

The British Experience in Palestine: A Decade of Jewish Cooperation and Resistance, 1936-46

by
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INTRODUCTION

In attempting to understand the reasons for the withdrawal of an imperial power from its colonies, one should examine the reasons that made it possible to maintain control in the first place. Imperial rule, it will be argued here, can be maintained only through the cooperation of the local leadership. Britain's experience in Palestine during the decade between 1936 and 1946 seems to confirm this observation. The British made strenuous efforts to encourage cooperation from the official institutions of the *Yishuv* (the Jewish Community in Palestine) as well as from the illegal resistance groups. Furthermore, the British attempted to demonstrate fairness by promoting both Jews and Arabs in the Palestine Administration. The leaders of the *Yishuv*, who regarded the Mandate as a vital framework for the growth of the National Home, helped the British to maintain control, and thereby allowed the Mandate to operate in a relatively smooth fashion until after the Second World War. Jewish assistance continued despite the stormy events which threatened to destroy it (mainly, the Arab Rebellion of 1936-39 and the British government's 1939 *White Paper* policy statement on Palestine). Only after the Second World War, when the British failed to maintain the cooperative mechanism by not rewarding those who cooperated, did the latter unite with the non-cooperative elements and force the British to withdraw.

BACKGROUND

With the outbreak of the First World War and the subsequent disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France were to divide its domains, the most important of which was Palestine. The strategic importance of the country made both sides determined to gain control of it. Successive British governments insisted that Palestine was a vital base on the route to India. France, they thought, could be compensated elsewhere. This was the opinion of some British officials, particularly Leo Amery and his followers. In fact, this was one of the reasons for the British Government's decision to issue the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which endorsed the Jews' claim to a 'homeland' in Palestine and committed Britain to support its establishment there.¹

In the euphoric atmosphere of the postwar era, when Wilsonian idealism dominated all agreements and treaties, it seemed inappropriate to refer to the former German and Ottoman territories as imperial possessions. A new concept with humanitarian overtones was found. Thus Britain was given a 'Mandate' by the League of Nations. It was to administer Palestine until the country's inhabitants became politically mature enough for independence. The terminology changed but nothing else; Palestine was administered in the old imperial style and by similar methods.²

Undoubtedly, the Mandatory powers acted primarily to promote their own interests and less out of deference to Wilson's ideas. Some politicians like Lord Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary, admitted in the House of Lords that the Mandate was a fiction the purpose of which was to legitimize the apportionment of the conquered territories among the victors.³ Yet, there were several factors which pressured the British Government to adopt new terminology for its newly acquired territories. British public opinion was becoming more sensitive to the economic burden which the occupation of foreign lands entailed. The self-governing members of the Empire were becoming more assertive. Nationalism became vocal in Ireland, India and other areas. It was obvious therefore, that any further extension of the Empire would be seriously challenged. Consequently, there was a need to apply more human terms to the occupation of colonial areas. Furthermore, there was still a sense of idealism and commitment to humanitarian mission among British politicians. Curzon himself believed that the postwar situation gave Britain the opportunity to fulfill its mission by reshaping the future of mankind.⁴

THE FORMATION OF THE COOPERATIVE MECHANISM

In all of its imperial possessions, the British Government made serious attempts to create political allegiance which could smooth and prolong the occupation.⁵ The British Government attached great importance to the manipulation of political elites in the colonies, preferably without the use of force. The British military was of secondary importance in the imperial context.⁶ Throughout its imperial experience, therefore, Britain was constantly in search of collaborators.⁷ The hope of finding such elements in the Middle East continued throughout the entire period of British occupation and beyond. Thus, for example, after the Second World War, Ernest Bevin and Anthony Eden hoped that the Arab League would serve British purposes as did the Arab Legion of Glubb Pasha.⁸ Generally, the British allowed the local governments and their supporting services to operate freely.⁹ Palestine was no exception to this practice; it was however, unique in another sense. Here was a case in which an imperial power moved in to take control of the remnants of a disintegrating Ottoman Empire whose rule over its inhabitants, though basically benign, was opposed to the Wilsonian idea of self-determination. To those peoples who wished to free themselves from Ottoman rule, the British take-over was a relief. This was especially the case in the Jewish community. Eliahu Golomb, the future commander of the *Haganah* (later the main Jewish defense force) who witnessed the arrival of British forces into Palestine, had written that the event caused boundless joy in the *Yishuv*.¹⁰

The Balfour Declaration, guaranteed a willingness to cooperate with the Palestine Administration. Britain assumed control of Palestine with the confidence that the Jews would remain grateful and help them to control the country. Generally, the majority of the Jews supported Britain until the late 1930s. The country was relatively quiet until the outbreak of the Arab Rebellion in 1936, mainly because the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (OETA) operated through the cooperation of Jews and Palestinian Arabs, some of whom managed to hold key positions in the Administration.

CHAIM WEIZMANN AND THE GENESIS OF ANGLO-JEWISH COOPERATION

The origins of the cooperation between Zionism and Great Britain can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when the Zionists of Russia and Eastern Europe aspired to return to their homeland, Palestine. Chaim Weizmann, the most prominent among them, regarded Britain as the only country capable of helping the Jews. In a letter to his teacher, Shlomo Tsvi Sokolowsky, Weizmann (who was barely eleven years old), said: "All have decided: The Jews must die, but England will nevertheless have mercy on us".¹¹ Weizmann believed that only through a dialogue would it be possible to convince the British to respond to Jewish needs.¹² Although he thought that the British were intellectually mediocre,¹³ he called them "the best Gentiles in the world".¹⁴

Throughout his negotiations with Lord Balfour, Weizmann constantly emphasized the identity of interests between Britain and Zionism. At one time he wrote that Jerusalem, just as much as Cairo or Delhi, was a part of an important chain that must be maintained by Britain.¹⁵ He realized that friendship with Zionism could not always be to Britain's advantage, yet he wished to maintain it long enough to enable the Zionist enterprise to take root in Palestine. Furthermore, Weizmann regarded the Jews as uncompromising and rigid and believed that Britain had a moderating influence on them. He admitted, "Whatever revolutionary methods I adopt in getting the Jews into Palestine, I can't do it without the support of Great Britain".¹⁶ He even went to the extent of saying that the connection with Britain was "precious to me . . . whatever the humiliations I had to swallow . . ." ¹⁷ and that all Jews should be grateful to Britain.¹⁸ Weizmann maintained this attitude through the entire period. Thus, for example, in a statement to the UN Special Committee on Palestine, Weizmann thanked the British for their cooperation and stated that he deplored the deterioration in their relationship which he regarded as an "unpleasant intermezzo."¹⁹

Weizmann always made a clear distinction between the British Government and the British Administration in Palestine which he disliked because he thought that it was staffed with petty anti-Semites and shortsighted bureaucrats who supplied the British Government with distorted information regarding the events in Palestine.²⁰ This outlook was common among the leaders of the recognized *Yishuv*, all of whom preferred to cooperate with British Labor governments rather than with the Conservatives.²¹

THE JEWISH OPPONENTS OF COOPERATION

Weizmann's pro-British attitude was not shared by those Zionists who did not wish to turn the future Jewish state into a British client state. Opposition to total dependence on Britain was common in the right-wing of the Zionist movement. Abba Achimeir of the extremist right-wing group *Brit ha-Birionim*, condemned the collaboration with "Perfidious Albion." He argued that the Balfour Declaration was a mere piece of paper which by no means guaranteed that the British really intended to establish a Jewish state.²² Rabbi Joshua Radler-Feldman (Rabbi Benjamin) thought that its acceptance was a sin.²³ Israel

Zangwill, the Anglo-Jewish writer, was infuriated by it, and others thought that the *Yishuv* should have refused to accept it. Joseph Chaim Brenner, one of the most critical writers, said that it was "a foggy declaration given to the Jews in a foggy day and in a foggy metropolis".²⁴

Even in the Labor camp there were those who regarded Weizmann as a collaborator whose reliance on Great Britain would be harmful to the Zionist cause. American Zionists such as Felix Warburg, Justice Louis Brandeis and Rabbi Stephen Wise disagreed with Weizmann's methods. At the Seventeenth Zionist Congress held in Basle at the end of June 1931, Weizmann defended his conciliatory policy. He was attacked by Rabbi Wise who told him, "You have sat too long on English feasts."²⁵ Shortly after the murder of Lord Moyne, the British Minister of State Resident in the Middle East, by the members of the Stern Group in November 1944, the *Yishuv* was in a rebellious mood. Weizmann appeared at the Twenty Second Zionist Congress at Basle and delivered a speech condemning violence and calling for self-restraint. This attitude seemed too conciliatory and subservient in the eyes of some members. Emmanuel Neumann, one of the leaders of American Zionism, called Weizmann a "Demagogue".²⁶ David Ben Gurion's stormy relations with Weizmann were largely a result of the latter's conciliatory attitude. Weizmann's connection to London was stronger than any other leader in the *Yishuv*.²⁷ His independent contacts antagonized many Zionists.

VLADIMIR JABOTINSKY AND THE IDEA OF COOPERATION

That Jewish collaboration with Britain continued until the late 1930s and beyond was in a large measure the result of its acceptance not only by the leaders of Labor Zionism, but also by some of those on the right-wing. Vladimir Jabotinsky, the leader of the Revisionists (the militants within the Zionist movement), was highly influential in this respect. He called for friendship with Britain all along and never called upon the *Yishuv* to rebel.²⁸

Jabotinsky lived in England for many years and had met government officials on numerous occasions. He admired British customs and manners, but, whereas Weizmann thought that Englishmen were politically gifted, Jabotinsky believed that they lacked political wisdom. He was convinced, however, that they were sensible people who could be convinced by reasonable arguments. "The Englishman is not a plunderer," he said,²⁹ yet he argued that they were utterly incapable of ruling intelligent people.³⁰ Nevertheless, he never budged from the belief that only through cooperation with Britain would the Zionists be able to achieve their aims. Furthermore, he insisted that Britain and the Jews depended on each other because they had similar interests. He even went to the extent of suggesting to Britain a strategic alliance in exchange for recognition of the *Yishuv* as an independent state.³¹ In his essay, "what do the Revisionists want?" he said:

It is untrue that England is doing us a favor without getting anything in return. Among all the colonies of the European powers, there is only one country developing rapidly...and that is Palestine. Moreover, in the Mediterranean — England's

corridor to the Orient—in the eastern and southern shores which are under anti-European threat, the Jews are building the only base which morally belongs to Europe and will always belong to it...This mutual loyalty is based upon mutual benefit—This is the way on which the Zionist movement must base its relations with the Mandatory Government.³²

BRITISH POLICY: THE MANIPULATION OF POLITICAL ELITES

The Jewish Agency, whose officials represented the Socialist wing of the Zionist movement, was recognized by the British Government and the League of Nations as the authority whose assistance was deemed essential to the smooth operation of the Mandate. According to Article 4 of the Mandate for Palestine, the Jewish Agency was recognized as a public body whose purpose was to advise and help the Administration of Palestine, "so long as its organization and constitution are in the opinion of the Mandatory, appropriate...."³³

The 1922 White Paper did not allow the Jewish Agency any share in the official administrative apparatus of Palestine, yet by commanding the allegiance of the great majority of the Jews, the Agency exercised considerable influence on the *Yishuv* and constituted an effective instrument of cooperation with the British. According to the original conception of the Mandate, the Mandatory power was to create the external conditions for the development of the National Home while the Jews themselves would be responsible for its construction.³⁴ By delegating responsibilities to the Jewish Agency, the British Government created a loyal agent whose role was to relieve the Palestine Administration of many functions necessary to maintain the effective functioning of the Mandate, to cushion the effect of unpopular decisions and thus to diminish local resistance.

The appointment of the Zionist, Sir Herbert Samuel, as the first High Commissioner for Palestine on 1 July 1920 was part of a method by which the British sought to obtain the assistance of the Jewish community. Throughout the Mandatory period the British employed both Zionist and anti-Zionist officials in the Palestine Administration, all according to the needs of the moment and to the pressure exerted by the local communities. There was also an attempt to employ both Jews and Arabs in the Palestine police force relative to their proportion in the population as a whole.³⁵ The British did not attempt to destroy the power of the local elites and their institutions. On the contrary, they preferred to use them as mediators with the local population and an effort was made to ascertain that the nominees could be relied upon as loyal agents. As early as February 1917 the Arab Bureau in Cairo had published a report called "Personalities of South Syria", in which an evaluation was made of the various families and the degree of their loyalty to the British.³⁶

By allowing the local elites to exercise considerable political control, the British hoped to gain the support of both communities. Their attempt failed, however, because the Jews as well as the Arabs became increasingly loyal to their leaders while the Palestine Administration remained little more than an umpire.³⁷ The British made occasional adjustments in the Administration's

apparatus. When it seemed to the British Government that the Palestine Administration was obviously partial toward the Jews, pro-Arab officials were nominated as a counterweight. In 1919, for example, Colonel B.H. Waters-Taylor was nominated by Viscount Allenby as the Chief of Staff of OETA. Waters-Taylor was an anti-Zionist and his appointment acted as a counterweight to Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, who was known for his sympathy for the Jews. Another obvious example occurred more than twenty years later, on 5 July 1942 when Churchill wished to win the support of American public opinion by forming Jewish defense units under Colonel Orde Wingate's command. He wrote to Lord Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, that in order to carry out this plan, it might be necessary to discharge some anti-Semite officers who opposed it, suggesting "If three or four of them were recalled and dismissed, and the reason given, it would have a very salutary effect".³⁸

Until the late 1930s, the Jewish Agency worked quite well with the British Administration. It assumed the responsibility for collecting funds required for the development of the National Home and organized a whole range of immigration and settlement activities which otherwise would have had to be carried out by the Mandatory Administration.³⁹ Without the existence of this support mechanism it is difficult to imagine how the British could have continued to maintain control over a country which both Arabs and Jews claimed as theirs. The Jewish Agency was not an opposition party to the Mandatory regime. It developed into an indispensable instrument of cooperation with the British Administration. Despite its importance however, the Agency never gained a significant share in the administration of Palestine and its influence on the Mandatory's policy remained limited.⁴⁰

COOPERATION AND RESISTANCE IN THE ARAB COMMUNITY

In their attempt to find collaborators among the Palestinian Arabs the British had little success. Arab officials who served in the Palestine Administration were rarely in a position to cooperate. In the absence of powerful representative bodies such as the Jewish Agency, Arab notables employed by the Palestine Administration were forced not only to maintain a high level of competence, but also to mediate between their people and the British authorities. This was a position which did not allow them much freedom of action since they were expected to represent a community which entirely repudiated the concept of British rule. Their loyalty to their family and religion had prevented them from acting freely on behalf of the British Government. Even prominent officials such as Hajj Amin al-Husaini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, Ragheb al Nashashibi, Aref al Aref, and George Antonius had to face this dilemma. Such officials were not only under pressure from their immediate relatives, but also from their political opponents. The Arab newspaper *Falastin* summed up this dilemma by saying that being in the position of intermediary between the local government and his people had forced the Arab official to be candid in his opinions.⁴¹

Britain's endeavors to maintain a balance between Jews and Arabs in the Administration resulted in an increase in the number of Arab employees.

Samuel encouraged this trend by liberally appointing Arabs in many departments. By June 1921, out of a total of 2,490 government employees of all ranks, 1633 were Arabs (although in the Senior Service Arab officials numbered 145 out of 360).⁴² This trend continued throughout the entire Mandatory period, yet it did little to encourage Arab cooperation. Its failure to produce results led some officials to doubt its effectiveness. Thus for example, the Palestine Royal Commission had criticized it as being a 'government by arithmetic' and argued that it had no beneficial effect on the relations between Arabs and Jews.⁴³

The appointment of Hajj Amin as the Mufti of Jerusalem on 10 March 1921 came in large measure because the British sought to appease his supporters and thus control their activities against the Government. Ernest Richmond, Samuel's advisor on Arab affairs, even went to the extent of asking that Hajj Amin be granted a high salary. The proposed sum offered to Hajj Amin was 30 pounds per month.⁴⁴ The appointment was made despite opposition to it by many Jews and Arabs. On 8 December 1938 (at which time Hajj Amin was leading the Arab rebellion in Palestine) Samuel defended his appointment in the House of Lords by stating that Hajj Amin had never refused to cooperate.⁴⁵

The creation of the Supreme Muslim Council was another calculated step taken by the British to earn the support and the cooperation of the Palestinian Arabs. Samuel reported to the Foreign Office that the Arabs wished to have complete control over their *wakf* funds.⁴⁶ He contacted Arab officials and informed them of his intention to give them full control over the *awkaaf*.⁴⁷

The British Government attempted to reach moderate as well as radical Arab officials. Ragheb al Nashashibi one of the leading notables, was rewarded by a high position for his cooperation in the past and as a guarantee that such cooperation would continue in the future. The importance of loyal Arab officials was recognized by the British all along. Therefore, an attempt was made to form a Legislative Council as a step toward self-government. The attempt failed due to the refusal of the Arabs to cooperate.⁴⁸ When his attempts to create an Arab Agency failed in 1923, Samuel urged the Colonial Office to appoint more Arab officials to important positions in order "to establish other points of contact with the people."⁴⁹ The British, however, were not free to appoint Arab officials as freely as they wished. Arab officials were often less qualified than Jews and Christians, who were more knowledgeable in western languages and culture. Moreover, the Jews had constantly complained that the Palestine Administration was staffed with too many Arabs. Such complaints came not only from ordinary Jews but also from prominent leaders such as Jabotinsky and Weizmann.⁵⁰

The British who sought Arab cooperation were often willing to employ Arab instigators in order to have better control over their activities. Not all Arab officials reacted to British rule in the same manner. Their attitude was determined not only by their sense of loyalty to their people, but also by their personal experience as employees within the Palestine Administration. Ruhi Bey Abd al-Hadi who had a successful career, first as the Assistant Secretary in Jerusalem (the highest position ever occupied by an Arab in the Palestine Administration), and later as the liaison officer in the Secretariat, did not develop

the degree of hostility which George Antonius, the Christian notable had toward the Mandatory Government. Antonius was hurt because of his inability to be nominated to a high level diplomatic position in the Palestine Government.⁵¹ Musa Alami, the eminent attorney, had a similar experience. Many British officials opposed his nomination as a Government Advocate and he had to be satisfied with the position of Junior Legal Advisor at the lowest possible grade and salary. On the other hand, there were many Arab officials like Aref al Aref who were fairly successful and maintained a low profile despite their hostility toward the British.⁵²

By the mid 1930s the rate of Jewish immigration increased. Arab nationalism intensified and it became harder for Arab officials, however moderate, to cooperate with the British. The Arab Executive, the main political body of the Arab community was torn by strife and by the beginning of 1935 it was losing control over many of its members, who began to form their own parties. The Arab press became critical of all moderate leaders, and even Hajj Amin came under attack for not taking a bold anti-British stand. The Arab nationalists worked out a plan to resist Britain by starting a propaganda campaign against it. They tried to benefit from Britain's embarrassment in the Ethiopian conflict and made contacts with Mussolini.⁵³ This revelation had caused an uproar in the Arab community. The pro-Nashashibi newspapers denounced Hajj Amin's connection with Italy.

By the end of 1935 the Arabs of Palestine were organized in political parties with clearly defined platforms. These were: the Palestine Arab Party led by Hajj Amin; the National Defense Party, which stood in opposition to Hajj Amin and was led by Nashashibi; the *Istiqlal* (Independence) Party, led by Auni Abdul Hadi; the Youth Organization of Yacoub Ghussein; the Reform party under Hussain Khalidi; and the National Bloc, led by Abdul Latif Bey Salah. With the possible exception of the Reform Party, which at times adopted a moderate stand toward the British, all parties were nationalist and hostile to Britain. The Arab rebellion of 1936 further intensified their resistance.

THE ARAB REBELLION AND ITS AFTERMATH

It was only during the outbreak of the Arab Rebellion and the issuing of the *White Paper* of 1939 (which drastically limited the immigration of Jews into Palestine and substantially reduced the amount of land that they could purchase) that the leaders of the Jewish Agency began to doubt the need to assist the Mandatory Administration.⁵⁴

Jewish restraint during the Arab Rebellion reassured the British that the cooperation would continue. Despite the fact that there were those who called for action against the Arabs and accused the Palestine Administration either of indifference to the Jewish predicament or of unwillingness to control Arab terrorism, the recognized leaders of the *Yishuv* opted for *Havlagah* (self restraint). In fact, the leaders of the Jewish Agency felt that helping the British would be more beneficial to the *Yishuv*.⁵⁵

Initially, there was an effort on the part of the *Haganah* as well as the *Irgun Zvai Leumi* (IZL - the Revisionist para-military group) to collaborate with

Britain; as a result of its retaliatory actions, however, the IZL became a target of persecution and oppression by the British authorities.⁵⁶ Jabotinsky supported the *Havlagah* until 1938, largely because he wished to convince the British of the need to form a Jewish defense force. However, when Shlomo Ben Yosef, an IZL member, was murdered by Arabs, Jabotinsky called for action, not against the British, but against the Arabs. Ben-Gurion and Menachem Ussishkin, the prominent Russian Zionist, still called upon the *Yishuv* to cooperate with the British.⁵⁷ The *Yishuv* was willing to join the British police and to help the Palestine Administration in its attempt to restore order.⁵⁸ Ben-Gurion insisted that Britain should not be held responsible for the disturbances. He called upon the *Yishuv* not to confuse Britain with the British Administration in Palestine.⁵⁹ The Zionists were quite pragmatic, as *Bamachaneh*, the *Haganah*'s organ noted:

The political calculation prevailed [since] revenge on our part would have made it much easier for Sir Arthur Wauchope [the High Commissioner] to introduce pro-Arab reforms. ... We realized that if we retaliated, the Mandatory power would immediately declare, as it had tried to do in the past, that since a battle had broken out between the two communities, Jewish immigration must come to an end.⁶⁰

BEN GURION vs. WEIZMANN: CONFLICTING ATTITUDES TOWARD COOPERATION

In 1939, the Zionist movement faced one of the most crucial tests in its history. The British Government announced its new policy in a *White Paper* which limited Jewish immigration to 75,000 over the next five years. Additional immigration was subject to Arab consent. In addition, land sales were restricted. This plan ended all hope of a Jewish state in Palestine. Accustomed as it was to cooperating with Britain, the Zionist leadership became a target of criticism from the *Yishuv*'s right-wing parties. What had hitherto been accepted by the *Yishuv*, including many militants, as necessary and even desirable cooperation, became increasingly regarded as a betrayal of the Zionist cause. Ben-Gurion was by no means an Anglophile, yet, he was pragmatic enough to decide that despite the *White Paper*, the *Yishuv*, should be part of the British war effort. He wrote: "Despite my bitter evaluation of the British attitude ... obviously, the fate of political Zionism is tied to England".⁶¹ Ben-Gurion continued to insist that the *Yishuv* needed the support of a great power. It was not without difficulty, however, that he made up his mind regarding this issue. The conflict between Ben-Gurion and Weizmann was inevitable, largely due to their disagreement on the nature of the *Yishuv*'s attitude to Great Britain and Weizmann's excessive dependence on it. It started during the crucial sessions of the Round Table Conference held in London in 1939. Ben-Gurion argued that Weizmann was hopelessly committed to Britain. Therefore, he demanded that Weizmann must always be accompanied by other members of the Zionist Organization when meeting British officials. Weizmann regarded this as an insult, and the rift between them widened.⁶²

Whereas Ben-Gurion realized that at some point it would be necessary

to use force against the Mandatory Government, and strongly felt that it would be wise to prepare the *Yishuv* for such contingency, Weizmann refused to consider that alternative and regarded it as a danger to the Zionist movement. Ben-Gurion, who was known for saying that “what matters is not what the Gentiles say, but what the Jews do,”⁶³ was well aware of the necessity of obtaining the support of a great power. He tended to rely on the United States as a counterweight to British influence in the area and thought that such association would serve the Zionists better; US support would help to increase the number of Jewish immigrants, and that in turn would lead to a Jewish majority in Palestine. However, due to the Nazi threat, which was of major concern to both sides, the cooperative mechanism that the British endeavored to maintain in Palestine still remained intact during the war years, a factor which considerably eased the burden of controlling the country.

The differences between Weizmann and Ben-Gurion continued to cause friction during the war years. The tension reached its height in October 1943, when the ‘Biltmore Plan’ was adopted by the Zionists. This bold plan endorsed Ben-Gurion’s demand for the establishment of a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine. The conflict reached a point of crisis when Ben-Gurion, who was heavily criticized by Weizmann and his supporters, resigned from the Jewish Agency. Realizing that he was incapable of weakening Weizmann’s position, Ben-Gurion resumed his duty shortly afterwards. This was a clear indication that the official institutions of the *Yishuv* were still in a cooperative frame of mind despite British restrictive measures which were generally regarded as harmful to the Zionist enterprise. It was only after the war, when the Labor Government, in which most Jews had great faith and whose leaders had pledged to support the Zionists at more than ten party conferences, failed to fulfill its promises, that the *Yishuv* became disillusioned.⁶⁴

The cooperation of the Jews in Palestine was regarded by the British as a ‘fait accompli’. The idea that the Jews might revolt against Britain was considered bizarre, and until the end of 1939 it was not taken into consideration in forming British policy.⁶⁵ Even after the publication of the *White Paper*, the British expected the *Yishuv* to remain docile if not supportive. They failed to grasp the attitude of the Jews of the new generation who opposed Weizmann and “Weizmannism”. Ben-Gurion was ready for a temporary cooperation with immediate rewards: the withdrawal of British troops and the formation of a Jewish state. Ben-Gurion’s Statement that the Jews will “fight the White Paper as if there was no war and fight the war as if there was no White Paper,”⁶⁶ was a politically calculated move aimed at achieving immediate results.

THE ORIGINS OF MILITARY COOPERATION: WORLD WAR I AND AFTER

It is significant that the *Haganah* supported Britain in its darkest hours during the Second World War. Undoubtedly, there was an identity of interests: Hitler was the enemy of the Jews as well as Britain. It seemed obvious to Ben-Gurion that the cooperation with the British must be carried out through the legitimate bodies of the *Yishuv*: the *Haganah* and its crack force, the *Palmach*,

rather than the IZL or the more militant 'Stern Group'. As Eliahu Golomb, the *Haganah's* Commander in Chief, said, "Illegal forces cannot be expected to fulfill serious military duties."⁶⁷

In order to help the British war effort the *Yishuv* formed special defense units which provided military assistance and supplied vital information regarding the activities of the enemy. Such collaboration was not entirely new in the history of the *Yishuv*. During the First World War the Jews of Palestine had given military assistance to the British against Germany and Turkey. Three Jewish battalions operated within the British Army. The 38th, 39th and 40th battalions of the Royal Fusiliers were formed after long negotiations with the British Government. In return for its military assistance, the *Yishuv* hoped to gain the support of the Allies after the war.⁶⁸ This collaboration was not limited to formal military assistance, but included intelligence activities as well. A group which called itself *Nili* was organized by the Aaronson family with the assistance of others.⁶⁹

The *Nili* Group was convinced that the *Yishuv* was under threat from the Turkish authorities and the only logical way to save the Jews was to transfer Palestine to British control. One of the Group, Avshalom Feinberg, planned to organize a Jewish rebellion using British assistance. The plan did not materialize but the group began to collaborate with the British through its intelligence activities. They informed the British about the various activities of the Central Powers in the Middle East. The British encouraged this initiative and assumed an active role in the mediation between *Nili* and Weizmann who subsequently gave his approval to its activities.⁷⁰ Simultaneously, the British were actively seeking Jewish support everywhere. William Ormsby-Gore, the intelligence officer of the Arab Bureau in Cairo, had drafted a memorandum to the War Cabinet entitled "Zionism and Suggested Jewish Battalions for Egyptian Expeditionary Force, 14 April 1917", in which he suggested looking into the possibilities of military assistance by Jews all over the world.⁷¹ By the end of 1917, however, the *Nili* members had been caught by the Turkish authorities. Most were sentenced to prison terms, two were executed, and one committed suicide. Commenting on the value of this sort of help, General Macdonough, the British Chief of Military Intelligence said, "General Allenby knew with certainty from his intelligence in Palestine, all the movements of the enemy."⁷²

Jewish cooperation during the Second World War was quite different from previous acts of support which had not been recognized by official Zionism.⁷³ This was collaboration by the official authorities of the *Yishuv*, and as such it had instant legitimacy. The British encouraged the *Haganah's* cooperation and helped finance its operations. Although it was far more convenient to obtain the assistance of the recognized authorities of the *Yishuv*, the British did not seem to reject such offers even from members of the IZL. For example, David Raziell and Ya'acov Meridor were involved in the campaign to overthrow the pro-Nazi regime of Rashid Ali el Kilani in Iraq.⁷⁴ Cooperation seemed beneficial to both sides. Yet, among the *Yishuv* there were even those who believed in collaboration with Nazi Germany. Some Stern members proposed a plan to assist Germany in the conquest of Palestine in exchange for a Hebrew state and the transfer of European Jews to that state.⁷⁵

At the beginning of the war, Weizmann had established contact with the British Admiralty in an attempt to examine the ways in which Jews could contribute to the British war effort, and throughout 1940 the Jewish Agency made contacts with the British War Ministry to discuss the possibility of cooperation. *Haganah* units were to carry out military operations throughout Europe. In the spring of 1940, *Haganah* men assembled in Romania and planned sabotage operations against Germany. Shortly afterwards, its members cooperated with British and Free French forces in Syria. *Haganah* fighters became involved in intelligence and propaganda activities against the Vichy regime and its collaborators in the Middle East. Their most daring action was the attempt to destroy the oil refinery in Tripoli which served the German air force. The twenty-two soldiers sent on this mission never returned.⁷⁶

The cooperation between the British and the *Haganah* intensified as Rommel approached Egypt and the Middle East seemed to be under real threat. There was, of course, much to gain from the support after the war. Yigal Allon, the *Palmach*'s celebrated commander, wrote: "It was clear that German domination of the Middle East meant our destruction in Palestine and the end of the resurrection of the State of Israel."⁷⁷ *Haganah* men joined a special British commando unit whose aim was to carry out sabotage operations in areas occupied by German forces in North Africa. They were also to provide a 'stay behind' resistance network in the event that the Germans occupied Palestine. Also important were the Bureau of Investigation established in Haifa in 1940 and the Jewish Brigade that had fought in World War II under British command and helped smuggle substantial amounts of arms and munitions to Palestine.

The *Haganah*'s activities were meant to achieve certain goals; to participate in the destruction of the Nazi regime, to establish contact with Jewish communities in Europe in order to rescue European Jews, to improve Anglo-Jewish relations in order to revoke the *White Paper* and to give *Haganah* officers an opportunity to benefit from British military expertise. Normally, most British officials were receptive to the idea of collaboration in times of crisis. The *Haganah*'s actions, however, were not universally well received within the British government. There were opponents in the Foreign Office, in the Colonial Office, and in the Palestine Administration. These officials felt that Jewish support would compel them to make concessions to the Zionists. The main advocates of collaboration were the special departments within the British Army whose duty was to organize secret activities against the enemy. On the other hand, even the *Yishuv* was not unanimous in its decision to join the British war effort.⁷⁸ The best example of this was Achimeir who wrote in his "Address to a Zionist Youth":

The road leading to Zion, to the Kingdom of Israel, is not covered with roses. Those people who really expect to be redeemed must pay heavily for this redemption. No nation obtains statehood as a gift. No public ideal will materialize unless it has many youth ready to sacrifice their lives for it.⁷⁹

Achimeir blamed the *Yishuv*'s leadership for its reliance on Britain whose Labor governments had initially supported the Zionist enterprise only

because they regarded it as an experimental ground for their Socialist ideas; once they realized that the Jews were determined to form their own state, they withdrew their support.⁸⁰

COOPERATION AND RESISTANCE: THE 'SAISON' AND ITS AFTERMATH

The year 1944 marked the beginning of a new stage in the collaboration between Britain and the *Yishuv*. On 6 February 1944, the IZL leader Menachem Begin declared a revolt against the British. The declaration set the ground for a conflict between the *Haganah* and the IZL. The *Yishuv* was on the verge of a civil war. Begin's declaration was made not only because of political circumstances, but mainly because it was a logical conclusion to his deterministic ideology and his conviction that an oppressed people is destined to rebel against its foreign occupier.⁸¹ Begin and his followers attempted to justify the decision to rebel by arguing that Jabotinsky, Begin's great mentor, was the "Father of the Revolt," whereas, in fact, he remained dedicated to the idea of cooperation with Great Britain. The attempt to attribute the concept of "revolt" to Jabotinsky has no historical proof.⁸² Be that as it may, the consequences of this declaration threatened to terminate the cooperation with Britain.

On 8 October 1944 General Bernard Paget, the acting High Commissioner and Commander of the British Army in the Middle East, appealed to the *Yishuv* and implored its leaders to assist the Mandatory Government. Paget wanted information that would lead to the arrest of the instigators. On 23 October the Jewish Agency and the Zionist Commission decided to warn the dissident groups that all anti-British activities must come to an end at once, or else the leaders of the *Yishuv* would punish all perpetrators. The following day the Zionist Executive Committee declared war on the IZL. Golomb stated that his army was ready for action. A last-minute meeting between Moshe Sneh, the Jewish Agency representative, and Begin took place in attempt to find a peaceful solution. It ended in failure, however, because Begin refused to stop his men. Consequently, Ben-Gurion decided that the *Yishuv* must help Britain to stop terrorism. He stated that the liquidation of terrorism would be achieved by punishing those who provided shelter to terrorists and by joint actions with the British.

That the British had striven to maintain the cooperative mechanism in Palestine intact is evident from the policy pursued by Churchill at that time. On 6 November Lord Moyne was murdered by members of the Stern Group. British policy makers were outraged and suspended further consideration of a partition plan for Palestine, but otherwise their response was surprisingly mild.⁸⁴ Churchill kept a low profile and thus all the fears of the Jewish Agency that Britain would put an immediate stop to Jewish immigration and withdraw its consent to the formation of a Jewish brigade were allayed. The British response encouraged the Agency to put an end to the anti-British campaign of the other paramilitary groups in the *Yishuv*. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary written on 17 November Churchill said that Moyne's murder was a triumph for the moderates since most of the *Yishuv* abhorred it.⁸⁵ He was partially right. The

Haganah embarked on a furious campaign to liquidate the IZL, but not the Stern Group, whose leaders had realized that their ability to fight the *Haganah* was limited and therefore adopted Marxist ideology which brought them closer to Labor Zionism. This campaign against the IZL, which became known as the 'Saison', was generously financed by the Jewish Agency.⁸⁶

The *Haganah* began to arrest IZL members and actually cooperated with the Palestine Administration in apprehending them. There were, however, some members who did not wish to cooperate. For example, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Fishman of the religious Mizrachi party and Itzhak Gruenbaum of the General Zionists resigned from the Jewish Agency in protest against the 'Saison'.⁸⁷ In December 1944 High Commissioner Lord Gort wrote a letter to the Colonial Secretary saying that although the Jewish Agency was supporting the British, there were some who remained determined not to do so and they were threatening to resign from their position in the Zionist leadership.⁸⁸ Even among the ranks of the left-wing Labor parties there were those who emphasized the ideological and moral danger of collaboration with the British. In a speech to the Movement of the Union of Labor, Israel Idelsohn (Bar Yehuda) said, "A Labor movement which consents to such collaboration is terminating its mission. If Mapai and Hashomer Hatsair (the main Labor parties) would take this course, both would become rotten."⁸⁹

Begin of course, was infuriated. In February 1945 he wrote: "You chose yourself an ally, Cain; the oppressive regime in the homeland and the Nazi-British intelligence are your allies."⁹⁰ The activities of the *Haganah* against the IZL caused an uproar in the *Yishuv*. Hugo Bergman, a member of *Brit Shalom* (Covenant of Peace), compared the *Haganah's* actions to those of the Ku Klux Klan. *Palestine Post* came up with the idea of organizing special groups to defend the members of the IZL. The Chief Rabbis called upon the Jewish Agency to end this campaign.⁹¹ Despite the fact that the Jewish Agency relied mostly on volunteers to perform this task, there was a general feeling that the Agency's Political Department was directly responsible. A poem popular among the *Palmach* members ran as follows:

Cooperation is a very pleasant situation when it is kept by both sides. But when my friend comes to arrest me, then this is not gentleman-like. Let cooperation come to an immediate end.⁹²

The 'Saison' continued, however, until the spring of 1945, when the leaders of the Jewish Agency concluded that the IZL was no longer a threat. To Begin's credit, it must be said that he decided to order his men not to react to the *Haganah's* actions. This was perhaps because he did not wish to be blamed for causing a civil war. He wanted to be able to blame others.⁹³ On 31 January 1945 Colonial Secretary Oliver Stanley informed the House of Commons that there had been an improvement in the cooperation of the Jewish Agency.⁹⁴ On 31 July 1946 Richard Crossman said that more than a thousand IZL men had been turned over to the British authorities.⁹⁵ Among the IZL members who were handed over were Eliahu Lankin, Shlomo Levi and Ya'acov Meridor, all of whom occupied high positions in that organization. Most of the captives were placed in prisons in Eritrea and elsewhere in Africa.

INDIVIDUAL AGENTS AND COLLABORATORS

The cooperation with the British authorities was not confined to the recognized bodies of the *Yishuv*. There were collaborators within the IZL, and even in the ranks of the more militant Stern Group, some of whose members claimed that they handed over to the British other members suspected of anti-British actions. In fact, individual collaborators operated throughout the entire Mandatory period within the Palestinian Administration.⁹⁶ Although in the beginning Jews were not easily admitted as officials and employees of the OETA, they gradually managed to occupy positions of power despite Arab resentment. In addition to local Jews who were employed by the Mandatory Administration, English Jews were hired largely through the efforts of Norman Bentwich who became a Senior Judicial Officer of OETA.⁹⁷

Bentwich did not betray the *Yishuv*, but there were others who did. David Tidhar, the right-wing police inspector who attended Labor Zionist meetings, reported on Jewish "Bolshevist" activities to the British Administration and earned promotion for his collaboration. Later he was dismissed from the police force. This decision was motivated by the desire of the Palestine Administration to avoid an open confrontation with the official institutions of the *Yishuv*. Colonel Edmund V. Gabriel "took positive measures, overt and underhand, to defeat the policy of encouraging the Jewish National Home".⁹⁸ He was involved in a scheme to import cheap Maltese labor into Palestine. One of the most notorious cases of collaboration with the British Administration was that of Harry Luke, a man of half-Jewish origin. He was considered by the Colonial Office for an appointment as a Chief Secretary of Palestine. During the Hebron massacre of 1929, he was active in disarming Jewish constables. After being labelled a collaborator and a traitor by the Zionists, he was transferred from Palestine in December 1929.⁹⁹

The British found collaborators within the Jewish paramilitary groups as well as in the Palestine Administration. The most famous case of this kind of collaboration was not within the *Haganah*, but within the IZL. It started shortly after Begin's declaration of revolt against the British. On 23 March 1944 the IZL operated against the British intelligence by bombing its central building in Jerusalem. This was a turning point in the history of the IZL. For several years there had been active cooperation between some members of the Revisionist Party and the IZL on the one hand and British intelligence on the other. The attempt to destroy this building brought this cooperation to an abrupt end. There were, however, some IZL members who did not resign themselves to this change. One of these die-hard collaborators was Ya'acov Khilvich who served as a fund-raiser for the IZL. Shortly before the attack, Khilvich contacted Intelligence and announced his willingness to submit a list of names of all IZL members. The British accepted the offer and transported Khilvich to Egypt. The list was incomplete, but it led to the arrest of more than fifty IZL men. Of the key personnel, only Begin and Meridor managed to escape. After a long period of confusion, Begin decided to send messengers to Khilvich's hotel in Cairo in order to bring him to justice. Khilvich denied any wrongdoing and agreed to return in order to prove his innocence. In the course of the negotiations, he

managed to flee to the United States. The IZL's leadership was astonished to hear that Khilvich had received a warm welcome by the American Revisionists. Jabotinsky's son, Eri, who was in Turkey at that time, sent a telegram warning that Khilvich was a collaborator and a traitor. The latter, however, managed to escape. A special IZL court sentenced him to death, in absentia, for treason against the *Yishuv*.¹⁰⁰

Whereas the British Administration found collaborators within the IZL, as the Khilvich case demonstrates, it was far more difficult to find collaborators within the Stern Group. The British did not wait for collaborators to come forward. In fact, they made efforts to find them. On 8 May 1944, for example, Captain John Rymmer Jones, the Police Commissioner of the Palestine Administration, promised to pay up to five hundred pounds for any information leading to the arrest of Nathan Yellin Mor and other key members of the Stern Group.¹⁰¹ Apparently, the Group's intensive intimidation campaign and the posters warning the would-be collaborators proved effective and none of its members were caught by the British Police. The British even made efforts to find collaborators among the 251 prisoners who were flown from Palestine on 19 October 1944 to various prisons in Africa, but the attempt failed.¹⁰²

THE END OF ANGLO-JEWISH COOPERATION

The end of the 'Saison' and the formation of a united resistance front against the British constituted a new stage in the history of the Mandate. The negotiations between all resistance groups in Palestine started in September 1945. Sneh represented the *Haganah*, Begin represented the IZL, and Yellin Mor spoke for the Stern Group. On 24 November 1945 a consensus was reached to form a united front called *Tenuat Ha-meri Haivri* (The Hebrew Resistance Movement).¹⁰³ The Movement was formed as a result of the growing sense of despair and disillusionment in the *Yishuv*. Both the official institutions of the *Yishuv* and militant groups condemned the *White Paper* policy, ended their collaboration with the British, and took up arms against them.

In addition to the enormous postwar problems which made it financially difficult to continue the occupation of its imperial possessions, Britain also ran out of collaborators who had hitherto allowed its colonial apparatus to function. The British, nevertheless, held on to their Mandate for a while longer. Now that the official representatives of the *Yishuv* were no longer cooperating, the British resorted to desperate measures such as the unprecedented arrest of the recognized leaders of the *Yishuv*. These measures caused resentment among the Jews and brought all cooperation to an end. There were some politicians who realized that the recent British actions were contradictory to Britain's interests. Crossman, for example, saw a contradiction between Britain's desire to obtain the cooperation of the *Yishuv* and the arrest of the Jewish leaders.¹⁰⁴

By 1946 the *Yishuv* was in a rebellious mood. Further anti-British actions triggered repressive measures. Curfews, searches, flogging and executions increased and the official institutions of the *Yishuv* were in no mood to cooperate with Britain. Weizmann remained one of the few die-hard Anglophiles. Ben-Gurion believed that friendship with the United States would be

more beneficial to the *Yishuv*. Faced with a severe economic crisis at home, the British Government was left with no alternative but to surrender the Mandate to the United Nations.

CONCLUSION

The article has focused on the last decade of the British Mandate in Palestine. Its main thesis is that colonial rule cannot be maintained by brute force alone, and that the cooperation of the local elites must be sought by the colonial power. The maintenance of a colony requires considerable wisdom particularly if it is a battleground for national groups who seek to control it.

Throughout the entire period under investigation the British had invested considerable efforts in manipulating the political elites, both Jewish and Arab in order to smooth and prolong the occupation. British strategy had some success and this is especially significant since the government was under unremitting pressure to withdraw from Palestine, not only due to local resistance which came from Arabs as well as Jews, but also as a result of domestic constraints which were primarily financial. These pressures had made it imperative that the occupation continue without increasing the budget allocated to maintain the Palestine Administration and the local garrison. Under these circumstances the British Government was compelled to seek the cooperation of the local elites and even to search for individual collaborators. The conflict between the official institutions and the militant groups within the *Yishuv* facilitated Britain's attempts to encourage collaboration. As long as Britain managed to reward these groups and individuals it managed to control the country, but when their demands could no longer be met withdrawal became inevitable.

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