

11.1. POST WAR CONFLICT IN PALESTINE AFTER FIRST WORLD WAR TILL THE FORMATION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

Back Ground

Arabia is the land of ancient civilization. In Biblical times, Palestine was the home land of the Jew people. Palestine is a part of Arabia. The Jews were known as Philistines. It is claimed that one Egyptian Emperor or Pharaoh banished the Jewish people from Palestine. **This is known in the Bible as the Great Exodus.** After that, the Jews lost their home land and were scattered all over the world. But it should be remembered that a good section of Jews continued to live at Palestine as a minority people.

Meanwhile the Arabs rose as a conquering race embracing Islam. Under their Prophets and Caliphs, they conquered and migrated to different parts of Arabia. They made Palestine a part of Arab home land. They were majority in that country and considered Palestine as a part of Arabia. Before the First World War, the Sultan of Turkey was the Lord of Arabia. The Sultan's Governors or Pashas ruled the Arabs including Palestine.

The geographical situation of Palestine was very important. A part of Palestine is situated on the Suez Canal, the most important water route between Europe and Africa. Another part is situated on the Mediterranean Sea. Possession of Palestine provides partial control on this strategic sea route. The discovery of oil fields in Palestine and Arabia made the possession of this country tempting to European colonial powers.

The Arabs were proud of their own Islamic religion and culture. Though lived under Turkish rule of the Sultan, they had nothing but hatred for the Turks. The Grand Sheriff King Hussein of Mecca was the symbol of unity of every quarreling Arabian tribe, who were very much clannish. He held his office in hereditary capacity.

Hussein-McMahon Letters (July 15- January 30, 1916)

With the outbreak of the First World War, the British government decided to drive away the Turks from Arabia and the Middle East. As the Sultan was an ally of Kaiser's Germany, the British agents contacted the Grand Sheriff King Hussein of Mecca to give a call to the faithful Muslims to wage a jihad against the Turks. The British agents like **Col. Lawrence (known as the Lawrence of Arabia), Major Hogarth etc.** sowed seeds of deep discord between the Arabs and the Turks though they belonged to same faith. Secret correspondences were exchanged between King Hussein and General McMahon, the then High Commissioner of Egypt. Their correspondences, very important historical document, are known as **Hussein -McMahon Letters.** The British government promised King Hussein independent Arabia after the end of the

War. Then King Hussein would automatically succeed as the king of Mecca and the descendant of the Prophet. The British encouraged the Arabs to revolt against the Ottoman Empire which had become a German ally in the First World War. The letters declared that the Arabs would declare revolt in alliance with the United Kingdom. In return, the United Kingdom would recognize Arab independence. The Hussein-McMahon letters conspicuously did not mention the question of Palestine. In the subsequent years, in a letter McMahon declared "I feel it my duty to state, and I do so definitely and emphatically, that it was not intended by me in giving this pledge to King Hussein to include Palestine in the area in which Arab independence was promised." Pan-Arab nationalism swept the Arab people. But Hussein failed to get what he and his people desired.

Letter of McMahon

Sir,

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

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

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

I feel it my duty to state, and I do so definitely and emphatically, that it was not intended by me giving this pledge to King Hussein to include Palestine in the area in which Arab independence was promised.

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

Yours faithfully,
A. HENRY McMAHON.

5, Wilton Place, S.W.i.

July 22.

Sykes-Picot Agreement, May 16, 1916

This was also called the Asia Minor Agreement. This secret convention was made during the First World War between Great Britain and France with partial assent of Tsarist Russia for the division of Ottoman Empire, among the Allied Powers. This secret arrangement conflicted with the pledge already given by the British to Hussein who encouraged the Arabs to revolt against the Turks. Russian claims in the Ottoman Empire were denied following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The Bolsheviks thus released the full text of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement. This caused great embarrassment and distrust between the Allies and the Arabs. Thus the British were embarrassed, the Arab dismayed and the Turks were delighted.

World Zionist Movement

The Jews people who were scattered all over the world for many centuries had a great spirit of nationalism. Their living land was separate, but each Jewish family taught its own children Hebrew, their original language and they worshipped their God Jehovah. Jewish priests called Rabies united the Jewish families through religious ceremonies and their special funeral rites. As the Jewish were persecuted by the Christians all over Europe, they were determined to protect their nationalism and their lost home land at Palestine. One German **Professor Dr. Wiseman** started the **World Zionist Movement and raised the demand for restoration of Palestine to the Jewish people**. This movement gradually became well organized and very strong. Rich Jewish bankers, industrialists and intellectuals joined World Jewish Congress to place the demand for restoration of their land in Palestine.

With the outbreak of the First World War, the British government faced severe economic crisis and approached the Jewish bankers for loan and subsidy. Under pressure of the Zionist Congress in return for the loan, Lord Balfour made a public declaration in the Parliament that *"His Majesty's government views with favour establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavour to facilitate the object."* This **Balfour Declaration of 1917 was highly contradictory to Hussein-McMahon letter**. By this, former home land of the Jews in Palestine was promised. But this promise did not mention over whole Palestine or part of it. Now the Jews adamantly demanded the whole of Palestine. But previously Arabia was promised to King Hussein. In their understanding, Palestine was a part of Arabia where the Jews were trespassers. This contradictory diplomacy of the British was the root of Palestine problem. The problem became most formidable as the Arabs treated the Jews as intruders in Palestine. The Jews claimed Palestine as their original home land from ancient times. Culturally, the westernized Jews were more advanced than the Arabs. The Jews were better equipped, better educated, richer and more enterprising. Hence, cultural, economic and religious gaps between the Arabs and the Jews aggravated the Palestine problem.

After the First World War, Palestine became a British mandated area and the administration was in British hands. The Zionists then encouraged the Jews of different parts of Europe to immigrate to Palestine. Hitler's persecution on the Jews encouraged them to move to Palestine

The European countries were sympathetic to Jewish immigration to Palestine. The Arabs felt endangered, but their protests did not receive any international attention.

When the question of conflicting pledge was raised in the League, British cleverly pointed out that there was really no duplicity and conflict. If they promised Arabia to Hussein, certainly Palestine was not included in the pledge. Palestine was not mentioned in Hussein-McMahon letters. If home land was assured to the Jews, it was their home land in Palestine which meant a part, not whole of Palestine. Thus the British government washed its hands.

The unrestrained entry of the Jews in Palestine and their purchase of lands from the poor Arabs became a problem to the Arab leaders. They apprehended that the British administration encouraged Jewish colonization at Palestine. Occasional riots also broke out between the two communities. After 1929, the British government began to seek ways and means to solve the Palestine problem. Meanwhile a number of people died in riot. **Britain then appointed the King Crane Commission in 1919 and the Hay-Craft Commission in 1929.** Britain now restrained free immigration of the Jews into Palestine. But a fresh riot in 1933 showed that Britain had failed to take effective steps so far. **In 1936 a Royal Commission under Peel was appointed in Palestine.** This Commission reported that Palestine should be partitioned into two small Jewish States; the Holy places were to be kept under British mandate and the rest was to be annexed to Jordan. This partition proposal was out rightly rejected by the Arabs leaders and partly by the Jews. The Arabs started fresh riots. King Hussein then declared that till whole of Palestine was not assigned to the Arabs, bloodshed would continue. Meanwhile the Second World War broke out and Britain tightly restrained Jewish immigration during the war.

Formation of the State of Israel, August 1, 1948

During the Second World War, the Zionist leaders again helped the Allies with men and money. Naturally sympathy of the Allies for Jewish homeland became strong. The clever Zionist leaders realized that America had emerged as the new centre of the world politics after the Second World War. They then shifted the headquarters of Zionist movement from London to New York. Five million Jewish Americans supported the claims of Jewish home land. No American politician could ignore five million votes. The Republicans and the Democrats became sympathetic towards the Jews.

In a Zionist Congress at New York, the Jews demanded:

1. Declaration of a Jewish state in Palestine.
2. Formation of Jewish voluntary force.
3. Free, unfiltered entry of Jews in Palestine should be made.

After the Zionist Conference at New York, Britain informed the UNO that Britain would withdraw her troops and officials by 1948.

An Anglo-American Commission was appointed, but its recommendations were rejected both by the Arabs and the Jews. At this point, Jewish terrorism got intensified. **On November 19, 1947, the UNO decided to partition Palestine on the lines laid down by the Royal Commission of Peel. The Zionist leaders accepted the proposal but the Arabs rejected it.** UNO then sent a Commission to fix the boundary of the Jewish state. **August 1, 1948, the Zionist leaders declared the birth of the state of Israel on the lines laid down by the UN Commission with Dr. Chaim Weizmann as the President and David Ben Gurion as the Prime Minister.** The USA recognized the new state of Israel within one day and the Soviet Union followed suit. Britain and other countries did not make any delay in granting recognition. Thus the state of Israel was born.

15/11

Answer the following:

1. State the background of the formation of the state of Israel.
2. Give the significance of the Hussein-McMahon Letters.
3. Discuss the World Zionist Movement.