

# **Compelling Interests:**

## **Understanding the Balance of Mandatory Autonomy Through Metropolitan Pressures**

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Countries have long attempted to project their interests outside their borders. Some of the most powerful have even attempted to take over and directly administer less powerful territories. However, politicians back home rarely make an appearance overseas to direct policies personally, and so with administering comes an administration composed of people who can choose to enact the desires of the government back home, or attempt to mediate between metropolitan and local interests. Of course the politicians in the metropolis have their own methods of dealing with insubordinate colonial administrators—if they find it worth the effort needed to take them, or even know about it.

Historians have long debated who is more influential in colonial policymaking, the so-called man on the spot or the national government. The fact of the matter is that some representatives overseas have more autonomy than others. While the British were enacting their mandate in Palestine after World War I, High Commissioner Herbert Samuel not only managed to hold his position as High Commissioner from 1920-1925 despite the shifting political moods back home, but he was able to enact most of the policy goals he had desired when he first set out. In contrast, the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon went through five High Commissioners during a similar time period, each with slightly different policies and subject to the whims of politicians back home.

The disconnect between the degree of autonomy exercised by the British and the French High Commissioners in Palestine and Syria, respectively, was a direct function of political sensitivity of the issue at home. The British High Commissioner had more freedom to act because the government had only indirect interests in Palestine, and was thus subject to fewer pressures at home, and so policy remained relatively consistent

throughout many shifts in government. On the other hand, the French government had much more direct interests in Syria and Lebanon, and so the High Commissioners were forced to adapt to changing political pressures at home.

From the moment they stepped foot in Palestine, the British representatives had a relatively strong autonomy there, and London tended to place trust in their judgment. General Allenby, the commander of the British forces in the Middle East, entered Jerusalem December 9, 1917, and the British government regularly deferred to him on matters ranging from agreements with Arab leaders in Saudi Arabia to the advisability of the French sending additional troops to Syria.<sup>1</sup>

However, there was one matter on which the British government refused to budge: Zionism. The military authorities were remarkably anti-Zionist. S. Landman, personal secretary to Chaim Weizmann, the President of the World Zionist Organization, dedicated a section of his report on the “antagonistic attitude of [the military] administration” despite his staunch belief in “the absolute sincerity of the pro-Zionist policy among the officials...in the Foreign Office.”<sup>2</sup> The Acting Commander in Chief actually gave orders that Weizmann was to be refused admittance to Palestine unless given specific approval by General Allenby.<sup>3</sup> Allenby himself was skeptical of the Zionist program. Some of his subordinates actually protested against it to the extent that

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<sup>1</sup> Segev, Tom. *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate*. Trans Haim Watzman. New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2000. 50.

Bidwell. *British Documents of Foreign Affairs—reports and appears from the Foreign Office confidential print Part II, from the First to the Second World War. Series B, Turkey, Iran, and the Middle East*. Frederick, MD: University Publications of America 1985-1997. [Henceforth BDF A Ser. B]. Vol III 70.

Woodward. E.L. and Rohan Butler. *Documents on Foreign Policy 1919-1939, First Series*, London: HM Stationary Office. [Henceforth DBFP S1] Vol. 4. 256.

<sup>2</sup> BDF A Ser. B Vol. II 14.

<sup>3</sup> DBFP S1 V4 442.

Foreign Minister James A. Balfour recommended that an “advisor on Zionist matters” be sent who “understands the different currents of opinions” in Europe—in other words, someone who would support the Foreign Office’s Zionist line.<sup>4</sup>

Following this episode, it is hardly surprising that when the Foreign Office was looking for a High Commissioner of Palestine in 1920, they chose one of the original proponents of Zionism in the Foreign Office—Herbert Samuel. Though Samuel may have disappointed his mother and ceased practicing his Jewish faith in his days at Oxford, he was still an ardent Zionist.<sup>5</sup> He was the one responsible for introducing Chaim Weizmann and David Lloyd George in 1914, starting a chain of events that found fulfillment in the 1917 Balfour Declaration promising a “National Home” to the Jewish people in Palestine.<sup>6</sup> Samuel had written a report back in 1919 that he considered the official Zionist stance a *chose jugée*, and wrote that he considered that the “success of the whole plan for the future of Palestine depends upon the extent to which the country can absorb Jewish immigrants,” bemoaning that the “attitude of the administrative authorities in Palestine does not appear to be fully in harmony with that of H.M. Government.”<sup>7</sup> This was all done over the vehement protests of General Allenby.<sup>8</sup>

After Samuel’s appointment, it seemed that the Foreign Office and the High Commissioner could work together along similar lines. Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid 281.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel, Herbert Louis, Viscount. *Memoirs*. London: Cresset Press, 1945. 18.  
[Henceforth “Memoirs”]

Enough so that Lord Asquith, Prime Minister in 1915 when Samuel circulated a memo proposing the concept of a British annexation of Palestine to support a Jewish colony, commented on its “dithyrambic” nature (Asquith qtd Memoirs 143).

<sup>6</sup> Stein, Leonard. *The Balfour Declaration*. London, Vallentine, Mitchel & Co, 1961. 139-40.

<sup>7</sup> DBFP S1 V4 284-285. HM Government stands for His Majesty’s Government.

<sup>8</sup> DBFP S1 V13 255.

1899-1905 and then Foreign Secretary, was a Zionist, had been one of the people who had selected Samuel precisely for his Zionism. However, in 1921 there was a political shift in London, and after a “sharp division of opinion” in the Cabinet, it was decided to hand over the administration of Palestine to the Colonial Office.<sup>9</sup> The Colonial Office was considerably less Zionist than the Foreign Office. Richard Meinertzhagen, formerly Chief Political Officer to General Allenby and then at work in the Colonial Office complained about the “hebraphobia” in the Colonial Office, especially in John Shuckburgh, the head of the Middle East Department.<sup>10</sup> Winston Churchill, then Secretary of State for the Colonial Office rejected the Zionist request to annex the Trans-Jordan to Palestine, despite Samuel’s insistence that it was a “vital need” for the successful support of Jewish immigration into Palestine.<sup>11</sup> Churchill went further in his 1922 White Paper to emphasize the second portion of the Balfour Declaration promising equity to the Arabs as opposed to the first part, which promised the Jewish National Home.<sup>12</sup> This White Paper specifically rejected Weizmann’s formulation that Palestine is to become “as Jewish as England is English.”<sup>13</sup>

It is remarkable that despite this shift in power to a less sympathetic office in London, the High Commissioner, Herbert Samuel was able to keep his domestic policy largely consistent. He visited Palestine to do a report on the state of affairs for the Foreign Office in March 1920, which he expanded on in his monthly reports from when

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid 428.

<sup>10</sup> Meinertzhagen, R. *Middle East Diary: 1917-1956*. London: Cresset Press, 1959. 99, 95.

<sup>11</sup> DBFP S1 V 13 285.

<sup>12</sup> Churchill, Winston. “Churchill White Paper (6/3/22).” *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*. Ed. John Moore. Vol 3: Documents. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 66.

he came into office July 1. By the time he left office in 1925, he had almost completely enacted the recommendations he had previously sent.

Upon his appointment, Samuel took measures to combat the Malaria problem that Weizmann had reported in February to be one of the worst problems facing Palestine.<sup>14</sup> By 1925, he reported 5,574 formerly marshy ground to have been drained, largely eliminating the Anopheline mosquito from the larger towns.<sup>15</sup> In his original report, Samuel had bemoaned the lack of manufacturing in Palestine.<sup>16</sup> By the time he left there was a flour mill, factories for brick, vegetable oils and soap, and cement. Added to the smaller industries, Samuel estimated that about 150 enterprises had been founded, largely due to his encouragement of Jewish investors and various changes in economic policies.<sup>17</sup> Last, in his March report Samuel recommended that immediate improvement was necessary in the telegraph system.<sup>18</sup> Samuel left behind a fully functional postal system, including letter delivery, 34 public telegraph offices, and 31 previously unheard of public telephones.<sup>19</sup>

Samuel also recommended increased funds for education and a restructuring of the education department.<sup>20</sup> In his final report to the Colonial Office, he referenced the establishment of 190 schools with British support, as well as a British supervised Board

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<sup>14</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol 1 234

<sup>15</sup> Samuel, Herbert Louis, Viscount. *Palestine: Report of the High Commissioner on the Administration of Palestine*. London: HM Stationary Office, 1925. LLMC Digital. 10-11. [Henceforth "Report"]

<sup>16</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol 1 239, 304.

<sup>17</sup> Report 19.

<sup>18</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol 1 303.

<sup>19</sup> Report 9-10.

<sup>20</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol I 302, 303.

of Legal Studies offering law classes.<sup>21</sup> In his March visit, he also urged the necessity for judicial reforms.<sup>22</sup> By 1925, the judicial system had been overhauled to include British judges at the higher courts and Palestinian judges “drawn impartially from the three religious communities” on the lower ones.<sup>23</sup> Samuel also reported that roads would need to be built, defrayed in part by the British Exchequer.<sup>24</sup> He left behind him 680 kilometers of new or rebuilt roads, serving 177 secondary villages.<sup>25</sup>

Even the pieces of Samuel’s agenda that clearly favored the Jewish population were successful. His March 1920 report claimed that Jewish agricultural colonies were “the most energetic and significant factor in the Palestine of today.” He encouraged lifting the moratorium on land sales that had frustrated Zionist efforts to colonize and cultivate the land, though under certain restrictions.<sup>26</sup> By the time Samuel left, the amount of cultivable land allotted to the Jewish population had doubled.<sup>27</sup> Most important to the Zionist agenda, Samuel was able to put through much of his goals for Jewish immigration. In a November 1920 report, Samuel mentions he took steps to replace the Egyptian Labour Corps, who had been largely responsible for much of the infrastructural development, with Jewish immigrants.<sup>28</sup> Between September 1920 and February 1925, 46,226 of the 48, 252 immigrants were Jewish, with 31,542 of those occurring after the shift in authority to the Colonial Office.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Report 13-14.

<sup>22</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol 1 302.

<sup>23</sup> Report 6. The referenced communities are the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish.

<sup>24</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol 1 303.

<sup>25</sup> Report 17.

<sup>26</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol 1 304.

<sup>27</sup> Report 32.

<sup>28</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol 2 36.

<sup>29</sup> Report 30.

This is not to say that Samuel was able to accomplish everything he wanted. In a telegram to Curzon, he stated that the following points were “essential to Palestine:” British control of the banks of the Jordan River between lake Huleh and lake Tiberias on account of Palestinian water power schemes, the undivided control over the Semakh, that Lake Tiberius be within Palestine, and an arrangement to draw water from the Litani River.<sup>30</sup> Even though the negotiations in Europe did not go in his favor, his ultimate goals of irrigation and water power was arranged by an agreement with the French for the British to have the right to access the water in the concerned areas.<sup>31</sup> His failure to effect an annexation of Trans-Jordan has already been discussed. However, on the whole, he was able to put a remarkable number of his policies into effect considering a skeptical administration in the Colonial office.

Like the British High Commissioner, the French High Commissioner had considerable power. He was charged with organizing the territories by creating individual states and drafting the laws.<sup>32</sup> He also controlled almost every aspect of the personnel at the lower administrative levels. Similarly to the British Resident’s control over a supposedly indigenous government in Egypt, the French had a *conseiller* in nearly every department of the indigenous administration whose approval was required before any action could be taken.<sup>33</sup> Even elected Deputies were largely Francophile and picked

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<sup>30</sup> DBFP S1 V13 355.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 350

<sup>32</sup> Chaigne-Oudin, Anne-Lucie. *La France et les rivalités occidentales au Levant: Syrie-Liban 1918-1939*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006. 107.

<sup>33</sup> BDF A Ser B Vol II 187.



by the French administration.<sup>34</sup> General Gouraud had a budget of 500,000 francs for electioneering in Lebanon alone.<sup>35</sup>

Though the French High Commissioner certainly had authority, he was also subject to considerably more oversight than the British High Commissioner. When the first high commissioner, General Gouraud, was appointed, Alexandre Millerand and Aristide Briand's Conservative *Bloc National* was in power, and it is speculated that one of the primary reasons for Gouraud's appointment was his devout Catholicism,<sup>36</sup> rather than his expertise in Middle Eastern affairs. On meeting him in Paris, the British Ambassador in France and once Viceroy of India, Baron Hardinge, remarked "General Gouraud struck me as being an honest, modest and straightforward man, but I should have said totally incapable of dealing with Eastern intrigues."<sup>37</sup>

Upon arriving, Gouraud transferred the divide and rule policy he had used in Morocco to Syria.<sup>38</sup> Each of the various religious groups had a different territory. In 1921, the French region of the Levant was divided into Greater Lebanon, the State of Damascus, the autonomous territory of the Alaouits and the Government of Aleppo, with a state of the Jabal Druze added later.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol IV 111.

<sup>35</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol V 9.

<sup>36</sup> Chaigne-Oudin 106,

Kaufman, Asher. *Reviving Phoenecia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon*. New York: IB Taurus & Co Ltd, 2004. 28, DBFP S1 V4 450.

<sup>37</sup> Porter, Bernard. *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-2004*. 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. London: Pearson Education Ltd, 2004. 216, 232. DBFA S1 V13 415.

<sup>38</sup> Kaufman 27, BDFA Ser B Vol. III 196.

<sup>39</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol II 217.

The Catholic bias may not be immediately apparent from this division; however one sees it in the boundaries Gouraud drew for Greater Lebanon. The Lebanese mountain range had long been the home of Christians, especially the Maronite sect. In fact, in 1860, an outbreak of hostilities between the Maronites and a Muslim sect called the Druze opened the way for a French-led European intervention to force the Ottomans to grant to Lebanon an autonomous government under Ottoman suzerainty, guaranteed by the five European countries involved. However, this traditionally “Lebanese” area was confined to the Lebanese mountain range, excluding Beirut and the major ports of Tripoli, Sidon, and Tyre.<sup>40</sup>

When General Gouraud came, opinion was divided largely on religious lines: Christians were mostly supportive of a largely autonomous or French Greater Lebanon so they could retain their “old privileges with...the lion’s share of customs receipts,” while Muslims wanted inclusion in a Muslim federal state of Syria including the entirety of the French Mandatory holdings.<sup>41</sup> Yet not only did Gouraud expand Lebanon to a “Greater Lebanon” including the above mentioned cities, but he drew the boundaries to ensure that there was still a Christian majority: 274,708 Muslims to 330,382 Christians.<sup>42</sup> The British Consul observed the Maronites felt they ought to hold a predominant position with the French and the French Catholics felt a common bond with the Maronites as Catholics “of

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<sup>40</sup> Longrigg, Stephen. *Syria and Lebanon Under French Mandate*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958. 21-22.

<sup>41</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol 3 237. There was also much talk about “La Syrie Intégrale” among the Muslims which would include both the French Mandatory holdings as well as Palestine, which they claim to have been part of the Historic boundaries of Syria (BDFA Ser B Vol I 14).

<sup>42</sup> Chaigne-Oudin 100.

a special ritual.”<sup>43</sup> A similar policy of favoring the Lebanon was continued when General Weygand took control of the office of the High Commissioner in 1923. Even in Aleppo, where the Christians were much less influential, British Consul Smart reported that the French were inclined to “flatter unduly the Christian elements who [had] little real power.”<sup>44</sup>

However, as soon as the politics in France changed, so did the High Commissioner’s Office. The tension between the Conservative and Catholic France that had been once the home of the *Rex Christianissimus*, and the home of the Leftist and anticlerical French Revolution was always felt in French politics, especially in light of the 1905 laic laws officially enacting a rigid secularization of French society. The military was an especially sore spot for the French Left, as it was a bastion of the religious and right-wing.<sup>45</sup> Thus, when politics shifted again in 1924, it is no surprise that the new Leftist ministry appointed General Maurice Sarrail—a remarkable choice in that he was one of the few anticlerical, Leftist generals and had no Colonial experience to speak of.<sup>46</sup>

We see the repercussions of the new choice almost immediately. The new governor of Lebanon, M Cayla, worked extremely hard to try and decrease the influence of the clergy. However, the British Consul-General in Beirut, H. E. Satow, characterized

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<sup>43</sup> B DFA Ser B Vol III 21.

Gouraud, Henri. *La France en Syrie*. Corbeil: Imprimerie Crête, 1922. 5-6.

“d’un rite spécial.” All translations from French originals by author, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>44</sup> B DFA Ser B Vol III 289.

<sup>45</sup> Longrigg 148

<sup>46</sup> Provence 50.

his methods as “heavy handed,” which helped to cause the “various alleged scandals and abuses.”<sup>47</sup>

After Sarrail’s failed handling of the Druze revolt in 1925, the less radical Henry de Jouvenal—Syria’s first non-military High Commissioner—was named to replace him. The Left was still in power, and de Jouvenal was a member of the “Groupe de la Gauche démocratique” in the Senate.<sup>48</sup> He wanted to undo the favoritism that had been granted to the Christians by pushing the creation of a “United States of Syria and Lebanon.” However, after an outcry from the Lebanese Christians, he succumbed to local necessities and backed away from his hopes.<sup>49</sup> He even ended up arming the Christians against the Druze when their revolt infringed on the Southern border of Lebanon.<sup>50</sup>

The Parisian government did not limit itself to manipulating the office of the High Commissioner to control policy, however. They also would take a direct hand in creating local policy. This can be seen in the metropolitan government’s determination of the monetary policy. Whereas Herbert Samuel had sat on a committee examining the budget of Palestine, the circulation of currency in Lebanon and Syria was decided by negotiation between the Finance Ministry and the Quai d’Orsay in Paris.<sup>51</sup> Over the course of several exchanges in 1919, they agreed on creating a Banque de Syrie to create a Syrian national currency which would be based on the franc: 20 francs to 1 Syrian pound.<sup>52</sup> Only after the Banque de Syrie started printing these Syrian pounds did the Finance minister

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<sup>47</sup> B DFA Ser B Vol V 6.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid 60. “Left Democratic Group.”

<sup>49</sup> Ibid 211.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid 76

<sup>51</sup> B DFA Ser B Vol I 302

<sup>52</sup> Hoyakem, A et al. *Documents diplomatiques français relatifs à l’histoire du Liban et de la Syrie 1914-1946: Tome 1: Le démantèlement de l’Empire ottoman et les préludes du mandat 1914-1919*. Paris, L’Harmattan, 2003. 497. [Henceforth DDF]

recommend informing General Gouraud what the currency of his mandate would be.<sup>53</sup>

The next year, Gouraud would make the acceptance of these bank notes a part of his ultimatum to the Emir Faisal, who was leading a revolt in Damascus against French rule.<sup>54</sup>

So the question arises, why was Herbert Samuel not only able to have such autonomy, despite shifting political power in London, but able to successfully complete so much of his agenda even when it was not in alignment with the Colonial Office, while the French High Commissioners were so subject to the shifts in political mood in Paris?

Perhaps some of Samuel's success had to do with his willingness to take matters into his own hands. In his memoirs, Sir Ronald Storrs, the British Governor of Jerusalem relates a story of how, in 1920, the Treasury had not approved the budget for the April 1 Financial Year by the time Samuel came in July. Civil officials were facing imminent eviction, and Samuel sent a telegram requesting the immediate passage of the budget. Samuel was ignored, but, in a move Storrs claims was "a defiance of Whitehall before which the boldest Crown Colony Governor would have quailed," Samuel announced the budget passed and started authorizing the appropriate expenditures.<sup>55</sup>

However, while audacity may have played a part, it cannot be the whole story. When General Gouraud tried to take matters into his own hands and invade Dekaa for stability, Paris reprimanded him and insisted he withdraw the troops.<sup>56</sup>

Another possible reason for the disconnect was Samuel's tendency to downplay all unrest and dissent, avoiding notice by Whitehall. In the 1921 race riots in Jaffa

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid 594.

<sup>54</sup> BDFA Ser. B Vol. II 10.

<sup>55</sup> Storrs, Ronald. *Orientalisms*. London: Nicholson and Watson, 1945. 392-393.

<sup>56</sup> DDF 770.

between the Arabs and the Jews, Samuel told one of the Zionist leaders, Nahum Sokolov, that a state of war had broken out.<sup>57</sup> Yet, in his final report to the Colonial Office, he downplayed it—dedicating just a few sentences to “quickly suppressed” racial riots.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, he downplayed anti-Zionist sentiment, and his political ally, Meinertzhagen, reported any anti-Zionism “largely artificial.”<sup>59</sup> Yet, in a report on Palestine, Hubert Young, who worked in its Middle Eastern Division, estimated that 80% of the population were anti-Zionist.<sup>60</sup>

Again, it is impossible to attribute all autonomy to the withholding of information, and the Colonial office would certainly have received ~~the~~ Young’s reports.<sup>61</sup> There must be some other reason that would allow the Colonial Office to grant greater autonomy to Samuel while the Quai d’Orsay was so interventionist in Syria and Lebanon.

Perhaps the reason for this difference in autonomy has less to do with what Samuel or any other High Commissioner did or did not do, but rather something coming from the side of the government at home. To determine the reasons for the degree of relative autonomies in the two different administrations, one must look first to their metropolitan government’s motivations for being there in the first place.

When one examines the British government’s reasons for being in Palestine, one sees three primary motivations: strategic reasons, domestic reasons and economic reasons. The first, and arguably the most important reason for Britain to be there were the strategic reasons. Herbert Samuel wrote in his memoirs that it was important to know

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<sup>57</sup> Segev 183.

<sup>58</sup> Report 4, 26.

<sup>59</sup> DBFP S1 V4 525.

<sup>60</sup> BDF A Ser B Vol 1 323.

<sup>61</sup> Meinertzhagen 95.

who would be bordering Egypt.<sup>62</sup> The British in Egypt had been attacked by hostile Bedouins at the beginning of World War I, and though the British easily fought the Bedouins off, with the rising nationalist agitation and the beginnings of pan-Arabism, having a completely Arab state bordering Egypt could easily give rise to problems.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the French had been pushing for a connection of their Syrian Railway system with the British Egyptian railway system, but the British saw such a plan as not in keeping with the security of the Suez Canal area.<sup>64</sup> Thus a British protectorate would keep the French out of the area, keeping the Suez area safe. From 1915, Lloyd George had been considering the idea of a Jewish buffer state in Palestine, and, after the Russian Revolution, British control of Palestine seemed all the more important.<sup>65</sup> The War office had formulated three possible lines of defense in case of Communist attack, but they concluded the only practicable one was holding Northern Palestine and Mosul.<sup>66</sup>

Another strategic consideration for the presence of the British in Palestine was the perceived effect of a British support for a Jewish national home on foreign Jews. After the Balfour Declaration, Mr. Ormsby Gore, advisor to David Lloyd George, commented that it “secured for Great Britain the support of Zionist Jews around the world.”<sup>67</sup> Adding to this was perception of a Jewish dominated White House, especially with the

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<sup>62</sup> Memoirs 140

<sup>63</sup> Stevenson. *British Documents of Foreign Affairs—reports and appears from the Foreign Office confidential print Part II, from the First to the Second World War. Series H, The First World War, 1914.* Frederick, MD: University Publications of America 1989-. [Henceforth BDFA Ser. H] Vol 1. 139.

<sup>64</sup> Stein 50.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid 56, Memoirs 143.

<sup>66</sup> DBFP S1 V3 753-755.

<sup>67</sup> BDFA Ser H Vol IV 21

appointment in 1914 of Judge Brandeis to the Supreme Court.<sup>68</sup> Before 1917, there had been German overtures to the Zionists considering promising them a Jewish state in Palestine, hoping to win the Jews in America, and, thereby, American support for their cause.<sup>69</sup> Though by April of 1917 that was a moot point, with America's declaration of war on Germany, another reason arose to appeal to foreign Jews. Beginning in March, the czarist government was overthrown and the Russian Revolution had begun. In November, the Bolsheviks came to power, and the Jews were commonly (falsely) seen as a large force behind the Bolsheviks. Thus, appeasing the Jews was thought to make the Russian government sympathetic enough to the British to remain in the war.<sup>70</sup>

The second motivation for the British being in Palestine were the domestic reasons—largely as a solution to the Jewish problem, felt all throughout Europe. This problem was epitomized in the newly-founded Jewish Regiment. Edwin Montagu, in a memo protesting the Balfour Declaration, explained the situation well. Essentially, there were foreign Jews who were in the British army and yet could not speak English. There was a people living in Britain, some of whom considered themselves English Jews, and some of whom considered themselves Jewish Englishmen.<sup>71</sup> How should the government treat these people? What rights should they have? A simple solution is to create a separate home for them. Add to this the influence of charismatic individuals like Chaim

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<sup>68</sup> Segev 48. Tom Segev writes of how, at first, Wilson counseled against the Balfour Declaration, while after being spoken to by Brandeis, he turned around and gave it his full support. The impression the sudden shift made on Lloyd George was immense (48).

<sup>69</sup> Stein 535-537. The proposals to the German government largely fell due to Ottoman opposition to giving up a part of their country to the Jews.

<sup>70</sup> Stein 570.

<sup>71</sup> Montagu, Edwin. "Memorandum on the Anti-Semitism of the Present Government." August 1917. Zionism-Israeli Information Center. [http://www.zionism-israel.com/hdoc/Montagu\\_balfour.htm](http://www.zionism-israel.com/hdoc/Montagu_balfour.htm).



Weizmann and an inherent romanticism in Balfour and Lloyd George which made them like the idea of giving back to the Jews the land they held before the diaspora, and there is another strong factor in favor of British involvement in Palestine, specifically to create a Jewish state.<sup>72</sup>

Another motivation for being in Palestine that is largely overlooked by scholars of the period is the economic influences. Certainly, there were few British economic interests in Palestine itself; however, the British had considerable interests in Mesopotamia. While the British were negotiating with the Sherif Hussein over a possible Arab revolt in the Hedjaz, which eventually occurred in 1916, they promised support for an Arab state, but throughout the entire negotiations, it was always clear that Mesopotamia was going to be under a British economic sphere of influence.<sup>73</sup> When the British negotiated an agreement with France over mutual spheres of influence, the British insisted upon the necessity of the Mesopotamian region to remain in British hands.<sup>74</sup> In response to an American complaint of British favoritism to British oil companies, Lord Curzon wrote to Washington that the US controlled more than 70% of world's oil supply and will soon own 80%, while Britain owned only 2.5% without Persia and 4.5% with it. He noted that World War I had highlighted the importance of oil.<sup>75</sup> The British government had long followed a policy of pressing Constantinople for concessions for British companies in Mesopotamia.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Memoirs 143-144

<sup>73</sup> DBFP S1 V4 245

<sup>74</sup> McMahan, Henry and the Sherif Hussein. "Hussein-McMahon Letters." July 1915-March 1916. *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*. Ed. John Moore. Vol 3: Documents. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974, 11

<sup>75</sup> DBFP S1 V13 256.

<sup>76</sup> BDF A Ser. H Vol III 272-278.

Clearly, Britain placed a very high value on Mesopotamian oil. Yet that oil would do Britain no good sitting in Baghdad; it needed to be transported to Europe. In order to do that, the British had to transport it from Mesopotamia to the coast. With French interests in Syria conceded as a foregone conclusion, Britain did come to an agreement with them, allowing the British to take control of the Haifa-Mesopotamia Railroad and the rights of oil pipelines as far north as Deir ez Zor.<sup>77</sup> However, Britain did not want to be dependent on France for access to oil. To be dependent on the Ottomans for oil access was even less desirable, and so having access to the Palestinian ports appeared to be a very desirable arrangement. This can be seen in the sense that, despite the fact that the French desired the area, the British ensured that, even in any preliminary agreements, the British never let the French gain Palestine.<sup>78</sup>

These motivations, and the shifting relations between them, explains much about the relationship of the High Commissioner to the national government. The Foreign Office, where Weizmann had most of his contacts, was more sensitive to Zionist pressure than the Colonial office, whose skepticism towards Zionism has already been discussed. The Colonial office, with pressure from the anti-Zionist India Office and its concern over its large Arab and Muslim territories, were less concerned with courting the Jewish of the world, and more concerned over their relationship with the Arabs. In fact, when the India office heard about dividing up the Ottoman Empire even with no mention of a British Palestine, they immediately expressed concerns over Muslim reaction.<sup>79</sup> The British Ambassador in Paris had defended setting up the Emir Faisal in Iraq by repeating the

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<sup>77</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol II 371, BDFA Ser B Vol I 97.

<sup>78</sup> DBFP S1 V7 102-107

<sup>79</sup> BDFA Ser. H Vol II 376.

“well known argument” of the British government that it was “vitaly interested in keeping the goodwill of the Arabs, which was more important to the British Empire than to any other country.”<sup>80</sup> In the early 1920s when the Colonial office took control, the British government was dealing with unrest in India, Iraq, and Persia, that goodwill was even more pronounced.<sup>81</sup>

With the desire to placate the Jews diminished and no real pressure on the British government coming from sources other than the Zionist Organization, the remaining strategic and economic motives were the primary reasons for being in Palestine. The only real domestic policy necessary for transportation of oil would be control of a reliable railroad system, and during his term Samuel nationalized the Palestinian Railroads and made various improvements to them, as agreed to in the treaty of Sèvres.<sup>82</sup> As long as relative security and peacefulness was maintained, the strategic interests would also be maintained. Thus, the Colonial office could afford to grant Samuel much more autonomy in policy without harming its interests in the region.

In contrast, the French interests in Syria and Lebanon were much more direct. They can be divided into economic motives and religious motives. The French economic interests in Syria and Lebanon were extensive and historic. French economic interests stretch all the way back to the crusades in the twelfth century, when Marseille drove the merchants of Venice, Pisa and Genoa out of Syria and started lucrative posts which

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<sup>80</sup> BDF A Ser. B Vol II 239.

<sup>81</sup> Porter 244-245.

<sup>82</sup> Report 9. Some may consider this policy a breach in the autonomy of Samuel, but it would be naïve to think that Samuel who had been in the Cabinet for years would have been completely insensitive to interests, especially when an effective transportation system is also useful for internal economic development—something Samuel worked for throughout his tenure.

traded with India, Persia and the far East.<sup>83</sup> Mark Sykes, the British Middle East expert and negotiator of the famous Sykes-Picot agreement once commented in a speech to the House of Commons that French financiers were the number one threat to British dominance in the domain of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>84</sup>

The French government had also long followed a policy that favored their economic interests in Syria. Before the Ottoman Empire had declared war on the allies in 1914, the Russians were ready to appease them with just about anything, including accepting the abolition of capitulations. The Russians were fearful of opening up a second front, which they did not feel they could hold.<sup>85</sup> The French, on the other hand, insisted that the Ottomans dramatically scale back their plans to dismantle the capitulation system, and causing the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Sazonov to complain to the British Ambassador in Petrograd about “lukewarm support” for the Russians from the French ambassador in Constantinople.<sup>86</sup>

But this behavior was completely understandable; the French had invested very heavily in the Levant, and stood to lose a lot from the abolition of any capitulations. The former ambassador to Constantinople summarized the French interests in the region to Delcassé, the French Minister for Foreign affairs which included in the financial sector the Banque impériale Ottomane, the Banque de Salonique, and the Crédit foncier de Turquie. Commercial interests included the Régie cointéressée des Tabacs,<sup>87</sup> the Lighthouse companies who also owned the streetlights, the Railroad companies with

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<sup>83</sup> DDF 85.

<sup>84</sup> Stein 42.

<sup>85</sup> DDF 18-19

<sup>86</sup> BDFa Ser. H Vol I 86, 54.

<sup>87</sup> A state owned Tobacco Company

junctions at Salonica, Smyrne, Cassala, Damascus, Haham, Moudania, Brousse, Jaffa, Jerusalem, the Lebanese tramways, the Port of Beirut, the wharfs at Constantinople and Smyrna, the docks at Sténia, and the mines at Heraclion. He recommended that the French press claims to the Baghdad Railroad and the port at Alexandria.<sup>88</sup>

Even before the war ended, messages from the major cites began pouring into the Foreign Office, insisting on French control in Syria. Lyons alone imported 500,000 kilos of silk thread per year, which various factories in that city would convert into silk. In 1914 this trade was worth 25 million francs.<sup>89</sup> Marseille claimed Syria produced 300 million francs for France, who was the primary trade partner of Syria.<sup>90</sup> Marseille's and Lyons' Chambers of Commerce were joined by Grenoble's and Paris', as well the Federation of French Industrialists and Merchants in encouraging French control not only in modern-day Syria and Lebanon, but also in *La Syrie Intégrale*, which stretched from the Taurus Mountains to Egypt along the Mediterranean coast, as well as East all the way to the Euphrates river.<sup>91</sup> This would include not only the important Syrian cities of Homs, Aleppo, and Damascus, but also the cotton-producing Adana plain in Turkey and the port of Haifa in Palestine.<sup>92</sup>

There is hardly any doubt the economic interest alone would have been sufficient to ensure that the French government would have taken note of Syria, but, on top of that, there were large religious interests in the region. The Vatican had granted the French

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<sup>88</sup> DDF 72.

<sup>89</sup> DDF 82.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid 87. To put that in perspective, there were 5.2 francs/1914 dollar, which makes 300 million francs worth just under 58 million 1914 dollars (Hautcoeur 190).

<sup>91</sup> DDF 81, 83, 88, 127-128

<sup>92</sup> Ibid 527

Church official rights to protect Catholic sanctuaries in the Holy Land.<sup>93</sup> In the aftermath, with the British taking control, the rights were revoked, considered to be no longer necessary with a Christian power in control.<sup>94</sup>

There were also many secondary schools established by religious interests: the school of Saint Paul in Adana, the school of the Lazarists in Damascus, the schools of Saint-Nicholas and the Marist brothers in Aleppo, the school of the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine in Tripoli, and in Beirut, the Maronite and Melkite secondary schools along with another school of the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine.<sup>95</sup>

The Maronites, whose relationship with France has already been mentioned, were also in the region. Their relationship post-1860 had only deepened. In fact, after the French Consul in Beirut departed rapidly after the declaration of war, the Ottomans went through the records of the Consulate, uncovering documents in which the Christian Lebanese requested the occupation of French troops, containing signatures from such people as the Orthodox Bishop, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan, a Maronite Bishop, and the Syriac Patriarch. The only signer who remained in Beirut, a Maronite noble named Joseph Hani, was hanged by the Ottomans.<sup>96</sup>

Between these two factors, there was much cause for the French people to take a much heavier interest in policy enacted by the French in Syria. In 1919 the newspapers reported that the British were carrying out anti-French propaganda during the time period they were administering it as occupied enemy territory in 1919, resulting in a veritable

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid 188

<sup>94</sup> Ibid 312, DBFP S1 V7 102-107.

<sup>95</sup> DDF 527.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid 132-133

uproar by the people and outright accusations from the press.<sup>97</sup> The French Foreign Ministry soon forwarded a vehement protest to London which demanded immediate action.<sup>98</sup>

In case there remains any doubt for the importance of Syria to France, the French Ambassador in Paris in 1920 relayed a hearing of the French Prime Minister in front of the Senatorial Committee on Foreign Affairs, “In reply to a question by M. Bonefont as to what part of Syria he intended to occupy and for how long, M Leygues replied: ‘The whole of it, and for ever’.”<sup>99</sup> Unlike with Britain in Palestine, there was no debate over whether France should be in Syria or not; it was a foregone conclusion. It is no surprise, then, that the French government would take a much greater interest in the administration of Syria. Rather than needing the land only indirectly for economic interests and mainly for strategic reasons, like the British in Palestine, the French economic interests were much more direct. This directness caused much more pressure on the French government to exercise much more metropolitan control in practicing policy in the Levant than the British.

Unfortunately, scholars in the field have a habit of not looking for any relation between the metropolitan government and the mandatory government, but focusing on either the person of the High Commissioner, the metropolitan government, or any other various factors. Perhaps the best example of this is Henry Longrigg in his work *Syria and Lebanon Under French Mandate*. Throughout the book, he hardly ever mentions the French government until it appears as some malevolent influence in the distance. This is

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<sup>97</sup> DBFP S1 V4 318-320

<sup>98</sup> Ibid 321

<sup>99</sup> BDFA Ser B Vol II 41

best seen in his introduction of General Sarrail. He writes “The sudden and unexpected recall of the vigorous, respected, and generally popular High Commissioner Weygand...came as an unwelcome surprise to the French in Syria.” He then introduces Sarrail as “the ageing, authoritarian and impatient General Sarrail.”<sup>100</sup> He rightly attributes the shift to a shift in political parties in France, but the reader is ultimately left feeling as though irrational anticlericals in Paris imposed an unexpected and unqualified General due to certain anti-religious convictions. He does not mention the ongoing religious tension, the importance of the issue to the French people, or any other reason why France may have taken an interest in the High Commissioner of Syria—something integral to understanding French policy in the region.

Anne-Marie Chaigne-Oudin takes a step in the correct direction. She notices the correlation between the politics of Europe in the policy followed in Syria and Lebanon. She correctly identifies the tension between the official anticlerical French national policy, and her Christian designs in the Levant as a key element in the Levant.<sup>101</sup> Yet, in even in her title—*France and Western Rivalries in the Levant: Syria-Lebanon 1918-1939*<sup>102</sup>—evinces her focus on the International European rivalries playing themselves out rather than the just as important domestic rivalries. Her thesis is “In the period between the Wars, the Levant was the theater of rivalries between France and the Western powers.”<sup>103</sup> Yet, as has been seen, the complex domestic political and economic interests in France play a key role in French policy in the region.

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<sup>100</sup> Longrigg 148

<sup>101</sup> Chaigne-Oudin 11.

<sup>102</sup> *La France et les revalités occidentales au Levant: Syrie-Liban 1918-1939*

<sup>103</sup> Ibid 12. “Pendant l’entre-deux-guerres, le Levant est le théâtre de rivalités entre la France et les puissances Occidentales.”



Tom Segev, in his book *One Palestine, Complete*, emphasizes the influence of the Jewish operations. He spends much of the time focusing on the contribution the Jews gave to the establishment of their national home. For example, his narrative on the Balfour Declaration attributes it to the statesmanship of Weizmann combined with an anti-Semitic view taken by the British government—completely overlooking the economic and strategic motivations for the Balfour declaration.<sup>104</sup> In Palestine, Herbert Samuel's influence is downplayed in favor of Zionist Committee. Certainly, the Zionist Commission was an extraordinary group, yet, all the same, they were still dependent on Samuel for many of the enacted policies. Whether this is due to any possible bias due to his loyalties to his native country of Israel, or just his heavy reliance on the correspondences of Chaim Weizmann, who would naturally play up his influence and that of his fellow Jews, the fact remains that one cannot fully understand influence through solely the influences on the ground; one must also look to the metropolitan government in London.

Thus, the question why the French and British High Commissioners had such different degrees of relative autonomy is not a mystery at all. One simply has to look to the pressures back home. Whitehall could allow Herbert Samuel room to exercise policy initiatives in Palestine because British interests in Palestine were indirect, and still served by Samuel's policies, while the politicians in Paris faced many political pressures and so were much more interventionist in their Mandate in Syria, making the High Commissioners much more dependent on the political mood back home.

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<sup>104</sup> Segev 43-48.

These findings would suggest that the more important a given political issue is, with a greater range of groups and constituencies interested, the more interventionist any metropolitan government's policy will be, and the less likely a consistent policy will be adopted as the political winds change and administrations shift. It also suggests that the administration policy adopted for important overseas interests are less insulated from the electoral process and will also be much more subject to the whims of the electorate at home.

The question left up to the political philosophers is whether that is a desirable arrangement.

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