

[HANSARD 1803–2005](#) → [1920s](#) → [1921](#) → [June 1921](#) → [14 June 1921](#) → [Commons Sitting](#) → [CLASS V](#).

### MIDDLE EASTERN SERVICES.

*HC Deb 14 June 1921 vol 143 cc265-334* [265](#)

§ Motion made, and Question proposed, That a Supplementary sum, not exceeding £27,197,000, be granted to His Majesty, to defray the Charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of March, 1922, for Salaries and Expenses in connection with Middle Eastern Services under His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, including a Grant in Aid.

§ *The SECRETARY of STATE for the COLONIES (Mr. Churchill)*

I must take, as my starting point this afternoon, the obligations and responsibilities into which this country has entered in the Middle East, and which, in accordance with the policy of the Government, I am endeavouring to discharge. During the War our Eastern Army conquered Palestine and Mesopotamia. They overran both these provinces of the Turkish Empire. They roused the Arabs and the local inhabitants against the Turks. We uprooted the Turkish administration, and, as the Army moved forward, set up a military administration in its place. In order to gain the support of as many of the local inhabitants as possible, pledges were given that the Turkish rule should not be re-introduced in these regions. There is no dispute about these pledges. They were given by Lord Hardinge, by Sir Percy Cox, and by General Maude, and they were given during the War by the present Prime Minister. Secondly, in order to gain the support of the Arabs against the Turks, we, in common with our Allies, made during the War another series of promises to the Arabs. We made them, through King Hussein and those [266](#) who gathered round him, for the reconstitution of the Arab nation, and, as far as possible, for a restoration of Arab influence and authority in the conquered provinces, or, as we term them, the liberated provinces. There is no

doubt about these pledges either. In regard to Palestine, a third promise of a very important character was made, on behalf of the Government, by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council (Mr. Balfour), on 2nd November, 1917, that Great Britain, if successful in the War, would use her best endeavours to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine. Such was the position, and such were our obligations when the War came to an end.

After the fateful period of the War, we entered upon the painful period of the peace negotiations. The principles governing the disposal of the conquered Turkish provinces and of the German Colonies among the victorious Allies were decided by the Supreme Council sitting in Paris during 1919, and their conclusions were embodied in the Treaties of Versailles and Sèvres and in the Covenant of the League of Nations. These Treaties were approved on behalf of Great Britain by the War Cabinet of those days, and their provisions have been accepted or acquiesced in by Parliament. Under decisions arising out of these Treaties we have solemnly accepted before the whole world the position of mandatory Power for Palestine and Mesopotamia. That is a very serious responsibility. It is not only a formal responsibility; it is an actual responsibility. We are at this moment in possession of these countries. We have destroyed the only other form of government which existed there. We have made the promises that I have already recited to the inhabitants, and we must endeavour to do our duty, to behave in a sober and honourable manner, and to discharge obligations which we entered into with our eyes open. We cannot repudiate lightly these undertakings. We cannot turn round and march our armies hastily to the coast and leave the inhabitants, for whose safety and well-being we have made ourselves responsible in the most public and solemn manner, a prey to anarchy and confusion of the worst description. We cannot, after what we have said and done, leave the Jews in Palestine to be mal- [267](#) treated by the Arabs who have been inflamed against them, nor can we leave the great and historic city of Baghdad and other cities and towns in Mesopotamia to be pillaged by the wild Bedouins of the desert. Such a proceeding would not be in accordance with the view the British Parliament has always hitherto taken of its duty, nor would it be in accordance with the reputation that our country has frequently made exertions to deserve

and maintain.

It is no use consuming time and energy at this stage in debating whether we were wise or unwise in contracting the obligations I have recounted. Moving this way and that way in the agony of the great War, struggling for our lives, striking at our enemies, now here and now there, wherever it was thought best, we eventually emerged victorious in arms and encumbered with the responsibilities which so often attach to the victor. We are bound to make a sincere, honest, patient, resolute effort to redeem our obligations, and, whether that course be popular or unpopular, I am certain it is the only course which any British Government or British House of Commons will in the end find itself able to pursue. I say an honest, patient, resolute endeavour. I agree that the obligation is not an unlimited one; I agree that a point might be reached when we should have to declare that we had failed and that we were not justified in demanding further sacrifices from the British taxpayer; that the conditions of our finance or our military resources were such that we could do no more. That would be a very humiliating and melancholy confession to have to make, and after giving most careful and, I think, quite unprejudiced consideration to the whole subject, I do not think it would be true to say at the present time either that we have failed or that our resources do not enable us to discharge our obligations. On the contrary, I believe that, judging by all the facts before us at the present time, it is our duty to persevere, and I hope that by persevering we may find an honourable and inextravagant and ultimately prosperous issue from our affairs. But if we are to succeed, if we are to avoid the shame of failure; if we are to bring our enterprises to a satisfactory conclusion, the fundamental condition, the only key, lies in the reduction of expenditure in these [268](#) two countries to within reasonable and practicable limits. It is to that I have endeavoured to address myself in priority over other considerations, and it is to that therefore I shall first direct the attention of the Committee this afternoon.

Perhaps I may say in parenthesis how it was that I came into this sphere of business. I found it impossible from the War Office to enforce the military reductions which were needed in Mesopotamia, because those reductions depended absolutely on political action, and that political action was exercised by other Departments of the State. I therefore pressed most strongly for placing the whole responsibility for the Middle East under

a single Minister with direct responsibility to Parliament, and for the setting up of a separate Vote which will show Parliament exactly the extent to which it is committed in respect of Middle Eastern matters. In this I was in entire agreement with the Prime Minister. In these circumstances the Cabinet decided to create a Middle Eastern Department and to place that Department under the Colonial Office, and to set up a separate Vote. I had certainly no contemplation or wish at any stage that I should become the Minister responsible. On the other hand, when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pressed me most strongly on several occasions to undertake this task I felt that I could hardly avoid it in view of the opinions I had been expressing, and their adoption by my colleagues in the Government. Such is the explanation of how I find myself charged with this matter to-day.

As soon as I had completed, in January, the formation of a Middle Eastern Department, I endeavoured to work out a policy of reduction by cable with the military and civil authorities in Mesopotamia. I failed entirely to make any progress as long as the discussions were conducted by cable. I therefore, with the absent of the Cabinet, went to Cairo and convened a conference of British authorities concerned in the affairs of the Middle East. What it had been impossible to arrange by telegraph proved quite easy to settle by conference and discussion. Whether the conclusions we reached will be justified by events, I cannot tell, but at any rate they were conclusions which were reached unanimously by all the very important and varied experts there, and they will achieve, if they succeed, the [269](#) essential condition of reduction which I set before myself as my paramount object. But at any rate within the whole of the Arabian Peninsula, and throughout the whole of that great area, we have a single clear policy upon which all the authorities, military and civil, are at the present time agreed.

I will now trace briefly the successive reductions which have taken place since the Armistice in the garrisons of Palestine and Mesopotamia, and the consequent reductions in charges falling on this country. At the Armistice there were in those two countries over 700,000 persons, comprising soldiers, followers and refugees, the whole of whom were on our pay list and on our ration strength. Counting in battalions, the army which we had represented 175 battalions. I take battalions as a convenient method. Of course there are batteries and regiments and ancillary services,

but the battalion is convenient simply for measuring the scale. During the financial year 1919–20, in which period demobilisation of this enormous army was going on, and the repatriation of the troops was being actively pursued, the total expenditure on these two countries was between £70,000,000 and £80,000,000. At the beginning of the next year 1920–21, the numbers had been reduced to 250,000, or a scale of 70 battalions, and the expense had fallen to £40,000,000. I hoped, as the House knows, to reduce the garrison in Mesopotamia still lower during last year, but the outbreak of the rebellion in the summer effectively frustrated this intention, and it became necessary to bring back two divisions from India to cope with the situation. This present financial year 1921–22 opened with a total of 200,000 persons on our pay list in Palestine and Mesopotamia, not counting 30,000 refugees, but comprising a military force of 48 battalions as against 175 at the Armistice. The Government had already decided to reduce the force forthwith by returning the two divisions which had been brought over from India, and it would then have stood at practically 33 battalions in Mesopotamia and three or four in Palestine, and the Government had also determined to explore the possibility of making further reductions in the year.

Even with these large reductions it was inevitable that the expense in 1921 would be very heavy indeed. First of all, the [270](#) condition of the country had to be such as to permit of the departure of the troops. Secondly, these troops had to be collected and filtered down long lines of river communications with limited shipping resources, the railways having been greatly damaged during the rebellion. Thirdly, the British troops had to be transported to other stations, and the expense of sea transport is included in this Vote. The Indian troops had to be transported back to India, and there demobilised after receiving a period of leave on full pay, and that expense has to be borne on this Vote. Even on the basis of those large reductions on which the Cabinet and the War Office had decided before these matters were transferred to the Colonial Office, it was clear that when the Estimates were finally worked out by the War Office the expense would not be less than £32,500,000. In addition there were the expenses of the Air Force, which were over £1,000,000, and certain other unavoidable charges, such as those for refugees who were still on our hands, and for repairing the railways, which were necessary if for no other purpose to the outward movement of the troops. In all, the final total estimated expenditure

for the current year in Mesopotamia and Palestine, after all the reductions which have been decided upon had been given effect to, amounted to £35,000,000.

I now come to the Cairo Conference. If any saving was to be effected in this total, it was evident that the rate at which the troops should leave the country must be substantially accelerated, and that being so, a large body of troops must quit Mesopotamia before the hot weather, which is a dangerous period, instead of waiting until afterwards as had been intended. Another large body of troops also had to quit Mesopotamia after the critical period was passed. The following are the principal economies effected by the Cairo Conference. I should like to say I had the assistance of the most able soldiers who are responsible on the spot as well as representatives of the General Staff, and no violence has been done to responsible military opinion. I had the great assistance of General Congreve and General Haldane, commanding in Egypt and Mesopotamia respectively, and General Radcliffe, representing the General Staff, and it was agreed that [271](#) subject to the political arrangements which are a counterpart of these reductions, and other methods which I shall mention in the course of my statement, there should be an immediate reduction of the Mesopotamia garrison from a 33 battalion to a 23 battalion scale. This reduction will be completed by the 15th July, and troops have been pouring out of the country ever since the decision was come to. We decided on a further prospective reduction after 1st October to a 12 battalion scale, and on the immediate disposal of stock and surplus military stores in Mesopotamia, with the consequent economies in storage expenses and personnel. We decided upon a reduction in the number of horses from 47,000 on the 1st April down to 17,000 by the 1st August, which I am sorry to say involved a wholesale destruction of great numbers of horses, which it would have been uneconomical to feed or transport elsewhere, and which could not be provided with humane treatment among the population of the country. Lastly, there is a large reduction in the number of followers and in the Indian and native labour employed by the Army. The total traceable definite saving resulting from these measures amounted to £5,500,000, and a further close scrutiny of Army Estimates has enabled us to make another saving of £1,000,000. Against these savings we have, however, to set certain other charges for the Air Force, for Arab levies, and for subsidies—of which I will speak

later—and charges for refugees, railways, and miscellaneous civil charges. These represent a total of nearly £2,000,000, making a net total reduction of £4,500,000. While I was still at Cairo endeavouring to effect these economies, I learned that the Cabinet had decided that the War Office should anticipate the resultant saving by a sum of over £4,000,000, and the Army Estimates were presented to Parliament on that basis. Such a mark of confidence in the impending success of my labours was very gratifying to me, but the consequence is that the actual net reduction on the Estimates which I am able to submit to the Committee to-day only amounts to a further £379,000 over and above the £4,000,000 to which I have referred. The total expense on these two countries during the present year is therefore newly estimated, not at £35,000,000, but at £27,250,000.

[§ Mr. ORMSBY-GORE](#)

How much of that relates to Mesopotamia and how much to Palestine?

[§ Mr. CHURCHILL](#)

I think I would rather unfold my case as I go along. I shall be dealing with the two provinces separately in a few moments. If the arrangements we are now making are successful, and if the policy which renders these arrangements possible is carried out, and if it is not interrupted by untoward events—I am putting in a good many "ifs," but long and varied experience leads me to safeguard myself as effectively as possible—if, as I say, our anticipations are not overthrown by events, I expect, and propose, that the Estimates for next year, 1922–23, for the normal current expenditure in both Palestine and Mesopotamia together—apart, that is to say, from terminal charges and special charges which may result from the evacuation and demobilisation of the troops—will not exceed £9,000,000 or £10,000,000; and I may remind the House that that amount has only a pre-War value of £4,000,000 or £5,000,000. If this further saving of approximately £18,000,000, as compared with the expenditure of the present year, or of £28,000,000, as compared with that of last year, can really be achieved, it will constitute a very considerable relief to the British taxpayer. It

will mean that our expenditure in these two countries will have been reduced to more or less manageable proportions, and will enable us to carry out in a fair and reasonable manner the obligations and pledges into which we have entered.

Let us now see what is the policy and what are the methods by which we hope to achieve this enormous reduction in military strength and in expenditure while at the same time carrying out our undertakings. Hitherto, in the financial argument, I have treated Palestine and Mesopotamia as one, but now the path bifurcates, and I must deal with each country separately. I will take Mesopotamia first. In June of last year the High Commissioner for Mesopotamia was directed by His Majesty's Government to announce the early setting up of a distinctly Arab Government under an Arab ruler in Mesopotamia, or Iraq, as it is, perhaps, more [273](#) convenient to call it. That declaration we have already to a great extent carried out. A provisional native Government has been in existence for a good many months. It has been formed by Sir Percy Cox under the headship of the Naqib of Baghdad, whose services, in spite of his great age, in coming forward and assisting us at this juncture, are worthy of the highest praise and recognition. A Government with British advice and assistance, and, of course, under the protection of Imperial troops, is at present administering the country. It is our intention to replace this provisional Government in the course of the summer by a Government based upon an assembly elected by the people of Iraq, to instal an Arab ruler who will be acceptable to the elected assembly, and to create an Arab army for the national defence. I must now speak about the ruler. We have no intention of forcing upon the people of Iraq a ruler who is not of their own choice. At the same time, as the Mandatory Power, as the Power which is put to such heavy expense, we cannot remain indifferent or unconcerned in a matter so vital to us. We should like to have the best candidate chosen, but we must in any case have a suitable candidate chosen. The situation is not free from delicacy or uncertainty, and I must pick my words very carefully.

*Mr. G. MURRAY*

Would the right hon. Gentleman give the boundaries of Iraq.

[§ Mr. CHURCHILL](#)



It would be very difficult to do so without reference to a map, and I think my hon. Friend might be one of quite a small minority who were able to retain the frontiers in their minds without a map. I should certainly be very sorry to undertake the task of explanation without being provided with a map. I can easily supply a map: I will have one put in the Tea Room. As I have said, the situation is not altogether free from uncertainty, and I must be very careful what I say. I would point out, however, that, after all, it is not a situation which is wholly unfamiliar to Members of Parliament. It seems to me, looking at it as a layman, that it is not altogether unlike what sometimes happens at a by-election, where several candidates present themselves as representatives of different parties and different interests, and seek the nomination of the various associations; and where those associations, while exercising, of course, an absolutely [274](#) independent judgment, are nevertheless often anxious, and rightly anxious, to know what are the views of Parliament Street and Whitehall, and, after all, are not wholly insensible to the advice that is tendered to them. I do not say that these conditions apply to the problem we have to face in Mesopotamia, but these Arab matters are very delicate and complicated, and I hope the Committee does not suppose that I shall pose as an expert on these Arab imbroglios and complications. It does, however, seem to me that the situation will not be wholly foreign to those with which many of us have been familiar in our ordinary political life.

I think I am right in leaving these matters entirely in the hands of Sir Percy Cox. He is a great believer in the Arabs; he is devoted to the people of Iraq; he is acquainted with every aspect of Arab politics; he is in close personal relations with most of the candidates; he is accustomed to deal with these Arab notabilities, and I hope that under his guidance the people of Iraq will make a wise and at the same time a free choice: I feel, however, that it is necessary, after consultation with my advisers—and I have tried to obtain the best experts that the British Empire can produce in these matters—I think it necessary to state quite plainly the view which the British Government takes of what would be the best choice of ruler. Broadly speaking, there are two policies which can be adopted towards the

Arab race. One is the policy of keeping them divided, of discouraging their national aspirations, of setting up administrations of local notables in each particular province or city, and exerting an influence through the jealousies of one tribe against another. That was largely, in many cases, the Turkish policy before the War, and cynical as it was, it undoubtedly achieved a certain measure of success. The other policy, and the one which, I think, is alone compatible with the sincere fulfilment of the pledges we gave during the War to the Arab race and to the Arab leaders, is an attempt to build up around the ancient capital of Baghdad, in a form friendly to Britain and to her Allies, an Arab State which can revive and embody the old culture and glories of the Arab race, and which, at any rate, will have a full and fair opportunity of doing so if the Arab race shows itself capable of pro- [275](#) fitting by it. Of these two policies we have definitely chosen the latter.

If you are to endeavour so to shape affairs in the sense of giving satisfaction to Arab nationality, you will, I believe, find that the very best structure around which to build, in fact, the only structure of this kind which is available, is the house and family and following of the Sherif of Mecca. It was King Hussein, who, in the crisis of the War, declared war upon the Turks and raised the Arab standard. Around that standard gathered his four capable sons—of whom the Emir Feisal and the Emir Abdulla are the two best known in this country—and many of the principal chiefs and notabilities of the Arab world. With them at our side we fought, and with their aid as a valuable auxiliary Lord Allenby hurled the Turks from Palestine. Both the Emir Abdulla and the Emir Feisal have great influence in Iraq among the military and also among the religious classes, both Sunni and Shiah. The adherents of the Emir Feisal have sent him an invitation to go to Mesopotamia and present himself to the people and to the assembly which is soon to gather together, and King Hussein has accorded his son permission to accept the invitation. The Emir Abdulla, the elder brother, has renounced his rights and claims. I have caused the Emir Feisal to be informed, in answer to his inquiry, that no obstacle will be placed in the way of his candidature, that he is at liberty to proceed forthwith to Mesopotamia, and that, if he is chosen, he will receive the countenance and support of Great Britain. In consequence, the Emir Feisal has already left Mecca on the 12th of this month, and is now on his journey to Mesopotamia, where he will arrive in about 10 days. We must see how opinion forms

itself and what is the view of the National Assembly when it is elected. I cannot attempt to predict the course of events, but I do not hesitate to say that, if the Emir Feisal should be acceptable to the people generally, and to the Assembly, a solution will have been reached which offers, in the opinion of the highest authorities on whom I am relying, the best prospects for a happy and a prosperous outcome.

There has, however, lately arisen in Iraq and particularly in the Province of Basra, a considerable movement in the [276](#) direction of continuing direct British rule. People always seem to want something different from what is actually being done. When we were giving them direct British rule a few years ago they rebelled against it. Now that we offer them the Arab State which was then demanded so ardently, there is a considerable feeling that perhaps after all British rule will be found to be most stable. It is one of the comparatively few compliments that we have been receiving in this part of the world. I think it reflects very much credit upon Sir Percy Cox that in so short a time he has effected such a considerable change in the public sentiment towards us. But I can hold out no hope that we shall be found willing to continue these direct responsibilities. Our object and our policy is to set up an Arab Government, and to make it take the responsibility, with our aid and our guidance and with an effective measure of our support, until they are strong enough to stand alone, and so to foster the development of their independence as to permit the steady and speedy diminution of our burden. I cannot say in regard to Mesopotamia that there are primary, direct, strategic British interests involved. The defence of India can be better conducted from her own strategic frontier. Mesopotamia is not, like Egypt, a place which in a strategic sense is of cardinal importance to our interests, and our policy in Mesopotamia is to reduce our commitments and to extricate ourselves from our burdens while at the same time honourably discharging our obligations and building up a strong and effective Arab Government which will always be the friend of Britain and, I will add, the friend of France.

We are leaning strongly to what I may call the Sherifian solution, both in Mesopotamia, to which the Emir Feisal is proceeding, and in Trans-Jordania, where the Emir Abdulla is now in charge. We are also giving aid and assistance to King Hussein, the Sherif of Mecca, whose State and whose finances have been grievously affected by the interruption of the pilgrimage, in which our

Mohammedan countrymen are so deeply interested, and which we desire to see resumed. The repercussion of this Sherifian policy upon the other Arab chiefs must be carefully watched. In the vast deserts of Arabia, which stretch Eastward and North-Eastward from the [277](#) neighbourhood of Mecca to the Persian Gulf and to the boundaries of Mesopotamia, there dwell the peoples of Nejd, powerful nomadic tribes, at the head of whom the remarkable chief Bin Saud maintains himself. This Arab chief has long been in a state of warfare, raid, and reprisal with King Hussein and with his neighbours generally. A large number of Bin Saud's followers belong to the Wahabi sect, a form of Mohammedanism which bears, roughly speaking, the same relation to orthodox Islam as the most militant form of Calvinism would have borne to Borne in the fiercest times of the religious wars. The Wahabis profess a life of exceeding austerity, and what they practise themselves they rigorously enforce on others. They hold it as an article of duty, as well as of faith, to kill all who do not share their opinions and to make slaves of their wives and children. Women have been put to death in Wahabi villages for simply appearing in the streets. It is a penal offence to wear a silk garment. Men have been killed for smoking a cigarette, and as for the crime of alcohol, the most energetic supporter of the temperance cause in this country falls far behind them. Austere, intolerant, well-armed, and bloodthirsty, in their own regions the Wahabis are a distinct factor which must be taken into account, and they have been, and still are, very dangerous to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and to the whole institution of the pilgrimage, in which our Indian fellow-subjects are so deeply concerned.

The Emir Bin Saud has shown himself capable of leading and, within considerable limits, of controlling these formidable sectaries. He has always shown himself well disposed towards Great Britain and has long been in intimate relations with Sir Percy Cox. Under the advice of Sir Percy Cox, and of my counsellors here at home, we have arranged to continue the subsidy which Bin Saud has hitherto received from the British Government of £60,000 a year, together with a lump sum of £20,000. It is only the cost after all of a single battalion of Indian infantry. This subsidy will be paid monthly in arrear, contingent on the maintenance of peace and order externally. It must be understood that the granting of this subsidy gives the Chief the power to establish the authority on which that order and control depend, and that, deprived of [278](#) these funds, he would soon lose

control of the nomadic and predatory tribes which are brought under what is after all a restraining influence. We shall pay only in so far as good behaviour is assured, and if injury is done by one of these parties to the other a deduction will be made from the subsidy of the aggressor and handed over, in the form of compensation, to the victim. King Hussein has expressed his willingness to enter into negotiations, and I trust that a period of comparative tranquillity may be achieved. I have seen a number of ignorant suggestions that we should have done better to press Bin Saud as a candidate for Iraq. The religious views with which he is identified, and which his followers would be bound to enforce, would, of course, have set the whole of Mesopotamia in a blaze. On the other hand, we desire to live on friendly and amicable terms with this potentate and not to be disturbed by him, particularly at a time when we are seeking to withdraw so large a proportion of our garrison from the country.

If we are successful in the plans we are pursuing, by the end of the financial year the Arab ruler and Arab Government will be installed at Baghdad. The Arab army is already partly formed under the administration of Ja'afar Pasha, the present Mesopotamian Secretary of State for War. I do not know whether the Committee have in their minds the romantic career of this man. I have no doubt my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for the Wrekin Division (Sir C. Townshend) is well acquainted with it. He began the War fighting against us at the Dardanelles, and he achieved a German iron cross. He then came round to the Western Desert where he commanded the army of the Senoussi against us. He fought, I believe, three battles, in two of which he was victorious, but the third went amiss from his point of view, and he was wounded and pursued by the Dorsetshire Yeomanry and finally caught in the open field, taken to Cairo as prisoner of war and confined in the citadel. He endeavoured to escape, but, being a somewhat ample personage, the rope by which he was descending from the wall of the citadel broke and precipitated him into a ditch, where his leg was broken. While he was in hospital recovering from these injuries he read in the papers that King Hussein, the Sherif of Mecca, had declared war upon the Turks. [279](#) and he immediately saw that he was on the other side to what he had hitherto thought. He therefore made representations to the Arab leaders at Mecca, and after some hesitation he was given a command in their army. He very speedily rose to a position of high confidence and distinguished himself greatly in the fighting which

took place in the next two years. He was finally given the companionship of St. Michael and St. George by Lord Allenby in a hollow square of British troops composed almost entirely of the same Dorsetshire Yeomanry which had ridden him down. Such is the personality of the Mesopotamian Minister of War, and he is of course a devoted adherent of the Sherif of Mecca.

The cost of the Arab army will be defrayed from Mesopotamian revenues, but there are, in addition to that, Arab levies which will gradually be absorbed in the Arab army and will pass out of our expense, Kurdish levies and a certain number of Assyrian levies which I have been endeavouring to form out of the refugees who have so long enjoyed our reluctant hospitality. This force of levies is engaged in taking over outlying stations from the British troops, and so enabling the garrison and the expense to be reduced. Behind the Arab army and behind these levies there will stand at the end of the year about 12 battalions of British and Indian infantry. The hon. and gallant Gentleman (Sir C. Townshend) said last Session that if he had the matter in his own hands he would guarantee to defend Mesopotamia with a division.

§ [Sir C. TOWNSHEND](#)

Basra.

§ 5.0 P.M.

§ [Mr. CHURCHILL](#)

We are attempting something far more ambitious, and therefore the Committee will not accuse us on the score of undue extravagance. These 12 battalions with their ancillary unite will, it is considered, be sufficient to hold Baghdad and the river communications which connect it with the sea. Last of all in our arrangements for maintaining public security, but by no means least of all, comes the powerful Air Force which is now stationed in the country, and which is being somewhat increased. There are at present six squadrons of aeroplanes in Mesopotamia, and next year there will be two more. [280](#) The extent to which aerial control can be used in substitution for military force is still disputable, but with every month that has passed our confidence in its great utility has been increased. It must not be supposed that aeroplanes have no means of acting except by

using lethal force. That, of course, is in reserve. But we hope that, by their agency, we shall be able to keep in amicable touch with the tribes and local centres, and to ward off in good time movements of unrest, to sustain and, if necessary, relieve detached posts, to keep political officers in close relation with their districts, and to maintain a reasonable degree of order in the country. There is also a squadron of the Air Force in Palestine, and three squadrons in Egypt. Arrangements are being made which will make it possible for aeroplanes to fly regularly to and fro across the desert between Baghdad and Cairo. At the present time, if you wish to move a squadron from Egypt to Mesopotamia, or vice versa, the aeroplanes have to be taken to pieces at the port, packed in crates, and taken on a long sea voyage; then unpacked, put together and trued-up for flying—a process which takes two or three months at the least. But once this route across the desert has been marked out, and it is possible for it to be flown in the regular course of affairs, the whole of the Air Force in Mesopotamia can be speedily transported to Palestine or Egypt, or vice versa, and be sent to reinforce the Air Force in Mesopotamia.

That may, in the end, be used as a means of securing a reduction of the aggregate number of squadrons we shall have to employ. It is going on now, but I am, of course, counting on the friendly sentiment in the desert, and we have every reason to believe we shall get it. That is the whole policy. It is to develop a friendly policy with the Arabs, to keep in close touch and sympathy and sentiment with them. I should mention that as all this Air Force has to be on the ground for the purpose of maintaining peace and order, arrangements can be made to fly a certain number of commercial aeroplanes, which can carry mails, and possibly passengers, and, incidentally, will, if we have a peaceful solution, at which we are aiming, afford a most valuable link in the chain of [281](#) Imperial communications, which may ultimately result in very great advantage in shortening communication with India and with Australia and New Zealand.

I do not want to detain the Committee longer than is necessary, but I fear I must be allowed to present my picture as a whole. I must mention, before I leave Mesopotamia, the question of Kurdistan. Before Sir Percy Cox left Baghdad, he had

intimated to the Kurds that, in anticipation of the plebiscite, which was provided for them in the Treaty of Sèvres, he would continue to administer Kurdistan direct. The Kurd does not appreciate the prospect of being ruled by an Arab Government. He is more ready, more contented to rule himself under the guidance and advice of the British administration. But they have expressed considerable apprehension at the idea of an Arab Government, because they have not been informed of the extent to which we shall support that Government and sustain it, and they do not know whether the Arab Government will be a success or not. We have therefore instituted inquiries throughout the Kurdish areas, and the result has been to confirm the view that the people of Southern Kurdistan would only accept union with Iraq if they were dealt with by the High Commissioner direct. Therefore Sir Percy Cox will perform a dual function in regard to Iraq and Kurdistan, somewhat analogous to the functions of the Governor-General of South Africa with regard to the Union and Rhodesia and the native territories. I trust that, under his influence, Southern Kurdistan and Iraq will be drawn closer together, but, in the meantime, I want to make it quite clear that we are developing, as it were, a principle of home rule for Southern Kurdistan within the general area of Mesopotamia at the same time that we are developing the general self-government of Mesopotamia.

[§ Mr. ASQUITH](#)

What does the right hon. Gentleman mean by Southern Kurdistan? What about Mosul?

[§ Mr. CHURCHILL](#)

Mosul is in Iraq. I shall be very glad to lay a map.

[§ Lord R. CECIL](#)

Then is everything to the north of Iraq included in Southern Kurdistan?

[§ Mr. CHURCHILL](#)

Of course, they are going to be administered as one commercial area, but the chiefs in Southern Kurdistan will look direct to the High Commissioner and will not be themselves under this new Arab Government until a later stage, when we hope matters will be so far stabilised that



there will be a general community of interests. Such are the arrangements, political, financial and military, by which we hope to erect and to sustain during its early years an Arab Government in Mesopotamia. In proportion as that Government grows strong and efficient, we shall hope to reduce the forces we have in that country, even below the limit I have mentioned, till ultimately the main, if not the whole, responsibility for order will be assumed by the Arab ruler and Government, with the possible assistance of the Kurdish levies. At Kurdistan the Arab levies will be merged in the Arab Army, but there will be Kurdistan levies in addition. You must have Kurds levied in Kurdistan, and they will furnish a most valuable bulwark against infiltrations from Kemalist or Bolshevist sources. It would be disastrous if you tried to police the Kurdish districts with Arab levies. As they say, I believe, in the language of the Turks, "Horses for horses." We should not think of mixing up the different classes or putting them in their wrong places; it would be most unfortunate. We are prepared, when the Arab Government has been set up, and a ruler chosen, to enter into negotiations with that ruler, to enable us to readjust our relations with Mesopotamia upon a treaty basis, that is, recognising in a much more direct form her independence, and thus still further to disengage ourselves from the problems, burdens, and responsibilities of these embarrassing regions. As I have said, the normal cost of the military and aviation arrangements for Mesopotamia in the coming year, on the basis I have described, will not exceed £7,000,000 or £8,000,000, but I must not be understood as presenting the exact Estimate a year and a half before the time.

§ *Colonel WEDGWOOD*

How much of that is for the Air Force?

§ *Mr. CHURCHILL*

About £1,250,000 for the Air Force, and the rest for levies and certain subsidies. The Committee will ask me, Do you guarantee that these arrangements which you are making will actually

work, and will they permit the [283](#) great reductions in the garrisons to be made without leading to a renewal of disorder and of war? I can give no guarantee. All I can say is that I believe they are the best arrangements that can be contrived, and that they have gathered behind them a very general measure of support among the experts, military, civil and aerial, who have been concerned in making them. The High Commissioner was prepared on this basis to carry on, and the military authorities were in accord. If they succeed they will relieve the Exchequer of an immense burden, and ultimately lead up to a condition where the country will be self-supporting. The carrying out of this policy will require great skill and prudence, as well as resolution, from Sir Percy Cox, and from the military and civil authorities concerned. If it is successful, I am sure the Committee will feel that very great credit will be deserved by all of these devoted men who have been maintaining their position and our interests in that country all these weary months, under circumstances of great discouragement and uncertainty, and who are now so loyally co-operating in this experiment of the development of a national Government there.

I turn to Palestine. Here, at the present time, the problem is more acute than in Mesopotamia. On the other hand, it is a much smaller problem in a military sense. Mesopotamia is a vast, inaccessible country. Palestine is a country readily accessible from all points from the sea, a country which a motor car can traverse from end to end in the course of a day or less than a day. Although, according to my information, there is more danger of trouble in Palestine in this present year than in Mesopotamia—I am only giving you my information—the trouble could be much more easily dealt with if it broke out. The cause of unrest in Palestine, and the only cause, arises from the Zionist movement, and from our promises and pledges in regard to it. But for these promises, and this movement, there is no doubt that the garrison maintained at the British expense in Palestine could be sensibly reduced. At the end of last year, whilst I was still at the War Office, we arranged to make a very large reduction in the Palestine garrison. Our forces were reduced from a ration [284](#) strength of 16,000 to one of 7,000, giving a combatant strength of 5,000. That is the number

there at the present time. I cannot hold out any hope of diminishing this force in the immediate future. On the contrary, it is possible it may require some slight reinforcement. The total cost to which we were put on this account in Palestine last year was £6,500,000, and this present year it will be £4,500,000. But of that £4,500,000, £2,000,000 represents the repatriation and demobilisation charges for the very large body of Indian troops which have now evacuated the country.

Therefore, you may say that the expense in Palestine of the military garrison—be cause the civil establishment maintains itself; the country supports itself—but the expense of the British military garrison will be £2,500,000 next year. It is not quite fair to say that that expense could all be reduced if, for instance, we had not got Palestine, because the bulk of the troops in Palestine are regular British units, and if they were not stationed in Palestine, it is probable that they would be stationed elsewhere, unless this House were to embark on a further policy of disbanding the pre-War units of the British Army. Still, there it is, and I am not at all minimising the difficulties of the problem. Let us see how we stand towards the Jews and the Arabs of Palestine. I have mentioned to the Committee the declaration of the Lord President of the Council, endorsed as it was by the Supreme Council of the Allies at San Remo. The substance of it found its repetition in the draft mandate which is shortly coming before the League of Nations.

§ *Sir F. BANBURY*

Is the League of Nations going to be represented in Palestine and Mesopotamia?

§ *Mr. CHURCHILL*

No. We have quite enough complications. The mandates are held under the Covenant of the League of Nations. The difficulty about this promise of a national home for the Jew in Palestine is that it conflicts with our regular policy of consulting the wishes of the people in the mandated territories and of giving them representative institutions as soon as they are fit for them, which institution, in this case they would use to veto any further Jewish immigration. There are many difficulties, but, numerous as they are,

vexatious as they are, I [285](#) believe that with patience, coolness, and a little good fortune we may find a way out of them. The British Empire has been built up by optimism and by positive assertions rather than negations. There are in Palestine about 500,000 Moslems, 65,000 Christians, and about 63,000 Jews. There have been brought into Palestine under the Zionist scheme of immigration about 7,000 Jews. This immigration and the propaganda by which it has been accompanied has greatly alarmed and excited the Arab population. It is not so much the number of the immigrants which has created the alarm, but the continuous and ardent declarations of the Zionist organisations throughout the world—which they have a perfect right to make—of their hope and aim of making Palestine a predominantly Jewish country, peopled by Jews from all over the world, and also the fear that these Jews will come principally from Central Europe, and particularly from Russia.

The Arabs believe that in the next few years they are going to be swamped by scores of thousands of immigrants from Central Europe, who will push them off the land, eat up the scanty substance of the country and eventually gain absolute control of its institutions and destinies. As a matter of fact these fears are illusory. The Zionists in order to obtain the enthusiasm and the support which they require are bound to state their case with the fullest ardour, conviction and hope, and it is these declarations which alarm the Arabs, and not the actual dimensions of the immigration which has taken place or can take place in practice. However, we have there Sir Herbert Samuel, who is so well known to many Members of this House; a skilful, practised, experienced liberal politician—qualities of which it is very necessary to have an ample supply in the government of so widespread and various an empire as ours. He is also a most ardent Zionist. I am following with very great confidence his action and giving him every possible measure of confidence and support in these difficult times. He has lately made a further declaration to the peoples of Palestine, explaining to them his interpretation of the phrase "national home," as used in the pledge given by the British Government in 1917. This is what he said: These words (national home) mean that the Jews, who are a people scattered throughout the world, but whose hearts are [286](#) always turning to Palestine,

should he enabled to found here their home, and that some amongst them, within the limits fixed by numbers and the interests of the present population, should come to Palestine in order to help by their resources and efforts to develop the country to the advantage of all its inhabitants. There really is nothing for the Arabs to be frightened about. All the Jewish immigration is being very carefully watched and controlled both from the point of view of numbers and character. No Jew will be brought in beyond the number who can be provided for by the expanding wealth and development of the resources of the country. There is no doubt whatever that at the present time the country is greatly under-populated. Anyone who has seen the work of the Jewish colonies which have been established during the last 20 or 30 years in Palestine will be struck by the enormous productive results which they have achieved. I had the opportunity of visiting the colony of Richon le Zion about 12 miles from Jaffa, and there, from the most inhospitable soil, surrounded on every side by barrenness and the most miserable form of cultivation, I was driven into a fertile and thriving country estate, where the scanty soil gave place to good crops and good cultivation, and then to vineyards and finally to the most beautiful, luxurious orange groves, all created in 20 or 30 years by the exertions of the Jewish community who live there. Then as we went on we were surrounded by 50 or 60 young Jews, galloping on their horses, and with farmers from the estate who took part in the work. Finally, when we reached the centre, there were drawn up 300 or 400 of the most admirable children, of all sizes and sexes, and about an equal number of white-clothed damsels. We were invited to sample the excellent wines which the establishment produced, and to inspect the many beauties of the groves.

I defy anybody, after seeing work of this kind, achieved by so much labour, effort and skill, to say that the British Government, having taken up the position it has, could cast it all aside and leave it to be rudely and brutally overturned by the incursion of a fanatical attack by the Arab population from outside. It would be disgraceful if we allowed anything of the kind to take place. I am talking to the Committee of what I saw with my own eyes. All round the Jewish colony, the Arab houses were [287](#) tiled instead of being built of mud, so that the culture from this centre has spread out into the surrounding district. I have no doubt that with the proper development of the resources of Palestine, and that if Jewish capital is available, as it may be, for development in Palestine, for the creation of

great irrigation works on the Jordan, and for the erection of electrical power stations in the Jordan valley, which can so readily be erected there, there will be, year after year, new means of good livelihood for a moderate number of the Jewish community, and the fact that they will be gaining their livelihood by these new means will inure to the general wealth of the whole community, Arabs and Christians as well as of Jews. I see no reason why with care and progress there, there should not be a steady flow of Jewish immigrants into the country, and why this flow should not be accompanied at every stage by a general increase in the wealth of the whole of the existing population, and without injury to any of them. That, at any rate, is the task upon which we have embarked, and which I think we are bound to pursue. We cannot possibly agree to allow the Jewish colonies to be wrecked, or all future immigration to be stopped, without definitely accepting the position that the word of Britain no longer counts throughout the East and the Middle East. If representative institutions are conceded, as we hope they will be, to the Arabs in Palestine, some definite arrangements will have to be made in the instrument on which those institutions stand, which will safeguard within reasonable limits the immigration of Jews into the country, as they make their own way and create their own means of subsistence. Our task, using a phrase of the late Lord Salisbury, will be to persuade one side to concede and the other to forbear, by keeping a reasonable margin of force available in order to ensure the acceptance of the position by both parties.

The riot which took place at Jaffa and in the neighbourhood two weeks ago was serious in its character. About 400 persons were killed or injured. While the situation still fills us with a certain amount of anxiety, I do not think it is an unmanageable situation or likely to become unmanageable, but I believe it is one that [288](#) we shall be able to shape according to our wishes and undertakings within the limits of the expense I have mentioned. Lastly, I must deal with the question of Trans-Jordania. This is one of the most valuable parts of Palestine, and comprises the ancient regions of Moab, Edom and Gilead. We have no troops of any kind in this district, and a state of continuous disorder has prevailed there for the last two years. The normal trade between Eastern and Western Palestine across the Dead Sea and the Jordan has been interrupted, and raiding parties of Arabs from Trans-Jordania have repeatedly crossed the Jordan to kill and steal on

the western side of the river. It was necessary to bring Trans-Jordania under some form of settled government. This was necessary not only from our point of view but from that of the French, whose Syrian northern mandatory sphere marches with the northern boundaries of Trans-Jordania. All the discontented elements who were driven out of Damascus by the French in the recent trouble, under circumstances with which the House is well acquainted, had gathered in Trans-Jordania, and had begun to raid northwards into French territory, blowing up bridges, etc., and taking other aggressive action. The French, naturally, objected to this state of things.

It was clear that we ought to keep order ourselves, otherwise it was difficult to deny them the right to enter and to carry out operations in our territory. On the other hand we were very reluctant to face the expense of maintaining two or three battalions in Trans-Jordania and, worse than expense, the risk of getting them isolated and cut off by risings of the tribes. In these circumstances, we had recourse to the good offices of the Emir Abdulla, the elder brother of Emir Feisal, as part of our general policy of acting in accordance with Sherifian influence. I had a long conference with the Emir Abdulla at Jerusalem. He has undertaken to maintain order in Trans-Jordania and to prevent any hostile action against the French. That was the indispensable stipulation which I made. We are assisting him to raise local levies for the purpose of maintaining internal order, and the aeroplane squadron at Ludd, within half an hour's distance, and a few armoured cars are available for his support. So far, these arrangements have been successful. The Emir Abdulla [289](#) who is a very agreeable, intelligent, and civilised Arab prince, has maintained an absolutely correct attitude, both towards us and towards the French, and should he find it necessary to lay down the charge which we have persuaded him to assume, I trust it will be possible to find another Arab ruler who will, no doubt, command his goodwill and influence over the tribes.

The general policy which we are pursuing of work with the Sherifian family is in no way opposed to the interests of France. On the contrary it is the surest method open to us of securing France from disturbance in Syria by Arab influences with which she has unhappily disagreed. There is, unfortunately, a certain undercurrent of recrimination among French and British officials in the Middle East. This does not extend to those in responsible positions on either side, and will, I

am sure, be firmly suppressed on both sides by superior authority wherever it manifests itself. It would be deeply injurious to both of us if France and Great Britain should be unable to act together in the Middle East. It would be absolutely fatal to our joint interests if the impression were to continue, as it has done during the last two years, that one country was indifferent to Arab aspirations and the other was especially opposed to the Turks. That would be disastrous. In such a way we should unite all the forces in these lands in hostility against us at the very time when we wish to reduce our military forces and the heavy expense to which both countries are put thereby. If we wish to maintain our position and to discharge our responsibilities in the Middle East, England and France together must pursue a policy of appeasement and friendship towards both Turks and Arabs.

The policy which I have been endeavouring to explain to the Committee, and in listening to which they have shown me such special kindness and indulgence, is animated throughout by a sincere desire to establish and consolidate a community of interest between the Arabs on one hand and Great Britain and her Allies on the other. But all these efforts will be frustrated and brought to naught unless we can combine with them a peaceful and lasting settlement with Turkey. It is not to be expected that such a settlement can be reached by the exhibition of absolute powerlessness on the part of Great [290](#) Britain and France. We must have the means of defending our vital interests, and we must show that we possess those means, and that in the last resort we are not incapable of using them. Otherwise there is absolutely no limit to the extent of humiliation and maltreatment which will be inflicted upon these great victorious Allies, who so lately struck down the whole Turkish Empire, by antagonists who, if elusive, are also very feeble. But if we show ourselves powerless or incapable of defending ourselves we shall not get that peaceful settlement which is the goal of our aims.

The paramount object which we are pursuing, and have been pursuing for months past, has been to secure a real and lasting peace with Turkey. It is only upon the basis of such a peace that the prospect which I have held out, of a substantial abatement in the heavy charges which will fall upon both countries on account of their Middle Eastern commitments, can be realised. I am bound to bring this matter before the Committee as it is fundamental to the whole argument which I have



addressed to them, and to the policy which we are endeavouring to achieve. Such is the counsel which I respectfully offer to the Committee. I cannot say with certainty that the unknown future which lies before us will enable this policy of reduction and appeasement to be carried out with complete success, but I do believe that the measures which we are taking are well calculated to that end. I have great confidence in the experts and high authorities who have combined in thinking that they are so calculated, and I advise the Committee to give their assent to them and to give us their support in the difficult and delicate process of reduction and conciliation which lies before us, and on which we are already definitely embarking.

§ Earl WINTERTON

The right hon. Gentleman who has just spoken gives an impression of power and grandeur which is possessed by few persons and institutions with the possible exception of the Pyramids or Lord Northcliffe. Very few Members of this House, or for that matter of the Government either, in these days can hold the attention of a Committee of this House with a closely reasoned and well-knit speech in the manner in which my right hon. Friend has done. May I say to my right hon. Friend, [291](#) with all respect, that I think that it is a personal triumph of no small nature, and this is a proposition with which even those who disagree with some of the things which he has said will be inclined to agree with that. I recognise that a great many hon. Gentlemen wish to take part in this Debate from different angles, and that, owing to circumstances over which the Committee has no control, the time available is shorter than we expected. Therefore I will make my remarks as brief as possible. My only excuse for troubling the Committee is that I have been from the first identified in a very strong degree with the policy which my right hon. Friend has put forward, that I am on terms of personal friendship with the members of the Hussein family to which he has referred in such laudatory terms, and that I have visited a very large number of the places which he has mentioned in his speech.

I would first ask the Committee to consider what is common ground between all of us on both sides,

from whatever angle we view this question. I think that every one of us outside Government circles among the Allies and ourselves will agree that since the Armistice there has been almost inconceivable chaos, confusion and conflicting aims among the Allies in their Eastern policy generally. In Mesopotamia we have got a formidable monument of folly. I do not think there is any use in harping upon it. There is no use in indulging in any recriminations with regard to the action of any of those countries with which we have been associated for what has taken place in the past. Nobody wants to act as a sort of refilling point to the vitriolic continental journalism which has taken such a prominent interest in our Eastern affairs. I think that that is common policy between us. Where there is very great difference of opinion in this country—and it is well to recognise the fact at the outset—is in regard to the policy which is now to be pursued. I would like to say a word, first of all, about the policy which has been described as "get out to Basra," the evacuation of Mesopotamia, except in so far as Basra is concerned.

The right hon. Gentleman in his speech explained the circumstances in which we entered Mesopotamia, and I think that they are circumstances which should be recognised, and have not been sufficiently [292](#) recognised by public opinion and the Press in this country generally. After a series of incredible blunders made in Mesopotamia, partly military, partly by politicians at home, and partly in India, we succeeded, after great sacrifice of life and treasure, not only in driving the Turks from Mesopotamia, but in defeating them on other frontiers in Palestine and elsewhere. Without going into the vexed and delicate question how far we can consider that the whole of the Allied front in the War was one front, though a French friend once pointed out that the Turks were as much defeated beneath the walls of Verdun as in Mesopotamia, it is we alone who took any great part at all in defeating the Turks except in the early days of Gallipoli, and we found ourselves as a result in military possession of Mesopotamia when the Armistice came. I would ask if anyone in his senses in those circumstances can suggest that either then immediately after the Armistice, or for that matter to-day, we should turn out of that country bag and baggage, leaving it to the anarchy, murder, chaos, and rapine which would undoubtedly follow? I do not think that anyone would suggest that.

§ Lieut. - Commander KENWORTHY

Even if it is—

§ [Earl WINTERTON](#)

My hon. and gallant Friend has far too great a habit of interrupting those with whom he disagrees. Perhaps when he has heard my argument I shall be glad to give way.

§ [Lieut. - Commander KENWORTHY](#)

You asked a question.

§ [Earl WINTERTON](#)

My hon. and gallant Friend is too fond of asking questions.

§ [Lieut. - Commander KENWORTHY](#)

You asked a question.

§ [Earl WINTERTON](#)

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I am not sufficiently interested in his speeches to ask him any questions. I maintain that that is a policy which no country in its senses could possibly have followed, either after the Armistice or can possibly follow today. As to the "get out to Basra" policy, I view with considerable alarm the kinds of arguments which are used in certain quarters, which hitherto were regarded as Imperialist, about our position in Mesopotamia. Exactly the same arguments [293](#) were used by a section of the Press and a large number of people in this country in the early days of the nineteenth century against our whole Colonial policy. It is the argument which we see in the Press to-day—"How can this country afford to pay for a single soldier in Mesopotamia when people are starving through want of work at home?" It is exactly the argument which was used about Canada, Australia, and the rest of the Empire in the hungry 'thirties and 'forties.

Two Noble Lords, two brothers, in another place, apparently are giving support to a policy which fills me with alarm for the whole British Empire. It is put on the naked issue of what I may call pure commercial material interests. They may just as well ask "What advantage it is to us to have a fleet in the Pacific?" We have to keep ships in the Pacific

to assist in protecting Australia and exactly the same arguments that apply to Mesopotamia might equally be applied to the position of Australia. "Why should money be spent on the Far Eastern fleet when people are starving at home?" They are most dangerous arguments. I could understand them from some sections of the Labour party. They have always been the arguments of the Manchester School. I do not believe I am alone in resenting the way in which what I may term the stinking corpse of the Manchester School is being resurrected by people who, one might think, would be ashamed to touch such an object. But even if the answer is that we ought to get out of Mesopotamia, if any hon. Member says "I will go the full length of the Manchester School, for I agree with the sermons preached 30 and 40 years ago, when the question was asked: what use are the Colonies to us?"—sermons that the late Mr. Disraeli did so much to fight in this House and sermons which but for his influence might have been in force to-day with the result that the policy might have been put in effect; to-day—if any hon. Member holds those views he is entitled to put them forward. But there is another answer besides that I have given. It is that we have undertaken obligations there. It would be impossible for us having accepted the idea of the League of Nations and the Mandate for Mesopotamia to leave that country in the condition in which it would be if we withdrew.

[294](#) There is the other sort of argument used in this House by those who are bitterly opposed to the whole idea of the League of Nations, by those who lose no opportunity of sneering and jeering at the League. They are entitled to use the argument, but it would be more honest and honourable of them if they said openly that they would do all they could to smash the League. I do not know whether the hon. Baronet who represents East Nottingham (Sir J. D. Rees) has formed any association to defeat the League, but I suggest it would be more honest to do so than to adopt the attitude which opponents of the League adopt now of losing no opportunity of sneering and jeering at the ideal. They should come out openly and say that they will do all they can to defeat the League and to fashion public opinion to that end; they should say frankly that they will use all the intellectual advantages with which Providence has supplied them in order to rouse the people of the country in support of their views. I suggest that as a policy to the hon. Baronet. There are those who object to our being in Mesopotamia on the ground of the Mandate, but unless they are prepared to attack the whole idea of the League of Nations and to refuse to carry out

the obligations under the Covenant, they are in a dilemma, and meanwhile we are bound to undertake the task which is imposed upon us.

I come to what I believe to be a common-sense view, and one which in the main has been enunciated by the right hon. Gentleman to-day. It is that we cannot get out of Mesopotamia bag and baggage, but equally that we cannot afford the money we have hitherto spent, and that that expenditure must cease. It only remains for those who look at this question from different angles, such as the hon. and gallant Member for Wrekin (Sir C. Townshend), and others on this side, to devise some means for carrying out the policy of spending less money. There is the common ground between us that it is impossible for us to get out bag and baggage. How far is it possible to carry out the policy of the Secretary of State—the policy of responsibility for good Government with a minimum charge on the Imperial Exchequer? My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Ormsby-Gore) and myself, at a time when hardly anyone had heard of the Arab movement in this House, advocated [295](#) in season and out of season, until we ran the risk of becoming bores on the subject, the idea that the Government should adopt the solution of the problem which, in effect, they have now adopted. From that point of view it is a triumph for the views we put forward. We have always said that you must give the Arabs self-government, give it to them on as wide a basis as possible, and make the territorial area as wide as possible; and, while we are not prepared to go so far as to say that there is no one else to whom you could give the headship of that self-government, we do believe that the Hussein family is the family which is most likely to be able to find a cadet who can carry out that policy.

Everything my right hon. Friend has said about King Hussein and his family has been justified by the part they played in the War. I do not wish to go into that matter at any length. It is public knowledge that they have been subjected, both King Hussein and his sons, the Emir Abdulla and the Emir Feisal, to a great deal of criticism in this country and a great deal of unfair criticism in a foreign country. No one who served, as I did, in the most close personal touch with the Emir Feisal and the Hussein family, and who saw the tremendous military obligations which they undertook and the tremendous personal risk which they ran in order to carry out those obligations, and understood their complete belief in Arab self-government, and knew the friendship of the Arab people with this

country—no one who knew that would think that the right hon. Gentleman has praised the Arabs extravagantly to-day. I would like to read extracts from a letter from the Emir Feisal to me, because he deals with what should be the object of British and Arabs alike in the Middle East. The Emir Feisal says: I earnestly believe that you and the political friends who share your view are working for a thoroughly sound principle—a good understanding between this country and Empire and the Arabs. By helping the latter to rebuild their national life and regain their ancient civilisation, while scrupulously respecting their independence as a nation, Great Britain will have a great moral achievement to its credit, which I believe history will rank as the highest of this generation. Moreover, I am content that this policy and this policy alone will secure to Great Britain those economic and political interests on which she rightly lays [296](#) stress. It has the additional advantage of being the most economical to this country. I believe that those statesmanlike words represent the point of view held by the Emir's father, King Hussein, and the whole of his family, and I associate myself with the statement of the right hon. Gentleman as to the fitness of the two members of that family for holding high constitutional office in Arab self-government.

I can see that a great deal will be made of the fact that the right hon. Gentleman has to-day made what is in effect an extended promise of a chance to the Arabs of carving out their own destiny in their own way. I can quite imagine that in certain other quarters, particularly in Egypt, an attempt will be made to draw a comparison between what we are prepared to do in Mesopotamia and Palestine and what we have not yet done in Egypt. I hope that no member of the Committee will be deluded into agreeing with the people who make such a comparison. As the right hon. Gentleman has said, there can be no possible comparison between our position in Mesopotamia and Palestine and our position in Egypt. We have obligations in Egypt of which we cannot divest ourselves; we have undertaken obligations to a large foreign community such as does not exist in Mesopotamia. In my right hon. Friend's remarks on Palestine there was one matter to which I must refer, and that is the question of emigration. I know Richon le Zion almost better than my right hon. Friend knows it. I took part in a fight in its environs during the War, and I am glad to say that few of its pleasant buildings were damaged by the artillery fire of the combatants. It is a monument to the hard work and the good sense shown by the

Jewish immigrants, but I think the right hon. Gentleman, perhaps unintentionally, did rather an injustice to the Arab cultivators in the community. It is true that their methods of cultivation are inferior to those of the Jews.

I recognise that here I am getting on delicate ground. After all, the Arab cultivators of Palestine, however old-fashioned and antiquated their methods may be, were the people who were originally on the ground. There was a period of, I believe, about 1,600 years, during which there were no Jewish cultivators at all and the Arab cultivators were in possession. There is a feeling among the Arabs that by stressing the superior methods of cultivation adopted by the Jews compared with the primitive methods of the Arabs, a suggestion is made that in course of time the Arabs will have to make way for the Jews. Nothing could be more vital to the good government of Palestine in the future than the dispelling of that idea. No sort of pressure should be put on the Arab cultivators to give up their land, even though they prefer to cultivate it in old-fashioned ways. If you do not dispel the idea to which I have referred you will have an agrarian movement of a very serious kind in Palestine. Already we have got there what is rather amazing, a Moslem-Christian league, the object of which is largely to support the interests of the original cultivators. The matter will require very careful handling. I have always had considerable doubts as to whether it is possible to bring many more emigrants into Palestine and to settle them on the land. I have discussed the matter with a former Member of this House who, unfortunately, is now gone from us, the late Sir Mark Sykes, and he had the idea that it would be possible to settle a large number of people in the Jordan Valley. But I have grave doubts about it. I do not think Palestine will accommodate many more emigrants on the land. But there are forms of manufacture; there is a great deal to be done in the first few years in improving communications; there is the possibility of minerals in the country. I think there is room for development.

6.0 P.M.

Any Government in Palestine would be placed in a dilemma between the claims of the Arab cultivator and the claims of more progressive, economic, and intensive cultivation. Unquestionably, they can carry out the latter, but only at the cost of dispossessing the Arab cultivator. Directly you begin to buy land for the purpose of settling Jewish

cultivators you will find yourself up against the hereditary antipathy which exists all over the world to the Jewish race. At the same time, I do not take a gloomy view of the future of Palestine. I resent as strongly as the most enthusiastic supporter of the Zionist movement the attacks which have been made upon it. We have in Sir Herbert Samuel a man with wide experience of government and [298](#) of most impartial and judicial mind, and I believe he has already made himself popular with all sections in Palestine. We, in this House and in this country, owe him this obligation, that we should refrain from making more difficult, than it would otherwise be, the position which he fills in Palestine. It is a very small country, and questions asked in this House are eagerly followed by local parties, and it is not desirable that attention should be drawn to differences between Jews and Arabs. If an effort is made in this House to treat it as the question of Ireland is treated, and the differences between Ulstermen and the rest of Ireland, it will have a most deplorable effect in Palestine. Palestine, in some respects, I am glad to say not in all, is not unlike Ireland, and nothing is easier than to stir up trouble by controversies outside. I think that Sir Herbert Samuel, to use a vulgar phrase, should be given a chance to prove his hand.

The statement which has been given regarding military expenditure in Palestine is most satisfactory. As in the case of Mesopotamia so in the case of Palestine I cannot see how any sane person can suggest that we should now go out of the country bag and baggage and leave it in a worse condition than it was before. I think we are entitled to receive at the hands of the so-called Anti-Waste party some explanation of their attitude on this matter. The Committee is entitled to hear from the leaders of that party what is their alternative policy in Palestine and Mesopotamia, and whether it is really one of getting out bag and baggage, or one of spending a modified sum of money, and, if so, in what respect it is a better policy than that which has fallen from my right hon. Friend. I believe my right hon. Friend has chosen far the wiser course. I think the Conference in which he took part at Cairo will be of the greatest possible present and future benefit to the whole British Empire.

The country is fortunate in having the right hon. Gentleman at the head of this great Department at a time when it is called upon to fulfil responsibilities greater than it has ever been called upon to fulfil before. It has had to deal with, and



stop, the faults committed in the past by other Members of His Majesty's Government. Those were not the faults of the right hon. Gentleman, but of other [299](#) Members of the Government, some of whom, unfortunately, do not sit in this House any longer. I wish they did sit here. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name, name!"] Well, as to giving the name I am not quite sure of the Standing Orders on the subject. I shall only express the wish that a certain Noble Lord had taken a step downwards in the Peerage rather than one upwards so that some of us might have a chance of putting questions to him in this House. As I have said, it is not the fault of the right hon. Gentleman if mistakes have been made in the past. I believe he will go a long way towards retrieving those mistakes. I am aware that this is a form of flattery which has never been very popular with him, but I am only speaking in the interests of truth which are more important than any tribute which could be paid to him. I believe that with good luck he will succeed. He was very frank when he admitted that in this matter we are dependent to some extent upon luck and the course of events. No one can say that any policy in the countries with which he has to deal, can be immediately successful. If I may use an aerial term there are all kinds of pockets of wind to be encountered, some of which may be very favourable and other of which may be quite the reverse. Given the average luck and carrying out his task, as I believe he will, with the proper spirit and intention, I think he will succeed in eliminating the present really dangerous situation in the Middle East and in casting fresh lustre on the traditions of British Imperial policy.

[§ Sir CHARLES TOWNSHEND](#)

I do not think anyone in this House understands more than myself the difference between criticism and execution—between theory and practice. On the few occasions I have had to attempt to criticise the Government mine has always been constructive criticism. No one has heard me, either inside or outside the House, making obstacles for the Government, or trying to hamper them. On the other hand, in many cases I have supported them. I have never gone under the banner of "Anti-Waste." I prefer to be honest and to say what I am. I hope I am independent however, and, as hon. Members know, it is the banner of Independence under which I go. If I honestly think a thing is right I vote [300](#) for it; if I think it is wrong I vote against

it, and I do not care a two-penny piece who the proposers of these things are. I think, therefore, I can afford to laugh at the sneer about Anti-Waste.

[§ Earl WINTERTON](#)

I was not referring to the hon. and gallant Gentleman in my remark.

[§ Sir C. TOWNSHEND](#)

I am glad to hear the hon. Member did not mean me. Nobody has listened more attentively, or with greater interest, than I have to the scheme which the right hon. Gentleman has unfolded for Mesopotamia. Nobody would, if he could, support the right hon. Gentleman in any scheme for bringing about a better situation in the world more than I would, but I have some right to talk about Mesopotamia. I have suffered enough in connection with that country. I should like to make reference to one remark of the right hon. Gentleman, when he talked about my saying that I could hold Mesopotamia with one battalion.

[§ Mr. CHURCHILL](#)

No, one division.

[§ Sir C. TOWNSHEND](#)

I beg your pardon—one division. I should like to explain to the House what I meant by that statement. As some hon. Members recollect, I stated that in that case I would concentrate in the seaboard provinces, with my back to the sea at Busrah. That is quite a different thing from holding the whole of the country which we call Mesopotamia, or which the Turks call Iraq, with 12 battalions. Twelve battalions is one division, and therefore what I suggested was a very modest plan compared with holding the whole country and holding the line as well with 12 battalions. You would require to have aerodromes at various points, and defensive posts would have to be put in the centres of population or the strategic points, to use a term which is now somewhat worn out. You would require to have aerodromes at such places as Kutel-Amara, Bagdad, and at places along the Tigris, and I reckon you would certainly require to

have a large number if you took in the whole country right up to the frontier. I would prefer, if instead of using the word "battalions," the right hon. Gentleman had referred to the numbers of combatants. The term "battalions" is a rather misleading one, but when we speak of so many thousand [301](#) combatants that embraces all arms, and gives us a more exact idea. The Secretary of State for War, in answer to a question from some hon. Member recently, said he had still 90,000 men in Mesopotamia.

[§ Mr. CHURCHILL](#)

That would include followers, refugees and other people on the rations list, but would not be confined to combatants.

[§ Sir C. TOWNSHEND](#)

I should like to refer to some of the remarks which have been made in regard to the Arabs. It is now some years ago since I first had experience of the Arabs at the time of Abu Klea, and I have had experience of them in Mesopotamia and also in parts of Northern Africa, so that I can claim some knowledge of the Arab and his character. I know what the Arab is capable of under the influence of religious fanaticism. Those who stood in the broken square at Abu Klea or on the plains of Omdurman must have a respect for him, but I found the Arab in Mesopotamia an extraordinary mixture. He is as treacherous as a Pathan and he is often cowardly, but he is very pleasant outwardly. I have noticed that officials, when they first meet the Arab, are attracted by his good-humoured laugh and the manner in which he appreciates a joke. He is a master of dissimulation with those whom he calls "the white lords above him," or the political officer who has a well-filled treasury chest for the purposes of backsheesh. But unless you wish to have very great disappointments you must remember that, speaking generally, his religion teaches him to hate you. There is a proverb amongst them, "Kiss the dog on the mouth until thou hast got thy desire." I know what the Arab has done and how unreliable he is in many cases. Sir Percy Cox is a man whom I admire for his work

with the Arabs, yet I have never seen a man so "let in" by them. The Arab only respects force and strength. The mailed fist is the only thing by which you can gain his respect. He understands that, but he puts all diplomacy down to cowardice.

[§ Sir F. BANBURY](#)

Is not that the same everywhere?

[§ Sir C. TOWNSHEND](#)

I have no desire to prolong this discussion, but I was going to recount an anecdote of Sir Percy Cox, and I hope it will not bore [302](#) the House. In Mesopotamia, after I won the battle of Nurna, I pursued the Turks some 90 miles north. Sir Percy Cox came with me as my political officer. The Arabs turned round against the Turks and massacred their wounded, and I am glad to say I shot many Arabs in retaliation, although the Turks were my enemies. When I occupied Amara they all came in and salaamed. Sir Percy Cox was in his element, with all the Arab chiefs all round him, but directly Nureddin Pasha, who had been sent from Constantinople, advanced with his army and took up a position to defend the approach to Kut-al-Amara, his army being exaggerated in numbers as the people believed, all the Arabs left us within 24 hours. Sir Percy Cox and myself met the Arabs in Durbar in their camp, and we sat amongst them; in the battle they all fought against us, those 5,000 Arabs. I did not mind that, as they made little difference in the battle. The only thing I did mind was that they massacred many of my wounded in the night. Men were left out in the desert owing to the 18 or 20 miles turning move I made with my principal mass. Consequently I had to leave some of the men, who could not be collected that night, and they were murdered, and then two or three days afterwards, as we were the victors, in came all the Arabs again, and to my disgust and amazement they were pardoned by a higher authority than myself. Needless to say, I should not have done it. The main point, however, is in regard to Mesopotamia, and as the Government mean to carry through what they have laid down, I hope with all my heart they will have success, and I

would do all I could to support it. At the same time I hope they will be cautious about the Arab business. I hope they will remember what the Arab character is. There is another business, and that is, as the right hon. Gentleman says, that the whole thing hangs upon this Greek and Turkish war being stopped. In that event the right hon. Gentleman will be able to carry out what reforms he wants in Mesopotamia and Palestine and reduce that enormous garrison, but as long as that war is allowed to go on you will have continual uprisings in Mesopotamia and on the frontiers of India. I am told on reliable authority that Djemal Pasha is at Kabul.

§ *Colonel WEDGWOOD*

I am sure we were much edified by the speech of the [303](#) right hon. Gentleman in introducing this Estimate, and I could not help thinking how unfortunate it was that the Government had not sent him out to Cairo two and a half years ago, that for two and a half years the conduct of this Department has been in the hands of the Coalition Government and has been bandied from pillar to post between the India Office and the Foreign Office. At last the right hon. Gentleman has cut the Gordian knot and plunged out in the East to see what was the matter and to try and put things right, but meanwhile we have spent anything up to £60,000,000 of public money, and thrown it away into the Mesopotamian wastes. We have had the Foreign Office and Lord Curzon, magnetised apparently by the virtues of Sir Arnold Wilson who has since got a job somewhere else, into believing that the only way to conduct Mesopotamia was on the extravagant scale which has been carried out in the last two and a half years. That has gone on until the taxpayer could stand it no longer, and finally the Government had the brilliant idea of sending the right hon. Gentleman out and through him of enforcing economy. I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his being sent to Cairo, on the use he has made of that visit, and on its results, but I join with my predecessor on these Benches in asking him whether he really thinks it likely that he will be able to hold Iraq with 12 battalions. To have suggested that before this visit to Cairo would

have been laughed out of court, and it is obviously, from the right hon. Gentleman's speech to-day, a gamble at the present moment, but I am not at all certain that it is not a gamble into which I would have gone myself, and I am not at all certain that this gamble, in the right hon. Gentleman's hands, may not come off, if he gets the goodwill of the people, and if there is no pressing from the other side by people with offers and temptations greater than we can offer—but, obviously, the whole success of this gamble, this leaving Sir Percy Cox in Bagdad without any support, exactly as Sir Louis Cavagnari was left in Kabul many years ago, the whole chance of this turning out well depends on whether Kemal Pasha desires that it should turn out well.

The Turks have bossed and bullied the Arabs for centuries, and the Arabs of [304](#) Bagdad are much more afraid of the Turks than of Sir Percy Cox, or even of the right hon. Gentleman. If your Turks some 40 miles North of Mosul on the Kurdistan border are hostile, if they are determined to get us out of Iraq, they will have every chance of intriguing successfully with any Arab Government, any Arab State, resting upon Bagdad. The whole success of this solution depends upon peace with Turkey and upon that peace being honestly carried out by Turkey. How delightful it is to see the right hon. Gentleman the Colonial Secretary trying to persuade the Prime Minister to make peace. The situation was almost exactly the same six months ago, when the Prime Minister tried to persuade the right hon. Gentleman to make peace in order to stop the waste in Russia, which was even more extravagant than this. Now the rôle is reversed, and the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for the Colonies, with the wings of the Angel of Peace bursting from his shoulders, is trying to persuade the Prime Minister not to fall entirely under the spell of M. Venezelos, is trying to disillusion him of his Constantinian Greeks and to prove to him that in the interest of British trade, and finance, and economy, as well as of morality, it is desirable that we should end this warlike adventure in Asia Minor and withdraw our troops. I hope he will be successful. If peace can be obtained on any terms, I would have peace. I hope that peace will be obtained by retaining the freedom of the Straits, but I do not want that peace to be obtained by leaving the Turks in Smyrna and Thrace under the control of the Greeks, especially of the Constantinian Greeks. I want to make that

point clear. This is a gamble just as much as the Dardanelles was a gamble, and as justified as was the Dardanelles gamble. I hope it will turn out better, but if it is going to turn out better, it depends, not upon the right hon. Gentleman's agents in Mesopotamia, but upon his action in his own Cabinet in straightening up this dispute between Greece and Turkey at the present time.

Why have we waited for two and a half years for all this? The expenditure has gone on, and at any moment the right hon. Gentleman could have gone out to Cairo and put things straight. He could have done it at this time last year just as well, if he had been sent, of course, [305](#) and at any moment since the Armistice day in 1918, if somebody had gone out and said, "This waste is to stop," and put his foot firmly down upon the extravagance of a military-cum-Indian administration, it could have been done. We should not have had the rebellion of last year. We should have saved £50,000,000 of our money, and I attribute the whole trouble to the absolute want of co-operation and knowledge on the part of the Coalition Government. We on the Labour Benches have constantly urged the same course upon the Government. Just as for two and a half years we urged them to play the straight game in Russia, so we have been urging them for two and a half years to cut this wasteful extravagance which has been grafted upon the Mesopotamian administration; at last they come round, and now they expect us to get up and throw them bouquets and say what wonderful administrators they are. We admit that they get better under our tuition, but it takes them so long to improve. Though they know they are the only people fit to govern, and that we of the Labour party are quite unfit to govern, I cannot help thinking that if there are a few more changes of policy such as this put before the country, the country will begin to be a little sceptical as to whether that Front Bench itself is quite fitted to govern. Let me now come to details. As I understand, Mesopotamia and Palestine together are to cost us in future between £9,000,000 and £10,000,000, and I want to know whether all that sum is rightly charged to the Middle Eastern Department. I will take first of all the 12 battalions. Are they to be European or Indian?

[§ Mr. CHURCHILL](#)

They will be partly the one and partly the other. We must have a certain proportion of white regular troops.

[§ Colonel WEDGWOOD](#)

In that case these white regular troops will be living and working in Mesopotamia instead of living and working in England or Ireland, and the whole of the charge for those troops is not really a fair charge against the Middle Eastern Department. Or is the fact, as I have heard rumoured, that the right hon. Gentleman was quite content with Indian troops defending Mesopotamia and that the War Office persuaded him that unless the British Army was to be cut down in numbers, occupation must be found for them somewhere [306](#) and on some other Vote than the Army Vote?

[§ Mr. CHURCHILL](#)

No. There must be a certain balance or proportion between the forces. The bulk will be Indian, but there will be a certain number of British. I should not be prepared to take men from the War Office if I did not require them. The whole interest of the Minister in charge is to economise, and I do not want to pay for a man I could do without.

[§ Colonel WEDGWOOD](#)

I am glad to hear that. I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that it is possible that the War Office is anxious to cut down the Army Vote as an Army Vote, and transfer items which should appear upon the Army Estimates to the Middle Eastern Estimates, and that that in effect is what has been done. An Army which we should have had to support at home, and which would appear on the Army Estimates, is being put down to Mesopotamia, and we cannot treat that as an additional expenditure due to Mesopotamia. It is an additional expense due to what the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues consider is the proper strength for the British Army. It is home or Imperial defence which is taken into account, and not merely Mesopotamia. In regard to the Air Service, I understand that eight squadrons of aeroplanes will be employed in Palestine and Mesopotamia. I do not imagine that those eight squadrons are only useful for that purpose, and it seems to me that those eight squadrons are getting



the very best war training imaginable, that they are the reserve where the British Army ought to be, at the strategic point, at the centre of things, getting their experience of warfare and training themselves for every eventuality. If there was no Mesopotamia or Palestine these air squadrons would be on Salisbury plain. As it is the charge has been transferred from the Air Estimates and the new baby put upon the new nurse, and this makes up £1,250,000. The troops amount to another £2,000,000. Really, these items in the consideration of this Committee, should be deducted from the charge on Mesopotamia and charged to the War Department and back to the Army Estimates. The same may be said in respect to Palestine and the 5,000 troops there costing £2,500,000 a year. Every one of those troops is wanted either in Palestine or Egypt for the protection of the Suez Canal, and if [307](#) you had not had Palestine you would still require these troops there. Therefore, the people who drew up the Army Estimates have managed very skilfully to put on to the Jews this £2,500,000. It is a charge on the British Army, and we have no right to say that we are spending that money on making Zionism possible.

I naturally subscribe to everything that the Noble Lord opposite and the right hon. Gentleman have said about Sir Herbert Samuel. Both the right hon. Gentleman and the Noble Lord have imbibed in their stay in Palestine some of the atmosphere of that country. No doubt since the Armistice, or perhaps before it, the military atmosphere there was anti-Jew and pro-Arab. They moved in the society of the effendis, the ex-Turkish officials owning large acres; the old lords of the country. They liked them. They got on with them. They listened to their views, and when the Noble Lord and the right hon. Gentleman get up in this House and tell us what are the views of the Arabs about the Jews, how bitterly hostile they are, they are voicing the views of the Arab effendis, the old officials of the Turkish Government. These people hate the Jews, and for a perfectly good and sufficient reason. The Jews go in from Rumania, Russia, Poland, and go in not only as Jews but as outposts of Labour ideals, of Western ideas of civilisation, they plant themselves down in Palestine. The first thing the Jew does is to start a trade union. The next thing he does is to try and

get the uneducated and unskilled Arabs to join him in raising wages. There is nothing on earth that any governing class hate more than the ignorant, stupid, slavish proletariat getting ideas as to what wages it ought to get. These wretched Jews, these Bolshevik Jews, start telling the Arabs they ought to get more wages when they are working on Government contracts. Hitherto the effendis have had the time of their lives, getting the Arabs to work for them and swindling them of their pay. This sort of thing has gone on in these Eastern countries for countless centuries. Now that the westernised Jews go into the country and teach that this is not what the working classes ought to put up with the effendis do not like it. They pass it on to the Noble Lord (Earl Winterton) at dinner. The officers of the British Army burn with zeal when they think of [308](#) it. Naturally, of course, they, like the effendis, like to get their labour cheap; they do not like these new ideas; their life becomes more expensive.

§ Sir F. BANBURY

Do not the Jews get their labour cheap in Russia at the present time: they pay nothing at all?

§ Colonel WEDGWOOD

The right hon. Baronet does not understand. The Jews here are an Eastern race. The Jews in Palestine are the pioneers of Western civilisation, breaking in upon the immemorial slumber of the ages. It is these horrible new Europeans that are the victims of the pogroms! It is not the Arab cultivator that hates them. He works in with the Jews quite nicely, is good friends with the Jews and does not quarrel with them. The Noble Lord, I think, really ought to know that most of the Arabs are pastoral, not cultivators. They wander to and fro on the earth, and are not likely to be injured by close connection with the Jewish element. It is not the poor country Arab at all who counts for much. The people who count are these financial Arabs who have been in the custom of swindling the inhabitants of Palestine. They hire the cheap labour, and are in favour of killing off the new agitators and emigrants. All these things work up together, and the effendi uses, them for his own purpose to stir up the low class Arab into murdering the Jews—and that is the history of

pogroms all over the world.

§ Mr. ORMSBY-GORE

The hon. and gallant Gentleman refers to the Levantines.

§ Colonel WEDGWOOD

The Levantine in a red fez. He stirs up the "black hundreds" to butcher the Jews, and on the first occasion of these riots the Government immediately stopped the influx of more Jews into Palestine. That is the worst possible policy to pursue. That is putting a premium on the pogroms. If you stop more Jews going in, that is exactly what the effendis want—to keep Palestine a preserve for the old ideas. When you give these people what they want in return for murdering the Jews you are likely to require more than 5,000 troops there. Unfortunately, Sir Herbert Samuel gave in to the Arabs. I hope if he has to choose again he will pay a little less attention to the evidence that is being concocted to prove that Jewish agitators [309](#) and Bolsheviks came straight from Lenin at Moscow.

There is one way in which you can protect the Jews without throwing any administrative charge upon the revenues or the taxpayer of this country, and without increasing the garrison of 5,000 English troops; and that is by simply allowing the Jews to form a defensive force of their own. They had an excellent regiment during the War. That regiment did admirable service. At the end of the War the military administration, as it then was in Palestine, immediately disbanded it. Let them form their own regiments. The Palestinian Jews and the Zionist organisation are perfectly prepared themselves to find the money for the equipment for the troops. Give them a chance to defend their own settlements and we shall hear much less of this danger spot in the East. It is not necessary to fear that they will attack the Arabs. The Jews are a most peaceable people. They know the minority is always unwise to attack the majority. At the present time all the police of that country are Arabs. These Arab police stimulate others to assist in massacring the Jewish inhabitants. The danger for the Jews is very real. I submit to the Government they should take every step they can to assist in the formation of territorial forces to protect the Jews, and at the same time to relieve the taxpayers of this country from an expense

which otherwise will fall upon their shoulders. Meanwhile the right hon. Gentleman has my blessing. I could wish that years ago he had been appointed to the Colonial Office instead of the War Office. We might have saved millions at both offices. Wherever he is he becomes the stormy petrel for his own department, and I cannot help thinking that it would be well that the rest of the Government should come to take his new view, that after all, peace is the principal necessity for the inhabitants of this country.

§ Mr. ORMSBY-GORE

There has been more or less a chorus of admiration on the head of my right hon. Friend this afternoon in this Debate. I certainly will not be the one to break that general pæan of congratulation upon the policy which he outlined so lucidly. I must say that I entirely agree with the hon. and gallant Gentleman who has just sat down. I only wish that the policy which is now being [310](#) pursued in Mesopotamia had been pursued from the moment of the Armistice onward, and that instead of setting up in Mesopotamia a huge, expensive, and unpopular Anglo-Indian bureaucracy, with what Lord Curzon used to call an Arab façade, we could have got the real thing, namely an English façade with the Arab reality behind it. When my hon. and gallant Friend opposite (Sir C. Townshend) talks about the difficulties of the Englishman and of the foreigner dealing with the Arabs there is something in what he says, and I rejoice to think that the Government have made up their minds that the head of the Mesopotamian Government is to be an Arab, who will not be a merely titular head, but will have power. I quite agree that for some time to come it will be necessary to deal with the Arabs of Mesopotamia after the manner of their own liking, their own history, and their own ideas and methods of civilisation. That is why I rejoice that the Government have succeeded in overcoming the scruples which they formerly felt and have not allowed one of their Allies to prevent a Sherifian candidate being nominated for the governorship of Mesopotamia and the Assembly of Notables if the people of Mesopotamia so wish. We have too long lived under the threat of the French Press that if

we allowed any member of the Sherifian family to take responsibilities in Mesopotamia they would cause difficulty.

I am profoundly glad that that difficulty has been overcome, and that at last the Emir Feisal has actually set out for Mesopotamia. Those of us who have known him so long, and who were in the Arab movement from the beginning of the War, know that France has nothing to fear from him, and the French prejudice was manufactured by a few interested adventurers resident in France, and not in the East. So far from France having anything to fear from the Emir Feisal, I am sure that we have in him a thorough Arab, in religion, tradition, and race, and he is a true friend, not only to this country but to the whole of the alliance, and of the ideals we fought for and stood for in the War. He is a man of proved courage in the War, and I rejoice to think that the right hon. Gentleman has taken his courage in his hands and allowed his candidature to go forward.

*Sir J. D. REES*

Is he not a Sunni?

[311](#)

[§ Mr. ORMSBY-GORE](#)

The greater part of the vilayets of Basra and Baghdad are Shiahs, and probably there is no individual family more suitable to supply the candidate for Mesopotamia than a Sherifian family. The theological question is very important in Mesopotamia. If you read Miss Gertrude Bell's interesting document, giving an account of the recent rising in Mesopotamia, you will find that she points out that the Sherifian cause is supported by the Shiah population in Basra and Baghdad, and I believe that is an established fact.

The House of Commons must look at these questions from the point of view of its responsibilities. I know it has responsibilities as the representative of the British taxpayer, but still more, to my mind, it is responsible as the guardian of a far greater responsibility than that of the taxpayer, namely, the honour of the British Empire. That is why I resent the type of article you see in the "Daily Mirror" and the Anti-Waste Press —[An HON. MEMBER: "And the 'Morning Post!'" ] —in which the writers seem to think that you can

retire from Jerusalem and Baghdad without loss of honour. You have entered into honourable obligations with the people of those countries and with the people who have befriended you in fact you have entered into wide international obligations. You have set your seal to a covenant and to undertakings and, in a moment of financial embarrassment, to say that the British Empire is to throw up its honourable obligations and retire is simply setting a doom upon the British Empire. Never in the history of the world has a great Empire taken up obligations of this kind and gone back upon them without being doomed. The Anti-Waste campaigners, who are the Little Englanders of to-day, and the narrow-minded politicians of to-day, what do they care about Jerusalem or the British Empire? They only care about winning bye-elections and about getting an anti-Semitic cry in St. George's, Hanover Square.

We cannot get out of the international obligations we have entered into, and we cannot clear out of those countries without loss of national honour. I do not believe, hardly hit as we are by over-taxation, that we have any right to overthrow those obligations at the present moment. At least let us have a chance of trying the present policy, and of seeing [312](#) whether those obligations and ideals which we fought for, which we have inserted in treaties and enshrined in covenants, will not be successful in the end. We may have to pay something in the first year or two, and we may not get much out of it for a time, but in the long run we shall have a greater Empire, and I think we shall be doing a greater service to the Empire by hanging on than by adopting a policy of scuttling.

We have a duty to the world in Mesopotamia, and it is not limited to the formation of an Arab Government. I am not a great believer in its oil and mineral resources, but I am a believer in its agricultural resources, and in the fact that Mesopotamia was once the granary of the ancient world and the centre of ancient civilisation, can with modern civilisation and enterprise once again bring to the common stock of the food supplies and the cotton supplies of the world the production which is so badly needed. To allow Mesopotamia to go back to anarchy and to go back to the government of the Turk, who for 400 years allowed nothing to be done for that country, to throw away 14,000,000 acres of fertile land, capable of growing crop after crop, is a thing we ought not to do. We should proceed with the ideal we had before us in the past, and which is contained in Article 22 of the Treaty, namely that it

is a sacred trust of civilisation which we have undertaken, and not something which we are going to get anything out of and run away directly it costs us something.

It is in that spirit in these ancient centres of civilisation that we have an opportunity, by the part we are playing in the world, of showing that we can carry out the highest principle of our trust. In practice, what does it mean? It does not mean withdrawing to Basra. It means working with the goodwill of the inhabitants for a few years until they have built up their own national life and defence. That is the kernel of the whole thing. My Noble Friend and I have agitated in this House for the formation of Arab levies and the sending back of the Indian troops. We did this two years ago, and I am delighted to hear that the Arab levies are now being formed. I hope to see the day when no Indian troops will be employed in the Middle East. The sooner we can get them out the better for India, and [313](#) the better it will be for the Middle East. I hope to see a progressive reduction in the British garrison and in the number of British officers required in all those territories.

I do not think I need say anything more about Mesopotamia, but I want to say a few words about Arabia. Ever since the beginning of the War the way in which rival followers and rival Emirs have been subsidised by different Government Departments in the Arabian Peninsula has been heartbreaking, and at last we have got it established that one Minister, and one Minister alone, is to be allowed to fish in those troubled waters. As long as you had the India Office subsidising and running someone, and Lord Curzon running and subsidising someone else, it was quite hopeless. Instead of the India Office and the Foreign Office—whose record in this matter is pretty black—we have now adopted a fresh line, and we have a fresh staff to deal with the situation.

7.0 P.M.

I was particularly glad to hear what the right hon. Gentleman said on this subject, in view of the extremely unfair articles that have appeared in "The Times" in February and March this year, attacking the Sherifian family. Those articles, in my opinion, were designed deliberately to frustrate the best interests of this country and the line of policy that has been pursued by us during the War and subsequently. They are articles which have done infinite harm in the Middle East, and a protest appeared in yesterday's "Times" That was a

most unfortunate publication of articles. This will be fully realised by anybody who knows the history of the movement, and they can only have been written with inside official information and never ought to have been published. I only hope that the right hon. Gentleman will do something to clear up the situation at Aden, because the two Turkish provinces in South Arabia are, so to speak, left by the Treaty in the air, and the hinterland of the British Protectorate at Aden is not even yet clear and restored. In spite of questions in, this House we have retained a battalion of Indian troops at Hodeidah for months and months, for no purpose whatsoever, at great expense. The matter has been allowed to drift on, and there has been no real effort made to clear up the situa- [314](#) tion in the south-western corner of the Arabian peninsula. I only hope—and I should like to have some information from the Colonial Secretary now that the matter is exclusively and entirely within his control and initiative, and that it is no longer a shuttlecock between the India Office and the Foreign Office with nothing being done—that throughout the whole of Arabia the right hon. Gentleman has got the initiative and control over policy.

I turn to Palestine. I do not agree with what my Noble Friend (Earl Winterton) said about Palestine entirely, but I agree to a greater extent, though not entirely, with what was said by my hon. and gallant Friend (Lieut.-Colonel Wedgwood), I certainly share the view if you take Galilee, for instance, that the Arab cultivator and the small Arab in Palestine gets on extremely well with his Jewish neighbours and his Jewish neighbours with him. I quite agree in Jaffa, and in the towns and in the immediate vicinity of the towns, directly you come to the middle class of both sects of population that, so far from there being any amelioration of racial animosity, there has been an increase during the last few months. It is lamentable. I have been in that country and have held a responsible office in that country. I was a political officer in Jerusalem all through the summer of 1918. I always thought that the only chance for Palestine to become prosperous and go ahead was to attract Jewish capital, Jewish brains, Jewish labour, and Jewish energy to restore actually the very soil of the country. I was also convinced that in the Levantine portion of Palestine, that portion of Palestine west of the Jordan—they are not true Arabs, because the population of Palestine west of the Jordan is a mixture composed of Phoenicians, Canaanites, Arabs, Egyptians, and other tribes—if the Moslems



of that country were to be worthy of the great traditions of the Holy Land, it was absolutely essential to bridge the gulf between them and other races, and more particularly the Jews. I believed the Jews—they are original cousins in blood, with great traditions of civilisation behind them—were the people to do it. Lord Beaconsfield, in books like "Tancred," set out ideas that have been long associated with that perpetual Zionist movement which has gone on for the last 2,000 years, and which 315 does not depend on any particular number of Jews in Palestine, but on the association of Jewish energies with the ultimate reconstruction of Palestine. When I saw what Jewish colonists have done in Palestine I was convinced that it was a practical policy.

I quite agree that there is no room in Palestine for a very large number of Jews, and probably not a very large number of Jews want to go there. There are 15,000,000 Jews in the world, and it is very fortunate that the whole 15,000,000 do not want to go into a country which is about the size of Wales. A large number will remain, as heretofore, scattered throughout the nations of the world, without any particular home, but bound together as all Jews are by a common religious tradition. That common Jewish tradition has one centre only, and that is Palestine. If you want to understand the Zionist movement you have to understand something of the Jewish religion. Palestine is inseparably bound up with their religious ideas and religious sentiment. It is essentially connected with the idea that the Bible was written by Palestinian Jews; that the greatest productions of the Hebrew race and their contributions to humanity came from Palestine; that the Psalms came from Palestine, and if they are going to write Psalms again they are going to be written in Palestine by Jews. That is the idea behind Zionism, and it called forth the Balfour Declaration.

It is that sentiment which has caused a great many Christian people all over the world to sympathise with the Zionist idea, and it is that cultural aspect of Zionism which will be of enormous value to the Near East. The Near East wants a movement of that kind. If, in the coming century, there is going to be an approximation between East and West, there is either going to be that approximation or a great gulf fixed between East and West. There is either going to be a split between Asia and Africa, on the one hand, and Europe on the other, or a bridge built. I am not at all sure that that bridge cannot and will not be built in Palestine. It is quite

possible, from a Jewish university in Jerusalem, that West can be explained to East and East to West, and that you will be able to revivify what the West wants from the Eastern ethical 316 and spiritual ideal, as similarly you will give to the East some of the practical, social and political ideals that have been worked out in the West.

It is that aspect of Zionism which is so important and significant. You see it working out in quite small things. The right hon. Gentleman has described his visit to Richon le Zion. The mere existence of a Jewish peasantry is, to our minds, something quite extraordinary and wonderful. We associate Jews with Park Lane and Whitechapel. I stayed with a Jewish farmer, going out in the morning with his cattle and coming in in the evening after labour in the fields, and living in communities where the old Hebrew is talked. That is a charming and new thing which is worth encouraging at some sacrifice. I want to say a word about the difficulty between these pioneers, who deserve our sympathy and encouragement, and the Arab, who is a little afraid of those immigrants and particularly of a new invasion. We have to understand the situation. I agree that the new immigrants come, for the most part, from the Ghettos of Eastern Europe, from the Ukraine, Roumania and Bukovina, where they lived a secluded life under persecution apart; where the tides of the late War passed over them, probably killing off most of their families. They have seen Bolshevism come up, and Wrangel, and various people, who have all persecuted them in turn. Those who were Zionists were persecuted by the Bolsheviks, because those people stood for a national view which was proclaimed by the Bolsheviks in Russia as being the antithesis of Bolshevism. These people come with all their prejudices from Eastern Europe, and admittedly they do not form that golden bridge between East and West. I hope that the Colonial Office, which can do a great deal in this matter, will do something more to encourage the emigration into Palestine of Sephardic Jews, that is to say, the Jews who were originally in Spain, and lived with the Arabs and who know the Arabs and have the tradition of Arab culture. You will find them all over the Mediterranean. They have gone to Salonika and Smyrna, and further East. Those are the people who ought to be facilitated and encouraged to go to Palestine to lay the foundations of the national home. Culturally they are enormously valuable, and will make a success of this great experiment.

317 I do not want to emphasise the Jewish-Arab aspect of this question; that will work itself out in time. In Jewish Palestine the task that Great Britain has to perform is to ensure that the Christian holy places will be as well and better looked after in the future than in the past. Why are we always concentrating on the Moslem and Jewish aspects of Palestine? Cannot we occasionally remember the Christian aspect of Palestine? After all, for too long, Easter after Easter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been the scene of bloodshed and sectarian rivalries which have been encouraged by the Turkish Government. For centuries Christians have been offended by the sight of Christianity in Jerusalem. England has a unique and great responsibility and opportunity. Are we going to hand that over to anybody else? Is there anybody else who can take it? The Crusaders may have been impetuous, and have wanted to thrust their idea on somebody else, but is there not some moral idea behind the Crusades? Is there not the idea that in the land which we all regard as holy there should be such conditions of government that for the pilgrims and representatives of all nations and races Jerusalem shall be regarded as a house of prayer for all men? Any policy which entails scuttling from Palestine and handing it back to the Turk, or anybody else, will provoke an outburst of the most deep indignation on the part of the most religious-minded people in this country which no anti-waste campaign could possibly withstand. I must congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on the reductions he has already made, and I shall support him in every way I can in what he is doing. I want to say one word in this connection. Whatever he does, do not let us make the same mistake in Palestine as was committed in Mesopotamia two years ago, that is to say, have too many English officials; rather have a less efficient Government, manned by Palestinians, Jews, Christians and Moslems, getting them to work together in the same office. They may not be as efficient as British administrators, but let us keep the number of British officials in Palestine down to the barest possible limits. I hear accounts that there are too many already, and it will be most unfortunate if the same mistake as was 318 made in Mesopotamia were to be produced in Palestine again.

One word about Trans-Jordania. Across the Jordan you have a real Arab country, and I am delighted that there a settlement has been arrived at. A settlement has been arrived at, for the present at any rate, by having a member of the

Sherifian family and by trying to start something like a decent administration. For centuries there have been bloody feuds between the tribes. Their conditions are quite separate. Do not let us create any economic barriers between them. Free trade and eventually federation are absolutely essential. Free intercourse also is absolutely essential. I am quite sure that that country can never develop except through Palestine. The right hon. Gentleman referred to his water schemes. I hope he will go on with them, and that he will get to work in Eastern Palestine. Too much time is being wasted in preparing and thinking out schemes. What we want is actual results, and then when we can show the world those actual results, these people will not wish to exchange their position under Great Britain as the mandatory power for any other form of rule. If we show no results, then they will say: "Political memories are short, why not let the Turks come back?" If they do come back, it will be for another 400 years. We have to have peace with Turkey. It is absolutely vital if we are going to reconstruct the Arab territories. We shall have to recognise the Turkish, the Arab and the Jewish national movement, and we shall have to make an honourable understanding between them. The less of Foreign Office interference and of Foreign Office control there is, to my mind, the better. The Government must do everything it can to put a stop to the war now going on in Asia Minor. It must use its good efforts for peace, and make it quite clear that the national movements will be recognised and the desire to have their own civilisation considered. I believe if we have such a policy the right hon. Gentleman will make a great name for himself in history and this House will have cause to be proud of its own work.

§ Lord R. CECIL

With a great deal of what has fallen from the hon. Member who has just spoken I find myself in agreement. But there was one observation with which I did not quite agree. 319 He expressed his great pleasure that the Middle East Department had been handed over to the Colonial Office. I share with other hon. Members of the Committee the admiration which has been expressed for the right hon. Gentleman's speech at the beginning of this Debate, but I still think, in principle, that as a matter of organisation it is entirely wrong to hand over the Middle Eastern part of Europe to the Colonial Office. This Debate has shown that it is

so. I do not object to its being handed over to a single Department. On the contrary, I agree with the last speaker that it was a fantastic arrangement which existed in the Arabian Peninsula when one Government Department was supplying rifles in order that an Arab chief might shoot down the followers of another chief who had the support of another Government Department. I am not at all sure that this Department ought not to be kept in the Foreign Office. You cannot treat the administration of these countries without reference to the policy you are pursuing in neighbouring countries. How can you really discuss the proper policy to be pursued in Palestine irrespective of the policy you are pursuing in Egypt? The two countries must have immense concern with one another. But here you have Egypt left under the Foreign Office and Palestine put under the Colonial Office. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend can tell me which Department deals with the Arabian Peninsula.

§ *Mr. CHURCHILL*

It is a very complicated matter. The initiation of policy rests with the Colonial Office, but it is carried out in consultation with the Foreign Office in relation to the Hedjas. The Foreign Office has general control. I act in consultation with the Foreign Secretary.

§ *Lord R. CECIL*

How do you communicate with the Foreign Secretary?

§ *Mr. CHURCHILL*

I do so directly.

§ *Lord R. CECIL*

How about Aden?

§ *Mr. CHURCHILL*

Aden is to be transferred to the Middle East Department directly we have adjusted with the India Office the financial conditions under which the transfer shall be made. I am endeavouring to

make the best bargain I can.

320

§ *Lord R. CECIL*

And what about Egypt?

§ *Mr. CHURCHILL*

That remains with the Foreign Office.

§ *Lord R. CECIL*

This statement shows how very unsatisfactory the present arrangement really is. I do not say that it may not be better to have the Colonial Office instead of the India Office, but they have added this additional complication. Any policy which refers to the Hedjas is to be initiated by the Colonial Office and subsequently carried out through the Foreign Office. Of course a good deal will depend on the conciliatory methods adopted by my right hon. Friend, but we cannot always hope to have so conciliatory a Minister, and, after all, it is not the Minister it is the Office which has to be considered. You have added a new series of complications by divorcing your policy in the Middle East from your policy in Anatolia; your policy in Mesopotamia from your policy in Persia, and your policy in Smyrna from your policy in Silesia. I do not know that anyone will differ from me in saying that that is a form of political organisation which is most unsatisfactory. My hon. Friend thoroughly distrusts the present Foreign Secretary. I do not know whether that mistrust is shared by the Prime Minister. If it is the proper thing is to get a new Foreign Secretary and not to break up the Foreign Office. It is no use nibbling at the Foreign Office, and taking away from it first the administration of the League of Nations and then the administration of the Middle East, simply because you do not like your present Foreign Minister.

I quite agree that the policy which the right hon. Gentleman has announced is the policy which personally I have always wished to see carried out in reference to the Middle East. But my complaint is that made by the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Colonel Wedgwood) and the hon.

Member for Stafford, namely, that it was not done 2½ years ago. I am afraid that is a serious defect in our present policy. It is all very well for the hon. Member for Stafford to sneer at the anti-waste party. I am not a member of that party, but I do know that it represents a very strong feeling in all parts of the country, and not merely among a few eccentric politicians, as my hon. Friend seems to suggest. By carrying on this [321](#) extravagant administration in the Middle East, and particularly in Mesopotamia, for two years, the Government have made great difficulties in carrying on what I believe to be the essential and necessary policy at the present time. The great charge I make against the Government is that it is handing over to this particular Department the administration of Palestine. I fully admit that our policy in Palestine has been by far the best feature of the Government policy as a whole. I believe, with my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford, that the policy of Zionism is a sound one. We had a very eloquent passage in his speech explaining the moral and spiritual side of the policy of Zionism, and it is only right I should add that this policy was adopted by the Government not only for the reasons given by my hon. Friend, but for good solid business reasons as well. It was a very essential part of our policy that we should adopt measures which would show that we were not unsympathetic towards the great current of feeling in the Jewish race, and while I was personally in favour of that policy because I am sure it is perfectly sound. I am glad to hear from my right hon. Friend that there is no thought on the part of the Government of abandoning the policy. I also fully agree with what the right hon. Gentleman said as to our position in Palestine being a very onerous position. It is quite true it is going to be onerous, although I hope it will not be so financially. It is going to prove a difficult piece of administration, it is no use denying that. We have got two races to consolidate in Palestine. One is in a small minority and yet by far the more progressive of the two races. That is an administrative problem which I believe only an administrator born in this country could be trusted to face. I was always in favour of our undertaking the administration of Palestine. I am sure it is essential it should be done. It is essential to the peace of the world that we should have a properly administered Palestine. It is also a sound policy for us to undertake the duty. But I do regret, and regret most bitterly that owing to the diplomacy pursued, various parts of the world were led to believe that we were grabbing at something in Palestine which would be of special advantage to the interests of Great Britain. It has done us a great

deal of harm ever since. [322](#) We are constantly exposed to the retort in foreign capitals and in foreign newspapers that we have got everything that we wanted out of the Peace, and now we are standing in the way of other countries getting what they want. That is very unjust, but we ought to have made it clear from the outset that we were ready to undertake as a sacred trust for civilisation the administration of Palestine—that it was as a duty, and not for profit in any way.

For the rest of the Government policy—I am not talking of the policy announced this afternoon, but am speaking generally of the policy of the Government in the Middle East—I must say that I think the speech of my right hon. Friend is really a proclamation of the bankruptcy of the policy of the Government up to now. It has been marked, in the Middle East especially, by an infirmity of purpose and an indifference to pledges which make it one of the blackest pages of British diplomatic history. Let me give two or three instances in justification of that observation. I see that, in the Estimate presented to us, £400,000 is put down for the maintenance and resettlement of the Assyrians. Let me remind the Committee what their history is. We induced the Assyrians to take up arms on our behalf, during the War, to resist the Turks. I do not know exactly what pledges were given to them. They were given by the officer on the spot, and I do not know exactly how far they went, but at any rate we induced them to take up arms. The result was that they were driven from their homes, and they came pouring down through the upper portion of Persia into Mesopotamia. We thereupon gave them hospitality at a camp called Baqubah, run, I am told, in the most extravagant way. We made no attempt, apparently, to resettle them anywhere until November of last year. We just allowed them to live on our bounty. In November of last year, we sent them out with an expedition, apparently in an effort to get them back to Assyria. I do not know exactly what happened, but the expedition was a complete failure. Many of them were killed, and the rest had to come back ultimately and are still in our charge. Now, I believe for the first time, a rational plan for the resettlement of these people has been adopted, and we are going to try and settle this question definitely. I do not think that anyone [323](#) can look back with pleasure on our dealings with the Assyrians, whether the incident be treated as an example of successful administration or of generosity and good faith.

Then there is a sum of £140,000 for the Armenian refugees. Why are they here? Why have they not



gone back to Armenia? It is the same thing. We gave pledge after pledge to the Armenians that we would do our best to see that they were established in independence in their own country. In January, 1918, the Prime Minister, speaking, not only after close consultation with the Cabinet of the day, but with the leaders of opinion—with the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Paisley and with Lord Grey of Falloden—it was as national an expression of policy as could possibly be made—

*Sir J. D. REES*

Did the pledge include the permanent support and maintenance of the Armenians outside their own country?

§ [Lord R. CECIL](#)

No. I will read to my hon. Friend, whose views on this question are, I know, different from mine, exactly what was said about the Armenians: Outside Europe we think the same principles should be applied. While we do not challenge the maintenance of the Turkish Empire in the homelands of the Turkish race with its capital at Constantinople—the passage between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea being internationalised and neutralised—Arabia, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine are, in our judgment, entitled to a recognition of their separate national conditions. What the exact form of that recognition in each particular case should be, need not here be discussed, beyond stating that it would be impossible to restore to their former sovereignty the territories to which I have already referred. That is a definite pledge that the territory of Armenia is not to be restored to its former sovereignty.

*Sir J. D. REES*

There is nothing about support outside.

§ [Lord R. CECIL](#)

No, I am not dealing with that. I am pointing out that if we had carried out our pledges it would not have been necessary to support them. They would have been able to go back to an independent Armenia. That is the whole of my case. I need not

elaborate [324](#) it; it is well known that we gave those pledges. How did we carry them out? We have done nothing to assist the Armenians to maintain their independence except one thing, with which I will deal in a moment. We spent millions in assisting Denekin and other Russian adventurers—

§ [Lieut.-Commander KENWORTHY](#)

For which you voted

§ [Lord R. CECIL](#)

I do not know that I voted for it; I may have. But we did spend about £100,000,000—£50,000,000 down and £40,000,000 or £50,000,000 in stores, if I remember rightly. A tenth of that would have established Armenia in independence and security. What did we do for Armenia after giving those pledges? We sent her at the last minute—a month before she was attacked—a consignment of Ross rifles and ammunition. Ross rifles, I understand, are an exceedingly complicated form of military rifle, and I believe they were totally useless in the hands of partially trained mountaineers. That is all we did. If we had taken any trouble, if we had sent, I do not say a large force, but, say, a small military mission with adequate munitions, we could, at very small cost, have enabled the Armenians, who were in large numbers relatively to the Turks, but quite untrained, to retain their independence. We should not have had to maintain them in Mesopotamia or elsewhere, and we should have erected a most important, stable point in the Middle East, which would have been of incalculable advantage to us in the future. What has happened? These unhappy people, deserted by us, harassed by the Turks, have turned to the Russians, who had befriended them, or at any rate governed them relatively decently before the War. At this minute it is the Russians who are in control, as I understand, of the only part of Armenia that is left. I confess that that is not a record which it gives me any pleasure to contemplate.

Nor can I say very much more for the way in which we have treated the Arabs. Take the Syrian side.

We gave, undoubtedly, as my right hon. Friend very fairly admitted, pledges to King Hussein to induce him to come into the War on our side. Those pledges, on any reading that I can make out, certainly led him to believe that he would have Damascus, Horns, Hama, and Aleppo. He has not [325](#) got them. It is quite true that at about the same time we entered into what is known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which is thought, as I consider wrongly, to be in conflict with our pledges to King Hussein. There were practical difficulties, but I do not think that those practical difficulties were incapable of being overcome. I believe it would have been perfectly possible to have entered into fresh negotiations after the entry of America into the War, by which we could have arrived at a satisfactory settlement of all those questions with the French and the Arabs before the end of the War. Then, at the end of the War, we again made a declaration, this time to the French. The effect of that declaration was that the Arabs were to have complete self-government—complete autonomy—and that they were to be governed according to their own wishes, and were not to have anyone imposed upon them except with their own consent. An American Commission went out there and took evidence as to what the Arabs of Syria wanted. Their conclusions have never been published, but, unless rumour is more than usually untrustworthy, they were in favour of a different solution from that which was ultimately adopted.

All these things are deplorable. They show no fixed or settled purpose, no real consistency in dealing with this question, or indeed with any questions. It is just the same in the case of Mesopotamia. What is the history of our dealings with Mesopotamia? When we first went to Baghdad, the first thing we said was a flowery Proclamation that was issued in our name saying, "You are to govern your own country; we are not going to interfere in any way; we are merely here to enable you to restore the old Arab Kingdom and the old Arab history." That policy was re-affirmed in November, 1918, and yet, as was said just now, instead of carrying it out we established in Mesopotamia an autocratic, bureaucratic system of an Indian type, in which the Mesopotamians had practically no share whatever, and we kept that going until June of last year. Then, at last, after constant pressure from various quarters, the Government adopted a different policy. There was no reason, I assert most strongly, why that policy should not have been adopted in the spring of 1919 just as well as a year and a half later. Then we should not only have carried out our [326](#) undertaking, we should not

only have kept our name free from reproach, but we should have saved millions of pounds. What is the net result? We have had a delay of two years; we have incurred enormous expense. We know the expense that has been incurred in the past, and we know that my right hon. Friend hopes next year to be able to reduce it to £9,000,000 or £10,000,000 a year. That might have been done two years ago, and it would have been done had we carried out our pledges. That is the point. It is not that we require to do anything eccentric. We promised to do these things. The policy has been laid down in the clearest way by more than one Government, but we failed to carry it out.

I know it is said that this delay was the inevitable result of America not making up her mind as to what share she would take in the administration of the Middle East, but I have always regarded that excuse as absolutely worthless. There might have been doubt as to what America was going to do as regards some of these territories, but there was no doubt about two things. The first was that they ought to be taken away from the Turks immediately. That was a fixed point in our policy. That could have been done immediately. The second thing there was no doubt about is that there was never any question about the Americans taking any part of Mesopotamia or Syria. The only question was as to Armenia. So far as Mesopotamia was concerned there never was any question that we were going to administer that as a trust under the mandatory system. That was a fixed point in the earliest stages of the negotiations. There is no reason why we should not have done it. The delay of America had nothing to do with our failure to do it. On the contrary we should have made our position much clearer and much more intelligible to America if we had carried out our pledges from the very outset instead of wasting all this time. In my judgment we have done much to diminish our prestige by the course we have pursued in the East. We have incurred enormous expenses which might have been saved. We have done all this because there has been up to now, at any rate, no consistent and definite policy in the matter at all. We have just muddled along without any plan or policy to guide us. I hope profoundly [327](#) that my right hon. Friend's speech means that that period has come to an end and that the Government now have a definite policy, and will pursue it without flinching and without changing. I am afraid we shall never recover all we have lost during those two years, and in particular I am terribly afraid lest the people of this country, wearied with the delay and

with the expense, and disgusted by the ineptitude of our policy, may decline to support what I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford is the right policy, namely, to carry through, as cheaply as possible, but to carry through the obligations which have been imposed upon us by the War.

§ Lord EUSTACE PERCY

The record of the Government in the past in this region of the world is, I think, indefensible, and no one to-day has attempted to defend it. But I think the hon. and gallant Gentleman opposite (Colonel Wedgwood) is perhaps not justified in representing the Opposition as having had a policy during those years which was a satisfactory alternative to the Government's policy. On the contrary, if we have not got peace in Asia Minor now, if there is a war between Greece and Turkey, and if that war has its repercussion, as we know from the right hon. Gentleman's speech it is bound to have, on Mesopotamia and Palestine—if that war is in progress, it is not due to this legendary love of His Majesty's Government or the Allies for M. Venezelos. That is pure legend. If Greek troops ever went to Smyrna it was solely because, when it was considered necessary by the Allies to occupy Smyrna, there were no allied troops to send there. I think the hon. and gallant Gentleman might ask himself what attitude he took three years ago when the Secretary of State for the Colonies introduced the [Military Service Act](#) and whether, if he had then remembered what the right hon. Gentleman now says, that if you are to have peace with Turkey you must show adequate force, we should not have had peace with Turkey Very much sooner in spite of all that may be said about the Government's mistakes.

I should like to put one or two points, because I think there is a certain danger in eloquence, even such good eloquence as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Ormsby-Gore) on this [328](#) question. As regards the League of Nations, let it be clearly understood that any obligation we undertake in Mesopotamia is not undertaken in pursuance of any pledge which we made in the Covenant of the League of Nations, for there is no such pledge. There is no reason in the Covenant

why we should take up any particular kind of obligation in Mesopotamia or in Palestine. The Government itself has had the drafting of the mandate. It cannot say that any particular form of mandate has been imposed upon it, and the Committee will have to judge of it according as it is necessary to carry out the pledges which we gave to the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, and to the Jews in the case of Palestine, long before the League of Nations was ever invented. Let that be quite clear, because it puts a limit to our obligations. The second point is this: You are going to set up an independent autonomous Arab Government at Baghdad. There is going to be a High Commissioner, and the relations between His Majesty's Government and this autonomous Government are to be registered in a Treaty. That Treaty, again, has got to embody that restriction of our obligations which I have mentioned. We have been asked often not to fall into any of our old mistakes. Do not let us fall into the mistake into which we fell in Egypt. Do not let us appear to say to this autonomous Arab Government, by the form of the advice or assistance which we set up, that we are not responsible, that we are only advisers, and then be obliged to take the actual direct control under the camouflage of mere advice. That is what happened in Egypt. It happened inevitably, but by its very long continuance, by our neglect to clarify the constitutional position, we are involved in many of the troubles and the expenses which face us in Egypt to-day. Do not let us fall into the same mistake in Mesopotamia, and it is on that question of the actual exact constitutional relations which we are going to establish with the Arab Government that everything depends.

I should like to pass to Palestine, and to ask a question. The right hon. Gentleman has told us about the Arab levies in Mesopotamia, but he has told us nothing about a native defence force in Palestine. The hon. and gallant Gentleman opposite has mentioned the question of a purely Jewish defence force. I [329](#) think the Palestine Government has for some months past had a scheme for a defence force, which shall not be a "mixed" defence force, but shall contain distinct Arab and Jewish units used independently. I should very much like to know whether the Government have now authorised that scheme, which was a long time in suspense, and whether that defence force is in process of formation, and, if so, what is its strength, and what is its strength intended to be in the future. I think the hon. and gallant Gentleman who spoke a little while ago was a little bit behind the times in what he said about

British officials in Palestine. It was probably true a year ago, or a little more, but I do not think there is any justification for any such suspicion about the present British civil administration in Palestine, which reaches a very high level of efficiency and of liberal open-mindedness and wisdom. The hon. and gallant Gentleman explained in his own words the reason for Arab violence. He said it arose by reason of the fact that Jewish immigration from Europe led to the announcement of Western trade union ideals and so on. That is perfectly true, but I think any trade union leader in this country would feel it a little bit dangerous, and probably not really useful in the long run, to make the same speech in Palestine at present which he might make on Labour Day in Hyde Park. There used to be an old story under the old Turkish régime—I am speaking of years before the War—that a good deal of the Christian persecution arose from the unfortunate habit of missionaries translating "Onward, Christian soldiers" into Turkish, and the Turkish Government was not perhaps to blame if they were a little bit doubtful as to the political implications of such a very militant hymn. That is, I think, what has been happening in Palestine. It is not only a question of lack of tact. It is a question of teaching the advanced views of advanced Western labour to a population still in a primitive stage of civilisation. The immigrants in Palestine have been very largely drawn from the professional classes and not from the labour classes. The wholesale accusations against recent Jewish immigration are absolutely baseless, but there has been an element whose views have been expressed in a form which has very justifiably alarmed the population.

330 There is no point on which the Committee has more cordially agreed with the right hon. Gentleman than that peace with Turkey is essential to the carrying out of his very risky policy in Mesopotamia, though, perhaps, it is a necessary one, and that the only way to get that peace is to have adequate force behind you. Elected as I was on pledges to cut down expenditure in every direction in the Middle East, and believing, as I always have done, in a very speedy withdrawal from Mesopotamia, and believing there is not a single selfish British interest which ought to keep us in Mesopotamia for a day, and that nothing but our obligations to the inhabitants ought to keep us there, I say that if the Government need more troops in order to ensure the conclusion of a lasting peace, I would, in the interests of economy, vote for a larger force than the right hon. Gentleman foreshadowed if it is necessary for the purpose of peace, because if there is any danger of

making the mistake we made two years ago and denuding ourselves of force before we have concluded peace, I will be no party to the repetition of such a policy.

§ 8.0 P.M.

§ *Mr. E. HARMSWORTH*

After listening to the speech of the hon. Member for Hastings (Lord E. Percy), I felt that we were even more justified in the position we take up, and which I myself have always taken up since I have had the honour of being a Member of this House, that we should withdraw from both Palestine and Mesopotamia. I first gave my view on that question in February, 1920. I asked the Government on that occasion to take no mandate for those countries, and to keep away from any expenditure that was unnecessary in those quarters. Our opposition to continuing in those two countries is on one ground, and one ground only, and that is that the country cannot afford it. There is no other ground whatsoever. We believe that the country's finances are in such a state, and the present conditions of the country are so abnormal, that we must take drastic measures, and before taking any measure we must cut down our—I do not like to call them adventures, but the mandates which we took over for Mesopotamia and Palestine. I think any Member of this House who studies the revenue returns of this year, or the trade returns month by month, 331 cannot but realise the serious state the country is in at the present time. I am not a little Englishman, as one hon. Member called the movement with which I am associated. I have never been a little Englishman, and I hope I never shall be. But I believe that this country and this Empire of ours can never exist unless we keep our financial resources and recuperate from the War.

The Secretary of State made one reference to us—I presume it was a reference, because it has been made in many quarters before—when he said that the British Empire was not made by negation or pessimism. I would like to remind him that the Roman Empire fell in great measure through taxation, and, first of all, the taxation of the middle-classes, so that when an emergency arose there were not the financial resources at hand. The



same thing will happen to this country, unless we safeguard our financial resources, so that we have resources at hand if an emergency arises. I admit that the right hon. Gentleman is very clever and very diplomatic. He may for some months be able, to keep the peace in Mesopotamia, but he said he could not guarantee anything. I ask the Committee whether we are justified in passing this money when we have only the personal guarantee of the right hon. Gentleman's diplomacy and cleverness that there will not be any uprising in Mesopotamia as there was a short time ago? Again, if we rely on his personal cleverness and diplomacy, we have no guarantee that a new Secretary of State may not come along without the same diplomacy and cleverness of my right hon. Friend. We have to look at this in a far larger way than it has been looked upon in this Debate. It has been debated practically the whole time on technical issues. I do not pretend to be able to debate this matter on technical issues. I look at it purely from one point of view, and that is that we cannot afford this expenditure.

§ Earl WINTERTON

Moral obligations undertaken by you and your party.

§ Mr. HARMSWORTH

Moral obligations are perfectly understood by this party, but I have the interest of the British Empire first at heart, and it is for that that I speak here at the present time.

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§ Earl WINTERTON

Chucking away everything we won in the War!

§ Mr. HARMSWORTH

With regard to Palestine, the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Ormsby-Gore) made many references to the Zionist movement. He made a speech that is very typical of those fanatics who take much the same view. I do not pretend to be either a Zionist or an anti-Zionist. I have never thought about the Zionist movement before this country was intimately connected with it in the way it is at the present time, and I say that it is a mistake that the taxpayers of this country should

be asked to pay for a national loan to the Jews. The Jews are a very wealthy class, and should pay for their own national home if they want it. I have never yet met one who would go and live there, but, if they want their national home, after all, they are the richest nation in the world, and let them pay for it. As representing a portion of the British taxpayers, I do protest most strongly that any money of theirs should be thrown away in Palestine to provide for that home. Holding these views, I shall vote against this sum of £27,000,000 to-night, because this country cannot afford it.

§ Mr. CHURCHILL

I venture to appeal to the Committee to allow us to have the Vote now. It is not our fault that we have not got an opportunity of debating this up till 11 o'clock, but I understand that it has been arranged, through those channels which are frequently called into requisition in these matters, that the Colonial Vote shall be put down again at an early date, that the first part shall be devoted to the same topic we have been discussing to-day, which will give an opportunity to Members who wish to take part in this Debate, and that then the ordinary regular Colonial Office discussion will be taken, perhaps about 6 or 7 o'clock, and the 11 o'clock Rule suspended up to 12 o'clock to enable a full Debate to take place on the various topics.

§ Lieut.-Commander KENWORTHY

I beg to move that the Vote be reduced by £1,000,000.

If we give this Vote, there is no hope of moving a reduction in the future.

§ Mr. ORMSBY-GORE

Yes, on the salaries.

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§ Lieut.-Commander KENWORTHY

I do want to protest against the way the discussion has been cut short. I admit that is not the Government's fault, but for so many months we have been refused any declaration of Government

policy on this subject, that it is perfectly absurd for the right hon. Gentleman to ask for this money at a quarter past eight after a discussion in which the speeches have been particularly long, except that of my hon. Friend who has just sat down. It is all very well talking about obligations to be discharged. It seems to me that the only obligation we have in Mesopotamia is to set up an Arab State, and that is the one obligation we have so far not carried out. We have much greater obligations to our own people at home. We have already torn up pledges to the agriculturists and the unemployed of this country. The principal obligation in Mesopotamia is to set up an Arab State, and the sooner it is set up the sooner it will function. Once you create a vested interest in the Civil Service of Mesopotamia, as you are doing at present, you will never dislodge these persons, and the monstrous suggestion of giving a coupon to the Emir Feisal, and propping him up with British bayonets, will end as that sort of thing has always ended. As soon as your support is withdrawn, the fact that he is resting on foreign bayonets will lead to his downfall. By garrisoning these nations in Asia, we run the risk of going the way of the Roman Empire and other empires which have died by super-Imperialism. There is one bright spot I can see as the result of the War. The only good thing that has come out of the War is the carrying out of the Balfourian declaration as to Palestine, and I am delighted that there has been only one attack upon that. That is the one idealistic achievement of the War we have so far seen. There is a moral obligation, and it will be disastrous if we abandon it. I do not think the strategic aspect of this matter has been suggested. I quite agree we have no strategical interest in Mesopotamia. With regard to Palestine, if we really think it is necessary to take special steps to protect the Suez Canal, the question of Palestine is very essential from the strategical point of view. As to Mesopotamia and the subsidies, we simply cannot afford that. I therefore beg to move the reduction.

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*Mr. CHAMBERLAIN (Leader of the House)*

If this Amendment goes to a Division, of course we cannot get the Vote to-night, and the whole arrangement falls to the ground.

§ *Mr. ARTHUR HENDERSON*

What is the good of making an arrangement? The hon. and gallant Gentleman's leaders have agreed to it.

§ *Lieut. - Commander KENWORTHY*

One is put in a very great difficulty, but in view of what the right hon. Member for Widnes (Mr. A. Henderson) has said, I shall have to withdraw my Amendment. Why cannot the Vote be put down next time? Why is it necessary to get this enormous sum of money to-night. We are being blackmailed into voting a sum of money which we cannot afford. I beg leave to withdraw the Amendment.

§ Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

§ Original Question again proposed.

§ *Mr. E. HARMSWORTH*

I beg to move that the Vote be reduced by £1,000,000.

§ It being a Quarter-past Eight of the Clock, and leave having been given to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 10, further Proceeding was postponed, without Question put.

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