Palestine

A Twice-Promised Land?

VOLUME 1

The British, the Arabs & Zionism
1915–1920

Isaiah Friedman

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In memory of my parents,
to whom I owe more than I can possibly convey.

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Isaiah Friedman

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

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Introduction

The notion that during World War I the British Government made conflicting commitments to Arabs, to the French, and to the Jews has become almost a cliché. This belief had serious political and moral implications; it impinged on Britain's standing and good faith. The French were resentful of the systematic attempts made by British military officers to undermine their position in Syria. The Muslims in India and elsewhere were incensed at the destruction of the Ottoman Empire and the encouragement given by Britain to Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, to rebel against the Caliph. The Arabs regarded themselves to have been cheated. They maintained that, when an agreement had been negotiated with Sharif Hussein to grant the Arabs independence, the Allies, without telling Hussein, had divided the Ottoman Asiatic provinces among themselves as future spoils of the war. They condemned the Sykes-Picot Agreement as "a product of greed and a startling piece of double-dealing."

Palestine, in particular, was a controversial issue engendering passionate debate: the Zionists were aggrieved by the gradual whittling down of the Balfour Declaration and the failure of the British Government to live up to its commitments according to the terms of the Mandate, while the Palestine Arabs pointed to the Balfour Declaration as the root of all their troubles. The latter maintained that, in his letter of 24 October 1915, Sir Henry McMahon, the High Commissioner in Egypt, promised the Arabs independence. However, the "pledge," they insisted, was violated. It was this letter of 24 October 1915 that was at the center of the controversy and the subject of hair-splitting exegesis.

In spite of persistent official disclaimers, the idea that the British Government had made conflicting commitments did not

go away. It was embraced by some well-meaning and sincere, albeit misguided, British intellectuals. Thus, characteristically, on 26 October 1930, Beatrice Webb noted in her *Diaries*: "The man on the spot gave promises to the Arabs; the British Cabinet gave promises to the Jews."¹ In the late thirties, Arnold Toynbee propagated these arguments on numerous occasions, infecting British intellectuals with feelings of guilt and shame. The appearance of George Antonius's book, *The Arab Awakening* (1938), spread the idea that the British had defrauded the Arabs. This book came to be regarded as the most authoritative guide to Anglo-Arab relations during World War I. Foreign Office officials admired his work to the total neglect of searching in their own records. It imbued them with a corrosive feeling of embarrassment and eroded their conviction in the justice of the British case. It had a demoralizing effect on British Middle Eastern policy-makers.

Geoffery Furlonge, a former Head of the Eastern Department, in a biography of Musa al-Alami, a Palestinian notable, subscribed unreservedly to Antonius's thesis.² J. R. Colville, who served as secretary of the British representatives on the committee set up to investigate the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence during the London Conference in 1939, confirmed in his book that the Balfour Declaration "promised the Jews a home," but in the same breath stated that Sir Henry McMahon, in his correspondence with the King of the Hedjaz, "had assured the Arabs . . . that when they were liberated from the rule of the Turkish Sultan, all Arabia, including Palestine, should be theirs to inhabit and govern."³ Such a statement is all the more remarkable, since the same committee, headed by Lord Maugham, Lord Chancellor, had concluded just the opposite, and Colville had had a hand in drafting the Committee's report.⁴

Misperceptions plagued British officials. To quote yet another glaring example, Sir Hugh Foot (later Lord Caradon), who served officially in Palestine and the Middle East for about fifteen years, declared in his memoirs:

The failure of British administration in Palestine was inevitable. The double sin had been committed of raising false hopes both with the Arabs and with Jews. The hopes were false be-

cause they were conflicting. The Arabs who fought with Great Britain in the first world war to throw off the yoke of the Turkish Empire were led to believe that they were fighting for their freedom...the main responsibility was ours...by prevarication and procrastination and basically by the fundamental dishonesty of our original double dealing we had made disaster certain. . . . In 1915 we supported King Feisal's desert rising. In 1917 we signed the Balfour Declaration.⁵

Breast-beating was contagious. It was practiced in the press and in some of the history books. Thus, Elizabeth Monroe, wrote in her book: "Measured by British interests alone [the Balfour Declaration] was one of the greatest mistakes in our imperial history."⁶

It was therefore in the late 1960s, when the British records for the period of 1914-1922 were opened to the public for inspection at the Public Record Office, London, that I immersed myself enthusiastically in the official files in order to find out what had really happened. I was fortunate to be the first scholar to do so. In my book, *The Question of Palestine 1914-1918*,⁷ I challenged the view current among British historians, that the Balfour Declaration was the result of miscalculation, a product of sentiment rather than of considered interests of the state, and showed that there was no incompatibility between the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Correspondence with the Sharif of Mecca—that Sir Henry McMahon had definitely excluded Palestine and so it was understood by Hussein at that time. The idea that Palestine was a "twice-promised land" was without foundation.

A chapter of *The Question of Palestine*, "The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence and the Question of Palestine," was published in the *Journal of Contemporary History* (April 1970) and a dialogue between Professor Arnold Toynbee and myself appeared thereafter in the same journal. For the readers' convenience, these are republished in the preamble to this volume.

In due course I found to my amazement that, during World War I and thereafter, Toynbee had been a convinced Zionist—not only out of narrow British interests, but also ideologically. On the other hand, he was not at all sympathetic toward the Arabs. I also discovered how his ill-conceived notion of the

"twice-promised land" originated. (See Chapters 3 and 4). His much quoted "Memorandum on British Commitments to King Hussein" (October/November 1918), which was widely circulated in print, misled a great number of British statesmen, officials, and, consequently, also historians. Armed with this newly found data, I approached Toynbee, asking him for some clarifications. To my regret he remained silent.

To probe into such a complicated subject, I felt that a more comprehensive study of British Middle Eastern policy was called for. The documentary material was immense. It was not until the years 1989-1991, when I was a visiting Fellow at the Centre for International Studies at LSE, that I was able to devote all of my time to research at the Public Record Office and elsewhere.

I think I have showed in the present study that McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915 was not a legal letter, as it had been treated heretofore, but a political and nonbinding document. It was a part of a series of letters that were inconclusive and left in abeyance until the Peace Conference. Moreover, the letter did not bear a *unilateral* nature, as it has been misrepresented; the "pledge" for Arab independence was conditioned on the general Arab uprising in the whole area of the Fertile Crescent. The British, as well as the Allies, committed themselves merely to recognize and uphold Arab independence in the area liberated by the Arabs themselves. From all that we now know, only the tribes in the Hedjaz, and thereafter those in the territory east of the River Jordan, rebelled against the Turks; the Arabs in Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia fought shoulder to shoulder with the Ottoman troops against the British. If any party remained in debt toward the other, it was rather the Arabs to the British than vice versa.

Gallons of ink have been spilled on the meaning of the phrase "district of Damascus." I was fortunate to discover at the Public Records Office the Arabic version of McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915—which was thought to have been lost—as well as its retranslation into English made at the British Residency in Cairo in November 1919. Of the latter document, neither the Foreign Office, nor any historian, was aware. By juxtaposing these two documents and comparing them to McMahon's original letter of 24 October 1915, it becomes

crystal clear that the Arab term *wilāya*, the Ottoman vilayet, and the English “district” were identical in meaning, and so it was understood at the time by the contemporary *dramatis personae*, both British and Arab. The “district of Damascus” covered the whole area, which later became Trans-Jordan, down to Ma’an and Akaba.

Although this startling discovery may well lay the long drawn-out controversy finally to rest, I thought it expedient not to limit myself to the analysis of the Correspondence and its implications, but also to describe the surrounding circumstances, to trace the genesis of the policy, and to examine whether it paid off. I tried to re-examine the rationale behind the Inter-Allied Agreement (May 1916), commonly known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement—whether it was compatible with the arrangement with King Hussein and whether there was any substance in later accusations that this Agreement had been deliberately concealed from King Hussein.

In view of French complaints in the aftermath of the war that the British did not play fair with them in Syria, I tried to investigate how Damascus had been captured in October 1918, and particularly to examine the conduct of British officers, first and foremost, as to whether their activities conformed with official policy.

During the interwar period and after, the Palestinian delegations buttressed their case on McMahon’s letter of 24 October 1915, jealously regarding it as their title-deed to Palestine. It was therefore of prime importance to find out what Hussein’s understanding of the Correspondence with the High Commissioner was, and what was his response to the British Jewish National Home policy. Investigation into Emir Feisal’s motives for concluding an agreement with Chaim Weizmann and into the reasons for its failure also provided some interesting insights.

In the second volume of this study, subtitled *The Creation of the Historical Myth: 1920-1939* (forthcoming), I have described the role of Herbert Samuel, the High Commissioner, in shaping the Palestinian policy and have tried to show how Winston Churchill, the Colonial Secretary, did carry out British commitments to the Arabs during the conferences in Cairo and Jerusa-

lem in March 1921. At this juncture it was necessary also to demonstrate how Churchill, as well as succeeding British Governments, viewed their obligations toward the Jews, as embodied in the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate.

Confrontation between the Palestinian leadership and the British is the central theme of volume two. Particularly intriguing is the question of how the loophole in McMahon's much-quoted letter was discovered, consequently opening the floodgates to endless controversy. George Antonius and his *Arab Awakening* will be the subject of special scrutiny, and, in the concluding chapter, there will appear a critical review of bibliography.

Perhaps the greatest delight for an historian is when he is able to revise stereotyped versions and demythologize deeply ingrained theories. A subject of this nature, laden with emotion and mired with distortions, is a veritable challenge to any student of history. I, for one, have endeavored to treat the subject matter as a purely academic issue. Intellectual curiosity alone propelled my research and examination of a huge mass of documentation. If I were to be asked what is the ultimate criterion for judging an historian, I would summarize in one word: honesty. I sincerely hope that in this study too, I have lived up to the very generous compliment that Arnold Toynbee paid me in his "Comments."

Preamble

The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence and the Question of Palestine*

The controversy over this question is half a century old. To-day it has no more than an academic interest, but in the past the keenest brains in Middle East politics were pitted against each other to prove their respective cases, only to demonstrate the gulf that separated them. Despite statements made by the high-ranking British officers directly involved in negotiations with the Arab leaders, passions did not subside. To those who could see only duplicity in the conduct of the British government of the time, the slogan of the "twice-promised land" became almost an article of faith. It infected some well-meaning and sincere, albeit misguided, British intellectuals.

Publication of the relevant records could have dispelled much of the misunderstanding, but, though this was urged in both Houses of Parliament since 1921, successive British governments objected on the ground that publication would be "detrimental to the public interest."¹ The refusal to allow publication was due not to the weakness of the British government's case, as its critics suspected, but to considerations entirely unconnected with Palestine. The chief reason for official secrecy, as we are now able to learn, was that the correspondence contained encouragement to the Sherif of Mecca (given both by Lord Kitchener and his successor as High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon) to rebel against the Sultan-Caliph in Constantinople and seek the Caliphate for himself with British assistance. Publication of this fact, it was

feared, would have precipitated a storm of indignation in the Moslem world, particularly in India, with most embarrassing consequences. The Foreign Office held the view that it would not be possible to publish part of the correspondence, omitting the allusions to the Caliphate, that partial publication would almost certainly lead to complete publication, and, still worse, would have involved raking up the detailed history of serious disagreements between the British and French governments respecting the Near East in the latter part of the first world war and the earlier armistice period.²

Whatever the merits of these considerations, official records now available for research provide us with the long-awaited opportunity to re-examine this complex problem.³ But before venturing to investigate whether or not Palestine was included in McMahon's pledge to Sherif Hussein, it is pertinent first to appraise the nature of the British commitments to the Arabs, to ask whether they bore a *unilateral* character — heretofore the accepted criterion by which Anglo-Sherifian relations were judged — or whether the other party, the Arabs, were equally under certain obligations, the discharge of which conditioned the validity of the understanding. Textual examination of the correspondence alone will not lead us far. The task of interpretation requires a reconstruction of what went on behind the official façade and a scrutiny of the motives and expectations of the chief *dramatis personae*.

The dominant theme in the correspondence is "Arab independence." This loosely used phrase caused much misunderstanding. What did it mean? A note written by Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, to Sir James Rodd, the ambassador in Rome, on 21 September 1916, is illuminating:

The Shereef of Mecca had communicated to the [Anglo-]Egyptian authorities his desire to make himself independent but had insisted upon knowing whether we were prepared to recognize an independent Arab State. We were, of course, prepared to do that if he succeeded in establishing his independence; for all we were pledged to was that the Moslem holy places should remain in independent Moslem hands.⁴

This tallies with Grey's earlier communication. On 14 April he

had authorized Sir Reginald Wingate, Sirdar of the Sudan, to inform the Sherif of Mecca that the British government "will make it an essential condition, in any terms of peace, that the Arabian Peninsula and its Mohammedan Holy Places should remain in the hands of an independent Sovereign Moslem State." The message was apparently passed on to Hussein by Seyyid Sir Ali Morghani, Grand Kadi of the Sudan, who was in close contact with Wingate. By the end of June, its substance was embodied in a proclamation which was distributed in the form of a leaflet in Arabia, and on 29 July 1916, following the Sherifian revolt against Turkey, an official communiqué to the same effect was made public.⁵

Hence it would be fair to deduce that, apart from the Holy Places, Britain (as well as the Allied governments) was not pledged to the establishment of an independent Arab state or confederation of states. It was up to the Arabs themselves to make good their aspirations to independence. But as there was no likelihood of their being able to stand on their own feet, it was natural for the British and French governments to fill the vacuum and assume the role of "protectors."⁶ Absence of a protective shield would have inevitably invited "foreign [i.e., Turkish] aggression," nipping the scheme of an Arab state or confederation of states in the bud. It was to make the creation of an Arab entity possible, as well as to harmonize it with their own legitimate interests in that region, that the British and French governments concluded the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Although this document became notorious in ensuing years, there was nothing in it that was inconsistent with McMahon's pledge.

It is evident that, at that time, neither the Arabs nor the British took the meaning of "independence" in its literal sense. The Arabs, Sir Mark Sykes disclosed to the War Committee after his return from the East, "must ask for theoretical independence, otherwise, if they ask for an obvious European tutelage, the Committee of Union and Progress will take the reactionary party over on their side."⁷ Despite his grandiose claim, Hussein was well aware of his own limitations. Hence his request for "assistance" in order to ensure "the stability of Arab independence." Not only was he apprehensive of "constant provocations . . . and utmost vengeance" from the Turks during the war

should Britain leave him alone, but even after its termination.⁸ McMahon indeed reassured the Sherif that Britain would not conclude "any peace . . . of which the freedom of the Arab peoples and their liberation from the German and Turkish domination do not form an essential condition"⁹; and it is only in this context that the meaning of Arab "independence" should be understood: liberation from their adversaries, not necessarily independence. Neither to Sherif Hussein nor to any other Arab leader did the British "ever explicitly guarantee or even promise anything beyond liberation from the Turk."¹⁰ This was the testimony of David G. Hogarth, formerly Director of the Arab Bureau in Cairo, a scholar of repute who had intimate knowledge of Anglo-Arab relations.

Least of all did the sponsors of the Arab movement themselves take the word "independence" at its face value. What McMahon had in mind was, as he told Grey, recognition of "the principle of Arab independence," but no more. When read together with the text of a subsequent cable, we may well deduce that the term was merely a convenient substitute for autonomy: "I have endeavoured in my statement to Sherif Hussein [of 24 October, 1915] to make any such future Arab state (within the British sphere) subject to our creation, direction and control." The term "independent Sovereign State," Grey had been told six months earlier, "has been interpreted in a generic sense because idea of an Arabian unity under one ruler, recognized as supreme by other Arab chiefs, is as yet inconceivable to [the] Arab mind."¹¹ Lt-Col., later General Sir Gilbert Clayton, Director of Military Intelligence in Cairo and one of McMahon's chief advisers, denied that it was his intention to promote "the establishment of a powerful Arab Kingdom . . . all we want is to keep the friendship and, if possible, the active assistance of the various Arab chiefs . . . while at the same time, working towards maintenance of the *status quo ante bellum*, and merely eliminating Turkish domination from Arabia." Five weeks later he confided to another friend:

to set up a great Arab State . . . was never my idea. . . . The conditions throughout Arabia, Syria and Mesopotamia did not allow of such a scheme being practical, even if anyone were so foolish as to attempt it. . . . The object we have to aim at is, I

consider, to work to preserve all the various elements in the Arab territories very much in the same position as they were before the war, but minus the Turks. In this way we shall have an open field to work in.¹²

The underlying assumption was that the Arabs for some time to come were bound to need European assistance and protection. This situation, as Clayton saw it, offered an opportunity for the British to step in. The term "independence" was merely a euphemism for supersession of Turkish rule by British and French in their respective spheres of interest. Looked at from this point of view, the concessions made to Sherif Hussein were not so far-reaching as they appeared, and it explains why McMahon, in his celebrated letter of 24 October 1915 to the Sherif of Mecca, granted them so lightly, though this is not the whole explanation.

When, in mid-August, Hussein's note of 14 July 1915 arrived in Cairo to open the long-drawn-out correspondence, it was received at the British Residency with astonishment. "It was at the time and still is my opinion," commented Ronald Storrs, its Oriental Secretary, "that the Sharif opened his mouth and the British Government their purse a good deal too wide. . . . We could not conceal from ourselves (and with difficulty from him) that his pretensions bordered upon the tragicomic,"¹³ These related to the comprehensive demand for recognition of the independence of the Arab countries bounded on the north by the line Mersina-Adana to parallel 37°N, to include the whole of the Arabian peninsula (except Aden), Mesopotamia, Syria, what was later Transjordan, and Palestine. Hussein's messenger, Muhammed Ibn Arif, who brought this letter to Cairo, assured Storrs on his master's behalf that the Arabs were "ready and well prepared"; "our word," Abdullah, Hussein's son, asked him to tell Storrs, "is a word of honour and we will carry it out even at the cost of our lives; we are not under the order of the Turks but the Turks are under our orders." Arab officers in the Ottoman army, Ibn Arif went on, had sworn allegiance to the Sherif and were prepared to fight under his banner. Many had deserted already and consequently Hussein's prestige had become so paramount that even the Sultan had proclaimed him Chief Governor and Administrator

of Hedjaz, with the Wali "under his orders." But Storrs was not deceived. "It may be regarded as certain," he noted, "that [Hussein] has received no sort of mandate from other [Arab] potentates." As to the territorial desideratum, "he knows he is demanding, possibly as a basis for negotiations, far more than he has the right, the hope, or the power to expect. Like his co-religionists elsewhere, he will modify his tone later."¹⁴ To McMahon, Hussein's profession of "sincere friendship" was welcome, as was the idea of "reversion of the caliphate to a true Arab"; but as to the question of frontiers and boundaries, so long as the war was in progress and the Turks' occupation of their Asiatic provinces effective, negotiations were "premature and waste of time."¹⁵

McMahon's negative response was fully in line with the attitude adopted by Grey, who was reluctant to commit himself to delimitation of territory of the projected Arab state, particularly in the north.¹⁶ The predicament confronting him emerges clearly from a note quoted earlier (above, note 4):

We had no difficulty in agreeing to any boundaries which the Shereef wanted on the south [i.e., in the Arabian Peninsula] but on the north the Shereef came up against Syria, where we had always admitted French interest and the French would not make concessions to the Shereef of places like Damascus without knowing what the limits of their sphere were to be.

But McMahon had additional grounds for pouring cold water on Arab territorial desiderata: Syrian Arabs, instead of aiding the British, "have lent their assistance to the Germans and the Turks," he reminded the Sherif on 30 August 1915. What then made McMahon change his mind two months later and yield so generously to Hussein's demands, as is apparent from his letter of 24 October 1915?

It was the arrival of Muhammad Sherif al-Faruqi in Cairo that constituted the decisive turning point. Al-Faruqi¹⁷ was an Arab staff officer in the Ottoman army and a prominent member of a Young Arab secret society called *al-'Ahd*, an off-shoot of the civilian *al-Fatat*. On some pretext, he managed to make his way to the English lines in Gallipoli, whence he was taken to Cairo. Under interrogation, he revealed to Colonel Clayton that Young Arab secret societies in Syria and Mesopotamia had

decided to cooperate with England in return for British support for Arab independence. Learning of Sherif Hussein's communication with the British High Commissioner in Cairo, and realizing how far-reaching the consequences might be, they hastened to stake their claim to the northern boundary of the Arab Empire. This would follow the Mersina-Diarbekir line. Direct contact was established thereafter with Jedda. Al-Faruqi claimed that the Young Arab party wielded great influence in Syria and Mesopotamia and that Turkey and Germany, alive to this fact, had approached their leaders and promised to meet their demands "in full." The Young Arabs, however, trusted England and preferred a deal with her, but unless they received a favorable reply within a few weeks, the Young Arabs would throw in their lot with Turkey and Germany in order to secure the best terms they could.¹⁸

We learn from Antonius that, early in the war, the *al-Fatat* committee passed a resolution "to work on the side of Turkey in order to resist foreign penetration of whatever kind or form," but shortly after Emir Feisal's arrival in Damascus on 26 March 1915, they switched their allegiance and decided on cooperation with Britain against Turkey; their so-called "Damascus Protocol"¹⁹ served later as a blueprint for Hussein, in his letter to McMahon of 14 July 1915, to outline the boundaries for Arab independence. But al-Faruqi's statement on a rival proposition by Turkey and Germany is puzzling. Antonius is silent about it. Moreover, no evidence of such an offer can be traced in the German Foreign Ministry files. If anything, it is rather to the contrary. The Young Turk government, with its strong centralist disposition, was in no mood to grant the Arabs autonomy, let alone independence, and with Djemal Pasha's autocratic rule in Syria and Palestine, this was a practical impossibility. As for the Germans, though not slow to criticize Turkish short-sightedness, any negotiation with an Arab secret society behind the back of their ally was out of the question.

German records belie al-Faruqi's testimony on Young Arab influence and the revolutionary fervor among the population. "The anti-Turk movement . . . aiming at Arab autonomy," Dr. Prüffer, the Consul-General in Damascus, reported early in December 1915, "appears much to be weakened. Among the wealthier middle classes, reformism has scarcely any suppor-

ters, and among the small land-owners, merchants and workers, who constitute the bulk of the population, the cause of the Ottoman Government is quite popular. . . . The brilliant successes of the Ottoman army strengthened the confidence of the people in the future of the Empire." The anti-Turkish elements enjoyed little support and, with the population riven by dissent, an uprising had little chance of success. Prüffer's successor, Dr. Loytved-Hardegg, by no means an anti-Arab, assured Berlin five months later that "no rebellion need be feared in Syria. The Syrians are shopkeepers but no warriors. They are little gifted for the profession of revolutionaries."²⁰ Djemal Pasha had only praise for the loyalty of the Arab regiments in his army. He could find no better proof of his conviction that "the Arab would not revolt and turn traitor."²¹

In view of this evidence, al-Faruqi's report about Turco-German overtures to the *al-'Ahd* and *al-Fatat* societies, and the latter's ability to foment a revolt against the Ottoman government, merits little credence. Moreover, it would be reasonable to assume that this tale was deliberately fabricated in order to strengthen the Arabs' bargaining position vis-à-vis the British, as in fact it did. How successful al-Faruqi was can be gauged from the impression he made on his interrogator, Colonel Clayton, who thought his proposals "very grave and of urgent importance," and that the rebellious position adopted by the Sherif reflected that "of the majority of the Arab peoples." Should the British prove accommodating, the Young Arab Committee would embark "at once" on their operations in Syria, Palestine, Baghdad, and Mosul, where their influence was great. On the other hand, rejection, or even evasion, of the proposals, Clayton feared, would "throw the Young Arab party definitely into the arms of the enemy. Their machinery will at once be employed against us throughout the Arab countries, and the various Arab chiefs, who are almost to a man members of, or connected with, the Young Arab party, will be undoubtedly won over . . . the *Jehad*, so far a failure, may become a very grim reality, the effect of which . . . might well be disastrous."²²

Clayton was a shrewd and down-to-earth man. Few could rival his experience with the native Arabic-speaking people; and his "balanced advice," as Storrs put it, could not be

hustled by a sudden crisis.²³ His acceptance of al-Faruqi's account is, therefore difficult to comprehend. Was it because of faulty intelligence and inadequate information on the true state of affairs behind the Turkish lines,²⁴ or because, following the setback at the Dardanelles, the fear of a *jihad* was so all-pervading that British officers in Egypt were apt to grasp at every floating straw to relieve them of their growing feeling of isolation. Whatever the reason, it was on the basis of these findings that General Sir John Maxwell, Officer Commanding in Egypt, urged Lord Kitchener, then Secretary of State for War, that it was imperative to meet Hussein's wishes:

A powerful organization . . . of the Young Arab Committee . . . with considerable influence in the [Ottoman] army and among Arab chiefs . . . appears to have made up its mind that the moment for action has arrived. The Turks and Germans are already in negotiations with them and spending money to win their support. The Arab Party is, however, strongly inclined towards England. . . . If their overtures are rejected, or a reply is delayed . . . the Arab party will go over to the enemy and work with them. . . . On the other hand, their active assistance . . . in return for our support, would be of the greatest value in Arabia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine.²⁵

Kitchener replied promptly: "The Government is most-desirous of dealing with the Arab question in a manner satisfactory to the Arabs. You must do your best to prevent any alienation of the Arabs' traditional loyalty to England." McMahon too pressed the Foreign Office to win over the Arabs through a speedy settlement of the boundaries, but only "in so far as England is free to act without detriment to the interests of her present Allies." This was urgent, because the Arab party in Syria was "ready to revolt . . . they are on the point of parting of their ways." The Sherif of Mecca was in communication with Imam Yehhia of Yemen and endeavored to dissuade him from aiding the Turks. It was therefore imperative, McMahon urged, to deal without delay.²⁶

Grey, no less than Kitchener, appreciated the urgency of the matter and was favorably disposed. But suspecting (as it turned out quite correctly) some ulterior motives for the undue haste, he warned the High Commissioner to avoid giving the

impression that the British supported Arab interests in Syria merely in order to establish their own at the expense of the French. However, McMahon, without further consultation, dispatched his crucial letter of 24 October 1915 to Sherif Hussein. Two days later he cabled that the matter brooked "no delay" and he had, therefore, to act "without further reference."²⁷ The Rubicon was crossed. The Arabs won their Magna Carta and Great Britain a standing embarrassment. The responsibility was solely that of McMahon.²⁸

The India Office was aghast. Since Britain's declaration of war against Turkey, Moslem loyalty in India had been strained. The position was still more complicated because Hussein was highly unpopular among the pilgrims to Mecca for his high-handed methods. His rebellion against the Sultan, openly encouraged by the British, might have had an incalculable effect on Moslem opinion. Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, bitterly complained that he had not been consulted before "a pledge of such vital importance was given to the Arabs." He thought that London should not have committed itself to such a policy at all. "We have always regarded with much [?]diffidence] creation of strong Arab state lying astride our interests in the East and in the [Persian] Gulf as not unlikely source of ultimate trouble, and we doubt either military or political advantage likely to accrue from it."²⁹ Austen Chamberlain, Secretary of State for India, was also disturbed by McMahon's letter. According to his information, the Grand Sherif of Mecca was "a non-entity without power to carry out his proposals," the Arabs were "without unity and with no possibility of uniting" their followers. Chamberlain doubted the reality, and certainly the efficacy of the suggested Arab revolt in the Ottoman army and elsewhere. He pointed out that al-Idrissi, the Imam of Asir, and Ibn Saud, the Amir of Najd, friends of the British, were hostile to the Sherif, whereas the latter's friends, Imam Yehhia of Yemen, and Ibn Rashid, ruler of Hayil, were pro-Turk. Until therefore both the Sherif and Faruqi proved themselves able to carry out their promises, it was imprudent for the British Government to undertake any commitment. "The next step should be to make clear to them that promises made by McMahon are dependent on immediate action by them in sense of

their offers and will not be binding on us unless they do their part at once."³⁰

Lord Crewe, Chamberlain's immediate predecessor, now deputizing for Grey, also criticized McMahon for negotiating, as he put it, "without great wisdom."³¹ Sir Arthur Hirtzel, head of the Political Department of the India Office, subscribed to the Chamberlain-Crewe appraisal. However, should it be considered expedient to pursue the negotiations with the Sherif, he noted, any commitments in future should be "as vague as possible" and made subject to the extent and success of Arab co-operation.³²

McMahon disagreed with the India Office. He regarded the Sherif as a leader of importance, both by descent and personality, and the only rallying point for the Arab cause.³³ Yet, as his policy had been censured and Hussein remained elusive about the proposed revolt, McMahon adopted a tougher line. He urged Hussein in unequivocal terms:

It is most essential that you spare no effort to attach all the Arab peoples to our united cause and urge them to afford no assistance to our enemies. It is on the success of these efforts and on the more active measures which the Arabs may thereafter take in support of our cause, when the time for action comes, that the permanence and strength of our agreement must depend.

Hussein thereupon assured McMahon that he fully "understood the contents" of his note.³⁴ There was thus no unilateral commitment. The Arabs were equally under definite obligations to fulfill their part, and it was on the nature and quality of their performance that the "permanence and strength" of the agreement depended.³⁵ That recognition of the "independence of the Arabs," in specified areas "south of latitude 37°" was conditional on an Arab revolt, was testified also by T. E. Lawrence (in a letter to *The Times*, 11 September 1919), and confirmed by Lloyd George.³⁶

During the winter and early spring of 1916, there seemed no reason for McMahon to question his trust in the Arabs. According to Brigadier-General W. M. Walton, British Political Resident in Aden, the Sherif of Mecca undertook to organize a "general rising" of Arabs against the Turks both in the Hedjaz

and Syria. Simultaneously Idrissi and Imam Yehhia were to raise the standard of revolt in Asir and the Yemen. The Sherif estimated that he could raise a force of 250,000 men and measure up to the Turks.³⁷ Some of these good tidings McMahon learned directly from Hussein, who revealed in his letter of 18 February 1916 that his son Emir Feisal, at that time in Syria, was planning to attack the Turkish troops from the rear should the latter advance on the Suez Canal. Feisal was awaiting the arrival of troops from Aleppo and Mosul, 100,000 strong, the majority of whom were Arab. Thereafter Abdullah would deploy sufficient forces to buttress Feisal's rebellion and, should circumstances permit, would occupy the Hedjaz railway. This would mark "the beginning of the principal movement," entirely different from what the Turks expected.³⁸

The news that Feisal would enlist the support of the native Arab element in the Ottoman army was very encouraging. However, as the Turco-German advance towards Egypt did not seem to be imminent, McMahon suggested that the Sherif employ the Arab tribes in the north to demolish the Baghdad railway instead. To prepare the ground, al-Faruqi and al-Masri were to infiltrate the Turkish lines. So elated was Sir Mark Sykes (at that time in Cairo) that, assuming that the Arab movement would lead to a successful rebellion in Syria and Hedjaz and that Arab troops would defect, he hoped that an "avenue [would be] open to liquidating Mesopotamian expedition and doing away with [this] theatre of war."³⁹

However, these expectations proved misplaced. The British military authorities in Basra were sceptical as to the advisability of the al-Faruqi/al-Masri mission to Mesopotamia. Experience with Arab officers who had defected from the Ottoman army had been discouraging, and Turkish vigilance remained unabated. As time wore on and the much vaunted rising did not materialize, London became impatient. Grey warned McMahon not to go beyond assurances already given to the Sherif: "We are giving arms and money and the sole question is whether the Arabs will do their part." A week later, McMahon received the bad news from Hussein that "owing to dispersal of chiefs," the Syrians could neither engineer a revolution nor seize the Hedjaz railway. Instead, he asked the British to help the Anaizah tribes (on the eastern side of the river Jordan)

financially and blockade the coast of Yemen.⁴⁰ Its Imam remained loyal to Turkey and was reluctant to join forces with Hussein (see note 37). Colonel Clayton had now to admit that "a certain rapprochement" between the Arab decentralization party and the Turks had evidently taken place. A general Arab uprising seemed to be a mirage and Arab unity practically non-existent. The newly established Arab Bureau in Cairo arrived at the inescapable conclusion that the British had been misled. The Sherif had always posed as spokesman of the Arab nation, but in fact no such entity or organization existed; "nor, given the history, economic environment and character of the Arabs, can it be expected to exist."⁴¹

But the most crippling blow for McMahon was the revelation contained in Feisal's confidential message to his father. From its contents McMahon learned, much to his surprise, that Feisal wrote "as an upholder of Islam against Christian encroachment" and seemed to imply that, had the Turks been "strong enough to keep Moslem frontiers intact . . . he would have backed" them rather than the British. McMahon had to concede the bitter truth that the Hedjaz Arabs were "unlikely to act efficiently in Syria . . . or to cut the Baghdad Railway." He advised the Sherif to confine his action to Arabia proper and to recall Feisal. "We can safely trust Sherif but we have no guarantee of Feisal's attitude."⁴²

Such a contraction of the original plan of the Arab revolt undermined much of the validity of the McMahon understanding with Hussein, but it did not make the High Commissioner draw the logical conclusions. Was it because he attached so little importance to his pledge⁴³ that he thought modification of the agreement with the Sherif superfluous? Or because such a suggestion would have *ipso facto* implied an admission of error in his policy and it was better to gloss over the issue altogether? Whatever the reason, McMahon continued the pretense that it was safe to back the Hedjaz revolt. At any rate, a public demonstration to the Moslem world that the Sherif was against the Turks was still a creditable achievement. Yet, however commendable, this was not why McMahon had agreed to meet such extravagant claims to recognize Arab independence in regions lying north of the Arabian peninsula.

Sir Arthur Nicolson was indignant. "As regards . . . the She-

rif, I think we have gone quite far enough . . . we should wait for some action on his part. Hitherto, we had plenty of promises from him — but nothing more — while we have given him, beyond assurances, arms and money.”⁴⁴ “The Arabs,” as General Walton commented, “are waiting for our victories in other fields.”⁴⁵ But it was not before the autumn of that year that the bubble exploded. Soon after Hussein had rebelled against the Turks on 6 June 1916, his forces were on the point of collapse. Wingate, much perturbed, cabled from Sudan: “unless supposed Syrian revolt interferes with . . . Turkish reinforcements . . . Sherif is faced with possible recapture of Medina and an advance on Mecca. . . . He will have to choose then between accepting offer by us to dispatch a military expedition and almost certain defeat.” McMahon, who had been responsible for inflating the Arabs’ military importance, now claimed that the revolt had been undertaken with “inadequate preparations in ignorance of modern warfare,” whereas four months later Wingate reported that the Arabs, even if adequately equipped and organized, were incapable of acting on the defensive. Both Wingate and McMahon bombarded London with requests for military assistance to cut off the Turks and “prevent early collapse of Sherif’s movement.” This movement not only did not snowball, but was widely condemned by Mohammedan opinion in India and elsewhere, and produced a bad effect in Syria. Hussein was blamed for ingratitude towards the Turks and his revolt commanded little or no sympathy. McMahon and his entourage in Cairo were alarmed. “We are morally committed to support the Sherif and shall certainly be held in a large measure responsible for his failure.” So hopeless seemed the position that, in contravention of Moslem custom prohibiting the presence of non Moslems in the Hedjaz, Hussein himself requested British military assistance in troops, which, he claimed, “is a condition of our alliance.”⁴⁶

The General Staff was indignant. The Sherif had undertaken to expel the Turks from the Arab area and asked in return for British assistance in the shape of arms and money, which had been given. Before the revolt, Hussein had estimated that he could raise a force of 250,000 men and gave the impression of commanding sufficient resources to overcome the Turks. His predicament was as unexpected as it was embarrassing. It was

he who had pledged military assistance to the British and not vice versa. Technically, the military argument went on, the British government was under no obligation to come to his rescue. Yet, as prestige was involved, the General Staff was prepared to overlook that it had not been consulted during the correspondence with Hussein, and suggested a speed-up of the operations in Sinai in order to capture El-Arish and Aqaba, a move that would simultaneously relieve Turkish pressure on the Sherif and encourage the Syrian Arabs to revolt.⁴⁷ The War Council doubted whether an offensive in Sinai would rescue Hussein in time. On the other hand, a landing of Christian troops in the Hedjaz posed a serious problem. Not only would they run a grave risk of offending Mohammedan opinion, but various reports indicated that the native troops would disperse rather than be supported by Europeans. In addition, the General Staff strongly objected to mounting another expedition with unforeseen consequences. Overtaxed on the Western front and short of transport and manpower, they feared that the deployment of 15,000 men to save Rabeqh would impair the El-Arish operation.⁴⁸ For nearly six months an awkward dilemma confronted the British government. The difficulty was eventually resolved because the much feared Turkish assault on Rabeqh and Mecca did not materialize.

During this episode, the British drew some comfort from the prospect that, should succor be brought in time to the Sherif, and when the British invaded Palestine, the Arabs in the north, "discontented with the Turkish rule," would rise. "A very favourable turn might [then] be given to events in the whole of Syria and Palestine besides putting the Sherif out of all danger."⁴⁹ Sykes placed so much hope in such a development that he expected Turkish authority to crumble and their military operations to be hindered.⁵⁰ This, however, proved an illusion. At the turn of 1916, an Arab Legion was organized by the British to prop up the Sherifian forces and to serve as a rallying point for discontented elements in Syria and Mesopotamia, but this came to nothing. "I must honestly confess," Clayton told Sykes, "that, viewed as a symbol of Arab nationalism, the Legion has been a failure. It has not been received with any enthusiasm by the local Arabs, in spite of much propaganda. . . . I cannot say that it is worth either the money or the time of

skilled officers which has to be expended upon it."⁵¹ Had it not been for the steady flow of gold from the British Treasury and guidance provided by the British officers, the Northern Arab Army (composed of the Legion, as a regular force, and the Sherifian tribesmen) would have been crushed by the Turks or have disintegrated from within.⁵² The capture of Aqaba on 6 July 1917 was a bold military maneuver, but it failed to become the rallying point for a movement on which the British Residency in Cairo pinned their hopes. Philip Graves had some words of praise for the Arabs of the Hedjaz and their Bedouin allies, but those of Syria and Palestine "remained passive or aided the Turks."⁵³ C. S. Jarvis, formerly Governor of Sinai, expressed himself in less complimentary terms: "The Syrians as a people did nothing whatsoever towards assisting the Arab cause . . . beyond hold secret meetings and talk. The inhabitants of Palestine did rather less."⁵⁴ Lloyd George recalled ironically that "the Arabs of Palestine, who might have been helpful in many ways, were quiescent and cowering. Right through the War and up to the end, there were masses of Arab soldiers from Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine in the Turkish Armies fighting against the liberation of their own rule . . . the Palestinian Arabs were fighting against us."⁵⁵ Despite much encouragement, when the British troops were already firmly entrenched in Jerusalem, the results of recruiting for the Sherifian forces were disappointing; no more than 150 Arabs were recruited.⁵⁶ The verdict of the Palestine Royal Commission was clear: "It was the Sherif's own people . . . who bore the brunt of the actual fighting. The Arabs of Palestine did not rise against the Turks."⁵⁷

But in this context Palestine was of marginal importance. The big plum was Damascus, and it was primarily with an eye on the Syrian hinterland that the Declaration to the Seven was issued in June 1918. It pledged that those territories conquered by the Arabs would remain Arab. Yet the response was negligible. With no substantial rising in sight when Allenby's forces were converging on Damascus towards the end of September 1918, the only way out, for those who engineered it, was to stage a victory by the Sherifian troops, to give the impression that the Arabs had taken the city from the Turk. Even so, the Sherifians found the city in a state of turmoil,⁵⁸ not of rejoicing,

thus giving the lie to the belief that the Syrians craved nothing better than liberation from Turkish rule. Testifying before the Palestine Royal Commission in 1937, Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, denied that the Arabs were ever "under the yoke of the Turks" or that they expected to be relieved from such a yoke. For centuries they had been fully integrated within the Ottoman Empire and enjoyed equality of rights.⁵⁹ During the Committee of Union and Progress regime, they might have nourished some grievances against Constantinople, but fundamentally they "would prefer to remain under Turkish domination, with all its mis-government, tyranny and oppression . . . rather than . . . fall under the Christian yoke."⁶⁰ Arab troops in the Ottoman army remained essentially loyal and would not aid the destruction of a Moslem power.⁶¹ Throughout the war, the Sherifian rebellion remained an isolated phenomenon. As Wingate, one of its chief protagonists, admitted in September 1918: "The Moslems in general have hitherto regarded the Hedjaz revolt, and our share in it, with suspicion and dislike."⁶² A distinguished British historian, and a close observer of Middle East politics, attested that "a *general* Arab insurrection was planned [but] it never took place . . . [It was] mainly the soldiers of Britain, the Commonwealth and India, who played a part in the overthrow of Ottoman rule."⁶³ Ronald Storrs, judging retrospectively, doubted whether the deal with the Sherif was after all worthwhile. It "imposed upon us the real obligation of raising and maintaining his prestige to the limit of the possible, so that for this and other reasons we were in the end committed far more deeply in bullion, in munitions of war and in promises very hard to fulfil, than most of us had dreamed of in September 1914."⁶⁴

This did not mean that Hussein's revolt, though limited in scope, was devoid of advantages. Politically, it set one Moslem against another,⁶⁵ and militarily, it harassed Ottoman troops and occasionally disrupted communications along the Hedjaz railway. But between the original expectations, on which the deal between the British and Hussein was based, and the actual performance, there was a considerable gap. There was no general uprising against the Turk. The Arab revolt, as Lawrence succinctly concluded, bore a distinctly "*local* nature."⁶⁶ If any party remained in debt towards the other, it was rather the

Arab to the British than vice versa.

It remains now to examine the question whether Palestine was in fact included or excluded from the promises made to Hussein, and why McMahon's wording was so vague as to give rise in subsequent years to such acrimonious controversy.

The point of view advanced during the twenties and thirties by the Arabs was that, since Palestine was not specifically mentioned in the reservations made by McMahon in his letter of 24 October 1915, it followed that it was *ipso facto* included in the territory in which Great Britain was to recognize Arab independence.⁶⁷ In contrast, the British government maintained that McMahon's reservation applied to "those portions of Syria lying to the west of the district of Damascus," reading the term "district" as equivalent to "vilayet"; and since the vilayet of Damascus comprised *inter alia* also the sanjaks of Hauran and Maan, which became known as Transjordan, it followed that the vilayet of Beirut and the independent sanjak of Jerusalem, were covered by the reservations, to the effect that "the whole of Palestine, west of the Jordan, was thus excluded from Sir H. McMahon's pledge."⁶⁸ The Arabs rejected the equation of "district" with "vilayet" and remained adamant in their position. Yet a succession of British officials, notably McMahon, Clayton, and William Ormsby-Gore, then Colonial Secretary, testified that it was never their intention that Palestine "should be included in the general pledge given to the Sherif."⁶⁹ Clayton, according to his own testimony, was "in daily touch with Sir Henry McMahon throughout the negotiations with King Hussein, and made the preliminary drafts of all the letters," whilst Ormsby-Gore served in 1916 in the Arab Bureau in Cairo and on McMahon's staff. In spring 1939, in connection with the Palestine Round Table Conferences in London, a joint committee of British and Arab representatives was set up to examine the McMahon correspondence, but failed to reach agreement on matters of interpretation. The British representatives agreed that the language used to indicate the exclusion of Palestine was "not so specific and unmistakable as it was thought to be at the time," and that "Arab contentions regarding the meaning of the disputed phrase [district] have greater force than has appeared hitherto," but maintained that "on proper construc-

tion of the Correspondence Palestine was in fact excluded." Lord Maugham, Lord Chancellor and spokesman for the British representatives, confidently reiterated that: "The Correspondence as a whole, and particularly the reservation in respect of French interests in Sir Henry McMahon's letter of the 24th October, 1915, not only did exclude Palestine but should have been understood to do so."⁷⁰ Official Foreign Office records, now available at the Public Record Office, fully confirm this conclusion. It is however a matter of surprise that the Committee, though said to have examined microscopically the wording of the actual correspondence, did overlook much other material related to its background which tends to support the British case.

It may be recalled that Hussein, in his letter of 14 July 1915, when outlining the boundaries of territory to fall within the sphere of Arab independence, was acting under the inspiration of the Arab secret societies in Syria. Hussein himself declared that these boundaries represented not the suggestion of one individual, but the "demands of our people" in the regions concerned.⁷¹ Although excessive, they were not taken at the British Residency in Cairo at their face value, but regarded merely as a basis for negotiations, an assumption which statements made by al-Faruqi in October-November of that year fully endorsed. Al-Faruqi conveyed the impression that the aims of the *al-'Ahd* and *al-Fatat* societies were moderate. They fully realized that the establishment of an Arab Empire, as they visualized it, was entirely outside the realm of practical politics; in al-Faruqi's own words: "our scheme embraces all the Arab countries, including Syria and Mesopotamia, but if we cannot have all, we want as much as we can get." They appreciated that, in the regions in question, England was bound by obligations to her Allies and they would recognize the French position in Syria. The point on which the Young Arabs would not budge was the inclusion of Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, and Homs in the Arab Confederation. Otherwise, Clayton noted, the leaders of the Arab societies were "open to reason and ready to accept a considerably less ambitious scheme than that which they formulated" earlier.⁷²

That the inclusion of Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Damascus within the Arab state was the Syrian nationalist leaders' pri-

mary concern is evident also from General Maxwell's cable to Lord Kitchener, as well as from McMahon's private communication to Sir Edward Grey of 18 October: "The occupation by France of the purely Arab districts of Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Damascus, would be opposed by the Arabs by force of arms, but with this exception, they would accept some modifications of the northwestern boundaries proposed by the Sherif of Mecca."

On the same day, McMahon assured the Foreign Office that the Arabs "have not included the places inhabited by a foreign race in the territories which they demand."⁷³ What then was the nature of the modifications of the northwestern boundaries and conversely the extent of the territories excluded from the sphere of Arab independence? The answer can be gauged from al-Faruqi's statement to Sykes on 20 November 1915, during the latter's stay in Cairo. Sykes, anticipating difficulties with France, pressed Faruqi to be specific. The latter responded: "Arabs would agree to convention with France, granting her monopoly of all concessionary enterprise in Syria and Palestine"; the area to be bounded by the Euphrates in the north running south to Deir Zor, and to Dera'a and along the Hedjaz Railway to Maan. Furthermore, "the Arabs would . . . agree to employment of none but Frenchmen as advisers and European employees in this area. . . [and] to all French educational establishments having special recognition in this area." An identical convention would be concluded with Britain with regard to Irak, Jazirah, and Northern Mesopotamia, Basra and its enclave to the south would be recognized as British territory.⁷⁴

If Sykes' cryptic language conveyed al-Faruqi's thoughts faithfully and if the terms "monopoly of all concessionary enterprise" and "employment of advisers" were substitutes for sphere of influence, which in the given context was most likely, then we can visualize two lines demarcating the French sphere from that designated for an independent Arab state. One was to run in a crescent from Adana to the Euphrates, and from there along the river as far as Der-es-Zor, taking in the district of Aleppo. The second line was to run from the center of the crescent southwards towards Dera'a and along the Hedjaz railway to Maan, leaving out the four towns of the Syrian hinterland. Thus the Arab state or confederation of states was to

cover the districts of Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Damascus, then southwards the territory which later became known as Transjordan and the Arabian peninsula, except Aden and the sheikdoms adjacent to the Persian Gulf. The bulk of Mesopotamia east of the Euphrates was to fall within the British sphere of interest, and the districts of Mersina and Alexandretta, the Lebanon and the whole of Palestine extending eastwards as far as the Hedjaz railway and southwards to the Egyptian border, under the French sphere of influence. The desiderata of *al-'Ahd* and *al-Fatat* covered only Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Damascus. Inclusion of these districts was regarded as *conditio sine qua non* for initiating a revolt against Turkey. Palestine and the Syrian littoral were left out. Both because of the long-standing French interests there and because these regions could hardly be termed "purely Arab districts," the two societies did not see fit to claim them. As Lloyd George put it: "The Arabs' special concern was for Irak and Syria. . . . Palestine did not seem to give them much anxiety. For reasons which were obvious to them they realized that there were genuine international interests in Palestine, which placed it in a totally different category."⁷⁵

Al-Faruqi was operating at a high level. His statements, McMahon understood, conveyed "the purpose" of the Sherif's letter of 14 July 1915, which outlined the boundaries of Arab independence. But Faruqi was more than an interpreter or even a representative of Hussein in Cairo. "Your honour will have realized," Hussein briefed McMahon on 1 January 1916, "that after arrival of Mohammed [Faruqi] . . . all our procedure up to the present, was of no personal inclination or the like . . . but that everything was the result of the decisions and desires of our peoples . . . we are but transmitters and executants." McMahon had therefore reason to take al-Faruqi's word as reflecting, if not binding upon, that of his fellow Arabs. Being under the firm impression that Palestine was excluded from Arab desiderata, there was no compelling necessity for him to specify its exclusion, all the more as he understood that the Arabs "have not included the places inhabited by a foreign race in the territories which they demand."⁷⁶ This limitation applied with particular force to Palestine where, according to British Consular reports, there were before the war about 100,000

Jews.⁷⁷

This, however, does not dispose of the enigma of McMahon's ambiguous wording in his fatal letter of 24 October 1915, which left a loophole for future assertions that the British pledge extended also to Palestine. Was the failure a mere accident caused by undue haste in despatching the note which admitted "no delay," or a deliberately calculated risk? Philip Graves was the first, in a book published in 1923,⁷⁸ to throw some light on this question. We are now in a position to confirm that Graves' statement was, in fact, a repetition of McMahon's confidential letter to Sir John Shuckburgh at the Colonial Office dated 12 March 1922. With the controversy unfolding, McMahon wished it to be put on record that in his letter of 24 October 1915 it was his intention to exclude Palestine from the Arab state. He thought that he had so worded his letter as to make this "sufficiently clear for all purposes." He elucidated:

My reasons for restricting myself to specific mention of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo in that connexion in my letter were: (1) that these were places to which the Arabs attached vital importance and (2) that there was no place I could think of at the time of sufficient importance for purposes of definition further south of the above.

It was as fully my intention to exclude Palestine as it was to exclude the more northern coastal tracts of Syria.

I did not make use of the Jordan to define the limits of the southern area, because I thought it might be considered desirable at some later stage of negotiations to endeavour to find some more suitable frontier line east of the Jordan and between that river and the Hejaz Railways. At that moment, moreover, very detailed definitions did not seem called for.

I may mention that I have no recollection of ever having anything from the Sherif of Mecca, by letter or message, to make me suppose that he did not also understand Palestine to be excluded from independent Arabia.⁷⁹

McMahon's predicament is understandable. Neither the river Jordan nor the eastern limit of the French sphere, as sketched out by al-Faruqi — running from Der-es-Zor to Dera'a and along the Hedjaz railway to Maan — seemed to him to offer a practical border between Palestine and the projected Arab

state, and since the matter at that time was only of academic import, McMahon did not think it necessary to spell out a precise delimitation. But Palestine's exclusion was embodied also in the phrase "the regions . . . in which Great Britain is [not] free to act without detriment to the interests of her ally France." In this case, we are fortunate to have McMahon's contemporary explanation. On 26 October 1915, he told Grey:

I have been definite in stating that Great Britain will recognize the principle of Arab independence in purely Arab territory, this being the main point on which agreement depends, but have been equally definite in excluding Mersina, Alexandretta and those districts on the northern coast of Syria, which cannot be said to be Arab and where I understand that French interests have been recognized.

However, with regard to the portions lying south of the vilayet of Beirut, he had no option but to be vague:

I am not aware of the extent of French claims in Syria, nor of how far His Majesty's Government have agreed to recognize them. Hence . . . I have endeavoured to provide for possible French pretensions to those places by a general modification to the effect that His Majesty's Government can only give assurances in regard to those territories 'in which she can act without detriment to the interests of her ally France'.⁸⁰

The territory about which McMahon was dubious as to the extent of French claims being recognized by the British was Palestine, or, more precisely, the sanjak of Jerusalem. Four months earlier, a specially appointed Committee on Asiatic Turkey, under the chairmanship of Sir Maurice de Bunsen, Assistant Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign Office, had submitted a report on British desiderata in Turkey-in-Asia. The committee rejected the French claim to Palestine but considered that, for similar reasons, it was futile for the British to demand it.⁸¹ Such an imprecise formulation of policy could provide no guidance for McMahon in phrasing the relevant passage of his letter. But as France's standing in the Holy Land was a matter of common knowledge in the Levant, it seemed expedient to resort to the ambiguous but also elastic phrase of not being "free to act without detriment to the interests of her ally France" in

order to meet all possible contingencies. This was particularly the case since Grey had specifically warned McMahon to take heed of French susceptibilities in that area and agreed that the general reservation, especially with regard to the northwest boundaries [i.e., Syrian littoral and Palestine], was "most necessary."⁸²

The recommendations of the de Bunsen committee, it should be noted, pointed to the internationalization of Palestine and not to placing it under a single power. Although aware of this, McMahon thought it inadvisable to warn Hussein about it. "It will be observed," he wrote to Grey in the above mentioned letter, "that I have definitely specified France as the only Ally concerned. The use of the term 'Allies' would, I understand, inevitably have aroused the suspicion of the Arabs, who would have conjured up visions of all our Allies putting forward claims in various parts of the Arab territories." The reference to France was no indication that McMahon and his aides in Cairo unreservedly accepted the French claim to Palestine. He was well aware of its strategic importance, both as an eastern outpost for Egypt and a link with Mesopotamia. This may explain his interest in Edgar Suarès's scheme for Jewish settlement in Palestine under British protection, which could have usefully tipped the scales in Britain's favor. That McMahon detected no contradiction between Suarès's scheme and the promises made to Hussein only reinforces the case that Palestine was not meant to be given to the Arabs. Neither Grey nor his staff at the Foreign Office discerned any such inconsistency.⁸³ A marginal annotation on a translated copy of Hussein's letter of 14 July 1915 indicates how London understood the limits of Arab independence. "It includes vilayets of Basra, Baghdad, Mosul, Aleppo and Damascus."⁸⁴ In other words, in the opinion of the Foreign Office officials, Hussein's desiderata did not include the Syrian littoral and Palestine. If O'Beirne feared that the scheme of Jewish colonization in Palestine "with the possible prospect of eventual Jewish self-government . . . might have a very chilling effect on the Arab leaders,"⁸⁵ it was not because he thought it conflicted with the McMahon-Hussein correspondence, but because it might entail displacement of a "large proportion of the 6-700,000 [native] Arabs," although he believed this could

be avoided.⁸⁶

In 1922, Sir Vivian Gabriel testified that Lord Kitchener, when Secretary of State for War, "would certainly not have admitted the exclusion of Palestine" from the Arab state.⁸⁷ Careful examination of both Foreign Office files and the Kitchener Papers⁸⁸ shows that there is no foundation for such a contention. Kitchener was indeed "most desirous," as he told General Maxwell, "of dealing with the Arab question in a manner satisfactory to the Arabs," but apart from this general statement he made no specific reference to the territorial extent of Arab independence. This was a political matter which lay within the province of the Foreign Office on which he, as Secretary of State for War, would not encroach. As far as Palestine was concerned, Kitchener adhered always to the view that it lay predominantly within the French sphere. "The French," he told the War Committee on 16 December 1915, "would leave the [Jerusalem] *enclave* [to be internationalized] but beyond that they would take everything up to the Egyptian boundary." Kitchener's favorite scheme was the acquisition of Alexandretta, linked territorially with Mesopotamia under a British protectorate. Palestine, curiously enough, he dismissed as of "no value." Should Turkey be partitioned, he reasoned, an Arab kingdom in Arabia under British auspices should be established, "bounded on the north by the . . . Tigris and Euphrates, and containing within it the chief Mohammedan Holy Places: Mecca, Medina and Kerbala."⁸⁹ The omission of Jerusalem, and even of Damascus, was not accidental; these were meant to fall within the French sphere of interest in recompense for their concession of Alexandretta. It is therefore highly improbable that Kitchener had the slightest intention of awarding Palestine to the Arabs. Such an idea never originated with any British minister or official in London or in Cairo.

Least of all would Lloyd George have entertained it. On 3 April 1917, at a conference at 10 Downing Street at which Curzon was present, Lloyd George warned Sykes before his departure on a mission to the East not to commit the British government to "any agreement with the [Arab] tribes which would be prejudicial to British interests." He impressed on Sir Mark also "the importance of not prejudicing the Zionist movement and

the possibility of its development under British auspices."⁹⁰ It would have been inconceivable for the Prime Minister to issue an instruction of such fundamental importance in the knowledge that it was incompatible with earlier promises made to Arab leaders.

"I was a party to the Balfour Declaration," Lord Milner declared in the House of Lords on 29 June 1923. "I do not believe that the Balfour Declaration is inconsistent with any pledges which have been given to King Hussein or to anybody else. . . . When all the documents are published it will be clearly established that in the promises which we made to King Hussein a distinct reservation was made of [Palestine]."

This was the consensus of opinion within the British government both before the Balfour Declaration was made public and after. A notable exception was Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee, at that time attached to the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office. In a *Memorandum on British Commitments to King Hussein*, he stated: "With regard to Palestine, His Majesty's Government are committed by Sir H. McMahon's letter to the Sherif on the 24th October 1915, to its inclusion in the boundaries of Arab independence." And in the same breath, he added: "But they have stated their policy regarding the Palestinian Holy Places and Zionist colonization in their message to him of the 4th January, 1918 — the well-known Hogarth message. In a second memorandum, dated 21 November 1918, in the item dealing with Palestine, he wrote: 'We are pledged to King Hussein that this territory [i.e., west of Jordan] shall be 'Arab' and 'independent'.'"⁹¹

This is rather a matter for surprise. Had Toynbee consulted McMahon's letter of 26 October 1915 to Grey, in which the High Commissioner explained why he had phrased his reservation covering the territory of Palestine as he did, Toynbee would have presumably arrived at a different conclusion. But even more puzzling is his failure to detect the relation between al-Faruqi's desiderata, which he gives in full, and McMahon's letter to Hussein of 24 October 1915. It was, it may be remembered, al-Faruqi's exclusion of the Syrian littoral, running from Alexandretta down to the Egyptian border near Rafah, from the projected Arab state, which was the cornerstone of McMahon's crucial letter to Hussein. Nor was Toynbee struck by

the inconsistency between Hussein's acceptance of the formula conveyed to him by Hogarth and his own conclusion that the British Government had pledged that Palestine should be "Arab" and "independent." Had this been the case, Hussein would not have been slow to protest against such an unwarranted intrusion.

What grounds did Professor Toynbee have for reaching his conclusion? He has been good enough to say that, in the autumn of 1918, when considering the question, much depended on the meaning of the word "vilayet of Damascus." In Ottoman administrative usage, it was applicable in a wider sense, covering Cis-Jordanian Palestine, whereas in Arabic, *wilayah* meant "environs," "banlieux." Professor Toynbee thinks that McMahon could not have used the Ottoman terminology in his letter of 24 October 1915, in which case Palestine was meant to be included.⁹² This is, however, a hypothesis which, though cogently argued,⁹³ cannot hold good when juxtaposed with McMahon's contemporary testimony. Moreover, in correspondence on political matters, it is most unlikely that a High Commissioner would have resorted to ambiguous wording in the Arab vernacular in preference to accepted terminology in which both Hussein and his son Abdullah were well versed.

Nearer the mark would be the explanation offered by W. J. Childs of the Foreign Office in a paper dated 24 October 1930.⁹⁴ Childs pointed out, quite correctly, that Dr. Toynbee, when preparing his memorandum, used a copy of the Arab Bureau's *History of the Hedjaz Rising*,⁹⁵ as his various references showed. The *History*, in Childs's view, perverted McMahon's pledge. It was "in no way authoritative and should not be taken at face value." It read the phrase "districts of Damascus" as meaning its immediate neighborhood, thus gratuitously including Palestine in the Arab area; a most peculiar interpretation, since subsequent statements, private and public, made by prominent members of the Arab Bureau contradicted it.⁹⁶ At any rate, Childs goes on to explain, when Toynbee was preparing his memorandum, he felt that he was on "safe ground, being conclusively supported by the views of the Arab Bureau," a fact which accounted for his failure to make any serious attempt "to examine the pledge critically." Toynbee did not trace the connection between al-Faruqi's declaration and McMahon's

wording which was "construed in the wide sense intended by El-Faroki [*sic*]; that the 'district of Damascus' extended to the Gulf of Akaba," thus, by implication, excluding Palestine from the Arab area.⁹⁷

Curzon was the only Minister who thought that the British government had made conflicting promises to Arabs and Jews. On 5 December 1918, at a meeting of the Eastern Committee, of which he was chairman, he made a statement which practically amounted to a verbal repetition of that produced by Toynbee.⁹⁸ Curzon did not however persist in his mistake for long. On 15 October 1919, in his letter to Emir Feisal, he made no mention of Jerusalem (or of any other city in Palestine) being included in the area where the British government was bound to recognize the establishment of "an independent Arab State."⁹⁹ Several weeks later the whole question was re-examined by Major Hubert Young, an Arabist who had participated in Arab military operations east of the Jordan under Emir Feisal and T. E. Lawrence. In 1920, when serving in the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, he read the Arabic text of McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915 and found that the meaning in Arabic of the words "district of Damascus" was equivalent to the Ottoman "vilayet," which extended southwards to the Gulf of Akaba, with Damascus as its capital. It followed that the area of Palestine to the west of the vilayet's boundary (running along the river Jordan and the medial line of the Dead Sea), was excluded. The British government adopted Young's interpretation and, in the ensuing years, followed it consistently. It was not without good reason that Lloyd George, in his memoirs, when reproducing Curzon's statement in the Eastern Committee almost in its entirety, pointedly omitted the passage that "the British Government pledged itself that [Palestine] should be Arab and independent in the future."¹⁰⁰

McMahon's statement that the fact that Palestine was not included in his pledge "was well understood . . . at the time . . . by King Hussein,"¹⁰¹ is fully borne out by contemporary evidence. Although Hussein must have been aware that Sir Henry's letter of 24 October 1915 was nearly a replica of al-Faruqi's scheme, Wingate was not satisfied and, through Seyyid Ali Morghani, hastened to reiterate the "reservations which

we [the British] have made in Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia."¹⁰² Two months later (letter dated 1 January 1916) the Sherif reminded the High Commissioner that after the conclusion of the war he would claim "Beirut and its coastal regions,"¹⁰³ but made no mention of the sanjak of Jerusalem. The following year, Fuad Khetib, Hussein's Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, was reported to have said that he anticipated "no difficulty with the Jews . . . 'now we understand each other.'"¹⁰⁴ Even more indicative of Hussein's attitude was his deliberate silence following the publication of the Balfour Declaration. He categorically refused to add his voice to protests against this document, though urged to do so by the Syrian notables in Cairo. On the contrary; we learn from Antonius that Hussein "ordered his sons . . . to allay the apprehensions caused by the Balfour Declaration among their followers [and] dispatched an emissary to Feisal at Aqaba with similar instructions."¹⁰⁵ When Hogarth called on the King, 4 January 1918, the latter seemed quite prepared to accept the formula that "no obstacle should be put in the way of the realization of [the Zionist] ideal . . . and agreed enthusiastically, saying that he welcomed Jews to all Arab lands."¹⁰⁶ About three months later, Antonius tells us, Hussein caused an article to be published in *al-Qibla* (23 March 1918), his official mouthpiece. Palestine, the article attested, was "a sacred and beloved homeland . . . [of] its original sons (*abna' ihil-l-asliyim*)" — the Jews. "The resources of the country are still virgin soil" which could not provide a livelihood for the Palestinian native. But the Jewish immigrants would develop the country. "Experience has proved their capacity to succeed in their energies and their labours. . . . The return of these exiles (*jaliya*) to their homeland will prove materially and spiritually an experimental school for their [Arab] brethren . . . in the fields, factories and trades."¹⁰⁷

In 1920, Colonel C. E. Vickery, an accomplished Arabist, was sent on an official mission from Cairo to Jedda to examine the original Arabic text of the correspondence and found that Palestine was not included in the proposals to Hussein. But it was not before 1939 that Vickery published his impressions:

I can say most definitely that the whole of the King's demands were centred around Syria, and only around Syria. Time after

time he referred to the vineyard, to the exclusion of any other claim or interest. He stated most emphatically that he did not concern himself at all with Palestine and had no desire to have suzerainty over it for himself or his successors.¹⁰⁸

As for Feisal, he seemed first to have fallen under the spell of the Syrians in Cairo and was "inclined the other way," but Clayton endeavored to persuade him, through Lawrence, that his sphere stretched east of the Jordan and not to Palestine, which lay "outside the real Arab policy." But it was only following Feisal's meeting with Weizmann in Aqaba on 4 June 1918 that Clayton was able to tell Miss Gertrude Bell: "There is little doubt that the main ambition of the Sherifian Arab lies (at any rate, of Sherif Feisal) in Syria. His eyes are fixed on Damascus and Aleppo and nothing else seems to matter to him. . . . It is this that leads him to welcome Jewish co-operation, as he is quite prepared to leave Palestine alone provided he can secure what he wants in Syria."¹⁰⁹ Guided by his mentor Lawrence, Feisal proved so zealous in forcing his way into Syria that he soon overplayed his hand. He was urgently summoned by General Allenby, who, reminding him of the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, told him that he would "have the Administration of Syria (less Palestine and the Lebanon Province) [but] under French guidance and financial backing, [and] that the Arab sphere would include the hinterland of Syria only." Feisal, according to General Chauvel's note, "objected very strongly" and pretended to have no knowledge about arrangements with France; he understood from Lawrence that the Arabs were to have "the whole of Syria including the Lebanon but excluding Palestine."¹¹⁰

Four months later, when asking the Supreme Council at the Versailles Conference for recognition of Arab independence, he specifically excluded the Lebanon and Palestine. "Palestine, for its universal character," according to D. H. Miller, "be left on one side for the mutual consideration of all parties concerned."¹¹¹ Feisal's agreement with Weizmann on 3 January 1919¹¹² shows that, in principle, he was prepared to give the Zionists a free hand in Palestine and renounce any claims to it provided, as the inserted postscript in Arabic indicates, the

Arabs achieved independence in Syria. This was also implicit in Feisal's positive response to William Yale's solution setting Palestine apart under British mandate and permitting the Zionists to carry out their plan.¹¹³ Not before 1921 were accusations of betrayal and double dealing hurled against Britain. This is understandable. With Feisal's eviction from Damascus, Palestine provided a convenient outlet for the Arabs' mounting frustration, but the charges were unfounded. As Professor Temperley put it: "Had . . . the Emir not been ejected from Syria by the French, much less might have been heard of his father's claim to Palestine."¹¹⁴

Feisal made the first challenge on 20 January 1921 in an interview at the Foreign Office with R. C. Lindsay, representing Curzon, the Foreign Secretary. Feisal claimed that "nothing in the original correspondence stated that Palestine should be excluded from the Arab boundaries." To this Lindsay pointed out that Palestine had been "expressly reserved" from these boundaries and the relevant passage from McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915 was read aloud to the Emir in Arabic. After an exchange of views, Feisal conceded that it had been the original intention of the British government to exclude Palestine. This concession, however, he qualified by the contention that, "as the Arabic stood, it would clearly be interpreted by any Arab, and had been so interpreted by King Hussein, to refer to the four towns and their immediate surroundings [and as] Palestine did not lie to the west of the four towns [it] was therefore . . . included in the area for which His Majesty's Government had given pledges to his father."¹¹⁵

Childs, who cited Feisal's statement in his memorandum, commented that, in 1915, it suited Sherif Hussein and his advisers to give the word "district" the widest possible interpretation, whereas in 1920, "the narrowest interpretation promised them the greater advantage." He found Feisal's arguments "deliberately disingenuous." That Feisal persistently substituted the word "town" (not prefixed in McMahon's letter) for "districts" suggested that he was fully alive to the weakness of his case. The native Arab populace might have had a local usage of the word vilayet, as meaning vicinity or immediate surroundings, but this argument, Childs remarked, was beside the point. He was convinced that the British government's

interpretation of the contested passage had been adopted on "adequate grounds, and in good faith."

The dispute which bedeviled Middle East politics during the twenties and thirties can now be comfortably resolved: the exclusion of Palestine from promises made by McMahon to Hussein was covered both in the phrase "the regions . . . in which Great Britain is [not] free to act without detriment to the interests of her ally France," and in that "portion of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus." That advantage would be taken of its ambiguity to interpret "districts" in the narrower sense of "neighborhood" could not be foreseen. Moreover, examination of Foreign Office records shows how shaky, on all counts, was the basis of the McMahon-Hussein understanding. It was extracted from the British by the unwarranted assertion that German-Turkish recognition of Arab independence was imminent. McMahon thereupon made a hasty decision, misjudging its far-reaching implications. He made a pledge on behalf of the British government, yet did little to consult London. The correspondence, although protracted, remained inconclusive.¹¹⁶ However, the deal was not a unilateral one. Its permanence and strength depended on how the Arabs fulfilled their part; and, as our evidence suggests, it was they who remained in debt, not the British. Hussein contributed his share and for this he was amply rewarded in the Hedjaz.¹¹⁷ But when the general Arab uprising in the regions of the Fertile Crescent failed to materialize, the corresponding part of the understanding, pledging the recognition of Arab independence east of the Jordan and in the Syrian hinterland, lapsed. All in all, the correspondence was not a foundation on which sound Anglo-Arab relations could be built; its imperfections were pinpointed by Dr. Toynbee:

Our commitments to King Hussein are not embodied in any agreement or treaty signed or even acknowledged by both parties. In this way they differ from those to Russia, France, Italy [the 1916 Asia Minor Agreement] and certain independent Arab rulers such as the Idrisi and Bin Saud. They can only be analysed by summarizing the history of our dealings with the King during the War, under different heads. And the position is complicated by the King's habit of ignoring or refusing to take note of conditions laid down by us to which he objects and then carrying

on as if the particular question had been settled between us according to his own desires.¹¹⁸

Significantly, Emir Feisal made no reference to his father's correspondence when presenting the Arab case to the Peace Conference in Paris. Neither Britain's Allies, signatories to the Asia Minor Agreement, nor the League of Nations, endorsed it. From the point of view of international law, the McMahon-Hussein correspondence had no validity.

Preamble

The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence: Comments by Arnold Toynbee

Mr. Friedman's article in the *Journal* on this subject is by far the best of the discussions of it, known to me, that have been published so far. He has made a very comprehensive and careful study of the information now accessible. He has not only studied the official papers, now on view in the Public Record Office, which are the most important part of the evidence; he has also taken into account other sources of information, both published and unpublished. Moreover, Mr. Friedman has been non-polemical in his treatment of a subject that has become controversial, and he has dealt courteously and considerately with the people, living and dead, who were personally concerned.

In writing the following notes on Mr. Friedman's article, my purpose is not to enter into controversy with him, but to supplement what he has written from my own knowledge and to put some questions which arise, I think, out of Mr. Friedman's paper, but which are not fully answered there. Very likely, Mr. Friedman knows what the answers are, since it is clear that he has made himself a master of the subject.

The reasons why there are memoranda, written by me, among the relevant official documents, now in the Public Record Office, are as follows. In 1918, I was a temporary Foreign Office clerk in the FO's Political Intelligence Department. About six weeks before the Armistice of 11 November 1918, I was told to get from the FO Registry all files dealing with HMG's existing

commitments in the Middle East (including still valid pre-war commitments; e.g., the international agreements of the eighteen-sixties about the Lebanon) and to submit memoranda setting out what these commitments were and stating whether, in my judgment, they were or were not all compatible with each other. The FO Registry is efficient, and I do not think that any relevant FO files failed to reach my desk. I quickly noticed one blank. The files concerned with the St. Jean de Maurienne Agreement (which assigned zones to Italy in Anatolia) did not include the record of the actual agreement. On inquiry, I was told that, at the crucial stage in the negotiations, Lloyd George had taken these out of the FO's hands and had eventually presented the FO with a *fait accompli*. However, the St. Jean de Maurienne Agreement is not relevant to Palestine. I am sure that I had before me every relevant file that was in the Foreign Office. I certainly had all those, of dates earlier than the end of 1918, that are mentioned by Mr. Friedman in his article.

One of my memoranda was the paper on *British Commitments to King Hussein*.¹ I submitted this and my other memoranda to Crowe, who was then Permanent Under-Secretary, and I went through them with him personally. He ordered them to be put into the FO Print, and to be included in the FO's dossier of papers for the Peace Conference. This was done. Immediately after our arrival in Paris, I was sent for by Smuts and was told by him to boil down my memoranda to something that the statesmen who were going to take the decisions would have time to read. I then produced the second paper to which Mr. Friedman refers.²

The following points are, I think, undisputed:

- i. It was the arrival of Muhammad Sherif al-Faruqi in Cairo that constituted the decisive turning-point³ in the British negotiations with Hussein. Al-Faruqi's formula seemed to the British authorities to give an opening to her satisfying the Ottoman Arabs without falling foul of the French.
- ii. According to al-Faruqi, "the point on which the Young Arabs would not budge, was the inclusion of Damascus, Aleppo, Hama and Homs in the Arab Confederation."⁴
- iii. McMahon, in writing his letter of 24 October 1915 to Hus-

sein, took his cue from al-Faruqi's hint in the name of the Ottoman Arab organizations, on whose behalf al-Faruqi claimed to be speaking, that the Ottoman Arabs might acquiesce in territorial concessions to France that did not extend to the four towns that al-Faruqi had named.

McMahon, in his letter to Hussein of 24 October 1915, named "the wilayahs of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo" as being the Ottoman territories in, and to the east of which, but not to the west of which, HMG was prepared to recognize and uphold Arab independence. Why was McMahon's use, in this letter, of the word "wilayahs" apparently interpreted on 29 November 1916, by the author of the Arab Bureau's *History of the Hedjaz Rising*,⁵ and certainly interpreted by me in my two memoranda and by the Arab Delegation to London in 1922, as meaning, not "vilayets," in the Ottoman official meaning of the word, but "environs" or "banlieux," which was the unofficial usage of the word in Arabic? When I was writing my first memorandum (my second was merely an abridgment of the whole of my set of memoranda), I had before me the English version of McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915, as well as the Arab Bureau's *History*. Why did I interpret McMahon's "wilayahs" in the sense in which the author of the *History* appears to have interpreted it? And why did the Arab Delegation put forward the same interpretation in 1922?

The identical interpretation was made independently by three different people at three different dates. In 1918, I did not have the time or the opportunity to compare notes with the author of the Arab Bureau's *History* (I still do not know who he was). In 1922, the Arab Delegation cannot have had access to my papers, and I never met any of the members of the Delegation or had any correspondence with any of them. (I had ceased to be a temporary Foreign Office clerk in the spring of 1919, and in any case I should not have been entitled to give the Arab Delegation any information.) Of course, by 1922, the Arab Delegation had an obvious political motive for interpreting McMahon's "wilayahs" as meaning "environs," not "provinces." But the author of the Arab Bureau's *History* in 1916, and I in 1918, had no political ax to grind. We were concerned solely to make out, if we could, what HMG's commitments actually

were. Nor would the Arab Delegation in 1922 have felt it worth while to interpret McMahon's "wilayahs" as we had done if there had not been a convincing reason for interpreting the word in this context in this way.

Mr. Friedman is quite right in saying (pp. xlv) that the most natural interpretation of the words "the wilayah of Damascus" would have been "the Ottoman province of Damascus," not "the environs of Damascus." However, McMahon did not write "the wilayah of Damascus," he wrote "the wilayahs (in the plural) of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo," and this is why his word "wilayahs" was interpreted three times, independently, as meaning not "provinces," but "environs."

There were no Ottoman vilayets of Homs and Hama. In the vilayet of Damascus there was a sanjaq of Hama consisting of four kazas, two of which were the kazas of Hama and Homs. There was a vilayet of Aleppo, but this vilayet extended westwards to the coast. Its sanjaq of Aleppo included, among its kazas, the three coastal kazas of Iskanderun, Beilan, and Antaqiyeh. It is quite certain that McMahon was not intending to include these three kazas in the area within which HMG undertook to recognize and uphold Arab independence. In his letter of 26 October 1915, to Grey, McMahon says "I have been definite in excluding Mersina, Alexandretta (i.e., Iskanderun) and those districts on the northern coast of Syria which cannot be said to be Arab and where I understand that French interests have been recognized."

If McMahon was intending (as certainly was to be expected) to write in terms of Ottoman official administrative areas, what he ought to have written was "the vilayet of Damascus and the portion of the vilayet of Aleppo that lies to the east of a line running northward from. . ." — and here he would have had to describe a line running northwards, from the north-east corner of the Ladiqiyeh sanjaq of the vilayet of Beirut through the vilayet of Aleppo to this vilayet's northern boundary.

Subject to Mr. Friedman's opinion of this point, I guess that this was why the author of the Arab Bureau's *History* substituted the word "line" for McMahon's word "districts." I think that he must have been trying, as I was trying, simply to make out what McMahon had meant.

The consequences of interpreting McMahon's "wilayahs" as

meaning "Ottoman provinces" are so disconcerting that it was — and, to my mind, still is — difficult to believe that McMahon was intending to use the word in this sense in his letter. This interpretation would force on us a choice between the two following alternative conclusions:

- i. First alternative: McMahon was completely ignorant of Ottoman administrative geography. He did not know that the Ottoman vilayet of Aleppo extended westward to the coast, and he did not know that there were no Ottoman vilayets of Homs and Hama. It seems to me incredible that McMahon can have been as ill-informed as this, and that he would not have taken care to inform himself correctly when he was writing a letter in which he was making very serious commitments on HMG's account.
- ii. Second alternative: McMahon was properly acquainted with Ottoman administrative geography, and was using the word "wilayahs" equivocally. Apropos of Damascus, he was using it to mean "Ottoman provinces"; apropos of Homs and Hama, and Aleppo, he was using it to mean "environs." This equivocation would have been disingenuous, impolitic, and pointless. I could not, and still cannot, believe that McMahon behaved so irresponsibly.

I do not know when, in the discussion between al-Faruqi and the British, and in the correspondence between McMahon and Hussein, the word "wilayahs" was first introduced in association with the names of the four towns that had been designated by al-Faruqi. Was this done by McMahon himself, or by his draftsman, or by the translator into Arabic of the letter that McMahon or his draftsman had composed for dispatch on 24 October 1915? It seems to me most improbable that McMahon got the word "wilayahs," as well as the four place-names, from al-Faruqi. Al-Faruqi was an Arab Ottoman officer. I shall not be convinced that al-Faruqi ever wrote or said "the wilayahs of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo" unless and until these words appear in a document written or dictated in Arabic by al-Faruqi himself. Mr. Friedman does not quote any documents of al-Faruqi's own, and I do not know of any. The only information that I know of about al-Faruqi's

statements is contained in reports, at second hand, of British officials who had talked to him. There can be no doubt that he mentioned the four place-names, and he must have had in mind, not just the four towns but a continuous belt of territory linking them together. But is there any evidence of the extent of the area that he had in mind, and of the words in which he described it?

The areas that al-Faruqi outlined to Sykes on 20 November 1915⁶ were those in which the Ottoman Arabs would be willing to give a monopoly of concessions, foreign advisers and employees, and foreign educational work, to France and Britain, respectively. In this conversation — and, I believe, throughout — al-Faruqi took care to avoid defining the area which the Arabs would recognize as being French territory, though he did commit himself to Sykes, on this occasion, to recognizing an area round Basra as British territory. Al-Faruqi included not only the territory to the west of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo in his proposed French sphere of influence; he also included in it the four towns, and, since he carried the eastern boundary of the suggested French sphere of influence as far south as Maan, he was proposing to include in this sphere not only Damascus itself but also the whole of the Ottoman vilayet of Damascus. Mr. Friedman infers (p. xlv) that al-Faruqi was implying that all the territory between the western boundary of the Ottoman vilayet of Damascus, “down to the Egyptian border near Rafah,” was to be French territory. But this is only an inference. As I read al-Faruqi’s proposal according to Sykes’ report of it, al-Faruqi was deliberately limiting himself to defining the future French sphere of influence, and was taking care to avoid specifying, within this sphere, a boundary between French territory and Arab territory.

As long as I was in temporary government service I was never challenged on my interpretation of McMahon’s word “wilayahs”: not by Crowe, who was both well-informed and precise; not by Smuts (but Smuts was concerned only for brevity); and, most surprising of all, not by McMahon himself.

When the Western Powers decided to send an international commission of inquiry to Syria and Palestine, McMahon was appointed head of the British section, and I was appointed secretary. I came from Paris to London, met McMahon in

London for the first time, and worked there with McMahon every day, for several weeks, on making preparations for our intended expedition to the Middle East. I then fell sick, and, a week or two later, Britain and France withdrew from the commission and the United States carried out the inquiry alone. (It resulted in the King-Crane Report.)

During those weeks that I was in daily contact with McMahon, he never raised with me the question of the interpretation of his letter to Hussein of 24 October 1915. Of course, I did not raise it on my side; this was not my business, and also I was not aware that McMahon's interpretation of his letter was different from mine. Yet my memoranda must have been in McMahon's hands long since, and I was now going to be his aide. If, in the spring of 1919, McMahon was convinced that he had excluded Palestine from the area of Arab independence, it is incomprehensible to me that he did not take me up on this point — a point of great personal importance to him, as well as of public importance for the Commission — as soon as I arrived in London and reported to him. Yet McMahon never said a word to me about this. Nor had he previously taken up with the Arab Bureau its substitution of the word "line" for his word "wilayahs." The substitution had been made already in a prototype of the Arab Bureau's *History* which McMahon himself had forwarded to Grey on 19 April 1916.⁷ He forwarded this interpretation of his own letter without demur.

The first challenge to the Arab Bureau's interpretation and my interpretation that I had was from Major Hubert Young. He told me that he had been looking into the meaning of McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915 and had concluded that, apropos of Damascus, McMahon's "wilayahs" meant "the Ottoman vilayet of Damascus" — which would mean, of course, that in this letter McMahon had excluded Palestine from the area of Arab independence. The date at which Major Young told me this must have been about the time when he was writing his memorandum of 29 November 1920.

I have pointed out that, by 1922, the Arab Delegation to London had a political motive for interpreting McMahon's word "wilayahs" as meaning "environs." I must now also point out that, as soon as HMG was sure that it was going to get the mandate for Palestine, it had a political motive for interpreting

McMahon's word "wilayahs" as meaning, apropos of Damascus, "Ottoman vilayets." The acquisition of the mandate for Palestine carried with it, for Britain, the obligation to implement the Balfour Declaration, and HMG would have found it embarrassing to do this in the teeth of Palestinian Arab protests if it had not now maintained that Palestine was excluded from the area within which McMahon had pledged HMG to recognize and uphold Arab independence. The documents written by British officials, contesting the interpretation of McMahon's word "wilayahs" that was made by me and, before me, by the author of the Arab Bureau's *History*, all date from after the time at which HMG had become sure that Britain had Palestine in her pocket. The date on which the Principal Allied Powers assigned the mandate for Palestine to Britain is 24 April 1920. The date of Major Young's memorandum is 29 November 1920⁸; the date of McMahon's confidential letter to Sir John Shuckburgh is 12 March 1922⁹; the date of Childs's memorandum is 24 October 1930.¹⁰

It can be, and has been, argued that, even if the interpretation of McMahon's "wilayahs" as meaning "environs," not "Ottoman vilayets," is correct, McMahon's letter still excludes Palestine from the area of Arab independence by the reservation, included in the letter, that HMG could give assurances to the Arabs only in regard to those territories "in which she [*sic*] can act without detriment to the interests of her ally France." In making this reservation, McMahon was giving HMG *carte blanche* to revoke the undertakings that McMahon himself was making to the Arabs on HMG's behalf; but this reservation was a contingent one. It would come into effect only in so far as France claimed to have interests and pressed her claims.

In October 1915, McMahon did not know, because HMG did not know, what the extent of the French claims was going to be or how hard France was going to press them. On 24 April 1920, the Principal Allied Powers, of whom France was of course one, assigned the mandate for Palestine to Britain, and thus France implicitly renounced any interest in Palestine that she may previously have claimed. On the same date, however, the Principal Allied Powers, of whom Britain also was one, assigned the mandates for the Lebanon and Syria to France, so, on that date, the contingent reservation in France's favor that

McMahon had included in his letter of 24 October 1915 was liquidated in respect of Palestine but simultaneously came into force in respect of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo — the very places that McMahon had explicitly included (subject to this reservation) in the area within which he pledged HMG to recognize and uphold Arab independence. Accordingly, HMG made no move to uphold Arab independence there when, in July 1920, France pressed her claim to the four towns in the interior of Syria by conquering them by force of arms.

In any case, the McMahon-Hussein correspondence, of which McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915 to Hussein was a part, did not result in the conclusion of any agreement or treaty. I "pinpointed" this, as Mr. Friedman says (p. 1), in my memorandum on British Commitments to King Hussein. Thus the commitments in this letter of McMahon's had no juridical validity. Yet an undertaking may be morally valid, even if it does not have the force of law. McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915 was not, and is not, a dead letter, and the attempts to ascertain the true meaning of this letter have not been wasted labor. I do not agree with Mr. Friedman's judgment (p. xix) that today, the controversy over this question has no more than an academic interest. McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915 struck some of the sparks that have set ablaze the present conflagration in the Middle East.

I do not think that Young's or Childs's or Mr. Friedman's interpretation of McMahon's use of the word "wilayahs" is tenable. After studying Mr. Friedman's paper and writing these notes, I am inclined to think that the drafting of this letter was not disingenuous, but hopelessly muddle-headed. Incompetence is not excusable in transacting serious and responsible public business. If the draftsman had been Crowe or Hirtzel (I did some work for both of them, and have first-hand knowledge of their carefulness and precision), I think it is improbable that this important letter would have been as ambiguous as, unfortunately, it has proved to be.

Isaiah Friedman replies

I am grateful for Professor Toynbee's comments and for the opportunity to elucidate a few points. (Figures in parentheses refer to the pages of my article.)

I agree that, unlike the Arab Delegation, Toynbee in 1918 had no political ax to grind. If anything rather the reverse, for, in his memorandum dated 21 November 1918,¹ he recommended, consistently with Whitehall's desideratum, that Britain should administer Palestine and advised that the British Government should ensure "reasonable facilities" for Jewish colonization, without giving offense to Arab or general Moslem opinion. On this point he made an important contribution:

The problem of Palestine cannot be solved entirely on the principles of self-determination and free choice of assistance. As in Armenia, there will be a mixed population, and there will be one element in that population, in this case the Jewish colonists, which, for special reasons, will be entitled to a position more than mathematically proportionate to its numbers at the start.

Moreover, in Palestine there are international religious interests so important and so difficult to reconcile that they almost overshadow the internal problems of the native inhabitants.

However, his dilemma with regard to what appeared to him contradictory commitments made to Sherif Hussein (24 October 1915) and the Zionists (2 November 1917) remained unresolved, and his doubt has persisted for over half a century.

1. On what grounds did Dr. Toynbee reach his conclusion? At the time this question was only marginal, and I am inclined to think that W. J. Childs, in his paper dated 24 October 1930, was correct in assuming that, when Toynbee was preparing his memorandum, he used a copy of the Arab Bureau's *History of the Hedjaz Rising*, as his various references show (pp. xlv-xlv). Since writing my article, I have ascertained that the author of this work was Ormsby-Gore, then on the staff of the Arab Bureau.² It is not a "History," certainly not an interpretative one, nor even a summary, but merely a collection of cables and dispatches set out in chronological order about the Hedjaz rising and negotiations with the French representative in London

leading to the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The document in question, on which Toynbee based his conclusion, is dated 16 April 1916. I recently traced its paternity to David Hogarth.³ Noting that the correspondence with Sherif Hussein remained inconclusive, Hogarth attempted to establish what was and what was not agreed. He wrote:

We for our part have not agreed to:

A) Recognize Arab independence in Syria west of the line [*sic*] Aleppo-Hama-Homs-Damascus, or in any portion of the Arab area in which we are not free to act without detriment to our ally, France . . .

What has been agreed to, therefore, on behalf of Great Britain is:

A) To recognize the independence of those portions of the Arab speaking area in which we are free to act without detriment to the interests of France. Subject to these undefined reservations, the said area is understood to be bounded north by about latitude 37°. East by the Persian frontier. South by the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. West by the Red Sea and the Mediterranean up to about latitude 33° and beyond by an indefinite line [*sic*] drawn west of Damascus, Hama, Homs and Aleppo; all that lies within this last line and the Mediterranean [*i.e.*, the Syrian littoral] being, in any case, reserved absolutely for future arrangements between the French and the Arabs.

Hogarth joined the newly established Arab Bureau in mid-March 1916 and, beyond the correspondence, had no first-hand knowledge of relations with Sherif Hussein. Even a cursory examination of his note shows that:

1. He considered Hussein's letter of 14 July 1915, in which the latter outlined the boundaries of the Arab Empire bounded on the north by the line Mersina-Adana to parallel 37°N to include the whole of the Arabian peninsula (except Aden), Mesopotamia, Syria and what was later Transjordan and Palestine, as the ultimate embodiment of Arab desiderata. This was obviously not the case, since this letter served merely as a *basis* for negotiations (pp. xxiii-xxv);
2. He was completely unaware of what had passed since al-

Faruqi's appearance on the scene — a fatal gap, since it was the statements made by Faruqi that formed the cornerstone of McMahon's crucial letter of 24 October 1915 and his reservations set out therein;

3. He overlooked the correspondence between Cairo and London, for had he seen it, he would have realized from McMahon's cable to Grey of 26 October 1915 (p. xli) that "the area in which we are not free to act without detriment to the interests of our ally, France," was Palestine.

Moreover, Hogarth erroneously substituted the word "line" for the word "districts" used by McMahon, compounding this lapse by another mistake. By inventing a second line "up to about latitude 33° and beyond an indefinite line drawn inland west of Damascus . . . and the Mediterranean," he gratuitously included Palestine within the area of Arab "independence," contrary to McMahon's intention. When he reserved it "absolutely for future arrangement between the French and the Arabs," he tacitly admitted that Palestine fell within the French sphere of interest; the term "independence" was not used in its literal sense but was synonymous with liberation from the Turk.⁴

Hogarth's blunder stands out even more conspicuously when set against another section of his note where, discussing the Sykes-Picot Agreement, he wrote: "Palestine, west of Jordan, to be internationalized. Acre and Haifa to be British . . . Independent Arab State to consist of remaining area [i.e., east of Jordan and the Syrian hinterland], but to be divided into two spheres of influence . . . French and British." This inconsistency apparently accounts for McMahon's failure to notice Hogarth's error when forwarding a copy of his note (undated and unsigned) to London.⁵

However much Hogarth might have disliked the system of an international regime, particularly so close to the eastern Egyptian border, he saw one advantage in it: "Palestine under International Control was perhaps the best solution, especially in view of the aspirations of the Jews to the area in which they may enjoy some sort of proprietorship." This statement, written only two weeks after his note of 16 April 1916, is interesting, since he thought that the Lebanon, unlike Palestine, should have been included in the area of Arab independence.⁶

Hogarth's mistake, although unfortunate, was soon obliterated from his memory. Henceforth he regarded British-oriented Zionism as a useful tool with which to undermine the French position accorded by the May 1916 Asia Minor Agreement.⁷ On 4 January 1918, when delivering his (now famous) message to King Hussein, Hogarth could detect no contradiction between the terms of the Balfour Declaration and McMahon's pledge. Nor did his host, who referred to Palestine as "a sacred and beloved homeland . . . [of] its original sons (*abna' ihil-l-asliyim*)" — the Jews (p. xlvii). Hogarth was one of the high-ranking British officers who gave his unequivocal support to Yale's solution during the Peace Conference (p. xlix). In a paper read on 27 January 1925, he assured his audience that the British Government was "guiltless . . . of any betrayal of King Hussein. The sole condition of his active alliance . . . that he be freed from his Ottoman overlords and recognized as an independent sovereign — has been fulfilled."⁸ In the discussion that followed, Col. Jacob, Ormsby-Gore, Sir Percy Cox, and Sir Arnold Wilson participated. None of them disputed Hogarth's contention.

All signs show that Ormsby-Gore was unaware of the error that Hogarth made in his note of 16 April 1916, when he incorporated it into his voluminous collection entitled "Summary of Historical Documents . . .," on 29 November 1916. Early in 1917, Ormsby-Gore moved from Cairo to London to join the War Secretariat. He advised Lord Milner in drafting the Balfour Declaration, and like Sir Mark Sykes was considered an expert on Arab and Zionist affairs. In 1918, he accompanied the Zionist Commission to Palestine, and in 1919 assisted the British delegation to the Peace Conference. In none of his numerous memoranda, minutes, or dispatches is there the slightest hint that he saw any inconsistency between the British commitment to the Zionists and that made to Hussein. On 21 July 1937, then Colonial Secretary, he assured the House of Commons that "it was never in the mind of anyone on that staff [i.e., Arab Bureau] that Palestine west of the Jordan was in the area within which the British Government then undertook to further the cause of Arab independence . . . the whole sequel proves the case."

2. That McMahon made no comment on Toynbee's statement in 1919 does not prove that he agreed with it. It constituted a small part of Toynbee's memorandum and McMahon might have overlooked it (if he saw it at all). More telling is that McMahon fully endorsed Yale's solution on Palestine and the Middle East at the Peace Conference. Other distinguished British officers like Cmdr. Hogarth, General Allenby, Col. Lawrence, Col. Cornwallis, Col. Stirling, as well as Lord Robert Cecil, Emir Feisal, Rustum Haidar Bey, and Nuri Said, also approved Yale's plan. Yale, as his reports show, was well-informed about the nature of British commitments to Hussein and was in a position to judge whether or not they conflicted with those made to the Zionists.

Sir Eyre Crowe was undoubtedly a competent man, but in 1915-16 did not deal with the Arab question, and in 1919 also probably relied on other Middle East experts. How could he have suspected a "breach" if Emir Feisal, representing his father, publicly left Palestine aside and entered into an agreement with Dr. Weizmann? The late Sir Charles Webster (during the war, in Military Intelligence), who also assisted the British Delegation to Paris, in a personal interview with myself, categorically rejected any idea of contradictory promises to Arabs and Jews.

3. Not until January 1921, when Feisal made his first challenge, did the Foreign Office examine the whole question thoroughly. The "Summary of Historical Documents . . ." (on which Toynbee relied) was traced and printed with the explicit purpose of showing "without any possibility of doubt" what McMahon meant by the relevant passage of his letter of 24 October 1915.⁹ Professor Toynbee had by then left the Foreign Office and subsequently it was shown (see Childs's paper dated 24 October 1930) how he had been misled.

4. As to the meaning of the word "districts,"¹⁰ it would certainly have been much tidier had McMahon phrased the passage as Professor Toynbee suggests. But the fault was not McMahon's. As Childs had shown, this phrase originated with al-Faruqi. McMahon referred to it in his dispatch to Grey on 18 October 1915 (p. xxxviii) six days before making his territorial

pledges to Hussein. Since then it had become a cliché in both Cairo and London. Al-Faruqi certainly did not intend a narrow interpretation of the "immediate neighbourhood," since this would have been fatal to the whole concept of an Arab state stretching from the Syrian hinterland southwards through what later became Transjordan to Hedjaz. Moreover, we have McMahon's own interpretation given to Sir John Shuckburgh on 12 March 1922 (p. xxxix-xl), which I have no reason to question. The Arab Bureau staff were of course quite familiar with the administrative division of Syria and Palestine. Thus Ormsby-Gore specifically referred to the region east of the Jordan as "part of the Vilayet of Damascus."¹¹

5. Al-Faruqi specifically mentioned Palestine by name when excluding it, as well as the Syrian littoral, from the area destined to become an Arab state. Palestine was also covered in al-Faruqi's phrase "the places inhabited by a foreign race"; his statement conveyed the purpose of the Sherif's letter of 14 July 1915 outlining the boundaries of Arab independence. This is not my inference, as Professor Toynbee suggests; it was so understood at the time by McMahon, Clayton, Sykes, Sir Arthur Nicolson, and Grey (as their respective dispatches and notes show), and it was on the basis of this understanding that the Sykes-Picot Agreement was subsequently outlined. Moreover, al-Faruqi's reservations tally with Hussein's admission in his letter to his friend, Seyyid Ali Morghani: 'We have no reason for discussing the question of the frontier other than a preliminary measure.' Professor Toynbee overlooked all the evidence adduced in my article to this effect (pp. xxxvii-xxxix, xlv-xlvii).

6. France's standing in the East was a matter of common knowledge. Following her claim to Syria and Palestine in March 1915 (on the heels of Russia's claim to Constantinople), the British Government was in no position to assign any part of these provinces to the Arabs without French consent. Paris insisted that Syria was a purely French possession and by Syria meant the region bounded by the Taurus ridges on the north and the Egyptian frontier near Rafah on the south. This was what Picot stated officially to Nicolson during their

meeting in London on 23 November 1915.

With the Arab desiderata centered on the Syrian hinterland and their four towns, the future of Palestine was left exclusively to France and Britain and their allies. It is therefore immaterial to argue that, on 24 April 1920, when France renounced her interest in Palestine in favor of a British mandate, the force of the reservation made by McMahon in his letter of 24 October 1915 lapsed, and that, by the same token, the British Government was free to give Palestinian Arabs their independence. This argument is not new. It was advanced by successive Arab delegations to London (1922-39) and by Antonius. Lord Maugham, Lord Chancellor, dismissed it as "irrelevant"; Mr. Leonard Stein termed it "irrational" and "cynical" whilst Childs maintained that French interest remained. The official French position, was that the Jewish National Home policy should be implemented; the award of Palestine to the Arabs would have violated the French pledge given to the Zionists in June 1917 and February 1918, to say nothing of a similar pledge given by the Italian Government and the subsequent arrangement made by the League of Nations in 1922.¹²

I do not excuse the conduct of the French in Syria in July 1920, but it is worth bearing in mind: a) that British advice to Feisal in 1919/20 to come to terms with the French Government, as set out in the Asia-Minor [Sykes-Picot] Agreement, remained unheeded; b) that the nature of Arab "independence" in the Syrian interior was conditional on the extent of the Arab rising against the Turk, which did not take place; and, c) that the British position in regard to Palestine and the pledge to the Zionists, were unrelated to Franco-Arab relations in Syria.

7. I agree that, if the draftsman had been Crowe or Hirtzel, the important letter to Hussein would have been written differently. I presume that the readers of my article did not fail to take note of the attitude of Sir Arthur Hirtzel and the India Office to the whole affair (p. xxix).

8. I cannot accept Professor Toynbee's contention that, though devoid of any juridical validity, the undertaking to Sherif Hussein is still "morally valid." This undertaking, as I hope was

shown in my paper, was not of a *unilateral* nature, and, if any party remained in debt, it was rather the Arabs toward the British than vice versa; the method employed by al-Faruqi to extract far-reaching obligations from the British could not be termed moral. Nor can I accept Toynbee's assertion that, because of the British Government's interest in retaining the mandate over Palestine, statements and memoranda produced by British officials after April 1920 are not reliable. The charge that high-ranking officers and Ministers consistently and deliberately perjured themselves is to my mind inadmissible. Nor can I understand how Professor Toynbee overlooked a considerable body of evidence relating to the pre-1920 period (adduced in my article) that belies his conclusion. It would be legitimate to ask at this point why, in his 1918 memoranda, Toynbee recommended that Britain assume the role of trustee of the Jewish National Home, rather than hand Palestine to the Arabs, if he thought that it was included in the boundaries of Arab independence?

Whether or not the subject has any political bearing, is not for me to say. For me it was and remains an academic issue and I hope I treated it in that spirit. On the basis of my study, I do not hesitate to state that the record of the British Government in this matter is clean. It was not McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915, unfortunate though its phrasing was, that complicated Anglo-Arab-Jewish relations, but the myth that was built up around it. If to reveal historical truth helps to create a better climate of international understanding, the labor was not in vain.

Maps

Map 1 - reproduction of original

Ottoman administrative division of vilayets (districts) covering the territory of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.

Reproduced in Palestine Royal Commission Report, July 1937 (Peel Commission), Cmd 5479 (London 1937), facing page.

Map 2 - schematic & reproduction of original

Ottoman administrative division of vilayets (districts), in Arabic terminology, *wilāya*. The *wilāya* of Esh SHAM covers the territory of the Syrian hinterland and east of the River Jordan down to Akaba. Esh SHAM (Damascus) is the capital of this *wilāya*, vilayet in the Ottoman terminology.

Map 3 - schematic & reproduction of original

Map sketched by Lawrence (end of November 1918?). The line that separates Palestine from the territory to be allotted to the Arab State under Feisal runs 10 miles approximately east of the River Jordan and the Dead Sea.

Map 4 - schematic & reproduction of original

A map sketched by Toynbee on 8 October 1918. The eastern border of Palestine runs 10 miles approximately east of the River Jordan and the Dead Sea.

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Map 1

Map 2

Map 2

Map 3

Map 3

Map 4

Map 4

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1

A Follow-up to the Dialogue with Arnold J. Toynbee

Replying to the criticism made by Professor Trevor-Roper, Professor Toynbee wrote:

I agree that my claim cannot be sustained if I have not tried to test my theories and hypotheses by the facts, or if I have tried but have not done the job properly or successfully. For, while it is true that theories and hypotheses can never be deduced from facts, it is also true that they can be validated only if they are confronted with the relevant facts and are confirmed by them.¹

Toynbee's self-proclaimed credo was: "I have greater respect for the historical evidence than I have for a particular hypothesis that I happen to have picked out of my tool-bag."² The author of the present study had therefore expected that Toynbee would be willing to continue our discussion and clarify certain points that remained unresolved. Regretfully, my further correspondence elicited no reply, and on 22 October 1975 he died.

In 1969, Toynbee told this author that, when considering the question in the autumn of 1918, much depended on the meaning of the phrase "Vilayet of Damascus." In Ottoman administrative usage, vilayet was used in a wider sense, covering Cis-Jordanian Palestine, whereas, in Arabic, *wilāya* meant "environs" or "banlieux." He further stated that McMahon could not have used the Ottoman terminology in his letter of 24 October 1915, in which case Palestine was meant to be included.³

However, there is no scintilla of evidence that this was what

Toynbee thought when preparing his "Memorandum" on British Commitments to King Hussein" (October/November 1918). His reason for concluding that the British Government was pledged that Palestine "shall be 'Arab' and 'independent'" was quite different.⁴ Moreover, it is most unlikely that the word *wilāya* was considered by him at any time. Toynbee did not know Arabic and the term in this particular sense does not exist.

In vain can one search for *wilāya* among British, French, or German official records. Nor does it appear in the vast literature of travelers, among whom Seetzen⁵ and Volney⁶ are prominent. The latter, noted for his acuteness of mind, was familiar with Arabic and, during his lengthy sojourn in Syria, learned to appreciate the customs and character of the native people. His book was translated into five languages including Arabic. The term does not appear in Baedeker's authoritative handbook either,⁷ or in any other guidebooks of the time. Nor is it mentioned in any of the letters of Gertrude Bell or T. E. Lawrence. In her memorandum of 23 June 1917, Miss Bell gave a vivid description of Damascus and its environs, but nowhere does she use the term *wilāya*.⁸ This is important, since Syria, by her own admission, was the province with which she was "most familiar."⁹ In his comprehensive memorandum on Syria, Lawrence used the familiar Arab word *Shām* for Damascus.¹⁰ Had *wilāya* been in current use, he would have undoubtedly mentioned it as well when describing its neighborhood.

Major Hubert Young served on the staff of Emir Feisal's army in 1918 and took part in operations in the Dera'a-Damascus region. He spoke Arabic fluently. Nonetheless, he never, as far as evidence goes, came across the word *wilāya* used in the sense indicated by Toynbee.

Even more telling is its absolute absence from the classic study of Vital Cuinet, *Syrie, Liban et Palestine. Geographie Administrative* (Paris, 1896), whose thoroughness and erudition is noticeable on every page. His map of the administrative division of the region during the Ottoman period was published in the *Palestine Royal Commission Report* (the Peel Report) of 1937, and later in countless modern Middle East histories and textbooks. Similarly, the word does not appear in the specialized studies of Gibb and Bowen,¹¹ Rafeq,¹² Barbir,¹³ Maoz,¹⁴ and others.

Ironical as it may seem, the Palestine Delegation to London in 1922 did not mention the word *wilāya* at all when they challenged the British for equating the term "district" with the Ottoman "vilayet." They argued that the name of the area in question was not the Vilayet of Damascus, but the Vilayet of Syria and, since Homs were "districts" within the Vilayet of Syria, the district of Damascus could only have meant a smaller administrative unit. "Palestine," they concluded, "thus comes within the scope of the promise."¹⁵ Antonius repeated this argument in his book *The Arab Awakening* (pp. 177-178), which appeared first in November 1938.

It was not until the Round Table Conference in London early in 1939 that the word *wilāya* was aired for the first time. The person who brought it out was the same Antonius, then Delegate and Secretary-General to the Arab Delegation. He claimed that the Arabic *wilāya* did not correspond to the Turkish vilayet and that, in the given context of the 1915-1916 Correspondence, the word *wilāya* was "without any reference to administrative boundaries."¹⁶ This interpretation, as we shall see later was palpably not true and was meant merely to confuse his British opposite numbers. Sir Michael McDonnell, the Legal Adviser to the Arab Delegation, reiterated this argument, insisting that the Arabic word *wilāya* "does not necessarily impart an Ottoman *vilayet*, which was a determined administrative unit," and that "the Sharif was using the Arab term *wilāya* . . . in the sense of the *environs* of the towns named."¹⁷

It was from these statements in 1939, that Toynbee learned that *wilāya* could mean "environs" or "banlieux," but not before that time. In 1967, when writing to the present author, and thereafter in his "Comments," he quite erroneously attributed this interpretation to himself when he prepared his "Memorandum on British Commitments to King Hussein" in 1918.

Since the meaning of the terms vilayet/*wilāya*/district was so hotly disputed — still remains controversial — a more detailed examination is called for.

The word *wilāya* is derived from the Koran (Sura IV, 62) and in constitutional law means the sovereign power (e.g., sultan), or the power delegated by the sovereign, the office of a governor, a *wāli*. In time it came to be applied to the area governed by a *wāli*. In Turkish, it was pronounced vilayet, and,

from the sixteenth century (when it was called also *eyalet*), the term was applied to the largest administrative units.¹⁸ *The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*¹⁹ also states that the term means the appointment and certificate of appointment of an official, and, in later times, an administrative district.

Professor Bernard Lewis, in his *Handbook*, equates *wilāya* with vilayet, or state.²⁰ Professor Philip Khoury put it thus: "*wilāya*(A); vilayet(T) = Ottoman administrative unit or province."²¹ Dr. Welga Rebhan, in her authoritative history of Arabic political terms during the nineteenth century, states that *wilāya* means *Herrschergewalt*, which stands for sovereign power.²² According to the Arabic-English dictionary of J. G. Hava (a Jesuit priest), which appeared in Beirut in 1915, *wilāya* means: government, supremacy, dominion, management of a province, state, vilayet; while the most authoritative and relatively recent dictionary of Hans Wehr²³ terms it similarly: sovereign power, rule, government, administrative district, headed by a *wāli*, vilayet, province, state. In this respect, there is no material difference between the colloquial and literary Arabic. *Wilāya* is essentially associated with a governmental, not geographical, concept and is invariably related to a large administrative unit, not to a town and its environs.²⁴ Arab scholars at the University of Haifa have confirmed this deduction.²⁵ The Arab scholar Rafiq Tamimi entitled his book (in Arabic) that dealt with the Vilayet of Beirut, *Wilāya Bairut* (Beirut, 1331/1913).²⁶ The substantive body of all this learned opinion belies the Antonius/McDonnell contention.

Contemporary records show that British officials considered the terms *wilāya*, vilayet, and district, as well as province, to be synonymous in meaning. Thus, in a cable to Grey, Cheetham referred to "districts of Mesopotamia."²⁷ On the other hand, General Barrow used the Arabic term "*Basra wilayat*,"²⁸ while Lord Crewe, Secretary of State for India, stated during the meeting of the War Council on 19 March 1915 that "*Basra Vilayet* must be part of the British Empire."²⁹ Holderness, Admiral Jackson, Major-General Calwell, Sir Mark Sykes, and other members of the de Bunsen Committee used the terms "province, vilayet" interchangeably during their meetings with regard to the districts of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra.³⁰ In his important telegram of 20 October 1915 to McMahon, Grey

used the word "Vilayet" with regard to Basra, but "province" for Baghdad, although they had an identical administrative status. On the other hand, the Viceroy of India (4 November 1915) called Basra a "Vilayet" but used the Arabic word *wilāya* for Baghdad. The following day McMahon applied "vilayets" to both Baghdad and Basra, while Sykes, in his cable from Cairo to the Director of Military Operations on 21 November 1915, wrote "Baghdad and Basra provinces."³¹ On 2 November 1918, in a note to the India Office, the Foreign Office referred to Mosul as "district," while the Political Officer in Baghdad (Wilson) on 27 November 1918 preferred to use the Ottoman term "vilayet."³²

Hedjaz was a vilayet, but Lt. General Sir Edwin Locke Elliot, in a conversation with Sir Afsur Bahadur of Hyderabad, chose the English term "district" of Hedjaz.³³ The British Consul in Aleppo followed a similar pattern when reporting to Sir Louis Mallet, the British Ambassador in Constantinople: "Syrians in this district [of Aleppo]."³⁴ Sir Reginald Wingate urged the necessity of holding on to the Aleppo and Beirut Provinces and, in the same breath, insisted on retention of Baghdad and Basra Vilayets.³⁵

It is even more illuminating to juxtapose the English and Arabic versions of the Correspondence,³⁶ in which *wilāya* is invariably translated as district, province, or vilayet. Thus, Sharif Hussein, in his letter of 5 November 1915, used the word *wilāyātāin*, which is the dual of *wilāya*, with regard to Aleppo and Beirut; at the British Residency it was translated into "provinces of . . ." In the second paragraph of the same letter, where the English translation reads "since the provinces of Iraq . . .," the Arabic original is *wilāyāt*, the dual number of *wilāya*. Vilayets of Aleppo and Beirut in McMahon's letter of 14 December 1915 were translated as *wilāyat* (plural); whereas "Vilayet of Baghdad," in the same letter of McMahon, as well as in his subsequent one of 30 January 1916, was translated as *wilāya* (singular). These examples remove any doubt about the identity of meaning of the English, Turkish, and Arabic terms. Parenthetically, it should be added that *wilāya* is even stronger in meaning than its English equivalent, since it denotes rule and authority; the territory that it covered was always governed by a high-ranking official called a *Vali* (in Arabic, *wālī*). The Otto-

man vilayet was merely a linguistic derivation of the Arabic word. Professor Geoffrey Lewis, the distinguished philologist in Turkish at St. Antony's College, Oxford, thinks that "*vilayet* is simply the Turkish pronunciation of the Arabic *wilāya*."³⁷

There was, however, an exception. In his much quoted letter of 24 October 1915, McMahon referred to the districts of Mersina and Alexandretta (translated in Arabic to *wilāyāt*) — obviously a lacuna in his knowledge, since neither Mersina nor Alexandretta were vilayets, the first laying in the Vilayet of Adana and the second in that of Aleppo. But the error was seized on by those who rejected the British equating district with vilayet as additional proof to fortify their case. Their deduction, however, is fallacious, if not mischievous, for, had this been so, the vilayets of Aleppo and Beirut, as well as those of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra, would have to be downgraded in their respective administrative status, which is absurd.

At this juncture it would be of interest to point out that, in his reply of 5 November 1915, Sharif Hussein committed a similar mistake. The relevant sentence translated literally to English reads:

We renounce our insistence on the inclusion of the *vilayets* of Mersina and Adana in the Arab Kingdom. But the two *vilayets* of Aleppo and Beirut and their sea coasts . . .³⁸

Was Hussein as ignorant as the High Commissioner in this particular case, or was he merely repeating his correspondent's error? The only explanation for this peculiar confusion is that, before the introduction of the Law of Vilayets in 1864, the boundaries separating provinces from each other were arbitrary and subject to many changes. They were fixed for military, fiscal, and administrative convenience and altered at will. Moreover, irrespective of official delimitation, the local population had their own notions of local boundaries, often determined by agricultural requirements or ancient custom.³⁹ Barbir, who relied on Gibb and Bowen's study,⁴⁰ concluded:

The problem of provincial boundaries in the Ottoman Empire has been taken too seriously by modern observers. They tend to assume that boundaries were literally fixed and provinces clearly defined. This often reflects a desire to project the limits of

modern states back into the past.⁴¹

But the main bone of contention, which generated so much heat, related to "the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo." Gallons of ink have been spilt on it, only to demonstrate the gap between the disputants. The controversy was fraught with emotion; it had serious political implications and impinged on Britain's good faith. It would therefore be useful to examine the matter more carefully.

In official Ottoman parlance, the district of Damascus was called Vilayet of Syria. It extended from the Vilayet of Aleppo in the north to the Vilayet of Hedjaz in the south. On the east, it reached the *mutesarriplik* of Zor and the desert of Syria, and in the west — a border which is most relevant in our case — ran conterminously with the eastern border of the Vilayet of Beirut and the Sanjak of Jerusalem, bisecting the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, and the Dead Sea. From its lower end, it took a southwesterly course to the Egyptian border about seventy miles northwest of the Gulf of Akaba (see Map 1).⁴² To comply with the laws of Vilayets 1864 it was divided into four sanjaks: those of Hama, Damascus, Hauran, and Ma'an, which were each subdivided into kazas, and the kazas into *nāhiyes* and villages. Damascus was the seat of the Vali, a governor with extensive authority. One of his tasks was to ensure the safety of the pilgrimage to the holy places in Mecca and Medina, an appointment that acquired religious prestige, coupled with financial benefits.⁴³ For Moslems through the centuries, the link between Damascus and the Hedjaz has been essential.

A distinction should be drawn between the Vilayet of Syria and Syria (in Turkish *sûristân*), which, in contrast to the former, did not have administrative significance, being merely a geographical expression. The area that Syria covered extended from the Taurus Mountains in the north to el-Arish in the south, and from the Mediterranean in the west to the Euphrates in the east.⁴⁴ With the exception of Aleppo, the Vilayet of Syria covered the whole of geographical Syria until the mid-nineteenth century; hence its name. But, following the separation of the Sanjak of Jerusalem in 1872 and the reconstruction of the Vilayet of Beirut in 1888, the Vilayet of Syria in 1888 became confined strictly to the eastern part of geographical Syria.

The name Syria is an abridgment of Assyria and took root when the country became the western province of the Assyrian Empire. The Greeks thereafter transmitted the name to the European languages, but the Arabs, who did not adopt the Greek names, were ignorant of it and called Syria Barr-ush-Shám or ush-Shám. *Shám* signified the country of the left, whereas all the territory of the south (named by the Romans Arabia Felix), which covered the Arabian Peninsula, was called Yamin, which meant country of the right.

Ush-Shám was also the name of Damascus; the native inhabitants were delighted to name their capital after the country. Damascus had yet another name — Dimashq-ush-Shám — which is derived from the Hebrew *Dammeseq* (2/Kings, viii, 5, 6), corresponding to the *Aram Dammeseq* of the Bible.⁴⁵ Literally it meant "Damascus of Syria." The city itself was called *Madinat Dimashq*.⁴⁶ The Arabic equivalent of the Ottoman Vilayet of Syria was wilāya ush-Shám, while geographical Syria, which also embraced Palestine, was often referred to by a more specific name — Bilad ush-Shám — *bilad* meaning country, or, in modern political vocabulary, translated as Greater Syria.⁴⁷ It is essential to bear all these details in mind when we examine the Arabic translation of McMahon's much-disputed letter of 24 October 1915.⁴⁸

The British, too, refrained (at least during the period under discussion) from using the term Vilayet of Syria, both in literature and in official dispatches, albeit for entirely different reasons than the Arabs. They tried either to avoid confusion with the geographical Syria and/or, for the sake of convenience, to conform with the vilayets. A number of examples illustrate the point. Thus, a Foreign Office official lumped together the "Vilayets of Basra, Baghdad, Mosul, Aleppo and Damascus."⁴⁹ Likewise, Sir Mark Sykes, in his cable from Cairo to the D.M.O., wrote, "vilayets of Aleppo, Beirut and Damascus."⁵⁰ And a week later, when writing to Cox, he referred to the "vilayets of Damascus, Beirut, Aleppo, Mosul [and] Baghdad," as well as to "Mosul, Baghdad and Basra Provinces."⁵¹ He used the terms interchangeably with regard to identical locations. T. E. Lawrence wrote the following: "[The Vilayet of] Syria in Turkish (the word exists not in Arabic) is the province of Damascus,"⁵² whereas McMahon, in a "Note on Possible Terms of Peace with

Turkey," pointed to the "Vilayets of Damascus and Aleppo."⁵³

Father Janssen, a noted geographer serving in British Naval Intelligence, wrote in a joint memorandum with M. Savignac his French counterpart, about Trans-Jordan: "Administratively, all the region forms part of the Vilayet of Damascus . . . whose southern boundary passes between El Ala and Medain Saleh" in the Sanjak of Ma'an.⁵⁴ In like manner, Ormsby-Gore referred to the region east of the Jordan as "part of the Vilayet of Damascus,"⁵⁵ while Hogarth preferred to use the word "district."⁵⁶ During his last visit to the East, Sykes reported that "Damascus and district [are] pro-Feisal but anti-Sherifian."⁵⁷ By "district," he meant all the territory south toward Akaba, Feisal's headquarters during the summer of 1918. Moreover, Toynbee, when working on the terms of an armistice or peace with Turkey early in October 1918, sketched out the boundaries of "Six Vilayets," one of which was that of Damascus.⁵⁸ That he did not use "Vilayet of Syria" on this or on any other occasion was not accidental, since nowhere does the term appear in the "History of the Hedjaz Rising" (29 November 1916) or in any other document that Toynbee had consulted.

For similar reasons, the Germans and the French preferred the Vilayet of Damascus to the Vilayet of Syria. Thus, Loytved-Hardegg, the German Consul in Damascus, reported on the "Angliederung des . . . Deschofgebietes als Kasa an das Wilayet Damascus."⁵⁹ On 21 December 1915, during a meeting at the Foreign Office, Picot referred to the Vilayet of Damascus; he specifically emphasized that "the whole of the Damascus vilayet . . . as defined by the Turks" must be included in the French sphere.⁶⁰ Likewise, the French Apostolic Missionary, in his highly valued *Guide to the Holy Land*, stated that Syria was composed of the Vilayet of Aleppo, the Vilayet of Beirut, and the Vilayet of Damascus.⁶¹

Shortly before drafting his letter of 24 October 1915, McMahon consulted the Report of the de Bunsen Committee. In paragraph 36, the Report delineated the boundary between "Arabia proper and those Arabs who belong to the districts of Damascus and Mesopotamia." Accordingly, the boundary ran "from Akaba . . . thence to Ma'an, on the Hedjaz Railway, then eastwards in a northerly course to the limits of Kuwait."⁶² In other words, the district of Damascus covered the whole area

of what later became Trans-Jordan. As a newcomer to the area, McMahon did not know the exact position of Mersina and Alexandretta, but he was fully apprised of the status, as well as the scope, of the district of Damascus. There is also no reason to suspect him of inadequate command of his native tongue, since, in English, district is understood to mean not a geographical, but a well-defined administrative unit.

This, however, does not dispel the confusion caused by the linkage between "districts" and the four cities. It was argued that, since there were no districts of Homs and Hama — the former being a sanjak in the Vilayet of Syria, and the latter a kaza in the Sanjak of Homs — McMahon's phrase could only make sense if "districts" was taken to mean the regions adjacent to the four cities. This point was made first by Feisal during his meeting at the Foreign Office with R. C. Lindsay on 20 January 1921, and repeated over and over again by the Arab Delegations in 1922-1939, as well as by Toynbee in his "Comments."⁶³ However, the argument is a red herring, since, whatever the incongruity, neither on logical nor on factual grounds could the status of Homs and Hama affect that of Damascus or Aleppo.

The phrase originated with Muhammad Sharif al-Faruqi⁶⁴ and, as Childs cogently showed, al-Faruqi certainly did not intend a narrow interpretation of the immediate neighborhood, since this would have been fatal to the whole concept of an Arab state stretching from the Syrian hinterland southward through what later became Trans-Jordan to Hedjaz. The minimum for which "the Arabs would fight" was a continuous stretch of territory to ensure the control of the Hedjaz Railway and unimpeded traffic of the pilgrims to Mecca.⁶⁵ A narrow interpretation would have been self-defeating, since it would have left the four cities as isolated islands within French territory.

Al-Faruqi might have had a special reason for lumping the four cities together, but this was not an extraordinary case. Thus, in 1848, Colonel Rose, the British Consul in Beirut, complained about the state of insecurity of "the great towns [of] Aleppo, Hama, Homs [and] Damascus."⁶⁶ Early in 1915, Lawrence wrote: "Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo are the four ancient cities in which Syria takes pride. They are

stretched like a chain along the fertile valleys of the interior . . .”⁶⁷ And in September 1919, William Yale, a member of the American Delegation to the Peace Conference in Versailles and an expert on Syria, presented a memorandum in which he referred to the four towns at least three times, almost as a cliché.⁶⁸

There was apparently a good reason for this habit. During the sixteenth century, Hama and Homs were removed from the control of Damascus; the former became attached to the newly created Vilayet of Aleppo, and the latter to that of Tripoli, although they still continued to pay taxes to the Valis of Damascus in their capacity as commanders of the pilgrimage. This disposition lasted throughout the eighteenth century.⁶⁹ Geographically, the arrangement makes little sense, but was perfectly in line with the Ottoman system of government under which administrative units were frequently shifted from one vilayet to another.⁷⁰ For someone like al-Faruqi, who was keen to ensure the territorial integrity of the Syrian hinterland, specifying the four cities was not only natural, but even essential. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that what both he and McMahon had in mind were the districts that *contained* the four cities of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo; the word “contained” was probably omitted for brevity’s sake, or because it was self-evident. This was, in a way, a variant of the formulae given in McMahon’s preceding cables to London, in which al-Faruqi was quoted as pressing for the inclusion of the four cities within the Arab Confederation or Arab sphere. However, the meaning, as well as the purpose, of all the formulae was identical: to secure for the inhabitants of the Syrian hinterland a territorial contact with Arabia.

If this was the case, why, it could be asked, was not McMahon more specific in delineating the boundary of the district of Damascus, particularly in the south, where it was contiguous with that of the Hedjaz? We are fortunate to have McMahon’s own explanation in this matter in his letter to Sir John Shuckburgh, dated 12 March 1922.⁷¹ The reason for restricting himself to specific mention of the four cities in the Syrian hinterland, he explained, was because: (a) “these were places to which the Arabs attached vital importance”; and, (b) because there was no place he could think of at the time “of

sufficient importance for purposes of definition further south of the above." (Places like Dera'a, Salt, Ma'an and Akaba were at that time no more than large villages.) It may be recalled that the Ottoman boundary separating Galilee (in the southern part of the Vilayet of Beirut), as well as the Sanjak of Jerusalem, from the Vilayet of Syria bisected the Sea of Galilee, the River Jordan, and the Dead Sea, but McMahon refrained from making use of it either, because, he continued,

I thought it might be considered desirable at some later stage of negotiations to endeavour to find some more suitable frontier line east of the Jordan and between that river and the Hedjaz Railway. At that moment, moreover, very detailed definitions did not seem called for.

As George A. Smith, the author of the *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, told Herbert Samuel, the River Jordan never constituted a boundary of Palestine.⁷² Nor did it make much sense economically and militarily. A natural strategic boundary runs several miles eastward along the ridges of the adjacent plateau, which dominates the Jordan Valley. This was recognized by some British officials toward the end of World War I and during the Peace Conference in Paris. Ormsby-Gore, a member of the British Delegation to the Conference, suggested that "a line drawn a few (not exceeding 10) miles east of the main stream of the Jordan should form the eastern boundary" separating Palestine from the Arab State.⁷³ Ormsby-Gore was following the footsteps of two other Britons deeply involved in Middle Eastern affairs: one was Lawrence, the other — Toynbee.⁷⁴

In this respect, McMahon revealed remarkable prescience. However, when drafting his hapless letter of 24 October 1915, he was in a dilemma. According to the map for the Ottoman Devolutionary Scheme (Course IV), provided by the de Bunsen Committee, the Ayalet of Palestine, which was to be internationalized, extended deep into the territory east of the River Jordan.⁷⁵ This clashed with the desiderata of the Arab nationalists; but, since Palestine was not an issue at that time, McMahon thought it prudent to postpone the exact definition of the southwestern boundary of the projected Arab State. He thereby unwittingly left a loophole in an already badly phrased

document, unable to envisage that advantage would be taken of the ambiguity.

In his "Comments,"⁷⁶ Toynbee was unduly dismissive of McMahon's explanation given on 12 March 1922. He suggested that McMahon had ulterior motives. But Shuckburgh thought otherwise. He interviewed McMahon and thereafter invited him to put his words on record. "You will see," Shuckburgh told Forbes Adam, "that he is quite clear on the point that the intention was to exclude Palestine. I hope that the question will not become a practical one, but it is just as well that we should have all the evidence possible at our disposal in case we are definitely challenged on the subject." Forbes Adam agreed that McMahon's statement was "important and will be most useful if and when the matter is raised again."⁷⁷

Philip Graves, the noted Near East correspondent of *The Times* and a member of the Arab Bureau Staff from 1916 to 1918, also trusted McMahon and, after interviewing him, deemed it important that his statement to the Colonial Office be published in order to counter the misleading propaganda launched by the *Daily Mail* at that time.⁷⁸

When preparing his "Memorandum on British Commitments to King Hussein," Toynbee ignored a sizable body of documentation showing that, in October 1915, Britain was in no position to award Palestine to the Arabs without the prior agreement of the Quai d'Orsay. Nor did he take much notice of the work being done at that time by the Historical Section of the Foreign Office on French interests in the East,⁷⁹ which, by common knowledge, were of long standing. Dating from the Crusader period, these interests had made an indelible impression on the French psyche. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, France had secured from the Sublime Porte exceptional privileges, known as Capitulations.⁸⁰ On the strength of these, the Porte recognized France as Protector of the Christians, not only in Palestine and Syria, but throughout the Ottoman Empire. Henceforth, French monarchs interested themselves in projects for occupying and annexing Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. This ambition was almost realized during Napoleon's campaign in 1799 and subsequently under France's protégé Mehemet Ali (1831-1840). Although these efforts were frustrated, France

remained jealous of her rights. In 1853, friction between the Latin monks and their rivals, the Greek Orthodox Church, over the right of custody of the Holy Places in Palestine led to the Crimea (1854-1856). France scored a diplomatic victory during the Congress of Berlin, 1878,⁸¹ when her rights were expressly recognized; and, following the Cyprus Convention, which was signed on 4 June 1878, the British Government assured the French that its occupation of Cyprus would in no way jeopardize the privileged position France enjoyed in Syria. In a separate dispatch, Lord Salisbury, the Foreign Secretary, confirmed that "the interests of France as a great Catholic Power in the Lebanon and in the Holy Places of Palestine have always been scrupulously respected."

The Anglo-French Agreement of 1904 opened a new page. In return for French withdrawal from Egypt, Britain gave her unqualified approval for consolidation of the French position in North Africa and Syria. And in 1912, Raymond Poincaré, reassured by Grey, made it clear, after coming to office, that France had no intention of renouncing her "traditional mission" in the East. The determination and vigor with which this mission was pursued did not escape the notice of Toynbee himself. In 1915 he wrote: "The French railways and missions succeeded in transforming Syria into a dependency of France."⁸² And two years later he added:

All over Syria there are French clerical, secular, and Judaic schools. Beirut and Damascus, Christian and Moslem . . . are equally under the spell of French civilisation; and France is the chief economic power in the land . . .⁸³

On the eve of World War I, France formalized her position still further, initialing an agreement with Germany 15 February 1914, and two months later with Turkey.⁸⁴ By this agreement, France gained a free hand in Central and Southern Syria, including Palestine. In return for receiving a substantial loan, the Porte granted France liberal concessions to construct ports in Haifa and Jaffa, as well as in Tripoli, and to further develop the Syrian railway system, including its southward extension to a point on the French-owned railway running from Jaffa to Jerusalem. It was therefore quite reasonable for the French to point out their newly "acquired rights" when negotiating with the

British on the future of Turkey in Asia.⁸⁵

In October 1914, a month before Turkey entered the War, M. Lèygues, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber, asserted the French claims to Syria in language that showed that, by Syria, he meant Greater Syria including Palestine:

The Mediterranean will not be free for us . . . unless Syria remains in our sphere of influence. By Syria must be understood, not a Syria mutilated and discrowned, but Syria in its entirety, that extends from El Arish to the Taurus.⁸⁶

Le Matin of 30 December 1914 went so far as to propose the merger of Syria with Palestine under one name, *La France du Levant*; and in the following year, Paul Cambon told Grey most seriously that France regarded Syria as a "dependency."⁸⁷ On 4 March 1915, in consequence of Russia claiming Constantinople, France made a counter-claim to Cilicia and Syria, which included Palestine. These desiderata were aired two weeks later in London. Thereafter, it became obvious in Whitehall that Britain was "not free to act" in any northern or southern region of Syria. For Lord Crewe, then Secretary of State for India, it was a foregone conclusion that France regarded Palestine and Syria as her "inheritance."⁸⁸

It is true that St. Petersburg objected to the inclusion of Palestine within the exclusive French sphere and that the de Bunsen Committee recommended its internationalization: "Palestine must be recognised as a country whose destiny must be the subject of special negotiations, in which both belligerent and neutrals are alike interested."⁸⁹ But, if anything, recognition that Palestine was *sui generis* and a country that had a universal appeal circumscribed to an ever greater degree Britain's freedom as to its future disposition. To assign it unilaterally during the War to Arabs, or for that matter to Jews,⁹⁰ without prior consultation with the Allies, was unthinkable. Any decision on the future status of Palestine could certainly not be effected without French concurrence. Throughout 1915 — in fact, almost until the end of December of that year — the French were in no mood to forego their pre-eminent position in Palestine lightly. Any doubts that might have lingered on this count were dispelled on 23 November, when Picot met Sir Arthur Nicolson and his

colleagues at the Foreign Office. Picot insisted that Syria was a purely French possession, and, by Syria, he meant the region bounded by the Taurus ridges in the north, Diabekir, Mosul, Kerkuk, and Deir al-Zor (on the Euphrates) in the east, and the Egyptian border in the south. No French Government that surrendered this claim, he maintained, would survive a day.⁹¹

Grey displayed great sensitivity toward French sensibilities. "I am well aware of French feeling toward Syria and we have no intention of disregarding it," he told Bertie.⁹² This was why he rejected so brusquely the Alexandretta scheme advocated by Cairo. "You should do all you can," he instructed McMahon on 17 February, "to discourage any movement of the kind . . . as regards Alexandretta or places near Syria [such as Haifa or Gaza]."⁹³

He felt so strongly on this matter that, three weeks later, he repeated his warning in a private telegram, which he drafted himself. He emphasized that a claim to Syria by England, or even one made for Egypt, which in the given circumstances would be tantamount to a claim for England herself, would inevitably bring a break with France.⁹⁴ On the same day, Ronald Storrs advised Fitzgerald, Kitchener's Secretary that

H. E. [McMahon] has just received a private wire from Sir E. G[rey] stating that any Syrian aspirations for ourselves or [for] Egypt would mean a break with France and are therefore unthinkable.⁹⁵

Even more indicative is Grey's minute, dated 27 November 1915: "I made it clear to Picot that we have no designs in Syria and [will] promise nothing about it to anyone [i.e., the Arabs] unless the French agree."⁹⁶ This minute was drafted two days after Picot's meeting with Arthur Nicolson and a month after the dispatch of McMahon's letter of 24 October 1915.

If Grey showed such deference to French interests, it was not only because of his innate decency and unquestionable loyalty to an ally, but primarily because of highest strategic considerations. This transpires clearly from his memorandum that he circulated to the War Committee. Germany, he revealed, was making persistent overtures to both Russia and France, who "could have peace tomorrow on comparatively favourable terms" — an option which was not open to Britain, whose very

survival hinged on the outcome of the war.

We are therefore dependent upon the Allies for our safety to a greater extent than they are upon us. My conclusion is [he continued] that we must therefore efface ourselves in the councils of the Allies . . . [and] if we cannot make ourselves prevail by argument and influence, we must be very careful not to proceed to threats or pressure that might alienate our Allies.⁹⁷

This was why, in March 1915, he conceded to Russia Constantinople and the Straits — the “richest prize of the entire war.”⁹⁸ It also explains why, until the fall of Asquith’s government, he cared so scrupulously for France’s interest, as well as the kind of predicament that confronted him when he received a copy of Hussein’s letter of 14 July 1915. As he later revealed to Sir James Rennell Rodd, the British Ambassador to Rome,

We had no difficulty in agreeing to any boundaries which the Shereef wanted on the south [i.e., in the Arabian Peninsula], but in the north the Shereef came up against Syria, where we had always admitted French interest and the French would not make concessions to the Shereef of places like Damascus without knowing what the limits of their sphere were to be.⁹⁹

McMahon too was nonplused. He found Hussein’s pretensions with regard to the boundaries of the Arab state “in every way exaggerated, no doubt beyond his hope of acceptance,” while Chamberlain, then Secretary of State for India, dismissed them forthrightly as “unacceptable. . . . [They] appear to be dictated by extreme Pan-Arab aspirations.”¹⁰⁰ McMahon was all the more taken aback by the Sharif’s overweening territorial ambitions because, three months earlier, he had received a reassuring letter on this question from Sir Reginald Wingate:

In my talks with the Arab leaders here, I think they now admit that we must stick to Mesopotamia and I am inclined to think that they realise that parts of Syria and Palestine cannot — in all the circumstances of the case—be incorporated in their future utopian sovereign state. On the whole they are becoming more reasonable . . .¹⁰¹

Wingate was referring to Sir Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani, the Chief

Cadi of the Sudan, through whom he was conducting parallel negotiations with Jeddah. So, the question that inescapably comes to mind is what made Hussein change his demands so drastically in such a short time?

On 23 May, practically on the same day that McMahon received Wingate's letter, Feisal, on his return journey from Constantinople, met for the second time the leaders of *al-Ahd* and *al-Fatat* societies and received from them their so-called "Damascus Protocol." It will be recalled that this protocol demanded recognition by Great Britain of the independence of Arab countries bound by the line Mersina-Adana to parallel 37°N; the Indian Ocean (with the exclusion of Aden) in the south; the Persian frontier in the east; and, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea in the west.¹⁰² It was also during this meeting that the leaders of the societies endeavored to impress upon Feisal the following they enjoyed and their readiness to take action against the Turks. Yasin al-Hashimi, Chief of Staff of the 12th Ottoman Division, which was then stationed in Syria, and who acted as spokesman for the "Young Arabs," declared rather bombastically for Sharif Hussein's consumption: "We ask for nothing. . . . you only have to lead us and to march in the vanguard."¹⁰³ Hussein, disappointed with the Young Turks' lukewarm response to his overtures,¹⁰⁴ embraced the *al-Ahd* and *al-Fatat* plan *in toto* and incorporated it into his letter of 14 July 1915 to McMahon. (This letter was written on his behalf by his son Abdullah.) But such extreme claims led nowhere.

It was Muhammad Sharif al-Faruqi who broke the impasse. Al-Faruqi was an aide-de-camp of Fakhri Pasha, the Turkish Commander of the 12th Ottoman Division and Djemal Pasha's deputy. As a descendant of Omar Ibn El Faruq, the second Khalifa of El Islam, al-Faruqi claimed to be of noble lineage and, despite his youth — he was then twenty-four years old — had reached a leading position within the ranks of the Arab secret societies. On his initiative, *al-Ahd* forged closer links with *al-Fatat*, its civilian counterpart, and when Yasin al-Hashimi assumed the overall leadership of the societies, al-Faruqi became his deputy. On 23 May 1915, he was a member of the delega-

tion that met Feisal on his return from Constantinople. Later, at the height of Djemal Pasha's repressive measures against Arab nationalists, al-Faruqi was arrested, but, as there was no incriminating evidence against him, he was deported to Constantinople together with Yasin al-Hashimi, Amin Lufty Bey, and Abd al-Qādir. There they conceived a plan to defect to the British in order to win them over. The idea, to which al-Faruqi was made privy, originated with Yasin al-Hashimi. The headquarters of the societies in Damascus were also informed. Al-Hashimi's aim, and that of the other conspirators, was to create an identity of Arab and British interests and convey a message of friendship: "We must be friends," they asserted. Those who could manage to cross the lines to the British should impress upon them "the strength of the Arab movement and the sincere loyalty and attachment" of the Young Arabs to Sharif Hussein's cause.¹⁰⁵

Al-Faruqi arrived in Cairo on 10 September 1915, where, in the home of Na'um Shuqair, a Syrian Christian notable employed by British Intelligence, he met some of the leaders of the Syrian colony in Cairo. Present were Rashid Ridā, Rafiq al-Azm, Hakki al-Azm, Jamil al-Rifai, and Aziz Bey Ali al-Misri.¹⁰⁶ It was to the last-named that al-Faruqi confided the purpose of his mission, for al-Misri, as Lawrence described him, was "an idol of the Arab officers,"¹⁰⁷ the founder of *al-Ahd*, and Yasin al-Hashimi's predecessor. Thereafter, when negotiating with McMahon, al-Faruqi's name was linked inseparably with that of al-Misri.

Al-Faruqi was not the only Young Arab who defected to the British. Habib Lutfallah, a Staff Officer in the Ottoman Army who had participated in the Young Turk Revolution, made his way to Cairo via Athens, but General Maxwell distrusted him:

He is a . . . vain type of a Syrian with no bottom, full of schemes. I allowed him to return to Syria to bring me, or send me, information; he did neither, but allowed himself to get mixed up with the Turks and took office with them.¹⁰⁸

In contrast, al-Faruqi was singularly successful in his mission. Having interrogated him thoroughly, Clayton deduced that,

The influential leaders [of the Arab party] appear open to reason and ready to accept a considerably less ambitious scheme than that which they have [originally] formulated, which the more enlightened [ones] allow to be beyond their hopes at present.

Moreover,

They realise that to carry out the idea of an Arab Empire in its entirety is probably outside the region of practical politics at present, and [al-Faruqi] at any rate appreciates the fact that England is bound by obligations to her Allies in this war. The more experienced probably are aware that England could hardly be expected to regard with equanimity the establishment of a powerful and united Arab Empire, marching with Egypt and on the flank of the highway to India. But they do ask that England should promise to assist them to obtain a reasonable measure of independence and autonomous Government in those Arab countries where England can fairly claim that her interests are greater than those of her Allies. . . . Syria is of course included their programme but they must realize that France has aspirations in this region.

Although initially al-Faruqi made a bold statement that "French occupation of Syria would be strenuously resisted by the Mohammedan population," he eventually scaled down his claim to "the inclusion of Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, and Homs in the Arab Confederation." In his own words: "our scheme embraces all the Arab countries including Syria and Mesopotamia, but if we cannot have all, we want as much as we can get."¹⁰⁹

Delighted, Clayton broke the good news to Wingate:

I have had some extremely interesting discussions with an Arab officer [al-Faruqi] . . . a leading spirit in the Pan-Arab party . . . their aims are . . . very much more moderate and practical [than Rashid Ridā's] and do not appear to be tinged to the same extent by Moslem fanatics. [Their leaders] are not carried away by the dream of an Arab Empire but appear to be reasonable men, quite prepared to give and take and fully aware of the fact that the elements of such an Empire do not exist among the Arabs . . .¹¹⁰

On the basis of Clayton's report, General Maxwell reported to Kitchener:

We have reason to believe that in negotiations with Great Britain [the Arab party] would accept considerable modification. ... [They] will, I think, insist on Aleppo, Homs, Hama and Damascus being in their sphere.

[Hence] if we can make the French realize that we are up against a big question of the future of Islam, they may be more inclined to agree to a settlement.¹¹¹

At the Foreign Office, Sir George Clerk noted with satisfaction that the Arabs had recognized the impossibility of totally excluding France — and this was a good omen.¹¹²

Thus, al-Faruqi's statement gave the British an opening to negotiate with the Arabs without giving undue offense to the French. But what attracted the British officers in Cairo in particular was the prospect of a wholesale defection of Arab troops from the Ottoman Army coupled by an ensuing uprising of the native population in the whole territory of the Fertile Crescent down to the Arabian Peninsula. Such an outcome would have altered the course of the war in the Eastern theater — no mean feat, especially after the traumatic débâcle of the Allies in the Gallipoli campaign and the setbacks that the British sustained in Kut and elsewhere.

Al-Faruqi assured Clayton that the Arab party was "a power which cannot be disregarded"; that ninety percent of Arab officers in the Turkish Army and some of the Kurdish officers were members of his society; that these officers formed the backbone of the military administration of the Aleppo, Damascus, and Beirut provinces; that in April 1915, two battalions of Arabs and Kurds of the 36th Division of the 12th Ottoman Army in Hama caused disturbances and "were able to raise in revolt." As proof that the Young Arab party wielded "very great power," he quoted the fact that neither the Turks nor the Germans dared to suppress it, although they were fully aware of the Arabs' active sympathy toward the Allies, especially toward Great Britain. He claimed that Turkey and Germany had already approached the leaders of the Young Arab Committee and promised to concede to their demands "in full." The German Consul at Aleppo was particularly active in this matter. However, he went on, the Committee "are strongly inclined toward England, the Power on whom they can rely. We

would sooner have a promise of half from England than of the whole from Turkey and Germany." Should Britain view Arab aspirations favorably, "the Committee would at once begin to work actively and their operations, begun in the Hedjaz . . . would soon extend to Syria and Palestine . . . [as well as] to Baghdad and Mosul, where the Committee's influence is perhaps the greatest."

Al-Faruqi maintained that he was "accredited by the Committee" to represent it vis-à-vis the British, an assurance that he qualified subsequently, stating in rather obscure and labyrinthine language:

I am not authorised to discuss with you officially our political programme, but . . . I can, for the sake of shortening negotiations . . . give answers to any questions you wish to make re the agreement and if necessary make modifications in its articles including Mersina-Diarbekr line; modifications which I promise to try my utmost to convince most of them to go by my agreement.

In spite of these equivocations, Clayton felt confident that he was confronting "a leading spirit in the Pan-Arab party." This was particularly so since al-Faruqi assured him at the same time that "if we come to the arrangement I guarantee to go to Mesopotamia and bring over a great number of officers and men, especially from the 35th Division of El Mosul, who all know me." The matter was pressing, since his Committee would no longer remain neutral and, unless they received a favorable reply from England within a few weeks, would throw in their lot with Turkey and Germany to secure the best possible terms.

Faced with such an ultimatum, Clayton considered the matter to be of "very grave and urgent importance." He warned that

to reject the Arab proposals entirely, or even to seek to evade the issue, will be to throw the Young Arab party definitely into the arms of the enemy. Their machinery will at once be employed against us throughout the Arab countries, and the various Arab chiefs, who are almost to a man members or connected with the Young Arab party, will be undoubtedly won over. Moreover, the religious element will come into play and the Jihad, so far a failure, may become a very grim reality, the effects of which would certainly be far-reaching and at the present crisis might

well be disastrous.¹¹³

McMahon reached an identical conclusion. After further conversation with al-Faruqi, he cabled London,

it appears evident that [the] Arab party are at a parting of the ways and, unless we can give them immediate assurance of nature to satisfy them, they will throw themselves into the hands of Germany who, he says, has furnished them fulfilment of all their demands. On the one [hand] they seem ready to work actively with us which will greatly influence the course of Mesopotamia[n] and Syrian campaigns, while on the other [hand] the Arabs will throw in their lot against us and we may have all Islam in the East united against the Allies.¹¹⁴

The matter was considered "urgent." General Maxwell also thought that al-Faruqi's idea of arranging desertions of Syrian troops would be helpful to the British plan of operations and should therefore be encouraged.¹¹⁵

At that time, Aubrey Herbert, M.P., the younger son of the Earl of Pembroke, arrived in Cairo from Gallipoli. Before joining the Gallipoli campaign, he had served a few months as Intelligence Officer under Clayton. He therefore had easy access to senior officers in Cairo and to confidential information. Soon after his arrival, he met General Maxwell, Clayton, Cheetham, and the High Commissioner. They all agreed that it was of the utmost importance to win the Arabs over and that the opportunity would be lost if this was not done soon.

Herbert interviewed al-Misri who impressed him as "a man of striking personality." The latter revealed that the Germans had some "dazzling gifts to offer" and that the Arabs had reached a crossroads. Should England offer an unambiguous alliance, Arab officers would switch their allegiance away from the CUP (the Committee of Union and Progress of the Young Turks). Herbert was certain that such a move would greatly facilitate the Mesopotamian campaign and reduce the chance of another attack on the Suez Canal.¹¹⁶

This was the atmosphere that prevailed in Cairo. Little wonder that Grey's earlier instruction was totally ignored: that Cairo should be exceedingly careful not to commit the British Government in negotiations with deserters or emissaries from the Ottoman army without London's prior approval.¹¹⁷ Ignored

also was the opinion of Lord Hardinge, then Viceroy of India, who dismissed the idea of an Arab rebellion in Mesopotamia as unrealistic. "I regard [the] scheme as unlikely to materialise, both owing to [poor] quality of leaders and because tribes and sheiks concerned are too backward to pay attention to Young Arab propaganda."¹¹⁸ Likewise little notice was taken of the report of the British Consul in Aleppo, who characterized the native inhabitants of his district as "deficient in any strong feelings unconnected with money-making or intrigue."¹¹⁹ More amazing is the fact that even Lawrence's note was overlooked. From the beginning of the war, Lawrence had worked in the Intelligence Department under Clayton. Early in 1915, he prepared a memorandum¹²⁰ in which he gave a penetrating analysis of the geographical and socio-political conditions in Syria based on his personal knowledge of the country and on the vast amount of information amassed in the Department. The memorandum was not circulated at that time, but its contents must have been known to his superiors. He wrote:

. . . a review of the present components of Syria proves it as vividly coloured a racial and religious mosaic today as it has notoriously been in the past

Between town and town, village and village, family and family, creed and creed, exist intimate jealousies, sedulously fostered by the Turks to render a spontaneous union impossible

Hamah and Homs are towns which dislike one another . . . An Aleppine always calls himself an Aleppine, a Beyrouti a Beyrouti, and so down to the smallest villages.

This verbal poverty indicates a political condition. There is no national feeling

This description tallies with that given by Gertrude Bell in her book entitled *Syria* (p. 228) which appeared first in 1907 and was reprinted in 1919.

As already shown,¹²¹ there was no shred of truth in al-Faruqi's report about Turco-German overtures to the *al-Ahd* and *al-Fatat* societies and the latter's ability to foment a revolt against the Ottoman Government. All the evidence adduced from the German Foreign Office files points the other way. Moreover, al-Faruqi's own testimony belies his claim. In his

letter of 7 December 1915 to Sharif Hussein (already quoted), he bitterly complained that the aim of the Turks was "to kill us, our people, and our sacred aspirations."¹²² When interrogated by Na'um Shuqair in Cairo, he submitted a list of members, both civilian and military, who had been executed, and made a passionate plea: "now that I have escaped from the hands of the Turks, I consider it is my first duty to try and help my companions to escape from their hands as well."¹²³ In 1919, the Arab Bureau confirmed that, early in 1915, the *al-Ahd* Committee became so harassed and disorganized by Djemal Pasha that they were "almost a negligible quantity and of no importance."¹²⁴ In September 1915, when al-Faruqi, as well as Habib Lutfallah, defected to the British, the Young Arabs had already been cowed and scattered. Far from being courted by the Turks and their German allies, many had been executed, others were languishing in prisons, and the remainder were fleeing for their lives.

Nor was there much truth in al-Faruqi's claim of the Societies' widespread network and influence. As Professor Dawn ascertained, only 126 men were known to have been public advocates of Arab nationalist societies before October 1914. Even this number, according to the Arab sources on which he based his estimate, is too large, since only thirty of the men could without any doubt be regarded as "active Arab nationalists before 1914." How many of the convicted nationalists were actually engaged in anti-Ottoman activities during 1914-1915 is, in his view, impossible to determine.¹²⁵ Professor Khoury also concluded that Arabism was not translated from an idea into a viable political instrument, and, though it was spreading, it nevertheless "remained a humble minority position in Damascus and elsewhere, unable to erode the loyalty of the dominant faction of the local political elite in Syria to Ottomanism. . . . The political leadership in the Syrian towns either continued to identify with the ideology of Ottomanism and thus with [the] Empire, or they opted not to take a stand until the outcome of the War was known."¹²⁶

Not only was there no political will to rebel against the Ottoman regime but even a rudimentary infrastructure, as well as the indispensable machinery to carry out such a move, was lacking. Gertrude Bell, with her unerring sense of observation,

pointed to the "fatal lack of cohesion in a society which has never succeeded in obliterating its tribal origins," a state that militated against any idea of "any national union. At best there was little more than what may be described as municipal patriotism, a unity which extended no further than the limits of the big townships. Comprehensive organization was non-existent . . ."127

Gerhard Mutius, the scholarly German Consul in Beirut, discounted any likelihood of a popular uprising. He conceded that, politically, the local population was "unreliable." Nonetheless, "they do not dare even to think about a revolt. They have neither the leaders nor the means to resist the Turkish troops."128

In fact, contrary to al-Faruqi's protestations, the leaders of the societies did not seriously contemplate such a daring move. Under the Young Turk regime before World War I, the societies had continued to be solidly loyal to the Ottoman Empire. No separatist tendencies whatsoever were in evidence; the sole aspiration of Arab nationalists was to achieve administrative decentralization of the Arab provinces and a certain degree of local autonomy coupled with the recognition of Arabic on a par with Turkish. In 1913, an Arab Congress was convened in Paris. It reiterated the need for decentralization and the recognition of Arabic; but, in deference to more extreme members of the secret societies, it demanded, for the first time, recognition of "political rights" to be exercised through actual participation in the administration of the empire. The only individuals who aimed at "ultimate Arab independence" were the *al-Fatat*, formed by some half a dozen students in Paris, as well as *al-Ahd*. "But neither the few army officers nor the handful of students in Paris were the unchallenged representatives of general Syrian, still less of Muslim, public opinion. . . . More experienced and thoughtful Syrians were still striving for a basis of collaboration with the Turks."129

This was particularly true of Aziz Bey Ali al-Misri. Born in Egypt of Circassian extraction, he was a devout Moslem and loyal to the Ottoman Caliphate. In Constantinople, to which he moved in 1891, he became an outspoken opponent of British occupation of Egypt and, during his studies in the Ottoman Military Staff College, developed unbounded admiration for his German tutors. He also struck up friendships with his Turkish

classmates and, after the 1908 Revolution, became an influential member within the CUP ranks. However, disturbed by their subsequent policy of Turkification, he became convinced that the only way to resolve a potential Turco-Arab conflict and ensure the territorial integrity of the Empire was decentralization. This was his overriding motive when founding the *al-Ahd* society. Its program was in the nature of a broad federal scheme, modeled after the Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich*, in which all nationalities would be given autonomous status. It was only after the Porte rejected the demands set out by the Congress in Paris in 1913 that the objectives of *al-Ahd* became radicalized.¹³⁰

The outbreak of World War I put an end to this trend. Ottomanization prevailed. "All nationalist and pro-Entente propaganda ceased . . . [and] the former ardent agitators became ultra-patriots."¹³¹ Members of the secret societies resolved "to work on the side of Turkey in order to resist foreign penetration of whatever kind or form." A few months later, on 16 March 1915, when Feisal met the leading members of the *al-Fatat* and *al-Ahd* societies (he was then on his way to Constantinople), he too made it known that he favored cooperation with the Turks.¹³²

Djemal Pasha, however, rightly or wrongly, suspected the Arab nationalists of treason and dealt with them severely. Only then did their leaders decide to throw in their lot with England. Even so, just six members are known to have embarked on anti-Turkish activities; of these, two were in Egypt.¹³³ Professor Dawn does not list their names, but even the uninitiated reader will have no difficulty in identifying at least three members. They were Yasin al-Hashimi, al-Faruqi, and al-Misri.

Their alleged friendship toward England proved, however, to be skin deep and motivated by opportunism. Yasin al-Hashimi, with whom the idea of Anglo-Arab cooperation originated, decided to follow Lutfallah's example after all and rejoined the Ottoman Army. During the summer of 1918, Feisal, then in Akaba, offered him the post of a Commander-in-Chief of the Arab Army, but he rejected the invitation and preferred the command of an Ottoman division instead. He fought the British until the fall of Damascus, when suddenly he switched allegiance and became Feisal's Chief of Staff, though only to

assert himself soon after as "one of the extreme exponents of Arab independence, as against a French mandate or any other form of foreign control." His pro-Turkish sentiment remained undiminished, and, when it was discovered that he was in league with the CUP, as well as with Mustafa Kamal,¹³⁴ working against British interests, he was arrested on General Allenby's orders on 22 November 1919.¹³⁵

Al-Faruqi, al-Hashimi's deputy and the societies' emissary, was found, several months after his arrival in Cairo, to be unreliable¹³⁶ and intriguing against the British. Ruhi, who watched his activities while in Jeddah, thought that he was "a rascal [and] entirely Anglophobe."¹³⁷

Al-Misri nourished similar sentiments. Following Hussein's uprising in June 1916, he was, at the suggestion of the British, asked to take over command of the Arab revolt as Minister of War; but at his meeting with the Sharif in Jeddah, al-Misri told Hussein that he still adhered to his original aim of an Arab autonomy within the framework of the Ottoman realm, as embodied in the *al-Ahd* program. An acrimonious quarrel between the two broke out, which subsequently led to al-Misri's stormy resignation. During an interview with Professor Khadduri, he revealed that his purpose was to conclude a separate peace with Turkey as opposed to Hussein's policy. Like other Egyptian nationalists, he regarded the Arab revolt as a blow to Ottoman unity and thought that his own participation in the war on Germany's side would influence the German Government to bring pressure to bear on the Sultan to reorganize the Empire on a decentralized basis. With this in mind, he tried to make his way to Germany through neutral Spain. However, on learning of Germany's defeat, he felt "so depressed that he contemplated suicide." Nevertheless, he proceeded to Germany and stayed there until the proclamation of Egypt's independence in 1922.¹³⁸

It gradually dawned on British officials in Cairo that they had miscalculated badly. First came the report of Sir Mark Sykes. As he had anticipated, he found during his visit to Mesopotamia that the country was riven by deep ethnic and religious schisms, that the idea of a Sharifian Caliphate had no following, and that there was hardly any evidence of Arab nationalism.¹³⁹ More shattering was the letter that General