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THE
HUSAIN-McMAHON CORRESPONDENCE
OR
PALESTINE IS COVERED BY THE BRITISH
PLEDGE OF 1915 REGARDING THE ARAB INDEPENDENCE

WITH AN ADMINISTRATIVE MAP

BY

ABDUL-LATIF TIBAWI,
B. A. (BEIRUT); B. A. HONOURS (LONDON)

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APOLOGIA

This little pamphlet was submitted to the Palestine Royal Commission in January, 1937, and, except for certain minor alterations, it is reproduced in the following pages with a recapitulatory postscriptum. In July, 1937, the Report of the Palestine Royal Commission was published and, in it, important references were made to the "McMahon Pledge," and the claim for the independence of Arab Palestine based on that pledge. And shortly after that, Sir Henry McMahon himself made his first public declaration on the problem in the form of a letter to "The Times." The Postscriptum deals briefly with the Royal Commission's references and with Sir Henry's declaration.

It is perhaps unnecessary to make any apology, but it must be stated most emphatically that the writer is neither inclined to nor interested in political controversy. This account is essentially historical and geographical in nature, and it may be considered political only in so far as it happened to be related to ~~an~~ most controversial and ambiguous problem in Anglo-Arab relations. I cannot, therefore, overstress the point that I speak in the following pages entirely as an unbiased student of historical research.

That the conclusions arrived at with regard to the interpretation of the McMahon letter of the 24th October, 1915 is contrary to the official British view may be readily appreciated and, it is hoped, accepted, if the arguments set forth are studied with sympathy and fairness. The continued refusal of the successive British Governments to publish the official texts of the Husain-McMahon letters precluded, as far as the English-speaking public is concerned, the possibility of any scientific examination of the problem. The Arabic official texts, on the other hand, were from the beginning an open secret, and the least intensive study of these documents leaves no doubt as to the conclusion that must be made. This explains the sharp variance between the Arab view and the British view of the problem, for the former is based on all the available facts, while the latter is necessarily overshadowed ^{by official} pronouncements.

It is in the highest degree unfortunate that from the beginning the matter was not thoroughly investigated by an impartial committee. Much bitterness, ill-feeling and indeed bloodshed might have been avoided to the advantage of all parties concerned. This moment is most appropriate, on the eve of the London Conference on Palestine, for a readjustment of the case. And better late than never. Speaking in the House of Lords on the 27th of March, 1923, Sir Edward Grey who was Foreign Secretary when Sir Henry McMahon concluded the engagement with the Sharif, made the following very relevant statement:-

"I am sure that we cannot redeem our honour by covering up our engagements and pretending that there is no inconsistency, if there really is inconsistency. I am sure that the most honourable course will be to let it be known what the engagements are, and, if there is inconsistency, then to admit it frankly, and, admitting that fact, and, having enabled people to judge exactly what is the amount of the inconsistency ~~to consider what is the most~~ fair and honourable way out of the impasse into which the engagement may have led us"

AT SPES NON FRACTA

February, 1939.

A.L. Tibawi

ANGLO-ARAB FRIENDSHIP

At the end of August, 1914, Sir John Maxwell was sent to Egypt to organize the defence. In the following October he reported about the Turkish intrigues among the Arabs of Sinai and their overtures to the Senusi. He recommended counter British plans, be adopted and added, "I do not know what the policy of the Foreign Office is, but I think the Arabs about Mecca and the Yemen ought to be approached and set against the Turks."

In Egypt, Palestine, Aden, Arabia and Iraq, British interests were in direct touch with the Arabs and every day it became necessary to enlist and enjoy their aid. Lord Kitchner's experience in Palestine and his various connections with Arab chiefs elsewhere made him a convinced prophet of an Arab state in Arabia, Syria and Iraq with British assistance. He was therefore in favour of an inter-play between the Sultan of Turkey and the Sharif of Mecca (Husain Ibn Ali) as the religious heirarch of Islam. He saw the possibility of encouraging the national aspirations of the Arabs so as to enlist their military and civil help.

The British Government took an interest in the Sharif and solicited his friendship even before the war with Turkey had actually taken place. Emir Abdullah, the second son of the Sharif, was encouraged to meet secretly Lord Kitchner and Mr. (later Sir) Storrs in Cairo, on his way to and back from Constantinople. In the course of an early meeting which took place in 1913 Lord Kitchner and Mr. Storrs asked Emir Abdullah to convey to his father the thanks of the British Government for the help and good reception the British Moslem subjects had received in Hijaz, but on another occasion, in July 1914, discussions of purely political nature were made on the subject of the demands of the Sharif for an independent status and the desire of the Arabs in general for a decentralized system of administration within the Turkish Empire. The whole affair did not however exceed compliments and exploratory talks of a general nature.

Lord Kitchner declared that the British Government was anxious for the continuance of its friendly relations with Turkey. Subject to this it was ready to help the Arabs in pursuance of its traditional policy. Late in August 1914 and after the outbreak of the War, Emir Abdullah returned to Cairo on his way back to Hijaz. In absence of Lord Kitchner, Mr. Storrs handed the Emir a letter for his father from the British Government that they "would not oppose the restoration of the Caliphate to the Arabs." A month later, Mr. Storrs addressed the Emir through a special messenger in the following terms:-

"Lord Kitchner, the British Secretary of State for War has directed me to write to your lordship, inquiring whether you are still of the same opinion in regard to the defence of the rights of the Arabs. Though he formerly replied to you that he was unable to assist you in securing them, it is now within the power of His Majesty's Government to afford you all the assistance required in view of the determination of the Turkish Government to join the ranks of the enemy and to sever the traditional friendly relations between the two countries."

Receiving no prompt reply to this letter Mr. Storrs wrote again. "Whereas the Turks," he said, "have finally determined to enter the War on the side of the Germans and, whereas the opportunity is favourable for the achievement of the aims of the Arabs, I regret that you should have left my letter without reply and hope that you will hasten to send a reply to my question."

The Emir made a very short and noncommittal reply. But the British authorities meant to arrive at a definite arrangement. Meanwhile Turkey had entered the war and Mr. Storrs wrote again to the Emir:—"We are wholly prepared to help the Sharif of Mecca in his course and to afford him all help he desires." But the Sharif had not yet made up his mind. He was considering the consequences of a revolt against the Caliph of Islam. He was still hopeful to obtain satisfaction from the Turks through peaceful negotiation. His plans to rally the Arabs of Syria and Iraq around him were not yet complete. Therefore the Emir Abdullah replied that it was not in his father's power to do anything until he had consulted the Arabs, but he promised to make definite proposals in due course.

Emir Feisal, (third son of the Sharif), was sent to Constantinople to make certain representations on behalf of his father. But he stopped at Damascus where he made contact with the secret Arab Societies. He discovered that there was no hope of co-operation with the Turks on the principle of administrative decentralization and other concessions to the Arab provinces. In fact Jamal Pasha refused the intercession of the Sharif on behalf of the national leaders in Syria, and Enver Pasha cabled to him to mind his own business and to leave to the central government the question of decentralization in the Arab provinces.

In these circumstances and in view of the increased tyranny of Jamal Pasha the Arab leaders and the numerous secret societies invited the Sharif, through Emir Feisal, to take the lead. Feisal had a dramatic escape to Hijaz from Syria, where he was half prisoner with Jamal Pasha. He gave his father a full report of the desires of the Arab leaders. The Sharif, disgusted with Jamal and inflamed by the repeated representations from the Arab leaders resumed his correspondence with the British authorities in Cairo.

THE CORRESPONDANCE

On July 14, 1915, the Sharif sent a formal letter to Sir Henry McMahon in which he asked whether the British Government was prepared to acknowledge the independence of the Arab countries to be "bounded on the north by Mersina and Adana up to 37 degree of latitude up to the borders of Persia; on the east by borders of Persia up to the Gulf of Basra; on the south by the Indian Ocean, with the exception of the position of Aden; on the west by the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea up to Mersina."

There were other conditions and clauses providing for material aid and special concessions to Great Britain in giving the guidance and advice to the proposed state. The Sharif wanted to be clear about his terms before he decided

to enter a war in which, as he put it, his lot was to be
"either a success which will guarantee to the Arabs a life
becoming their past history or destruction in the attempt
to attain that object."

On August 30, 1915, Sir Henry replied as follows:
"We rejoice that your Highness and your men are of our opinion
that Arab interests are British interests and in this
intent we confirm to your Lord Kitchner's message in
which our desire for the independence of the Arabs and the
Arab countries has been stated..... As regards the boundaries
it would appear to be premature to consume our time in dis-
cussing such details in the heat of war"

The Sharif was not satisfied with this evasive
answer and insisted on his boundaries in a long letter dated
9th September 1915 which reads in part: "The question of the
boundaries is not the concern of one person to be surrendered
easily. It concerns a whole Arab race living within those
boundaries. They all consider this question a very vital one
on which their future depends I hope it is now
clear to Your Excellency that this question is not a personal
condition made by myself The Arab people desire to be
clear on this point first and they hope the British Government,
in whom they have complete trust, will see its way to meet
their demands"

Sir Henry McMahon reported the whole case to the
Foreign Office for a ruling. It seems that the matter was
very seriously considered and warranted consultation with
France. Kitchner was commissioned about the end of September
1915 to go to Paris. From Paris he wrote to the Prime Minister
among other things on the Arab question: "I have had my
interview with Briand and Gallieni As regards the
Arab movement they quite agree in pushing it on, but had no
troops to help it forward. They spoke of maintaining French
sentimental rights in Syria, but not with any view of stopping
the Arab movement there."

It is likely that the British Government based their
decision on similar facts. Apart from their own interests
they had to take account of French "sentimental rights". On
October 24, 1915, Sir Henry McMahon sent his historic letter:-

" I have received your letter (of 9th September)
with much pleasure; and your expressions of sincerity and
friendship have given me the greatest satisfaction.

" I regret that you should have received from my
last letter the impression that I regarded the question of
the boundaries with coldness and hesitation; such was not the
case, but it appeared to me the moment had not arrived when
they could be profitably discussed.

" I have realized, however, from your last letter,
that you regard this question as one of vital and urgent
importance. I have therefore lost no time in informing the
Government of Great Britain of the contents of your letter;
and it is with great pleasure that I communicate to you on
their behalf the following statement which, I am confident,
you will receive with satisfaction:-

" The districts of Mersina and Alexandretta and
the portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of
Damascus, Hama and Aleppo cannot be said to be purely
Arab, and should be excluded from the proposed limits and

boundaries. With the above modification, and without prejudice to our existing treaties with Arab chiefs we accept these limits and boundaries, and in regard to those portions of the territories therein in which Great Britain is free to act without detriment to the interests of her ally, France, I am empowered in the name of the Government of Great Britain to give the following assurances and make the following reply to your letter:-

" Subject to the above modification, Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs within the territories included in the limits and boundaries proposed by the Sharif of Mecca. Great Britain guarantee the Holy Places against all external aggression and will recognize their inviolability.

" When the situation admits, Great Britain will give to the Arabs her advice and will assist them to establish what may appear to be the most suitable forms of government in those various territories.

" On the other hand, it is understood that the Arabs have decided to seek the advice and guidance of Great Britain only, and that such European advisers and officials as may be required for the formation of a sound form of administration will be British.

" With regard to the vilayets of Bagdad and Basra, the Arabs will recognize that the established position and interests of Great Britain necessitate special measures of administrative control in order to secure these territories from foreign aggression, to promote the welfare of the local population and to safeguard our mutual economic interests.

" I am convinced that this declaration will assure you beyond all possible doubts of the sympathy of Great Britain towards the aspiration of her traditional friends, the Arabs, and will result in a firm and lasting alliance, the immediate results of which will be the expulsion of the Turks from the Arab countries and the freeing of the Arab peoples from the Turkish yoke which, for so many years, has pressed heavily upon them

The Sharif agreed, in his letter dated November 5, 1915 to exclude Mersina and Alexandretta, but he refused to renounce any claim to Iraq in view of its position in the history of Arab and Moslem civilization. He agreed however that "our mutual interests" necessitate a temporary occupation subject to the payment of certain amount of money.

But with regard to "the portions of Syria lying to the west of districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo" the Sharif remarked that "the vilayets (provinces) of Aleppo and Beirut and their sea coasts are purely Arab, and there is no difference between a Moslem and a Christian Arab."

Towards the end of 1915 Great Britain was more or less acquainted with, or even agreed to, future French acquisition in Syria. According to the secret agreements between Great Britain, France and Russia in respect of Turkish territories which were finally concluded in February 1916, France was given the Syrian coastal regions. This provisional acquisition was confirmed in the Sykes-Picot agreement of May 1916, in which France was given roughly these "portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo." That this was the case is amply illustrated by

the hint of the Cabinet to "French susceptibilities" in connection with Lord Kitchner's proposal for a landing in Alexandretta area after the disasters at Gallipoli. Lord Kitchner suggested to "allot Syria with suitable boundaries to France after the war" and the difficulty would be removed.

In these circumstances Sir Henry replied to the last letter from the Sharif that the Government of Great Britain took note of the views expressed by him but "as the interests of our Ally, France, are involved the question will require careful consideration, and a future communication on the subject will be addressed to you in due course."

The Sharif knew that France stood firm in her demand for a recognition of her interests in those portions of Syria. Unwilling to spoil the negotiation on this point the Sharif agreed, in his letter dated January 1, 1916, "to avoid what may possibly injure the Alliance of Great Britain and France" but he made the reservation that "after this War is finished we shall ask you (i.e. the British Government) for what we now leave to France at Beirut and on its coasts."

THE RESERVATIONS

The issue arising from this correspondence is that the British Government pledged herself to guarantee and support the Arab independence within the boundaries proposed by the Sharif subject to the following reservations:-

1. From the very start the colony of Aden was excluded by the Sharif himself and at the demand of Great Britain her "special position" in Iraq was recognized subject to the payment by the British Government of a certain amount of money and to mutual consideration of settlement after the War. Apart from that Great Britain claimed no territorial or other concessions for herself. In fact she was in no need to do so on account of the privileged status given to her in the agreement as the country to give all advice and guidance to the future Arab state.

2. The Sharif anxious not to injure the alliance of Great Britain and France, and at the insistence of the former, made a provisional recognition of the claims of the latter in "the portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo" or, to put it in his own words, "Beirut and its coasts". A detailed discussion of the connotation of this phrase will be given later it is sufficient to remark in this place that prima facie the Lebanon and certain coastal areas to the north of it (notably Alexandretta) were intended. The provisions of the secret agreements of February 1916 and the secret Sykes-Picot agreement of May 1916 justify this conclusion since French acquisition under these agreements follow very closely the provisions of the McMahon Correspondence.

Apart from these two reservations there is no provision for any claims in the Arab territories within the boundaries of the Sharif. On this basis it is the contention of the writer that Palestine falls within the territories in which the British Government promised to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs. In 1922 Mr. Churchill, the Colonial Secretary declared, for the first time in the history

of the case, that Palestine was excluded from the McMahon Pledge. For a full appreciation of the geographical and historical details given below in support of the Arab, and in refutation of the Churchill interpretation, it is essential to give some account of the administrative divisions of Syria (including Palestine) as they were in 1914-1915. (See attached Map).

GEOGRAPHICAL DISCUSSION

Palestine, Trans-Jordan and the present French mandated areas in Syria form one geographical unit. The expression "Palestine" has no specific independent geographical existence. Principally it is historical rather than a geographical expression. The political expression, however, was introduced with or even after the Balfour Declaration and the British mandate.

Before the War and during the long Turkish rule there was no political or administrative unit with the name of Palestine. Roughly speaking the present North District of Palestine was connected with the province of Beirut. The present Jerusalem and Southern Districts, on the other hand, formed an "independent" district, not attached to any province but connected directly with Constantinople.

It is interesting to note in this connection that all Syria, Palestine and Trans-Jordan were and still are known in Arabic literature, and indeed also in modern usage in Egypt, as "Sham", which has the meaning conveyed by the expression "Greater Syria" or "La Syrie integrale". It is equally significant to note that the Arabic name given to Palestine in modern usage is "Southern Syria" or "Suriya Al-Janubiya". We read in the Handbook No. 93 issued by the History Section of the Foreign Office under Lord Curzon in 1919 the following definition of Palestine: "In modern usage the expression Palestine has no precise meaning, but it is best taken as an equivalent to Southern Syria".

At the eve of the World War the Ottoman Empire was administratively divided in the following manner and according to the following nomenclature given in a descending order:

1. The Vilayet (Province)
2. The Sanjaq - also called Liwa or Mutasarifiya
3. The Qaza (Sub-district) (District)
4. The Nahiya (the smallest unit after the sub-district)

Normally a Vilayet is composed of a certain number of Sanjaqs; a Sanjaq in turn is composed of a certain number of Qazas; and finally the Qaza is composed of a certain number of Nahiya's. The whole administration was centered in the capital of the Vilayet under the Vali (Governor-General). The Vali was responsible only to Constantinople. But within the Vilayet, the Mudir (Officer in charge of the Nahiya) was responsible to the Qaim-Maqam (Officer in charge of the sub-district); the latter was responsible to the Mutasarif (District Governor) who in turn was responsible to the Governor General.

There were however special cases where a Sanjaq (district) was given special dignity of "independence" i.e., not attached in any way to the Vilayet (province) but connected

directly with Constantinople. This was done usually on account of special local conditions (e.g. the Bedwin district of Zur) or as a special favour from the Sultan (e.g. the sacred district of Jerusalem).

Now at the eve of the War, Greater Syria was divided into the following units, each of which was directly connected with Constantinople:-

1. The Vilayet (Province) of Aleppo with its capital at Aleppo town.
2. The "independant" Sanjaq (district) of Zur with its capital at Deir Az-Zur town.
3. The autonomous Lebanon (special status) with its capital at Ba'abda town.
4. The Vilayet (province) of Suriya with its capital at Damascus town.
5. The Vilayet (province) of Beirut with its capital at Beirut town.
6. The "independent" Sanjaq (district) of Jerusalem with its capital at Jerusalem.

Thus besides the three "independant" districts (namely Lebanon, Zur and Jerusalem) Greater Syria was composed of three provinces. The province of Aleppo contained the two districts of Aleppo and Aintap. The province of Suriya contained the four district of Hama, Damascus, Hauran and Kerak. The province of Beirut contained the five districts of Latakia, Tripoli, Beirut, Acre and Nablus. Each district contained a certain number of sub-districts and each sub-district contained a number of Nahiyas.

The phrase "portions of Syria lying to the west of the district of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo" should be interpreted on the bases of these facts. Damascus was a capital of the Vilayet of Suriya. Within that vilayet there was a sanjaq (district) and also a qaza (sub-district) of Damascus. There was never vilayet (province) of Damascus. Also within the vilayet of Suriya there was a sanjaq and a qaza of Hama. There was never a vilayet of Hama. But with regard to Homs there is only one possibility. It was a qaza (sub-district) within the district of Hama within the vilayet of Suriya. The case of Aleppo is inclusive; there was a vilayet of Aleppo, there was a sanjaq of Aleppo, there was a qaza of Aleppo and Aleppo itself was the capital of vilayet.

INTERPRETATION

It would be a grave charge against the British Government and its High Commissioner in Egypt, not far away from these places, to say that they were unaware of these facts. On the contrary there is every reason to believe that they knew such facts very well while they were negotiating with the Sharif. What is then the actual meaning of the phrase regarding those portions of Syria in question? The whole matter depends on an interpretation of the word "district" which may be taken to mean:-

Either (a) the immediate neighbourhood of these towns, on the construction that the word "district" was used in a general sence which construction seems to be justified on the ground that each of the four towns, at least one (and in other cases more than one) special administrative meaning. Hence Lord Curzon in a memorandum dated October 9, 1919 addressed to

the independent Sanjaq of Jerusalem was to the west of

Emir Feisal refers to the portions of Syria in question as lying to the west of "the towns of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo".

Or (b) the Sanjaq (district) of Damascus, the Qaza (sub-district) of Homs, the Sanjaq (district) of Hama, and the Sanjaq (District) of Aleppo, on the construction that the word district was used in its particular technical sense.

Reference has already been made to the declaration made in 1922 by Mr. Winston Churchill that the reservation in the McMahon letter of October 24, 1915 excluded Palestine as "lying to the west of the district of Damascus". According to Mr. Churchill "this reservation has always been regarded by His Majesty's Government as covering the vilayet of Beirut and the independent sanjaq of Jerusalem." Relying on this dogmatic statement Mr. Churchill concluded that "the whole of Palestine west of the Jordan was thus excluded from Sir Henry McMahon's pledge." This interpretation is clearly arbitrary, based on half truths and without justification on points of fact. In the first place the McMahon letter does not mention the "district of Damascus" alone. That letter excludes portions of Syria lying to the west of a line of four districts or four towns, which start from Damascus and stretch northward to Homs, Hama and finally Aleppo. It is very much like telling half the truth to stop at Damascus and to say nothing about the rest. In the second place neither the Palestinian portions of the vilayet of Beirut (i.e. the districts of Acre and Nablus) nor the "district of Damascus". The boundary line of the district of Damascus with the district of Hauran used to touch the boundaries of the vilayet of Beirut in the neighbourhood of Hulah. If this boundary line is extended straight to the west it would reach the Mediterranean Sea at a point near Ras Al-Nakura, on the present north boundary of Palestine. And one would retort by saying: "The whole of Palestine west of the Jordan was thus covered by Sir Henry McMahon's pledge."

Mr. Churchill's "has-always-been" argument is therefore without a geographical foundation, to say nothing about the historical evidence derived from a study of the whole of the McMahon correspondence. Mr. Churchill seems to suppose that the word "district" means "vilayet" (province) which is, in this case, impossible for the following reasons:-

(1) With reference to their claim in Iraq the British Government openly and clearly said they were interested in the provinces (vilayets) of Basra and Baghdad. In the same document making a claim on behalf of France they used the word "district" rather than the word "province", a Vilayet. In the same document also the word "district" is used in reference to Mersina and Alexandretta. The use of the word "province" in the one case and the word "district" in the others is very instructive indeed. For it is a common rule of construction that, where in the same document and with reference to the same subject, different words are used it must be presumed that such an alteration was intentional and meant to express different ideas.

(2) Well advised and well informed the British Government could not err in conferring on Homs, a humble qaza (sub-district) the dignity of a vilayet (province). It will

be remembered that the word "district" was used with reference to "Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo" and consequently the discussion must be conducted and the argument based on this fact, that ~~is~~ to say, the word "district" must be taken to refer to each of these place names and also to all of them as forming a demarkation line.

(3) The vilayet of Aleppo stretched far north into Asia Minor and certain portions of Turkish land geographically belonging to Asia Minor were included within this vilayet. If, in spite of the objections already put forward, it is still maintained that the word "district" meant "vilayet", there could be no portions of Syria which lie to the west except purely Turkish areas. With regard to the "vilayet" of Aleppo there is still another discrepancy. This vilayet was bounded on the west by the Mediterranean Sea and it was erroneous to refer to portions of Syria lying to the west of that boundary!

(4) In his memorandum of 9.10.1919 Lord Curzon addressing Emir Feisal, among other things, on the question of these "portions" referred to them as lying to the west of the towns of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo.

(5) If the British Government had in mind the vilayet of Damascus (i.e. Suriya) there was no point, it was indeed superfluous, to mention also Homs and Hama which were sub-districts within that province. Since the district of Alexandretta was excluded by name it was sufficient for the purpose of the British Government, had they intended to exclude Palestine, to say: "portions lying to the west of the vilayet of Suriya". This would have covered all the vilayet of Beirut and the independant sanjaq of Jerusalem.

(6) The Sharif understood, and there is no written evidence that either the British Government or its High Commissioner who received and considered the Sharif's interpretation, tried to correct him, that the excluded portions meant "Beirut and its coasts". In his letters to Sir Henry McMahon he referred to the reservations as generally affecting the vilayets of Aleppo and Beirut and insisted that both vilayets and their coasts were purely Arab. In his reply dated December 13, 1915 Sir Henry McMahon stated that "with regard to the vilayets of Aleppo and Beirut, the Government of Great Britain has taken careful note of your observations.....". This shows that both parties referred and understood that they referred to the same thing. No reference to the vilayet of Damascus (sic) or the Liwa of Jerusalem was made. Dr. Hogarth who was an advisor to Sir Henry McMahon on the Arab affairs declared in the History of Peace Conference that "The wording (i.e. of our pledges) justified Hussain's interpretation".

(7) The historical and biblical names of Palestine are well known. All parties knew Jerusalem, Bethlchem and Nazareth. The British High Commissioner knew that too well when he was writing to the Sharif on behalf of the Government of Great Britain. The High Commissioner was certainly aware that the sanjaq of Jerusalem, across the Egyptian frontier, was administratively independant. Why then did not the High Commissioner find a way to state clearly that he wanted to exclude Palesting? But Sir Henry knew that the Sharif

was not willing to part with Iraq on account of its place in the history of Islam and Arab civilization. Palestine was not inferior to Iraq in this respect and no one knew the place of Jerusalem in Islam and the battles of Yarmuq and Hittin in the history of the Arabs more than the Sharif did.

There seem to be no justification to interpret "district" as meaning "province". We are therefore reduced to the two alternatives given above, namely that the word "district" was used either in its general sense meaning the immediate neighbourhood of the four towns in question, or it was used in its particular sense meaning the sanjaq of Damascus, the gaza of Homs, the sanjaq of ~~Hama~~ and the sanjaq of Aleppo.

In the first case there can be no question that the whole of Palestine does not fall to the west of the four towns. In the second case the greater part of Palestine (the independent sanjaq of Jerusalem comprising the present Jerusalem and Southern districts) was clearly not affected by the reservations. As to the norther part of Palestine (the present Northern district) it did not fall to the west of the district of Damascus, the first of the series of the four towns (or administrative units) forming the demarkation line.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) From the very nature of the British claim for excluding certain portions of Syria and the reiteration in it of the interests of France, Palestine could not reasonably have been intended. The arguments in the letters centre constantly and only around the interests of France. There is not the slightest evidence in the correspondance that Palestine was excluded in favour of Great Britain herself or any of her allies. The Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 were still unborn. The secret arrangement between Great Britain, France and Russia in February 1916 provided only for the British interests in the ports of Haifa and Acre. This claim was more or less retained in the Sykes-Picot agreement two months later.

Great Britain therefore did not, even in the secret agreements exclude Palestine as such for herself. France had no pronounced interests in Palestine to compare with her traditional connection with the Lebanon. Hence in 1916 Palestine was reserved for an international regime to be decided upon after consultation with the Allies and the Sharif. The promise made by the British Government in 1917 to establish a Jewish National Home in Palestine, implied some form of future British control but the international scheme of 1916 was still valid. The one scheme seems at first sight as designed to be practical realization of the other, but both, though in a different way, were contradictory to the promise made to the Arabs in 1915. Towards the end of 1917, therefore, neither England nor France was considered the potential master of Palestine. It is noteworthy that the Sharif, the Arab chief who obtained the promise for the independance of the country, and not the Sultan, the Caliph of Islam and the legal sovereign of the country, was to be, though he never was, consulted concerning the future of Palestine.

(2) From the interpretation of the passage in the McMahon letter of October 24, 1915 providing for the exclusion of portions of Syria lying to "west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo" based on internal and external evidences as detailed above it is clear that Palestine was not excluded by these provisions. In the first place it is not mentioned by any name whether in the historical or the administrative sense, and in the absence of a clear evidence to the contrary the explanation of the McMahon letter given above stands. In the second place the British Government acting through its well-informed High Commissioner could not fail to frame an inclusive formula had they intended to exclude Palestine. But in 1915 the British Government had in mind an inclusive Arab state or states to be under her "guidance and protection" excluding the coasts of the present French mandated area in Syria. Under such circumstances Great Britain could guarantee "special interests" in lower Iraq and in the ports of Haifa and Acre, for indeed that was all that she was after from the very beginning even in the secret treaties.

It is not intended to follow the history of the case from 1915 to 1922 when Churchill's "has-always-been" argument opened a new chapter in Anglo-Arab relations. The above discussion, mostly historical and geographical may be conveniently concluded with two points:-

1. What Sir Henry McMahon thought about the problem? (in 1915)
2. What the Arabs of Palestine thought about it? (in 1915)

I read some-where in a Jewish publication that Sir Henry supported the Churchill interpretation in 1922. If he really did so, one can quite understand the reasons that convinced him to support the "has-always-been" argument. But we have the evidence of Dr. Albert H. Lybyer, the Advisor to the American Commission of 1919. He says: "I met Sir Henry McMahon in Paris in 1919 Certainly it is stretching things to say that Palestine lies west of Damascus..... My personal opinion is that Sir Henry was referring only to the known desires of the French when he made his reservations and that he thought he was promising Palestine, to the Arabs. The whole tone of the paragraph (and indeed the subsequent correspondence) indicates this."

As for the feeling of the Arabs of Palestine it is safer to quote from the findings of the Military Commission appointed to enquire into the riots of April 1920. The report states that as a result of the agreement with the Sharif the Arab population of Palestine-Moslems and Christians- became favourable to the British occupation. "As late as June, 1918, active recruiting was carried on in Palestine for the Sharifian Army, our allies, the recruits being given to understand that they were fighting in a national cause The real impression left upon the Arabs generally was that the British were going to set up an independant Arab state which would include Palestine."

January, 1937

A.L.T.

POSTSCRIPTUM

This memorandum was submitted to the Palestine Royal Commission in January 1937. In Part I, Chapter II, of their Report, the Commission made an important contribution to the study of the subject. They attempted to explain, in their short discussion of the problem and from their own point of view, some of the problems proposed in the above memorandum. The map accompanying the memorandum and showing pre-War Turkish administrative divisions in Syria-Palestine seems to have inspired an almost identical one prepared by the War Office and published in the Report of the Commission (Map No. 1, page 19).

It is most unfortunate, however, that the Commission considered that their terms of reference precluded "the detailed and lengthy research among the documents which would be needed for a full re-examination of this issue". But, excluding such detailed discussion of the issue, the Commission had clearly good reasons to say that "it was in highest degree unfortunate that, in the exigencies of War, the British Government was unable to make their intentions clear to the Sharif. Palestine, it will have been noticed, was not expressly mentioned in Sir Henry McMahon letter of the 24th October, 1915. Nor was any later reference made to it. In the future correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon and the Sharif the only areas relevant to the present discussion which was mentioned were the Vilayets of Aleppo and Beirut."

This statement is very apt. In the first place it displays that the authors of the Report entertain serious doubts as to the validity of the British interpretation of the problem. And on that account it justifies, in the second place, the Arab contention that reference to the provinces of Beirut and Aleppo has no relation to Palestine. Basing our conclusion for the present merely on this statement we might ask whether the Arab case could be reasonably and equitably made to suffer simply because the British Government failed "to make their intentions clear."

It was a natural outcome of the publication of the Report of the Commission that public interest in the problem was revived. And Sir Henry McMahon himself made a dramatic, if much belated, reappearance on the stage. On 23rd July, 1937 the London Times published a letter over his signature which reads as follows:-

"Many references have been made in the Palestine Royal Commission Report, and in the course of the recent debates in both Houses of Parliament, to the "McMahon Pledge," especially to that portion of the pledge which concerns Palestine, and of which one interpretation has been claimed by the Jews and another by the Arabs.

"It has been suggested to me that the continued silence on the part of the giver of the pledge may itself be misunderstood.

"I feel therefore called upon to make some statement on the subject, but I will confine myself in doing so to the point now at issue; i.e., whether that portion of Syria now known as Palestine was or was not intended to be included in the territory in which the independence of the Arabs was guaranteed in my pledge.

"I feel it my duty to state, and I do so definitely and emphatically, that it was not intended by me in giving this

pledge to King Hussain to include Palestine in the area in which the Arab independence was promised.

"I also had every reason to believe at the time, that the fact that Palestine was not included in my pledge was well understood by King Hussain."

Sir Henry's disclosure is no contribution to the subject, for it merely confirms the doubt referred to by the Royal Commission as to the "intentions of the British Government." Sir Henry asserts that "it was not intended" by him in giving the pledge to include Palestine in the areas wherein the British Government promised Arab independence. In other words he assumes in 1937 that he made in 1915 a mental reservation that the case was thus. That King Hussain, at the time, understood this fact cannot be legitimately claimed, especially by Sir Henry himself who received and considered the Sharif's written objections to the exclusion of any portion of the coasts of Syria-Palestine. This point is discussed in details above. It may be added that King Hussain was not free, if willing, to dispose of any territory in Syria and Iraq. This fact was made clear to Sir Henry McMahon by the Sharif in his letter of 9th September, 1915 when he referred to the question of the boundaries as "the demands of our people" and not "the suggestion of one individual."

The attitude of King Husain after 1915 is well known. It is best described by the Royal Commission when it said that both King Husain and Emir Faisal considered the practical application of the British interpretation of the problem by the separation of Palestine from Syria for the purpose of implementing the policy of the Balfour Declaration as a breach of the McMahon Pledge. It is suggested that any reasoned study of the official documents, British and Arab, coupled with an appreciation of the known attitude of King Husain in the matter, form a more acceptable indication as to the mind of the British Government and the mind of King Husain than either Sir Henry's recollections or Mr. Winston Churchill's mistaken conception of geographical facts.

Sir Henry's "it-was-not-intended" argument and Mr. Churchill's "it-has-always-been" argument are both dogmatic, irreconcilable with historical facts and untenable on a point of logic.

January, 1939

ALT

REFERENCES

It is not intended to give an exhaustive bibliographical list of all the books, pamphlets and various articles that were consulted in preparing the preceding details of the Anglo-Arab agreement of 1915. Such will be the case if the manuscript of which the present account forms only one chapter is destined to go to the press. But for the present it is deemed desirable to quote below very few of the most reliable references.

For the texts of the Husain-McMahon Correspondance the writer had to refer constantly to the published Arabic versions as well as to the rare unofficial English versions. Having discovered that the text of the famous letter of the 24th October, 1915, given in the original account, corresponds almost literally with the version given in the Report of the Royal Commission, the latter version was adopted in the present account, since the indirect reference to Palestine in both versions is stated in the same terms, and it is considered safer, for the purpose of the present study, to base the argument on the official British version.

The references that were of valuable help in shaping the arguments in the above account are:-

1. The Arab Peninsula in the Twentieth Century by Sheikh Hafiz Whba, Saoudi-Arabian Ambassador in London, published in Arabic at Cairo, 1935.
2. The Arab Revolt, three volumes, by Amin Sa'id, published in Arabic at Cairo, 1934.
3. Atlas of the Historical Geography of the Holy Land by George Adam Smith. London, 1915.
4. Atlas of the Ottoman Empire by Major Nasrullah and others, published in Turkish at Istanbul in the year 1325 Maliya, i.e. 1910.
5. The Life of Lord Kitchner by Sir George Arthur, volume 3. Macmillan, 1920.
6. Ottoman Geography by Safwat Bey, published in Turkish at Istanbul in the year 1332 Maliya, i.e. 1915.
7. The Palestine Deception, being an inquiry on the spot conducted on behalf of the "Daily Mail", by J.M.N. Jeffries, 1923.
8. The Truth about Mesopotamia, Palestine and Syria, by J.De V. Loder. London, 1923.