British Jewry and Zionism
How internecine debate influenced Britain’s wartime policy (1914 – 1917)

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‘I acknowledge that this dissertation is my own work. I have read and understood the definition of plagiarism and the details of possible penalties for plagiarising in the History Handbook or at http://www.history.soton.ac.uk/handbook6.htm.’
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Abbreviations

CAB  Cabinet Papers, National Archives, Kew
FO   Foreign Office Papers, National Archives, Kew
JC   Jewish Chronicle, London
WO   War Office Papers, National Archives, Kew
Introduction

For the British in World War One, 1917 represented a year of dramatic change. In April the United States finally agreed to join the war alongside Britain and France, but with the collapse of Russia as an ally in November and with military failure in Flanders and Salonika, the prospect of victory was far from secure. In the Middle East, 1917 was a year of great achievement for Lloyd George’s new government; the capture of Baghdad in March and Jerusalem in December represented Britain’s first major advance into the region, putting pressure on the Central Powers and threatening the collapse of the weakened Ottoman Empire.¹

For Jewish communities across the world, 1917 was also a poignant year. Famously referred to as the ‘Balfour Declaration’, Arthur Balfour’s public letter to Baron Rothschild, sent 2nd November, affirmed British sympathy towards Zionist aspirations and provided support for the establishment of a Jewish ‘National Home’ in Palestine.² Referred to as both a “timely and crucial achievement”³ and “one of the greatest mistakes of our imperial history”,⁴ the Balfour Declaration is arguably one of the most controversial statements ever issued out of Whitehall. Coinciding with the declaration was the announcement in August that the government planned to raise a Jewish battalion for service in Palestine⁵. For the majority of Zionists, these few months represented the pinnacle of their success and the culmination of years of

² The Balfour Declaration. In the *Manchester Guardian*, 9th November 1917.
⁴ Monroe, p. 43
⁵ The *Times*, 8th August 1917.
effort. A contrary view was held by the representatives and members of the traditional Anglo-Jewish establishment, many of whom felt the declaration and battalion represented a grave error in judgement. They saw Judaism solely as a religion, and argued that in accepting the concept of a specifically 'Jewish nationality', the government endangered the rights of Jews worldwide who felt loyal to their own countries and had sought to assimilate with the local population.

The origin of the Balfour Declaration has been the subject of great debate amongst historians. Perhaps the most comprehensive book to deal with the topic is Leonard Steins’, ‘The Balfour Declaration’\textsuperscript{6}. Whilst providing few conclusions as to why the government chose to issue the statement, his exhaustive use of primary material paints an incredibly broad yet detailed picture of the specific events, meetings, and correspondence that culminated in this now famous declaration. Other historians have attempted a more critical analysis, providing interpretations as to why the British Foreign Office chose to issue the statement at this time. Whilst a number of alternative theories have been suggested\textsuperscript{7}, it can be seen that historians have principally argued along a series of three common hypotheses. Firstly, that the Balfour Declaration was issued as a means for Britain to expand its colonial interests in the East - securing protection over British control in Egypt and ultimately opening a pathway to India\textsuperscript{8}. Secondly, it is suggested the declaration was issued as a propaganda tool, aimed initially at winning support of Jews in America and subsequently at winning support of

\textsuperscript{7} Barbara Tuchman in her book \textit{Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour} (New York, 1957) argues that the English Bible was the crucial factor in bringing about the Declaration.
\textsuperscript{8} This argument was perhaps most famously put forward by Mayir Vereté in his article, \textit{The Balfour Declaration and its Makers} (1970, \textit{Middle Eastern Studies}, 6(1), pp.48-76.).
Russian Jews, who at the time were widely believed to be involved in the Russian revolutionary movement. The final common hypothesis is that many high ranking British officials were actively sympathetic towards the Zionist movement and it was the work of several key figures within the British Zionist Organisation, such as Chaim Weizmann, that persuaded the British government to issue the declaration as a statement of goodwill towards world Jewry.

Much less has been written about the origins of the Jewish Legion - Martin Watts’ book, ‘The Jewish Legion and the First World War’, provides the most comprehensive study of the battalion’s formation and the controversy that surrounded it. Firsthand accounts by Vladimir Jabotinsky and Colonel John Henry Patterson provide fascinating insights into the mindset of the individuals involved, though the latter tends to focus more on the actual service of the legion rather than its creation.

Few books on the Balfour Declaration deal with the Jewish Legion in any significant way. Given the complex relationship that exists between the two, this omission seems strange. Therefore one of the primary goals of this essay is to examine the process that led to the Balfour Declaration through a more detailed examination of the forces that brought together the Jewish Legion.

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9 Isaiah Friedman in *The Question of Palestine* (1973, London: Routledge) argues that the Balfour Declaration may have been issued to address a growing concern over pro-German influence in the Jewish press in America and over a fear of Jewish pacifism in Russia. Mark Levene in, *The Balfour Declaration: A Case of Mistaken Identity* (1992, *English Historical Review*, 107(422), pp.54-77) develops this point. He argues that anti-Semitic trends in the British Government still existed, leading to an exaggerated fear of Jewish influence in Russia and America and belief among some in a Jewish world conspiracy.

10 Jehuda Reinharz in *Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Statesman* (Oxford University Press, 1993), particularly stresses the role of Chaim Weizmann in guiding the formation of the declaration, and argues that many British officials were actively sympathetic to the Zionist cause.


13 Stein devotes a chapter to the subject and Freidman pays it some attention, however both Levene and Vereté do not mention the Legion at all.
attempted to use the Jewish Legion proposal as a vehicle to influence the government, how the government reacted to the scheme and what relevance it had to the government’s decision to align itself with Zionist objectives in 1917.

In order to address such issues, this essay aims to examine the origins of the Jewish Legion and later the Balfour Declaration through the eyes of the three key groups that contributed towards their formation; namely the traditional Anglo-Jewish community representatives, the developing Zionist movement in Britain and finally the British government itself.

The rising influence of the Zionist movement between 1914 and 1917, presented a major challenge to the role of traditional Anglo-Jewish bodies as representatives of the wider Jewish community. The refusal by many Russian Jewish immigrants to enlist in the army caused embarrassment for many British Jews. Vladimir Jabotinsky’s proposed Russo-Jewish battalion was unpalatable to the majority of the Anglo-Jewry who felt that behind the scheme lay the contentious issue of a specifically Jewish nationality. The Anglo-Jewish bodies found themselves unprepared to deal with both the internal and external challenges the war presented to their community. Despite their appeals to the Foreign Office, by 1917 the representatives found their ideas cast aside as the government actively began pursuing a relationship with Zionists. A controversy raged on either side of the community, ultimately reaching its climax in November with the announcement of the Balfour Declaration.

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By considering opinions on each side of this controversy, and by exploring how each group developed its relationship with British officials in the run up to 1917, this essay seeks to find answers as to why the government ultimately chose to pursue a Zionist policy. Focusing first on the traditional Jewish community in Britain, Chapter one explores how the Anglo-Jewish establishment dealt with the rising challenges presented to them by the war, and why their solutions to the problems were ultimately cast aside by the government. Chapter two focuses on the Zionists – particularly on Jabotinsky’s efforts to develop a Jewish Legion – examining how Zionist attempts to form a relationship with the government may have influenced the course of events. The final chapter considers the broader picture, examining the government’s mindset throughout the period, focusing on the factors that influenced its changing relationship with the Jewish bodies in England. This final section also examines the external factors that ultimately affected the government’s policy and its decision to issue the Balfour Declaration in November 1917.
Chapter One – The Anglo-Jewish Representatives

The Making of Anglo-Jewry

In his book, ‘The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry’, Eugene Black shows that by 1900, three separate types of Jew had emerged in Britain\textsuperscript{15}. Firstly, there were the original Sephardic Jews who had migrated to England throughout the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries, following the reign of Oliver Cromwell. This group generally developed to form the basis of the Anglo-Jewish establishment, producing influential Jewish names such as, Montefiore, Magnus and Henriques\textsuperscript{16}. Secondly there were the Ashkenazi families, who had primarily migrated from Germany and Holland from the 18\textsuperscript{th} century onwards\textsuperscript{17}. Achieving full emancipation in 1858, the Jewish community in Britain made much of the fact that they cared for their own\textsuperscript{18}. Institutions such as the Jewish Board of Guardians were established to care for Ashkenazi newcomers and less fortunate individuals in the community. Throughout the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, the Anglo-Jewish establishment in Britain fought hard the remove image of the Jewish community as separate and exclusive from the nation\textsuperscript{19}. Awarded statutory recognition in 1836, the ‘Board of Deputies of British Jews’ claimed to speak for the entire Jewish community in Britain. The Board generally supported assimilation and religious conservatism; seeking to anglicize itself and the Jewish community, whilst remaining proud of its place as part of such a well established British subculture\textsuperscript{20}.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 1
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 2
\textsuperscript{20} Black, p. 2
The third type of Jew that Black identifies emerged in Britain following a series of violent attacks against Jews in Russia during the late 1800s. The attacks led to a wave of mass immigration sweeping across Britain, which inflated the Jewish population from 65,000 in 1880 to 260,000 by the start of World War One\textsuperscript{21}. More than half these new immigrants chose to settle in a single borough of London, with the majority choosing to maintain their Russian identity and Yiddish language\textsuperscript{22}. The concentration of Jewish immigrants in London’s East End began to revive a negative stereotype of the Jew that the Anglo-Jewish establishment had spent centuries trying to erase. The image of the Jew as a ‘menacing, unfairly competitive and even criminal’\textsuperscript{23} minority threatened the values and ideals of the traditional Jewish elite. Faced with a growing dilemma, many Anglo-Jewish organisations cooperated in the government’s early attempts at limiting immigration\textsuperscript{24}. The Aliens Act of 1905 – for the first time setting a definite limit on the level of immigration allowed into Britain – served only to magnify a growing divide in the Jewish community\textsuperscript{25}.

Prior to the war, the majority of Britain’s prominent Jewish elite were opposed to the idea of a specifically Jewish nationality. A perfect example of a staunchly assimilationist and anti-Zionist Jewish attitude can be found in Claude Montefiore. Grandnephew of perhaps the most prominent Jew of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Sir Moses Montefiore, and president of the Anglo-Jewish Association, Claude Montefiore was at the very centre of the Anglo-Jewish elite. Using his position to his advantage,

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid}, p. 4  
\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid}, p. 6  
\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid}, p. 5  
\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Ibid}  
Montefiore became a fierce critic of Jewish nationalism. He warned that the Zionist movement constituted a “blow and an injury to the development of Judaism as a religion” and referred to Theodore Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism, as a “stupid ass who affects English correctness”\textsuperscript{26}. Many others were inspired by his views and supported Claude Montefiore’s opposition to Zionism early on\textsuperscript{27}. One such man was Lucian Wolf, a figure who would ultimately play an important role in the politics surrounding the Balfour Declaration and the creation of the Jewish Legion.

Wolf was a member of the Board of Deputies, and a prominent Jewish journalist and lobbyist\textsuperscript{28}. Unlike Montefiore, Wolf would not accept that being Jewish was purely a matter of religion. Whilst he believed there was such thing as a Jewish racial identity and distinctiveness, he argued nationality was simply a state of mind\textsuperscript{29}. Despite an early friendship with Theodore Herzl\textsuperscript{30}, Wolf had become increasingly convinced that the idea of a ‘national postulate’ would be a great detriment to Jews everywhere\textsuperscript{31}. In September 1903, Wolf published an article in The Times titled, ‘The Zionist Peril’\textsuperscript{32}. The article demonstrated the type of opposition he, and many of his associates, felt towards the question of Jewish nationalism. He argued that, should a situation present itself in Palestine for the unassimilated and troubled masses to form a Jewish colony under the protection of the Western powers, then he would support it.

\textsuperscript{26} Montefiore’s presidential address to the AJA. In, JC, 8\textsuperscript{th} July 1898.
\textsuperscript{27} Cohen, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{31} Levene, War Jews and the New Europe, p. 110
\textsuperscript{32} Wolf, L., The Zionist Peril. In The Times, 8\textsuperscript{th} September 1903.
What he disagreed with, however, was the Zionist assumption that the World Jewry in general is an “unassimilable element”; and that in both East and Western Europe “we must turn tail in our fight for citizenship”\textsuperscript{33}. Like many others, Wolf was actively involved in the struggle to achieve rights and emancipation for persecuted Jews in Eastern Europe. By giving up on emancipation and accepting only the theory of Jewish nationalism and the solution in Palestine, he believed the situation for persecuted Jews would only get worse. He feared that the Zionist belief in Jewish nationalism would produce a logical base for anti-Semites, who could use it to show that the Jews really only cared for their own kind and were better off elsewhere\textsuperscript{34}.

Montefiore and Wolf’s opinion was shared, at least in part, by a great number of their peers; however among the British Jewry not all agreed. For example, Herbert Samuel, one of Britain’s first ever Jewish MPs and Home Secretary between January and December 1916, had long favoured a solution in Palestine along Zionist lines\textsuperscript{35}. In 1915, Samuel submitted to the Cabinet one of the earliest memoranda supporting the idea of a British protectorate in Palestine to help facilitate Jewish immigration\textsuperscript{36}. Other prominent British Jews such as Joseph Cowen, Sir Francis Montefiore (cousin of Claude Montefiore) and Leopold Greenberg (owner and editor of the Jewish Chronicle), openly supported Zionist aims and played important roles in establishing the English Zionist Federation\textsuperscript{37}. In early 1914 however, Zionist aspirations were bleak\textsuperscript{38}. With the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{33}Ibid
\bibitem{36}Samuel, H., \textit{The Future of Palestine}. CAB 38/11/9
\bibitem{37}Cohen, pp. 64-65
\bibitem{38}Levene, \textit{War Jews and the New Europe}. p. 77
\end{thebibliography}
politics of the Jewish community firmly in the grasp of Anglo-Jewish bodies such as the powerful Board of Deputies, these men were largely in the minority.

Lucian Wolf and the Conjoint Foreign Committee

Established in 1878, the "Conjoint Foreign Committee" was as a special branch of the Board of Deputies assigned to act in all matters concerning foreign Jews. Under the command of Lucian Wolf, the Committee assumed a particular significance during the First World War. The Committee was to act as a mediating body between the government and Jewish immigrants. However, with community tensions already running high, this task would become a considerable burden for the Committee\textsuperscript{39}.

For British Jews, the issue of identity surfaced almost as soon as the war began. Most saw Britain's alliance with the anti-Semitic Russian Empire as repugnant\textsuperscript{40}. To support their country they would have to put aside their Jewish identity and agree to fight against their German and Austro-Hungarian coreligionists in an alliance with Russia\textsuperscript{41}. For the Russo-Jewish immigrants in Britain, having fled Russia to escape persecution, the decision to enlist was all the more difficult. Under the 'Defence of the Realm' and 'Alien Restrictions' acts of 1914, alien subjects had initially been unable to enlist. By late 1915, however, with Britain's policy of voluntary enlistment struggling, this decision was reversed. With the support of the Anglo-Jewish community, the 'Derby Scheme', announced in November 1915, allowed "foreign born men who have

\textsuperscript{39} Cohen, p. 217
\textsuperscript{40} Lloyd, A., p. 69
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, p. 71
been in Britain since their infancy" to enlist. At the beginning of 1916, this decision was extended further; the 'Military Service Act' was passed in January introducing conscription for all eligible single men, with a second act for married men being passed in May.

The atmosphere of compulsion produced a heightened public awareness of the question of Russian Jewish service. Throughout 1915 it became clear that while many Jews in the West End had willingly volunteered for service, those in East End had generally resisted the idea of signing up. The Conjoint Committee was left with the rather awkward choice of either excusing their coreligionist's actions, or accepting the increasingly popular charge that they were 'shirking their duty'. Despite the introduction of conscription, the majority of the first generation immigrants had not yet taken the decision to become naturalised and were therefore still illegible to fight. With the pressing problem of around 20,000 Russian Jews of military age avoiding conscription, Home Secretary Herbert Samuel wrote to Wolf in August complaining that "the mass of Russian Jews in this country refuse to lift a finger to help ... the effect on the reputation of Jews everywhere will be disastrous." By 1916, the non-Jewish press in East London had become overtly anti-Semitic in discussing the question of Jewish enlistment - and with public opinion rapidly turning against the East End Jews, it was clear the Committee would have to do something to find a solution.

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42 JC, 19th November 1915
43 Watt, p. 57
44 Cohen, p. 218
45 'Herbert Samuel to Lucian Wolf, 30th August 1916' in, Stein, p. 489
46 Lloyd, p. 85
47 Watt, p. 63
Earlier attempts at attracting potential candidates for enlistment in the East End had often taken the form of recruitment agencies such as the ‘Central Jewish Recruiting Committee’. These attempts had generally been unsuccessful, and by late 1915 it had become clear that more needed to be done\textsuperscript{48}. Wolf recognised early on that the fundamental difficulty in attracting new Russo-Jewish recruits was the British allegiance to the anti-Semitic Tsarist regime. Throughout the war Wolf had put pressure on the government to take action on Russia\textsuperscript{49}. Unwilling to do anything that might harm Britain’s fragile relationship with its ally; Wolf’s requests were largely ignored\textsuperscript{50}. In February 1916, British Ambassador to America, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, wrote to Lord Robert Cecil\textsuperscript{51}, stating that “the danger of direct relations with Lucian Wolf is that his Committee would ask you to obtain assurances from the Russian Government as to the treatment of Russian Jews which would cause great difficulties with Russia”\textsuperscript{52}. In order to find a solution that might appeal to the Russo-Jewish immigrants, and to ensure his relationship with the government remained on positive terms, Wolf decided he would have to take a different approach.

Throughout this same period, there had been a parallel concern growing in Whitehall that pro-German propaganda in the Jewish American press might be turning many influential American Jews against Britain and her allies\textsuperscript{53}. With the outcome of

\textsuperscript{48} Lloyd, A., p. 84-86
\textsuperscript{49} Kadish, p. 169, shows Wolf saw the Russian question as “vastly more important than the Palestine question”.
\textsuperscript{50} Levene, M., 1992. The Balfour Declaration: A Case of Mistaken Identity. English Historical Review, 107(422), p. 64
\textsuperscript{51} Lord Robert Cecil was the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs throughout the War.
\textsuperscript{52} ‘Spring Rice to Robert Cecil, 1\textsuperscript{st} February 1916’, FO 371/2835/22005
\textsuperscript{53} FO 371/2835 - Series of papers from between late 1915 to mid 1916, highlight a growing concern over a supposedly pro-German influence in the American Jewish Press, FO 371/2835/66227 – Spring-Rice writes to Robert Cecil, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, “The great mass of Jewish voters are
the war still uncertain, and with the USA remaining neutral, it was vital that the
Foreign Office prevent any influence that might push America into an alliance with
Germany. In December 1915 the French government set up ‘Le Comité Français
d’Information et d’Action auprès des Juifs des Pays Neutres’, a committee intended
specifically to deal with propaganda aimed at the American Jewry. Despite the
difficulties it might cause with regard to Franco-Russian relations, one of the
committee’s main goals was to speak out in favour of Jewish emancipation in Eastern
Europe\(^54\). Eager to get the British on their side, members of the French committee had
written to Wolf outlining their concerns and suggesting he establish a parallel
committee in England\(^55\). Despite being unconvinced that the situation in America was
as serious as the French committee feared\(^56\), Wolf realized this was a unique
opportunity, and set about drafting a proposal to send to the government.

The chance to present his views to the Foreign Office, with the backing of the
French committee, presented a number of benefits to Wolf. Throughout 1915 he had
begun to grow suspicious of several prominent Zionist figures, in particular the Russian
Chaim Weizmann, who had been approaching a number of key individuals in both the
government and British press over the possibility of a Zionist solution in Palestine\(^57\). An
additional threat came from the Zionist, Vladimir Jabotinsky, who by 1916 had

\(^{54}\) Levene, *War Jews and the New Europe*. p. 81
\(^{55}\) Ibid. p. 82
\(^{56}\) Ibid
\(^{57}\) Cohen, p. 224. Cohen shows that by mid 1915 Weizmann had already made contact with, Herbert
Samuel (then President of the Local Government Board), C.P. Scott (ed. Manchester Guardian), H.W.
Steed (ed. The Times), Lloyd George (then Chancellor of the Exchequer), Winston Churchill (then First
Lord of the Admiralty), Arthur Balfour (who succeeded Churchill in May) and Lord Robert Cecil (then
Parliamentary Foreign Understudy, who entered cabinet in July of same year).
submitted to the government his own solution to the recruitment problem in the form of a Jewish Legion, comprised specifically of Russo-Jewish immigrants\textsuperscript{58}. For Wolf, the opportunity to present his views to the Foreign Office not only meant that he might have the chance to work on a solution to the Jewish problem at home and abroad, but also meant that he might be able to trump the Zionists in reaching agreement with the government first – thus securing a solid relationship between his committee and the Foreign Office.

Wolf’s experience had taught him that he would have to offer the government more than just a solution to the Russia problem in line with the French recommendations. For that reason his memorandum, submitted 16\textsuperscript{th} December 1915, proposed a radically different platform. Entitled, ‘Suggestions for pro-allies propaganda among the Jews of the United States’, Wolf insisted that the time had come for “the Allies to declare their policy on Palestine”\textsuperscript{59}. He claimed that “[should the allies] say that they thoroughly understand and sympathise with Jewish aspirations in regard to Palestine, and that when the destiny of the country comes to be considered, that those aspiration will be taken into account ... I am confident they would sweep the whole of American Jewry into enthusiastic allegiance to their cause”. Despite maintaining that, “I am not a Zionist, I deplore the Jewish national movement”, Wolf accepted that “in any bid for Jewish sympathies today, very serious account must be taken of the Zionist movement”. His new proposal did not represent a complete departure from his earlier stance – elsewhere in the memorandum he mentions the

\textsuperscript{58} Jabotinsky, V., 1945. \textit{The Story of the Jewish Legion}, New York: B. Ackerman. p. 51

\textsuperscript{59} Wolf, L., \textit{Suggestions for pro-allies propaganda among the Jews of the United States}. FO 371/2835/37215
government should still try and work together with the Russians to improve the Jewish situation there. However, by now Wolf knew that in order to win the support of the government, he needed to shift the emphasis. As a patriot he had long supported the idea of a British protectorate over Palestine; if he could get the government to agree to a non-nationalist solution on his own terms, his proposal had the potential to both outbid the Zionists and win over the sympathies of Jews both at home and abroad.

Though unintentional, the timing of Wolf's memorandum was significant. Received by the government whilst British politician Sir Mark Sykes was in France negotiating a plan for the post war annexation of the Middle East, Wolf's memorandum struck a chord at the Foreign Office. Wolf had not been the first to submit a memorandum recommending a Zionist type solution in Palestine, but with the crucial link to the propaganda issue, and timed as it was, his proposal would ultimately become the catalyst for the government’s interest in Zionism. While his memorandum caused a great deal of excitement at the Foreign Office, not everyone was convinced Wolf would be the best man to deal with the proposals. Unsure how to act, and still waiting for Sykes to conclude negotiations in France, the Foreign Office was unable to provide Wolf with the positive response he wanted. Ultimately weakening his ties with the government even further, Wolf spent the first few months of 1916 pestering the Foreign Office over the need for Russian concessions.

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60 Watt, p. 61
61 Levene, The Balfour Declaration, p. 64
62 As we have seen, Herbert Samuel first submit his memorandum a year earlier. Samuel, H., The Future of Palestine. CAB 38/11/9
63 Levene, The Balfour Declaration, p. 64
64 Levene, War Jews and the New Europe. p. 91
Ultimately deciding to pursue a policy in Palestine in agreement with the Zionists; the Foreign Office perhaps saw Wolf as a liability.

Throughout this period Wolf had grown ever more suspicious of the Zionist’s actions. In February he wrote to Baron Edmund de Rothschild that, “The Zionists are taking advantage of our courtesy to push forward their plans without reference to us”\(^{65}\). False information and rumours fuelled his anxiety; in May he wrote to Montgomery at the Foreign Office complaining, “...about Mr. Jabotinsky’s scheme of a Jewish Legion ... you were good enough to say that before the matter was decided you would consult me as to the views of the Jewish community ... I am told today that the scheme has been approved by the Army Council”\(^{66}\). By this point no agreement had actually been reached with regard to the legion, though Montgomery’s response would have done little to ease Wolf’s fears. He wrote, “I have not heard of any development of the scheme for a Jewish legion ... it is possible that something has been decided. I think you must have misunderstood what I said when I mentioned the scheme to you: I only intend to convey that I would be interested to hear what you thought of it”\(^{67}\). With accusations and rumours being spread on either side, a showdown between the Zionists and the Conjoint was inevitable.

Wolf knew that his interference in relation to the Palestine question was a massive gamble. He had not consulted the Zionists over the proposal and to them his

\(^{66}\) ‘Wolf to H. Montgomery, 16\(^{th}\) May 1916’, FO 371/2835/98116
\(^{67}\) ‘H. Montgomery to Wolf, 19\(^{th}\) May 1916’, FO 371/2835/98116
actions seemed like a deliberate stab in the back. Wolf had bargained on a quick approval by the government which would bring the Zionists on their side, neutralizing the question of Jewish nationalism in the process. By mid 1916, however, the government had shown no real public interest in pursuing his ideas. In August, Wolf agreed for himself and his colleagues, to meet with the Zionists at the house of James de Rothschild. Convinced by Herbert Samuel that the Zionists might actually agree to his formula “when it comes to the point,” Wolf had decided to share his plans with the leading Zionist figures. A month prior to the meeting, Zionist writer Harry Sacher had published a book titled, ‘Zionism and the Jewish Future’. The book contained essays by the likes of Weizmann and Moses Gaster; viciously attacking the position of Anglo-Jewish representatives. In his essay, Gaster wrote, “The claim to be an Englishman of Jewish persuasion – that is, an Englishman by nationality, Jewish by faith – is an absolute self-delusion.” Weizmann wrote that the Jew who seeks to assimilate “deceives nobody but himself.” The fact that the book was published in the precise build up to the Conjoint’s meeting with the Zionists was an insult; one which Wolf and his colleagues could not ignore. Claude Montefiore wrote to Wolf, “I think the Conjoint will have to consider whether we are to sit silent at the awful things the Zionists print ... that Sacher book is too bad.” At the meeting a fierce debate raged; the Conjoint representatives were frustrated by the uncompromising attitude of the

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68 Levene, War Jews and the New Europe, p. 114
69 Ibid
70 Cohen, p. 230
74 Cohen, p. 233
75 ‘Montefiore to Wolf, 11th July 1916’, In Cohen, p. 233
Zionist figures, whilst the Zionists themselves felt deceived by Wolf’s attempt to reach a solution in Palestine behind their backs. The meeting had turned out to be a disaster.\footnote{Cohen, p. 231}

Through the remainder of 1916 accusations were cast back and forth, spilling out into a public row\footnote{Ibid. 234}. In November Wolf published an article by Montefiore entitled ‘Zionism’; the article caused great controversy for its claim that Jewish nationalism was “a very dangerous movement”\footnote{Attributed anonymously to ‘An Englishman of the Jewish Faith’ [Montefiore, C.], Zionism. Fortnightly Review, 100 (Nov 1916).}. The Zionists hit back with a series of articles and with Leon Simons’ book, ‘The Case of the Anti-Zionists: A Reply’\footnote{Simon, L., 1917. The Case of the Anti-Zionists: A Reply, London: Zionist Organisation}. By May 1917, Wolf had learnt through his contacts that the Zionists had reached some kind of agreement with the government\footnote{By this point the Zionists had had their first crucial meeting with Sir Mark Sykes. With official approval, Zionist figure Nahum Sokolow had begun to lobby for French and Italian approval for the Zionist objectives. Cohen, p. 235}. Whilst still unsure of the exact details, Wolf had been made suspicious by the repeated warnings from the Foreign Office that there should be “no public polemic” (he felt the warnings seemed like a strange intrusion in to a matter of internal Jewish debate)\footnote{Cohen, p. 236}.

Despite still not understanding the full extent of the Zionist agreement, a meeting with Lord Milner on 16th May 1917, had convinced Montefiore that drastic action needed to be taken. An emergency meeting of the Conjoint was called on 17th May at which it was decided that the best course of action would be to produce a
statement on Palestine; a strongly worded memorandum outlining fully the situation as it stood and the Conjoint’s position. Titled ‘Palestine and Zionism: Views of Anglo-Jewry’, and published in The Times on 24th May, the article proved disastrous for its authors. The letter caused outrage not only in Zionist circles, but also in the wider Anglo-Jewish community, as many felt it had been rushed to publication without the full backing of the Jewish bodies. Whilst its authors had hoped the article would unite Jewish society against Zionism and force the government to sever its ties with the movement, it ultimately served only to polarize the community even further.

Following a large and unpleasant debate, a majority of members on the Board of Deputies expressed their “profound disapproval of the views”, calling for the representatives of the Conjoint to resign “forthwith”. For the time being the Conjoint was dissolved.

In the struggle to form a solid relationship with the government based on their proposals, the Anglo-Jewish establishment failed to beat the Zionists. Whilst the Anglo-Jewry’s opposition to Jewish nationalism was not silenced following their split in May, the government took it as a chance to relieve themselves of any prior commitments they had made to the anti-Zionists. Following the Board’s decision, one Foreign Office clerk frankly minuted, “This vote means the dissolution of the Conjoint Committee and it will no longer be necessary to consult that body.” It is perhaps significant that only two days after the decision, the Foreign Secretary himself wrote to the leading Zionist,
Weizmann, asking him to submit a Palestine formula for his consideration\textsuperscript{87}. Faced with an already divided community, and unwilling to compromise on their most fundamental principles, the Conjoint Committee was unable to keep up with the times. Tragically for Wolf, his greatest contribution in regard to Palestine was a proposal that inspired the government into negotiations with his Zionist rivals. In the coming chapter we shall see how Jabotinsky’s Zionist based Jewish Legion, provided a solution to the recruitment problem that was far more radical than anything Wolf or his associates would ever have recommended.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid. 244
Chapter Two – Jabotinsky and the Zionist Movement in Britain

As we have already seen, by 1914 the Jewish community in Britain was divided. On the one side was the more traditional Jewish community; primarily represented by the Board of Deputies. On the other was the growing Russo-Jewish community, living primarily in London’s East End. Out of touch with the identity and ideology of this new generation of Russian immigrants, the Board of Deputies struggled to deal with the rising challenges that faced them. For the immigrant Jews in the East End, the old ideology and practices of the Anglo-Jewish elite seemed outdated. Conditioned by their experience in Russia, the immigrant community had increasingly begun to militate against the likelihood of emancipation and assimilation on Western lines. Instead the Russian community tended to favour an entirely auto-emancipatory creed; ‘a Jewish awakening and an awareness of national distinction that would focus on a heritage in Palestine’. The doctrine of Zionism appealed directly to these immigrants’ concerns. Rejected as a group from Russia and left homeless, many would find great comfort in an ideology that promised unity and hope for a displaced people.

The modern Zionist movement had been founded in the late 1800s by the Austro-Hungarian journalist Theodor Herzl. At a basic level it was a Jewish nationalist movement founded on the premise that the Jewish nation in the diaspora was facing destruction. To ensure the nation’s continued survival against anti-Semitic persecution they would have to create a Jewish state in which the nation could be rebuilt and

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88 Levene, War Jews and the New Europe. p. 109
89 Ibid
rejuvenated. Whilst earlier attempts at choosing a location had focused on forming a state in places such as Argentina and Uganda, by 1914 the sole focus of mainstream Zionism was the establishment of a Jewish nation in Palestine\(^90\).

The declaration of war in 1914 had initially caused embarrassment for many British Zionists. Up until that point the Zionist Executive had been primarily based in Berlin, leaving many in Britain uncomfortable about their connection to a movement with such strong ties in Germany\(^91\). The events caused a crisis of identity for many Zionists; loyal first to the ‘Jewish nation’, most were unsure which country they should try and defend. Some Zionists realised early on that serving the victorious side might eventually lead to some territorial reward following victory; though many others suggested that fighting alongside the Entente powers might mean retribution from the Ottoman rulers of Palestine should they lose\(^92\). In December 1914, the Zionist Council declared a position of neutrality, moving their headquarters from Berlin to the neutral city of Copenhagen.

Not all Zionists agreed with their neutral stance. The Russian chemist Dr Chaim Weizmann predicted Palestine would fall to the British during the course of the war, and had travelled to England to begin reconnoitring work in pursuit of his Zionist aims. Weizmann had always maintained that he was the Zionist best qualified to undertake the task of winning government support – it had been though his scientific work on

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\(^90\) Territorial Zionists such as Israel Zangwill had favoured a solution elsewhere to Palestine as they felt the region was already too heavily populated. At the 7\(^{th}\) Zionist congress in 1905, Zangwill had led a precession of territorialists out of the convention in protest of the movement’s direction. Winkler, M. & Schaar, M. 1996. *Index to the minutes of the seventh Zionist congress, Basle, 27\(^{th}\) July – 2\(^{nd}\) August 1905*, Tel-Aviv: Institute for Zionist research.

\(^91\) Cohen, p. 219

\(^92\) Watt, p. 3
behalf of the Admiralty that he was first able to introduce David Lloyd George to the
Zionist objectives. Eventually elected to the head of the English Zionist Federation in
1917, Weizmann dominated the movement in Britain via his extraordinary ability at
winning important friends. Having overtaken opposition from the likes of Greenberg
and Joseph Cowen, he united the English federation and could dictate the exact action
the organisation should take.

Vladimir Jabotinsky first met Weizmann whilst visiting Italy in April 1915. Jabotinsky
was a Russian journalist, who like Weizmann had predicted the downfall of
the Ottoman Empire and foresaw the benefits this could bring. Upon meeting they
immediately recognised their shared interest in creating a Jewish Legion. They each
reasoned that the scheme had massive potential for recruitment among Russian Jews
living in Western Europe and the United States, and that it would be necessary to
approach all western Allies with an interest in the Mediterranean. Jabotinsky
viewed the scheme as a vehicle for achieving his Zionist objectives; if he could be seen
to have raised such a historically significant unit, fighting triumphantly on the side of
the Entente, then perhaps at a post war peace conference the allies would favour the
territorial objectives of the ‘Jewish nation’. Earlier in the war, Jabotinsky had played a
crucial part in the formation of the ‘Zion Mule Corps’; a specifically Jewish transport
unit, comprised of Palestinian refugees in exile in Alexandria. Organised by the

and Watson. pp. 584-586
94 Cohen, p. 221
95 Ibid. p. 223
96 Watt, p. 48
97 Ibid
98 ‘JC, 30th April, 1915’, On Formation of the Zion Mule Corps.
British, the unit was led by the non-Jewish Colonel John Henry Patterson, and joined the unsuccessful allied campaign in Gallipoli. Despite his achievement in Egypt in helping to form this transport unit, Jabotinsky left Alexandria with bigger plans. To receive genuine recognition, he believed he would have to raise a much larger, combative unit for service in Palestine.

By the time Jabotinsky arrived in Britain in the summer of 1915 his scheme already faced a number of challenges. Early in the war he had tried somewhat unsuccessfully to interest the Zionist leaders with his proposals for a specifically Jewish military unit. With a few key exceptions, most notably Weizmann, the majority of the Zionist organisation’s membership said they wanted nothing to do with the scheme. Most of the Zionists in Copenhagen took their neutrality seriously, and regarded the idea of raising a Jewish battalion as a dangerous and unnecessary strategy. In England he also faced opposition from the Anglo-Jewish bodies, and from the Russian immigrants themselves who, as we have seen, were less than enthusiastic over participation in the British war effort. Nevertheless, Jabotinsky was determined to see his plan through, collecting written endorsements from key individuals such as Colonel Patterson and General Sir Ian Standish Hamilton who was leader of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. Through his friendship with Weizmann, Jabotinsky was able to develop a network of important contacts, including Joseph Cowen, C.P. Scott (editor of

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99 Watt, pp. 20-30
100 Ibid, p. 23
101 Nahum Sokolow and Jehiel Tschlenow in particular had expressed a strong disinterest. Stein, *The Balfour Declaration*, p. 488
102 Watt, p. 50
The Times) and Leo Amery (a Unionist MP who would become a major supporter of the scheme).\(^{103}\)

Jabotinsky initially submitted a request to the War Office suggesting the Mule Corps be converted into a fully combative brigade. The timing was unfortunate. With Britain’s campaign in Gallipoli failing, its future strategy in the region was uncertain. After a long wait, Jabotinsky received a reply suggesting his best option would be to write to the Foreign Office, with a request to form a Foreign Legion\(^{104}\). Jabotinsky understood the troubles the government was facing over recruitment in the East End. Seeing the Legion as a possible solution, he submitted his first memorandum to the Foreign Office on the 23\(^{rd}\) December 1915. His letter proposed the formation of a ‘Jewish Eastern Legion’, consisting only of foreign subjects for service on any front\(^{105}\). He indicated his scheme would appeal to the Russian immigrants, putting to rest their fears over fighting alongside non-Jewish soldiers who might not appreciate their customs. After weeks with no response, Col. Patterson decided he should try submitting his own letter. Frustratingly for Jabotinsky, Patterson received a response almost immediately, requesting that he travel to London for a meeting with Robert Cecil, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs\(^{106}\).

The different treatment Patterson and Jabotinsky received upon submitting their letters to the Foreign Office shows just how little understood or respected the Zionists were in 1915. During the same period that Wolf and the Conjoint were in

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\(^{103}\) Watt, pp. 54-55  
\(^{104}\) Ibid, p. 51  
\(^{105}\) Ibid, p. 57  
\(^{106}\) Ibid
constant contact with the government over their Russian suggestions, Jabotinsky and the Zionists were unable to even get a response to a letter. On the 31st January 1916, Jabotinsky wrote a strongly worded complaint to Charles Masterman, head of the British War Propaganda Bureau. Following Patterson’s meeting with Cecil, Jabotinsky had learnt about the government’s concerns over pro-German propaganda in the American Jewish press. Complaining about the slow response from the War Office and lack of response from Cecil, he wrote, “this treatment does not exactly coincide with my conception of play ... I do not see why I deserve to be treated like this”. Despite his complaints, Jabotinsky was still eager to promote his scheme, stressing that the, “value for propaganda in favour of the allies is obvious”\(^{107}\). Whilst no response to his letter is recorded, a Foreign Office file suggests his proposal had been rejected by the War Office, adding “there are no great benefits [to the scheme], although perhaps it will upset the US, which likes all its citizens to serve under Stars and Stripes”\(^{108}\).

Determined not to give up, Jabotinsky managed to persuade Leo Amery to table a parliamentary question for Cecil, asking him to clarify the objections the Foreign Office had to the scheme. Cecil responded that the Foreign Office had “no objections on political grounds to raising a Jewish Corps in England (we are not at all irrevocably opposed to Zionism)”\(^{109}\). The timing and nature of the response is interesting – at the very least it shows the Foreign Office understood that it was Zionism that lay behind the proposal. Being sent in late February, around a month after Wolf had excited the Foreign Office with his own proposals; Cecil’s response

\(^{107}\) ‘Jabotinsky to Charles Masterman, 26th January 1916’, FO 371/2835/18095
\(^{108}\) FO 371/2835/18995
\(^{109}\) ‘Cecil to Amery, February 1916’, In Watt, p. 59
seems to indicate the degree of change that was taking place in Whitehall. Whilst previously the Foreign Office had shown a total indifference to Zionist aims, forcibly removing Nahum Sokolow during a visit in 1913 and having failed to respond to Jabotinsky a month earlier, it now seemed as if the movement might have attracted their interest\textsuperscript{110}. Despite this seemingly positive response, the Foreign Office felt the issue should be a matter for the War Office to deal with, and without their backing the scheme could not progress.

In May 1916, in search of a solution to the recruitment problem in the East End, Herbert Montgomery at the Foreign Office decided to canvass Wolf over the Jabotinsky’s plans. Wolf, like many of his associates, greatly disliked the idea of a Jewish legion. Having disregarded the concept of Jewish nationality, it seemed illogical to them that there should to ever be a Jewish battalion (arguing if so, then why not a Catholic or Methodist regiment). With thousands of British Jews already serving in the armed forces, why should the public be given the impression that the entire Jewish contribution was represented by one unpredictable foreign unit\textsuperscript{111}. Wolf wrote to Montgomery, “as far as I can see, it is almost universally disapproved. Jabotinsky, who now advocates it, has no position in the Jewish community at all”\textsuperscript{112}. Though his influence was fading, Wolf was still highly respected at the Foreign Office for his opinion over Jewish matters. His disapproval may have contributed to the scheme’s overall failure in 1916.

\textsuperscript{110} Nahum Sokolow was a Russian Zionist, and Secretary General of the World Zionist Congress throughout the war. Sokolow had visited the Foreign Office 11\textsuperscript{th} February 1913. Unhappy about his presence he had rather unceremoniously been shown the door. Sir Louis Mallet minuted, “the less we have to do with the Zionists the better”. Levene, \textit{War Jews and the New Europe}, p. 94

\textsuperscript{111} Stein, \textit{The Balfour Declaration}, p. 492

\textsuperscript{112} ‘Wolf to Montgomery, 22\textsuperscript{nd} May 1916’, FO 371/2835/98116
Meanwhile, the Conjoint had backed plans, discussed by Herbert Samuel, to introduce a ‘Military Service Convention’. Under the plans friendly aliens would be given the choice to either be conscripted into the British army, or sent back to their home countries to fight in the allied forces\textsuperscript{113}. Jabotinsky agreed with the act in principle, but felt Russian Jews ought to be exempt due the threat of persecution back home. On the 11\textsuperscript{th} July 1916, Samuel publically announced that service to either Russia or Britain was to become compulsory. The announcement caused outrage through parts of the East End, dividing the community even further\textsuperscript{114}. Unhappy with the plans, but with little progress elsewhere, Jabotinsky spent the remainder of 1916 assisting in a number of unsuccessful propaganda schemes aimed at enlisting Russian\textsuperscript{115}.

In December 1916, David Lloyd George became Prime Minster, replacing Herbert Asquith. Upon taking power Lloyd George announced a British push forward in the Middle East, edging closer to an invasion of Palestine. It was throughout this period, and into the beginning of 1917, that Zionists fortunes began to increase dramatically\textsuperscript{116}. The Russian revolution in March was disastrous for the British government. A great fear existed in Whitehall that influential Jewish pacifists in Russia might bring the Empire to negotiate a separate peace with the Germans\textsuperscript{117}. Lloyd George, already well acquainted with the Zionist ideas through his contact with

\textsuperscript{113} Watt, p. 64  
\textsuperscript{114} Wolf supported the scheme arguing fear of persecution was no reason not to enlist in the British forces. The Times and Jewish Chronicle disagreed, arguing it was wrong to make the immigrants fight out of fear of deportation. Jabotinsky suggested once again that a much better solution would to form a legion in which the Russian Jews could fight for their own national freedom rather than that of the British or Russian. Watt, pp. 70-71.  
\textsuperscript{115} With the backing of Herbert Samuel, Jabotinsky spearheaded the ‘Home and Heim’ campaign in late 1916. The campaign was, in his own words, “a complete failure”. Watt, p. 80  
\textsuperscript{116} Stein, p. 490  
\textsuperscript{117} Levene, \textit{The Balfour Declaration}, p. 70
Weizmann, began to think that if the British pursued a policy in support of Zionist objectives, then the affect would be to “bring the Russian Jewry to the cause of the Entente.”

In January 1917, Jabotinsky received a boost with the news that one hundred and twenty old members of the Zion Mule Corps had arrived in Britain and volunteered to join the Army. Quickly realising these men could provide a focal point on which to create another bid for a Jewish Legion, he wrote directly to the new Prime Minister on 21st January. The letter was initially referred to the War Office who, whilst recognising its potential use in raising recruits, recorded, “it would be very unsound to sanction such a step until we had obtained the concurrence of the French government, who are very jealous of the future establishment of Jewish colonies in Palestine.” The emphasis on the French question here goes to show how seriously the government took its relations with the allies. Although the government had already flirted with the possibility of a Zionist solution in Palestine, it seems they were still not entirely committed and were concerned about international support.

By the middle of March discussions between the Zionists and the British politician Sir Mark Sykes, over a Zionist solution in Palestine, were well underway. Following the revolution in Russia, and fearful the Legion idea might slip by, Jabotinsky wrote to Sykes pressing that “the events in Russia have tremendously influenced the East End aliens whom the government seems to be so anxious to enlist”, that the time

119 Jabotinsky, V., p. 78
120 Ibid., p. 79
121 ‘Internal WO note, 3rd February 1917’, WO 32/11352
was now right to initiate the Jewish Legion scheme. Sykes was seemingly impressed by his arguments, writing to the War Council on the 7th April requesting a thorough examination of the Jewish Legion proposal. Jabotinsky's case was aided greatly by Weizmann, who had won the support of Lloyd George at a meeting on 3rd April, and by Leo Amery who had sent his own memorandum to Lord Derby a few days earlier.

The affect of the appeals was immediate; on the 16th April the Army council sent a letter to the Foreign Office confirming their support for the formation of a Jewish Unit.

The scheme was delayed a number of times due to protests by the Anglo-Jewish representatives, notably Montefiore and Major Lionel Rothschild. By this point however, Lloyd George - having sent Weizmann to accompany Sykes in his role as political advisor for the forces invading Palestine – had become seemingly committed to the Zionist idea. On the 5th May, the Prime Minister’s secretary Philip Kerr wrote to the Foreign Office that the scheme should be accepted for its 'propaganda value'. The public split in the Anglo-Jewry, following the Conjoint’s article in The Times, weakened the opposition substantially. On 9th August 1917, the Army Council made the decision to go ahead with the “formation of the 1st Battalion of

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122 ‘Jabotinsky to Mark Sykes, 25th March 1917’, Watt, p. 88
123 Watt, p. 88
124 Ibid
125 Ibid, p. 90
126 On the 13th April, they submit a memorandum to the Foreign Office expressing concern over the impact of Russian Jewish behaviour in the service on the reputation of already serving British Jews. Easy to see how the conflicting opinions of such well placed Jews might cause a degree of uncertainty at the Foreign Office. Watt, pp. 90-91
127 Vereté, p. 90
128 Watt, p. 93
the Jewish Regiment”. On the 22nd August, Philip Kerr wrote again to the Foreign Office, pressing that they ensure the Regiment’s rapid formation, he stressed “[the Legion’s] political importance vastly outweighs its military importance”. Clearly by now Lloyd George saw it as much more than a measure designed to stimulate Russian recruitment130.

Whilst Jabotinsky and Patterson began preparations for its formation, the Anglo-Jewish representatives gathered their associates in opposition. On the 30th August, Lord Derby met with a delegation of more than thirteen of the most respected Jewish figures in Britain; including Montefiore, Major Lionel Rothschild, Lord Swaythling, Chief Rabbi Hertz and Board of Deputies’ President Sir Stuart Smith. Later described by Patterson as, “a few rich men ... out of touch with the thoughts and feelings of the vast majority of the Jewish people”131, the committee insisted Derby reconsider his decision, at the very least in regard to the unit’s name132. The War Office listened; pressured by the strength and authority of the delegation, they decided the Jewish Battalions would not bear a name, Jewish or otherwise. Instead, like all other battalions they would simply be numbered and would wear a regular general service badge – if they were to have a Jewish title, then they would have to earn it133. Patterson later pointed out that, “our worthy friends might have saved themselves all the trouble they took ... because, from the moment that the battalions

129 WO 32/11353
130 Ibid
132 Watt, pp. 111-112
133 Ibid, p. 113
were formed ... unofficially, everywhere and by every person, they were known solely as the Jewish Battalions"\textsuperscript{134}.

\textsuperscript{134} Patterson, p. 24
Chapter Three - The British Government and the Balfour Declaration

Although at a fundamental level the conflict between the Anglo-Jewish elite and the Zionist movement was based on a difference in ideology - it was not their contrasting opinions that caused the controversy to escalate in 1917. The real battle was fought over one issue; who had access to the government. While each side had their own solutions to the problems that faced the wartime Jewish community, ultimately it was down to the government to decide which policy to upon. To maintain their legitimacy, influence, and reputation in the Jewish community, the Anglo-Jewish bodies needed the government to listen, share information and aid them in implementing their initiatives. The Zionists also needed the government; the primary aim of Weizmann, Jabotinsky, Sokolow and many others had long been to persuade one of the Western powers to support them in establishing a Jewish nation in Palestine. Jabotinsky had sought to do this via his Jewish Legion scheme believing that such a legion, fighting triumphantly on the side of the Entente, would lead the allies to favour the territorial objectives of the 'Jewish nation' in some post-war peace conference. As we have seen, in 1917 of the two competing Jewish factions, it was the Zionists who came out on top. Having developed a solid relationship with Lloyd George’s government - the establishment of a Jewish Legion and the Balfour Declaration represented their ultimate success. This chapter aims to explore the motivation that lay behind the government’s decision to align themselves with the Zionists. To do so it is important to turn first to the external factors influencing their wartime strategy.
When Turkey joined the war in 1914 on the side of the Central Powers, it took Britain and her allies by surprise. For the first time in modern history the prospect of partitioning the Ottoman Empire became a possibility. Initially Britain was opposed to the option of post War annexation. The government felt that the destruction of the Sultanate would shift the balance of power in the region, potentially strengthening the regional and global ambitions of France and Russia over its own. Despite the failure of their campaign in Gallipoli, British attacks on the Ottoman Empire had caused the Russians to suspect the British of attempting to move in on Ottoman lands ahead of a possible land partition deal between the allies. These matters came to ahead on 4th March 1915 when Russia announced its claim to Constantinople and the Straits. For Britain and France this revelation was a bombshell. Fearful at the time that the weakened Russia Empire might settle for a separate peace with the Central Powers, Britain was left with little choice but to accept the Russian claims. Clearly unprepared to respond with claims of their own, the Foreign Office had little to suggest in response. France, seemingly better prepared than Britain, replied positively to the Russian claims, expressing their own desire for a French zone of influence in Syria running as far east as Damascus and incorporating Palestine. Despite earlier sentiments by some leading British figures expressing a belief that Britain should control a section of land on the route to India, at this crucial moment the Foreign

137 Monroe, p. 28
138 Klieman, p. 240
139 Gottliep., 1957. Studies in secret diplomacy during the First World War. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., pp. 80-81. Gottliep shows that France had long had an interest in Syria. That with around 1,000,000,000 francs sunk into the Syrian economy, the French were highly suspicious that the British may try and develop their influence there.
Office opinion was split. Whilst advocates for partition, such as General Kitchener and Lloyd George, pushed for British expansion countering French claims in areas such as Palestine and the Syrian port of Alexandretta, others were concerned that such a deal would stretch British resources too far. Prime Minister Asquith finally took action on 8th April, creating a group aimed at determining Britain's policy in the Middle East. This group was later to become known as the De Bunsen Committee.

Whilst the conclusions of the De Bunsen Committee's report were never formally accepted by the Foreign Office, nor its proposals implemented, many of the group's guiding principles led the way in the subsequent evolution of British policy in the Middle East. Chaired by Sir Maurice De Bunsen, the committee was specifically commissioned to consider "British desiderata in Turkey-in-Asia". Having examined a variety of options, the committee's report, issued in June 1915, stated that the best option would be to keep the Empire in tact but to impose upon it a new form of decentralised government. Throughout the De Bunsen meetings, the committee dealt with the issue of Palestine separately, agreeing the region should be a place of, "Special negotiations". The committee generally accepted the view, submitted primarily by one of its key members Sir Mark Sykes, that both western and eastern Palestine, from the line Acre-Dar'a in the north down to the Egyptian frontier and Aqaba in the south, were areas that fell within the sphere of British interests. Whilst the report never officially made a claim to any lands, it is made quite clear that Britain

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140 Monroe, p. 27
141 Klieman, p. 241
142 Ibid, p. 250
143 Ibid, p. 237
144 Ibid, pp. 247-249
‘could scarcely tolerate’ – to quote the report – the idea that the French would have a sphere of influence bordering along the Canal, the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf\textsuperscript{145}. Slowly cast aside throughout the remainder of 1915, the report’s proposal for a decentralised Ottoman empire was never realized. While the committee never actually considered the possibility of a Zionist solution, the report laid the groundwork for the future development of British policy in Palestine.

Returning from a trip to Cairo at the beginning of 1916, British colonel and politician Sir Mark Sykes was sent on a mission to meet French diplomat François Georges-Picot to establish a deal which would later become known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Having previously been a member of the De Bunsen committee, Sykes was of the firm belief that Britain “should have a belt of English controlled country between the Sharif of Mecca and France”\textsuperscript{146}. The ultimate findings of this secret agreement were concluded in London on 16\textsuperscript{th} May 1916. The report clarified many of the earlier French claims to control and influence over a greater Syria and introduced a number of British claims to influence and control over southern Mesopotamia, running as far east as Basra and Kuwait. Unable to reach a conclusive decision, Palestine was designated as an area of ‘international administration’. The ports of Haifa and Acre were, however, to be accorded to the British, whilst the French gained control over the

\textsuperscript{145} Vereté, P. 51
\textsuperscript{146} In Vereté, P. 52. In late 1915, British High Commissioner in Egypt Sir Henry Macmahon had formulated an agreement with one of the leading Arabs in Turkey, the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein Bin Ali. The British promised to support a post war Arab state in the Trans-Jorden in exchange for Arab support against the Ottomans (in the form of an internal Arab revolt). Whether the deal included the land to the west of the Jordan (Modern day Israel) was famously vague – following the War the British claimed to have only ever agreed to give to Arabs the land to the East of the Jordan. Full record of the secret negotiations can be found in, \textit{Correspondence between Sir Henry Macmahon and The Sharif Hussein of Mecca}, 1939. (CMD. 5957) London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office. PP. 7-9
port at Alexandretta\textsuperscript{147}. Despite having made at least some ground in preventing French claims to a greater Syria, the British Government was unhappy with the concessions Sykes had made to their ally. Later referred to by Lloyd George as a ‘foolish document’\textsuperscript{148}, the Foreign Office spent the remainder of the war attempting to bury (or at least modify) the arrangement anyway they could\textsuperscript{149}.

Despite Herbert Samuels’s suggestion in 1914, that a Zionist solution to the Palestine Question might be a means for Britain to assert its influence over the region, it seems that Asquith’s government had never really taken such a proposal seriously\textsuperscript{150}.

The prospect of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was not discussed in the De Bunsen committee meetings, nor was it mentioned during the Sykes-Picot negotiations. As we have seen earlier, by 1916 the Foreign Office had grown concerned over the possibility of a pro-German influence in the American Jewish press. Wolf’s memorandum, suggesting a Jewish solution in Palestine, was timed perfectly; providing the government with an alternative arrangement at a time when they felt defeated over their failure to guarantee any influence in a post war Middle East. The idea appealed to Sykes; if Britain came out in support of Jewish immigration to Palestine it would at least balance the influence that France and Russia had in the region with the Catholic and Greek Orthodox population; it might even result in the Zionists declaring support for a British protectorate over the proposed international administration. These reasons, combined with its potential use as a propaganda tool in America, meant the


\textsuperscript{150} Monroe, p. 26
Foreign Office took the idea very seriously. Sykes, uncertain about Wolf’s potential, began throughout the remainder of 1916, looking for Zionist contacts in England who could support the idea\textsuperscript{151}.

For British policy in the Middle East, 1917 was a watershed\textsuperscript{152}. Lloyd George came to power at the end of the 1916 announcing a campaign of advancement out of Egypt and a push for Jerusalem. Sykes was made chief political officer of the campaign, and under order of the Prime Minister was told to do what he could to ensure a British Palestine\textsuperscript{153}. The events of the year could in theory have rendered the Zionist scheme superfluous. The Russian revolution had meant full Jewish emancipation, laying to rest many of the anti-Entente sentiments existing among the Jewish population in America\textsuperscript{154}. When the United States joined the war on the side of the British in April 1917, it would have been reasonable to think that the Zionist proposal would have been dropped for good\textsuperscript{155}. However, the deteriorating situation in Russia and subsequent revolution in March introduced an entirely new problem. At this crucial moment in the war, one of Britain’s strongest allies seemed to be on the brink of collapse, Britain and France needed to act fast to produce a policy that would help stabilise the situation in Russia. By the spring of 1917, it was already clear the British

\textsuperscript{151} Sykes had initially mistaken Wolf as a Zionist. At this stage Sykes did not know any ‘genuine’ Zionists. Later he commented that he had been tricked by Wolf, referring to his as one who “has on more than one occasion masqueraded as a Zionist”. Levene, M., \textit{War Jews and the New Europe}, p. 96.
\textsuperscript{152} Monroe, p. 38
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid
\textsuperscript{154} Levene, \textit{The Balfour Declaration}, p. 68
\textsuperscript{155} Levene pp. 67-68
Government had already begun to interest itself in the suggestion that the Zionists might be able to exert a steadying influence in Russia\textsuperscript{156}.

In January 1917, British troops had begun to push forwards towards Jerusalem. The French, uneasy about the advance, sent Picot to join the British force as a representative of their Government in the future administration of Palestine. With the situation in Russia rapidly deteriorating, and with British troops poised outside Jerusalem, the issue over Palestine was becoming a reality. In February Sykes met with number of leading Zionist figures, including Weizmann, and pressed that ‘with great difficulty the British Government had managed to keep the Palestine question open’\textsuperscript{157}. On 25\textsuperscript{th} April, Lord Robert Cecil (who had been running the Foreign Office whilst Lord Balfour was in America) told Weizmann that it would strengthen the British position if the Zionists would ask for a British protectorate over Palestine, suggesting they draw together a draft declaration for consideration by the government\textsuperscript{158}. These events seemed to kick start the process by which the Zionist Organisation became involved with the British government in constructing what ultimately would become the Balfour Declaration.

It was also in April that Foreign Office first gave Jabotinsky an indication that his Jewish Legion scheme might be accepted. The letter, sent by Lloyd George's secretary, on 5\textsuperscript{th} May, stressing the ‘propaganda value’ of the Jabotinsky's scheme, gives a clear indication as to how the Foreign Office viewed the Zionist potential at this crucial

\textsuperscript{156} Stein, p. 556
\textsuperscript{157} Monroe, P. 42
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid
moment. Eager to exert their influence in Palestine, and desperate to keep Russia on its side, Zionism seemed to offer a solution to all their problems. The government envisioned that a Jewish Legion serving in Palestine - supporting the Zionist cause - would become a shining inspiration for anti-War Jews in Russia. Additionally, if the Zionists came out in support of a British protectorate over Palestine, then perhaps they could convince France to concede their share of the region. Guided primarily by an evolving series of external events, the British were willing to offer the Zionists everything they wanted. The Anglo-Jewry's opposition, based as it was on an ideological difference and a sense of community pride, meant nothing.

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159 Watt, p. 93
Conclusion

The First World War brought about massive change for the Jewish community in Britain. The powerful and influential Board of Deputies faced a series of unexpected domestic issues that ultimately challenged its role as the representative body of the entire Jewish community. The reluctance of many Russo-Jewish immigrants in the East End to enlist in the army served to aggravate an already deepening divide in the community. The Anglo-Jewish elite were less than sympathetic towards the Russian immigrant’s position. Supporting the government’s scheme to either conscript or deport the immigrants, Jewish MP Edwin Montagu wrote, “I regard with perfect equanimity whatever treatment the Jews receive in Russia”.

Perhaps the greatest challenge the representatives faced throughout the war was the rapid ascension of the Zionist movement in Britain. Although the doctrine of Jewish nationalism gave the displaced immigrants in the East End a new hope and identify, it had caused many to militate against the assimilationist principles of the Jewish elite. With Tsarist Russia substantially weakened by 1916, the government was unable to act upon the suggestion by Wolf and his colleges that they should force their ally to improve the Jewish situation there. Throughout late 1916, the government began to sever its ties with the traditional Jewish bodies. Feeling put off by their uncompromising solutions, they instead turned to Zionism as way out of their problems at home and abroad.

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160 ‘Edwin Montagu to Sir Eric Drummond, 3rd August 1916’. In Kadish, p. 166
The decision by the government to align itself with the Zionists in 1917 can be attributed to a variety of different internal and external factors. Within Britain a fundamental shift came with the changing of power. Whilst Asquith’s government only ever flirted with the Zionist idea, it was Lloyd George’s enthusiasm for the cause that rapidly developed the government’s relationship with the Zionists. The seed of the Zionist scheme was planted in December 1915, with Wolf’s memorandum suggesting a Jewish solution in Palestine. It was seen that such a scheme might help the government in three respects; firstly the Zionists might be persuaded to support a much favoured British protectorate over Palestine, secondly the scheme might counter a pro-German influence in the American Jewish press, and finally it might help solve the recruitment problem in the East End by winning the support of the Russo-Jewish immigrants.

The scheme was picked up again in 1917 by Lloyd George’s government, following the collapse of their Russian ally in March. Uncertain about the Anglo-Jewish representatives, the government choose instead to pursue the policy in agreement with the Zionists. Despite all the controversy that raged in the Jewish community, it was ultimately British politician Mark Sykes who arranged the deal. The main thrust of the Zionist effort throughout the war had not been to force a deal on Palestine, but to secure a place at an eventual peace conference. For Jabotinsky and Weizmann, the British offer must have come as a surprise.

In 1917 the government had not only decided to back a Jewish solution in Palestine, they had decided to back the Zionist idea in general. Support for Jabotinsky’s
Jewish Legion ultimately came for many of the same reasons; propaganda in Russia and the East End. That the government went back on their promise in May, and refused to give the unit a specifically Jewish title, goes to show how uncertain the entire process was. By late 1917 however, the process was complete. The Balfour Declaration represented complete allegiance to the Zionist cause; the Anglo-Jewish bodies were all but forgotten.
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