

The British Mandate for Palestine

At the conclusion of World War I, both Jews and Arabs felt betrayed because instead of either gaining independence, the region was divided between the British and the French. The region of Palestine, the ancient Jewish homeland, came under the control of the British as a mandate granted by the League of Nations. The articles of the mandate included the requirement of establishing a Jewish national home. Until the establishment of the mandate, Palestine's boundaries had not been defined because it was part of Greater Syria and was not a distinct political unit. With the imposition of the Palestine Mandate, the borders of Palestine were defined for the first time. It included land on both sides of the Jordan River encompassing the present-day countries of Israel and Jordan.

However, in 1921, Britain created an administrative entity called Transjordan, as a political division of the Palestine Mandate. In 1922, with the support of the League of Nations, Britain established that all provisions dealing with Jewish settlement in the Palestine Mandate would not apply to Transjordan. Although the two parts technically remained the Palestine Mandate, Transjordan operated as an autonomous unit under British authority, and the British ruled that Jews could not live in it. The Zionists felt betrayed. A huge part of Palestine, almost 80% of the original mandate, was now prohibited to them. After being prohibited from immigrating to Transjordan, Jews continued to immigrate to the remaining 20% of the Mandate west of the Jordan River, where they purchased and developed land, established agricultural communities and founded schools, universities, industries, courts, a system of tax collection, hospitals, cultural organizations, a form of self defense and self governance—all the institutions for a national life.



For the most part, the Arab community opposed the immigration of Jews, Zionism, and the mandate. This led to rejecting cooperation with British proposals and activities because it could indicate an acceptance of British authority. As a result, it was difficult for Arabs to create infrastructure for a national life and economic development as the Jews were doing. Arab hostility to Jewish immigration resulted in violent attacks on the Jewish community.

In an effort to pacify the Arab community, the British increased restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine, until it was virtually halted with the British White Paper of 1939. This was intolerable to the Jewish residents, because it closed a crucial escape route for Jews fleeing Nazi Europe. Nevertheless, the Jewish community joined Britain in its World War II fight against Nazi Germany. David Ben Gurion famously declared: "We shall fight the war as if there is no White Paper and we shall fight the White Paper as if there is no war."

After the war, Britain announced its intention to end the mandate and leave the region. In 1947, the United Nations partitioned the area west of the Jordan with the intention of creating a state for Jews and a state for Arabs. The Jews accepted the U.N. partition plan and in 1948 declared their portion to be the State of Israel. The Arabs rejected the partition on the basis that they would not accept any Jewish state. Since that time, Arab armies have unsuccessfully attempted to eliminate Israel. Only two Arab countries have peace treaties with Israel—Egypt, and Jordan.

