1 'The whole world is rocking': British governments and a dysfunctional imperial system, 1918–1945

'Our born leaders are dead.'[1] Of course we cannot prove that the British empire would have been better run if so many young men had not died in the First World War, which claimed the lives of over 37,000 officers, many of whom would have gone into politics and imperial administration. What we can say is that those who fought and survived and moved into public life and the service of the empire believed themselves to be merely the runts of what had promised to be 'a great generation': 'the better chaps were gone'.[2] They were, as one Cambridge don put it, 'most of them not meant to be our leaders at all. They are only the last and worst of our war substitutes.' Almost all of them were marked by 'moral and psychological shock', haunted by memories, guilty in their survival. Almost all intelligent young men of whatever political party were active supporters of the League of Nations, and attracted by disarmament. Many turned to pacifism, or something like it.[3] Some turned to communism. Another war was something to be avoided at all costs. They felt driven to serve, specifically 'to strive for the creation and organisation of peace, above all things', and to forge a better world.[4] The war caused at least one serious defection from the colonial service. Arthur Tedder, who had been posted to Fiji early in 1914, joined the Royal Flying Corps and remained in the RAF, rising to become Lord Tedder, Marshal of the Royal Air Force, deputy allied commander on 'D'-day, Chief of the Air Staff, and Chancellor of the University of Cambridge.[5]

If the immediate postwar years were ones of painful adjustment for individuals, they were near-nightmares for those in charge of the empire. The 'Great War' destroyed empires, the Muslim Caliphate, and ancient

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[1] Quoted in R. Hyam, *Britain's imperial century, 1815–1914: a study of empire and expansion* (3rd edn, 2002) pp. 336–7; J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British people* (1985), ch. 3, 'The lost generation', pp. 65–99.

[2] R. Vansittart, *The mist procession: the autobiography of Lord Vansittart* (1958), p. 187.

[3] Harold Macmillan, *Memoirs*, vol. I: *Winds of change, 1914–1939* (1966) pp. 9, 78, 95, 98, 582. M. Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–45: the defining of a faith* (Oxford, 1980).

[4] D. McLachlan, *In the chair: Barrington-Ward of 'The Times', 1927–1948* (1971), p. 6 (diary of Robin Barrington-Ward, 23 February, 1941).

[5] V. Orange, 'Tedder, Arthur W.', *ODNB*, vol. LIV, pp. 14–19.

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European dynasties. It led to the Bolshevik revolution. It created new states out of the ruins of the Ottoman empire. It transferred ex-German colonies to League of Nations mandates. It removed the centre of financial power after two centuries from London to New York. In Ireland, the first step towards the creation of the Irish Free State was launched by the Easter Rising of 1916. There was a revolt in Egypt led by the charismatic Saad Zaghlul; it was put down relatively easily but led to qualified independence and the end of protectorate status in 1922. In 1920 there was a large-scale Arab uprising in Iraq. It took six months and the lives of 2,300 British and Indian troops to repress, while 8,000 Iraqis died. In Ceylon there were Buddhist-inspired riots in 1915, leading to martial law. In India, quite apart from Gandhi's stirring up of riots and disorders, there were other violent protests: in 1919–24 the Muslim Khalifat movement (the most serious protest against British rule since the Mutiny-rebellion of 1857), the 1921 Moplah peasant uprising in Kerala, in 1922 the Akali Sikh movement. More portentous still, in China in 1919 there was the 'May 4th movement', which began in student protest in Peking (against the transfer of German holdings to Japan) but grew to involve nation-wide strikes by industrial workers; it saw the emergence of Mao Tse-tung, and was recognised as evidence of mounting rejection of Western ways and 'imperialism'. And although much less in the public consciousness, there were worrying disturbances in Africa: the epoch-making Chilembwe uprising in Nyasaland (1915), the continuing jihad of Muhammad Abdullah (Abdille Hassan) in Somaliland (1899–1920), another jihad in South Darfur in the Sudan (1921) in response to British taxation schemes, and a Dinka uprising (1919).[6] There were anti-white riots in Trinidad, Jamaica, and British Honduras.

The Great War also led to an intellectual revolt against the European colonial order. The barbaric horrors it revealed 'did much to break the psychological bondage of the colonised elite', whose writers now began to produce critiques of the 'civilising mission', rejecting Western models, and giving greater credence to Gandhi's contention that the industrialised West had not opened up a morally and socially sustainable path for humanity. The most famous critic was Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Indian poet, philosopher, and guru. This new world-wide discourse was to form a critical prelude to the struggles of decolonisation.[7]

For British politicians, the gravest situation of all was in Ireland. 'If we lose Ireland we have lost the empire', declared that Jeremiah,

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[6] Wm Roger Louis, *Great Britain and Germany's lost colonies, 1914–1919* (Oxford, 1967); *Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. VII (ed. A. D. Roberts, 1986), pp. 196, 764.

[7] M. Adas, 'Contested hegemony: the Great War and the Afro-Asian assault on the civilising mission ideology', *Journal of World History*, vol. 15 (Hawai'i, 2004) pp. 31–63.

Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff. In the Easter Rising of 1916, 64 Irish rebels and some 300 civilians were killed in Dublin, and 130 British soldiers died. Fifteen rebels were executed under martial law. This attempt to assert Irish nationality sent shock-waves well beyond the colonial empire. Even Lenin wrote half-a-dozen pages about it; one historical account is entitled *Six days to shake an empire*.[8] In January 1919 Sinn Feiners gathered in Dublin to set up their own assembly, both they and it soon proscribed. A two-and-a-half-year guerilla war began, as the British government dithered, agonised, and vacillated. To the more extreme right-wing officials there was no such thing as genuine politics in Ireland, only 'flagrant disloyalty'.[9] A truce and a 'treaty' in 1921 preceded the establishment of the Irish Free State, with sovereignty over twenty-six of Ireland's thirty-two counties, a compromise which not all regarded as permanent, and a precedent for partition which was to reverberate down the decades.[10]

Former prime minister and now foreign secretary, A. J. Balfour in 1919 detected 'a world movement which takes different forms in different places, but is plainly discernible on every continent and in every country. We are only at the beginning of our troubles.' It was not clear how they were going to deal with these forces of 'social and international disintegration'.[11] Lord Milner as secretary of state for the colonies (1919–21) was overwhelmed with the scale of problems which extended far beyond imperial issues, though these were bad enough. 'The whole world is rocking', he wrote in 1919.[12] With the Middle East 'in a state of raging chaos', Milner was 'quite at the end of my tether'. The conjunction of rebellions and troubles in Ireland, Egypt and India constituted a 'crisis of empire, 1919–1922'. Gandhi's new recklessness in 'non-cooperation' (*satyagraha*) put the rulers of the Raj 'at wit's end'. Everything interlocked. As the secretary of state for India, E. S. Montagu, explained: 'The concessions which look likely to be necessary in Ireland harden public opinion against any new concessions in Egypt. Anything that is done as to complete independence in Egypt might

[8] D. W. Harkness in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. V: *Historiography* (ed. R Winks, 1999), pp. 123–4; C. Duff, *Six days to shake an empire* (1966).
[9] Deirdre McMahon, 'Ireland and the Empire-Commonwealth, 1900–1948', in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. IV: *Twentieth century* (ed. J. M. Brown and W. R. Louis, 1999), pp. 143–6.
[10] N. Mansergh, *The prelude to partition: concepts and aims in Ireland and India* (1976), repr. in *Independence years: the selected Indian and Commonwealth papers of Nicholas Mansergh* (ed. Diana Mansergh, New Delhi, 1999), pp. 3–41. See also Mansergh's magisterial chapter in *The Commonwealth experience* (1982 edn, 2 vols.), vol. I: *The Durham Report to the Anglo-Irish treaty*, ch. 7, 'Ireland: the Dominion settlement', pp. 215–43.
[11] Quoted by Lawrence James, *The rise and fall of the British empire* (1994), p. 371.
[12] Sydney Buxton Papers, Milner to Buxton, 8 April 1919.

Illustration 1.1 The Imperial Conference, 1923.
This was the first gathering of dominion representatives after the forma-
tion of the Irish Free State in 1921. Desmond Fitzgerald, the Irish min-
ister of external affairs, and J. MacNeill, Irish minister of education, are
both shown centrally seated. In the back row, standing left to right:
Mr W. F. Massey (New Zealand), the Maharaja of Alwar (India),
Mr W. R. Warren (Newfoundland), and General Smuts (South Africa).
In the front row, seated: Mr S. M. Bruce (Australia), Mr Stanley
Baldwin (UK), Mr Mackenzie King (Canada). The scene in the confer-
ence room at No. 10 Downing Street, was painted by Douglas Chandor.
The painting was exhibited at the 1924 Wembley Exhibition.

appear to encourage Indian extremists.'[13] Sir Henry Wilson repeatedly drew attention to the dangers of 'being spread all over the world, strong nowhere, weak everywhere, and with no reserve', the 'desperately weak and narrow margin of troops on which we are running the empire'. In December 1921 at Camberley he lectured on 'The passing of the British empire.' Inability to deal with internal discontents strongly, as illustrated by Ireland, seemed to him certain to lead to imperial decline.[14]

When Winston Churchill became secretary of state for the colonies in 1921, he felt, like his predecessor, that 'the whole future of the world' was in the melting-pot. Despite severe-enough problems in Ireland and Iraq, Palestine and Kenya, he worried that the issues which really should preoccupy him were Russia and Turkey, America and Japan. Ireland he described as suffering an 'enormous retrogression of civilisation and Christianity'. Egypt and India were in revolt, on the edge of a blind and heedless plunge back into 'primordial chaos'. 'The whole accumulated greatness of Britain is under challenge', he wrote in 1922. Every separate foreign or nationalist embarrassment, created by the 'rascals and rapscallions of mankind', he saw as a threat to the crumbling global position. Straitened economic circumstances meant that 'the British empire cannot become the policeman of the world'. Yet there was trouble everywhere, and so 'we may well be within measurable distance of universal collapse and anarchy throughout Europe and Asia'. All over the world, countries were 'relapsing in hideous succession into bankruptcy, barbarism or anarchy', and not least within the ambit of the Pax Britannica.[15] Iraq presented him with a particular challenge. It was, he said, 'an ungrateful volcano': 'we live on a precarious basis in this wild land, filled with . . . extremely peppery well-armed politicians'. In an ominous new development, Churchill

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[13] The most attractive introduction to the post-war period remains J. A. Gallagher, *The decline, revival and fall of the British empire: The Ford Lectures and other essays* (ed. A Seal, Cambridge, 1982), pp. 73–141. Although making the fairly obvious point that decline was discontinuous, and that India made important contributions to the 1939–45 war-effort (pp. 135–41), the theme of 'revival' is not all that significant: Gallagher introduced the word into the title in order mainly to avoid too direct an echo of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and fall of the Roman empire* (1776–88). See also J. A. Gallagher, 'Nationalism and the crisis of empire, 1919–1922', in C. Baker, G. Johnson, and A Seal, eds., *Power, profit and politics: essays on imperialism, nationalism and change in twentieth-century India* (1981), pp. 355–68, repr. from *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 15.

[14] K. Jeffery, 'Sir Henry Wilson and the defence of the British empire, 1918–1922', *JICH*, vol. 5 (1977), pp. 270–93 and *The British Army and the crisis of empire, 1918–1922* (Manchester, 1984), esp. pp. 50, 143–9, and *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: a political soldier* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 229–55 ('Defending the empire').

[15] M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. IV: *1917–1922* (1975), pp. 859, 898, 912–15, and *Companion*, vol. IV, pt 3, *Documents*, *April 1921 to November 1922* (1977), pp. 2080–94.

authorised aerial bombardment and intimidation in order to control Iraqi rebels.[16]

Meanwhile, worse things still were occurring in India, with the horrendous catastrophe of the Amritsar massacre in 1919.[17] Rioting had broken out in this Sikh holy city in the Punjab. There was looting, arson, and the wrecking of property, including Christian churches; a lady missionary doctor was seriously assaulted (*not* raped) and almost died. A huge crowd gathered at a prohibited but peaceful meeting in the Jallianwala Bagh, an enclosure near the Sikh Golden Temple, partly to mark the beginning of a major festival. On the orders of General Dyer, 1,650 rounds of ammunition were fired into the crowd. At least 379 Indians were killed in the massacre. In the aftermath, martial law served to facilitate punishment rather than control order; 108 Indians were sentenced to death; there were public floggings, and collective punishments – water and electricity supplies were shut off in Amritsar, and there was some aerial bombing of surrounding villages. The British devised ritualistic humiliations. Wells were polluted by soldiers pissing in and near them. Most notoriously, Dyer closed off the lane where the missionary had been attacked, so that for some two weeks while the 'crawling order' remained in force, access to homes could only be obtained by crawling through the gutter-filth of a street without sanitation. Dyer believed he was doing no more than his duty: 'I thought it would be doing a jolly lot of good and they would realise that they were not to be wicked.' Regarding Indians as mere 'naughty boys', they had to be 'taught a lesson'. (Sir Harry Smith used to talk like this in South Africa in the 1830s and 40s.) Secretary of state Montagu condemned Dyer's actions as rule 'by terrorism, racial humiliation and subordination, and frightfulness'. When Dyer was forced to resign from the army there was a staggering demonstration of public support, raising money for him as if for a sporting hero's testimonial. Both

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[16] Gilbert, *Companion*, vol. IV, pt 3, p. 1511, Churchill to Lloyd George, 17 July 1921. Churchill has acquired a certain notoriety for the decision over air-power in Iraq. However, what he was trying to do was reduce the impact and enormous costs of the post-war military garrison, without a 'policy of scuttle', and to put British relations with turbulent Iraq on a footing more like that of an Indian princely state, with a treaty; in other words to apply the classic mid-Victorian theory of 'informal empire' – the difference being that instead of gunboats in the background there would be aircraft overhead. More than anything else, perhaps, he was promoting nascent 'but proven aerial power' (CAB 24/128, CP 3328, memo, 'Policy and finance in Mesopotamia, 1922–1923', 4 August 1921; Gilbert, *Companion*, vol. IV, pt 3, pp. 1577–80). It should also be noted that, true to his lifelong defence of minorities, Churchill laid it down as a matter of principle that they should not put the Kurds under Arab control (*Companion*, vol. IV, pt 3, p. 1547).

[17] D. Sayer, 'The British reaction to the Amritsar Massacre, 1919–1920', *Past and Present*, no. 131 (1991), pp. 130–64.

Gandhi and Nehru sat on the Congress committee of inquiry. It confirmed their despair of the Raj. Gandhi asked how could they possibly compromise when the British lion 'shakes its claws at us'? Indians now united behind the campaign of civil disobedience and non-cooperation.[18]

Pertinent comment on events like Amritsar comes from George Orwell, who as Eric Blair served in Burma with the Indian Imperial Police from 1922 to 1927, an experience which turned him into a critic of the 'evils of imperialism'. The dreadful thing about such brutalities, he wrote, 'is that they are quite unavoidable': 'in order to rule over barbarians, you have got to become a barbarian yourself'. If there was revolt, rulers had got to suppress it, 'and you can only do so by methods which make nonsense of any claims for the superiority of Western civilisation' (1930). It was hard for those in charge to remember that they were ruling human beings as opposed to 'a kind of undifferentiated brown-stuff, about as individual as bees or coral insects'. Soldiers in particular, he had observed at first hand, could be brutal, but perhaps of necessity: 'you cannot hold down a subject empire with troops infected by notions of class solidarity' (1939).[19]

Imperial Britain survived the 'crisis of empire', if not with naval superiority, or honour, intact. Horns were drawn in. Some of the overblown apparatus of immediate postwar territorial reponsibility was dismantled. America retreated into isolation.[20] But it remained 'a very distracted world' (Lloyd George), a world 'completely out of joint', in which crisis succeeded crisis (Neville Chamberlain, 1931).[21] It would also become painfully apparent that the survivors of the First World War were to live out their careers through yet another world war and in economic decline. New enemies emerged just when Britain was greatly weakened in its crucial economic underpinnings.

The Wall Street crash in the autumn of 1929 suddenly triggered an accumulating contraction of world trade which we know as the Great Depression. There was a major British recession which Ramsay MacDonald called an 'economic blizzard', marked by spiralling unemployment, and a financial crisis culminating in the replacement of the Labour government by a National coalition and the decision to abandon the gold standard in 1931. The Depression was a traumatic experience.

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[18] Judith M. Brown, *Nehru: a political life* (2003) or *Nehru* (1999), p. 33.

[19] George Orwell, *The collected essays, journalism and letters of George Orwell*, ed. S. Orwell and I. Angus (1968), vol. I, pp. 235, 388, 403.

[20] J. Darwin, 'Imperialism in decline?' *Historical Journal*, vol. 23 (1980), pp. 657–78; see also Darwin's remarkable essay on the Middle East, 'An undeclared empire: the British in the Middle East, 1918–1939', *JICH*, vol. 27 (1999), pp. 159–76, repr. in R. D. King and R. W. Kilson, eds., *The statecraft of British imperialism: essays in honour of Wm Roger Louis* (1999).

[21] W. R. Louis, *British strategy in the Far East, 1919–1939* (1971), p. 58; C. Thorne, *The limits of foreign policy: the West, the League and the Far Eastern crisis of 1931–1933* (1972), p. 90.

Economic decline was relative to the United States and to Japan. The Japanese launched a dazzling period of economic expansion, which in China and India was at the expense of British interests. Critical was what happened to British manufacture of cotton goods. Total exports of cotton piece-goods declined from 7,035 million square yards in 1913 to 1,448 million in 1938, from 58 per cent of the world's total to 28 per cent. Exports of cotton goods to India dropped rapidly from 1,248 million square yards in 1929 to 376 million in 1931, a loss in value from £26 million to £5.5 million. Exports to China fell from £71.25 million in 1929 to £300,000 in 1936. India's imports from Japan rose from 18.4 per cent in 1928/9 to 47.3 per cent in 1932–3, while Britain's share declined from 75.2 per cent to 48.7 per cent.[22]

The account of the 1920s and 1930s which follows must inevitably be compressed and selective. It is organised around certain key ideas and the dominant preoccupations of the period: racism (especially as it affected Africa), Zionism and the Palestine Mandate, nationalism, Commonwealth idealism, and geopolitical problems. The final section of the chapter – new directions and the impact of the Second World War – forms a narrative bridge from 1937 to the post-war period which must be the main focus of our attention.

1. Racism

'The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour-line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of man in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.' This was the prediction of the Afro-American writer W. E. B. Du Bois in 1903.[23] From a different perspective, Professor James Bryce, Liberal theorist and politician (chief secretary for Ireland, 1905–7 and then ambassador to the USA) came to similar conclusions. Relations between the dominant and backward races, declared Bryce in 1902, were 'a great secular process' which transcended everyday 'political and commercial questions' and had entered a critical phase.[24] Both Du Bois and Bryce were wrong. Race was not the critical problem of the twentieth century, even if it was an underlying reality. The defining problem of the twentieth century for Europeans, the chief preoccupation, which gives it an over-arching historical framework, was totalitarian aggression, the 'seventy-five years' war' from 1914 to

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[22] S. Pollard, *The development of the British economy, 1914–1967* (2nd edn, 1969), pp. 121–2; B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane, eds., *Abstract of British historical statistics* (1962), pp. 182–3.
[23] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The souls of black folk* (1903), ch. 3, 'Of the dawn of freedom.'
[24] James Bryce, *The relations of the advanced and backward races of mankind* (Romanes lecture, Oxford, 1902), pp. 45–6.

1989 when the Berlin Wall fell. There were hot and cold phases and shift-ing enemies. Although it was driven from Europe, or the Eurasian heart-land, the whole world became caught up in it. If, alternatively, the twentieth century is defined as 'the century of genocide', this was not fun-damentally racial in character, for exterminations were directed against any group seen as a threat to dominant economic or nationalistic projects, and for whom racial, ethnic, or social tags were found.[25]

Even if 'race' was therefore not the central focus of metropolitan concern, it was bound to be an issue for the British empire. Writing in 1937, Professor W. K. Hancock, its leading historian, drew attention to 'the inescapable and intractable issues of race and nationality which con-stitute the supreme challenge to the British Commonwealth', especially as they affected Indians, and particularly, perhaps, those in the diaspora created largely by indentured labour migration. Problems arose, sug-gested Hancock, from the way nineteenth-century liberalism had been 'distorted and impoverished by an unconscious philistinism which ignored all values except those of European bourgeois society' and showed 'profound indifference to the anthropological and historical indi-viduality of the communities in which men actually lived'.[26] There were continuing problems, too, in the sometimes nasty way individual army officers and soldiers treated non-Europeans in their everyday contact.[27] So was the British empire 'racist'?

The question is increasingly posed in these querulous days. It is difficult to refute because non-Europeans were invariably seen as basically different. This assumption generated emotional attitudes: difference meant inferiority. Race was seen as biological proof of difference, an elemental category of belonging. The 'idea of race' was integral to the mentality of post-Victorian generations in a way that is repudiated in the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, too, there is no agreed definition of 'racism'. Sometimes it is equated with racial preju-dice and said to be an ideology, a theory of biological racial superiority. This seems too vague and all-embracing. There is no human commu-nity which is incapable of racial prejudice and many are afflicted with ethnic hatreds. It is surely more satisfactory to distinguish between 'racism' and 'racial prejudice' and restrict 'racism' to the abnormal

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[25] M. Levine, 'Why is the 20th century the century of genocide?' *Journal of World History*, vol. 11 (2000), pp. 305–36.

[26] W. K. Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth affairs*, vol. I: *Problems of nationality*, pp. 22, 177–8.

[27] Orwell, *Collected essays, journalism and letters* vol. I: 'Democracy in the British army', p. 403. He frequently noted in Burma that soldiers were 'the best-hated section of the white community, and, judged simply by their behaviour, they certainly deserved to be'.

systematisation of racial prejudice into institutionalised (legalised) discrimination or exploitation.[28] By this tight definition it is clear that certain states are undoubtedly 'racist' by deliberate intent: the United States before the victory of civil rights, Australia in the days of 'White Australia' immigration policy, South Africa in the era of apartheid, Nazi Germany, Rhodesia between 1965 and 1979. These were all independent states (or claimed to be) over which Britain had no real control. In this sense, then, and by comparison, the British empire as a whole can only dubiously be called racist, and to the extent that it was, not by deliberate aim. The dynamic aim was not racial domination *per se*, but geopolitical security or commercial profit. By contrast the aim of racist states is ethnic survival, since they feel threatened by an alien 'other'. For this reason, settler communities were always more likely to be seriously racially prejudiced than politicians and officials sitting in the comfort of London, simply because settlers were in closer contact with other races. Fear was always at the bottom of settler racial prejudice, just as it was for racist states. Many factors may be involved: fear of the unfamiliar, fear bred by the memory of historic conflict, fear of demographic swamping by the superior numbers of a culture perceived as alien and inferior, fear of disease, fear of economic competition for limited resources or specialised markets, and fear arising out of sexual jealousies and insecurities. There was 'pressure from the inner core of colonial society to maintain social distance and to keep in line any Europeans who threatened to blur the margin' by 'going native', that is, taking a local mistress or wife. There was no legal racial separation, but an insidious hierarchical social convention.[29]

The attitudes of settler communities, however, were never built into an imperial system. The most that can be said is that race was a useful supporting mechanism for the imperial structure, or justification for the cosmoplastic (world-moulding) project. A sense of racial difference certainly permeated many aspects of colonial practice. It explains, for example, the general absence of inter-marriage with non-whites, the prohibition (after the Crewe Circular of 1909) of local concubinage for district officers, the segregation of non-Europeans into separate townships, the misbehaviour of soldiers towards local populations, the absence of

[28] I find the discussion in Robert Miles, *Racism* (1989), helpful, though I do not draw exactly the same conclusions. Historians who have tried to address these issues include R. Ross, ed., *Racism and colonialism* (Leiden, 1982); R. W. Winks, 'A system of commands: the infrastructure of race conflict', in G. Martel, ed., *Studies in British imperial history: essays in honour of A. P. Thornton* (1986), pp. 19–30; and P. B. Rich, *Race and empire in British politics* (1986, 2nd edn, Cambridge, 1990).

[29] C. Bayly and T. Harper, *Forgotten armies: the fall of British Asia, 1941–1945* (2004, 2005), pp. 62, 120–1, 168.

African diocesan bishops in the Anglican Church between 1890 and 1953 – and so forth. Categorising people by race or ethnic origin tended to harden divisions and make them seem more dependent on colonial rule, but it is not the case that this was its purpose. Making categories is what administrators do: it is a function of bureaucracy, and not normally evidence of political manipulation. The difference is sharply exemplified by the Afrikaner-nationalist regime in South Africa, which after 1948, did indeed use racial classification as a basis for European domination. That is true racism. So let us not exaggerate the mere shortcomings of the British empire when tested against genuinely evil regimes or the criteria of later generations. Racism certainly cannot be blamed on empire. It has more to do with antecedent class attitudes and snobberies exported from Britain itself. Moreover, meeting non-Europeans in an imperial context could sometimes make people less contemptuous.

None of this is to say that we may also acquit the empire of racial prejudice. In a society consumed and permeated with class consciousness, obsessed with snobbish codes of behaviour bordering on the ridiculous, and conditioned to the need to have social inferiors to look down upon, these attitudes were inevitably magnified when thinking about and treating Asians and Africans.[30] British attitudes were awash with cultural chauvinism, at least between the Indian Mutiny-Rebellion of 1857 and the collapse of Hitler's Germany. Derogatory terms were bandied about even by the elite: wogs, niggers, nig-nogs, 'Gypos, Chinks, and Japs – but also in reference to Europeans as Huns, Frogs, Wops, Dagoes, and Jugs. It is important to stress again that this cultural arrogance is not to be confused analytically with institutionalised racism, otherwise the whole charge-sheet dissolves in a dangerous miasma. In assessing what – if anything – 'racial prejudice' as a cultural phenomenon might mean in practice, we need to distinguish between words and actions, ideas and their implementation. Does it really matter – beyond affronting our own politically correct susceptibilities – if government ministers of an earlier generation used these terms in private, in their table-talk, family letters and diaries? Churchill inevitably comes under the spotlight here. As a central actor in 'the end of empire' – secretary of state for war and air 1919–21, for the colonies 1921–2, chancellor of the Exchequer 1924–9, opponent of Indian constitutional reform 1929–35, first lord of the Admiralty 1939–40, and prime minister 1940–5 and 1951–5 – if the charges that he was 'a malignant racist' practising a 'virulent Anglo-Saxon triumphalism' can be made to stick, then that will affect our perception of the mentality

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[30] V. G. Kiernan, *The lords of human kind: European attitudes towards the outside world in the imperial age* (1969), p. 214.

of the British elite and its performance overall.[31] In arguing against such charges it needs to be said that too much focuses on what Churchill *said*, mostly when relaxing with cronies, rather than what he *did* or decided.[32] Churchill himself was strict in observing the boundaries. He might joke with his private secretary about sending a telegram to Dr Malan, the Afrikaner prime minister, urging him to 'keep on skelping the kaffirs'[33] – but it was inconceivable that he would ever do so. Also, it is important to realise that, above all else, Churchill was a wordsmith, and proud of it, a master of the English language, delighting in everything from overblown rhetoric to earthy slang. Of course Churchill believed in British superiority over non-Europeans (and most Europeans), and thought the empire was a good thing. But he loathed racial exploitation ('racism' by our definition). He was incensed as a young man by Kitchener's disrespectful cavalier behaviour towards 'lion-hearted' opponents with 'legitimate motives' in the Sudan in 1898;[34] shocked by the Amritsar massacre in India in 1919 ('monstrous . . . sinister'), appalled by Mussolini's cynical invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. As first lord of the Admiralty in 1939 he wrote: 'there must be no discrimination on grounds of race or colour . . . I cannot see any objections to Indians serving in HM ships where they are qualified or needed, or, if their virtues so deserve, rising to be Admiral of the Fleet.'[35] His performance as a minister was invariably directed towards fairness, justice, pragmatism, and racial reconciliation. He had a genuine sympathy for 'subject races', and believed in trying to 'measure the weight of the burden they bear' in being ruled by alien administrators.[36] Paul Addison, while he also believes too much should not be read into Churchill's derogatory private utterances, thinks I have perhaps offered too generous a verdict. He points out that as a professional politician Churchill would have been constantly aware of the parliamentary danger of abuses in colonial administration.[37] But whether dictated from

[31] C. Thorne, *Allies of a kind: the United States, Britain and the war against Japan, 1941–45* (1978), pp. 669, 725, 750; see also Andrew Roberts, 'Churchill and the "magpie society"', in *Eminent Churchillians* (1994), pp. 211–41.

[32] Paul Addison, 'The political beliefs of Winston Churchill', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., vol. 30 (1980), pp. 23–47.

[33] Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians*, p. 214, quotation from Sir D. Hunt.

[34] Winston S. Churchill, *The River War: an historical account of the reconquest of the Soudan* (1st edn, 1899).

[35] M. Gilbert, ed., *The Churchill War Papers*, vol. I (New York, 1993): *At the Admiralty, September 1939–May 1940*, p. 240, memo of 14 October 1939.

[36] R. Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office, 1905–1908* (1968), pp. 503–5; and 'Churchill and the British empire', in R. Blake and W. R. Louis, eds., *Churchill* (1993), pp. 167–86.

[37] P. Addison, *Churchill: the unexpected hero* (2005), p. 38. This admirable short introduction to Churchill is based upon Addison's long entry on Churchill in the *ODNB* (2004), vol. XI, pp. 653–85.

the head or the heart, Churchill's record is good. 'Racially prejudiced' perhaps, but certainly not a 'malignant racist'.

Churchill was not alone in his careless private racial attitudes. Prejudice was typical of the governing elite of his generation. Why was this? In a word, they had little real knowledge and less understanding. They belonged to a more naive, more juvenile, more introverted private world, a world incomparably less well-informed about human nature and human societies, the cosmos, the flesh, and the devil than those who came after them, innocent of multi-culturalism, and much more prone to poke thoughtless fun at foreigners and every kind of outsider. Post-1918 British cosmologies inherited a late-Victorian racial stereotyping which was harsher than anything which had preceded it. Even Edwardian social-ist progressives and humanitarian campaigners shared the notions of a pseudo-scientific racial hierarchy. They allowed themselves to be unduly influenced by aspects of non-European life that should have been irrele-vant to any sensible assessment of capacity, such as nudity in tropical climes, or sexual activities. 'Nakedness is a grievous sin', declared Sir Harry Smith in the Eastern Cape in 1836, and he was still being echoed by the recently retired governor of British East Africa in 1905, Sir Charles Eliot. Although prepared to exempt the stylish Masai, Eliot thought 'most natives appear to be simply in the state of Adam and Eve before the Fall, which is also that of the animals, to have no idea of indecency'. (Sir Charles believed the distance between man and beasts was 'minimised in Africa.')[38] The other problem was male-to-male sex, widespread in China and Japan and many other societies untouched by the Judaeo-Christian tradition which – quaintly – regarded anal intercourse as unnatural. A major reason for virulent Sinophobia was the realisation that sodomy was very popular among the Chinese. The Webbs, Sidney and Beatrice, after a visit to China in 1911, dismissed the Chinese as 'essentially an unclean race', physically and mentally rotten, 'a horrid race' devastated by drugs and 'abnormal sexual indulgence'.[39] To an extraordinary extent, promis-cuity, prostitution, and sodomy were depicted as central characteristics of Asian and other societies, and it was this which was said to make them

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[38] Sir C. Eliot, *The East Africa Protectorate* (1905), pp. 92–3. Few things are more puzzling today about Victorian and Edwardian attitudes to Afro-Asian peoples than this unrea-soning and obsessive horror of nakedness, the equation of nudity not only with irre-deemable savagery but with grievous sin; the gravamen of Churchill's charge against Gandhi, of course, was that he was 'half-naked'. Was Churchill unaware of the German *wandervogel* movement or the *nacktbaden* cult, or the early British and American nudist and sunbathing organisations, later transmuted into 'naturism', that most genteel of respectable bourgeois pastimes?

[39] J. M. Winter, 'The Webbs and the non-white world: a case of socialist racialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 9 (1974), pp. 181–92.

inferior and unfit for self-rule. The differential was reduced to a simple equation: licentiousness + indiscipline = primitive, sexual restraint + rationality = modern.[40]

A further influential presupposition was that races must be inferior if they lacked industrial enterprise. The reputation of the Chinese – especially in comparison with the Japanese – suffered in this respect. It might be conceded that they had once invented useful things, but they stood accused of having done very little with them. The stereotype of Chinese society was essentially that it was stagnant, foolish and fatalistic, chaotic, amorphous and unmanageable: 'an inept, torpid polity' (Lord Curzon). It was annoyingly hard to know what was going on 'inside the ant-hill' (Sir John Simon), impossible to stir it up with gunboats: 'punishing China is like flogging a jellyfish' (Churchill).[41] Africans were regarded as indolent, lacking in initiative, thrift, and honesty. They had, it was argued, invented nothing – founded no civilisation, built no stone cities, or ships, or produced a literature, or suggested a creed. This, said the governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Alan Burns (1941–7), was a poor record. But he did at least realise that 'lack of achievement was no real test of capacity in different conditions', and he disliked colour prejudice enough to write a book about it.[42]

In the 1930s Europeans still tended to think they could do what they liked with Africa. Although during the Ethiopian crisis (1935–6) frontier changes and 'corridors for camels' were planned with scant regard for Ethiopian, Somali, or Eritrean feelings, the most shocking – but lesser known – example of European high-handedness was a massive proposed re-partition of Central Africa. The records lie in an extremely fat file innocently entitled 'Colonial policy 1938', but in fact discussions had been going on for a couple of years before that. There was some initial moral repugnance expressed in Cabinet committee, but this had become muted by 1937–8, mainly because the proposal was by then being presented as a 'new deal' or 'new conception', in order to head off public criticism. An area was designated for de-militarisation and governments within it would have to subscribe to certain principles about 'modern standards' concerning African rights and freedom of trade. But the essence of the scheme was Neville Chamberlain's plan as prime minister

[40] Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, race and politics: policing venereal disease in the British empire* (2003), pp. 177, 322–5, and 'Sexuality, gender and empire' in Levine, *Oxford History of the British empire*, Companion series: *Gender and empire* (2004), p. 151. See also, more generally, Hyam, *Empire and sexuality*, esp. pp. 200–15.

[41] Louis, *British strategy in the Far East*, pp. 18–19, 133, 186; S. L. Endicott, *Diplomacy and enterprise: British China policy, 1933–1937* (1975), p. 14.

[42] A. R. Burns, *Colour prejudice* (1948), p. 82. This book is mainly a history of the subject within the empire.

(1937–40) to restore to Germany the former Togoland and Cameroon colonies, and in addition to create for Germany a completely new colony. Britain and France would each surrender their colonies in Togoland and Cameroon; the British would add in bits of Nigeria around the Adamaoua Massif; Belgium would surrender a portion of the southern Congo; Portugal would be compelled to give up a part of northern Angola, and in compensation would receive from Britain a chunk of south-eastern Tanganyika (which one day became the site of the ground-nuts fiasco). The rationale for this farcical and elaborate reconstruction, admitted to be 'a patchwork solution', was that Britain was not prepared, for strategic reasons, to give back the whole of Tanganyika, which would mean severing the air-route to South Africa and giving up relatively large economic interests. Chamberlain did not entirely accept this reasoning. He did not believe he could purchase peace and a lasting settlement by handing over the whole of Tanganyika, but would not have hesitated for a moment to do so ('It would be of more value to them than to us'). Colonial secretary W. G. Ormsby-Gore (1936–8) also refused to toss in Sierra Leone or the Gambia, because this would lead to serious risings.

This bizarre scheme thus went beyond mere retrocession to involve a general adjustment of the African map. It was fundamentally unrealistic. It failed not because of ethical doubts but simply because Hitler rejected it, being unwilling to enter into the essential quid pro quo, a general settlement in Europe, including co-operation over Austria and Czechoslovakia.[43]

Despite low-grade racial prejudice and some high-handed politics, the empire had a definite countervailing doctrine of trusteeship – the idea that African territories were held in trust, and the interests of the ward should be carefully considered.

The doctrine of trusteeship between the wars was played out mainly in eight separate pronouncements about the future of East and Central Africa, especially Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, which had the largest and most vociferous settler communities, seeking self-rule.[44] The most famous

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[43] PREM 1/247. See also S. R. Ashton and S. E. Stockwell, eds., *Imperial policy and colonial practice, 1925–1945* (BDEEP, 1996), pt 1, pp. 136–49 (no. 20), meeting of Cabinet committee on foreign policy, 24 January 1938; W. R. Louis, 'Appeasement and the colonies, 1936–1938', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, vol. 49 (1971), pp. 1175–91; A. J. Crozier, 'Imperial decline and the colonial question in Anglo-German relations, 1919–1939', *European Studies Review*, vol. 11 (1981), esp. pp. 229–31.

[44] R. E. Robinson, 'The moral disarmament of African colonial empire', *JICH*, vol. 8 (1979), pp. 86–104, repr. in N. Hillmer and P. G. Wrigley, *The first British Commonwealth: essays in honour of Nicholas Mansergh* (1980); R. Hyam, 'Bureaucracy and "trusteeship" in the colonial empire', in J. M. Brown and W. R. Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. IV: *The twentieth century* (1999), pp. 255–79, esp. pp 265–7.
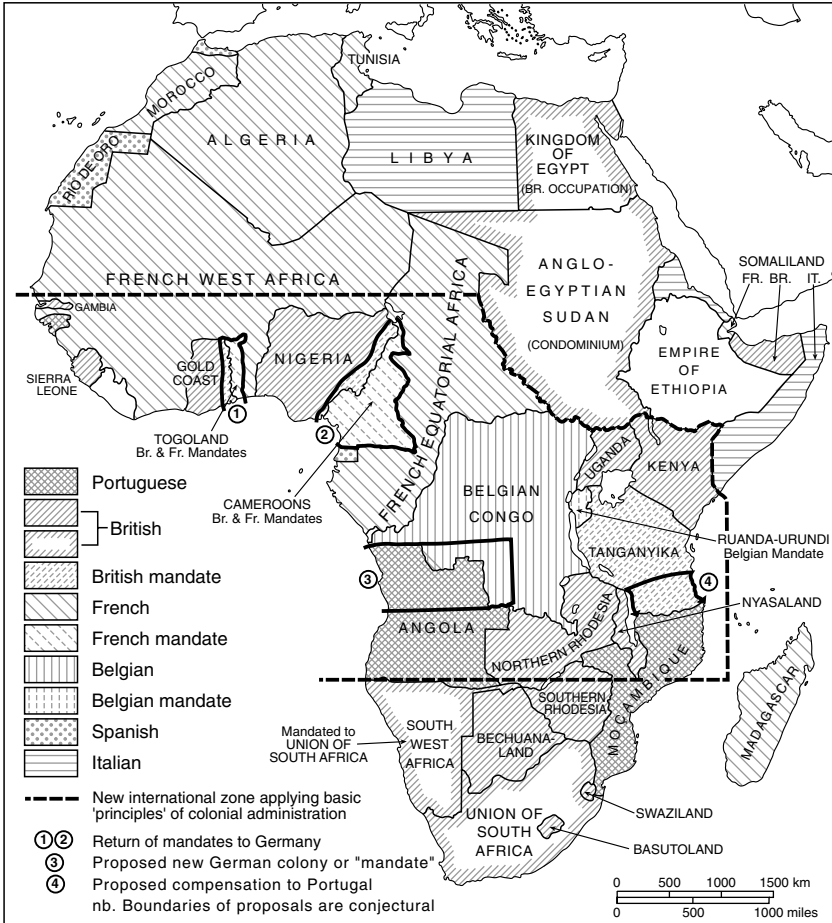
Source: Based on the information in PREM 1/247

Map 1.1 Appeasement in Africa: Neville Chamberlain's 'New Deal' for the re-partition of tropical Africa, 1938.

pronouncement was the Devonshire declaration of 1923, which said that the object of the trust was 'the protection and advancement of the native races': 'primarily Kenya is an African country and . . . the interests of the African natives must be paramount' – that is, prevail over the interests of immigrant races, whether Indian or European (23,000 Asians, 10,000 Europeans). The policy of the metropolitan government was thus clear, but constantly had to be adjusted to keep the settlers, or the government of

India, happy. It was in practice hard to implement the policy against the machinations of strong-willed settlers, who even threatened rebellion.[45] The various White Papers and declarations achieved little beyond a certain holding of the line. Too often the government felt let down by the governors they had chosen in the hope that they would stand firm on African interests, such as Girouard, Coryndon, and Mitchell, who were all either intimidated or 'captured' by the settlers. Even Lord Passfield (Sidney Webb) as Labour colonial secretary (1929–31) could not apply progressive Fabian principles, and had to water down his White Paper pronouncements, since a common-roll franchise could not be enforced without provoking a settler rebellion in kenya.[46]

Another equally important battle for trusteeship concerned the three High Commission Territories, Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland, in which South Africa had a reversionary interest under the South Africa Act of 1909. The Union of South Africa was an expansionist state and pressed its claims. Its increasingly harsh native policies made it hard to square any acquiescence in South African ambitions with the British protection of African interests. There was no doubt about African opposition to a transfer out of the area of British responsibility. To the Tswana, Sotho, and Swazi, South Africa was feared like a lion and distrusted like a snake, or as one chief put it, 'Our prayer is that our mother may keep her baby on her back and that she will not drop the blanket for a stranger to pick up.' The case against transfer was skilfully articulated by Tshekedi Khama, regent of the Bangwato in Bechuanaland (1925–50). This hard-headed, stocky, and persistent man was the favourite son of Khama the Great. He was intelligent and well-read, with a library which included British parliamentary blue-books as well as *How to play Association Football* and Kingsley's *Water babies*. Tshekedi was probably the outstanding African leader of the interwar years. In June 1938 he submitted to the British government a powerful statement of the case against transfer, based on a formidable indictment of Union policies. Civil servants in the Colonial and Dominions Offices stood firm on trusteeship, and managed to stave off any concession without provoking a large-scale row with the South African government. It was a victory for trusteeship which eventually made possible the emergence of three independent African states in the 1960s.[47]

[45] Edna Bradlow, 'The evolution of "trusteeship" in Kenya', *South African Historical Journal*, vol. 4 (1972), pp. 64–80; J. G. Kamoche, *Imperial trusteeship and political evolution in Kenya, 1923–1963: a study of official views and the road to decolonisation* (Washington, 1981); R. M. Maxon, *The struggle for Kenya: the loss and reassertion of imperial initative, 1912–1923* (1993).

[46] Robinson, 'The moral disarmament of African colonial empire' pp. 97–8.

[47] R. Hyam and P. Henshaw, *The lion and the springbok: Britain and South Africa since the Boer War* (Cambridge, 2003), ch. 5, ' "Greater South Africa": the struggle for the High

In so far as governments followed, or tried to follow, an ethical imperial policy, where did this come from? The fundamentals of an ethical policy were laid out by the Liberal governments before the First World War,[48] and progressive attitudes were self-generating within the Colonial Office in the 1930s. Fabian theorists made their contribution, though it is important not to exaggerate it. Passfield was quite unable to provide the charter of empire citizenship the Fabians hoped for, to outlaw colour-bars and grant all races equal rights to franchises. Moreover, even Fabians did not jettison hierarchical views of racial superiority. A Fabian who had worked in the Colonial Office, Sydney Olivier, believed, however, that 'the Bantu stand very much higher in the scale of human intelligence than the typical Boer statesmen': J. B. M. Hertzog, the South African prime minister from 1924 to 1939, was a 'hysterical dunderhead' and his regime one of 'pestilential obscurantism and reaction'.[49] Their feelings about empire were ambivalent. This is vividly seen in one of its most scholarly 'advanced' thinkers, J. S. Furnival, an experienced ex-ICS officer, who married a Burmese, converted to Buddhism (for ten years, at any rate), and supported Burmese nationalism. But Furnivall could not shake off a paternalist nostalgia for imperial rule in Burma, nor a belief that imperial rule could only be effectively dismantled and Burma freed by British administrators.[50] He wanted to preserve the 'established political connections between Europe and the tropics'.[51]

The ethnographers of the 1860s had played a big part in developing late-Victorian racial stereotypes, so it is appropriate that it was the social anthropologists of the 1930s who began a more positive and favourable intellectual reconstruction. Bronislaw Malinowski arrived in London from Poland in 1910 and taught at the London School of Economics, where he was a professor from 1927 to 1938. He was a

[ ] Commission Territories, 1910–1961', pp. 102–17; Hyam, *The failure of South African expansion, 1908–1948*; W. Henderson, 'Khama, Tshekedi', *ODNB* (2004), vol. XXXI, pp. 507–9.

[48] Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office*, pp. 525–45, and 'The Colonial Office mind, 1900–1914', *JICH*, vol. 8 (1979), pp. 30–55, repr. in Hillmer and Wrigley, *The first British Commonwealth*.

[49] M. Olivier, ed., *Sydney Olivier: letters and selected writings* (1948), p. 164, Olivier to H. G. Wells, 8 April 1929.

[50] Julie Pham, 'Ghost-hunting in colonial Burma: nostalgia, paternalism, and the thought of J. S. Furnivall', *South-East Asia Research*, vol. 12 (2004), pp. 237–68, and 'J. S. Furnivall and Fabianism: interpreting the plural society in Burma', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 39 (2005), pp. 321–48. See also W. K. Hancock's comment on Furnivall in *The wealth of colonies* (1950), pp. 28–34. For Fabianism in its setting, see P. S. Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour movement, 1914–1964* (1975).

[51] J. S. Furnivall, *Colonial policy and practice: a comparative study of Burma and Netherlands India* (1948), p. 550.

pioneer of fieldwork involving 'participant observation', working in the Trobriand Islands of the South Pacific. Among his pupils was Jomo (Johnstone) Kenyatta, who wrote *Facing Mt Kenya* (1938), which although in part it had a polemical purpose, was a revealing analysis of the Kikuyu world, one of the first ethnographic studies produced by an African of his own people. Another student was Evans-Pritchard, who made highly significant contributions, such as *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande* (1937) and *The Nuer* (1940), fascinating and marvellous works.[52] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown was also an important pioneer, who published his revised study of the Andaman Islanders in 1933, though his other influential books appeared only after the Second World War.[53] As the respected commentator Margery Perham wrote in 1934: 'We begin to understand how African cultures were integrated, and so to recognise the functions of certain customs which seemed to our grandfathers the perverse aberrations of the heathen.'[54] What the social anthropologists were achieving was in many ways only a recovery of understandings which had been clear enough to Captain Cook on his South Pacific voyages in the eighteenth century, insights which had stopped him being censoriously shocked by anything, from courtship customs to cannibalism.[55] Be that as it may, in the interwar years anthropological studies had their impact in the Colonial Office. It became apparent to the 'recruiting officer', Sir Ralph Furse, that the one charge they could not escape was 'that of insensitivity, even obtuseness on the spiritual and aesthetic values of other peoples'. He was thinking mainly of Africans, but it was equally true of Arabs.[56]

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[52] E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: a description of the livelihood and the political institutions of a Nilotic people* (1940).

[53] See especially *Structure and function in primitive society: essays and addresses* (1952).

[54] Margery Perham, 'A re-statement of Indirect Rule', *Africa*, vol. 7 (1934), p. 322.

[55] J. C. Beaglehole, ed., *The journals of Captain James Cook on his voyages of discovery*, vol. I: *The voyage of the 'Endeavour', 1768–1771* (1955); vol. II: *Voyage of the 'Resolution' and 'Adventurer'* (1961). When Cook found a 'young fellow' lying with a girl of ten or twelve, who was being instructed by a woman, his comment was, 'it appeared to be done more from Custom than Lewdness' (vol. I, p. 94). 'Youthful incontinency', he observed, 'can hardly be called a vice, since neither the state nor individuals are the least injured by it'; in any case, societies should not be judged by their prostitutes, any more 'than England by Covent Garden or Drury Lane' (vol. II, pp. 236–59.). The islanders' cooking pleased him: entertained by Chief Oreo at Raiaka, he ate roast pig tasting 'far sweeter than it would have done had it been dressed by any of our methods' (vol. II, p. 226). As to cannibalism, that was an ancient tradition, restricted to eating enemies slain in war, and 'we know that it is not an easy matter to break a nation of its ancient customs' (vol. II, p. 294). It is hard to imagine any Englishman even of the 1920s writing from such an enlightened perspective.

[56] R. Furse, *Aucuparius: recollections of a recruiting officer* (1962), p. 286.

2. Zionism

Theodor Herzl, a Hungarian journalist, in a pamphlet entitled *Judenstaat*, in 1896 called for a world council to discuss the question of a homeland for the Jews. He convened the first Zionist Congress at Basle in the following year, and became first president of the World Zionist Organisation. Zionism was a creed which set out its own national solution to the 'problem' of the Jewish diaspora. It saw itself, in modern parlance, as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. It was in fact a pure example of 'invented tradition', with no roots in existing Jewish tradition, of which it was a drastic rejection. In October 1902 Herzl approached Joe Chamberlain (secretary of state for the colonies, 1895–1903) and asked if the CO would agree to a Jewish colony in Sinai peninsula. Chamberlain, after a trip on the Uganda railway, preferred to offer a site on the Uasin Gishu plateau near Nairobi. Although the Zionist commissioner reported unfavourably, East Africa remained of interest to Zionists for a few years more.[57] In 1904 Chaim Weizmann arrived at the University of Manchester as a lecturer in chemistry, and made the acquaintance of his local MP, Winston Churchill, who was fascinated by him and his Palestine project. In 1908 Churchill wrote of his belief that

The establishment of a strong Jewish state astride the bridge between Europe and Africa, flanking the land routes to the East, would not only be an immense advantage to the Empire, but a notable step towards a harmonious disposition of the world among its peoples.[58]

This was probably more a romantic Churchillian rhetorical flourish than a serious political commitment.[59] Weizmann continued to cultivate many British politicians and officials.

However, in 1917, Lloyd George's foreign secretary from 1916 to 1919, A. J. Balfour, issued a famous – and fateful – statement, which said:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.

[57] J. Amery, *The life of Joseph Chamberlain*, vol. IV: *1901–1903* (1951), pp. 256–70; Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office, 1905–1908*, p. 407.

[58] I. Friedman, *The question of Palestine, 1914–1918: British–Jewish–Arab relations* (1973), p. 7. There is a good account of Chaim Weizmann in *ODNB* (2004), vol. LVII, pp. 959–63, by N. Rose.

[59] N. Rose, 'Churchill and Zionism', in R. Blake and W. R. Louis, eds., *Churchill* (1993), pp. 147–66.

The wording was almost entirely derived from Weizmann, though he had wanted 'the National Home of the Jews'.[60] In accordance with the Balfour Declaration, the British government accepted the Palestine Mandate from the League of Nations in April 1920, thus saddling themselves with one of the most difficult problems Britain ever had to face, and to which no British politician would find a solution. Unlike almost all other problems, it was not one which arose naturally or ineluctably out of the circumstances of, or challenges to, imperial power, but was actually created, a gratuitous piece of self-inflicted harm, if you like. Palestine developed into the world's most portentous dispute.[61]

How did this extraordinary involvement come about? Churchill's statement quoted above gives us one clue, for he had identified a geopolitical idea which was formally articulated in 1917 by L. S. Amery (a Conservative MP, soon to be the under-secretary of state for the colonies, in January 1919). Amery contemplated the possibility that the Germans might install themselves in Palestine, and try to link it up to their colony in East Africa, with a railway from Hamburg to Lake Nyasa, as a Germano-Islamic empire, 'the greatest of all dangers which can confront the British Empire in the future'. The Germans must therefore be removed from Tanganyika and from any possible influence in the Middle East, which alone would give an imperial strategical security, enabling 'that Southern British world, which runs from Cape Town through Cairo, Baghdad, and Calcutta to Sydney and Wellington, to go about its peaceful business without constant fear of German aggression'. The keystone of this geopolitical arch would be in Palestine. This would protect the British position in Egypt and India, as 'a central pivot of support for our whole Middle East policy as well as assuring the effective control of our sea and air communications with the East'.[62]

This geopolitical concept was, then, the first and long-term reason for the patronage of Zionism by the British government. Zionism provided a means of acquiring informal control without annexation.[63] Zionism played into British hands, making it possible to realise a strategic objective – an

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[60] J. Reinharz, 'The Balfour Declaration and its maker: a reassessment; *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 64 (1992), pp. 455–99. The declaration was made in the form of a letter to Lord Rothschild.

[61] T. Segev, *One Palestine, complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (transl. H Watzman, 2000, 2001): pp. 33–50 on the Balfour Declaration. This work is both controversial Jewish revisionism and an epic evocation of the three communities.

[62] L. S. Amery, *My political life*, vol. II: *War and peace, 1914–1929* (1953), p. 115; M. Howard, *The continental commitment: the dilemma of British defence policy in the era of the two world wars* (1972), pp. 65–8.

[63] M. Vereté, 'The Balfour Declaration and its makers', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 6 (1970), pp. 48–67, repr. in E. Kedourie and S. G. Haim, eds., *Palestine and Israel in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (1982).

imperial bastion on the cheap – without offending the USA. (It has been said that if Zionism had not existed it would have been necessary to invent it.) For prime minister Lloyd George, the attraction of the Palestine project was as a pre-emptive measure against the French, who wanted to be a major power in the Middle East. Asquith believed Lloyd George 'does not care a damn for the Jews or their past or their future, but thinks it will be an outrage to let the Holy Places pass into the possession of "agnostic, atheistic France"'. Palestine would be a buffer between the Suez Canal and French Syria to the north. (As late as 1923 Curzon said that if Britain abandoned Palestine, 'the French would step in and then be on the threshold of Egypt and on the outskirts of the Canal'.)[64]

There was, however, a much more important reason why Britain became the patron of Zionism. The short-term aim was to use it as a wartime device to rally the allies. When Churchill in 1922 explained the reason for the Balfour Declaration, he said 'it was considered that the support which the Jews could give us all over the world, and particularly in the USA, and also in Russia, would be a definite, palpable advantage' in the conduct of the war.[65] Or as Balfour himself argued, it would enable Britain to 'carry on extremely useful propaganda both in Russia and America'. There were reckoned to be two important groups of Jews who could be rallied. One was in Russia, where the revolutionary leaders were threatening to take Russia *out* of the war (it was assumed Jews were directing the Revolution and needed to be diverted from communism). The other was in America, which still had to be brought *into* the war, and where American Jews were antagonistic to the Allied cause. There were five million Jews in America, the largest single concentration of Jews anywhere – up to 1914 they had been entering the USA at the rate of 100,000 a year. Supposedly, a gesture to Zionism might unlock legendary Jewish millions in Wall Street, or at least divide the huge neutralist minority of the German-descended American Jews. Lloyd George probably saw British support as having a quid pro quo: in return he hoped the Jewish leaders would promote support throughout the world for the Allied war effort.[66] But contrary to folklore, there was no bargain. Folklore has suggested that he wanted to reward Weizmann for his contribution to the war effort: Weizmann's bulk-produced acetone process (making acetone from conkers) saved the British armaments industry. But as Weizmann himself recognised, governments do not operate like that, and 'history does not deal in Aladdin's lamps'.[67] The truth is, as the government said in

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[64] J. J. McTague, *British policy in Palestine, 1917–1922* (Lanham, USA, 1983), pp. 25, 39, 56, 252.   [65] Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. IV: *1917–1922*, pp. 652–3.
[66] Friedman, *The question of Palestine*, pp. 168–71.
[67] M. Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews* (1985), p. 34.

1923: the Balfour Declaration was a 'war measure . . . designed to secure tangible benefits which it was hoped could contribute to the ultimate victory of the Allies' at a time of 'extreme peril'.[68] The power of world Jewry was, however, vastly over-estimated. It simply was not true that Jewish minorities were all of the same mind or coherently linked, let alone active supporters of Zionism. Belief in the 'international power' of the Jews was sometimes ludicrously exaggerated. In the final analysis, it was a damaging absurdity.[69]

One other interpretation of the Palestine project is possible: that it was to forestall German competition for the patronage of Zionism, the pre-emption of a possible German initiative to sponsor her own sort of pro-Zionist gesture. This, it was argued, would have won over a great deal of the Jewish support that the British were aiming at. There were fears that the war might end in stalemate, and that a German protectorate in the Middle East might be the outcome. 'The Balfour Declaration was meant to torpedo the supposed German–Turkish move and to undermine their negotiating position at the peace conference' (Friedman). The fear was that Turkey would be 'teutonised' and play a new role in the Middle East after the withdrawal of Russian influence. Curzon (lord president of the council, former viceroy of India, and foreign secretary from 1921), noting the infection of the Turkish empire with German militarism, said that a 'Teutonised Turkey' in possession of Syria and Palestine would be 'an extreme and perpetual menace to the empire' – the kind of language Wellesley had used about Mysore in India in the 1790s. Many German-orientated and Turkophile Jews, especially in America, would perhaps have been happy to see a Jewish settlement in Palestine under German protection.[70]

Ironically, the Balfour Declaration was passionately denounced by the only Jewish member of the Cabinet, E. S. Montagu, the secretary of state for India (1917–22). He opposed a Zionist homeland as the reconstruction of the tower of Babel: 'Palestine will become the world's ghetto.' He claimed that most influential British Jews (including Sir Matthew Nathan, the leading colonial governor) were against it, and that it was, after all, a 'foreign' cosmopolitan movement which Britain was not obliged to support. He worried especially about the Muslim reaction in India.[71]

Nevertheless, Zionism was vaguely supported by many Britons, and the government did not renege on its promise after the war was over, so the policy must have touched roots beyond simple wartime short-term

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[68] D. Ingrams, ed., *Palestine papers, 1917–1922: the seeds of conflict* (1972), p. 173.
[69] N. Shepherd, *Ploughing sand: British rule in Palestine, 1917–1948* (1999), pp. 5–19.
[70] Friedman, *The question of Palestine*, pp. 285–6.
[71] R. M. Basheer, *Montagu and the Balfour Declaration* (Arab League pamphlet, 1966).

expediency. To some, sympathy for the Jewish cause was of interest to them as Christians. The idea of a return of the Jews to Jerusalem fascinated them. The number of 'biblical tourists' and pilgrims to the Holy Land was increasing. Biblical romanticism had a hold on Lloyd George and many Welshmen: 'I was taught in school far more about the history of the Jews than about the history of my own land.'[72] The South African leader, General Jan Smuts, said the Jewish cause appealed to him 'with peculiar force', because something was due from Christians to Jews in the interests of historic justice, compensation for 'unspeakable persecutions' of the people who had in fact 'produced Christ'; 'moral and religious motives thus reinforced the political considerations', security in the eastern Mediterranean.[73] In many ways support for a Jewish homeland was a specifically Edwardian emotion. Zionism had its appeal as a Jewish version of the idea behind the phenomenally successful boy-scout movement from 1908 in leading deprived boys, bare-kneed, out of Europe's crammed smoky cities into a healthier life outdoors (or overseas). The healthiness of British Jewish men was discovered and admired, and circumcision was becoming remarkably popular, especially with higher social groups.[74]

Certainly the idea bit deep with the empire-minded political elite. Many of the key figures were Zionists to some degree, including not only Joe Chamberlain, Balfour, Lloyd George, Churchill, Milner, Amery and Smuts, but also John Buchan, Malcolm MacDonald, William Ormsby-Gore, and, in the next generation, Harold Wilson. It was not supported to anything like the same extent by Middle East experts, such as General Sir Edmund Allenby or governor Sir Ronald Storrs, nor by those concerned with India. Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson could see no strategic value in it, and urged abandonment of the Mandate. Initially the project was actively opposed by Curzon, who in Cabinet in 1917 said the government 'should have nothing to do with it': Palestine was 'an unpropitious place', too poor, and what about its Muslims?; to aim at the repatriation of the Jews was 'sentimental idealism', and he felt 'cordial distrust' for the intoxicating 'fumes of Zionism'; on the principle of 'historic rights', Curzon added, 'we have a stronger claim to parts of France'. But Curzon allowed himself to be overruled, and, like other objectors, out-manoeuvred by those putting the strategic arguments.[75]

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[72] Segev, *One Palestine, complete*, p. 43; Wilson, *After the Victorians*, pp. 99–104.
[73] Jean van der Poel, ed., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, vol. VI (1973), p. 315, speech in honour of Dr Weizmann, president of Israel (27 November 1949).
[74] Hyam, *Britain's imperial century, 1815–1914*, pp. 276–9.
[75] Ingrams, *Palestine papers*, pp. 12, 96–7.

It was widely felt that the British could have it both ways. Jewish and Arab interests not only should but could be reconciled. Probably few British officials took the Jewish side, but they did not much care for Arabs either: a parity of disesteem, perhaps. Ormsby-Gore (secretary of state for the colonies, 1936–8) came to regard the Jews as greedy and aggressive, the Arabs as 'treacherous and untrustworthy',[76] equally devious, equally loathsome. Or as haughty Storrs wrote, after nine years as governor of Jerusalem: 'I am not wholly for either, but for both. Two hours of Arab grievances drive me into the synagogue, while after an intensive course of Zionist propaganda, I am prepared to embrace Islam.'[77] High Commissioner Sir John Chancellor (appointed in 1928) concluded that the Jews were ungrateful, the Arabs impertinent, and the Balfour Declaration a 'colossal blunder'.[78]

Patronage of Zionism reflected non-comprehension and contempt for nationalist movements which were general in the 1920s. Arab nationalism was not regarded as an identifiable factor at all until the Arab revolt of 1936. In 1919 Balfour – pressing the cause with uncharacterstic energy and commitment – recognised that the Arabs would oppose Britain's policy, and that it was indeed not consistent with principles of self-determination, but:

we do not propose to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country . . . The four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in agelong traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import that the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.

The question of the Jews, he added, was one of 'world importance'.[79] It would be hard to find a more shocking illustration of the extent and depth of the West's complacency in the early twentieth century about the supposedly inevitable decline of Islam, of the West's contempt for Muslim interests – its backing of Zionism 'right or wrong' – than Balfour's statement here. The British government was largely oblivious to the terrible nature of the provocation it was giving to the Muslim world.

In other ways, too, Zionism was underpinned by deep attitudes within the British ruling elite. The Victorian belief in 'the immorality of the economic status quo' was well to the fore. This goes right back to Charles Kingsley in the 1850s (if no further), castigating the people of Paraguay for their immoral unawareness that they could not remain in 'a stationary state': 'the human species has a right to demand . . . that each people

[76] Ormsby-Gore to N. Chamberlain, 9 January 1938, quoted in M. J. Cohen, *Palestine: retreat from the Mandate: the making of British policy, 1936–1945* (1978), p. 49.
[77] R. H. A. Storrs, *Orientations* (1943, 1945), p. 340.
[78] Segev, *One Palestine, complete*, pp. 334–5.
[79] Ingrams, *Palestine papers* (Balfour to prime minister, 19 February 1919).

should either develop the capabilities of their own country, or make room for those who will develop them'. Half a century later, the future Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald believed 'the world is the inheritance of all men' and no nation could deny its produce to the world; this economic reason justified the acquisition of territory.[80] Churchill was strongly moved by this kind of reasoning. 'Inefficient and out-of-date' Turks must be bought out, having misruled one of the most fertile areas in the world.[81] A new Palestine would be created by the Jews, which would bring prosperity and 'a higher economic and social life to all', a great experiment, in conformity with the empire's 'great estates' policy. The Arabs, insisted Churchill, 'should see them as their friends and helpers, not as expellers and expropriators'. After all:

Left to themselves, the Arabs of Palestine would not in a thousand years have taken effective steps towards the irrigation and electrification of Palestine. They would have been quite content to dwell – a handful of philosophic people – in the wasted sun-scorched plains, letting the waters of the Jordan continue to flow unbridled and unharnessed into the Dead Sea.

Churchill tactlessly reproached the Arabs for being guilty of a 'breach of hospitality'.[82]

Zionism also reflects the obsession of the interwar generation with declarations, definitions, legalistic pronouncements, paper solutions – what George Orwell called the 'time of labels, slogans and evasions' – and what a permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Robert Vansittart, recalled as a time when 'we paddled in a puree of words and hoped to catch a formula'.[83] Words tided over short-term crises without providing real solutions. The reports of nineteen Palestine commissions of inquiry piled up. The Balfour Declaration was subjected to interpretation and modification in no fewer than three White Papers: in 1922, in 1930, and in 1939.[84] Officially a Jewish state was not envisaged by British policy, but unofficially none could say. There was really no unequivocally clear policy before 1939. Churchill's glosses in his White Paper of 1922 were a careful balancing of allegedly incompatible earlier promises. The Balfour Declaration did *not* mean 'that Palestine as a whole should be converted

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[80] Charles Kingsley, *Miscellanies* (2 vols., 1859) vol. II, pp. 21–2; J. R. MacDonald, *Labour and the empire* (1907), pp. 65, 98.   [81] `Friedman, *The question of Palestine*, pp. 17–18.

[82] *PD, Commons* vol. 156, cc. 334–5, 4 July 1922. See also Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. IV, pp. 531–662, and *Companion*, vol. IV, pt 3, *Documents, April 1921–November 1922* (1977), esp. pp. 1610–18.

[83] Orwell, *Collected essays, journalism and letters*, vol. I: *1920–1940*, p. 519 ('Inside the whale', 1940); Vansittart, *The mist procession*, p. 484.

[84] Segev, *One Palestine, complete*, p. 9; B. Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine: the mandatory government and the Arab-Jewish conflict, 1917–1929* (1978).

into a Jewish National Home, but that such a Home should be founded *in* Palestine'. There was to be a Jewish 'centre' in Palestine, 'internationally guaranteed and formally recognised to rest upon ancient historic connection'. On the other hand the future development of the Jewish community must not lead to the imposition of a Jewish nationality on the inhabitants of Palestine as a whole; and Jewish immigration should not be so great as to go beyond the economic capacity of the country to absorb it. There must be no subordination of the Arab population, or its language or its culture. There ought, in his view, to be a shared bi-national state. Neither side was in fact really interested in such an outcome.[85]

There was some attempt to get off the hook, or at least spread the load. Alternative sites for Zion were investigated, all of them more fantastic – if that is possible – than Palestine itself. Tanganyika, Madagascar, and British Guiana were all looked at by Neville Chamberlain. Another possibility was satellite settlements in Eritrea and Tripolitania (Libya), as Jewish colonies affiliated to the National Home in Palestine. By 1943 Churchill thought this a possibility, and Professor Arnold Toynbee was working out possible plans.[86]

Palestine, however, had – in some evaluations at least – become too important strategically to be given up. As Colonel Wedgwood (a minister in the 1924 Labour government) put it, Palestine was 'the Clapham Junction of the Commonwealth'. It was argued that its evolving strategic significance was two-fold: as the 'strategic buffer of Egypt', the north-east buttress defending Egypt, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal; and as an easily accessible land link with Iraq and the Persian Gulf, necessary for the protection of the British position at Baghdad. In the 1920s communications were developed to make the Haifa–Baghdad route a viable alternative route to India if the Canal was threatened. In fact this second strategic consideration developed at the expense of the Egyptian function. Haifa was developed as a deep-water harbour, with oil pipe-lines laid from Kirkuk. Haifa was also a railway terminus. There was even consideration after 1936 of turning Haifa into a substitute for Malta, as a base, and for building up a local strategic reserve. In this way Palestine came to be regarded as an indispensable geopolitical link between British interests in Egypt and Iraq, and an irreducible strategic requirement of policy from the 1920s.[87]

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[85] W. S. Churchill, memo, 3 June 1922 (Cmd 1700); McTague, *British policy in Palestine*, pp. 259–60.

[86] R. Ovendale, *'Appeasement' and the English-speaking world: Britain, the United States and the Dominions, and the policy of 'appeasement' 1937–1939* (Cardiff, 1975), p. 196; W. R. Louis, *Imperialism at bay, 1941–1945: the United States and the decolonisation of the British empire* (1977), pp. 58–62.

[87] N. Rose, *The gentile Zionists: a study in Anglo-Zionist diplomacy, 1929–1939* (1973), pp. 73–103.

The tricky thing about strategic requirements is that they have an awkward propensity to change, and in any case can be subverted by local instability. And just such a dramatic change of evaluation about Palestine was expressed in the White Paper of 1939, marking a decisive shift to a greater sympathy with the Arab predicament, and in the context of growing disillusionment about the Mandate. There were disturbances in 1928–9, and by the mid-1930s the British were thoroughly sick of Palestine. It was never easy to rule. Too little money was available to the administration. Almost nothing was done to improve Arab backwardness. Officials felt frustrated. Sir Douglas Harris (for many years special commissioner in Palestine) complained 'that one is ploughing sand'.[88] Immigration and border control was a nightmare: not just illegal entrants, whether Jews or Arabs, but smugglers and bandits, nomadic shepherds and salesman, pilgrims and archaeologists all milling about. Guns poured in. From 1936 the Arab revolt gathered momentum, as strikes turned into sabotage. By 1938 the government had lost control of large areas of the country, and order was only restored by drastic counter-terrorist measures. The death penalty was extended to rebels merely carrying arms, and sometimes to simple arsonists. The suppression of this proto-*intifada* can only be described as cruel. Between August and October 1938, thirty death sentences were pronounced (six were commuted). Villages were razed to the ground as collective punishment, 2,000 houses were destroyed, and there were countless floggings. Protests at the latter merely mystified Britons who had been routinely caned at their public schools and even enjoyed it as sexually exciting. High Commissioner Sir Alan Cunningham asked what all the fuss was about: 'one shouldn't take these things so seriously'. However, there were unauthorised abuses not so airily dismissed. Soldiers robbed and vandalised, looted, and destroyed food in revenge attacks. There was widespread official refusal to believe such things could be done by British soldiers. Surely reports were 'fabricated by Nazi agents'? The truth is, though, that the abuses were well authenticated, often by Anglican clergy.[89] The suppression of the Arab revolt thus falls into place as one of the links in that deplorable chain of excessive retribution which runs from the Indian Mutiny, through 1865 Jamaica, Dinshawai 1906, and Amritsar, to the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya. The Israeli successor regime picked up many tips and tactics. (Indeed, the Mandate Emergency Regulations remained unchanged on

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[88] Shepherd, *Ploughing sand*, pp. 76–80, 226 (Harris made his comment in 1945).
[89] Segev, *One Palestine, complete*, pp. 415–26; Shepherd, *Ploughing sand*, pp. 211–21, 246–7; C. Smith, 'Communal conflict and insurrection in Palestine, 1936–1948', in D. Anderson and D. Killingray, eds., *Policing and decolonisation: politics, nationalism and the police, 1917–1965* (Manchester, 1992), esp. pp. 66–71.

the statute books and have been frequently invoked as a basis for Israeli destruction of property, collective punishment, and the confiscation of land in Gaza and the West Bank.)

The Arab revolt of 1936 was an expression of disgust for British policy perceived as pro-Zionist, and a protest against the levels of Jewish immigration, and the threat of partition, which now seemed to be the favoured solution of an inquiry headed by Lord Peel. The reaction of the British government to the revolt was in part a rediscovery of an underlying imperial policy alive to the need for an understanding with the Arab world. Zionism disrupted this, and thus imperilled imperial communications in the Middle East and the flow of oil.[90] For this reason the White Paper of 1939 should not perhaps be seen quite so much as it sometimes is as part of the policy of 'appeasement' (which was being abandoned at this date).

The White Paper of 1939 did four things. (1) It declared that the British government's 'ultimate objective is the establishment of an independent Palestine State, possibly of a federal nature, in such treaty relations with Great Britain as would provide satisfactorily for the commercial and strategic interests of both countries'; it was not the objective 'that Palestine should become a Jewish state or an Arab state; nor do they regard their pledges to either Jews or Arabs as requiring them to promote either of these alternatives'; the state envisaged would be a shared state, which, with the co-operation of both, it was hoped might emerge within ten years. (2) It severely restricted the opportunities for Jewish land purchase. (3) It severely restricted opportunities for Jewish immigration: a fixed quota of 75,000 Jewish immigrants over the next five years was set forth, to be made up of 10,000 a year, plus 25,000 refugees over the period as a whole. (This was a formidable restriction, because even assuming that Arabs would agree to 10,000 a year, it would then have taken a hundred years to bring in a million Jews.) (4) After five years, immigration was made 'subject to the acquiescence of the Arabs'.[91]

The reason for these changes was a realistic, or cynical, belief that the Jews would have no alternative but to be anti-Nazi in a German war, whatever Britain did. As Neville Chamberlain expressed it to Malcolm MacDonald (secretary of state for the colonies) in April 1939: 'we are now compelled to consider the Palestine problem mainly from the point of view of its effect on the international situation'; if they must offend one side, 'let us offend the Jews rather than the Arabs'. Thus the White

[90] Y. Bauer, *From diplomacy to resistance: Jewish Palestine, 1939–1945* (1970), pp. 411–12.
[91] M. J. Cohen, 'Appeasement in the Middle East: the British White Paper on Palestine, 1939', *Historical Journal*, vol. 16 (1973), pp. 571–96, and *Palestine: retreat from the Mandate: the making of British policy, 1936–1945*.

Paper showed a fundamental recognition that there was growing up an increasingly anti-British brand of Arab nationalism, and aimed to prevent its becoming contagious. Peace in Palestine was essential for three reasons: to release troops tied up to defend the Suez Canal in war; to bring Indian reinforcements to Egypt if Italy blocked the Red Sea exit of the Canal in war, reinforcements which would have to come overland via the Persian Gulf and Palestine on a guaranteed route; and to secure, in the long run, the important oil interests. There was a feeling with some that since the Jews had waited two thousand years they could afford to be made to wait a little longer.

As prime minister, Churchill in 1943 privately denounced the White Paper as 'a gross breach of faith'. The Arabs were, he believed, proving bad allies (unlike in the First World War), and Britain owed them nothing.[92] But as the Foreign Office officials pointed out, Churchill had missed the point:

The question is . . . not whether we owe [sympathy to the sufferings of the Jews, or the] Arabs a debt of gratitude, but whether we have important interests centring in the Arab world. The answer must be emphatically that we have; and in particular our oil interests.[93]

Churchill did not get matters very much back into a Zionist direction. By 1944 the Coalition government was moving towards the partition of Palestine as a solution, that is to say, a reversion to the abortive partition policy already proposed by Viscount Peel and the CO in 1937. Probably the trend towards partition resulted from growing American interest and Jewish terrorism, and from the administrative difficulty of implementing the White Paper in wartime conditions; and perhaps it was a means of sustaining old-fashioned and co-operative Weizmann at the head of the Zionist movement. But the White Paper policy was not overthrown. The Foreign Office saw to that.[94]

3. Nationalism

'Nationalism is essentially an anti-feeling . . . especially against the foreign rulers in a subject country.' Jawaharlal Nehru's uncomplicated definition of colonial nationalism is entirely serviceable. It *is* best

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[92] M. J. Cohen, 'The British White Paper on Palestine, May 1939: part 2, The testing of a policy, 1942–1945' *Historical Journal*, vol. 19 (1976), pp. 727–57.

[93] Cohen, *Palestine: retreat from the Mandate*, p. 163.

[94] A. S. Klieman, 'The divisiveness of Palestine: the Foreign Office versus the Colonial Office on the issue of partition, 1937', *Historical Journal*, vol. 22 (1979) pp. 423–42; R. W. Zweig, 'The Palestine Mandate', *Historical Journal*, vol. 24 (1981), pp. 243–51 and *Britain and Palestine during the Second World War* (1986).

conceived of as a political instrument for articulating a change in the power structure, by organising an alternative allegiance.[95] Definitions suited to Europe, about nationalisms as cultural phenomena, dependent on industrialisation, or 'things remembered in common', do not help us much when considering Asian and African nationalisms, though D'Azeglio's assertion (1871) 'we have made Italy – now we have to make Italians' has a definite relevance.[96] To Nehru 'nationalism pure and simple' was 'the feeling of humiliation of India and a fierce desire to be rid of it and to put an end to our continuing degradation'. This humiliation he likened to a subservient mentality: 'For many years the British treated India as a kind of enormous country-house (after the old English fashion) that they owned. They were the gentry owning the house and occupying the desirable parts of it, while the Indians were consigned to the servants' hall and pantry and kitchen.' And the terrible thing was that 'most of *us* accepted the hierarchical order as inevitable' and impassable. Of course there were benefits, but the imposed Pax Britannica was not enough: 'even peace can be purchased at too great a price, and we can have the perfect peace of the grave, and the absolute safety of a cage or prison'. Peace might also be 'the sodden despair of men unable to better themselves'. Nationalism aimed to change that, for a nation which was subject to another 'and hedged and circumscribed and exploited can never achieve inner growth'.

Indian nationalism developed strong religious and cultural elements, most evident in Gandhi's use of Hindu spiritual rhetoric, symbols, and practices. Gandhi acquired an awesome reputation for saintliness, but he was also an astute politician. 'Non-co-operation' was a skilful tactic to employ against the British.

African nationalism drew inspiration from Indian nationalism in general and Gandhian principles in particular, as well as from the Caribbean propagandists for 'negro improvement' like Marcus Garvey. In 1952 Kwame Nkrumah, graduate of American universities, founder of the Convention People's Party in the Gold Coast, said they had 'India,

[95] Jawaharlal Nehru, *An autobiography* (1936, 1938), pp. 66, 75, 379, 417, 436; it became a best-seller in Britain – see B. R. Nanda, 'Nehru and the British', *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 30 (1996), pp. 469–79. For nationalism as essentially 'a political instrument', see J. Breuilly, *Nationalism and the state* (2nd edn, 1993), and as 'colonial political growth', Gallagher, *The decline, revival and fall of the British empire*, pp. 101–12.

[96] D'Azeglio's remark was quoted as having contemporary relevance in *Nationalism: a report by members of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, (ed. E. H. Carr, 1939), p. 88. It reminds us that 'nationalism' can operate at two levels and speak to different concerns and agendas. The external interface debate with the colonial power is what concerns us here, but nationalism is at another level a form of identity politics, an internal debate about the nature and intent of the post-colonial state, for example whether secular or not.

Ceylon and Burma to draw inspiration from'. His 'positive action' campaign was a continuation of Gandhi's non-violent methods, based on strikes and boycotts, with a more disciplined and effectual political activity, manipulating newspaper and educational campaigns. Nkrumah's slogan was 'seek ye first the political kingdom and all things shall be added unto you'. There were echoes of Nehru in his belief that 'it is only when people are politically free that other races can give them the respect that is due to them', for 'no race, no people, no nation can exist freely and be respected at home and abroad without political freedom'. And of course, he proclaimed, 'it is far better to be free to govern, or misgovern, yourself than be governed by anybody else'.[97]

Everywhere, 'resentment of racial contempt was a primary source of nationalist thought and action' (Iliffe). Nationalism drew support by evoking African traditions of defiant heroic leadership, and stories of early resistance to the white man.[98] Nelson Mandela recalled: 'In my youth in the Transkei I listened to the elders of my tribe telling . . . of wars fought by our ancestors in defence of the fatherland . . . their freedom struggle.'[99]

The British were not short of experience and memory either, in dealing with nationalist protests, ever since the Home Rule movement in Ireland. In a speech in 1886, Charles Stewart Parnell (leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1880–90) threw down the challenge with the immortal words: 'No man has a right to fix the boundary to the march of a nation.'

The British technique for dealing with nationalism was first worked out in Ireland, applied to India, carried to Egypt by Lord Cromer (administrator, 1883–1907), and thence on to Africa. Viscount Goschen (chancellor of the Exchequer, 1886–92)[100] had dismissed the

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[97] Kwame Nkrumah, *The autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (1957, 1964), pp. ix–x; G. Shepperson, 'Notes on Negro-American influences on the emergence of African nationalism', *Journal of African History* vol. 1 (1960), p. 303. Other pioneering studies of African nationalism include T. Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (1956), Ndabaningi Sithole, *African nationalism* (Cape Town, 1959), and H. Kohn and W. Sokolsky, *African nationalism in the twentieth century* (Princeton, NJ, 1965). On African nationalism as 'the rejection of European control in the first instance', see B. T. G. Chidzero, 'African nationalism in East and Central Africa', *International Affairs*, vol. 36 (1960), pp. 465–74. Because colonial nationalism is essentially an 'anti' phenomenon, African nationalism functioned within the parameters of the colonial state, and this is why the successor states were defined exclusively by colonial boundaries rather than by ethnic or religious cohesion: see D. Birmingham, *The decolonization of Africa* (1995), p. 86.   [98] J. Iliffe, *Honour in African history* (2005), pp. 306–8.

[99] Nelson Mandela, *No easy walk to freedom: articles and speeches* (1973 edn), p. 26; T. O. Ranger, 'Connexions between "primary resistance" movements and modern mass nationalism in East and Central Africa', pts 1 and 2, *Journal of African History*, vol. 9 (1968), pp. 437–53, 631–41.

[100] L. P. Curtis, jnr, *Coercion and conciliation in Ireland, 1880–1892: a study in Conservative Unionism* (Princeton, NJ, 1963), pp. 408–10.

Irish Home Rule agitation as a fraud, 'a bastard nationalism', thus setting the precedent for tackling early nationalist movements – not least in India – [101] simply by denying their validity. To Cromer, Egypt was not and never could be a nation – it was just a 'fortuitous concourse of international atoms'. To Lord Curzon as viceroy from 1898 to 1905, the Indian National Congress was 'an unclean thing', absurdly unrepresentative of the people, led by a 'microscopic minority'.[102] Or, in Churchill's words, Congress was a 'highly artificial and restricted oligarchy', merely representing those who had acquired 'a veneer of civilisation'. Churchill could dismiss India as 'an abstraction . . . a geographical term . . . no more a united nation than the Equator'.[103] 'Voiceless millions' everywhere were alleged to be content with the Pax Britannica, in which – said Churchill in expansively indignant mood – 'an Indian maid with bangles on can travel from Travancore to Punjab all alone without fear of molestation', whereas in wartime Britain women service personnel 'cannot go two miles with the same feeling of safety'.[104] Non-Europeans in general, and Egyptians in particular, were held to be incompetent and lacking in character: every experiment in transferring administrative departments to their control seemed only to prove it. What was good as a system of government for white dominions was said not to be necessarily suitable for universal export. Analogies from Canada and South Africa were expressly ruled out for India, where administration required an exceptional degree of 'technical' ability. The British might be able to do business with 'moderates', but most nationalists seemed to be 'extremists', and these, whether in Dublin, Cairo, Delhi, or Lagos, it was simply not possible to conciliate, 'save on terms which in India and Ireland spell political suicide, and in Egypt would involve a relapse into all the misgovernment and disorder of the past' (Cromer).[105]

All this psychological blockage was cemented together by a personal dislike, a derogatory rhetoric against nationalist leaders. Again, this went back to Unionist vilification of the Irish leader Parnell. Curzon

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[101] The classic study is A. Seal, *The emergence of Indian nationalism: competition and collaboration in the late nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1968).

[102] S. Gopal, *British policy in India, 1885–1905* (1965); R. L. Tignor, *Modernisation and British colonial rule in Egypt, 1882–1941* (Princeton, NJ, 1966); Roger Owen, *Lord Cromer: Victorian imperialist and Edwardian proconsul* (2005).

[103] W. S. Churchill, *India: speeches and an introduction* (1931), p. 139.

[104] N. Mansergh and E. W. R. Lumby, eds., *India: the transfer of power, 1942–7*, vol. III: *Reassertion of authority, 21 Sept 1942–12 June 1943* (1971), p. 3 (no. 2), enclosure, Sir A. R. Mudaliar to Sir G. Laithwaite, 21 September 1942.

[105] Quoted in R. Hyam, 'The British empire in the Edwardian era', in Brown and Louis, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. IV: *The twentieth century*, p. 62.

denounced Surendranath Banerjea as 'that vitriolic windbag'. Cromer blamed all protest in Egypt on 'weak' Khedive Abbas personally. Sheikh Muhammad Abdille Hassan of Somaliland was referred to by everybody in Britain as 'the Mad Mullah'. Churchill called Indian leaders 'men of straw'. 'Fanatics' like Gandhi should be crushed: 'it is no use trying to satisfy a tiger by feeding him with cat's-meat'. And this is Churchill's best-known denunciation: 'It is alarming and also nauseating to see Mr Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well-known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the viceregal place . . . to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor.'[106] L. S. Amery (secretary of state for India, 1940–5), who regarded himself as considerably more liberal than Churchill in his views on India, described Nehru and Gandhi as 'niggling unpractical crea-tures', commenting on Nehru's 'complete intransigence' and 'unreason-ing bitterness'. He was not sure, he wrote, 'that these people really want responsibility, and if we offered them the moon they would probably reject it because of the wrinkles on its surface'.[107]

Churchill in 1930 believed that independence for India was not going to happen 'in any period which we can even remotely foresee'. In a series of speeches at around this time he stressed two big objections: the danger to Britain and the danger to India. 'The loss of India . . . would be final and fatal to us. It could not fail to be part of a process which would reduce us to the scale of a minor power . . . The British Empire would pass at a stroke out of life into history.' This was entirely in the Curzonian mode. But Churchill also had the concerns of a Lancashire constituency MP. Two million Englishmen, he foretold, could become unemployed as a result of Indian self-government, because Gandhi the bogeyman might stop cotton imports from Lancashire. There could be famine in the north-west. Churchill placed no faith in leaving everything to the chance of ties of tradition, 'which in India is adverse, and sentiment, which in India is hostile'. Churchill's second big theme was the danger to India itself. Drawing upon the late-Victorian themes adumbrated by his father Randolph Churchill and Sir John Seeley, he stressed the chaos which would ensue upon a British withdrawal: 'Hideous disaster to hundreds of helpless millions . . . and immediate resumption of medieval wars.'[108] In sum, Churchill believed two things were at stake: 'British authority and

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[106] Churchill, *India: speeches and an introduction*, pp. 46, 94.
[107] N. Mansergh and E. W. R. Lumby, eds., *The transfer of power*, vol. I: *The Cripps Mission, Jan.–April 1942* (1970), L. S. Amery to Viceroy Lord Linlithgow, p. 108 (2 February 1942), 632 (3 April), 867 (29 April), and 840 (no. 681: 'Notes on the Indian situation', April, 1942); vol. II: *'Quit India', 30 Apr.–21 Sept. 1942* (1971), p. 43 (29 May 1942, to Linlithgow).   [108] *India: speeches*, pp. 35, 47, 82, 139.

Indian tranquillity.' The policy leading to self-government 'will bring a fatal disaster upon the British Empire and entail endless misery to hundreds of millions of harmless Indian[s]'.[109]

In all this, there is an awful substratum of truth. It is probably true to say that Britain as a great power suffered a mortal blow on 15 August 1947 when India became independent, and there was great misery for millions of Indians in the immediate post-partition upheaval.

In the light of this Churchillian analysis – strong or substantially correct in diagnosis, but hopelessly impracticable in prescription (the maintenance of an Edwardian status quo) – it is easy to see why the Government of India Act of 1935, not in itself a great liberal measure, has been regarded as 'a great liberal victory' over the Churchill-led diehard opposition to constitutional advance in India.[110] The diehard MPs numbered about eighty, and Churchill got about one-third of the votes at the Conservative Party Conference in 1933, attracting support from Lancashire cotton interests, and retired Indian army officers and administrators in the home counties, together with those impatient with Prime Minister Baldwin's general policy.[111]

The Government of India Act conceded provincial autonomy (that is, responsible self-government for the provinces), in the hope of diverting Congress politicians away from the central government, where British rulers still wished to remain in exclusive control of foreign and defence policy and most of the revenue. The Act also promised a federation at the all-India level, including princely states. This was an abortive chimera, not least because the princes were slow to accede and in effect exercised a veto. But provincial autonomy was established and proved to be a useful step forward, though perhaps more for the Muslim League than Congress. Churchill memorably denounced the Act as 'a monstrous monument of sham [*sic*] built by the pygmies'. ('Sham' because he was – rightly – sceptical of the federation's ever being set up;[112] the 'pygmies'

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[109] *Ibid.*, p. 11. Historians should treat Churchill's volume of speeches seriously. He said of it, 'I have taken much more trouble with them than with any book I have ever written': M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. V: *1922–1939* (1976), p. 400. For general accounts of Churchill on India, see R. Rhodes James, *Churchill: a study in failure, 1900–1939* (1970), and S. Gopal, 'Churchill and India', in R. Blake and W. R. Louis, eds., *Churchill* (1993), pp. 457–71.

[110] D. A. Low, 'Sapru and the First Round Table Conference', in Low, ed., *Soundings in modern South Asian history* (1968), pp. 294–329.

[111] G. Peele, 'The revolt over India', in G. Peele and C. Cook, eds., *The politics of reappraisal, 1918–1939* (1975), pp. 114–44.

[112] 'Sham' is too often incorrectly rendered as 'shame' by biographers who should know better, e.g. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. V, p. 595, and Rhodes James, *Churchill: a study in failure*, p. 212. The inaccuracy destroys the whole point of Churchill's criticism, which was not that the federal proposals were unworthy but that they were unworkable.

were its architects, Hoare, Simon, and Halifax.) The act was the culmination of a huge debate. In the Commons there were nearly 1,200 speeches, while a select committee had 159 meetings. This debate on the future of the Raj was never again equalled in the history of the demission of imperial power.

The essence of the Act – the reason why it was not a great liberal measure – is that its authors all saw it was possible 'to give a semblance of responsible government and yet retain in our hands the realities and verities of British control'. It was a grand device for 'holding the commanding heights of the Raj while gaining imperial kudos for giving away inessentials', a mechanism 'for ensuring the survival of the Raj by creating a buffer of collaborators'.[113] The underlying strategy went back to the Edwardian Morley–Minto package of 'order plus reforms', of cautious concessions. 'The imprint of ambiguity' was all over the Act. The policy, as one historian describes it, was ambidextrous, dualist, disingenuous, delusory: there was 'a pervasive dualism immersed in ambiguity', a vulnerable ambiguity which Gandhi understood only too well how to exploit. It was not really a workable solution at all.[114] As the Labour leader Clement Attlee said, it offered insufficient scope to 'the living forces of India', the politically minded; and whatever doubts there might be about it – and he was under no illusions – 'the nationalism of India is a force you cannot ignore'.[115]

Within five years British policy in India was in disarray, the whole situation was deadlocked, and imperial prestige in India at its nadir. Thus British Indian policy in the 1930s is unequivocal evidence of a dysfunctional empire. The transfer of power in 1947 was, on any objective criterion, at least ten years too late.[116]

The exigencies of war, dependence on or deference to the US, and pressure from the Labour leadership, led to the mission of Sir Stafford Cripps in 1942. The Cripps offer was in effect a promise of independence (with the option to leave the Commonwealth) after the war, in return for wartime co-operation and a political freeze meanwhile. Dissenting provinces might achieve freedom separately, and the princes could stand aside. There would be a treaty and a constituent assembly. It was a sharp departure in policy, in that it was entirely unambiguous and unqualified. Nevertheless, the Cripps mission failed, mainly and quite

[113] Carl Bridge, *Holding India to the empire: the British Conservative Party and the 1935 Constitution* (1986), esp. pp. 156–64.
[114] D. A. Low, *Britain and Indian nationalism: the imprint of ambiguity, 1929–1942* (1997), esp, pp. 1–40; R. J. Moore, *Endgames of empire: studies of Britain's Indian problem* (New Delhi, 1988), pp. 37–85.   [115] *PD, Commons* vol. 276, cc. 730–1, 27 March 1933.
[116] Mansergh, *Independence years*, p. 234 ('The partition of India in retrospect', 1965–6).

simply because it was unacceptable to Indian leaders, Muslim League as well as Congress. It had too little to offer in the short-term. Gandhi (it was said) famously dismissed it as 'a post-dated cheque on a crashing bank'. Cripps expostulated that viceroy Linlithgow was as wooden as he was impossible, no help at all. Linlithgow must bear much of the responsibility for failure.[117] This makes it unnecessary to lay the blame on Churchill's lack of enthusiasm – once he had impressed the Americans by dispatching the mission – however sardonic his observations.[118] Churchill was in fact privately rude about the 'bluff and sob-stuff' of Gandhi's hunger-strike 'antics' in February 1943: 'the old rascal' had not 'the slightest intention of dying'. (Churchill had heard that Gandhi had 'cheated' by taking glucose in his water, and was slipped the occasional orange juice when he looked groggy – nine doctors remained in attendance.)[119]

With more than a little of the English gentleman about him,[120] Gandhi looked and sounded remarkably like Attlee, though the latter was not so emaciated. Gandhi's influence became transcendent. It was his preaching of non-violence 'more than any other single factor that stood between India and bloodshed on a frightful scale'. The other dominant figures were Nehru, Jinnah, and Vallabhbhai Patel. Nehru was always the devoted disciple of Gandhi, but with all the easy confidence, charm, and eloquence of a born leader. Educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge, he was also a 'prison graduate', and long years of imprisonment left him with some bitterness. Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a brilliantly able man who resented the British presence partly because he felt he was cleverer than most British ministers and governors. As the Anglicised and secular leader of a religious party, the Muslim League, he had a difficult position to sustain, which perhaps explains why he kept his ideas about the future close to his chest. He was utterly dismissive of British notions of unity in India, believing Hindus and Muslims could not evolve

[117] P. F. Clarke, *The Cripps version: the life of Sir Stafford Cripps, 1889–1952* (2002), pp. 250–3, 276, 318–30.

[118] Mansergh, *Independence years*, pp. 42–50, 'The Cripps Mission to India, March–April 1942'; R. J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India, 1939–1945* (1979).

[119] Mansergh and Lumby, eds., *The transfer of power (TOPI)*, vol. III: *21 September 1942–12 June 1943* (1971), pp. 659, 738, 744, Churchill to viceroy, 13 February 1943, and to Smuts, 26 February 1943. It was also reported that Gandhi was massaged for 1¼ hours a day with mustard-oil and lemon-juice, and was given frequent enemas: *ibid.*, vol. VI: *1 August 1945–22 March 1946* (1976), p. 679.

[120] J. M. Brown, 'Gandhi – a Victorian gentleman: an essay in imperial encounter', *JICH*, vol. 27 (1999), pp. 68–85, repr. in R. D. King and R. W. Kilson, eds, *The statecraft of British imperialism: essays in honour of Wm Roger Louis*. For an incisive contemporary vignette of Gandhi, see *TOPI*, vol. VI, pp. 616–17 (no. 272), diary of R. G. Casey (6 December 1945).

a common nationality: 'they have two different religions, philosophies, social customs, literature. They neither inter-marry, nor even inter-dine.' They also, he might have added, treat penises and corpses differently. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was a somewhat brooding presence, but the most hard-nosed of senior Congress Party leaders, determined, with realism and a ruthless sense of purpose, not to unleash social revolution.[121]

The backdrop to the evolution of British policy for India was that India's importance was declining. Before 1914 the imperial value of India was manifest: 'she provided opportunities for export, professional employment, exported indentured labour through the empire, was crucial for imperial security, important for British trade and investment, [and made] sterling remittances to London' (which paid for ICS training and pensions).[122] Within twenty years, however, the position was very different. Indianisation of military, police, and civilian services reduced British career prospects. Indentured labour had been voluntarily given up in 1917. India no longer provided an 'oriental barrack', a standing army on the cheap, as the government of India stood its ground on the need for Britain to pay the costs of the overseas deployment of the Indian army, after concern that nearly one million Indians had fought in the First World War in major theatres abroad, and almost 65,000 were killed. British exports to India were dramatically declining. India was no longer the largest single market for British goods or its biggest single buyer. Import-substitution was proceeding apace. Investment was flagging. Tariff manipulation in the interest of Lancashire was interdicted. Sterling balances were problematic. In short, India's economic value was severely disrupted.[123]

None of this made a transfer of power inevitable, but it did make it easier to contemplate.

The nationalism that confronted Britain in India in the 1930s had aspirations to be broadly based. A specifically Muslim nationalism was an emerging force, however, registering mounting successes in gaining support.

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[121] Mansergh, *Independence years*, pp. 51–70, 'The last days of British rule in India: some personal impressions', 1948.

[122] The quotation is from J. M. Brown, 'India', in Brown and Louis, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. IV: *The twentieth century*, pp. 421–46, at p. 439.

[123] For analysis of 'decline', see B. R. Tomlinson, 'India and the British empire, 1880–1935', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 12 (1975), and pt 2, '1935–1947', *ibid.*, vol. 13 (1976), pp. 331–52, and *The political economy of the Raj, 1914–1947: the economics of decolonisation in India* (1979), esp. pp. 1–56, 104–41, and *The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929–1942: the penultimate phase* (1976), ch. 1, 'British policy and the Indian problem 1919–1935'. See also C. Dewey, 'The end of the imperialism of free trade: the eclipse of the Lancashire lobby', in C. Dewey and A. G. Hopkins, eds., *The imperial impact: studies in the economic history of Africa and India* (1978).

The Muslim League in India, founded at the end of 1906, more than twenty years after Congress, had a low profile and limited constituency, until Muslim politics were integrated and galvanised under Jinnah, with a new slogan, 'Pakistan'. The fissures which opened up in India in 1937 with the failure of Congress to form coalitions with the League politicians had their potential parallels elsewhere. The tectonic plates between Muslim and Christian (or other religious) worlds were uneasily aligned in Nigeria and Sudan, Iraq and Palestine, and in Malaya. British rulers had to keep the peace. Christian missions made little progress where they were in competition with Islam, in Africa particularly – at a disadvantage because Islam was not 'the colonial religion', did not insist on monogamy, and generally seemed closer to African styles and expectations. The British rulers also worried about the possibility of Pan-Islamic *jihad*. Not all Muslim ideology was driven, however, by 'fundamentalists' (Islamists), like the Muslim Brotherhood founded in Egypt in 1928. Islamic 'modernists', ill at ease with the traditional rigidities of the rural *ulama* ('religious institution') were reformists who preferred to seek an accommodation with Western ideas and promote a secular nationalism. The ideological divergences, tensions, and competition between modernisers and traditionalists (themselves of various kinds) could be profound and intense, and characterised the whole Muslim world in this period.[124]

In the Middle East these tensions were especially evident. Arab nationalism was stirring even before the First World War, marking a decidedly hostile reaction to increasing Western influence, questioning early more favourable images of the West. By 1919, the whole Arabic-speaking world was under European domination except parts of the Arabian peninsula. In response to this situation, the secular nationalism of reformist Islam was what most Arab-Muslims wanted, even if religion was an activating force in that nationalism. Pan-Arab sentiment certainly existed, but regional loyalties and rivalries remained strong. The disparity between British and nationalist forces was gradually shifting in the region towards a more even balance from the 1920s, and especially from the 1940s, when there was ever-increasing hostility. The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 became a Muslim rallying-point throughout the region and beyond.[125] A passionate reassertion of Islamic beliefs gained momentum,

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[124] F. Robinson, 'The British empire and the Muslim world', in Brown and Louis, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. IV: *The twentieth century*, pp. 398–419; M. G. S. Hodgson, *The venture of Islam: conscience and history in a world civilisation*, vol. III: (Chicago, 1974); C. C. Stewart, 'Islam', in A. D. Roberts, ed. *Cambridge history of Africa*, vol. VII, pp. 191–222.

[125] J. Abu-Lughod, *Arab discovery of Europe: a study in cultural encounters* (Princeton, 1963), pp. 157–63; A. Hourani, *A history of the Arab peoples* (1991); Chatham House Study Group Report, *British interests in the Mediterranean and Middle East* (1958).

much more in touch with the masses than earlier nationalist movements had been, and all the more potent for that. In Egypt, the 'Free Officers' group from 1939 were from the lower-bourgeois class, dedicated within the army to an ultra-nationalist and anti-British programme quite different from the now torpid Wafd nationalism of landed plutocrats and high-ranking bureaucrats. In the Sudan 'Abd al-Rahman emerged in the mid-1920s as a nationalist leader, but was challenged, and soon there were two opposing factions, a sectarian schism (neo-Mahdists and anti-Mahdists) which weakened the nationalist movement.[126]

4. Idealism: the British Commonwealth

The white Dominions also had their nationalist aspirations, which their costly contributions to the First World War had intensified. Between the wars, the British Commonwealth was essentially an arrangement by which the more independent-minded pushed for a clarification of their status and were prevented from breaking away completely from Britain.[127] South Africa and Canada were the leaders in this process, while the discontented Irish Free State was less prominent before 1936 when republicanism became more definite.[128] Britain was especially concerned to prevent the secession of South Africa, a course which seemed to be vaguely threatened by its prime minister, General J. B. M. Hertzog (1924–39). The centre-piece of Commonwealth evolution was a formula known as the Balfour Definition,[129] arrived at by the Commonwealth prime ministers meeting in an inter-imperial relations committee at the Imperial Conference of 1926, and chaired by Lord Balfour, by then

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[126] P. J. Vatikiotis, *Nasser and his generation* (1978); M. W. Daly and G. N. Sanderson, 'Egypt and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan', in *Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. VII, pp. 742–879; G. N. Sanderson, 'Sudanese nationalism and the independence of Sudan', in M. Brett, ed., *Northern Africa, Islam and modernisation* (1973), pp. 97–109.

[127] N. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth experience* (2nd edn, 1982), vol. II: *From British to Multi-racial Commonwealth*, 'Status seeking and tariff reform, 1921–1936', pp. 3–42.

[128] In a field always at risk from constitutional stulification, the liveliest essay is by Ged Martin, 'The Irish Free State and the evolution of the Commonwealth, 1921–1949', in R. Hyam and G. W. Martin, *Reappraisals in British imperial history* (1975), pp. 201–23, which takes apart the contention of Harkness that the Irish Free State radically made the running for a decade in transforming the empire into a Commonwealth: D. W. Harkness, *The restless Dominion: the Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921–1931* (1969), and related essays. On the 1926 formula, Martin writes: 'At best, it can only be a question of Irish spin-bowling's mopping up after the South African and Canadian pace-attack had broken through the batting'; and, the Irish were not genuine contributors, 'hardly even genuine members'.

[129] D. Judd, *Empire: the British imperial experience from 1765 to the present* (1996), ch. 22, 'The Balfour Definition of Dominion status, 1926'. It is of course important not to confuse the Balfour Definition, or Report, with the 'Balfour Declaration', which was on Zionism (1917), as some historians have done, though I will not embarrass them by naming them.

Britain's elder statesman as lord president of the Council. The famous formula defined dominion status – that is, Commonwealth membership – as follows:

> They are autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate to one another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Much of the initiative for this statement had come from L. S. Amery as dominions secretary, and it reflected theories going back to Edwardian liberalism. The aim was to recognise reality and avoid needless confrontation. It represented a genuine compromise. Hertzog, determined to see off any lingering suggestion that Britain was a 'super-state superior', objected to the term 'British Empire' – but New Zealand would not subscribe to a formula which omitted it. Mackenzie King of Canada objected to anything which seemed like an American-style 'declaration of independence', so Hertzog lost the word 'independent'. Balfour himself objected to 'freely associated', because it might imply they could be freely dissociated, which was a bit like stating in a marriage ceremony the possibility of divorce.[130] The reference to autonomy pleased the South Africans and the Irish; the reference to the Crown placated the Australians and New Zealanders; and there was a sizeable qualification to the substance – 'But the principles of equality and similarity, appropriate to status, do not universally extend to function' – which reassured some of the British sceptics.

   Subtle, but essentially bland, for five years the Balfour Definition had no legal force. However, the next imperial conference in 1930 agreed that legislation should give effect to the formula, and the Statute of Westminster was enacted in 1931. Henceforth the British parliament could not legislate on behalf of a dominion (except with its consent), and no law passed in the dominions could be invalidated on the grounds of repugnance to English law (thus repealing an act of 1865). Governors-general would no longer act in any way as the agent of the UK government. Dominions were now as independent as they chose to be. (New Zealand did not enact the statute until 1947.)[131] Each would remain the sole judge of the nature and extent of its co-operation with Britain, though in practice some dependence in diplomacy and defence remained until the Second World War.

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[130] P. Wigley and N. Hillmer, 'Defining the first British Commonwealth: the Hankey memoranda on the 1926 Imperial Conference', in H. Hillmer and P. Wigley, eds., *The first British Commonwealth: essays in honour of Nicholas Mansergh* (1980), pp. 105–16, repr. from *JICH*, vol. 8 (1979).

[131] A. Ross, 'New Zealand and the Statute of Westminster', in *ibid.*, pp. 136–58.

The Balfour Definition opened the way for a torrent of idealism about the Commonwealth, not least among academics, such as Alfred Zimmern, Duncan Hall, and Arnold Toynbee,[132] and even the more austere specialists such as Keith Hancock and the Cambridge historians E. A. Benians and Eric Walker. To the Australian Hancock – who began publishing his magisterial *Survey of British Commonwealth affairs* in 1937 – the empire had now commendably reconciled *imperium* and *libertas*. To Benians, the British, after 'making a shipwreck' of the 'first empire' by the loss of the American colonies, and after the tragedy of the 'ill-starred events' of the Boer War, had achieved the emergence of the Commonwealth – 'a union of states and nations in a free and peaceful co-operation' – in a way which was little short of miraculous, especially considering its heterogeneous membership and racial and geographical diversity. It was, as Benians described it, 'a moral conception, a great partnership', whose justification was 'to teach the way of freedom, to teach nations to live together in society'.[133] This idea – that the Commonwealth could be a model for larger international organisations, such as the League of Nations – was particularly important when it came to trying to estimate its significance and potential.

Those who thought along these lines were enthusiastic idealists. There were also visionary idealists. The visionaries wanted to use the Commonwealth in a quite different way. Some of them would have preferred a much more organic structure.[134] Most influential of them was L. S. Amery, Conservative under-secretary at the CO (1919–21), then first lord of the Admiralty, and secretary of state for the colonies between 1924 and 1929, and finally secretary of state for India and Burma during the Second World War.[135] Amery was a politician of unusually clear economic and geopolitical insight, who disagreed with Churchill more often than not. (They first met at Harrow School, when Churchill, his junior, pushed him fully clothed into the swimming pool.) Amery was short, and he talked too often and too much: it was said of

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[132] J. D. B. Miller, 'The Commonwealth and world order: the Zimmern vision and after', in *ibid.* pp. 159–74; W. D. McIntyre, 'Clio and Britannia's dream: historians and the British Commonwealth of Nations in the first half of the twentieth century', *Round Table*, vol. 93, no. 376 (2004), pp. 517–40.

[133] R. Hyam, 'The study of imperial and Commonwealth history at Cambridge, 1881–1981: founding fathers and pioneer research students', *JICH*, vol. 29 (2001), pp. 76–9. For Hancock, see W. R. Louis, 'Sir Keith Hancock and the British empire: Pax Britannica and the Pax Americana', *English Historical Review*, vol. 120 (2005), pp. 937–62.

[134] I. M. Drummond, *British economic policy and the empire, 1919–1939* (1972), esp. pp. 36–87, 'The imperial vision', and *Imperial economic policy, 1917–1939: studies in expansion and protection* (1974).

[135] W. R. Louis, '*In the name of God, go!': Leo Amery and the British empire in the age of Churchill* (1993); 'Amery, Leopold', in *ODNB*, vol. I, pp. 932–6 (by Deborah Lavin).

him that he might have been prime minister if he had been half-a-head taller and his speeches half-an-hour shorter. He was a dynamo of energy. He created the Dominions Office in 1925 by splitting it off from the CO. He prepared the first Colonial Development Act, 1929. He promoted Zionism, and the Singapore base. Geopolitical visions intoxicated him: he would use air-power, he would consolidate a 'Southern British world', a great territorial arc around the Indian Ocean, and he would 'take the lead in shaping the course of world economics', as Britain had done in the nineteenth century. He found money for modest improvements in colonial transport and research. The CO, he liked to say, was 'very essentially, a ministry of health for the tropics'.[136] In Treasury circles he was feared as 'the Mad Mullah of colonial finance', and in the War Office as 'the most dangerous amateur strategist we have got'.[137] Amery wanted to use the empire to develop not only primary production, but also patriotic settler communities in eastern and southern Africa. Introducing the Empire Settlement Bill in 1922, with provision for subsidised emigration, he declared that they had 'three-quarters of our people penned, confined and congested in this little corner of the Empire, and millions of square miles of the richest lands in the world – boundless plains, forests without end, water and coal-power without computation', which could be used to build up 'new centres of British power'.[138]

Other visionary idealists included Lord Beaverbrook, the Canadian who bought the *Daily Express* in 1921 and made it the most-read newspaper in the world; Philip Cunliffe-Lister (president of the Board of Trade for much of the 1920s, and secretary of state for the colonies, 1931–5, and later, as Lord Swinton, for Commonwealth relations, 1952–5); and J. H. Thomas, secretary of state for dominion affairs (1930–5). A leading Labour politician, former errand-boy and trade unionist, and inveterate dropper of aspirates (newspapers once reported him as having spoken of the 'islands of Kenya'), Thomas approached empire development with romantic idealism, supposing it could cure unemployment at home. Generally, the idealists looked to economic regeneration in the empire, sending out capital and labour, in order to stimulate the British share of the empire market. There was an enormous gap between vision and achievement. A great deal of extravagant nonsense was talked, not least about land settlement schemes, project-mongering full of homely gardening metaphors. South Africa

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[136] L. S. Amery, *My political life*, vol. II; *War and peace, 1914–1929* (1953), p. 338.
[137] Louis, '*In the name of God, go!*', pp. 26 and 69 n 99.
[138] *PD, Commons* vol. 153, cc 575–9, 26 April 1922.

consistently refused to participate in any of this. Canada was lukewarm. Even New Zealand was cautious.

The visionary idealists looked to imperial mutual tariff preferences, a form of protection within the empire as a single economic unit. As a result of the Great Depression, the Conservative Party, supported by Beaverbrook, launched a campaign for imperial preference, a revamped version of Joseph Chamberlain's 'tariff reform' programme from the early years of the century, now confusingly renamed as 'Empire Free Trade'. The British position within the Commonwealth was still strong enough to bring members together to discuss how to stabilise the economic situation, but proved not strong enough to secure a single unified agreement. There was much squabbling over meat and margarine quotas. The result was the Ottawa Agreements of 1932, operating a protectionist system through a series of voluntary bi-lateral trading treaties between Britain and the various countries of the empire. They did succeed in substantially increasing trade within the empire during the remainder of the 1930s.[139]

Over a third of a million emigrants received assisted passages under the empire settlement scheme, until it more or less collapsed after 1931. Politically, by 1937 the Irish had side-stepped dominion status through the External Relations Act.[140] But by-and-large the main achievement of the Commonwealth idealists between the wars was to have held it together in a disrupted world. This made it possible for the dominions to co-operate spectacularly well (with the exception of the Irish) in the Second World War, despite the absence of binding commitments. Postwar, the Commonwealth proved to be adaptable enough to produce another phase of idealistic hope placed in it.

5. Geopolitics

Geopolitics is a politico-strategic concept which relates a state's global position and its inter-state contacts to the configurations of world space, geography, resources, capacities, and military requirements. A more reductionist definition might simply be 'taking a global-political view'. It assumes the essential competitiveness of the international system, of states locked into an almost Darwinian struggle. Strategy is what is deduced from these considerations. Among British twentieth-century politicians, the most geopolitically aware were Curzon, L. S. Amery,

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[139] R. Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth alliance, 1918–1939* (1981).

[140] See the important essay by Deirdre McMahon, 'A larger and noisier Southern Ireland: Ireland and the evolution of Dominion Status in India, Burma and the Commonwealth, 1942–1949', in M. Kennedy and J. M. Skelly, eds., *Irish foreign policy, 1917–1966: from independence to internationalism* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 155–91.

Churchill, and the post-1945 Labour ministers, Bevin and Gordon Walker.[141]

The First World War notably increased geopolitical perceptions and alarms, and in 1919 Halford Mackinder ('the father of geopolitics') published his *Democratic ideals and reality: a study of the politics of reconstruction*, pointing out some of the dangers in the relations between land and sea-power, and air-power. Two of the main aims of the British government in peace-making were to strengthen security in the Middle East (in Egypt and through Palestine) and around the Indian Ocean rim. The geopolitical problems of an over-extended empire can explain all the overseas policies of the 1920s and 1930s, from appeasement to the Singapore naval base.[142]

(1) Appeasement

In a much-quoted metaphor, an Edwardian official had described the British empire as like 'some huge giant sprawling over the globe, with gouty fingers and toes stretching out in every direction, which cannot be approached without eliciting a scream'. By the 1920s the gouty giant had become (in the eyes of one historian) 'a brontosaurus with huge, vulnerable limbs which the central nervous system had little capacity to protect, direct or control'.[143] The British empire reached its greatest extent yet after the First World War, and thereafter suffered problems of acute strategic over-extension. Financial stringency meant it was increasingly impossible to balance resources and requirements. Throughout the whole period from 1918 to 1968 the central problem of British government was the fundamental conundrum of matching ends and means, of paying for a global imperial and defence system.[144] The Depression left Britain weak and demoralised, and the ruling elite half-paralysed.

One of the compounding problems of the interwar years was the soft-centredness of attitudes towards the realities of power politics, the hope that international difficulties would simply go away or resolve themselves

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[141] Geoffrey Parker, *Western geopolitical thought in the twentieth century* (1985), p. 175; B. W. Blouet, *Geopolitics and globalisation in the twentieth century* (2001).

[142] R. Hyam, 'The primacy of geopolitics: the dynamics of British imperial policy, 1763–1963', *JICH*, vol. 27 (1999), pp. 42–5.

[143] Howard, *The continental commitment*, pp. 11 and 75. Sir T. Sanderson quoted from G. P. Gooch and H. Temperley, eds., *British documents on the origin of the War, 1898–1914*, vol. III, p. 430 (23 February 1907).

[144] P. M. Kennedy, 'Strategy versus finance in twentieth-century Great Britain', *International History Review*, vol. 3 (1981), pp. 44–61, repr. in *Strategy and diplomacy, 1870–1945: eight studies*, ch. 3. See also P. M. Kennedy, *The realities behind diplomacy: background influences on British external policy, 1865–1980* (1981), pp. 285–312.

through disarmament. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Labour Party saw itself as the residuary legatee of the dissenting foreign-policy tradition and Gladstonian Liberal moralising internationalism, which the horrible experience of the war had only reinforced. The Labour leader George Lansbury was an extreme pacifist, 'whose notion of a diplomatic initiative was to propose going to pray for peace with Hitler'. The Party remained opposed to disarmament until 1937. Throughout the 1930s governments seemed to submit too passively to difficulties. Cabinets seemed awash with baronets, ministers of the Crown as short-sighted as they were second-rate. It was Edmund Burke who said 'a great empire and little minds go ill together' (1775).[145]

There was an air of unreality, only dispelled by the outbreak of another war: 'we lived in a world of imagination', wrote a leading official, 'trying to pierce the veil of the future', obsessed with paper solutions and juggling with formulas.[146] There were four foreign secretaries in the 1930s, all of them irresolute. Sir John Simon was a frigid, congenital fence-sitter, 'a serpentine lawyer . . . a snake in snake's clothing'. After four years, in June 1935 he was succeeded by Sir Samuel Hoare (previously secretary of state for India), who lasted just six months. Hoare would have been more convincing as an Anglican clergyman of the primmer Anglo-Catholic kind. (One of his senior advisers did not trust his ambitiousness, and decided he was 'the stuff from which a British quisling could be fashioned'.)[147] Then there was Anthony Eden (1935–8), to some a charming diplomat, but also vain and light-weight, a prima donna prone to vacillation and addicted to clichés. (Eden was to prove more successful as a breeder of cows than as a prime minister.) Lastly there was Viscount Halifax (1938–40), brilliantly nicknamed 'Holy-Fox', which tells you all you need to know about him: remote and religious, essentially mysterious, dismissed by some historians as an old-fashioned aristocrat with a speech impediment and a passion for fox-hunting, and clearly 'not encumbered by any particular intellectual subtlety'. He took his chaplain with him on his honeymoon, and leapt at the chance to visit Hermann Göring's hunting-lodge. As Lord Irwin he had been viceroy of India from 1926 to 1931. For Halifax the empire was 'a rallying point of sanity for a mad civilisation'.[148]

Stanley Baldwin was prime minister from 1923 until January 1924, and again from November 1924 until 1930, and from 1935 to 1937, and in

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[145] My views on the 1930s were formed early, strongly influenced by Harry Hinsley, who gave pioneering lectures in the Cambridge History Faculty in the late 1950s on 'British foreign policy, 1870–1939'.   [146] Vansittart, *The mist procession*, p. 487.

[147] R. J. Q. Adams, 'Hoare, Samuel', *ODNB*, vol. XXVII, p. 368.

[148] D. J. Dutton, 'Wood, Edward F., earl of Halifax', *ODNB*, vol. LX, pp. 81–9.

between he was second-in-command as lord president of the Council in the National government, from 1931 to 1935. Except for India, he had little interest in the empire. He was preoccupied with domestic issues, and although not as lazy as his reputation usually suggests, he was a nervous fidget prone to neurasthenic collapse. The other two prime ministers of the period both seemed out of their depth in external policy. Ramsay MacDonald fascinated people, with his grave Scottish pseudo-aristocratic manner – which did nothing to dispel the (unfounded) rumours that he was the illegitimate son not of a ploughman but of a marquis; a decent man, but more likely to wring his hands than to give a lead. He was a radical rather than a socialist, committed to a non-sectarian progressivism, and he seemed to slide all too effortlessly from running a Labour government into heading a National coalition from 1931. Neville Chamberlain took over from Baldwin in May 1937, and, like him, wanted to concentrate on domestic issues. Cold and corvine, an arrogant autocrat, a charmless, 'earnest, opinionated provincial', he 'hugged his illusions tightly' and 'was bound to err in diplomacy'. In September 1938 after his first meeting with Hitler he told a friend, 'I got the impression that here was a man who could be relied upon when he had given his word.' He complained like a petulant schoolboy that 'Mussolini has behaved to me like a sneak and a cad.' The Americans were cads, too, he thought. In short, in Lloyd George's immortal words, this son of Joseph Chamberlain was 'a retail mind in a wholesale business'.[149]

For nearly ten years from 1929 the country scarcely had any foreign policy worth the name, as more and more a vague reliance was placed on the League of Nations. Almost everybody thought the League would preserve peace, and disarmament would prevent war. This malaise led to a lack of clear-sighted policy, while an obsessive governmental anxiety about imperial weakness went hand-in-hand with a penchant for isolationist inaction and undue reliance on a clamorous but ill-informed public opinion consumed by an emotional surge of moralising idealism. In an unprecedented episode in 1935, the foreign secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, was dismissed by a supine Cabinet in order to placate a protesting public opinion, when it was realised that the government was trying to secure peace with Italy by the dismemberment of Abyssinia (Ethiopia),

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[149] Piers Brendon, *The dark valley: a panorama of the 1930s* (2000) ch. 24, 'Churchill, Chamberlain and appeasement', pp. 604–32, wonderfully full of sharp characterisations including the quotation about Lansbury on the previous page. For the quotation from Lloyd George, see Thomas Jones, *Whitehall diary*, ed. K. Middlemas, vol. II, *1926–1930* (1969), p. 422. There is a careful reassessment of Chamberlain by A. J. Crozier in *ODNB*, vol. X, pp. 934–55, but the fact remains that for all his commitment to social reform, 'he knew nothing of the real world' (Attlee) and would not listen to advice (*A prime minister remembers*, ed. F. Williams (1960), p. 19).

which Mussolini had invaded. Then, as Hitler became more menacing, Neville Chamberlain and Anthony Eden placed their faith in God and the good sense of their enemies. Halifax thought Hitler could be treated like a European Gandhi, never grasping his capacity for evil until it was too late. The result of this dysfunctional foreign and defence policy was that in September 1939 Britain entered war against Germany in almost uniquely unfavourable circumstances, worse prepared than at any time in the last two hundred years.[150] So what had happened about rearmament?

Ramsay MacDonald exemplified much of the ambivalence of the period. He was a man who would place his faith in any panacea, but discovered the dilemmas of disarmament. He was so confused by the emotional desire to disarm and the difficulty of implementing it as a policy that he paralysed himself into inaction. In 1930 he declared that 'we must never underestimate the effectiveness of moral bulwarks with no bayonet nor bludgeon behind them', but increasingly he realised that it was not as simple as that. Although he began to question the old assumptions, he could not bring himself to drop them, or even to decide what the alternative to a League-and-disarmament policy should be, or how he could communicate his realisation of the dangers of disarmament to his colleagues. By 1935 he was in failing health, a despairing and ineffectual figure earning the Churchillian epithet of 'a boneless wonder'.[151]

Again, Neville Chamberlain as prime minister dithered over rearmament – because of its cost.[152] The dilemma was real and we need not doubt it. The agonising that went on at Cabinet level echoes through the decades. At the end of 1937 Chamberlain's splendidly titled but ineffectual minister for the co-ordination of defence, Sir Thomas Inskip, produced a Cabinet memorandum supporting the prime minister and Treasury in their argument that economic stability was Britain's 'fourth arm of defence', alongside the three fighting services, and without it purely military effort would be of no avail. Fundamental truths and anxieties were propounded:

financial resources and economic strength more generally are essential components in the defence structure . . . Nothing operates more strongly to deter a potential aggressor . . . than our stability . . . But were other countries to detect in us signs of strain, this deterrent would at once be lost. The question is how are we to reconcile the two desiderata, first to be safe, secondly to be solvent.

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[150] For the 1935 Ethiopian crisis see R. A. C. Parker, 'Great Britain, France and the Ethiopian crisis, 1935–1936', *English Historical Review*, vol. 89 (1974), pp. 293–332, supplemented by J. A. Cross, *Sir Samuel Hoare: a political biography* (1977), pp. 180–265. For Halifax on Gandhi, see Roy Jenkins, *Nine men of power* (1974), p. 149.

[151] D. Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (1977), pp. 748–95, and in *ODNB*, vol. XXXV, pp. 268–82; Lord Strang, *Home and abroad* (1956), pp. 65, 153–4.

[152] A. J. Crozier, 'Chamberlain, (A) Neville', *ODNB*, vol. X, pp. 934–55; Vansittart, *The mist procession*, pp. 429–30.

With chilling flabbiness, Inskip confessed: 'I can find no solution of the problem presented.' To spend too much money in 1937–8 would exhaust British financial resources and undermine Britain's war capacity even before Germany moved against the UK.[153]

Appeasement had its roots in the economic depression, the financial anxieties which so worried Chamberlain, and in geopolitical evaluations and constraints. It is well understood today that appeasement rested in part on the need to defend an over-extended exhausted empire which could not in the final analysis be properly defended, and certainly not against three enemies so geographically spread apart as Germany and Japan, with fascist Italy having a stranglehold on the vital communications-link between the two theatres of war. 'The global dilemma was thus the forcing-house of appeasement', especially with respect to Italy. The imperial imperatives of appeasement dictated the essential outlines of much of Chamberlain's policy.[154] Italy, it was argued, had to be kept neutral, since the maintenance of the Far Eastern position against the Japanese was thought to be essential. If Singapore fell, Australia, New Zealand, Borneo, Malaya, Burma, and India would all be at risk; the whole Indian Ocean would be at the mercy of Japan; and if Japan got hold of Indonesian oil, and Malayan tin, iron, and rubber, the British empire might well be doomed. Despite their recognition that the number of enemies must be reduced, the Chiefs of Staff persisted in the strategy of building a Singapore naval base, provoking to Japan. In trying to sort out the priorities, the Chiefs of Staff decided that their basic aim was the security of imperial communications throughout the world, and that this was followed in order of priority by the security of the UK against Germany, the security of the empire in the Far East against Japan, the security of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and finally the security of India against Russia. This was a daunting and unrealistic programme.[155]

Policy was not of course determined solely by the Chiefs of Staff, but also by civil servants, often with different concerns and different solutions. There was no one 'official mind' on appeasement. There were complexities and contradictions.

[153] N. H. Gibbs, *Grand strategy*, vol. I: *Rearmament policy* (History of the Second World War, UK military series, 1976), pp. 283–7, report to Cabinet, 15 December 1937 (CAB 24/273, CP(37)316).

[154] L. R. Pratt, *East of Malta, West of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean crisis, 1936–1939* (1979); R. Quartararo, 'Imperial defence in the Mediterranean, 1935', *Historical Journal*, vol. 20 (1977), pp. 185–220. S. Roskill, *Hankey: man of secrets*, vol. III: *1931–1963* (1974), pp. 270–82.

[155] Gibbs, *Grand strategy*, vol. I: *Rearmanent policy*, pp. 410–18, Chiefs of Staff review, February 1937.

Whether or not Chamberlain's appeasement scheme for co-existence with Hitler's Germany – allegedly not in principle wanting to destroy the British empire – should be accepted as rational, or whether the true rationalism and realism was to accept the necessity of fighting against Germany, need not detain us here. The truth is that Hitler made co-existence impossible and forced on the war. Whatever Britain did, the results would be disastrous. Chamberlain was right that the war would wreck the empire – but Churchill was even more right in seeing that the empire could not survive as part of a German-dominated world.[156] Moreover, if you are in the frying-pan it is natural to jump into the fire. It is surely hard to believe that Britain had any option but to fight a war – a ruinous war, admittedly – for total security against the evils of Naziism, even at the risk of awakening the slumbering giants of Moscow and Washington, even at the expense of the future viability of the economy. High Tories have always been reluctant to accept these propositions, and denounced them as leading to the needless destruction of the old Establishment and empire.[157] As Dean Inge ('the gloomy Dean' of St Paul's) wrote in his diary: it was an incredible, insensate, fatuous, idiotic, suicidal war, which would 'ruin all who have anything to lose' and possibly end in 'national disaster' even if Britain won.[158]

As to the longer-term geopolitical conflict known as the cold war, it is presumably the case that Naziism had to be treated as the prior enemy to communism, and therefore a cautious alliance with the Soviet Union had to be adopted in order to defeat Hitler, costly and embarrassing though this was.[159] Churchill of course was under no illusions. Asked in 1942 by the new ambassador (Sir Archie Clark Kerr) for a directive on policy towards the Soviet Union, Churchill replied, 'I don't mind kissing Stalin's bum but I'm damned if I'll lick his arse.' To which the ambassador replied, 'Thank you, prime minister: now I quite understand.'[160]

(2) Anglo-Japanese relations and the Singapore base

The crumbling of the British position in the Far East seems to register all its significant set-backs in ten-year intervals. In 1911 came the definitive

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[156] J. Kent, *British imperial strategy and the origins of the Cold War, 1944–1949* (1993), p. 212.

[157] M. Cowling, *The impact of Hitler: British politics and British policy, 1933–1940* (1975); N. Annan, *Our age: portrait of a generation* (1990), pp. 190–204, 441–3.

[158] Magdalene College Archives, Dean Inge Papers, F/WRI/36 and 37, diary, 1939–43.

[159] D. Carlton, *Anthony Eden: a biography* (1981), p. 482.

[160] LSE, Hugh Dalton Papers, I/36, f. 49, diary, end of 1948. After four years in the Soviet Union, Clark Kerr became, as Lord Inverchapel, ambassador in the USA, 1946–8.

confirmation of the decision in 1905 to rely on Japan as an ally (using the alliance of 1902) to keep the peace in the region, and thus to withdraw five battleships from the China Seas in order to make three-quarters of British battleships available against Germany.[161] In 1921 came the termination of the Japanese alliance, followed by the Washington Naval Conference (1922) which marked the surrender of British supremacy at sea. In 1931 the Manchurian and Shanghai crises demonstrated the post-1921 inability to stop Japanese expansion in China, and highlighted the significance of the Singapore naval base, which project was reactivated. In 1941 came the loss of the battleships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* and the fall of Singapore to the Japanese in 1942.

In 1921 Britain had a terrible choice to make: between the useful Japanese alliance and the wishes of Canada and the United States, one of the most crucial decisions Britain ever made on strategic policy. The USA was obsessed with the Japanese 'yellow peril' menace. (American revulsion against the Japanese was so strong that all Japanese immigration was halted in 1924.) Curzon was concerned that the loss of the Japanese alliance would revive a colour prejudice which Britain had been trying to obliterate: 'you again revive the old position in the Far East – the white men against the dark men or the yellow men'.[162] Canadian opposition to the Japanese alliance was probably decisive. Canada's prime minister Arthur Meighen (1920–1) emphasised the need for good relations with the USA. He said that for Britain to maintain a 'special confidential relationship' with Japan to which America was not a party would be regarded as an 'unfriendly exclusion and as a barrier to an English-speaking accord'. For all practical purposes Canada's Mr Meighen exercised a veto on the renewal of the Japanese alliance, while the Americans made abrogation a condition for a naval agreement which was meant to control the 'arms race' and end naval rivalry. The effect was that Britain lost a Far Eastern ally (and the possibility of exercising some restraining influence over Japanese expansion) without gaining any effective American support.[163]

Under the terms of the Washington Treaty (1922), for the first time the Royal Navy had mere parity with rivals, not superiority, and its size was determined by international treaty rather than by assessment of Britain's own strategic needs. A ratio of capital ships (battleships and

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[161] C. Northcote Parkinson, *East and West* (1963), pp. 230–4; I. H. Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese alliance: the diplomacy of two island empires, 1894–1907* (1966).

[162] Louis, *British strategy in the Far East, 1919–1939*, pp. 61, 94–5.

[163] I. H. Nish, *Alliance in decline: a study of Anglo-Japanese relations, 1908–1923* (1972); P. G. Wigley, *Canada and the transition to Commonwealth: British–Canadian relations, 1917–1926* (1977), p. 141; Louis, *British strategy in the Far East*, pp. 1–49.

battle-cruisers) was fixed in the proportion: USA 5, Britain 5, Japan 3, France 1.75, Italy 1.75. It was doubtful whether Britain could have afforded a more favourable ratio, but the aim in agreeing to it was basically to conciliate the Americans, who wished to build up their strength, and to eliminate friction. The British could accept these terms because they were less apprehensive of the Japanese, but also, no doubt rightly and sensibly, did so out of an overriding conviction that naval competition and war with the Americans was unthinkable; in any case the British could not afford the money for keeping ahead of the Americans if the Americans were determined to have a navy 'second to none'.[164]

As a result of the ending of the Japanese alliance and the Washington Naval Conference, and the problems which followed from them, Britain had neither alignment with Japan nor a navy strong enough to defend its imperial interests against the Land of Rising Sun.[165] Financial stringency seemed to make it impossible to maintain a sufficient fleet. And so they built a naval base instead.

Why was Britain building a huge base at Singapore?[166] The project began in 1921. It cost £25 million. The idea was that it would defend itself for the time it was estimated it would take the fleet to get there. The estimate got progressively longer, from 42 days to 90 days (June 1939) to at least 180 days (September 1939).[167] Singapore was chosen as less peripheral than Sydney, less vulnerable than Hong Kong. The project dominated strategic planning between the wars. Although coherent and plausible at first, it became increasingly obsolete and unviable as a strategy, partly because it depended as an essential precondition on peace in Europe and on free movement through the Mediterranean, and partly because the development of air-power upset all calculations. Singapore became a symbol, in which too much emotional capital was invested. The irony was that the Singapore naval base fell to overland attack, and capital ships were sunk by air-power. By the thirties it was essentially a bogus policy, a symbol of Britain's (unrealisable) commitment to protect

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[164] S. Roskill, *Naval policy between the wars*, vol. I: *The period of Anglo-American antagonism, 1919–1929* (1968), pp. 318–30; Louis, *British strategy in the Far East*, pp. 52–108.

[165] For Japanese background: N. J. Brailey, 'Southeast Asia and Japan's road to war', review article, *Historical Journal*, vol. 30 (1987), pp. 995–1011, and I. Hata, 'Continental expansion, 1905–1941', in P. Duus, ed., *Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. VI: *The twentieth century* (1988), pp. 299–314.

[166] There are three books on the Singapore base: W. D. McIntyre, *The rise and fall of the Singapore naval base, 1919–1942* (1979), P. Haggie, *Britannia at bay: the defence of the British empire against Japan, 1931–1941* (1981) and J. Neidpath, *Singapore naval base and the defence of Britain's eastern empire, 1919–1941* (1981) – and the best of these is McIntyre's.

[167] K. Hack and K. Blackburn, *Did Singapore have to fall? Churchill and the impregnable fortress* (2004), p. 32.

Australia and New Zealand from Japanese attack, as a cardinal link in the Commonwealth geopolitical structure.

Of course there was always a case against such a base. General Smuts and Admiral Richmond made prescient criticisms. There was strategic uncertainty (would battleships be effective and what about air-power?), financial-economic and diplomatic worries (don't bankrupt yourself and antagonise Japan at the same time), and moral questioning (queering the disarmament pitch). But a Singapore base nevertheless seemed to be essential in terms of Britain's total imperial role, geopolitical, technical, and diplomatic. Geopolitically, the defensive integrity of British territory and commerce had to be maintained and clearly demonstrated; the mere existence of Japan's 'New Order' and burgeoning naval power in the East required a response of a kind not necessary in the nineteenth century. There was a technical imperative too. Because warships were bigger now and oil-fired they were more dependent on major base facilities; therefore, not to provide the logistical framework for the operation of large naval units in the East would have been tantamount to accepting the hollowness of imperial pretensions. The project also seemed essential in terms of the relationship with the United States. Unless Britain could claim to have a convincing naval policy and an impressive base, Australia and New Zealand might increasingly have looked to America – which of course actually happened after 1942. (Singapore was especially important to New Zealand as a centre for oil supplies and air-links.) Even if people thought Britain would have to co-operate with the United States to preserve empire in the Far East, there were still three formidable reasons from the perspective of Anglo-American relations why a base was needed. The first was the overriding unlikelihood of obtaining a binding American commitment to act in alliance with Britain if only British territory were attacked by Japan. Secondly, the Washington Naval Conference had excluded the Americans from building any new base in the West and South Pacific, so that the American navy would not be able to interpose its main forces between Japan and the British possessions in South-East Asia. Thirdly, it followed that, in order to appear a worthwhile political ally for the Americans in the Far East, Britain must have a major base, which possibly the Americans could also use.[168]

The fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 was described by Churchill as 'the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history'.[169] British

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[168] J. P. D. Dunbabin, review of Haggie, Neidpath, and related books by I. C. McGibbon and A. J. Marder, *English Historical Review*, vol. 98, no. 386 (1983), pp. 170–6; C. Thorne, review of Neidpath, *Times Literary Supplement* 4 December 1981, 1409; S. Roskill, review of Haggie, *ibid.*, 12 June 1981, p. 675.

[169] W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. IV: *The hinge of fate* (1951), p. 81.

troops numbering 130,000 surrendered to Japanese forces of only a quarter of that number, fighting 3,000 miles from base. As one British soldier quipped, 'Never have so many been fucked about by so few.'[170] Why did Singapore collapse? Perhaps the isolationist Americans could have given more enthusiastic co-operation in defence of the British empire. More certainly, Malaya should have been better prepared against Japanese attack. This was not given the high political priority it deserved in 1940–1. Not to have done more to provide Singapore with static defences to the north was lamentably unsound militarily and politically. Churchill was partly to blame, because he wanted to reinforce Middle East Command instead.[171] In a memorandum on sea-power, in March 1939, he had declared 'how vain is the menace that Japan will send a fleet and army to conquer Singapore', which was as far from Japan as Southampton was from New York; it would be 'a wild adventure', and he was quite certain that the 'sensible' Japanese would not run such a risk, or, if undertaken at all, then not until after Britain had been beaten in Europe.[172] Japanese military abilities were seriously underestimated by many others besides Churchill. It was supposed they could not fly aeroplanes properly on account of their slit eyes ('they wouldn't be able to see in the dark') and poor sense of balance ('as a result' of having been carried on their mother's backs as babies), and that their aircraft were of shoddy construction.

But it also has to be said that the British in Malaya were unlucky, and faced with a resourceful enemy. The Japanese by contrast were lucky, and brilliant risk-takers. They came through the monsoon, which the British never expected. They came with astonishing speed in an epic advance of fifty-five days, hurtling down the Malay peninsula at the rate of twenty miles a day, cycling on good British roads, wearing shorts and plimsolls, peddling like mad, fighting all the way, repairing 250 bridges.[173]

The effects of the fall of Singapore are not in dispute. If the British were disabused of their belief that the Japanese were myopic midgets, the Japanese were confirmed in their belief that the British were indeed, as Darwin said, descended from monkeys, but *they* were descended from gods. Psychologically it was the end of many British illusions, while Asians were given a vision of the future without European over-lords. British prestige suffered a mortal blow.[174] The Japanese made white

[170] Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten armies*, p. 132.
[171] Neidpath, *Singapore naval base*, pp. 214–22.
[172] PREM 1/345, memo 25 Mar 1939; Gilbert, *Winston S Churchill* vol. IV *Companion*, p. 1415.   [173] Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten armies*, pp. 106–55.
[174] Mansergh and Lumby, eds., *India: Transfer of power*, vol. I: *January to April 1942* (1970), p. 110 (no. 60) Attlee, 2 February 1942; *ibid*, vol IX. *4 November 1946–22 March 1947* (1980), p. 803, Wavell to the king, 24 February 1947.

troops sweep the streets to prove that the reign of the Western man was over. No-one forgot the ease with which the rottenness of Britain's eastern empire was exposed.[175] The fall of Singapore destroyed the myth that Britain was capable of protecting Australia and New Zealand, and thus disposed them to look to the United States for protection. The Australian prime minister John Curtin said that Australia turned to America now, 'free of pangs as to traditional links'. There was a serious and rapid decline in relations between Britain and Australia, leading ultimately to the ANZUS pact of 1952 from which Britain was excluded.[176] At the same time it increased British dependence on America. Only through the USA could Britain get back some of the lost possessions. As to the effect on India, the nationalist movement received a boost. Churchill feared now a 'pan-Asian malaise spreading through all the bazaars of India'.[177] The failure of local populations in Malaya to rally to the imperial flag caused a mixture of pained surprise and disgusted recrimination. Full administrative control was never properly re-established after the war, which provided the conditions for the emergence of the Chinese communist insurrection of 1948.

On the more positive side, the wartime loss of South-East Asia did at least enable planning in Whitehall to break with the past. As the CO's Sir Ralph Furse commented: 'The change was coming anyhow; Singapore precipitated it.'[178]

6. New directions – and war

The lack of dynamism in foreign policy in the 1930s was paralleled by the lack of a forward-looking colonial policy. Britain's colonial record up until 1938 can only be described as deplorable. The historian Hancock, engaged on his Commonwealth survey, described the interwar period as one in which there was a disposition to draw too heavily on the capital of past achievements, an inability to strike out on new and adventurous policies, a passivity and out-of-date conventionality about economic and social policy, a general failure of imagination, initiative, and confidence. At the same time he recognised the moment of change, the 'explicit and deliberate purpose that is new', heralded by the Colonial Development

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[175] Thorne, *Allies of a kind*, pp. 7–10, 701–2.
[176] T. Reese, *Australia, New Zealand and the United States: a survey of international relations, 1941–1968* (1969), pp. 126–49; Thorne, *Allies of a kind*, pp. 252–3.
[177] D. Dilks, ed., *The diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938–1945* (1971), pp. 431–2.
[178] S. R. Ashton and S. E. Stockwell, eds., *Imperial policy and colonial practice, 1925–1945* (BDEEP, 1996), pt 1, intro., p. lix, and p. 15 (no. 5) Sir R. Furse, 27 February 1943.

and Welfare Act of 1940.[179] From within the Colonial Office, Sir Ralph Furse broadly agreed. There was, he admitted, no general colonial policy between the wars; the CO was fumbling, daunted by the bewildering and kaleidoscopic variety of problems. Concurrently there was a degree of public apathy and ignorance which Furse found unbelievable. Press and parliament were inattentive. Academics were largely indifferent. Worse still, most of the commentators were female (Margery Perham, Elspeth Huxley, Ruth Hinden), which Furse regarded as seriously unhealthy. But then, from about 1940, 'an embryonic policy' emerged. According to W. M. Macmillan, too, changes 'on a seismic scale' were then begun.[180]

Malcolm MacDonald was thirty when he was appointed a junior minister in the Dominions Office in 1931. His father was the prime minister. After being head prefect at the 'progressive' school Bedales, and studying history at Oxford, he went on a debating tour of the USA, Canada, Hawaii, Fiji, New Zealand, and Australia, and then on a trip to Kyoto as secretary of a British delegation. He became a Labour MP in 1929. At the Dominions Office he achieved the not inconsiderable feat of getting on well with the Irish prime minister de Valera, though he was perhaps less successful with South Africa's prime minister General Hertzog (1924–39) in delicate discussions about the future of the High Commission Territories. Acquiring a reputation for 'quiet efficiency', MacDonald was appointed as secretary of state for the colonies by Neville Chamberlain in May 1938. He still had to prove that he owed his fast promotion to merit and not to his father.[181]

MacDonald was determined to inaugurate a more active policy of colonial development, alerted to the potential salience of colonial questions by the plans for a deal with Germany (see above, pp. 43–5) and by major strikes and protests in the West Indies from the middle of 1937, looked upon askance by the Americans. Within weeks he had penned a memorandum arguing that the social and economic conditions in some West Indian colonies were 'at least fifty years behind the times'. 'It is in my view imperative that, at a time when the "colonial question" is being ventilated at home and abroad, we should ourselves be as far as possible above reproach', which plainly was not the case. The eyes of the world were watching Britain, and more money must be spent if British reputation 'was

[179] W. K. Hancock, *Argument of empire* (1943), pp. 134–5, and *Survey of British Commonwealth affairs*, vol. II: *Problems of economic policy, 1918–1939*, pt 2, p. 267.
[180] Furse, *Aucuparius*, pp. 301–5; W. M. Macmillan, *The road to self-rule: a study in colonial evolution* (1959), p. 205.
[181] Clyde Sanger, *Malcolm MacDonald: bringing an end to empire* (Canada/Liverpool, 1995), ch. 15, 'Moyne, Hailey and a new view on colonies, 1935–1940', pp. 143–58; P. Lyon, 'MacDonald, Malcolm', *ODNB* (2004), vol. XXXV, pp. 260–3; for MacDonald at the Dominions Office, see Hyam, *The failure of South African expansion*, pp. 153–60.

not to suffer irretrievable damage'. A few months later he told his officials, 'in future, criticism of Great Britain will be directed against her management of the Colonial Empire and . . . it was an essential part of her defence policy that her reputation as a colonial power should be unassailable'.[182] MacDonald was aware of foreign criticisms about a neglected 'slum empire', not just in Nazi propaganda, but also in French, Italian, and even Polish commentaries. Lord Moyne (formerly a junior minister at the Treasury) was appointed in July 1938 to head a royal commission on the West Indies; he reported in December 1939 and was very critical of 'defects of policy'. Meanwhile, plans were pressed ahead for a new colonial development act. By the end of 1938 MacDonald was also planning a new social services department in the CO, which began work in March 1939. Then, about a week after war broke out, MacDonald urged that they ought immediately 'to be formulating definite principles of future policy', otherwise they might get side-tracked 'from what ought to he our broad objective'. And, a month later, at a meeting in the CO, he gave details of a big ten-point plan which he hoped would impress colonies and enemies alike, identifying three main areas for investigation. These were the fundamental issue of land policy, the provision of more technical and social services, and political development which did not irrevocably give more power to settlers. He wanted more staff in the CO, and better office accommodation. He wanted to see a 'seething of thought' in the African division of the CO, with even the most junior members contributing.[183] The proposed inquiry into land policy was not implemented. In January 1940, in the context of a fight to keep 'welfare' in the title of the new Colonial Development and Welfare Act, he recorded his opinion that 'if we are not now going to do something fairly good for the Colonial Empire, and something which helps them to get proper social services, we shall deserve to lose the colonies and it will only be a matter of time before we get what we deserve'.[184] In introducing the new Act in May 1940 he explained that its funds could be spent on economic development, and 'everything which ministers to the physical, mental or moral development of the colonial peoples of whom we are the trustees'.[185]

[182] Ashton and Stockwell, *Imperial policy and colonial practice, 1925–1945*, hereafter cited as *IPCP*, pt 1, intro pp. lxvii–lxxii, and pt 2, pp. 61–5 (nos. 93 and 94), 27 June and 9 December 1938.
[183] Ashton and Stockwell, *IPCP*, pt 1, pp. 294–5 (nos. 55–7), September–November 1939.
[184] Ashton and Stockwell, *IPCP*, pt 2, p. 111 (no. 101), 14 January 1940.
[185] H. Johnson, 'The British Caribbean from demobilisation to constitutional decolonisation', in Brown and Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. IV: *The twentieth century*, pp. 608–11, and 'The West Indies and the conversion of the British official classes to the development idea', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, vol. 15 (1977), pp. 58–83.

MacDonald thus widened the vision behind trusteeship. His 'seething of thought' laid the foundations during the war for fundamental changes in British policy in Africa and the Caribbean, tackling economic stagnation, building up 'moral prestige', questioning hitherto sacrosanct doctrines of minimal government interference, colonial self-sufficiency in finance, and the almost ubiquitous system of Indirect Rule. Many specialist and advisory bodies were set up in and around the CO, including research and public relations, and helped the dynamic. MacDonald believed it to be 'essential to get away from the old principle that Colonies can only have what they themselves can afford to pay for'. Rather cleverly, he used the device of a royal commission in the West Indies as a lever to open the tight-fisted Treasury's coffers, for they would have to be impressed by such a high-level report. The ploy was successful. Whereas the Colonial Development Act of 1929 was a neo-mercantilist measure primarily aimed at stimulating British exports for British economic benefit, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 was quite different in its motivation.[186] It was the first step in a positive and constructive policy which led on to the postwar policy of 'political advancement'.[187] In 1940, £5 million was provided as pump-priming. In 1945 this was increased to £120 million over ten years. Despite Britain's financial difficulties, MacDonald's successor Oliver Stanley entered fully into MacDonald's vision. He commended the new act as showing gratitude for the participation of colonies in the war effort, which had 'increased our awareness of past deficiencies in our administration', but added: 'the overriding reason why I feel that these proposals are essential is the necessity to justify our position as a Colonial power'. The end of the war, said Stanley, was the psychological moment to have 'a dynamic programme of colonial development' which would demonstrate 'the permanence and adequacy of our policy'.[188]

Roger Louis has commented that 'the Second World War witnessed a moral regeneration of British purpose in the colonial world'.[189] Although it is true that war was a catalyst, the 'new direction' was in origin not a response to war or even to the Moyne report on the West Indies. MacDonald had taken the initiative in advance of both.[190]

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[186] S. Constantine, *The making of British colonial development policy, 1914–1940* (1984), pp. 232–61; see also M. Havinden and D. Meredith, *Colonialism and development: Britain and its tropical colonies, 1850–1960* (1993), pp. 195–205; D. J. Morgan, *Official history of colonial development* (1980), vol. I: *The origins of British aid policy, 1924–1945*, pp. 64–88.   [187] A. Cohen, *British policy in changing Africa* (1959), pp. 32–3.

[188] PREM 4/43A, no. 8; *IPCP*, pt 2, pp. 203–5 (no. 120).

[189] W. R. Louis, *Imperialism at bay, 1941–1945: the United States and the decolonisation of the British empire* (1977), pp. 101–3.

[190] J. E. Flint, 'Planned decolonisation and its failure in British Africa', *African Affairs*, vol. 82 (1983), pp. 390–410; but see also a cautionary 'addendum' by R. D. Pearce, 'The Colonial Office and planned decolonisation in Africa', *African Affairs*, vol. 83 (1984), pp. 77–93.

Although we must not exaggerate the practical effects of all this, the change in atmosphere is palpable. The demand for a 'seething of thought' certainly encouraged officials to clarify their ideas. On the West African desk, O. G. R. Williams pointed to the importance of retaining the initiative politically, forestalling African demands for progress 'rather than allowing ourselves to be forced into the position of making concessions to the "clamour of demagogues" '. Not that he expected progress to be fast: 'a good many years (perhaps a good many generations, though it would not be politic to say so openly) must elapse' before there was much advance to self-government in West Africa.[191] Sydney Caine, the financial adviser, called for 'a much greater development of initiatory power at the centre', giving much more informed thought to economic prospects. He believed colonial development required such specialised scientific and technical expertise that they should allow foreigners in, with contracts. This would be 'a big break with the past', but should be welcomed if it would help to attain their ideals more quickly. It might, he added, divert 'the surplus energy of European peoples to a co-operative task'.[192] Another assistant under-secretary, A. J. Dawe, insisted that Indirect Rule was outmoded, and it was 'absurd to erect what was an ephemeral experiment into a sacrosanct principle'; 'it was not handed down on Mt Sinai'.[193] After the war, he predicted, Africa was going 'to become a scene of a great contest for power'. In a major memorandum on Kenya, Dawe implied that MacDonald's economic and social initiatives would not be enough:

A marked transformation is taking place. Forces released by the war are gathering great velocity . . . The old nineteenth-century concepts are dead. The African territories can no longer be regarded as appendages of the European powers . . . There will be an increasing urge towards the self-government which Colonial peoples, under the British system, have been led to expect. These forces are not likely to be contained for long by any policy of material development and social welfare directed from London. Improved health services and education will not be accepted by these peoples as a substitute for the freedom to develop according to their own political consciousness. The problem for the British government, therefore, is to find a method by which these inexorable African forces can be reconciled with future British interests. How are we to bind these people to us in such a way that their moral and material sources of strength will continue to be ranged on the side of Great Britain?

It was to be expected that after the war Britain would be 'much exhausted and weakened by its long ordeal'. While there was weakness at the centre,

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[191] R. Rathbone, ed., *Ghana* (BDEEP, 1992), pt 1: *1941–52* intro, p. xxxvi.
[192] J. M. Lee and M. Petter, *The Colonial Office, war and development policy: the organisation and planning of a metropolitan initiative, 1939–1945* (1982), pp. 169–73.
[193] *IPCP*, pt 1, p. 350 (no. 68), 17 July 1943.

it would be natural for colonies 'to seek to widen control of their own affairs'.[194]

Dawe was especially concerned about Kenya, 'an inflammable country', where the prestige of the British government had never recovered from the potential settlers' rebellion in 1923. Imperial power was sharply limited here, and difficulties had ever since been pushed aside as far as possible. The move towards settler domination had been much speeded up by the war. Dawe wondered whether the solution might be to curtail settler power by absorbing the Europeans into an East African federation of five provinces, Kenya, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, Uganda, and 'a White Highlands state'.

Harold Macmillan as a CO under-secretary of state in 1942 was now seized with his own 'seething of thought'. He challenged Dawe's assumption that Kenya had proved to be a 'white man's country'. Instead of a federation, Macmillan suggested 'a quite different and much more radical policy', one which at first sight 'may seem quite fantastic; perhaps it is': 'let us nationalise all or some of the land in the Highlands', buying out decadent and unserious European farmers, putting control of African interests back in the hands of the British government, and allowing African access to the land. This would be very expensive, 'but it will be less expensive than a civil war', for a clash between black and white 'is bound to come'. The words were prophetic.[195]

In the field, too, some governors responded enthusiastically to the call for a new direction. Sir Charles Dundas in Uganda (1940–4) commented on a 'rather too narrow and unimaginative attitude in certain local quarters', a stultifying ultra-conservatism; but the empire had to be justified now by 'impeccable and progressive rule'. Britain could no longer determine policy dictatorially 'according as it seems best to us', but must accommodate to African demands, otherwise there was 'a danger that it will not be the Africans but ourselves who are backward'. The CO was pleased with this despatch. Sir Alan Burns had little difficulty in persuading the CO to approve the appointment of the first African district commissioners in the Gold Coast.[196]

In the 1940s, new universities were established in Legon, Ibadan, Makerere, Khartoum, and the West Indies, which it was hoped would produce more professional groups who could run their countries. This was a creditable achievement. The crucial impetus came from Earl De La

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[194] CO 967/57, memo by Dawe, July 1942, 'A federal solution for East Africa'; *IPCP*, pt 1, pp. 322–37 (no. 65); N. Westcott, 'Closer union and the future of East Africa, 1939–1948', *JICH*, vol. 10 (1981), pp. 67–88.

[195] Macmillan to Sir G. Gater, 15 August 1942; *IPCP*, pt 1, pp. 337–40 (no. 66).

[196] *IPCP*, pt 1, intro., p. xci, and pt 2, pp. 319–21 (no. 154), June 1942.

Warr's report in September 1937, the first published exposition of university policy for British Africa, recommending a synthesis of both African and European cultural elements. Oliver Stanley in 1943 declared his belief that higher education would be 'one of the most important questions in connection with the post-war reconstruction and development of the Colonial Empire'.[197]

One new contextual element was South Africa's wartime emergence as an African power. This was perceived as something which could be dangerous to British interests. Dawe was acutely aware of the insidious seductiveness of Smuts, so close to the British war establishment, but pursuing his own agenda: 'there is always the danger that we may be deluded by the ephemeral magnetism of General Smuts's personality into taking a step which would have grave consequences to our long-term interests in Africa'. South African expansion northwards, he realised, would be only too acceptable to many official and unofficial elements in British African communities, not least in Kenya. Other officials feared Swaziland might be transferred to South African rule.[198]

'Partnership' became the new slogan, though it was uncertain precisely what it involved. It was employed (though not invented) by Lord Hailey, who had published his much admired *African survey* in 1938, a vast compendium which provided useful information rather than innovative ideas. Macmillan then publicised 'partnership' in a parliamentary speech in June 1942.[199] The paternalism of the old trusteeship was supposed to be over. However that may be, it was clearly understood in the CO that colonial problems must be dealt with from 'a new angle of vision', collaborating with colonial peoples instead of merely directing them.[200]

The war saw a huge increase in the importance of Africa. Africans made heroic exertions on behalf of, and mostly at the behest of, the Allies. Some 400,000 African soldiers were mobilised by Britain alone, and by the end of their service 70 per cent of them were literate. Black soldiers served in North Africa, Madagascar, Egypt, Palestine, and Burma. Most parts of Africa also felt the pressure of the demand for labour. Many millions of men, women, and children were set to work. Freetown, Cape Town, and Mombasa became vital bases guarding the trade routes and

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[197] Flint, 'Planned decolonisation', p. 403; E. Ashby, *Universities; British, Indian and African: a study in the ecology of higher education* (with M. Anderson, 1966), pp. 197–223, 233.

[198] *IPCP*, pt 1, p. 350 (no. 68), minute, 17 July 1943, and p. 343 (no. 72), Stanley, 5 August 1943. See also Hyam, *The failure of South African expansion*, pp. 163–83.

[199] *IPCP*, intro, p. lii; Lee and Petter, *The Colonial Office, war and development policy*, p. 126.

[200] Sir John Shuckburgh quoted by K. Jeffery, 'The Second World War', in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. IV, p. 327.

supply-lines for war matériel and essential foodstuffs for the army. A West Africa supply-route ferried aircraft from the USA to the Middle East via Takoradi and Kano. By 1945 a chain of forty airfields existed across Africa, linking Nigeria and Egypt. West Africa was a scene of intense activity, especially in Sierra Leone, where the strategic harbour of Freetown was much improved, palm-oil production was greatly increased, iron ore, timber, rubber, bauxite (for aluminium), and above all tin (after the loss of Malaya) were sought. There was such urgency that forced labour was used to get the tin. The most notorious example of forced labour occurred in Northern Nigeria, where over 100,000 peasants were conscripted into tin-mines between 1942 and 1944. In the Gold Coast a 46-mile branch railway was built to open up sources of bauxite.[201]

In East Africa as well, food and raw materials were produced on a large scale for the war effort, especially for troops in the Middle East. As in West Africa, bulk-purchasing and marketing boards were established to enable the British government to buy raw materials more cheaply. The Japanese war caused a major restructuring of the world economy, halving the amount of hard fibres available to the West, cutting off America's sources of twine in the Philippines. The effect was felt in Tanganyika, where 84,500 Africans were conscripted for agricultural work, mainly on the sisal plantations, or in rubber estates reactivated after a generation of neglect. In Kenya, coffee and sisal production increased, and pyrethrum daisies were produced for the insecticides so vital in the jungle warfare of South-East Asia. The white farmers of Kenya for the first time could be regarded as useful, and not dismissed as a bunch of 'aristocratic playboys giving in to altitude, alcohol and adultery'.[202]

With a few individual exceptions, the vast majority of demobilised African soldiers were re-absorbed without trouble into the rural communities from which they came. Hundreds of thousands of Africans successfully uprooted for their labour were also quietly repatriated. So the impact of returning ex-soldiers and others – contrary to some accounts – did not fuel post-war nationalist agitation or political

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[201] Viscount Swinton, *As I remember* [n.d.,? 1949], pp. 191–207; D. Killingray and R. Rathbone, eds., *Africa and the Second World War* (1986), intro., pp. 1–17; M. Crowder, 'The 1939–1945 War and West Africa', in J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa*, vol. II (1974), pp. 596–621; G. O. Olusanya, *The Second World War and politics in Nigeria, 1939–1953* (Lagos, 1973).

[202] N. Westcott, 'The impact of the Second World War on Tanganyika', in Killingray and Rathbone, eds., *Africa and the Second World War*, pp. 143–59; J. M. Lonsdale, 'The Depression, the Second World War and the transformation of Kenya', *ibid.*, esp. pp. 119–36; D. A. Low and J. M. Lonsdale, in *A History of East Africa*, vol. III (ed. D. A. Low and A. Smith, 1976), pp. 1–64, intro, 'Towards the new order, 1945–1963'.

turmoil. The roots of imperial decline are not to be looked for in this particular process.[203]

This is not to say that the Second World War did not have a profound impact in Africa. New economic, social, and political forces were set in motion. Expectations changed and the whole milieu was different. Sylvia Leith-Ross, the widow of a colonial service officer, who had been in Nigeria since 1907, commented on this with extraordinary perception. Britain had ruled 'by prestige and with only a handful of rifles'. The only whites the Africans knew seemed to have not just wealth, but superior knowledge and skills entitling them to rulership. Before the war – according to her understanding – Nigerians believed all whites were one race, treating each other as 'brothers' ('with all the implications connoted in the African mind by that term'). But now:

Perhaps for the first time, except in individual cases, an element of contempt had crept into their minds: these 'civilised' white men could nevertheless kill each other in great numbers, their rich towns could be destroyed, their expensive homes burnt down, they could be tortured and starved, they could cringe and beg for help and for money. And, a curious sidelight emerging from conversations with observant Africans who had been in contact with our troops or sailors, for the first time in their lives these Africans had met a number of Europeans *less educated than themselves*, speaking a less grammatical English than themselves. They were careful to show no disdain, only sheer amazement that they should have been mistaken . . . You could not help feeling that this discovery was perhaps the final insidious blow which shattered the crumbling edifice of white superiority.[204]

An early African study of African nationalism confirms this analysis, arguing that 'after four years hunting white enemy soldiers the Africans never regarded them again as gods'; if Europeans could legitimately struggle against the domination of Hitler, they could legitimately continue their own struggle against alien domination.[205]

The war also brought portentous changes to the international scene, and tensions between Britain and the United States. The Americans had not fought to uphold the British empire. They thought Hong Kong should be given up. Conversely, Churchill told them 'I have not become the king's first minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the

[203] A. Jackson, 'Supplying war: the High Commission Territories military-logistical contribution to the Second World War', *Journal of Military History* vol. 66 (2002), pp. 719–60. Ashley Jackson, *The British empire and the Second World War* (2006) is a major new reassessment, redefining the role of the empire.

[204] Sylvia Leith-Ross, *Stepping-stones: memoirs of colonial Nigeria, 1907–1960* (ed. M. Crowder, 1983), pp. 116–17; quoted (not quite in full) by M. Crowder, 'The Second World War: prelude to decolonisation in Africa', in M. Crowder, ed., *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. VIII: *From c 1940 to c 1975* (1984), p. 40.

[205] Sithole, *African nationalism*, pp. 19–24, 156.

British Empire.' The Americans had schemes for an 'international trusteeship', to be superintended by the new United Nations Organisation. Churchill was sceptical. ' "Hands off the British Empire" is our maxim and it must not be weakened or smirched to please sob-stuff merchants at home or foreigners of any hue.' He would not have the empire 'jockeyed or edged nearer the abyss'. He would not consent to forty or fifty nations 'thrusting interfering fingers' into the vitals of the British Empire. He would not have 'one scrap of British territory flung into that arena' (the international organisation): 'I will have no suggestion that the British empire is to be put into the dock', and 'asked to justify our right to live in a world we have tried to save'. But for all his rhetoric, Churchill was insufficiently vigilant at the Yalta conference (in the Crimea, February 1945). The 'trusteeship formula' agreed there by the 'Big Three' was that it would apply only to existing League of Nations Mandates, conquered territory, and any other territory voluntarily placed under trusteeship. Churchill did not examine the proposal closely enough. The Americans explicitly but not very honestly said it had nothing to do with the British empire. But Britain *was* involved in respect of League of Nations Mandates, and Churchill unwittingly gave the future international organisation, the Trusteeship Council of the UN, a basis for putting the empire 'in the dock'. It was to lead to a great deal of trouble and anxiety as decolonisation unfolded.[206]

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[206] Louis, *Imperialism at bay*, pp. 433–5, 454–60; *IPCP*, pt 1, pp. 216–18 (no. 38), minutes, 31 December 1944–24 January 1945. The UN's trusteeship formula required 'progressive development towards self-government or independence'.