howard Blum, p.5. In 1946, a yiddish song written in the Yishuv by Jacob Jacobs ad Isadore Lilian included these lyrics: *Tserisn muz vern dos vayse papir, In der fremd viln mir mer nit zayn. Habeyt mishomyim ureey, Groyser got kuk arop un ze, Vi men yogt undz, vi men plot undz, Got, her oys undzer geshrey.* "They don't care about Jewish anguish, The White Paper must be torn, We don't want to be away from our home anymore." (As described in "Palestine in Song," *YIVO News* No. 204, Winter 2008,

p.15

17. ^ Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust* (1990) pages 218ff,290.
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See also

- Aliyah Bet
- Arab-Israeli conflict
- British Mandate of Palestine
- Churchill White Paper, 1922
- Passfield white paper, 1930
- 1936-1939 Arab revolt in Palestine
- Proposals for a Palestinian state
- Army of Shadows, Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948

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Documents of Mandatory Palestine

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