of the island, encapsulated in the dramatic slogan "Crete or Death" and eventually manifesting as advocacy for a total economic boycott of Greece and, more to the point, Greek Ottomans across the empire. This emotive, sensual, and (perhaps) conceptually vague rhetoric and discourse likewise can be understood as having emanated from an experience of civil war that ended in a profound feeling of betrayal.

All told, *Island and Empire* is a remarkable book: one that draws on multiple archives in several languages to tell a particular local story clearly and well, while also successfully shedding light on much bigger and more sweeping questions and suggesting a major conceptual reconfiguration of late Ottoman conflict. Peçe's account of mass violence in late Ottoman Crete is itself a significant contribution to a scholarship that has until recently given far too much credence to essentially European imperial narratives about Ottoman and Balkan sectarianisms as an explanation for the violence of the late nineteenth century in the Eastern Mediterranean. His recategorization of this conflict as a civil war is convincing and meaningful, and his conjoined account of the political trajectories of both those who left and those who remained is a remarkably effective tactic for explaining the trajectories of late Ottoman imperial and unionist politics and for thinking more broadly about refugee agency and the politics of displacement.

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Mahmoud Muhareb
The Jewish Agency and Syria during the Arab Revolt in Palestine Secret Meetings and Negotiations

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In his book about the Jewish Agency's clandestine diplomacy and influence campaign in Syria during the late 1930s, Mahmoud Muhareb argues that the Jewish Agency intended to weaken the Arab revolt by cutting off its political and material support. Moreover, he argues that the Jewish Agency intended to exploit fractures in Syria's independence movement so to harm their ties to Palestine and to foster genuine agreements based on their common ground. Such an agreement would exclude Palestinian representation or stated interests, if the Jewish Agency had its way.

The book situates itself among extant research that has illuminated the Jewish Agency's relations with elites in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, reinforcing arguments by Ilan Pappé and Avi Shlaim about the Zionist strategy to use formal relations with Arab states as part of a divide-and-conquer strategy, which would weaken the Palestinian national movement and fracture Arab unity. Muhareb states that the book challenges the prevailing narratives that there was no contact between the Agency and Syrian leaders or that such contact sought formal peace deals with Arab states. It documents especially important contact with leading nationalist parties of Syria and the Jabal al-Druze.

The book largely achieves its stated goals. Its convincing qualities come from the details. So, the meticulously documented contacts with Syrian politicians, with opposition leaders, and discussions about these contacts certainly illuminate the Jewish Agency's approach toward Syria during the revolt. In my own view, this is part of a much broader pattern in which the Jewish Agency and its predecessors sought Arab consent for Zionist colonization through formal ties with elites, beginning with the Faysal-Weizmann meetings.[1] I am less convinced by the portrayal of a Zionist strategy in an era where, at least in my own reading of the evidence, we observe much more improvisation than forethought. The arguments about Syria need to be put into a broader perspective. Insofar as the Jewish Agency pursued any strategy during the Palestinian revolt, it seems to me to be focused squarely on supporting the British army and air force. This was underpinned by an assumption that such cooperation would translate into political reward. The partition proposals that followed the publication of the 1937 Royal Commission report spurred an even greater motivation by the Jewish Agency to include Arab opposition parties in Palestine (under the Nashashibis) and in Syria under Shahbandar. It is in this context that Muhareb's book produces important details about the Jewish Agency's tactics. Hence, the book is an important resource to scholars of the Mandate, the revolt, and of information warfare.

1. Michael J. Cohen, "Colonial Intrigue in the Middle East: The Faysal—[Lawrence]—Weizmann Agreement, January 1919," in *The British Mandate in Palestine* (Routledge, 2020); Clive Jones, "Influence without Power? Britain, the Jewish Agency and Intelligence Collaboration, 1939–45," in *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies*, ed. Clive Jones and Tore T. Petersen (Oxford University Press, 2013), 31–48; Yoav Alon, Clive Jones, and Tore T. Petersen, eds., "Friends Indeed or Accomplices in Need? The Jewish Agency, Emir Abdullah, and the Shaykhs of Transjordan, 1922–39," in *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Steven Wagner, "Intelligence and the Origins of the British Middle East," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43, no. 4 (August 8, 2015): 721–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2015.1083231.

The book offers important new knowledge about these contacts and about the Jewish Agency's campaigns in Syria, but it would be an exaggeration to say that these issues are previously unexplored or that they challenge an existing Israeli narrative. Muhareb has not referenced where this false narrative exists in the literature at all or which texts have claimed that the purpose of Jewish Agency contacts with Arab leaders was peace with the Arab states (1–2). Yet, despite these assertions, Muhareb presents evidence that offers a more complex point of view: that the Agency either naively sought common ground for future partnership or even to support Britain's efforts to destroy the revolt. So while it paves new ground, I am not so sure the book is as much of a revisionist intervention as it is original in its own right. Its originality results from a close examination of Jewish Agency contacts and propaganda campaigns in Syria, in the context of the revolt. Indeed, most scholars of the revolt have focused on maneuvers, military cooperation, and in my own case, intelligence. Few have framed the revolt or counter-revolt as propaganda campaigns or have paid attention to this element.

The research grounding this study makes ample use of Hebrew, Arabic, and English studies on related topics. The close examination of Hebrew records against the Arabic sources makes for a particularly effective case. The primary research focuses on the records of the Jewish Agency's Political Department (JAPD) and its predecessor, the "Joint Bureau for Arab Affairs." These were its diplomatic and intelligence services. There is also admirable weaving of Arab perspectives through Arabic language memoirs and diaries. These are augmented by similar Hebrew records. British records are noticeably absent from the study. Although the British are not central to Muhareb's story, they are certainly central to the JAPD's aims, activity, and capability.

Unfortunately, the secondary research behind this book has not turned over every stone, at least not in English. Resultantly, the book lacks a framework for its examination of intelligence concepts and records. Moreover, reference to works on the revolt from its military, intelligence, and diplomatic dimensions would have strengthened the book's argument.[2] The main

2. To name a few, Steven B. Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth: Secret Intelligence and British Rule in Palestine* (Cornell University Press, 2019); Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial* (University of California Press, 2007); Weldon Matthews, *Confronting an Empire, Constructing a Nation: Arab Nationalists and Popular Politics in Mandate Palestine* (I. B. Tauris, 2006); Matthew Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine: The British Army, the Colonial State, and the Arab Revolt, 1936–1939* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); Charles W. Anderson, "From Petition to Confrontation: The Palestinian National Movement and the Rise of Mass Politics, 1929–1939" (PhD Dissertation, New

weakness of this book's arguments is that they are not situated in the bulk of the English scholarship on the revolt and surrounding events. The various diplomatic overtures and propaganda campaigns discussed in the book are presented in isolation from events in the field and in higher Anglo-Arab diplomacy. The chapter on Jewish Agency contact with the Druze does not address Laila Parson's book on the topic, although it devotes a chapter to this period.[3] Most surprisingly, the first and most consequential formal Zionist-Syrian meeting, between David Ben-Gurion and Shakib Arslan in 1934, is not even mentioned.[4] Yet it sets the tone for the following period and the JAPD's efforts to win over Syrian parties. It provides a competing hypothesis for the Jewish Agency's motives: naivete. Then Ben-Gurion believed that Arab nationalist parties could be persuaded to accept Zionist colonization. The contacts during the revolt could easily be seen in the same light.

Examined alongside the extant research that it neglects, the book's significant and original contribution becomes more obvious: we have a clear effort by the Jewish Agency to develop formal ties with Syrian politicians. At the same time, the Jewish Agency stopped trying to win over the National Bloc in Syria and focused on its opposition, while nearly simultaneously it launched a semi-covert press campaign in Syria to win over elites. These developments illuminate the impact of partition on the Jewish Agency's planning for the future. Muhareb discusses this only in reference to the transfer scheme.[5] Yet the missing context matters too: Jewish Agency intelligence received dire indicators at the time about the direction of the revolt, which could hamper partition. They also missed indicators about how European affairs would impact British policy, even though this was central to Palestinian and Syrian strategy.[6] Seen in these contexts, the Jewish Agency's limited capabilities come into perspective. So too, their Syrian ambitions seem to relate to the revolt more than population transfer. Perhaps, rather than a divide-and-conquer strategy of colonization, the Jewish Agency's Syrian campaigns sought to support Britain's divide-and-conquer approach to breaking the revolt.[7]

York University, 2013); Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (University of Arkansas Press, 2003).

3. Laila Parsons, *The Druze between Palestine and Israel 1947–49* (Springer, 2000), chap. 1.
4. Neil Caplan, *Futile Diplomacy, Volume 2: Arab-Zionist Negotiations and the End of the Mandate* (Routledge, 2015), 5–8, and document #5 in appendix.
5. Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882–1948* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).
6. Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth*, chaps. 7–9.
7. Matthew Hughes, "Palestinian Collaboration with the British: The Peace Bands and the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–9," *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 2 (2016): 291–315.

Muhareb offers a fascinating and original portrait of the common ground initially sought by the Syrian National Bloc and the Jewish Agency in their first discussions. They believed they needed each other. The former believed the latter could support their efforts to persuade the French government about Syrian independence. Likewise, the Jewish Agency thought the National Bloc could restrict rebel activity. Yet neither proved true. The revolt caused fissures in Syria and may have delayed France's ratification of its 1936 treaty (63, 88–89).

The book does not examine the extent to which Syria became a new base for the Palestinian revolt or what the Jewish Agency (or any other party) sought to do about that besides publish articles and talk to opposition leaders. Framing these activities as part of information warfare would enhance our understanding of the tactic, its limits, and the Jewish Agency's expectations. For example, it is not clear whether or why the Jewish Agency's press campaigns seem to vary between covert and overt contact and press communication. The answer could help illuminate their intentions. Disguising the origins of propaganda was often thought to enhance its effect.[8] Furthermore, where do competing campaigns by Britain and Italy fit into this picture? The existing scholarship shows, in fact, that Arabic newspapers were saturated with 'curated' content. Britain and Italy drove this competition but were not the only actors.[9] Muhareb's book has opened the door to further research on both the Jewish Agency's place in this competition but also the agendas of Syrian and Palestinian newspaper editors and proprietors.

The book could have done more to engage with intelligence scholarship. It would have benefited from some framing key concepts of intelligence. What

8. A key framework for understanding information operations is via "implausible deniability," per Rory Cormac, "Disruption and Deniable Interventionism: Explaining the Appeal of Covert Action and Special Forces in Contemporary British Policy," *International Relations* 31, no. 2 (2017): 169–91, https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117816659532; Rory Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny: Spies, Special Forces, and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2018).
9. Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933–40* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Massimiliano Fiore, *Anglo-Italian Relations in the Middle East, 1922–1940* (Ashgate, 2010); This area of research continues to grow. See Steven Wagner, "Espionage and the 1935 Press War in Palestine: Revisiting Factionalism, Forgeries and Fake News*," *The English Historical Review* 138, no. 592 (June 1, 2023): 528–65, https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/cead105; Jessi A. J. Gilchrist, " Sharing Empire: Great Britain, Fascist Italy, and (Anti-) Colonial Intelligence Networks in the Palestine Mandate, 1933–1940," *Intelligence and National Security* 38, no. 3 (April 16, 2023): 362–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2022.2104507.

did the JAPD believe it was doing? What were its means, who were its personnel, and what was their understanding of their achievements or failures? The book had the potential to help us understand why intelligence officers were handling clandestine diplomacy and influence campaigns. Was this their own initiative or part of Ben Gurion's strategy? Their goals certainly seem to align with Ben Gurion's during his 1934 meeting with Shakib Arslan.[10]

The book seems to take for granted that any intelligence record is a statement of an erstwhile secret fact. Cross-referencing these JAPD records against other similar evidence would mitigate this impression. This is a rare case where the British and Zionist evidence on the same topics are both available—their differences add meaningfully to our understanding of the purpose and effect of Zionist information campaigns.[11]

In another small section (104–5), Muhareb discusses a Jewish Agency plan to finance a sabotage campaign in Syria and Lebanon (presumably targeting the Palestinian revolt) and the assassination of National Bloc leader, Shukri al-Quwatli. Here is another area where further research into intelligence would have strengthened this work. At this time, assassination was rare. Although there are a number of cases of Jews assassinating Jews, the Jewish Agency and its militia, the Haganah, were each reluctant to target Arabs.[12] Muhareb describes a plot that fits neatly into the divide-and-conquer tactics described by myself and Mattthew Hughes, including exploiting divisions in the rebel ranks to encourage defectors and a reliance upon British finance.[13] Yet it is presented as a serious attempt by the Jewish Agency writ large to murder its erstwhile negotiating partner. Mischaracterizing a plan that never gained traction as an "attempt" to assassinate, Muhareb's analysis does not explore other possibilities. Muhareb concludes (105) that the plan was not implemented because the local gang could not do it or because the Jewish Agency could not pay. A better description of what actually happened, based on further research, would certainly paint a clearer, more accurate picture of these people and their work. The moment may have been important, but it is undoubtedly inconsistent with the JAPD's normal activity. While I believe Muhareb's evidence that such discussions took place, I see no reason to think they were anything more than discussions.

10. Caplan, *Futile Diplomacy, Volume 2*, 6–7.
11. These are detailed in my own work, mainly *Statecraft by Stealth.*
12. Steven Wagner, *Assassination and Information Operations in Palestine, 1917–48* (Georgetown University Press, 2025), http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/handle/2438/30024.
13. Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth*, chap. 8; Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine*, chaps. 7–8.

The only intelligence literature covered in depth by Muhareb is Yoav Gelber's semi-official, two-volume history of the Yishuv's intelligence services, *Shorshei Ha-Chavatzelet.* It serves as a point of reference to contextualize the growth of the Jewish Agency's intelligence offices and to check against certain basic facts. This coverage exists only in the endnotes. Muhareb relies on Gelber to show who organized these press campaigns but not where this fit into the normal function of the Jewish Agency's intelligence arm. His examination of the influence campaign's budgetary constraints is certainly a meaningful sign that there was more to the JAPD's work than security, espionage, and cooperation with Britain. Muhareb has left me craving more discussion about this area.

Readers are also left wondering whether any of this activity mattered. Muhareb's focus on a set of discrete issues comes at the cost of the big picture. That is, did it impact partition, the retreat from partition, or the failure of the revolt? The answers are not clear. Importantly, nobody in the Jewish Agency, or even the Syrian opposition, realized that it would be impossible to impose solutions. They seem to have shared an assumption that Britain and France would support their ambitions if they could find common ground. Obviously, they failed. Muhareb reveals signs of this eventual outcome, for example, we see a clear example of the Jewish Agency anticipating that Britain will exclude it from its policymaking process (59). Eliyahu Epstein, an intelligence hand, attempts to convince the Syrian government to include the Jewish Agency in a proposed intervention between the Palestinian rebels and the British government. Clearly, Epstein understood and anticipated an imminent danger that was developing, since previous interventions by Abdallah and Ibn Saʿud also excluded Zionists. Yet this danger to Zionism materialized by 1939 at the palace of St. James. Epstein's observation is a substantial finding, which illustrates the JAPD's motives for undertaking secret diplomacy and influence campaigns. Yet Muhareb never links JAPD intelligence and propaganda work to its overarching effort to influence a negotiated outcome to the revolt and the partition plan. Again, "transfer" may not have been the only thing on Epstein or others' minds at the time.

The book offers important original knowledge about the Jewish Agency's approach to influence and the resources that it invested in the endeavor. The book also reveals the bureaucratic limitations to what the Jewish Agency could achieve through all these contacts. Its effort was surprisingly substantial. I am left wondering about the extent to which these funds were shared with or by Britain. The book reveals much about what the Jewish Agency thought it could achieve through these contacts but not what they actually accomplished. It does offer an original, if partial picture of their motivations.

One of the greatest strengths of the book, which obliges all students and scholars of the Mandate and revolt to consult in their research, is the ample document selection in the appendix. This is an incredible resource for English-language studies of this topic and will be referenced for generations to come. These document the most convincing elements of the book: that the Jewish Agency undertook its Syrian campaigns as part of a larger divide-and-conquer strategy during the revolt and partition discussions. It offers important new knowledge about Zionist clandestine diplomacy in Syria and its covert and overt attempts to influence elite opinion. Importantly, it uses Arabic evidence to show how ineffectual these campaigns were. This fresh, empirical and multilingual study is sure to nourish researchers of the Mandate for many years to come.

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Hans-Lukas Kieser
Turkey's Violent Formation: New Social Contracts at the End of the Ottoman Empire

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In his seminal work, *The Age of Extremes*, Eric Hobsbawm depicts the period between 1914 and 1991 as a historical context in which a series of historical actions characterized by political and ideological extremes took place. These events were marked by acts of violence on political, economic, ethnic, and cultural grounds. With the two great World Wars, the rise of Bolshevism, Fascism, Stalinism, and Nazism and the devastation these totalitarian ideologies wreaked on humanity, as well as the Cold War era and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, the most important parameter that remained unchanged was political violence and its prevalence. Moreover, political violence perpetuated itself by taking on different forms. This process was also reflected in the Ottoman and Turkish examples.

The methodological problems posed by the possibility of associating countless issues ranging from ethnic conflicts and genocides to state coercion—from military interventions to revolutionary forms of violence—with this phenomenon are further complicated by the fact that academics are susceptible to subjectivism when examining the object of inquiry in