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Churchill, Israel and the Jews

Understanding Their Place in His World View

Abstract

This article examines Winston Churchill's evolving world view through the lens of his relationship with the Jewish people, Zionism, and the establishment of the State of Israel. It contextualises his actions and rhetoric within his broader imperial and strategic priorities, highlighting the interplay between his Western-oriented values, personal aspirations, and British national interests. Churchill's stance on Zionism and Jewish immigration, while grounded in philo-Semitism, was often pragmatic, shaped by geopolitical realities and the constraints of his time.

Drawing on archival materials and key biographical accounts, the article traces Churchill's relationship with Jewish communities, from his early opposition to the Aliens Bill (1905) to his advocacy for a measured Zionist policy during his tenure as Colonial Secretary from 1921 to 1922. It also explores the complex dynamics of his wartime leadership, including his support for the Jewish Brigade and calls to address the Holocaust. Despite his consistent condemnation of antisemitism and his acknowledgment of Jewish contributions to Western civilisation, Churchill's actions were limited by the systemic and political structures in which he operated.

The article argues that Churchill's support for Zionism reflected both his romantic idealism and realpolitik, as he sought to balance imperial priorities with humanitarian concerns. By situating Jewish and Zionist issues within Churchill's broader worldview, the study sheds light on the nuanced and often contradictory nature of his leadership, revealing both the possibilities and limitations of his influence during a transformative era.

A version of this article was first delivered online to the Sir Martin Gilbert International Conference on the Second World War and the Holocaust held by the College of Western Galilee on 13 and 14 March 2024. The author was lucky enough to know Sir Martin Gilbert, whose productivity was immense. Not only was he a leading scholar of Jewish history and the Holocaust, but he was also the official biographer of Sir Winston Churchill.¹

It is not surprising, given his own Jewish background and research interests, that Martin also wrote a book specifically about *Churchill and the Jews*.² In fact, his volume is part of a small and specialist subset of the broader Churchill literature relating specifically to Churchill's relationship with the Jews, Zionism, and Israel. Sir Martin may well have been spurred to take up his pen by an earlier publication, also called *Churchill and the Jews*, written by Professor Michael Cohen, an Israeli scholar, in 1985. Cohen's book reviewed Churchill's actions towards the Jews throughout his long life and career, before concluding rather negatively that during the Jews' two periods of greatest need "during the Holocaust, and the struggle to

1 Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vols. 3–8 (London: Heinemann, 1971–1988). Sir Martin was a literary assistant to Randolph S. Churchill for volumes 1 and 2.

2 Martin Gilbert, *Churchill and the Jews* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007).

secure diplomatic recognition for the State of Israel – they found Churchill wanting”³

It is a verdict that seems to contrast with that delivered by Norman Rose eight years later, in his essay *Churchill and Zionism* which appeared in a seminal reassessment of Churchill that was edited by Robert Blake and William Roger Louis and published in 1993. Rose’s conclusion was that: ... few Englishmen have a better record on behalf of Zionism ... Churchill has still earned the right to stand in the front rank of the Gentile Zionists of his day.⁴

A similarly positive line can be found in the introduction to Sir Martin’s volume *Churchill and the Jews* published in 2007. Here, Sir Martin quoted Churchill as saying that “[t]he Jewish people know well enough that I am their friend” before going on to make a rare explicit editorial intervention of his own and stating firmly that “[t]his was true: he was both a friend in their hours of need, and a friend in deed”⁵

The same year – 2007 – saw Michael Makovsky publish his book *Churchill’s Promised Land: Zionism and Statecraft*, which argued that Churchill was a strong supporter of the Zionist movement, noting that his

more sentimental interests – including religious, racial, historical, humanitarian, familial, personal, mystical and civilizational – as well as his ideological interests drew him to it. The Zionist movement, which appeared so far-fetched early in his career and became so unpopular in England later in his career, captured his imagination and became integral to his world view.⁶

More recently, these studies have been supplemented by works on Churchill that offer slightly different perspectives on his relationship with the Middle East. Warren Dockter, in his study *Churchill and the Islamic World: Orientalism, Empire and Diplomacy in the Middle East*, published in 2015, has written on Churchill’s complex relationship with the Islamic world. Dockter reminds us that Churchill’s view of Muslims was more nuanced than is often presented, and that Churchill was acutely aware that the British Empire – which he so desperately wanted to preserve – contained the largest Muslim population in the world.⁷ While Richard Toye, in his book *Churchill’s Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made*, published in 2010, puts the focus firmly on Churchill’s realpolitik and argues that, in 1922, “Churchill supported Zionism only insofar as it was compatible with British power, and over the coming years the aspiration for Jewish statehood was to conflict increasingly with imperial rule”⁸

Interestingly, these works do not disagree about the fundamental facts of Churchill’s relationship with the Jews, Israel, and Zionism, although they choose to emphasise different aspects and so reach quite different conclusions about the extent to which he was actively – as opposed to intellectually – pro-Jewish and pro-Zionist. To understand these debates, it is necessary to quickly present the broader context of Churchill’s life and career.

3 Michael J. Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews* (London: Frank Cass, 1985), 329.

4 Norman Rose, “Churchill and Zionism”, in *Churchill: A Major New Assessment of His Life in Peace and War*, eds. Robert Blake & William Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 166.

5 Gilbert, *Churchill and the Jews*, xvi.

6 Michael Makovsky, *Churchill’s Promised Land: Zionism and Statecraft* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 8.

7 Warren Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World: Orientalism, Empire and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

8 Richard Toye, *Churchill’s Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made* (London: Macmillan, 2010), 148.

Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born into the highest echelons of late Victorian society as the grandson of the seventh Duke of Marlborough, to an American mother and a father, Lord Randolph Churchill. Winston Churchill's father was a leading Conservative politician who had enjoyed a meteoric political rise before throwing away high office with an ill/judged resignation. Winston did not excel academically at school. He seems to have had few close friends, and he was earmarked for a career in the army rather than university. The early death of Lord Randolph in 1895 acted as a catalyst, freeing Winston from his father's shadow and spurring him to prove himself to his father's ghost. Between 1895 and 1900, and the ages of twenty and twenty-five, he embarked on a series of military adventures. What set him apart from other young aristocrats seeking glory in the Empire was his pen: he wrote up his campaigns as newspaper articles and books, using them to generate not only an income but also a public profile, and to get himself elected to parliament as a Conservative member for the Borough of Oldham in 1900.

Churchill's political career was controversial from the beginning. He became a member of a small group of disruptive Conservative MPs called the "Hughligans" (named for one of their number, Lord Hugh Cecil) before breaking with the Conservative Party over opposition to the introduction of tariffs. Churchill's vocal support for free trade led to his defection to the Liberal Party in 1904. His timing was opportune as the political pendulum was clearly swinging towards the Liberals, who won the general election of 1906. This necessitated a change of constituency, and Churchill moved down the road from Oldham to represent Manchester North-West. It brought him into contact with Manchester's substantial Jewish population, and it is perhaps no coincidence that it was at this time that he won considerable Jewish support for his opposition to the Aliens Bill, which had been designed to restrict Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. His switch to the Liberals brought him into government as undersecretary of state at the Colonial Office. From 1908, Churchill enjoyed the patronage of Prime Minister Herbert Asquith and established a close working relationship with the Welsh politician David Lloyd George. Churchill entered the British Cabinet at the age of just thirty-three and served as president of the Board of Trade (1908–1910), home secretary (1910–1911), and first lord of the admiralty (1911–1915), helping to introduce reforms to working conditions, prisons, and the navy. Yet, there were always limits to Churchill's radicalism, and he remained at heart a Victorian paternalist. The tensions between his support for the liberal agenda, his imperialism, and his belief in the established order are recurring and important elements of his world view. As early as April 1897, while still serving in the army, he had written a letter to his mother in which he set out his early political philosophy. Describing himself as a "Liberal in all but name", he summarised his world view as follows:

1. Reform at home. Extension of the Franchise to every male. Universal Education. Equal Establishment of all religions. Wide measures of local self government. Eight hours. Payment of Members (on request). A progressive Income Tax ... I will vote for them all.
2. Imperialism abroad.
East of Suez Democratic reins are impossible. India must be governed on old principles.⁹

⁹ Letter from Winston Churchill to his mother, 6 April 1897, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Churchill Papers, CHAR 28/23/31-33A.

The commitment to religious freedom is noticeable, as is the contrast between the need for liberalism and reform at home and imperialism on old principles – meaning less democratic ones – overseas. Churchill inherited many of the racial, cultural, and historical views of his age and class, but he also believed in progress and tended to see the struggles of the age in terms of civilisation versus barbarism.

The First World War was a defining experience for Churchill, one that nearly destroyed his political career and which challenged many of his pre-war assumptions about British power and progress. Desperate to see the British navy play a more prominent role, he was the leading advocate in Cabinet for the disastrous attempt to force the Dardanelles Straits, besiege Constantinople, and knock Turkey out of the war. Though originally intended as a purely naval operation, events escalated when the fleet failed to force its way into the Sea of Marmara, leading to the disastrous Gallipoli landings. Defeat heaped pressure on Asquith to restructure his government and bring in the Conservative opposition. Their price for coalition was Churchill's removal from the Admiralty. Clementine Churchill feared her husband would die of grief. He served briefly as chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, an office without any real power, before resigning from government and taking up a military commission on the Western Front, where he commanded a battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers in 1916. It was at this low ebb that he also discovered a passion for painting, a preoccupation that was to become much more than a simple hobby.

The events of 1914 to 1918 changed his world view. The devastating conflict in the European theatre was aptly described by Churchill as *The World Crisis* because it fundamentally weakened the old order.¹⁰ The nation states of Europe had failed to maintain the balance of power and were left in ruins. The new world in the form of the United States had been seen as coming to the rescue of Britain and her allies. The dynamic of Empire had been altered: Britain was left struggling to meet the cost of direct rule in her colonies, while the Dominions had gained in independence. The naval race with Germany in the years leading up to 1914, in which Churchill had played a key role as First Lord of the Admiralty, had undermined Britain's naval supremacy. The arrival of the Dreadnought, the submarine, the aeroplane, and the move from coal to oil, had created a new playing field on which British dominance could no longer be guaranteed. Revolution had brought the Bolshevik communists to power in Russia, while Russian and British weakness in the Pacific had strengthened the hand of Japan. Churchill's post-war approach to the Middle East was one that was governed by British weakness, not strength.

By 1918, Churchill was back in government as minister for munitions (1917–1919) and then as secretary of state for war and air (1919–1921) and secretary of state for the colonies (1921–1922). It was a period that saw him involved in dealing with the aftermath of the global conflict, in Ireland, in the Middle East, and in his visceral response to the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. He chaired the Cairo Conference which created the boundaries of modern-day Iraq and Trans-Jordan and which advocated a policy of managed Jewish immigration into the British mandate of Palestine, based on the principle of the country's economic capacity to absorb increased numbers. The defeat of Lloyd George's coalition government in 1922, after an election campaign during which Churchill was struck down by illness, famously left Churchill "without an office, without a seat, without a party, and without an appendix".¹¹

¹⁰ Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 6 vols. (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1923–1931).

¹¹ Winston Churchill, "Election Memories", in *Thoughts and Adventures* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1932), 213.

It took him just over two years to get back into parliament and, shortly thereafter, in response to the rise of socialism at home and communism abroad, he rejoined the Conservative Party. To Churchill's surprise, he was amply rewarded for this second defection when Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin made him chancellor of the exchequer. Churchill's time in that office between 1924 and 1929 is often dismissed as a failure, with his decision to return the country to the gold standard widely seen as contributing to the subsequent Great Depression. The beginning of the 1930s saw him relegated to the Conservative backbenches and the political wilderness, out of office and campaigning against the Conservative-dominated governments of Baldwin and then Neville Chamberlain, initially opposing greater independence for India, and later promoting British rearmament and condemning the appeasement of Hitler's Germany. To many, he now seemed a warmonger, a reactionary, and a dinosaur, yet as the risk of a new war grew, so did his reputation – fuelled by his oratory and writings.

It was the outbreak of war that brought Churchill back to the political front rank, returning to the office of first lord of the admiralty that he had held at the commencement of the First World War. Then came his premiership. Churchill was not elected prime minister. He led a national coalition government for five years. It was during these years, and especially in 1940 and 1941, that his reputation as the "greatest Briton" was formed. He is widely credited with leading from the front and is often praised and sometimes criticised for his bellicosity. The Anglo-American alliance was certainly central to his thinking and world view, but he also had to manage the relationships with the Soviet Union, the Empire, and other allies. He was often fighting from a position of weakness, not strength. The later stages of the war found both Britain and Churchill struggling to cope with their declining world role. Churchill warned of the dangers of Soviet expansionism in southern and eastern Europe but failed to recognise the swinging political pendulum on the domestic front.

The Conservative Party was comprehensively defeated in the 1945 general election, but Churchill refused to retire and stayed on as leader of the opposition. He wrote and published his multi-volume war memoirs and embarked on new political campaigns. In the face of Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and the developing Cold War, he sought to maintain and strengthen the alliance with the United States while also promoting greater unity between the countries of Western Europe.

Churchill had stated in 1942 that he had not become the king's first minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. However, out of power from 1945, he could only watch as India was partitioned and the Labour government abandoned the mandate in Palestine.¹² What is uncertain is whether, had he still been in office, he would have been able to ensure that events turned out differently. His response to the Cold War was to look to create bulwarks against Soviet expansionism by backing the American alliance, the reconciliation of Western Europe, and the creation of Israel. Back in 10 Downing Street as elected prime minister between 1951 and 1955, Churchill's room for manoeuvre on the domestic and international fronts was limited, while his health was failing. His last great political campaign was an attempt to seek a summit meeting with the Soviets, in which he was ultimately frustrated by President Eisenhower. The failure of his remaining political ambitions was obscured by his international celebrity. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and made a Knight of the Garter by Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

¹² Robert Rhodes James, *Winston Churchill: His Complete Speeches*, vol. 6 (New York: Chelsea House, 1974), 6695.

On leaving office in 1955, Churchill dedicated himself to finishing and publishing his last multi-volume work, a *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*.¹³ He did not intervene publicly in politics but remained a major international figure. After his death on 24 January 1965, seventy years to the day after the death of his father, he was given a state funeral and was buried in Bladon churchyard, within sight of his birthplace at Blenheim Palace.

That has been a gallop through Churchill's life – one which has condensed the eight volumes and twenty-three companion volumes of his official biography into just a few lines. Inevitably, it has not been comprehensive but, hopefully, in giving the reader the broad sweep of Churchill's long and often controversial life, it has highlighted the fact that the Jews and Israel were never the sole and rarely the main focus of Churchill's concerns.

Churchill had a long political career. If there is a common strand influencing and shaping his thoughts and actions, then it surely sits at the intersection between his Western world view, British national interests, and his personal aspirations and ambitions. To a man who believed in destiny and felt himself a “glow-worm”, these three often seemed the same thing, but they were also always changing.¹⁴ There were key moments when Jewish concerns were centre stage, such as: Churchill's opposition to the Aliens Bill of 1905 which sought to restrict Jewish immigration to Britain; his defence of the Balfour Declaration during his visit to Palestine in 1921; or his opposition to the Government White Paper of 1939 which sought to restrict Jewish immigration to Palestine. In general terms, however, the Jews and Israel were part of a bigger picture – a world view – in which Churchill's level of interest and support for the Jews and Zionism waxed and waned according to their alignment with his perception of the broader interests of Britain and her empire, and the role they might play in supporting or opposing threats from communism and fascism.

I think there is also a danger of the conflation of different questions. Was Churchill philo-Semitic? If so, is that the same thing as being actively pro-Jewish? If so, is that the same thing as supporting Zionism, and were their differences between his views and his actions? What was Churchill actually able to achieve?

The consensus in the existing literature is that Churchill was philo-Semitic and not antisemitic. There is no doubt that he was greatly influenced by his father's views, and his father was a great admirer of Benjamin Disraeli. Lord and Lady Randolph Churchill played a pivotal role in the foundation of the Primrose League (named for Disraeli's favourite flower). Lord Randolph's friends also included prominent figures like Nathaniel Rothschild and Ernest Cassel, and Churchill deliberately (and perhaps not surprisingly) maintained and cultivated these friendships after his father's death. As a young MP in Manchester, he became friendly with Chaim Weizmann. From the end of the First World War, he counted Bernard Baruch as a close friend. These personal contacts should not be underestimated. They ensured that he had informal access to the views of the Jewish community and was exposed to Jewish viewpoints and interests, including Zionism. The combination of Jewish support for him and his family, the philanthropic Jewish community spirit that he first observed in Manchester, and his admiration for Jewish hard work, entrepreneurship, and self-sufficiency, predisposed him towards a generally pro-Jewish outlook. But his personal experiences also have to be set within the framework of his views on racial and cultural hierarchies.

13 Winston Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, 4 vols. (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd, 1956–1958).

14 Violet Bonham Carter, *Winston Churchill as I Knew Him* (London: Eyre, Spottiswoode & Collins, 1965), 16.

Churchill was not particularly religious himself, but he believed in the freedom of religious worship, that Western civilisation was founded on a system of Judeo-Christian ethics, and that monotheism had marked a great leap forward for humankind. As result, the Jewish people ranked very high in this personal pantheon of races. In February 1920, he wrote in an article called “Zionism versus Bolshevism” that:

We owe to the Jews in the Christian revelation a system of ethics which, even if it were entirely separated from the supernatural, would be incomparably the most precious possession of mankind, worth in fact the fruits of all other wisdom and learning put together.¹⁵

You certainly do not find Churchill using antisemitic language in public or in private. This did not mean that he was not capable of stereotyping. His writings often veer towards characterising the Jews collectively as being enterprising, different, and separate, and in the same article from 1920 he writes: “In a people of peculiar genius like the Jews, contrasts are more vivid, the extremes are more widely separated, the resulting consequences are more decisive.”¹⁶

In 2007, the academic Richard Toye caused a controversy in the press when he publicised an unpublished newspaper article from 1937, found in the Churchill Papers collection, entitled “How the Jews Can Combat Persecution”. The text discussed the danger of separatism and urged Jews towards greater assimilation. In fact, the article had been written for Churchill by a literary assistant and was never published, but it had been worked up to his design. Though the words were not his, the article reflected a consistent strand in Churchill’s thinking – namely, his support for those Jews who embraced British liberal society, but not for those who challenged it.¹⁷

When he wrote his 1920 article, Churchill was acutely aware that many of the communist revolutionary leaders were Jewish. In it, he had therefore deliberately sought to draw a distinction between national Jews who were loyal to Britain and international Jews, by which he meant communists, who were not, writing that:

[i]t may well be that the same astounding race may at the present time be in the actual process of producing another system of morals and philosophy, as malevolent as Christianity was benevolent ...

His use of dramatic language was characteristic and deliberate, because it allowed him to highlight his solution, which was support for Zionism. In his words, “[t]he struggle which is now beginning between the Zionist and Bolshevik Jews is little less than a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people”, and he described a “Jewish national centre in Palestine” as “not only a refuge from the unhappy lands of Central Europe”, but also as a symbol of “Jewish unity and the temple of Jewish glory”.¹⁸

Makovsky is surely right to state that Zionism appealed to Churchill’s romanticism, the idea of the exile’s return after centuries of persecution. Yet, Churchill also embraced it in the 1920s as an alternative ideal to communism for poorer Jews displaced from central Europe, and he urged the wealthier national Jews of the Western

15 Typescript for article by Winston Churchill, “Zionism versus Bolshevism”, 8 February 1920, CAC, Churchill Papers, CHAR 8/36/84.

16 Churchill, “Zionism versus Bolshevism”, CAC, Churchill Papers, CHAR 8/36/85.

17 Annotated draft and typescript for article by Winston Churchill, “How the Jews can combat persecution”, 1937. CAC, Churchill Papers, CHAR 8/573/3-32. See also University of Cambridge, “Uncovered: The ‘Lost’ Paper Churchill Kept from Publication”, University of Cambridge, 8 March 2007, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/uncovered-the-lost-paper-churchill-kept-from-publication>, and Martin Gilbert, “Myth and Reality – What Did Churchill Really Think About the Jews?”, International Churchill Society, 29 June 2013, <https://winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour/finest-hour-135/myth-and-reality-what-did-churchill-really-think-about-the-jews/>.

18 Churchill, “Zionism versus Bolshevism”, CAC, Churchill Papers, CHAR 8/36/90-91.

nations to support it. Of course, there was also a strong element of realpolitik, of British Imperial self-interest, because Britain had taken on the League of Nations mandate for Palestine. As secretary of state for war in 1919 and 1921, and then for the colonies from 1921 to 1922, Churchill knew that Britain had little money for the defence and development of its Middle Eastern territories. He was charged with cutting costs and withdrawing the troops. Honouring the Balfour Declaration by creating a Jewish national presence within Palestine allowed Churchill to use Jewish money and Jewish settlers to bring investment and (as he hoped, stability) to the region. It was also in keeping with his view of promoting civilisation.

On 31 March 1921, Churchill was at Government House in Jerusalem, where he told a Jewish delegation:

I am convinced that the Zionist cause will bring good to the whole world, and will bring welfare and advancement to the Arabs of this country. The success of Zionism will depend upon the good it will bestow upon the whole country. The Arabs have expressed alarm at the Bolshevist character of some of the Jewish immigrants. Whatever we believe of this, your duty is to dispel these fears by a good and friendly attitude, and propagate peace between all. You must use patience and prudence, and allay alarm.¹⁹

So, was Churchill pro-Jewish? He was certainly, throughout his life, a consistent opponent of the persecution of the Jews, whether in Russia, central Europe, or Nazi Germany (and he also wrote critically of the persecution of the Jews in British history), but this did not mean he supported all shades of Jewish opinion. He supported those Jews who fitted with his world view – who supported the development of Western liberal ideals. His support for Zionism was similarly caveated. Prior to the Second World War, he did not support the whole of Palestine becoming a Jewish homeland. In 1920, he envisaged a Jewish national centre of some three to four million people within the mandate. In his subsequent 1922 White Paper, he advocated a Jewish homeland with immigration set at a level sustainable by the local economy. In 1939, he resisted Chamberlain's attempts to further reduce Jewish immigration but, on becoming prime minister, he still envisaged a controlled development and did not seek to lift all restrictions. His advocacy of patience and slow change was always going to run into opposition from frustrated Jewish and Zionist groups. There were certainly times between 1920 and 1948 (most notably the assassination of Lord Moyne, the British secretary of state in the Middle East, in November 1944) when Arab and Jewish violence led him to consider abandoning Palestine altogether, but overall you can see him consistently supporting a measured Zionist policy – often in the face of opposition from strong pro-Arab elements within Palestine and the British Foreign Office.

Which brings me to my final point. Could Churchill have done more to help the Jews during the Second World War, and particularly after 1942 and the beginning of the Holocaust? The evidence here has been pored over by many scholars, and the basic facts are known. Churchill did make some significant interventions to help the Jews. He wanted to give them the chance to fight back against the Germans and ultimately achieved the creation of the Jewish Brigade, but not until 1944. He overturned the decision to deport from Palestine the survivors of the *Patria* disaster. He consistently wrote and spoke out against persecution and supported the Allied Declaration of December 1942 condemning the Holocaust, and in private he insisted that those responsible be hunted down after the war. He unsuccessfully urged Stalin to use

¹⁹ Rhodes James, *Winston Churchill*, vol. 3, 3085.

Soviet forces to relieve the slaughter in the Warsaw ghetto, and he gave his personal backing to calls to bomb the railway lines to Auschwitz, even though this operation was subsequently not carried out.²⁰

In doing more, he was constrained. First, by the system he was working within. Churchill's public profile and iconic status is now such that we tend to think of him as an all-powerful leader. That is partly due to the image that he was able to project, but the reality was that he was working within a coalition structure and within an enormous bureaucracy. When he became prime minister in May 1940, his war cabinet initially consisted of his predecessor, Neville Chamberlain, his main rival within the Conservative Party, Lord Halifax, and the leaders of a Labour opposition party that he had spent much of the 1930s attacking. While the new wartime structures gave Churchill more power than his immediate predecessor, he was still heavily constrained: he was dependent on the support of his war cabinet and ultimately of parliament for the continuation of his coalition, and reliant on others to run the domestic and economic aspects of the war while he focussed on the high-level political and military issues.²¹ The British and imperial state was a huge bureaucracy. General John Kennedy, who became assistant chief of the imperial general staff, described it as "essentially a government of committees ... Winston is of course the dominating personality ... Yet Winston's views do not often prevail if they are contrary to the general trend of opinion among the service staffs".²² Churchill was presiding over a complex web of personalities, parties, departments, committees, and interests. His success in navigating and influencing them was constantly shifting and his power inevitably waxed and waned as the war progressed. With regard to Palestine, his pro-Jewish views put him at odds with much of the British military and civilian establishment and with large elements of the Foreign Office. He could not make policy unilaterally, though he could bring considerable pressure to bear.

But his immediate priorities were to mount a successful defence of Britain and the Empire. Churchill's achievement in 1940 and 1941 was to keep alive the hope of the liberation of Europe, but the focus was on national and imperial survival, with British forces stretched to the limit. Defeated in Norway, France, Greece, and then in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Burma, it was not until 1942 – with the Russians advancing on the Eastern Front and the Americans arriving in the European theatre after Pearl Harbor – that the Allies could think of taking the offensive. Even then, it was clear that it was going to take time to build up, train, and battle harden the forces for an invasion of continental Europe. In the second half of the war, Churchill's own health was failing – he came close to death in North Africa in late 1943 – and the war was being increasingly led from Moscow and Washington. The problems of the post-war settlement were looming and divisions were emerging between the "Big Three", with Stalin wanting a buffer in eastern Europe, Roosevelt keen to establish the new United Nations organisation, and Churchill desperate not to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. In a world of barbarity, the quickest way to save civilisation was to end the war, but British weakness remained (if not intensified). By 1946, Churchill – now out of office – was left still pondering how the pledge to deliver a Jewish homeland could be realised. In an unsent passage to his successor, the Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee, he wondered whether the

20 For details of Churchill's actions, see Gilbert, *Churchill and the Jews*, Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews*.

21 See Allen Packwood, *How Churchill Waged War: The Most Challenging Decisions of the Second World War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2018), 11–20.

22 Cited in Michael Hastings, *Finest Years: Churchill as Warlord 1940–1945* (London: Harper Press, 2009), xx.

only solutions were to ask the Americans to share the British burden in Palestine or to abandon the mandate.²³

Churchill's world view centred around Britain and the Empire and around preserving the British position on the world stage. In 1930, he wrote an article called "The United States of Europe". In it, he argued that Britain was not just a European power. Britain derived its unique position and power in the world from its global role and from sitting at the intersection of the British Empire and the Commonwealth, Europe, and the wider English-speaking world, by which he increasingly came to mean the United States.²⁴ The image of Britain being at the focal point of these three spheres of influence was one he would return to repeatedly. But those circles changed in size over time. In the world prior to 1914, the Empire had been dominant. By 1945, his world view was now more pessimistic: Britain and her Empire were diminished, Europe was in ruins, half dominated by the Soviet Union, and hope lay increasingly with the United States. Where did the Jews fit within this conception? Initially, they had been a proxy for a declining empire – a way of bolstering the British presence and advancing Western civilisation and interests in the Middle East. But by 1945, they were needed as a bulwark against the Soviet Union, while the resolution of the Jewish position in Palestine was passing to others – to the United States and to the Jews themselves. Churchill would continue to support the process and to claim some of the credit for it.

23 Draft of letter from Churchill to Clement Attlee, 1 May 1946, CAC, Churchill Papers, Churchill Papers, CHUR 2/42/54-56.

24 Winston Churchill, "The United States of Europe", *Saturday Evening Post*, 15 February 1930, CAC, Churchill Papers, CHAR 8/591/47, reproduced in *The Collected Essays of Winston Churchill, vol. 2: Churchill and Politics*, ed. Michael Wolff (London: Library of Imperial History, 1976), 176–186.

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The Churchill Archives Centre is located on the grounds of Churchill College, and it is home to the papers of Sir Winston Churchill, Baroness Thatcher, Sir John Major, and over six hundred of their contemporaries: politicians, diplomats, civil servants, military leaders, and scientists of the modern era. It is still collecting. Allen is responsible for the overall management of the team and collections.

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Quotation: Allen Packwood, Churchill, Israel and the Jews. Understanding Their Place in His World View, in S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON. 12 (2025) 1, 13–24.

https://doi.org/10.23777/sn.0125/art_apac01

Special Issue in Tribute to Sir Martin Gilbert

S:I.M.O.N.– Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON. is the semi-annual open access e-journal of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) in English and German.

ISSN 2408-9192 | 12 (2025) 1 | <https://doi.org/10.23777/sn.0125>

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