

Charters, David A. *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.

As David Charters rightly points out, Palestine was one of the British army's forgotten wars. Until the middle of the 1980s British staff promotion examinations (PQS2) concentrated on the campaign in Malaya. Palestine would have been a much better subject of study for an army fighting in Northern Ireland, particularly had Dr. Charters' lucid and well-researched book then been available. Not least of the advantages of studying Palestine was that it was a defeat and there is always much more to be learnt from defeat than from victory. However, the army and the service journals had shut their minds to Palestine and to much of the experience in Cyprus and Aden as well. Had they not done so, they would have had to acknowledge the enormous difficulties of fighting an insurgency which has the fervent support of the greater part of a people.

Charters is rightly critical of many of the British army's tactics in Palestine. The fact is that it was an exhausted force, tailored for fighting Germans in the desert. Its historic methods for dealing with unrest in the Empire were largely irrelevant when handling Jews in Tel Aviv and elsewhere. It did not understand the nature of the war, it did not develop the intelligence apparatus necessary and its efforts were not properly coordinated with politics and diplomacy. Thus Charters argues that the army lacked the skill and perseverance to win. Nevertheless, he also makes the point that it was the economic and political conditions, in which Britain found itself in 1947, that determined the timing of the withdrawal. But, even if Britain's economy had been healthy, even if the US had not been critical of Britain's policies in Palestine and even if the army had learnt all that there was to be learnt about insurgency, the war could not have been won.

The conventional wisdom developed subsequently in Malaya and elsewhere was that insurgencies could be defeated when the mass of the people were won over and separated either physically or psychologically from the active guerrillas. But that was just what was impossible in Palestine. Against the background of the holocaust, no Jew would ever be satisfied with anything less than the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Nothing less would offer them the protection they yearned for after so many centuries in exile. No "hearts and minds" techniques were going to win them over. British propaganda was poor, as Charters points out, and better propaganda might have helped the British case outside Palestine. The army was there in the perfectly respectable role of maintaining peace between Arabs and Jews. But even the world's most brilliant propagandist could not win over the Jewish settlers. Thus very few were willing to co-operate with British intelligence, whilst Jews in the British armed forces leaked information to the "enemy." Settlers might disagree on the tactics used against the British but on political aims they were united.

There remained two other theoretical possibilities for the British but neither, fortunately, had any chance of being accepted. They have often been accused of inciting one group against another, Moslems against Hindus in India, Turks against Greeks in Cyprus and the idea has certainly been mooted. The

British referred to this as the “Turkish” solution but, whatever the critics may say, it was never pursued consciously and systematically in India or anywhere else. The object was to maintain order not to undermine it. This left the option of using maximum force and, as Charters points out, this was what Montgomery, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, was effectively asking for. But, even if the men and money had been available, subsequent experience in Algeria and Vietnam suggests that such a strategy could not have worked. For a time guerrilla bands might, in theory, have been broken down by the sort of torture applied by the French in Algeria and by the Argentine armed forces during the “dirty war.” But such a strategy would have undermined British democracy and was just as inconceivable as the idea of inciting the Arabs and Jews against each other.

The only solution, as the government rightly saw by 1947, was to withdraw and leave the Arabs and Jews to settle their own future. Charters suggests that the British were more successful in dealing with guerrillas in later campaigns in Malaya, Oman and so on. However, they succeeded only in rural wars and only when the guerrillas had the backing of a very small section of the population. Military analysts too often run the risk of suggesting that better military techniques might alter the outcome of an insurgency. So they might if it were very finely balanced but no technique, however good, can change the situation if the government lacks support. What British politicians and officers should have learnt from Palestine is that, if the population cannot be weaned away from the insurgents, then a retreat has to be organized with whatever dignity is possible.

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Linn, Brian McAllister. *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899-1902*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.

Though there are many works on United States involvement in the Philippine Islands between 1898 and 1902, there are few which look at the United States Army’s counterinsurgency methods. Brian Linn’s book *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899-1902* fills this gap by examining the Army’s operations to pacify the Islands. Linn’s book is an informative and well-written work on how the US Army reacted to fighting an insurrection led by determined nationalists. His main thesis is that the different types of terrain and the different personalities of the nationalists forced US Army officers to adopt different policies and methods in their military districts in the Philippines. The book describes the conditions the Army encountered in four separate military districts on the Island of Luzon. Linn gives a thorough and detailed analysis of each district and the different forms of resistance used by the Filipino nationalists. Linn contends that these methods were used by officers in