

1947 Historical Security Council (1947 SC)

Research Report



Forum: 1947 Historical Security Council (1947 SC)

Issue: The Question of Establishing a Jewish State in Palestine (1946)

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Introduction

The question of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine in 1946 is rooted in a complex history of imperialism, migration, nationalism, and religious identity. For centuries, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire until its defeat in World War I, after which Britain assumed control under the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine in 1922. During this time, the British government struggled to balance conflicting promises: the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which supported the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine, and earlier assurances to Arab leaders regarding independence in exchange for support against the Ottomans. Jewish immigration to Palestine, spurred by rising antisemitism in Europe and especially by the horrors of the Holocaust, increased tensions between Jewish and Arab communities, who each laid historical and political claims to the land. Violent clashes, riots, and mutual distrust escalated through the 1930s and 1940s, placing the British administration in a precarious and increasingly untenable position.

By 1946, the situation had reached a critical juncture. British efforts to limit Jewish immigration in response to Arab opposition provoked fierce resistance from Zionist groups, who viewed unrestricted immigration as essential to the survival and self-determination of the Jewish people after the Holocaust. Simultaneously, Palestinian Arab leaders rejected proposals for partition or any plan that legitimized a Jewish state on what they considered Arab land. The post-war refugee crisis, particularly the plight of displaced European Jews, placed additional moral pressure on international actors to resolve the issue. Yet every proposed solution seemed to deepen divisions rather than resolve them. The instability threatened not only regional peace but also Britain’s credibility as a colonial power, prompting growing international interest, particularly from the United States and the newly established United Nations, in taking a more active role in addressing the problem.

Several key stakeholders were already deeply engaged in the issue by early 1947. The British government remained the mandatory authority, though increasingly eager to relinquish control. The Jewish Agency, led by David Ben-Gurion, acted as the de facto representative body for the Jewish population in Palestine and lobbied intensively for statehood. Palestinian Arab leaders, including the Arab Higher Committee, vehemently opposed partition and called for an independent Arab state. Surrounding Arab nations, such as Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, and Iraq, supported the Palestinian cause and viewed Zionism as a threat to regional stability. Meanwhile, global actors like the United States and the Soviet Union began to assess the conflict through the lens of post-war diplomacy and emerging Cold War dynamics. Finally, the United Nations, still in its infancy, faced growing calls to mediate the conflict as the British government prepared to hand over the issue to the international community.

Definition of Key Terms

Zionism

A nationalist movement that emerged in the late 19th century advocating for the establishment of a Jewish homeland, originally in Palestine, as a response to widespread antisemitism and persecution in Europe.

Mandate System

A system established by the League of Nations after World War I, through which former territories of the defeated powers were administered by advanced nations until deemed ready for independence; Palestine was administered by Britain under this system starting in 1922.

Partition

The proposed political division of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, often seen as a potential solution to the conflicting nationalist claims over the same territory.

Arab Higher Committee

The central political organization representing Palestinian Arabs during the British Mandate, formed in 1936 to coordinate Arab opposition to Zionism and British policies in Palestine.

Jewish Agency

The main organizational body representing the Jewish community in Palestine under the British Mandate, responsible for immigration, settlement, and liaising with international authorities.

Displaced Persons (DPs)

Individuals, primarily Holocaust survivors and other refugees, who were left without homes or countries to return to after World War II, often sought resettlement in Palestine.

Background Information:

The roots of the question concerning the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine trace back to the late 19th century, with the rise of Zionism in Europe. As antisemitism grew across the continent, many Jewish intellectuals and leaders promoted the idea of establishing a homeland in Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire. The idea gained political momentum during World War I, particularly with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, in which the British government expressed support for “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”¹ However, Britain had also made promises of independence to Arab leaders, resulting in contradictory commitments.

After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the League of Nations assigned Britain the Mandate for Palestine in 1922, giving it administrative control over the territory and responsibility for implementing the Balfour Declaration. Jewish immigration to Palestine increased throughout the 1920s and 1930s, driven by rising persecution in Europe, including Nazi policies in Germany. Arab resistance to Jewish immigration intensified during this period, leading to violent confrontations and uprisings, notably the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939. In response, the British government issued the 1939 White Paper, limiting Jewish immigration and land purchases, measures that deeply angered Zionist leaders.²

World War II and the Holocaust had a profound impact on the situation. The mass murder of six million Jews intensified the urgency of establishing a secure Jewish homeland. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Jewish survivors and displaced persons sought refuge, many hoping to immigrate to Palestine. Britain, however, maintained strict immigration quotas, leading to illegal immigration efforts and violent resistance by Jewish underground groups such as the Irgun and Haganah.³ The inability to find a peaceful solution and

mounting violence eventually led Britain to announce, in February 1947, its intention to refer the matter to the newly formed United Nations. This decision marked a turning point, shifting responsibility for resolving the conflict to the international community.

Causes of the Issue:

The issue is fundamentally rooted in territorial, ideological, and religious tensions. At its core is a conflict between two nationalist movements, Zionism and Palestinian Arab nationalism, each laying claim to the same land. For the Jewish people, especially after centuries of diaspora and recent genocide in Europe, Palestine represented a historic and necessary homeland.⁴ For Palestinian Arabs, the growing Jewish presence and demands for a state represented a colonial intrusion into their ancestral lands. The Mandate system, imposed by European powers without local consent, deepened resentment and distrust among Arab communities.

Ideological differences also fueled the conflict. Zionists viewed their movement as one of self-determination and survival, while many Arabs saw it as a foreign settler colonial project. Religious significance added to the volatility: Palestine contains sacred sites for Jews, Muslims, and Christians, making the land symbolically inseparable for all sides. British imperial policy, marked by contradictory promises and inconsistent enforcement, exacerbated these tensions, as did the lack of meaningful international mechanisms for mediation prior to the United Nations.

Effects of the Issue:

On individuals and citizens, the conflict led to widespread human suffering. Jewish refugees were denied entry into Palestine and detained in camps, while Palestinians faced curfews, arrests, and violent crackdowns on protests and resistance. Both communities lived in a state of constant fear and hostility, with civilians frequently caught in the crossfire of attacks and reprisals.

On national governments, particularly Britain's, the conflict eroded legitimacy and exposed the limits of colonial control. The British government faced increasing international criticism for its handling of the Mandate and came under pressure from both Arab states and Jewish advocacy groups. Internally, the growing cost, political, economic, and military, of maintaining order in Palestine pushed the government toward withdrawal.

On international peace and security, the issue had wide-reaching effects. Tensions between Jews and Arabs in Palestine risked sparking broader regional conflict, especially given the involvement of neighboring Arab countries. The refugee crisis added pressure on European governments and raised moral questions for global leaders. As Britain prepared to relinquish the Mandate, the international community, through the United Nations, was left with the monumental task of resolving a conflict that symbolized the complexities of decolonization, postwar recovery, and competing nationalist claims.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United Kingdom

As the Mandatory power in Palestine since 1922, the United Kingdom played a central role in shaping the territory's political future. Britain's dual commitments, to support a Jewish national home and to protect the rights of the Arab population, led to policies that pleased neither side. The British faced increasing violence from both Arab nationalists and Zionist paramilitary groups and, by 1947, were actively seeking to extricate themselves from the conflict. Their decision to refer the issue to the United Nations marked a shift from colonial management to international oversight.

Jewish Agency for Palestine

The Jewish Agency served as the de facto government for the Jewish population in Palestine under the Mandate. Led by David Ben-Gurion, it organized immigration, settlement, defense, and political advocacy. The Agency pushed for the establishment of a Jewish state, particularly in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and coordinated with Zionist groups worldwide to influence public opinion and international policy, especially in the United States and Europe.

Arab Higher Committee

Representing Palestinian Arabs, the Arab Higher Committee opposed Jewish immigration and the creation of a Jewish state. It advocated for the independence of Palestine as a unified Arab state. The committee coordinated strikes, protests, and political resistance to

British policy and Zionist efforts. It rejected partition proposals and insisted on Arab sovereignty over the entirety of Palestine.

United States

Although not directly involved in the Mandate, the United States increasingly played a diplomatic role due to its global influence and large Jewish population. President Truman supported Jewish immigration to Palestine and, by 1946, urged Britain to admit 100,000 displaced Jews. U.S. involvement reflected both humanitarian concerns after the Holocaust and geopolitical interests in the Middle East.

League of Arab States (Arab League)

Formed in 1945, the Arab League comprised Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Its member states strongly opposed the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine and viewed Zionism as a colonial enterprise. The League pledged political and military support to the Palestinian Arabs and sought to present a unified Arab stance in international forums, including opposition to any proposed partition.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
November 2, 1917	THE BALFOUR DECLARATION: The British government issued the Balfour Declaration, expressing support for the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine.
July 24, 1922	LEAGUE OF NATIONS MANDATE: The League of Nations formally grants Britain the Mandate for Palestine, incorporating the terms of the Balfour Declaration.
August 23, 1929	1929 PALESTINE RIOTS: Violence erupts between Jews and Arabs over access to religious sites in Jerusalem and Hebron, leading to the deaths of over 200 people and growing communal hostility.
April 1936	START OF THE ARAB REVOLT: A large-scale Arab uprising begins in protest of British rule and increasing Jewish immigration; it continues until 1939 and prompts severe British military responses.

May 17, 1939	WHITE PAPER OF 1939: Britain issues a policy limiting Jewish immigration to 75,000 over five years and restricting land sales to Jews, angering Zionist groups and appeasing Arab leaders.
November 1945	FORMATION OF THE ANGLO-AMERICAN COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY: In response to the post-Holocaust refugee crisis, the U.S. and Britain created a joint committee to investigate the situation in Palestine.
April 20, 1946	REPORT OF THE ANGLO-AMERICAN COMMITTEE: The committee recommends the immediate admission of 100,000 Jewish refugees to Palestine and opposes the establishment of either a Jewish or Arab state.
July 22, 1946	KING DAVID HOTEL BOMBING: Zionist paramilitary group Irgun bombs the British administrative headquarters in Jerusalem, killing 91 people, in retaliation for British operations against Jewish resistance.
October 2, 1946	MORRISON-GRADY PLAN REJECTED: A British-American proposal for federalized provinces in Palestine is rejected by both Arabs and Jews, intensifying the deadlock over a political solution.
November 1946	LONDON CONFERENCE ON PALESTINE: Britain hosts talks with Arab and Jewish leaders, but no agreement is reached. Britain begins to consider turning the issue over to the United Nations.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- **Mandate for Palestine (League of Nations Mandate):** Formally authorized British control over Palestine with the obligation to establish a "national home for the Jewish people" while protecting the civil and religious rights of non-Jewish communities; it became the foundational legal document for British administration in the region. (1922) (**League of Nations Document C.529.M.314.1922.VI**)
- **Covenant of the League of Nations:** Established the Mandate system, declaring that former territories of the Central Powers, including Palestine, would be administered by advanced nations until capable of self-rule; laid the legal basis for the British Mandate in Palestine. (1919) (**Treaty of Versailles, League of Nations, Article 22**)
- **Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry Report:** A joint British-American commission concluded that 100,000 Jewish displaced persons should be immediately admitted to

Palestine and recommended no partition but a binational state with equal rights for Jews and Arabs; it failed to gain support from either side. (1946) **(Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, Final Report, Cmd. 6808)**

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Peel Commission Report (1937)

The British government appointed the Peel Commission to investigate the causes of unrest in Palestine and propose solutions. The commission recommended partitioning Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with a British-controlled corridor around Jerusalem. It marked the first official endorsement of partition but was rejected by Arab leaders and accepted only reluctantly by some Zionists. The proposal failed due to Arab opposition to territorial division and the continued desire for full independence.

White Paper of 1939 (1939)

Issued by the British government in response to the Arab Revolt, the White Paper abandoned partition plans and proposed an independent Palestine within ten years, governed jointly by Arabs and Jews. It limited Jewish immigration to 75,000 over five years and severely restricted land purchases by Jews. While it was accepted by some Arab leaders, it was strongly opposed by Zionists, especially during the Holocaust, and led to increased illegal immigration and Jewish resistance. The policy ultimately failed due to its inability to satisfy either side and escalating violence.

Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry (1946)

A joint effort by the United States and Britain to address the refugee crisis and growing tensions in Palestine, the committee recommended the immediate admission of 100,000 displaced European Jews into Palestine and rejected the idea of separate Jewish or Arab states in favor of a binational solution with safeguards for both communities. However, the plan lacked enforcement mechanisms, was rejected by Arab leaders, and caused division within the British government. It failed to achieve consensus or implementation, and violence in Palestine escalated shortly after.

Possible Solutions

UN-Supervised Partition and Statehood Process

The United Nations could oversee the creation of two independent states, one Jewish, one Arab, through a phased partition plan with defined borders, population transfers where necessary, and shared administration of Jerusalem as an international city. A neutral UN peacekeeping force would monitor the transition, while a joint economic board could regulate trade and water rights. This plan would require UN member state approval, enforcement by an international body, and financial aid from nations like the U.S. and U.K. It could work because it offers sovereignty and security for both sides, backed by international legitimacy.

International Trusteeship with a Defined Timetable for Independence

Instead of direct British rule or immediate statehood, the UN could establish an international trusteeship for Palestine, temporarily administered by a neutral committee of nations (e.g., Sweden, Canada, India). The trusteeship would guarantee equal rights, regulate immigration fairly, and set a strict timeline, such as five years, for preparing both communities for peaceful co-governance or partition. This would avoid hasty withdrawal, reduce violence, and allow time to build shared civic institutions under international oversight.

Immediate Humanitarian Resettlement of Displaced Jews Outside Palestine

To reduce pressure on Palestine while addressing the post-Holocaust refugee crisis, a coalition of willing nations, led by the U.S., Latin American countries, and Western Europe, could launch a mass resettlement initiative for displaced Jews. The International Refugee Organization (or equivalent) would coordinate logistics and funding. This would ease tensions in Palestine, allow for a more gradual political solution, and demonstrate international solidarity without overwhelming local Arab populations.

Useful Links

- United Nations - Middle East: <https://www.un.org/middleeast/>
- Council on Foreign Relations - The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict>

- BBC - History of the Israel-Palestine Conflict:
<https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44124396>
- UNISPAL - UN Info System on the Question of Palestine: <https://www.un.org/unispal/>
- The Guardian - Israel and Palestine: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/israel>
- Al Jazeera - Palestine News & Analysis: <https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/palestine/>

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