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Britain and the Jewish Underground, 1944-46: Intelligence, Policy and Resistance

by

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## Abstract

Starting in the 1930s, but especially during the Second World War, the intelligence agencies of Britain and the Jewish Agency for Palestine had a complicated relationship. They often worked together to fight common threats, such as Arab rebels and Nazi Germany. Jewish terrorists presented another common threat during the Second World War, when the Jewish Agency cooperated with Britain, in the hopes of political rewards in the postwar settlement. British Intelligence, unable to penetrate the Jewish terrorist organizations, Irgun and Lehi, relied on the cooperation of the Jewish Agency to maintain security. This dependency and the strengthening of the underground Haganah, weakened the grip of British authority in Palestine, and made the Jewish community, the Yishuv, increasingly powerful. By 1945, when Britain did not fulfil the expectations of the Yishuv to lift immigration restrictions on Jews to Palestine, its dominant figure, David Ben-Gurion, launched a secret war against British policy. Intelligence failed to understand and react effectively to this development because it relied on its liaison with the Jewish Agency, now secretly hostile, to interpret the political and security situation in Palestine. In a classic problem of net assessment, British officials overestimated their own strength and resolve, and underestimated that of the Yishuv. British intelligence failed to accurately assess Jewish threats or intentions in Palestine from 1944 to 1946. These mistakes in intelligence contributed to failures of policy, which destroyed British policy in the Palestine Mandate, and opened the door to the creation of the state of Israel.

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## Acronyms

<b>AACE</b>	Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry on Palestine
<b>AFHQ</b>	Allied Forces Headquarters
<b>AIG</b>	Assistant Inspector-General, Palestine Police
<b>ASO</b>	Area Security Officer
<b>CID</b>	Criminal Investigation Department of the Palestine Police
<b>CIGS</b>	Chief of Imperial General Staff
<b>DP</b>	Displaced Person
<b>DSO</b>	Defence Security Office
<b>FBI</b>	Federal Bureau of Investigation
<b>GC&amp;CS</b>	Government Code and Cipher School
<b>GCHQ</b>	Government Communications Headquarters
<b>GOC</b>	General Officer, Commanding
<b>GSI</b>	Army Security Intelligence
<b>ISLD</b>	Inter-Service Liaison Division, a cover for MI6
<b>ISPAL</b>	(possibly) Intelligence Service Palestine
<b>JRM</b>	Jewish Resistance Movement
<b>JTA</b>	Jewish Telegraphic Agency
<b>MI5</b>	The Security Service
<b>MI6</b>	Secret Intelligence Service (SIS)
<b>MI9</b>	Escape Organization
<b>MID</b>	Military Intelligence Directorate
<b>MLO</b>	Military Liaison Officer, staffed ISLD

<b>NZO</b>	New Zionist Organization
<b>PICME</b>	Political Intelligence Centre, Middle East
<b>PKP</b>	Palestine Communist Party
<b>PMF</b>	Police Mobile force
<b>RAF</b>	Royal Air Force
<b>RAN</b>	<i>Rigul Negedi</i> , or “counter intelligence”
<b>RSS</b>	Radio Security Service
<b>SHAY</b>	<i>Sherut HaYediot</i> , or “information service”
<b>SIGINT</b>	Signals Intelligence
<b>SIME</b>	Security Intelligence Middle East
<b>SIS</b>	Secret Intelligence Service
<b>SOE</b>	Special Operations Executive
<b>TJFF</b>	Transjordanian Frontier Force
<b>UNSCOP</b>	United Nations Special Committee on Palestine
<b>WZO</b>	World Zionist Organization
<b>X2</b>	SIS officer in Jerusalem



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*“The whole subject is wearisome and painful to a degree...”*

... Old wounds have been re-opened after twenty-five years when they ought to have been allowed to remain closed... it is time that these events were left to the historians after the departure of the participants. We English are a strange people: we do not bear grudges, but sometimes I wonder if this is attributable less to the Christian virtue of forgiveness than to the mental laziness which is a national characteristic.<sup>1</sup>

Thus wrote Sir John Shaw, former chief secretary of the Palestine Mandate, when corresponding with Sir Gyles Isham, a former officer of MI5, the British Security Service, in Palestine. Shaw wrote in January 1972, when Menachem Begin made his first visit to the United Kingdom. Nearly 25 years earlier, Begin had been Britain’s most-wanted terrorist; leading the *Irgun Zvai Leumi* in a revolt against British rule in Palestine. The two old colleagues reminisced on the events surrounding the explosion at the King David Hotel, the Irgun’s most famous operation, which killed ninety-one people and destroyed part of the British government headquarters in Palestine. After sharing accounts of these events, of the failure to maintain British rule and security in Palestine, both men agreed never to mention the matters again. Shaw concluded, “The subject is no longer news, and I hope that it will remain that way during my lifetime.”<sup>2</sup>

Both these men have long since died, but the discussion about the bloody events that turned them into damaged souls has not. Both men felt beaten – Isham by a clever deception and Shaw by a self-sustaining propaganda campaign, which blamed him for the

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<sup>1</sup> Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO). *Sir John Shaw to Sir Gyles Isham*. 18 January 1972. Giles Isham Papers I /184.

<sup>2</sup> NRO. *Sir John Shaw to Sir Gyles Isham*. 25 January 1972. Giles Isham Papers I /184.

deaths. The intelligence record which recently has been made available enables an authoritative account of this particular outrage, which made headlines around the world. However, that act was just one part of a larger picture.

This thesis has three main sections. Its first section covers historiography and background, describing the cultural and political setting for the secret war between Britain and the Zionist movement. It describes the institutions and individuals that shaped British relations with the *Yishuv*, or the Jewish community of Palestine. The second section outlines the role of secret intelligence in British-Yishuv relations to 1945, after the defeat of Germany, where these erstwhile allies became enemies. It describes the complicated nature of these relations, where both sides simultaneously cooperated with each other's war effort while fighting other aspects of their policy. This section covers the period from the beginning of 1944 when Begin declared his revolt against British in Palestine, to the moment when the Labour government of Clement Atlee reneged on its promises of support for Zionist aims. The third section covers the role of secret intelligence in British policy and counterinsurgency from September 1945, through to the summer of 1946, when all the armed organizations in the Yishuv cooperated under the Jewish Resistance Movement to fight British policy. Using newly released documents, the third section will open with a fresh look at how British intelligence failed to grasp the Yishuv's slide from cooperation to resistance. It will conclude with an analysis of the role which secret intelligence played in two policy changes which Britain made in response to the Jewish Resistance Movement: the decision of 1946 to intensify counterinsurgency within Palestine, including a reorganization of intelligence and the implementation of unorthodox methods; and the choice in early 1947 to refer the Palestine question to the

United Nations – that is, to abandon the Mandate and to accept defeat in the struggle against the Yishuv.

This thesis will discuss the role of secret intelligence and its successes and failures in influencing British policy about the Palestine Mandate between 1944 and 1947, and preserving its rule against terrorism and other challenges posed by the Yishuv. From the victory at El-Alamein in 1942 until 1946, British and policy failed to comprehend just how powerful and determined the Yishuv was, and its will to break with Britain if its demands were not granted. Intelligence played a role in shaping this failure. It often overemphasized that threat, and thus gave policymakers the impression that a new approach to the Yishuv must be taken, and enforced. This tendency became problematic because intelligence, unable to penetrate the Jewish underground, gave confusing and contradictory assessments of the politico-security situation. Without this intelligence, both British policymakers and military leadership misconstrued their own power and resolution, compared to that of the Yishuv. By 1945, both intelligence and policy failed to appreciate that the long-anticipated threat posed by the Yishuv was materializing. Their plans for the Middle East were stifled in the process.

British intelligence and policymaking experienced a classic problem of net assessment; it undervalued the power and resolution of the Yishuv and overvalued its own. The bombing of the King David Hotel was neither the first nor the last such act against British rule, and was a symptom of a bigger problem. Jewish Resistance to British authority took other forms, such as illegal immigration to Palestine. Yet, British-Yishuv relations were complicated; resistance often coexisted with friendship. This thesis will

assess how personal relationships within the British intelligence community, and between it and the Yishuv, shaped the course of Jewish resistance in Palestine.

Both the evidence and the literature on these topics are multinational. They are divided between two languages and countries; much of the evidence still is not available, while another part began to be released only in February 2006. New primary material continues to be released both in the UK, and at the archive of the Palestine Police's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Tel Aviv. At the National Archives in the UK, certain documents still are withheld, including the activities of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Arab countries. This fact complicates a full study of the secret cooperation between Britain and the Yishuv from 1940-42. At the CID archive, only a small fraction of the existing material is available to the public, only 1000 out of 100,000 documents.<sup>3</sup>

The central study in the English language on this topic is David Charters' book, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47* and his article *British Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1945-1947*.<sup>4</sup> These pieces offer solid discussions of British counterinsurgency and policy in Palestine, and also give a detailed account of how intelligence was collected and worked and, to a lesser extent, how it was used. These works remain good surveys of the topic, but with clear limits. Little documentation from British secret or security intelligence organizations was available when Charters wrote these works, nor did he use part of the evidence which was available, such as the records of the British 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. Thus, some of Charters' comments are inaccurate.

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<sup>3</sup> according to "Files of the CID of the Palestine Police (Hebrew)", in *Israeli Ministry of Defence Website* <<http://www.archives.mod.gov.il/pages/MISC/h-cid.asp?AR=2>> [accessed 6 June 2010]

<sup>4</sup> David Charters., *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47* (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1989).

For instance, he states that “The security forces acquired strategic intelligence of adequate quality on the Haganah, but not on the Irgun or Stern Gang. That standard of strategic intelligence made possible more effective operations against the former than against the latter groups.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, the British had strong political intelligence on the Yishuv as a whole, but poor operational intelligence on the Haganah, and even less on Irgun or Lehi.<sup>6</sup> Charters, again, claimed that intelligence caused failure for policy in Palestine as a whole. Actually, the failure in Palestine stemmed from policy, not intelligence. The failure in policy, in turn, stemmed from a failure to understand political and security intelligence. Sir Richard Catling, who headed the Palestine secret police’s fight against terrorism, described Charters’ conclusion as being “very silly,”<sup>7</sup> on the grounds that economics shaped British withdrawal more than any other factor. Arguably, however, Catling overstated the role of economics in British calculations.

Recently, new and important English-language work has emerged on this topic. For example, Calder Walton studied the impact of Jewish terrorist threats on British national security, illuminating the great success which the security service had in preventing attacks within the UK and in Europe.<sup>8</sup> This thesis will discuss these successes, and address why the situation was so different in Palestine.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 124.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Wagner, "British intelligence and the Jewish Resistance Movement in the Palestine Mandate, 1945-46", *Intelligence and National Security*, 23:5 (2008): 629-57.

<sup>7</sup> Eldad Harouvi and Israel Haran. "Interview with Sir Richard Catling 9 October 1997" 220.1. Haganah Archives, Tel Aviv (henceforth known as HA). pp. 48.

<sup>8</sup> Calder Walton, "British Intelligence and the Mandate of Palestine: Threats to British National Security Immediately After the Second World War", *Intelligence and National Security*, 23:4 (2008): 435-62.

Other relevant works, in both English and Hebrew, include Menachem Begin's *The Revolt*, Eitan Livni's *IZL – Operations and Underground*,<sup>9</sup> and autobiographical material by Begin, David Ben-Gurion and the like, which illuminate the political dimension within the Yishuv and to the resistance to Britain. The remaining important works related to this topic are in Hebrew and generally take the perspective of insurgent intelligence. A good example is Yoav Gelber's *The History of Israeli Intelligence*,<sup>10</sup> a well researched and officially sponsored study of that topic – particularly during the 1940s. Gelber's former student, Eldad Harouvi, is publishing an updated version of his well-researched PhD thesis on the Palestine Criminal Investigation Department. It describes how the CID, the best of the British intelligence services working in Palestine, collected, interpreted and reported on intelligence, and its influence on counterinsurgency and politics.<sup>11</sup>

The literature also has been affected by the way that secrets have been released and interpreted. In particular, recent intelligence releases have caused controversy in one area, which reached the front-pages of Israeli newspapers. This evidence indicated that Teddy Kollek, a respected Zionist leader and later Mayor of Jerusalem, had been an informant for British intelligence.<sup>12</sup> A controversy arose as to whether or not these actions should be considered treachery. In fact, Kollek was the liaison officer for the

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<sup>9</sup> Eitan Livni, *I.Z.L. - Operations and Underground*, Yediot Aharonot ed. (Jerusalem: Edanim Publishers (Hebrew), 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Yoav Gelber, *The History of Israeli Intelligence Part I: Growing a Fleur-de-Lis: The Intelligence Services of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine, 1918-1947* (2 Vols. Tel Aviv: Israel Ministry of Defense Publications (Hebrew), 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Eldad Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918–1948" (PhD Diss., University of Haifa, Israel (Hebrew), 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Ronen Bergman, "The Scorpion Files: Teddy Kollek was an Informer for British Intelligence", *Yedioth Achronoth*, 30 March 2007, 21-8.

Jewish Agency with British security, which he misled on key issues that were fundamental to their intelligence failure. In doing so, he executed the policy of the Jewish Agency. However, he did favour closer cooperation with Britain and its intelligence services than his superiors did, and left his post as liaison officer partly due to disagreements on that tactical issue.

Above all, the literature lacks coordination of the various sources, in Britain and Israel, English and Hebrew. This thesis is an attempt to start such work. It will coordinate the multinational and multilingual sources, compare the conclusions that already have been drawn on the topic, while still taking an original view of the matter. When measuring the role of British intelligence in forming policy and in fighting an insurgency, it is too simplistic to blame any one person for failure, yet still assessment of causal responsibility is essential. This thesis will evaluate the overall influence of intelligence on the formulation of policy in Whitehall and the Palestine government, with its effect on Britain's struggle to maintain its authority in Palestine, and on the events which ended the Mandate.

### **(mis)Understanding Yishuv and British Politics**

There is no complete description of the organization of the Yishuv in the English language, while the many Hebrew sources on the matter tend to focus on internal political disputes. None of the British intelligence services, save possibly the Palestine CID, understood the Yishuv either. This lack of understanding led to weak assessments on the security situation, because even the most competent of British intelligence officers tended not to appreciate how Yishuv politics shaped that matter. British intelligence understood

the formal political structure of the Yishuv,<sup>13</sup> which does not mean that they knew how it worked. This confusion was not surprising. Several separate yet overlapping bodies had some degree of autonomy within Palestine: The World Zionist Organization (WZO), the Jewish Agency, the Histadrut or labour federation, and the Va'ad Leumi, or the National Council. The importance of each organization changed throughout the history of the Mandate, with power increasingly concentrated in the Jewish Agency after 1936.

The WZO, founded by Theodore Herzl at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was (and remains) Zionism's world political body. Dr. Chaim Weizmann led the World Zionist Organization (WZO) since the early 1920s. In 1920, the *Knesset Israel*, a political body which represented the Jews of the Palestine Mandate, was founded. It consisted of the legislative *Assifat HaNivkharim*, or Assembly of Representatives, and the executive *Va'ad Leumi*, or National Council. The Knesset Israel was responsible for communal institutions, such as education. The *Histadruth Haklalit*, henceforth known simply as the Histadruth, also founded in 1920, was the federation of Jewish labour in Palestine. It included all Jewish labour and kibbutz movements in Palestine and united the participating settlements of the Yishuv on a conceptual basis – Labour Zionism.<sup>14</sup> The Histadruth was a hub for nearly all political, economic and social activity in the Yishuv. In 1929 the Jewish Agency for Palestine was established by the WZO, as an attempt to include the non-Zionist elements of the Yishuv. It was designed to include world Jewry in the development of Palestine, and thus was not just a local organization. Other Jewish institutions in Palestine questioned this undemocratic aspect of the Agency. The Jewish

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<sup>13</sup> They had an accurate organizational chart since 1939. The National Archives at Kew, London. (TNA). KV 3/67 fol. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Gorney, "The Voluntaristic Zionist System in Trial," 553.



Agency and the Va'ad Leumi fulfilled overlapping roles – both dealt with education, infrastructure within the Yishuv and various social services. The Vaad Leumi maintained an important local political role but over time it dealt less with external politics. The Jewish Agency, whose leaders influenced the policy of the Yishuv and Mandate authorities over Immigration and Absorption while facing increasing restrictions throughout the 1930s, had growing importance. The Jewish Agency's increasing political prominence also stemmed from its access to the WZO's funds, and its own ability to raise funds.<sup>15</sup> To make this convoluted system even more confusing, most Jewish political parties in Palestine were represented in each organization: The Knesset Israel, Jewish Agency, WZO and Histadrut. The Revisionist Movement, however, founded distinct and parallel organizations, while certain Non-Zionist elements were represented in some organizations but not others. Meanwhile, some party members held seats in several political institutions. In 1944 for instance, Moshe Sneh was the chief of the Haganah's National Command, a member of the Vaad Leumi, and the Jewish Agency Executive.

### Political structure of the Yishuv

A central point about politics in the Yishuv is its divisions. The longest-lasting and most prominent of these splits was the division between the Zionists and the Non-Zionists, including the religious *Agudat Yisrael* and the communists, amongst others.<sup>16</sup> British intelligence took particular interest in the religious and non-Zionist elements, which were viewed as potential means for hostile forces to penetrate Yishuv politics and

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<sup>15</sup> Gorney, "The Voluntaristic Zionist System in Trial," 558.

<sup>16</sup> Yossef Gorney, "The Voluntaristic Zionist System in Trial," in *The History of the Jewish Community in Eretz-Israel Since 1882: The Period of the British Mandate Part Two*, ed. Moshe Lissak, Anita Shapira and Gavriel Cohen (Jerusalem: 'Daf-Noy' press, 1994), 552.

underground movements. The communists in particular were viewed as a threat to British influence in the region, especially because of their links to the USSR.<sup>17</sup> The British however, tended to misunderstand the fact that even “non-Zionist” groups identified strongly with Zionist aims, and that a desire for national consensus established limits to internal struggles.

The political system of the Yishuv had its roots in the Diaspora, where Jewish communities had much experience in self-governance with limited autonomy. In particular, the system of Jewish politics in Eastern Europe, characterized by a struggle for survival, self-regulation, democratic procedures with collectivist inclinations, shaped Zionist and Yishuv politics.<sup>18</sup> This experience in politics and autonomous institutions prepared the Yishuv for life under the British Mandate. It also left British policymakers and intelligence officers at a disadvantage when assessing the Yishuv.

The unity of the Yishuv was disrupted in the 1930s. The first major split occurred when the Revisionist movement, led by Ze’ev Jabotinsky, broke from the WZO and founded its own federation, called the New Zionist Organization, in 1935. The “General Zionists” also split between those who supported and opposed Weizmann’s policies, especially over relations with Britain. Furthermore, the Revisionist movement founded a competitor to the Histadruth, entrenching the fissures within Yishuv society, when no compromise could be reached between Jabotinsky and David Ben-Gurion (who led the labour federation). This division increased during the Second World War. In spite of the split, however, no radical political change occurred within the system, thanks to the

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<sup>17</sup> New work on this topic has recently emerged in Hebrew. See Yair Shpigel, "Agents of the 'Criminal Investigation Department' (CID) in the Palestine Communist Party (Hebrew)", *Iunim B'tkumat Yisrael*, 12 (2002): 271-88.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Dowty, "Zionism's Greatest Conceit", *Israel Studies*, 3:1 (1998): 1-23.

power wielded by the Histadruth, and a paradoxical phenomenon within the Yishuv, where rival ideologies curbed action against each other and shaped a common political-social framework. As well, the entire system was voluntary, which tended to curb extreme reactions.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the threats which grew in Nazi Germany since 1933, and were posed by the Arab rebellion starting in 1936, served as reminders of the need for unity within the Zionist enterprise.

The Jewish labour party, known from the 1930s as *Mapai*, was the political backbone of the Yishuv political system. The mainstream labour movement gained its power during the 1920s and 1930s because, unlike the anti-Zionists or revisionist Zionists, it invested in agricultural settlement, education, professional services and associations and other state building institutions. The other movements tended to focus purely on political matters. During the 1930s, as the international situation continued to worsen, the Zionist institutions in Palestine increased their role in Yishuv society. These institutions boosted the labour movement's advantage over its political competitors within the Yishuv.<sup>20</sup> The voluntary political system in the Yishuv, confusing as it was, had a unique composition. Being voluntary, but also holding some legal authority under Mandate law, the Yishuv had considerable autonomy from British authority while simultaneously remaining dependent on it. The Yishuv's authority became an increasing threat to British rule as its political demands increased during and after the Second World War.

From 1939 until the end of the British Mandate, the Yishuv confronted "a new, unexpected and constantly changing reality," which its leaders faced "without historical

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<sup>19</sup> Gorney, "The Voluntaristic Zionist System in Trial," 554.

<sup>20</sup> Gorney, "The Voluntaristic Zionist System in Trial," 552.

experience, without a political plan, and without mental preparation.”<sup>21</sup> The Holocaust of Europe’s Jews and the chance for the establishment of a Jewish state tested the Zionist political system and policies. The Zionist leadership’s effort to create a Jewish Army under the Allies, coupled with the firm demand for the establishment of a “Jewish Commonwealth” in Palestine (known as the ‘Biltmore Program’ after the New York hotel in which it was announced, in 1942) were “instinctive” political reactions, based on lessons learned in the First World War. Cooperation in intelligence, politics and military manpower had obtained the ‘Balfour Declaration’ and Zionist legal legitimacy within the Palestine mandate. The Yishuv’s cooperation with the British war effort during the Second World War was pursued with the same purpose in mind, along with immediate economic and military benefits. Until 1942, the possibility of a German invasion was real. The Arab Revolt from 1936-1939 also reminded the Yishuv of the possibility of annihilation in Palestine. The cooperation between the Yishuv and the British expanded considerably, based on mutual interest and common threats.

Illegal immigration, or *Aliyah Bet* in Hebrew, was the major issue upon which the British and Yishuv disagreed. Since 1930, immigration restrictions, imposed by Britain with the aim of keeping the peace in Palestine by balancing Jewish and Arab demands, threatened a fundamental Zionist endeavour. From 1934, *Aliyah Bet* was the Yishuv’s answer to this challenge, and also seen by some of its leaders as necessary in the face of a growing threat to Jews in Germany. Until 1942, however, the Yishuv was divided into several factions regarding illegal immigration and rescue. Only then, after the Nazi threat in the Middle East dissipated and news of the Holocaust became available to the public,

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<sup>21</sup> Gorney, "The Voluntaristic Zionist System in Trial," 551.

was the Jewish Agency forced simultaneously to cooperate with Britain and to conduct illegal immigration and rescue operations. The painful divisions on these issues within the Yishuv represented conflicts between Zionist and Jewish values. Some people felt that cooperation with Britain was paramount, others that its restrictions should be defied. Some held their views for the sake of Zionism, others for the good of the Jewish people.<sup>22</sup> Limitation and failure marked rescue efforts until 1942. The efforts of the Jewish Agency accounted only for a small fraction of the 68,549 Jews rescued between 1939 and 1944,<sup>23</sup> because of divisions within the Yishuv, British restrictions, limited ship availability, complicated transit laws in the Balkans and Turkey, and the threat of the war itself. Only in 1942 did the Jewish Agency form a clear policy on these matters. Rescue was broadened to include support to Jews who had not yet been deported. Statehood and unrestricted immigration were seen as the path to redemption of the Jewish people and the fulfilment of the Zionist movement.<sup>24</sup> Yishuv leaders preferred to achieve these aims through British support, but if necessary, would do so without it. They shared a strategy toward Britain, though to some degree they differed over tactics. British policy toward the Yishuv was far more complex, even chaotic.

### **British Policy**

The Yishuv confronted three levels of British government. His Majesty's government granted legal rights to Zionism in Palestine, with the Balfour Declaration in

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<sup>22</sup> A comprehensive description of the divisions is found in Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel 1939-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 38-39.

<sup>23</sup> See appendices in Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel 1939-1944*, 319-27.

<sup>24</sup> Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel 1939-1944*, 206, 212-213.

1917. During the Second World War, the Minister Resident in Cairo served as a coordinator of British policy in the Middle East. The Minister, while officially representing British policy, also had the power to shape it, especially when, during the war, his staff could crystallize unofficial views in the absence of direction from Whitehall. Their views, while never fully accepted in London during or after the war, still had considerable influence. Finally, towards the end of the Second World War, and especially after it, the government of the Palestine Mandate increasingly became central over matters like immigration or security measures. The High Commissioner controlled the civil services and commanded all British forces in Palestine, although this role was only vaguely defined until the fall of 1946, and policy still was dominated by Whitehall. The High Commissioner reported regularly to the Colonial Office. He was responsible for the day to day governance of the Mandate, including the preservation of law and order, and the implementation of British policies, such as immigration restrictions and development programs.

Between 1943 and 1947, British policy in the Middle East and Palestine was made by the Cabinet and particularly by three departments: the Foreign, Colonial and War Offices. They did not always agree on policy, due to differences in their functions and in the intelligence each body received. The War Office's primary concern was strategic. Both the Foreign and Colonial Offices managed and built protectorates, though the former also had responsibility for diplomac in the Middle East and across the world. The Colonial Office was bound by obligations laid out to the Zionist movement, which were embedded into mandate law, but also understood the problems which these

commitments caused elsewhere. The Foreign Office had broader interests in mind when it advocated dropping support for Zionism during the Second World War.

The British saw illegal immigration as a political weapon, even while the Jewish Agency had not resolved its own differences on the matter. British policy in this field was far more concerned about opinion in the world, especially the United States, than the Yishuv was. The Agency lacked a resolute policy on rescue and immigration until 1942; it first considered *Aliyah Bet* as a vehicle for political warfare only in 1944,<sup>25</sup> and made this approach policy after the “La Spezia Incident” in 1946. The British also saw illegal immigration as a threat, and this view was not unjustified. Though the British distorted the situation, they did need Arab and Muslim support during the Second World War. Britain nearly lost Iraq and its oil at a critical moment in the war in 1940-41, when many Middle Eastern governments conspired against them, and they constantly feared for the security of the Suez Canal. Tolerance of British rule, and at least passive support for it, by Muslims in the Middle East and India, were important – perhaps essential – to the Empire’s ability to fight on. These lessons were not forgotten. In April 1944, most British administrators in the Middle East insisted that Arab and Muslim peoples were sensitive to the Palestine issue, and therefore that Jewish immigration was a strategic threat to British interests.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the impact of the destruction of European Jewry drove Zionist policy. When it came to immigration and rescue, the British and Yishuv spoke two different languages. These experiences shaped their policies during and after the war. The Yishuv leadership watched people die because of its mistakes, British intransigence and

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<sup>25</sup> Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel 1939-1944*, 289.

<sup>26</sup> See ahead. Also see TNA. *Conference on Palestine Held at Cairo on 6-7 April 1944. Memorandum By Minister Resident in the Middle East summarising views expressed at the meetings.* FO 921/148. pp 2 of memo.

circumstances. Britain knew Zionism's hard-line stand from the Biltmore Program onwards, but still viewed Jewish immigration, illegal or not, as a threat to the stability of their Middle Eastern holdings.

British policy towards Arab states, which sought during the war to "loosen the imperial bindings,"<sup>27</sup> was to work discreetly to channel pan-Arab trends in a direction which would least harm its long-term interests. The events of the war themselves shaped this approach, when the Vichy regime in the Levant supported Rashid Ali's 1941 insurrection in Iraq. The Foreign Office responded by bolstering Arab support for the invasion of Syria and Lebanon. Inter-Arab rivalries shaped British policy. Pan-Arabism was a popular movement which also served as a vehicle for the rival ambitions of the monarchs of Iraq and Egypt. British policy delicately balanced the need to support pan-Arabism, at least in cultural and economic terms, without appearing to block it.<sup>28</sup> Palestine, British diplomats and administrators from Cairo and Jerusalem argued, was one of the few issues which united the Arab world.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Zionist interests directly conflicted with British aims to improve its relations with the Arab world, which included some of Britain's greatest assets.

Teddy Kollek, in *For Jerusalem*, identified "deep rooted" Orientalist romanticism as the cause behind British decisions to support Arabs over Zionism.<sup>30</sup> This view may be true of certain British officials, but strategic considerations and a lack of sympathy for the Yishuv played greater roles. Historians have pointed to anti-Semitism, Orientalism,

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<sup>27</sup> Thornhil, "Britain and the politics of the Arab League, 1943-50," 41.

<sup>28</sup> Thornhil, "Britain and the politics of the Arab League, 1943-50," 44-47.

<sup>29</sup> TNA. Notes on *Conference Held in C in C's War Room, Grey Pillars, GHQ, MEF*. 6 April 1944. FO 921/148.

<sup>30</sup> Kollek, *For Jerusalem: A Life by Teddy Kollek*, 59.



strategic policy, and the war itself, to explain Britain's tough stance on immigration and rescue during the Holocaust. Bernard Wasserstein suggested that

...the retreat from the Balfour Declaration policy was also a retreat from the perception of the Jews as a nation. The Jews lacked the essential attribute of state sovereignty, and (by contrast with the position during the First World War) it was a cardinal principle of British policy that Jews should not gain state sovereignty. Moreover, during the struggle against Nazism, liberal principle might appear to demand that the Jews be seen not as a distinct entity but merely as part of the nations among whom they lived. The British government therefore tended to regard the notion that the Jews were an allied people as (to quote an official minute) 'a major fallacy.'<sup>31</sup>

This view represents a Zionist perspective, thus, statehood alone could meet the needs of the Jewish people, who had been failed by Britain. It ignores the fact that Britain's struggle against Germany risked its own national survival and status as a power. This view also neglects the strategic importance of Palestine to Britain, which would have been threatened by handing over sovereignty. Wasserstein acknowledged a "tinge of anti-Semitism in the words of some British officials and politicians... But anti-Semitism does not by itself explain British conduct."<sup>32</sup>

On the same lines, Michael J. Cohen presents the British strategic views of the issue on the eve of World War Two.

Until the Cabinet meetings of 1939... there is no concrete evidence that ministers sat down and consciously decided that, for strategic reasons, the Arabs would have to be appeased at the expense of the Jews. But following the crises precipitated by the Italian conquest of Abyssinia, policy in Palestine had to be decided with one eye on the strategic needs of the area. Once the Arab states were brought in, or themselves took the initiative in mediation, the Palestine issue was treated as a Pan-Arab issue – at first only by the Foreign Office, but by mid 1938 by the Colonial Office as well.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, 353.

<sup>32</sup> Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, 351.

<sup>33</sup> Cohen, *Palestine to Israel*, 97.

By 1937 the policy of “self sufficiency” in the Middle East meant that no additional forces could be spared to handle internal problems, yet even so, at the same time, the strategic reserve of the British army was tied down in Palestine during the Munich crisis. In spite of the boasting of the Zionist movement, could Britain really “rely on some half million Jews to counter-balance the possible enmity of the Arab states in the region? What point would there be in having a Middle East supply base in Palestine, or for that matter a British-fortified Zionist state, if Iraq were to sell its oil to Germany, and allow axis (sic) aircraft to land on its airfields? If Saudi Arabia were to collaborate with the Italians along the Red Sea Littoral? If King Farouk [of Egypt] were to welcome Italian forces at his borders? The strategic nuisance value of the Arab states far outweighed any advantages the Zionists could hope to offer.”<sup>34</sup>

The Yishuv’s demands for full control over immigration and settlement could not be accepted by Britain, which had bigger problems to manage, like the Second World War. The British White Paper Policy of 1939 came after a decade of attempts to find a compromise between Arabs and Jews. Britain had run out of options and time, and adopted a new policy, a major shift for Britain, which traditionally was pro-Zionist, made in consultation with the Arab states. This policy was borne from fear that militant anti-British nationalism in Palestine could spread in the Middle East, and threaten its position, which was, indeed, possible.<sup>35</sup> The effect of events in Germany caused tragedy for Jews and dilemmas for Britons. As the Nazis gained power in Germany, an increasing number of Jewish refugees arrived in Palestine. The change of demographic balance contributed to the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, which cost Britain heavily. Thus, British policy centred

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<sup>34</sup> Cohen, *Palestine to Israel*, 98.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, *Palestine to Israel*, 101.

on keeping Palestine quiet. The Arabs of Palestine demanded an end to Jewish immigration and rejected the possibility of a Jewish state, as proposed by the 1937 Peel Commission. In any case, a Jewish State was never a British aim. The Government's solution, the White Paper of 1939, forbade further Jewish settlement and land purchases and restricted immigration to 75,000 people, divided evenly over five years, wherein it would expire. Afterward, a semi-independent Palestine would be governed on the basis of majority rule.<sup>36</sup> This policy emerged in the spring of 1939, on the eve of the greatest disaster the Jewish people ever suffered. David Ben-Gurion declared, 'We shall help the British fight the Nazis as if there was no White Paper, and we shall fight the White Paper as if there was no war.' The demand for statehood after the 1942 Biltmore Program was a natural reaction to the disaster facing the Jewish people in Europe, and to the political benefits the Yishuv expected through its cooperation with Britain. The outcome of these evolving attitudes was not clear to Britain, nor to the Yishuv. The latter, none the less, had formulated a clear strategy. Conversely, British policy toward the Yishuv became paralyzed at high levels and factionalized beneath.

## **Tensions and Intelligence: British-Yishuv Relations**

### **Yishuv Armed Organizations and Intelligence**

The Yishuv's political system had a dual nature, with "the political, official and legal on one side and the secret military on the other."<sup>37</sup> This underground characteristic of the Yishuv helped the British during the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, as in its contribution to the war effort from 1940 to 1945. After the Second World War, however,

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<sup>36</sup> Cesarani, *Major Farran's Hat*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Gorney, "The Voluntaristic Zionist System in Trial," 554.

this characteristic became the greatest threat to British rule in Palestine. This threat took three main forms: the *Haganah*; the *Irgun Zvai Leumi*, (Irgun for short) also known by its Hebrew acronym, Etzel; and the *Lohmei Herut Israel* (Freedom Fighters of Israel) henceforth known by its Hebrew acronym Lehi.

The Haganah originally was the Yishuv's defence organization against Arabs, who largely were hostile to Zionist settlement in Palestine. This organized territorial militia, founded by the Histadrut in 1920, defended the various *Kibbutzim* and *Moshavim*, or Jewish communes and settlements in Palestine. After 1929 a council, known as the National Command, was established to govern the Haganah, based on political parity between left and right. The Jewish Agency and the Va'ad Leumi shared authority over the organization.<sup>38</sup> In 1938 certain Haganah units helped the British aim to fight Arab rebels, and received useful training and experience. In May 1941, the British military and the Haganah created the Palmach, an elite offensive unit, to assist them in case of a German invasion of Palestine.<sup>39</sup> After British victory in the Middle East in 1942, however, the Palmach, which had enjoyed official status, was disbanded; so it went underground. The Haganah's underground and semi-legal status presented a challenge to Britain after 1944. It gave the Jewish Agency hard power, especially after 1945, when many of its forces had wartime experience. This was the central problem for British policy in Palestine. Few Yishuv politicians, however, appreciated the importance of that fact until after the war – they tended to view the Haganah purely as a defence organization against the Arabs. Until partition was adopted by the United Nations in 1947, this hard power seldom was used, with three outstanding exceptions: The fight

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<sup>38</sup> Gorney, "The Voluntaristic Zionist System in Trial," 553.

<sup>39</sup> Charters., *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47*, 52-56.

against the Arab Rebellion 1936-1939, its role in suppressing Irgun terrorists during the “*saison*,” and the struggle against Britain after 1944. The Yishuv leadership understood the Haganah’s potential as a political tool only during the last phase. From the time the Palmach was disbanded, however, British authorities were constantly worried about the possession of arms by Jews for purposes other than pure self defence. This fear extended into a belief that such arms, along with experienced Jewish soldiers, were creating a recipe for disaster for British authority in Palestine. These fears had cause.

The Irgun originated in 1931, when some Haganah officers broke from that organization over the issue of socialist politicization in the defence forces. The Irgun was unstable and no challenge to Britain or Mapai, until Menachem Begin took leadership in 1943. He reorganized the group into a secret revolutionary army, with its own front organizations for fundraising and a political program, separate but inspired by Revisionist Zionism. During and after the Second World War, this international fundraising effort was led by Hillel Kook, under the alias Peter Bergson, a subject of great interest to British intelligence.

Known to the British as the “Stern Gang,” Lehi split from the Irgun in 1940, when the Irgun agreed to a “cease fire” with Britain during the war. Founded by Abraham Stern, the group reached out to fascism, holding the approach that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”<sup>40</sup> It pursued agreements with Mussolini and the Nazis in 1940. For obvious reasons, Hitler did not respond. In 1942 Abraham Stern was killed in an arrest operation, allegedly while trying to escape, but the group continued to function. Its members assassinated the British Minister Resident in Cairo, Lord Moyne, in November

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<sup>40</sup> Colin Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism: Nationalism and the Origins of the Israeli Right* (New York: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd. , 2006), 218.

1944. The arrest of those responsible for this action provided one important piece of intelligence: Lehi security was airtight. None of the three men knew the others' true names or addresses nor those of their commanders. Lehi and the Irgun were suppressed during the "saison" when the Haganah and the British cooperated against terrorist organizations. Both groups, however, were reinvigorated politically during the Jewish Resistance Movement, when all armed organizations worked together to fight Britain.

British respect for the mysterious "Jewish Intelligence Organization" ubiquitously appears in the documentation. In a debate in Parliament after a major British arrest operation that temporarily shut down the Jewish Agency, the pro-Zionist labour MP Richard Crossman, a man with relevant experience from managing the SOE, described the "Jewish Intelligence Service" as "probably the best in the world."<sup>41</sup> A British 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne HQ report on another operation in the Yishuv commented that "the Jews have an extremely efficient intelligence organisation" and stressed the importance of secrecy before the operation.<sup>42</sup> These views were on the high side, but nonetheless, the competition was serious.

The central Yishuv intelligence organization was the *Mossad L'Aliyah Bet*, or Institute for Illegal immigration, which established a network in Europe for getting Displaced Persons (DP's) to Palestine. Led by Shaul Meirov (Avigur), the Mossad was one of many institutions which worked to slip Jews into Palestine illegally. Its roots emerged with the rise of Nazi Germany. In 1934 the *Hehalutz* Zionist youth movement first organized *Aliyah Bet*. Private individuals and the Revisionist movement also took

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<sup>41</sup> "Parliament: The Fighting in Palestine, Appeal for Urgent Decision, House of Commons " *The Times of London*, July 2 1946. 8.

<sup>42</sup> TNA, "Security of Operations" in *Operation AGATHA*. WO 275/27.

independent roles in the effort.<sup>43</sup> As an arm of the Haganah, the Mossad's actions generally were subject to the policies of the Yishuv, though in exceptional circumstances during the war, its leadership acted independently of Jewish Agency policy. Within the Yishuv leadership, immigration was less a question of strategy than principle. Forced to choose between Zionist interests and Jewish values,<sup>44</sup> this was a contentious and divisive issue for the Yishuv leadership during the war. Only agents of the *Mossad l'Aliyah Bet* saw those two core principles as one, and therefore tended to take initiative and a degree of risk in rescue operations.<sup>45</sup> Without immigration, the Zionist movement would have had neither hope nor promise to offer world Jewry during its darkest period in history. The determined drive for *Aliyah Bet*, however, damaged British policy during and after the war, and shaped its attitudes toward the Yishuv.

The Mossad and some arms of British intelligence cooperated during the Second World War. Afterward, Reuven Zaslani and other Yishuv intelligence leaders repeatedly offered the British further cooperation against the Soviet Union, which would have used the Mossad's networks in eastern Europe. In 1947, Kollek asked his MI5 contact in London, "why it was considered that we [British] considered the Jews to be 'bloody Bolshies.'" After receiving a reasoned answer about political trends in east Europe, Kollek replied, "The immigrants were coming not to spread communism but to get away from it. Kollek then got into the familiar theme of the strategical advantage which would accrue to [Britain] from a Jewish state..."<sup>46</sup> Kollek later told the same thing to his friend Douglas

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<sup>43</sup> Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel 1939-1944*.

<sup>44</sup> Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel 1939-1944*, 23-24.

<sup>45</sup> Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel 1939-1944*, 49.

<sup>46</sup> TNA. *Simkins (B1A) to Robertson (B3a)*. 3.2.47. KV 2/2263. 120z.

Roberts of Security Intelligence Middle East (SIME).<sup>47</sup> Because of real and imagined threats, however, the British did not trust these offers, despite the record of wartime cooperation. MI5 closely observed illegal immigration from April 1945, but took little action against the Mossad until the spring of 1946, when illegal immigration became an engine for political warfare against the British, and an effective one. They did not know what it was called, but had a good sense of how it worked.<sup>48</sup>

The Jewish Agency received its intelligence from the Haganah's espionage service and the Political Department. The *Sherut HaYediot*, or SHAY for short, developed slowly. It began exclusively as a volunteer organization and its structure changed according to current needs. By 1940, the SHAY was divided into several departments, each studying a different target. With headquarters in Tel-Aviv and regional offices around the country, SHAY had departments that studied the British regime, local Arabs, neighbouring Arab lands, "dissident" groups (Irgun and Lehi) and others. *Mossad l'Aliyah Bet* received security support from SHAY after the war. SHAY took special interest in decrypting British signals in Palestine and, with some success, learned British code words and its elementary encryption systems. Amongst the SHAY's best sources were postal and telegraph clerks, who often provided copies of British communications, and tried to pass Jewish Agency communications by the censor. The Yishuv benefitted from the military and intelligence cooperation it offered the British in suppressing the Arab Revolt. It enabled Yishuv intelligence officers to learn basic skills such as the use of

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<sup>47</sup> TNA. *Copy of minute 1*. 14.3.47. KV 2/2263. 136a.

<sup>48</sup> TNA, "Robertson 'Jewish illegal immigration from Europe to Palestine' 4.8.46" in *Jewish Illegal Immigration*. KV 3/56.



wireless equipment and cryptography, alongside further opportunities to penetrate the British government and intelligence establishments in Palestine.<sup>49</sup>

Until 1940, SHAY reported to the Jewish Agency's political department. Thereafter it maintained a close relationship with that department, and supplied the Agency with information on a routine basis, and also upon request. The SHAY was built on the principle that it was "not just for supplying information on current problems of the hour, rather as an auxiliary aid for the expected political and military struggle in the near future."<sup>50</sup> Some have credited SHAY for shaping David Ben-Gurion's "prophetic" view of events.<sup>51</sup> This argument is hard to ignore; Ben-Gurion's personal involvement in the direction of SHAY efforts and his acute security-consciousness seem to have kept him a step ahead of MI5 when the open struggle emerged.

Moshe Shertok (Sharett) ran the Jewish Agency's political department through the 1940s. It had some of its own, mainly diplomatic, intelligence sources, but relied heavily on SHAY. This department assessed SHAY reports, and sometimes edited and translated them for consumption by Allied intelligence. The Political Department had a unit which investigated the status of European Jewry and eventually contributed much evidence on Nazi war crimes to postwar tribunals.<sup>52</sup> Unlike the Haganah, the political department had

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<sup>49</sup> A fascinating topic which deserves new study in light of the new releases. Dozens of examples of this penetration and the Yishuv's methods are found in Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*, 563. and throughout this paper.

<sup>50</sup> Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*, 498-50.

<sup>51</sup> Hezi Salomon, "Influence of the Intelligence Organizations of the Yishuv on Ben-Gurion's Appreciation of the Situation: 1946-1947", *Ma'arechet (Hebrew)*, July-Aug: 309 (1987): 28-36.

<sup>52</sup> Examples of material on Nazi collaborators, evidence of war crimes and German agents in the Middle East passed from the Jewish Agency to SIME can be found at CZA, S25/7831. The subject of the escape organization and collaboration with the British was studied in Tuvia Friling, *Arrows in the Dark: David Ben-Gurion, The Yishuv Leadership, and Rescue Attempts During the*

official (and unofficial) relations with Allied intelligence agencies. Its material on Arab affairs in the Middle East, based on open sources as well as reports by its own officers and SHAY, was excellent. Arab politics was a topic which Yishuv intelligence had covered since 1918.<sup>53</sup> Starting in the 1930s, the political department's "Arab Branch" provided detailed information on relations between Arab statesmen, their policies, views and intentions. It sought to persuade the neighbouring states to reconcile with a Jewish national home, to prevent local Palestinian opposition, and to grapple with the threat posed by the Mufti of Jerusalem who in 1936 led the Arab rebellion.<sup>54</sup> Despite the quality of the Arab Branch's reports, they obviously failed to achieve these aims, though still they assisted the Jewish Agency's strategy. British SIGINT provided the same sort of illumination on these matters, and likely contributed much to decision making. SIGINT lacks the intimacy which friendship and networking provided to the Yishuv, but in this case slightly weaker data by Britain was put to effective use. The Arab Department produced regular digests of the Arab press, translated into English, and other papers on Arab affairs, which it gave to British and American intelligence. Its liaison with the British became particularly important during the *saison*, when the political department cooperated in the fight against Irgun and Lehi. The relationship also reached a critical point during the period of the Jewish Resistance, when Lehi, Haganah and the Irgun cooperated in the fight against Britain. That challenge demanded a major adjustment of British policy on Palestine.

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*Holocaust*, trans. Ora Cummings, II vols (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

<sup>53</sup> Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*, 7-12.

<sup>54</sup> Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*, 88.

Yishuv intelligence assistance to Britain has been studied in Hebrew, but less-so in English. The mission in 1944, where Britain sent a few dozen Palestinian Jewish paratroopers to the Balkans, was one instance of cooperation. Another is the intelligence gathered at an interrogation centre in Haifa, run jointly by the Yishuv and the British. Whereas SIME generally ran interrogation in the Middle East, it seemingly was not aware of this bureau. Between 1940 and 1944, the *Haifa interrogation bureau* interrogated Jews from Germany and Nazi-occupied countries on any matter of relevance to British needs. In 1940, after British intelligence collected intelligence on Germany from European refugees (mainly Jews), local British authorities, together with the Jewish Agency, founded an office to collect information accumulated amongst German and Italian Jewish immigrants on enemy strength. The Haifa interrogation bureau was originally opened as a department of the communications section of the RAF Levant headquarters, as a front for the British Secret Intelligence Service, or MI6, in cooperation with the Jewish Agency's political department. In typical fashion, British intelligence gave the department several names: *Haifa Interrogation Bureau*, the *Statistical Department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine*, or the *Statistics Office*, and others.<sup>55</sup> The Haifa interrogation bureau collected all available information from these immigrants, ranging from handmade maps to technical data on infrastructure by former engineers, to lists of friendly contacts in enemy countries. This material may have helped MI6's contribution to the war effort, though the issue requires further study.

In 1958, David HaCohen, who was involved as a liaison with British intelligence at the beginning of the war and later worked with the Ministry for Economic Warfare, or

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<sup>55</sup> Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem. (CZA), S25/10631. *Office of the Investigation of Refugees from Enemy States. 1940-44.*

the Special Operations Executive (SOE), related his perspective on the relationship between Yishuv and British intelligence. Before the war, he implored his British contacts to establish cooperation in intelligence: “when an Englishman goes to these countries for intelligence work, then he’s an Englishman, it’s written on his face, but we the Jews are already in place and we can serve intelligence...” Tony Simonds, head of the British escape organization, MI9’s “A” Force, shared this view, and later wrote

There is hardly a white country in the world that does not contain a Jewish minority; well integrated and assimilated. Palestine was the melting pot for Jews all over the world. Mainly from Europe, and at that, German occupied Europe. Due to the German atrocities, Jews, native to Europe, had fled to Palestine. It was from this vast reserve of potential agents that I wanted to obtain help to run Allied Service Escape Organisations...

A friend of Mine, David HaCohen, Mayor of Haifa and Managing Director of Solel Boneh, a big construction company, raised and equipped an entire Port Operating Company R.E. [Royal Engineers] out of his own pocket and found the expenses through-out the war...<sup>56</sup>

HaCohen admitted that he “obviously had a goal to penetrate into the English intelligence machine.” When the war started he was contacted for his aid. HaCohen emphasized that he was not “an agent for hire..;” he decided which Haganah men would be chosen for sabotage operations. “Take it or leave it,” he offered the SOE. According to HaCohen, the SOE wanted to replicate the underground methods that the Haganah had used in its illegal immigration operation of the 1930s.<sup>57</sup> This secret cooperation, studied by Eldad Harouvi and Yoav Gelber, deserves further work.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Imperial War Museum. *MSS-Jewish Aid to Allied Escape and Rescue Work*. AC Simonds Papers.

<sup>57</sup> HA, David Hacohen interview. 20/3/1958. 149.12.

<sup>58</sup> For a summary in English of the work, see: Eldad Harouvi, "Reuven Zaslani (Shiloah) and the Covert Cooperation with British Intelligence during the Second World War," in *Intelligence for Peace: the Role of Intelligence in Times of Peace*, ed. Hési Carmel (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 30-48. Also see Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*.

Certain Yishuv leaders viewed cooperation with Britain as a step towards independent statehood. Reuven Shiloah, a senior Jewish Agency intelligence officer who became known as the father of Israeli espionage, said on 27 November 1944:

...in the years to come, intelligence and the activity associated with it will continue to play an important role... We too will have to operate in Europe. That is where our immigrants will come from. We will have to continue this cooperation – or else find new ways of cooperating with these institutions.<sup>59</sup>

Shiloah's statement, however, also emphasized the increasing importance of illegal immigration in the political program of the Yishuv. While the Jewish Agency never received the political payoff that it hoped to achieve through cooperation with Britain, it emerged from the experience equipped to fight British policy with force. The Agency successfully used whatever ties it had developed by the end of the Second World War, and then forged new relationships. As a result, long-established patterns of intelligence cooperation left Britain vulnerable to manipulation,<sup>60</sup> due to the inherent weakness in its system – it relied on Jewish employees in the Police and administration, and on secret assistance from the Yishuv in order to maintain law and order. The more the Yishuv resisted British policy, the more Britain discovered the limits to its authority.

### British Intelligence

Only seasoned Mandate officials had any grasp of Yishuv politics, because they witnessed the major political shifts in the Yishuv which occurred in the 1930s. This disadvantage was mutual, as few leaders and intelligence officers in the Yishuv

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<sup>59</sup> Eldad Harouvi, "Reuven Zaslani (Shiloah) and the Covert Cooperation with British Intelligence during the Second World War," in *Intelligence for Peace: the Role of Intelligence in Times of Peace*, ed. Hési Carmel (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 47.

<sup>60</sup> Wagner, "British intelligence and the Jewish Resistance Movement in the Palestine Mandate, 1945-46," 641.

understood the British system either.<sup>61</sup> Thus, in 1943, British intelligence described a completely nonexistent terrorist organization known as “Afra,” led by another nonexistent “Ashra.” As well, they believed the Haganah was led by Yaakov Dostrovski, Aba Hushi and David Sholtiar [perhaps they meant Shaltiel].<sup>62</sup> Dostrovski (or Dori) was indeed the Chief of Staff of the Haganah, but Aba Hushi had nothing to do with the organization – he was a labour man. Shaltiel simply was the Haganah commander of the Haifa region. This significant mistake stemmed from the lack of British understanding of the Yishuv’s political structure and its relationship to the Haganah. In fact, until his death in 1945, Eliyahu Golomb was the *de facto* Haganah commander. The British never appreciated the informality of his position. The Haganah was an underground army, on which intelligence of any kind was hard to collect. The misconception continued after Golomb’s death in 1945, when the British wasted some effort trying to determine who his successor would be. The CID dossier on Shaul Meirov (Avigur), in charge of illegal immigration as head of the *Mossad l’Aliyah Bet*, cited a 1943 report from SIS saying that he, rather than Golomb, was the *real* head of the Haganah, while a police source from Haifa termed him the Haganah’s operations commander.<sup>63</sup> The wasted effort derived from confusion about the organization’s structure, a basic point of order of battle. The intelligence challenge posed by the distance of most officials from the Yishuv and the Haganah’s underground character, was endemic to the British in Palestine. The picture was not completely gloomy and many of its officers were able; Britain developed

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<sup>61</sup> Wagner, "British intelligence and the Jewish Resistance Movement in the Palestine Mandate, 1945-46," 634.

<sup>62</sup> Gelber, "British and Zionist Policy in the Shadow of the Fear of a Jewish Uprising, 1942-1944 (Hebrew)," 339.

<sup>63</sup> HA, *Shaul Meirov Personality Sheet*. 47/732. (role 12/slides 110-111).

several strong sources on the Yishuv, but no amount of intelligence ever can compensate for weak policy.

Among these officers was Alexander Kellar in MI5's B1(b) section, which handled counter-intelligence in the Middle East, relying heavily on SIGINT, especially solutions of Yishuv traffic. In November 1943 he summarized the situation in Palestine:

Palestine presents another security problem of considerable magnitude. Matters there are already heading for a crisis but it seems probable that disturbances, if they are to arise, will be postponed until we have made our future policy for the country known. Zionist claims in Palestine are becoming increasingly extreme and, backed as they are by the well armed para-military organization of the HAGANA, they may well recreate conditions similar to those existing during "the troubles" [the Arab Revolt] before the war unless the situation is handled with firmness and skill by the Authorities who will require even perhaps more than they do to-day the help of Intelligence in their task. Further, the Arab-Jewish problem is not localised within the boundaries of Palestine. It has important repercussions in all Arab countries and is the one issue which successfully brings them together in a common front against us because of our alleged anti-Arab policy in a country where they claim the Arab is there by right and the Jew on sufferance...

American commercial interests in the [Middle East] and their strong sympathy for the Jewish case in Palestine will probably cause her to operate an intelligence network in the area which we shall doubtless require to counter...

Such are the counter-intelligence problems as I see them in the Middle East after the war... The problems are sufficiently complex and important to indicate that there can be little, if any, let-up in our counter-intelligence activities in the area, and their integration under centralized direction would seem to be a necessary piece of rationalisation.<sup>64</sup>

This assessment was shrewd. It raised the esteem which Guy Liddell, head of B division, or Counter Intelligence as a whole, held for Kellar, who soon came to determine MI5's postwar approach to Palestine's security. On 25 August 1943, Liddell remarked "there is no doubt that Kellar knows his job well."<sup>65</sup> On that day, Kellar and Liddell met with John Rymer-Jones, who was about to leave to Palestine, to take on the role of Inspector-

<sup>64</sup> TNA, *Appendix B – note to DDB (Dick White)*. KV 4/438.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diary*, KV 4/192 pp. 162.

General of the police force. Rymer-Jones also spoke with Victor Rothschild, a Jewish MI5 officer and expert in counter-sabotage, about attacks on oil installations in Haifa. Kellar impressed Rymer-Jones and Liddell with his knowledge of Palestine, perhaps based on his work with solutions of Jewish Agency traffic, which Liddell described in his diary as ISPAL (probably an acronym for “Intelligence Service – Palestine”). The director of SIS was the custodian of ISPAL intercepts,<sup>66</sup> to which Hebrew speakers from GCHQ and MI6’s Radio Security Service (RSS) made contributions.<sup>67</sup> Over time the intercepts expanded to include new channels for Jewish Agency communications. In the summer of 1946, intercepts of Jewish Agency communications provided key evidence in Britain’s case against the Jewish Agency.

In January 1944, ISPAL was opened to the War Office and to Sir Bernard Paget, who had just been appointed chief of Middle East Command. MI5 expected Paget to share this material with SIME,<sup>68</sup> Britain’s main counter-intelligence agency in the Middle East, which had great experience using SIGINT against Axis espionage. In the next month, SIME expressed the desire to provide ISPAL to the Defence Security Officer (DSO) in Palestine, responsible for military security, and the High Commissioner.<sup>69</sup> The Director of Military Intelligence questioned this idea because the DSO, Henry Hunloke, reportedly had a Jewish mistress, casting doubt on his ability to ensure information security. SIME quickly investigated the matter. A month later, the rumour was found to

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<sup>66</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diary*, KV 4/195. pp.108, 186, 201.

<sup>67</sup> Walton, "British Intelligence and the Mandate of Palestine: Threats to British National Security Immediately After the Second World War," 438.

<sup>68</sup> TNA. *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/193 pp88.

<sup>69</sup> TNA. *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/193 pp167.



be unsubstantiated and Hunloke was brought into the picture as well.<sup>70</sup> Despite the dangers, ISPAL seems to have remained secret because it was treated with great security. Unfortunately this fact also hampers one's ability to reconstruct its effect. The only references to "ISPAL" in the documents comes from Guy Liddell's diary, though it is possible that *Circus*, *Buttercup* and other "top secret" sources mentioned in the files, were in fact codenames for what Liddell referred-to as ISPAL 1, 2, and 3.

When trying to penetrate the Yishuv, British intelligence persistently had the problem that willing agents were in short supply. When interviewed by Israeli researchers fifty years after the event, Richard Catling, former chief of the CID's special branch, stated that he had only five human sources, though they were well placed and trusted.<sup>71</sup> Other agents generally had to be paid, and were not always reliable. In 1943, MI5 noted that "it is virtually impossible to find a Jew prepared to divulge anything concerning the organization... and when he is found, he will almost invariably pay the penalty of his treachery with his life."<sup>72</sup> The Security Service had to rely on informants from the Polish Army, who were better able to penetrate the Irgun. Polish intelligence also was an important source on communist activity. The source was mostly lost after the war, although Polish sources continued to supply the Security Service with information on Palestine. Begin claimed to know of only three cases of treachery by Irgun members, which he discussed in *The Revolt*.<sup>73</sup> His claim seems accurate, though it is difficult to tell because the records tend to be very protective of these sources, while British penetrations

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<sup>70</sup> TNA. *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/193 pp256.

<sup>71</sup> Eldad Harouvi and Israel Haran. "Interview with Sir Richard Catling 9 October 1997" 220.1. Haganah Archives, Tel Aviv. pp 25.

<sup>72</sup> TNA. kv 5/33. 18 Jan '43. "the Jewish situation" pp2

<sup>73</sup> Begin, *The Revolt*, 99.

into Irgun were significant. Either way, the British faced great limitations when trying to penetrate the Yishuv, which had many ways to penetrate British organizations. What made matters more difficult for Britain was that even its strong SIGINT on the Yishuv only was useful if it could be assessed by someone with intimate knowledge of the politics of that community – another rare find. Cooperation by Kollek and others helped to clarify these matters, but only when the DSO was willing to ask questions. The DSO, however, rarely could ask specific questions without compromising top-secret listening and deciphering efforts.

Rymer-Jones had his work cut out for him when he arrived in Palestine two days after meeting with Liddell and Kellar. His predecessor, Major Alan Saunders, had been in Palestine since the establishment of the Mandate, and left big shoes to fill. Rymer-Jones was borrowed from the Metropolitan Police and maintained close contacts in MI5 throughout his tenure.<sup>74</sup> His appointment probably was guided by MI5, which was concerned about the growing threat posed by the Haganah and its illegal arms. It represented a drive, originating in London, to improve security intelligence in Palestine. There was no shortage of threats to British security in the Middle East, including the issue of the Haganah, as SIME and the Political Intelligence Centre Middle East, or PICME, agreed throughout 1943.

During the Second World War, British policymakers feared the possibility of a Jewish uprising in Palestine, even when it cooperated overtly and covertly with the Yishuv. The military victory at el-Alamein in 1942 actually complicated the political situation in the Middle East, as Britain believed a recovering and allied France would

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<sup>74</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918–1948," 198.

reclaim its possessions in Syria and Lebanon, while the Soviets would try to establish a grip in northern Iran, and perhaps to reach the Mediterranean. Arab nationalist movements in Syria and Egypt reawakened, and the Jewish-Arab problem in Palestine had yet to be resolved,<sup>75</sup> with repercussions stretching to Britain's relations with America.

None the less, Britain had more important issues to handle, such as winning the war, containing communist expansion, maintaining the empire and protecting assets like the Suez Canal and Middle Eastern oil. As news of Nazi atrocities slipped out of Europe, the Zionist position hardened, becoming what the British thought of as extremism. Given Britain's challenges and interests, the chances of reaching an arrangement with the Yishuv before the end of the war were slim.<sup>76</sup> The Biltmore Program, in Whitehall's view, was sure to damage British interests, and Arabs seemed a more powerful ally and danger than Zionists. The mere fact that Britain did not make a policy announcement against Zionism during the war was an achievement of past Zionist diplomacy, Churchill's continued support, and the undesirability of deciding policy while the future was still so uncertain.

British Intelligence in Palestine was as convoluted as its policy; it maintained vigilance against the Jewish Agency while still working with it very closely. Within Palestine, there existed several intelligence services. MI5 was not officially represented there, though the DSO was responsible for internal security in Palestine. Using field

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<sup>75</sup>It is possible, although the research has yet to come under scrutiny, that Britain colluded with Syria to keep the French out of the Levant, while the French returned the favour by working with the Jewish underground. see Prof. Meir Zamir, "Espionage and the Zionist Endeavour", *Upfront (Jerusalem Post)*, 21 November 2008, 22-6.

<sup>76</sup>Yoav Gelber, "British and Zionist Policy in the Shadow of the Fear of a Jewish Uprising, 1942-1944 (Hebrew)", *HaTzionut*, 7 (1981): 335-6.

security sections of the army, personal contacts in Jerusalem and his Area Security Officers (ASO) throughout the country, the DSO investigated Arab and Jewish threats, investing considerable effort against communist infiltration. He vetted government employees, although staff shortages hampered this task, and infiltration remained a high risk. The DSO reported regularly to MI5 and was subordinate to SIME. His role overlapped considerably with that of army security (GSI). The DSO's burden was not redefined until Kellar intervened in 1945.

SIME, based in Cairo, was “an inter-Service body responsible to the Defence Committee for all Civil Security and counter-Intelligence work in the Middle East... Although not officered, administered or financed by the Security Service [MI5], in London, [it] acted on their behalf in the Middle East and received direction as to general Security methods and policy from the Director of the Security Service in London.”<sup>77</sup> Until it was absorbed by MI5 in 1946, SIME was subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. SIME dealt with security issues in the Middle East, and thus monitored Arab and Jewish political activity. Among other activities, it contributed to the war effort by running an interrogation centre and supporting deception. During the war, SIME increasingly shared all of its material with American intelligence, which MI5 thought was a potential source of leakage to the Yishuv.<sup>78</sup> SIME's liaison with officers of the Jewish Agency's intelligence department also was productive and continued, to a lesser extent, after the war. In particular, Teddy Kollek and Maurice Oldfield became good friends during this time, a relationship which shaped the intelligence relationships between Britain and the Yishuv, and later the state of Israel.

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<sup>77</sup> TNA. *SIME Charter* 24 July 1943. KV 4/234. 1B.

<sup>78</sup> TNA. *Report on Visit to Middle East by AJ Kellar*. May 1944. KV 4/384. pp 3-5 of report.

SIME had another worrisome relationship with the ORBY organization, an intelligence agency set up in 1940 by wealthy British-Egyptian Jewish businessmen who “wanted to do their part” for the war. ORBY may have been connected to Moshe Filful, an Egyptian-Jewish lawyer, who during the war worked for British (and Free French) intelligence and later for the Jewish Agency. By 1944, Kellar cautioned his colleagues against ORBY’s intimate position to SIME,

Divided into a number of Departments covering the different fields of its activity, e.g. the Palace and Government circles; Moslem organisations; El Azhar and the Universities; the Business community; Egyptian Armed Forces, etc., it now employs both paid and voluntary agents on a considerable scale. Besides a head office in Cairo, ORBY has branches in Alexandria, the Canal Zone, Tanta and Upper Egypt. Funds are derived from SIME’s secret funds but recent retrenchments have forced ORBY to close down on certain of its commitments, as, for example, its activities among the Greek community.

Captains Zagdoun and Rolo continue to direct ORBY’s activities... There is, of course, no reason to doubt the loyalty of the British representatives or the present goodwill of its stateless members, but, in the case of the French personnel, consideration may well have to be given to the question whether a stage is not likely to be reached when their loyalties will be primarily with the French. The present strain on Anglo-French relations in the Levant States and the likelihood of further political disputes generically in our relations with De Gaulle may well prejudice these French representatives of ORBY against us and the possibility that the information they acquire will be passed to the French instead of, or even as well as, ourselves cannot, I feel, be discounted. One of ORBY’s directors is, for example, De Gaulle’s commercial representative in Egypt.

There is an added danger in that the sources of information at ORBY’s command are not confined to Egyptian circles for information derived from British sources also passes through its hand. [DSO Egypt] Jenkins told me in strict confidence – and I should be grateful if I could be consulted before any use is made of this information – that ORBY has an agent on the switchboard both at the British Embassy and the Minister of State’s office. I was disturbed to learn this and... I asked [Jenkins], knowing that a number of ORBY’s personnel are of Jewish persuasion, whether he had considered that this might have been the source of leakage to the Agency of certain top secret papers which it is thought may have originated in the Minister of State’s office. Jenkins told me... the Jewish members of ORBY were anti-Zionist and had so shown their views in a recent appreciation

of the Zionist problem.... the desirability of an organisation such as ORBY having agents inside British Government departments is very much to be questioned.<sup>79</sup>

Though originally subordinate to the military and focused on such issues, by 1944 SIME and the DSO Palestine worked more and more on political matters. This caused considerable tension with another intelligence organization. PICME, based in Cairo and headed by Brigadier-General Clayton, reported on Arab and other Middle Eastern affairs to the Minister-Resident in Cairo, the Foreign Office and the army, whose own intelligence service had a poor grasp on these matters. The only intelligence service with better information than PICME on these matters was the Jewish Agency's political department, which immediately provided records of every Arab League meeting, as well as information on Arab diplomatic and clandestine activity. Tuvia Arazi's observation of Arab agents working for the Nazis in Syria and Iraq gave the Jewish Agency an excellent means to establish cooperation with British intelligence.<sup>80</sup>

PICME tended toward an anti-Zionist and pro-Arab bent, though it also accused SIME of holding such beliefs, after the latter produced a lengthy paper on Zionist politics and the Palestine problem.<sup>81</sup> SIME was more willing to cooperate with the Yishuv than PICME, mostly because, as a security agency, it had much to gain from its relationship with Jewish intelligence. Conversely, PICME, primarily an assessment agency, had little to gain from such a relationship. Its role was to assess political threats to imperial security in the Middle East, and it saw the Yishuv through a hostile lens, in part because the latter was a danger. However, PICME's assessments sometimes were marked by wishful thinking. For example, in early 1943 some officers of the Middle East Intelligence Centre

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<sup>79</sup> TNA. *Report on Visit to Middle East by AJ Kellar*. May 1944. KV 4/384. pp 18-19 of report.

<sup>80</sup> Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*, 2:617.

<sup>81</sup> TNA. *SIME to DSO's, USLO, ISLD, AFHQ, MI5, PICME*. 28.8.1943. KV 3/67/58a.

(soon to be reorganized as PICME) claimed that, after the war, most European Jews, including even refugees to Palestine, would prefer to return to their countries of origin.<sup>82</sup> Equally, a year later PICME overstated the prospect of a revolt in the Yishuv against Britain. Nevertheless, PICME had occasional contact with certain members of the Yishuv such as Moshe Shertok, Reuven Shiloah and Teddy Kollek.

The Palestine Police's Criminal Investigation Department (CID), essentially a political police agency, was by far the best security and intelligence organization in Palestine. Its officers were uniquely experienced. The CID was commanded by Arthur Giles, a classic colonial serviceman. Born and raised in Cyprus and having served in the Royal Navy, he served as a translator on Malta in the Great War and settled in Egypt afterwards, where he served in the police. With great experience in the Middle East, he spoke Hebrew, Greek, Turkish, Latin and English. Not seeing any room for career advancement in Egypt, Giles joined the Palestine Police in 1938,<sup>83</sup> where he became an expert on Revisionist Zionism, the Irgun and Lehi. By 1941, he was appointed commander of the CID and Assistant Inspector General (AIG).<sup>84</sup> His colonial experience shaped him for the challenges of heading the CID. Another man with local experience was Sir Richard Catling, who started as a beat cop in Palestine in 1934 and ended up heading the CID's Special Branch, as well as achieving several other colonial appointments after 1948.<sup>85</sup> With Catling and Giles leading the fight, the CID was well-positioned to tackle terrorism in Palestine.

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<sup>82</sup> Yoav Gelber, "British and Zionist Policy in the Shadow of the Fear of a Jewish Uprising, 1942-1944 (Hebrew)", *HaTzionut*, 7 (1981): 341.

<sup>83</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918-1948," 111.

<sup>84</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918-1948," 198.

<sup>85</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918-1948," 16.

British military intelligence in Palestine gained importance only towards the late summer of 1946. Its principal sources were Field Security Sections, such as the British 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne's 317 Field Security Section. They produced regular, accurate and detailed reports, especially unique because they contained rumours, showing that it was tuned in to the happenings in the Yishuv and Arab communities. From late 1946, the Army in Palestine also had its own security intelligence centre, headed by the GSI, which coordinated the army, CID, MI6 and signals intelligence material in a central location, referred to as "the cage," to coordinate and conduct police and army anti-terrorist operations.<sup>86</sup> What value the GSI contributed to operations is unclear. Until 1946, army reports on the Yishuv, compared to DSO and especially CID material, were wrought with errors that reflect its distance from the civilian population. To fill this gap, until mid 1945 the army generally relied upon PICME's reports, and then on those from SIME and the DSO.

The CID significantly contributed to military operations only from the fall of 1946. Towards the end of the mandate, all intelligence services agreed on the superior quality of CID material. In order to avoid bottlenecks, in the spring of 1947 it was decided to pass CID information directly to London, and to establish a permanent liaison between it and the GSI's B division (counter-intelligence), so the GOC could have full access to the material.<sup>87</sup> However, as late as 1947, the CID still wanted to keep the army from running agents,<sup>88</sup> though the Field Security Sections had their own informants.

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<sup>86</sup> TNA. J.C. Robertson. *Report on visit to Middle East*. June 1947. KV 4/438 pp 23.

<sup>87</sup> TNA. J.C. Robertson. *Report on visit to Middle East*. June 1947. KV 4/438 pp 18-19 passing intel to London; pp20 liaison; pp21CID referred to as "High grade intelligence organization"

<sup>88</sup> TNA. J.C. Robertson. *Report on visit to Middle East*. June 1947. KV 4/438 pp20.



The Inter Service Liaison Division (ISLD) was the cover name for MI6, or the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). Its representative in Palestine was the Military Liaison Officer (MLO), attached to the RAF who, during the war, also worked with the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and Mi9 escape organization. The MLO liaised with Yishuv intelligence and the various British services operating in Palestine to support MI6 and SOE operations. MI6 also had an officer in Palestine, referred to in the documentation as X2. His activities mostly remain unknown; the documentation is sparse and references to it frequently are blanked-out. SIS's contribution to work against the Yishuv was mixed in quality. In January 1944, MI6 reported on negotiations between Haganah and Irgun, regarding the former's absorption of the latter group.<sup>89</sup> This report was nonsense; an anachronism, it probably derived from an earlier attempt by dissenters from each organization to form a united "Am Lochem," or "Fighting Nation" organization. This example further illustrates the tendency for British intelligence to misinterpret the meaning of evidence on Yishuv politics. There was a cultural gap between both communities; the British did not understand the Yishuv, and vice versa. This gap produced mistakes on both sides, which ultimately harmed the British effort more.

## **SIGINT**

MI5 collected reports from the DSO and SIME. MI5 also had a source called *Buttercup*, a form of SIGINT intercept which tended to focus on journalists and other visitors in Palestine, such as emissaries. As journalists found the terrorists more easily than could the security services, to observe their reports was logical. *Buttercup* seemingly

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<sup>89</sup> TNA. *SIS Extract*. KV 5/29. 22a.

had better access to the terrorists than did the security services.<sup>90</sup> Buttercup provided intelligence on all matters within the Yishuv, though its accuracy was inconsistent, because of the nature of journalistic access. In 1947, the DSO believed that one of the best contributions he could make to intelligence would be

...By intelligence use of the product of the BUTTERCUP unit. The BUTTERCUP type of source is of course already available to the CID, but they have little time to analyse its product in detail. The DSO, when adequately staffed, may be able to give it more specialised attention, and to apply this particularly useful source in directions which might not occur to the Police – for example, in discovering more about the activities of Russian and Russian-satellite diplomatic and consular representatives.<sup>91</sup>

MI5 intercepted mail from suspected terrorists which were addressed to Revisionist offices in London, and the correspondence of Teddy Kollek from his London and later New York offices.<sup>92</sup> It also took out Home Office warrants to tap Zionist leaders' telephones when they visited the country, especially those of Kollek. The latter, however, aware of this problem, frustrated these efforts in London.<sup>93</sup> MI5 collected and analyzed intelligence and decided whether to pass it on to a relevant authority. Usually, any information that MI5 took seriously was given to the Secretary of State for the Colonies or his Undersecretary. Analyses often were passed back down to the DSO for dissemination in Palestine.

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<sup>90</sup> Two examples highlight this phenomenon: TNA. *DSO to MI5*. 11 November 1947. KV 5/39. Item 198 refers to "Buttercup intercept on Gurdus" (possibly Luba Krugman Gurdus who worked for Yedioth Achronoth at the time). *DSO Extract*. 29.4.46. KV 5/29 88a refers to "Argus of Agence Independant Francaise." Both sources refer to the subject's conversations with seemingly well-informed sources.

<sup>91</sup> TNA. *Report on Visit to Middle East by JC Robertson*. 14 April -14 June 1947. KV 4/438 item 1, pp.27.

<sup>92</sup> TNA. *Teddy Kollek*. KV 2/2261-4. It is unclear how they had access to his personal mail while he was in New York.

<sup>93</sup> See two examples: In TNA, *i/c Kollek to Bill White*, 15.11.46. KV 2/2262. 89M. Kollek warns a caller against speaking openly on the phone, and in *i/c letter Kollek to Sherf*, 9.8.46. KV 2/2261. 39z. Kollek expresses the limitations caused by censorship.

The DSO also extracted much information from *Circus*. It is unclear who or what *Circus* was.<sup>94</sup> *Circus* usually provided information on the Jewish Agency and Haganah, but also the Irgun. It appeared regularly in DSO reportage, but its information, like that given by the Jewish Agency representatives, often was misleading. An examination of 17 references to *Circus* reveals patterns: Several examples present information on discussions within the ranks of the Jewish Agency executive on the “dissidents,” and Zionist fundraising and political activity abroad. Other examples include higher-level Haganah information (deriving from SHAY) about Irgun and Lehi. Determining the source is difficult, as it is well-guarded within the documentation. All *Circus* reports are paraphrased, in order to protect the actual sources. This procedure, combined with the fact that the earliest available reference to *Circus* is in January 1946, suggests that it stemmed from intercepts of communications within the Jewish Agency and the Haganah. *Circus* intelligence had its limits, and British misconceptions about the Yishuv led them to misinterpret or be misled by it.<sup>95</sup> The information was as good as the people from whom it was extracted, and those who assessed it. When *Circus* misled the British, it was because of their own misunderstanding of the Haganah and its relationship with Yishuv politics.

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<sup>94</sup> In Wagner, "British intelligence and the Jewish Resistance Movement in the Palestine Mandate, 1945-46," 638. I erroneously describe *Circus* as a human source who provided “false or inaccurate information.”

<sup>95</sup> These 17 examples, (not all of which can be practically cited) are spread across TNA. KV 5/29-39, KV 2/1435. More examples may exist in the CID material from the Haganah archive, but until such evidence emerges it is fair to conclude that *Circus* was purely a DSO source.

Sigint was a powerful source for both sides. The Jewish Agency and the Haganah<sup>96</sup> each had its own system for cryptography, but basic ones. Britain's only challenge in reading Yishuv traffic was to find reliable Hebrew speakers, which was a real problem. Britain had been solving Jewish Agency traffic since at least 1939, although it is unclear for how long. The Jewish Agency used a super enciphered version of a standard commercial code, the Bentley system. It also used a Hebrew language system based on a combination of the principles for the Bentley code, and the Jewish system of *gammatria* where letters of the Hebrew alphabet have numerical equivalents.<sup>97</sup> The CID, MI6 and above all, the GCHQ made contributions in attacking these systems. The Haganah and SHAY used a system similar to the Jewish Agency's, with a broader base of techniques.<sup>98</sup> Their experience with British systems allowed for a more complex method, but this narrowed down matters for British SIGINT. On the other hand, the SHAY read British traffic probably more than the British were doing; its limits in technique were equalized by advantages in language. Its inability to solve any high level British system was balanced by its ability to intercept plain language discussions over telephones which often compromised information of primary importance. Citing an insider, Yoav Gelber wrote, "All of Jerusalem was covered in a tapping network." The SHAY also gained information on Britain through informants in military and administrative offices.<sup>99</sup> One listening station was run out of a morgue by people whom

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<sup>96</sup> A manual on cryptography at the Haganah Archive, 47/p/8 shows a sophisticated understanding of sigint, for non-professionals.

<sup>97</sup> Instructions for these systems are found at CZA. *Code issues*. S25/10941 and S25/8214.

<sup>98</sup> Details found in Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*, 500.

<sup>99</sup> Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*, 587.

the British had trained during the Arab rebellion.<sup>100</sup> The police and MI5 understood the threat to information security and took steps accordingly,<sup>101</sup> but found it a constant challenge to enforce 'best practices' on the leaky offices of the Palestine government. SHAY, however, was not the only body to benefit from wiretaps. The CID also obtained much useful information from taps, for its fight against terrorism and the Yishuv. Yishuv intelligence had considerable advantages in Palestine, but its limits in assessing British policy were just as great. Policy, especially with the Labour government, was directed from Whitehall rather than Jerusalem. The new cabinet in 1945 left the Yishuv without the high-level political contacts it previously had enjoyed, especially through Weizmann's old ties with Churchill. Instinct, rather than intelligence, seemed to guide Ben-Gurion's reactions to British policy from then on.

### **Teddy Kollek: Caught Between Cooperation and Competition**

Nearly all branches of British intelligence worked closely with the Jewish Agency political department in the war effort, as well as on security matters in the Middle East. From at least 1943, the political department's liaison with Allied intelligence, Reuven Zaslani (Shiloah) gave copies of the Jewish Agency's Arab material to every British and American intelligence and political office in the Middle East. Until Zaslani's return to Palestine, he was replaced as liaison by Kollek in 1944 and Zeev Sherf in 1946. The Palestine CID wrote Kollek, on hearing of a temporary suspension of the *Arab Political News* digests, saying, "I am very sorry you are suspending the service of the 'Arab

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<sup>100</sup> Monya Adam, "The Listening Station in the Morgue: Jewish wireless operators in the listening unit of the mandate police", *Electronic Communications and Computers (Hebrew)*, 7:210 (1989): 46-8. Shay listening units listened to police boats and coastal control stations since 1939, but hardly anything else.

<sup>101</sup> TNA. *Report on Visit to Middle East by AJ Kellar*. May 1944. KV 4/384. pp 11 of report.

Political News' which I have always found most interesting and useful. I hope it will not be long before the publication is resumed. I have much appreciated your kindness in this respect and thank you."<sup>102</sup>

Local American officials were helpful to the Yishuv, though it is unclear if they were as suspicious as British ones. They appreciated the cooperation. In April 1946 the American Consulate in Jerusalem wrote to Kollek's secretary, "I am very appreciative of your courtesy and helpfulness in continuing to send me literature and material prepared by the Agency. You have always been more than kind, not only to me but to other branches of the United States Government..."<sup>103</sup> Gideon Hadari, a Jewish officer in the OSS, had similar praise. His correspondence with Kollek reflects a warm and close relationship.<sup>104</sup> In 1945, the OSS gave Kollek's department critical feedback regarding a report on the *Sunduq al-Umma*, a fund of the Arab Nationalist *Istiqlal* party in Palestine, which attempted to compete with Jewish land purchases.<sup>105</sup> Jewish Agency intelligence shared information on agricultural and economic matters, and on Zionism and the Yishuv itself. These pamphlets served as advocacy for the Yishuv. The full extent of OSS involvement in Yishuv espionage and diplomacy, however, remains unclear.

The British did not understand how the Yishuv's political system affected its underground activities. The Jewish political leadership almost always was divided on these matters, and underground action sometimes was undertaken by one faction without consultation with others. Though Yishuv intelligence also was confused about the British, it had a certain advantage on this matter. Between 1936 and 1945, many of its

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<sup>102</sup> CZA S25\8939. [illegible], CID to Kollek, Jewish Agency. 01/02/1946.

<sup>103</sup> CZA S25\22683 img. 19. Pinkerton, US consulate to Rosenbusch, Jewish Agency. 5/04/1946.

<sup>104</sup> CZA S25\22683 img. 31. Hadari to Kollek. 14/02/1946.

<sup>105</sup> CZA S25\22683 img. 104. Frechtling to Kollek. 25/07/1945

intelligence officers had worked with various branches of British intelligence. In the process, they made personal friendships and learned British methods. Zaslani initiated this pattern, believing that it would “generate good personal relationships with members of the British armed forces, officers and men alike, and thus help the Yishuv on two levels: gathering information and telling the story of Zionism – its history, aims and objectives – to all those British Army units that had been rushed to Palestine in the wake of the [1936] disturbances. Zaslani firmly believed that this would help counter the pro-Arab propaganda which was supported by the great majority of Mandatory government officials.”<sup>106</sup> Also responsible for coordinating Yishuv intelligence, he relied upon Eliyahu Sasson, who headed the political department’s “Arab Branch,” to use his carefully cultivated contacts throughout the Arab world as means to assist British counterinsurgency. Their contact with Syrian “peace gangs,” which independently sought to protect Arab life and property but were opposed to the Mufti, enriched this effort and deepened the Arab Department’s relations in the neighbouring countries. Cooperation with the British, rewarded only with the White Paper of 1939, nevertheless strengthened the Yishuv’s military potential and its overall organization, thus improving its bargaining position vis-a-vis Britain.<sup>107</sup> This pattern continued even into the Second World War, as Tony Simonds of MI9 described:

Since 1935 I had always maintained friendly contact with the Jewish Agency. I approached my friend Reuven Zaslani (sic) and sounded him out as to the possibilities and scope of help that the Jews could give under strict secrecy... About 24hrs. later, Reuven contacted me in Cairo with an offer from the Jewish Agency... [which would] provide, select, and co-ordinate, any number of Agents required, to penetrate German and Italian occupied Europe, all volunteers, and at no cost in pay, to rescue Allied Service Personnel, POW’s, escapers and evaders,

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<sup>106</sup> Eshed, *Reuven Shiloah: The Man Behind the Mossad*, 29.

<sup>107</sup> Eshed, *Reuven Shiloah: The Man Behind the Mossad*, 30-37.

provided that all such Agents were allowed to help in rescue efforts to save Jews. [My commander] cabled Churchill, and we obtained approval within 24 hrs.<sup>108</sup>

After Zaslani, a new officer brought an original quality to the secret British-Jewish partnership. Teddy Kollek, who worked for the Jewish Agency from about the beginning of the war, was recognized by 1943-1944 for his skills at the “hospitality” approach defined by Zaslani. “Kollek was, in many ways, Zaslani’s exact opposite with his light-hearted, open, ‘Viennese’ attitude to the world, his Continental demeanour and enormous personal charm, a man for whom the entire world was his stage, and everyone his friend.”<sup>109</sup> Kollek’s personal qualities facilitated liaison with his British counterparts. He and others did not view their activities as spying, but relationship-building.

We invited them for a drink out of decency and hospitality. Our ‘policy’ was to be simple and human; there really was no need to spy on the British. We did not want them to be suspicious of us either, so that we could work together with them, even though there was a difference in emphasis between our respective aims: they mainly wanted to defeat the Germans; we wanted to save Jews. It was not an easy relationship to cultivate.<sup>110</sup>

This cooperation helped to bridge two different cultures. Kollek knew how to drink with the British – a skill he learned as a youngster while working on a farm outside Vienna filling wine barrels.<sup>111</sup> MI6 once said of Kollek, “He is known in Jewish Agency as ‘the Goy’ [the ‘gentile’], owing to his very un-Semitic appearance.”<sup>112</sup> His ability to drink, and his gentile appearance, perhaps helped to earn him the moniker ‘the Goy.’ Alcohol had a significant role in the intelligence relations between the Yishuv and British

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<sup>108</sup> Imperial War Museum. *MSS-Jewish Aid to Allied Escape and Rescue Work*. AC Simonds Papers.

<sup>109</sup> Eshed, *Reuven Shiloah: The Man Behind the Mossad*, 79.

<sup>110</sup> Kollek, *For Jerusalem: A Life by Teddy Kollek*, 38.

<sup>111</sup> Bachi-Kolodny, *Teddy Kollek: The Man His Times and His Jerusalem*, 9.

<sup>112</sup> TNA. *Extract from SIS comments on SIME paper on JA intelligence in the Middle East of 5.11.47*. dated 24.12.47. KV 2/2264. 171z.



authorities. Menachem Begin remarked that British intelligence failed because of “...its habit of thinking in a rut – enemy number one of all creative thought. The British colonial office was accustomed to ruling backward peoples. Amongst such peoples agents can easily be secured with money or with drink,”<sup>113</sup> and maintained through extortion. He continued, “Nor did drink help British Intelligence in Eretz Israel. There is little or no drunkenness among Jews... it must be borne in mind that whisky-diplomacy works both ways.”<sup>114</sup> Though Begin’s comments always must be taken with reserve, and British intelligence did exploit talk by drunken Jews, he was right to claim that alcohol was a security risk for the British, whether it led to confidences shared with a trusted colleague in the Jewish Agency, or an agent of the underground. The British had no equivalent means to breach the cultural gap with the Yishuv.

Few British were acculturated to Yishuv life or politics the way that Kollek and other Jewish intelligence officers understood British habits. To be sure, Yishuv intelligence had limitations in understanding the British, but these were not as fundamental as British misunderstanding. For instance, neither Yishuv intelligence officials nor its leaders seem to have understood the power wielded by bureaucrats, who kept their jobs between governments. This led to disappointment in 1945, when the Labour government continued restrictions on immigration. The British limitations were more fundamental. MI5 and other intelligence services needed an interpreter to appreciate events in confusing Yishuv politics. When the DSO or SIME officers met with Kollek to discuss ‘business,’ they were listening as much as possible and speaking as little. Even

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<sup>113</sup> Menachem Begin, *The Revolt*, ed. Ivan M. Greenberg, trans. Samuel Katz, 12th ed. (Bnei-Brak: Steimatzy Group Ltd., 2002), 97.

<sup>114</sup> Begin, *The Revolt*, 98.

so, Kollek controlled these relationships, and it was impossible for the DSO to use the liaison to help fight the Yishuv in the way that it was used to fight terrorism.

Kollek cooperated with these agencies strictly in the Yishuv's self-interest. His help enabled him to request favours in return. For example, during the war he used his influence with Britain to obtain travel passes for Haganah agents who were running guns from British stores in Egypt up to Palestine.<sup>115</sup> He also obtained permission for the Yishuv to use American diplomatic communications between Jerusalem and Istanbul in order to send messages which bypassed the British censor.<sup>116</sup>

Kollek made similar efforts with the British, particularly after the *saison* began. His liaison with the DSO and SIME gave Britain crucial information in its fight against Irgun and Lehi, while fostering a certain dependence on the Jewish Agency. This trend became especially pronounced after the assassination of Lord Moyne in November 1944. Britain tried to escape this dependence by vetting Jewish Agency intelligence with its own top secret sources, and improving the coordination of those sources between SIS, MI5, SIME, the DSO and the CID. The effort improved efficiency, but could not overcome Britain's fundamental dependence on the Jewish Agency for successful counter-terrorism.

Furthermore, British intelligence services had wrong or dated information about the Yishuv. Kollek shared Zaslani's approach that the Yishuv would gain by showing its strengths to its potential adversary and highlight the benefits of cooperation. In doing so, Kollek hoped to change the British policy of supporting the Arabs at the expense of

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<sup>115</sup> Kollek, *For Jerusalem: A Life by Teddy Kollek*, 56-57.

<sup>116</sup> Ruth Bachi-Kolodny, *Teddy Kollek: The Man His Times and His Jerusalem*, trans. Dr. Amy Avgar (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House Ltd., 2008), 30.

Zionism by sharing intelligence on them, which revealed their hostility to Britain. As

Kollek noted in his autobiography:

[In 1946] I approached a high Cabinet official with facts and figures on our position in America. Britain and the Sterling bloc, to whom we belonged, were facing serious foreign-exchange problems, and I spelled out the vast potential in business investments – even gifts – that could be drawn from the Jews in the United States. I demonstrated the comparative strengths of our military resources, should we have to defend ourselves. And I even showed him how uniquely useful an independent Jewish state could be by infiltrating people into Russia and Eastern Europe... *My point was that the British had more to gain by going along with us and supporting statehood than by placating the Arabs.*[emphasis added]<sup>117</sup>

Information on economic development in the Yishuv compared to other Middle Eastern countries, served the same intent, demonstrating the value of partnership with the Yishuv. He expanded his passing of general intelligence to Giles, of the CID, who appreciated the gesture.<sup>118</sup> Unfortunately for the Jewish Agency, Kollek's work on these matters did not have the desired effect, although it had other benefits, such as gaining favours from friends. It also opened a window into the British intelligence machine. Kollek was social, charming, and able to get along with the British better than were most members of the political department. For example, Kollek and John Teague of ISLD became friends in 1945 after a night of socializing over drink. When Kollek followed-up with Teague and offered his office's literature, Teague responded, "We, too, enjoyed our evening together, and when you are down this way again [Cairo] we would very much like to have a similar occasion to talk about everything whether we know anything about it or not."<sup>119</sup>

Social activity gave him even more intimate access to British intelligence. He attended a ball on 25 January 1945 which was raising funds for St. Dunstan's War Fund

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<sup>117</sup> Kollek, *For Jerusalem: A Life by Teddy Kollek*, 63.

<sup>118</sup> CZA, *Kollek to Giles* 16.4.45 and *Giles to Kollek* 4.5.45. in S25/8939.

<sup>119</sup> CZA S25/8939 Teague to Kollek. 19/07/1945.

in Palestine. The event gave him a chance to rub elbows with Lord Gort, General D'Arcy, and other military and intelligence officials. He received his ticket from Arthur Giles' wife, and corresponded to their personal address in Jerusalem's Katamon district. There was a personal relationship of trust within the atmosphere of suspicion. Of his relationship with Giles during this period, Kollek said:

I knew them both [Giles and his brother in the Cairo police] because I travelled a lot between Jerusalem and Cairo. Their inclination was toward the Arabs, mainly because they understood them better – a traditional British colonial attitude. But the Giles brothers were certainly not anti-Semites. When it came to vital war needs, they welcomed every bit of cooperation from us. Their basic intention was to preserve British power in the area. I was able to confirm this strictly objective attitude when I met Giles in England in the early 1950s. We sat in his London club and reminisced, and I was impressed by his sincerity when he expressed both his political detachment and his personal friendship.<sup>120</sup>

The week after the ball, Kollek left for Cairo “to suggest to different offices cooperation in various fields.” This task faced difficulties from both sides. It took intervention by MI5 to allow the planting of Yishuv agents in Jewish army units so to watch suspected terrorists and propagandists. Kollek complained to Ehud Ueberall (Avriel), his colleague and replacement in Istanbul, about disorganization with the Political Department. He had asked for reports on the fruits of cooperation between the Yishuv and American and British intelligence in Istanbul, and regretted that he had nothing to show Allied intelligence in Cairo. “I cannot tell them, ‘look what we have done up there – why not do the same somewhere else’...”<sup>121</sup> Kollek wanted to attach Jewish Agency liaisons to various American intelligence departments and lamented “our common interests with all these organisations [is] naturally are on the decrease...”<sup>122</sup> Avriel regretfully reported,

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<sup>120</sup> Kollek, *For Jerusalem: A Life by Teddy Kollek*, 38-39.

<sup>121</sup> CZA, *Kollek to Avriel*. 25 January 1945. S25/22516.

<sup>122</sup> CZA, *Kollek to Avriel*. 7 February 1945. S25/22516.

however, that with the war nearly over, American intelligence was shifting its weight elsewhere.<sup>123</sup> Kollek's well-developed contacts informed him of their departure from Cairo as well.<sup>124</sup> To make up for the loss, Zaslani introduced Kollek to his own contacts.

In order to present our views to OSS, it was suggested [by them] that we supply them regularly with as much informative material as possible on Middle Eastern, particularly Palestine, matters: political, social, economic and other phases. It was agreed that a Hebrew-speaking representative be put in touch with our office to facilitate the work... in addition to written material, the OSS representative should be given an opportunity to meet occasionally with some of our experts, such as Sasson.. I have discussed, too, with the people here [in America] the subject of transmitting certain material to our office in this country through the good offices of the OSS.<sup>125</sup>

Most importantly, Kollek never gave his British colleagues a reason to distrust him. He was as forthcoming as could be and never spoke a lie (as against not speaking some truths); knowing that the information he passed would be scrutinized. By establishing a pattern of delivering good, often-actionable material, while simultaneously cultivating strong personal friendships, Kollek gave Yishuv intelligence a decided advantage over his friends and competitors. During the *saison*, British intelligence became dependent on Kollek's assistance in fighting the Irgun and Lehi. By late 1945, conversely, crucial information withheld by Kollek caused British intelligence to gravely misinterpret key changes which affected their security, while his transfer from Jerusalem damaged their collection in ways they did not understand until too late. With the war over, Yishuv efforts in diplomacy with foreign intelligence shifted its focus from the Middle East to Washington and London. Zaslani went to Washington in October 1945, and Kollek arrived in London in June 1946.

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<sup>123</sup> CZA, *Avriel to Kollek (Hebrew)*. 17 February 1945. S25/22516.

<sup>124</sup> CZA, *Moore to Kollek*. 26 February 1945. and *Leary to Kollek*. 16 February 1945. S25/22683.

<sup>125</sup> CZA, *Zaslani to Kollek*. 7.3.45. S25/7825.

An MI5 phone tap once revealed how others in the Jewish Agency perceived Kollek. Weizmann, suspicious of his political activity, asked Abba (Aubrey) Eban about him; "...he's a bit [of a] schmoozer?" Eban, who trusted Kollek, answered "yes- quite," and promised to keep an eye on him.<sup>126</sup> So did British SIGINT. Kollek's schmoozing served the Yishuv, and at times Britain. In his autobiography, Eban admiringly described Zaslani and Kollek's efforts in London in 1946 to exercise "their persuasive talents on British officials by a judicious mixture of careful argument and expensive cigars and alcohol."<sup>127</sup>

One more matter about Teddy Kollek must be addressed. Ronen Bergman stated that Kollek was a British agent with the Codename "Scorpion."<sup>128</sup> This statement is an error, one which unfortunately has caught on.<sup>129</sup> Kollek, while in London during the summer of 1946, among other things established an intelligence office at the London branch of the Jewish Agency. In early 1947, in a last ditch attempt to make direct contact with British intelligence, Kollek contacted his old friends, Maurice Oldfield and Douglas Roberts, whom he knew from his liaison with SIME. The two treated him to British hospitality at Oldfield's home in Derbyshire.<sup>130</sup> Until that time, Kollek had been in touch with C.A.G. (Anthony) Simkins, who then was in F-branch (counter-subversion), but later became a deputy director-general of MI5 and co-author of the official history of

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<sup>126</sup> TNA, *extract from Jewish Agency telechek dated 11.11.46*. KV 4/2262. 89C.

<sup>127</sup> Abba Eban, *Abba Eban: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1977), 64.

<sup>128</sup> Ronen Bergman, "The Scorpion Files: Teddy Kollek was an Informer for British Intelligence", *Yedioth Achronoth*, 30 March 2007, 21-8.; I am indebted to Jonathan Chavkin for our discussions on this matter.

<sup>129</sup> For example, Kollek is noted as 'Codename Scorpion' in Cesarani, *Major Farran's Hat*, 44 and 49.

<sup>130</sup> TNA. KV 4/216. February 12, 1947. Minute 27.

British intelligence in the Second World War.<sup>131</sup> Simkins was assigned the Codename ‘Scorpion,’ to protect his identity as a British intelligence contact from the Colonial and Foreign offices. Using this “cut-out” contact, ‘scorpion,’ was James Robertson’s way to keep Yishuv intelligence at an arm’s length from MI5, while protecting the identity of his source from leakage. He believed that direct contact with Kollek could lead to penetration of British intelligence by the Jewish Agency.<sup>132</sup> Roberts, however, warned Robertson and Kellar against this use of a “cut-out,” saying,

I strongly advise that either you or Alec [Kellar] deal with \_\_ [Kollek] you were given the news personally, arranging to meet him on neutral grounds suitable to both parties. Only by this means will he give of is (sic) best. I fear, from my knowledge of him, that after the close personal relations that we here have maintained with him in the past, he would resent your approaching him through a third party.<sup>133</sup>

Kollek’s encounters with Roberts and Oldfield followed the same theme of gentle advocacy and persuasion. Kollek told Roberts “that his ‘mission’ in the UK had failed. Roberts believed this mission to have had the object of persuading HMG to grant some concession in the matter of immigration.”<sup>134</sup> The blanked-out name is definitely Kollek, as the timing of his trip, as recorded in his autobiography, and his correspondence match the timeline of the blanked-out subject.<sup>135</sup> This ‘mission’ may have been one of his tasks, although Ben-Gurion gave him other tasks. Robertson also noted:

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<sup>131</sup> Obituary, "Anthony Simkins", *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 January 2004.; F. H. Hinsley and C.A.G. Simkins, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Volume 4, Security and Counter-Intelligence* (New York: Syndicate of Cambridge University Press, 1990), vol. 4.

<sup>132</sup> TNA. KV 4/216. August 29, 1946. Minute 1. In London Kollek had tried to get in touch with Roberts, who had returned to the Middle East on MI5 business. Robertson immediately saw the risk and set up the “cut-out” contact with Roberts’ help.

<sup>133</sup> TNA. *Roberts to Robertson*, 20 September 1946. KV 4/216. 8B.

<sup>134</sup> TNA. KV 4/216. March 14, 1947. Minute 31.

<sup>135</sup> See for example *Kollek to Zaslani* 20 March 1947. CZA S25/498. Fol. 8017. Kollek write to Reuven Shiloah, “this is on the eve of my departure [from London].” He also mentioned a JIC

In the course of the conversation \_\_\_\_ [Kollek] admitted the existence of a Jewish Agency intelligence network, \_\_\_\_\_, extending throughout Europe. He hinted that this intelligence machine could be placed at the disposal of the British for counter-Russian purposes – a line of approach which has been adopted by the Agency, and particularly by \_\_\_\_ [Kollek's] associate, \_\_\_\_\_ [perhaps Zaslani?] on a number of earlier occasions. In the past, MI6 have turned all such offers down. Roberts did not indicate what his own attitude had been towards the proposal, but implied that it had been one of polite refusal.<sup>136</sup>

Kollek told Roberts that the only form of cooperation between the Yishuv and the USSR was on illegal immigration. This statement was true as the communist party, perceived as subversive, was monitored by the SHAY's 'communist branch.'

By this stage, MI5 was right to be suspicious of Kollek, even if he was sincere in trying to persuade British intelligence of the value in restarting old patterns of cooperation. Whatever benefits that cooperation may have achieved for either side, by 1947 British policy in Palestine was focused on fighting terrorism, regaining authority and finding a UN solution to the Jewish-Arab dispute. Prior cooperation with Yishuv intelligence had weakened British authority in Palestine more than strengthened it. In London, as in Palestine, Kollek's role was to serve not Britain, but the Yishuv. Kollek's friends at MI5, in a similar position, had to protect security on their end. If not for Kollek's prior cooperation with SIME, Roberts would not have trusted him at all, rightly so.

The overall relationship between the intelligence and political bodies of Britain and the Yishuv, involved a pattern of alternating competition and cooperation, which repeated itself until the Mandate ended. Kollek often was at the centre of this pattern.

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secretary who ought to be toured around Palestine and expressed exasperation with the Agency leadership in London, and the lack of information reaching him from Palestine as a possible cause for his 'failure' in that city.

<sup>136</sup> TNA. KV 4/216. March 14, 1947. Minute 31.



Sometimes cooperation fed success in competition, and vice versa. During the war, meanwhile, British intelligence profited from the assistance of Yishuv intelligence, as Churchill was quick to remind his ministers. He even exclaimed to President Roosevelt in 1942, "I am strongly wedded to the Zionist policy, of which I was one of the authors."<sup>137</sup> During the war, most Yishuv leaders, no matter their views, had little choice but to tolerate the British White Paper policy. After the war, that situation changed, precisely because British policy did not. The Yishuv, feeling betrayed and horrified as it appreciated the consequence of the White Paper Policy on its European family, turned increasingly against Britain. British authorities did not appreciate the likelihood and consequences of these developments, but they did understand some of the weaknesses of their position, or the strengths of the Yishuv.

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<sup>137</sup> TNA. *FO to Washington, PM to President*. 10 August 1942. FO 954/19a. 22.

## Chapter 2 -

### Intelligence, Policy and the Threat of Revolt

During the 1930s, authorities in the Yishuv and Britain became locked in a struggle to dominate the future of the Mandate. From the White Paper of 1939 onward, that struggle came to centre literally on power. Britain was forced to allow the Yishuv to develop armed force – indeed, to encourage that aim, so to serve as auxiliaries during the Arab Revolt, and later against the Axis. Hence, by 1944, Britain was involved in a complex power struggle with the Yishuv, where it was deterred by Haganah and coerced by Irgun and Lehi.

British intelligence was unsure about the numbers of men and weapons in Haganah, Irgun and Lehi. British authorities knew that these forces could only be overcome by a sizeable British force, perhaps even a corps. During the war, Britain lacked the force to impose its policy on the Yishuv. This weakness limited its efforts to renew searches for illegal arms in the Yishuv which, with the help of Teddy Kollek's connections, Haganah had been stealing from the British army in Palestine and Egypt. An entire division would be required to conduct such searches, which might well have provoked a Jewish uprising, had one been available for the purpose, which it was not. For political reasons, neither the Palestine Regiment nor the Transjordanian Frontier Corps could be used to suppress a Jewish rebellion. Furthermore, the Palestine Regiment, with three Jewish and one Arab battalions and viewed as source of leakage of weapons to the Yishuv, was moved from Palestine to Egypt. A new division was introduced to Palestine in 1943. Another one was ordered to do so with the expiry of the White Paper at the end of March 1944, while the police would be strengthened and a gendarmerie established,

modeled after similar units used against Arab rebels in the 1930s.<sup>138</sup> The Police Mobile Force (PMF) was re-established in 1944 in response to terrorism. These measures were intended to enable searches for illegal arms and to maintain British authority.

Britain rightly feared a renewal of Jewish illegal immigration protected by force of arms, a hostile Arab reaction to such developments, and a challenge to its ability to maintain law and order. These fears led to “selective” searches for illegal arms.<sup>139</sup> In the fall of 1943 the British renewed arms searches and enforced new laws which criminalized carrying arms of any kind. Arms, except those held by the settlements for self-defence, were illegal, and their possession became a crime.<sup>140</sup>

In October 1943, one such search was conducted at Hulda, and in November another at Ramat HaKhovesh. At Hulda, under the pretext of searching for deserters from Anders' Army, the British found several mortar shells and bullets. Seven members of Kibbutz Hulda were put on trial. Ramat HaKhovesh, a major underground training centre for the Palmach, was searched under the same pretext. After the army and police surrounded the Kibbutz and began their search, however, a violent struggle ensued, producing an embarrassment for the British when the Hebrew press published the story despite of the censor.<sup>141</sup> The policy backfired, as the Yishuv's hostility to Britain increased. British intelligence and policymakers appreciated the predicament and

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<sup>138</sup> Gelber, "British and Zionist Policy in the Shadow of the Fear of a Jewish Uprising, 1942-1944 (Hebrew)," 347.

<sup>139</sup> Gelber, "British and Zionist Policy in the Shadow of the Fear of a Jewish Uprising, 1942-1944 (Hebrew)," 340.

<sup>140</sup> Gelber, "British and Zionist Policy in the Shadow of the Fear of a Jewish Uprising, 1942-1944 (Hebrew)," 361.

<sup>141</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918-1948," 196-97.

resolved to improve their intelligence.<sup>142</sup> One PICME report painted a gloomy picture of

British authority in Palestine:

Any government action conflicting with Biltmore Programme or confirming with white paper policy meets opposition and obstruction. Wishful thinking, self-deception and propaganda resulted in Jews regarding Jewish Agency practically as a Jewish government in Palestine... [There is] Increasing manifestations of Jewish nationalistic character of Jewish units and their allegiance to Eretz Israel. After Ramat HaKovesh search, Jewish leaders clearly adopted new policy and not only proclaimed existence of illegal arms in settlements but strongly declared their right to hold these arms for self-defence... Jews are highly organised and possess considerable quantities of illegal arms. They are openly defying Government and military authorities to deprive them of these arms and to that extent *rebellion can be said to already exist*...[emphasis added]  
[The] Highly organised and well armed Jewish community is steadily consolidating its position with the Jewish agency behaving like a sovereign government. Assertion of Palestine government authority correspondingly more difficult every day.<sup>143</sup>

Towards the end of 1943, British intelligence and policymakers in the Middle East understood that for the Zionists, “it is no longer a question whether or not to use force to achieve its political objectives. Now the question is what the right moment for the use of force is.”<sup>144</sup> They appreciated that a “conflict might be prematurely provoked if the Agency felt that its essential preparations (such as military training, possession of arms) were being seriously jeopardized by government counter action.”<sup>145</sup> The fear of a Jewish revolt extended beyond the issue of illegal arms. British intelligence also feared these arms would be used to fight British interdiction of illegal immigration.

...[The] essential object [of armed illegal immigration] would be to put the Palestine authorities in the dilemma of having either to prevent illegal immigration, thereby unleashing (sic) a storm of atrocity propaganda; or to

<sup>142</sup> TNA, *Summary of conclusions... Foreign Secretary's visit to Cairo and Jerusalem. June-July 1943*. WO 208/1705. 8A.

<sup>143</sup> TNA, *PICME. Military implications of Palestine Situation*. 16 Jan 1944. WO 208/1705. 11A.

<sup>144</sup> Gelber, "British and Zionist Policy in the Shadow of the Fear of a Jewish Uprising, 1942-1944 (Hebrew)," 358.

<sup>145</sup> TNA. *PIC PAPER NO.35 Possibilities in Palestine, 1944*. WO 208/1705. 9A.

acquiesce in such immigration, thereby raising strong Arab reaction and at the same time further strengthening the position of the Zionist leaders. In either case, the Zionists would be able to make a convincing case to justify the use of force...<sup>146</sup>

British policy was trapped; the White Paper was set to expire on 31 March 1944. It could not be enforced without endangering the war effort, nor changed except at political costs.

### Assessing British Assessments

PICME and the Minister Resident both inaccurately held that the Jewish Agency was taking an active “strategy” to force “the Palestine issue on the immigration question.”<sup>147</sup> Better intelligence actually might have eased British fears on these issues, showing that their position vis a vis the Jewish Agency was stronger than they supposed, and thus enabled them to take more active steps against the dangers posed by the Yishuv. Equally, of course, such actions also might have spurred the Yishuv toward more aggressive actions against Britain. In early 1944, armed immigration was not the policy of the Jewish Agency although some politicians and Haganah leaders had been pushing the idea for a long time. A Jewish Agency policy to use Aliyah as a political weapon only crystallized in the fall of 1944,<sup>148</sup> and arms never were used to protect it, even when Ben-Gurion ordered such steps in 1945. Unarmed immigration produced good propaganda. Armed immigration might bring harsher reactions from British forces.

In an interview with the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Stanley, Moshe Shertok (Sharett) remarked that “the problem of immigration was now synonymous with that of

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<sup>146</sup> TNA. *PIC PAPER NO.35 Possibilities in Palestine, 1944*. WO 208/1705. 9A.

<sup>147</sup> TNA. Minute 26. DDMI. WO 208/1705.

<sup>148</sup> Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel 1939-1944*, 27, 38, 289.

rescue...”<sup>149</sup> This sentiment had guided the policy of the Jewish Agency Executive since 1942, when Allied victory in the Middle East coincided with news of the Final Solution. After two years of diplomatic and practical frustration to efforts at rescue, the Agency tried to calm tempers while it continued to pursue cooperation with Britain. British officials tended to interpret immigration as a subversive activity, designed to create Jewish autonomy in Palestine and to thwart British designs in the Middle East. They feared losing Arab support during the war, thus endangering British assets in the Middle East. While a security vacuum did leave the Yishuv some room to grow and occasionally to flex its muscles, none the less, the Jewish Agency attempted to cooperate with Whitehall in all ways possible, hoping that British policy might favour Zionism as it did during the First World War. Nevertheless, British intelligence appreciated that enforcing policy on illegal immigration or arms could cause a Yishuv revolt.

This prospect shaped British policy, and helped to defeat it. In 1943-44, British administrators in the Middle East faced hard facts. The White Paper Policy could not be enforced. A bi-national state was impossible unless it was imposed by force. The Haganah could not be disarmed during the war, and some illegal Jewish immigration was unstoppable at present. In order to square this difficult circle, British authorities explored a concept that had last been raised in 1937. Partition, perhaps, could force a compromise between all of Britain’s conflicting promises and protect its interests. Since most Arab statesmen, as well as the Yishuv, opposed partition in 1944, Britain had to explore the idea silently.

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<sup>149</sup> TNA. Gater/Stanley to Palestine (possibly High Commissioner). 5 April 1944. FO 921/150.

Secrets are hard to keep in the Middle East. At the end of 1943, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) reported “from high quarters in Cairo,” that the British government was seriously considering partition as a solution to the Palestine problem.<sup>150</sup> A few weeks later, the Foreign Office contacted the Minister Resident in Cairo for an explanation. The latter replied by suggesting that the Jewish Agency had been debating the matter for some time, and the JTA report had

all the appearance of a trial balloon designed to elicit information. The message may not have originated from Cairo at all, but have been planted from the London end [of the Jewish Agency] under a Cairo date-line as ‘corroborative detail to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative.’”<sup>151</sup>

This view was reinforced when the same JTA journalist tried to verify with the British Minister in Cairo whether the partition rumours were true.<sup>152</sup> British bureaucrats in Cairo rightly decided not to react, in order not to give the Jewish Agency any confirmation about the possibility of partition, which would compromise their own room to manoeuvre. From that point onwards, the Minister of State in Cairo was careful not to keep detailed minutes of policy meetings.

In fact, contrary to the Minister Resident’s views, this press report had stemmed from leaks about British policy, which illustrate the problems Britain faced in maintaining security about such matters. The Jewish Agency learned of British discussions of partition in December 1943, only a few weeks before the JTA report was published. Eliyahu Sasson, head of the Arab Branch of the Jewish Agency’s Political Department, learned of partition from Mohammad Al-Unsi, the Transjordanian liaison to the Jewish Agency. In turn, Al-Unsi’s source was the Transjordanian Government’s

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<sup>150</sup> TNA. *Collect Press Supernews London*. Dec 29 '43. FO 921/148.

<sup>151</sup> TNA. *Bennet to Croft*. 17/01/1944. FO 921/148.

<sup>152</sup> TNA. *Minister Resident to Foreign Office*. 21/01/1944. FO 921/148.

consul in Baghdad, who reported that on the Iraqi Regent's visit to London, he learned of British designs in the Middle East, centring on the "Greater Syria Plan." Britain promised to guarantee Iraqi security and prosperity, and to evict France from the Levant, to divide Palestine into Jewish and Arab states (with the Arab part incorporated into "Greater Syria"), to maintain a continuous British military presence in Palestine, and of to offer considerable economic concessions to the United States, in exchange for its support of this plan.<sup>153</sup> Sasson's report was generally accurate, but may not have reflected what the British really planned in all details. For example, Sasson reported that Jewish State's borders would extend to 'Aqba and the Suez Canal (including Sinai). British planning for partition in 1943-44 tended to limit the Jewish state to the thin "N-shaped" area already settled, roughly the area of the Jewish state proposed by the Peel Commission, without the western Galilee.<sup>154</sup>

It is unclear whether the JTA report was a trial balloon, an attempt to damage British policy by publicizing its details, or just the work of an intrepid reporter with good contacts. The Jewish Agency political department, however, probably was the source for the JTA report, as the details of the partition scheme which it described were identical to those in Sasson's report. The Jewish Agency's political department was becoming increasingly aware, and fearful, of the situation it would confront when the war ended, but the Jewish Agency could not take firm action on such knowledge. At a Jewish Agency Executive meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, two days before the JTA's report,

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<sup>153</sup> Ben-Gurion Archive. *Conversation with M.A. (Transjordan)* (Hebrew). 17/12/1943. 271/229529. pp1.

<sup>154</sup> See throughout TNA. FO 921/148.



Moshe Shertok expressed frustration with his colleagues, as he urged them to adopt clear policies on the future of their country and warned of British plans:

...I can say that in British circles the question of partition has been reawakened... We will not discuss partition, but we cannot ignore the fact that others are proposing partition, because firstly: We see in it movement from the White Paper, we need in our operations to take advantage of the fact, that people came to realise that the White Paper cannot be fulfilled; This should help us strengthen our policy, i.e. talking about Jewish sovereignty, and then this can be done throughout the country, and the whole country is necessary, otherwise there will not be mass Jewish immigration and there will not be a large Palestinian contribution to the solution of the Jewish question, the problem of Jewish refugees – this is our line in London on this matter.<sup>155</sup>

Shertok perhaps was wrong to believe that the Agency really could influence British policy, but his frustration with its inability to act was understandable. As Britain sought to improve information security and intelligence-gathering in Palestine, the divisions within the Jewish Agency inhibited it from acting upon good information and forming a coherent policy. Shertok, when imploring his board to strengthen its ability to affect matters like partition, really wanted the Jewish Agency to end its unclear policy on the future of Palestine. Since the Biltmore Program, the Zionist leadership was divided on the definition of a “Jewish Commonwealth.” Partition, Shertok hoped, was a less abstract goal than commonwealth. Had British intelligence understood the Jewish Agency’s divisions, it would perhaps have been more confident about its present authority over the Yishuv. However, the belief that the Yishuv could and would start a revolt at any moment increasingly disfigured British policy towards the Yishuv.

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<sup>155</sup> Ben-Gurion Archive. *Jewish Agency Executive Meeting*. 27/12/1943. Protocols 928/20925. (my translation from Hebrew)

### The Cairo Conference on Palestine 6-7 April 1944

At the Cairo Conference on the future of Palestine, British policy was discussed according to strategic needs, imperial designs on the Middle East, management of Arab internal rivalries, and the acknowledgement of a growing threat from the Yishuv. British military and civil officials from the Palestine Mandate, Cairo and the Foreign Office were divided on how to tackle these problems. Their only common position was the aim to preserve the Empire. They all saw the same intelligence reports which warned of the growing hard power of the Jewish Agency. They acknowledged that a Zionist demand for a continuance of immigration “either into Palestine as a whole or into a partitioned area” was inevitable. These officials were divided on how to preserve British interests, but agreed on the need to abandon support for Zionism and to scrap the White Paper. Recognition of a determined and increasingly powerful Zionist movement forced all delegates to agree that Britain needed a new policy in the Middle East. The present position was invidious, forcing Britain to deny “democratic control to the most advanced section in the Levant.” America, France and Russia would oppose any extension of British interests and influence in the region. The bi-national aim of the White Paper had failed. Partition, although it threatened British attempts to work toward Arab Union, needed further exploration, and consideration of what were the Arab “reactions to be expected” to “various alternative policies for Palestine.”<sup>156</sup>

The British Ambassador to Egypt and High Commissioner for the Sudan Lord Killearn, and the Ambassador to Iraq, Sir Kinhan Cornwallis, credited “world Jewish

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<sup>156</sup> TNA. *Notes on conference held in C. In C's War Room.* 6 April 1944. FO 921/148.

pressure” for creating conditions which meant that the White Paper must be scrapped.<sup>157</sup><sup>67</sup>

They opposed the creation of any Jewish state, or further immigration. Yet to adopt partition would damage British prestige, and endanger the hard-earned cooperation of the Arab world, particularly that of Iraq, and by extension endanger British interests.<sup>158</sup> They argued that the Balfour declaration already had been fulfilled, and so could legitimately be abandoned, which would strengthen British prestige in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

The High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir Harold MacMichael, and the Minister Resident in Cairo, Lord Moyne, perhaps naively, wanted to impose a compromise solution on Palestine. Their partition scheme would limit a Jewish state to the area already settled by the Yishuv, annex parts of northern Palestine to a “Greater Syria,” and require British control of military bases in the country. Arab unity would be promoted through the “Greater Syria” scheme – a federation of Arab states which would combine degrees of internal independence and collective unity. Moyne emphasized that Arab leaders such as the Prime Minister of Transjordan and the Egyptian pan-Arab leader, Nahas Pasha, privately had told him that while they could not publically support a partition proposal, they could privately acquiesce to a scheme which was imposed upon them.<sup>159</sup> Moyne downplayed the potential for danger to British interests in the Arab world. “Of course we would be accused of bad faith; we always were.” No solution possibly could please all parties, MacMichael argued, and partition was “the least evil scheme.”

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<sup>157</sup> TNA. *Conference on Palestine Held at Cairo on 6-7 April 1944. Memorandum By Minister Resident in the Middle East summarising views expressed at the meetings.* FO 921/148.

<sup>158</sup> TNA. *Notes on conference held in C. In C's War Room.* 6 April 1944. FO 921/148. pp4.

<sup>159</sup> TNA. *Notes on conference held in C. In C's War Room.* 6 April 1944. FO 921/148.

The military, concerned about matters of strategy, influenced the true outcome of the conference, which was to defer any announcement of policy. Soldiers were first and foremost concerned about security, which could not be guaranteed until forces were available for the matter, after the war. Equally, they warned, time was of the essence: “If we wait until the end of the war when adequate forces should be available to control any attempted disturbances and when labour stoppages can be accepted, world opinion may preclude our using them to enforce the decision most favourable and necessary to the interests of the British Empire.”<sup>160</sup> The soldiers concluded that the best time to announce a policy would be when

adequate force can be or has been released to this theatre, and world opinion is not so focussed on Palestine as to prevent our wielding such force. Since it may be too easy in the immediate aftermath of the war in Europe to send British troops abroad (vide the end of 1918) other than to the Far East, it would appear that the most favourable time will be as soon as possible after the successful launching of “OVERLORD.”<sup>161</sup>

The soldiers misguidedly believed that the Palestine and the Jewish question would receive less attention as the war in Europe progressed, and emphasized that diplomacy must seek to limit American influence on the outcome and to secure British strategic interests. The Cairo conference defined the views on policy of leading officials in the Middle East, but they were not adopted by Churchill’s wartime administration. It also decided to defer any actions until sizeable reinforcements arrived, which was not until mid-1945, and even then was smaller than had been hoped. Thus, all decisions were postponed until the end of the war. Meanwhile, British policy remained paralyzed. In these events, intelligence assessments on illegal immigration, illegal arms, and the threat

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<sup>160</sup> TNA. *Appendix “A” to CC(44)19*. FO 921/148.

<sup>161</sup> TNA. *Appendix “A” to CC(44)19*. FO 921/148.

of revolt, had forced two key developments in policy. One was the acknowledgement that the White Paper policy was dead. The other was an inability to replace it. The same assessments which drove British administrators to rethink their position and to favour partition, forced the military to postpone the announcement of a new policy. During the war no policy could possibly be enforced, while any announcement of a new one might provoke an Arab or a Jewish revolt. Neither outcome was acceptable. With the war raging, the military view was accepted. The conference expressed opinion, but could not make policy. Direction from Whitehall was conspicuously absent from the conference. None the less, the postponement of decisions on policy gave British bureaucrats throughout the Middle East time to hone their views, which centred on support for pan-Arabism and opposition to the expansion of the Yishuv.

### **Intelligence and the Paralysis of British Policy**

Intelligence had warned about the problems of illegal arms, immigration and the threat of revolt since the summer of 1943. MI5 constantly complained about government policy, or the lack thereof. Whitehall had not defined objectives which British security could achieve. On 14 July 1943, Liddell noted the problem of Haganah arms.

There have also been difficulties with Palestine. It was recently discovered that the Haganah which is under the control of Ben Gurion, had come into the possession of 600 rifles, a number of machine guns, trench mortars and explosives. The fact was discovered through two soldiers who got tight in a brothel. The arms had been drawn from depots in Egypt on presentation of bogus documents, and had been taken to Palestine in army lorries.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diary*, 14.07.1943. KV 4/192. pp. 36.

Only a month later, Liddell remarked that, “It is difficult to know what the CO policy is. The FO on the other hand seem to be tacitly supporting the Pan-Arab movement.”<sup>163</sup> In the absence of direction, MI5 tried to learn more about the development of policy on Palestine. On 16 June 1944, Liddell discussed applying to see the Palestine committee’s papers,<sup>164</sup> perhaps to give feedback, or to get a sense of the nature of future policy. His comment and actions raise a key issue. Differences in policies and attitudes divided the British system of intelligence and damaged its work. They prevented progress on matters of security as well as politics. The Colonial Office, Foreign Office, and the military disagreed on the interpretation of British obligations, interests and strategy in the Middle East. The Cairo conference of April 1944 was meant to coordinate those positions, but instead merely acknowledged a failed policy, without developing a new one. In the eyes of MI5 and other intelligence officials, the outcome was not an improvement. From the April conference through to the summer of 1944, warnings about a Yishuv revolt, as well as changing attitudes in the Jewish population towards terrorism, contributed to the paradoxical view in Whitehall and among the military, that a change in policy simultaneously was essential and impossible.

### **Assessing the Disposition of the Yishuv: Conflicting Views**

On 19 July 1944, PICME evaluated the possibility that the Irgun had joined forces with the Haganah. It discussed past attempts at unity between these organizations, based, unfortunately, on misinterpretations of an attempt by dissenting junior officers of all three

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<sup>163</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diary*, 25.08.1943. KV 4/192 pp162.

<sup>164</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diary*, 17.06.1944. KV 4/194 pp112.

armed Jewish organizations to unite.<sup>165</sup> The Palestine Government had criticized these past reports and attributed these errors to PICME's misunderstanding of Yishuv politics. PICME now alleged that the two groups had reached a "gentleman's agreement" not to interfere in each other's plans. Careful of the need to justify its conclusions, PICME considered the possibility that its assessment might be wrong, and attributed its earlier mistake about Irgun-Haganah unity to a conscious effort by the Jewish Agency to warn Britain of its power of resistance.<sup>166</sup> This conclusion was nonsense; at this stage, the Jewish Agency had a growing interest in suppressing the Irgun, and still followed a policy of cooperation with Britain. PICME even managed to interpret meetings where Haganah warned Irgun of the dangers of its actions, as evidence of a union between the two bodies. Out of touch with events in Palestine, PICME's view was obscured by politics. It developed the habit of basing conclusions on unverified and even false reports.

A SIME paper, also dated 19 July, offered a more accurate assessment of the possibility of union between Irgun and Lehi. It presented evidence supporting the possibility that the two bodies had reached an arrangement: The Irgun newspaper "Hazit" had ceased attacks on Lehi, and even eulogized its fighter who was killed in an attack on the Police HQ earlier that year. SIME also pointed to the pattern where both Irgun and Lehi fighters refused to recognize British military courts, and insisted on the status of Prisoner of War. The fighters had begun to regard themselves as martyrs, a view which caught on when one terrorist, Rafael Birenbaum, sung *Hatkiva*, the Zionist anthem, to the court after having the death sentence passed on him. SIME reported that the Yishuv was

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<sup>165</sup> Gelber, "British and Zionist Policy in the Shadow of the Fear of a Jewish Uprising, 1942-1944 (Hebrew)," 384.

<sup>166</sup> TNA. *PIC PAPER 57*. 19 July 1944. FO 921/153

beginning to view ‘martyrs’ such as Birenbaum as the spiritual descendents of John Hyrcanus and the Maccabees, who had overthrown Seleucid Greek rule in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Furthermore, comparisons were being made between Jewish “resistance fighters” in Palestine and those fighting the Nazis. The outlook of the Yishuv had changed, as SIME understood quite well.

At first the attitude of both press and public was, superficially at least, one of strong condemnation. A campaign of unorganised violence was considered as most harmful to the Zionist cause. From about the middle of June, however, this attitude underwent a change. Although the terrorists were still condemned as acting against the interests of Zionism, stress was laid on their determination, courage and even heroism. After the death sentence had been passed on Birenbaum, this tone became more strongly marked.<sup>167</sup>

Even Haganah commander Eliyahu Golumb pleaded for Birenbaum’s reprieve. His case had moved all the Yishuv. SIME reported “the general feeling among the mass of the Yishuv was one of condemnation for the organisation and its methods, but one of sympathy and understanding for the individual.”<sup>168</sup>

SIME’s sources, mainly the DSO’s reportage and letter intercepts through censorship, illuminated the damaged heart of the Yishuv. SIME accurately described a paradigm shift in the Yishuv, where sympathy for individual Irgun and Lehi fighters found public expression. It also explained why this change was occurring: news of Jewish resistance in Europe, and failed negotiations with the Nazis to save Hungarian and Romanian Jewry, had become public knowledge. SIME understood the impact of this news on the Yishuv, and highlighted the connection which the public drew between Birenbaum and resistance fighters in ancient and contemporary times.

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<sup>167</sup> TNA. *Jewish Newsletter No. 10*. 19 July 1944. KV 5/29.

<sup>168</sup> TNA. *Jewish Newsletter No. 10*. 19 July 1944. KV 5/29.



The High Commissioner offered a similar assessment.<sup>169</sup> These events raised the political liability for the Jewish Agency in assisting Britain. While PICME missed this point, SIME, primarily a security organization, still gave better assessments of Yishuv politics. It reported on a possible Haganah proposal to Lehi, which would trade protection for restraint. This was a more likely scenario than PICME's report on Haganah's attempt to ally with its principal rival. Thus, SIME's reporting on matters of both security and politics was more accurate. PICME was supposed to advise the Minister Resident and the C-in-C Middle East on political matters, and its mistakes distorted their views and exaggerated the threat of revolt. All bodies of British intelligence knew that the Haganah *could* rebel, but PICME erred in claiming that it *would* do so.

The Military Intelligence Directorate (MID) at Whitehall shared SIME's view of the immediate situation, while still showing fear of the circumstances at the end of the war. One officer played down PICME's alarmism about a Jewish revolt, arguing that immigration was the only issue which united all factions of the Yishuv, and also gained sympathy from America and the Labour Party. That issue could spark a revolt, just as the Palestine Government's weakness against terrorism could encourage more of it.

The policy of violence adopted by the Irgun Zvei Leumi (sic) and terrorist Stern Group is believed to be gaining adherents, particularly from the youth element in the country. Manifestos recently issued show that their actions purport to be the beginning of the war of liberation for the rescue and admission into Palestine of Jews, to whose extermination in Europe HMG is supinely indifferent.<sup>170</sup>

The Director of Military Intelligence agreed, stating "we may have a serious situation in Palestine, with the inevitable repercussion in Arab countries, in the not too distant

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<sup>169</sup> TNA. *Extract from Telegram no.814*. 28 June 1944. CO 733/462/6. 9.

<sup>170</sup> TNA. *Minute 37*. 14 August 1944. WO 208/1705.

future.”<sup>171</sup> The Assistant Chief of Imperial General Staff (Operations) criticised General Paget’s handling of security problems in the Middle East, especially his failure to review the force requirements needed to maintain security in Palestine and Egypt after the Greek Mutiny. Six divisions would be needed in case of problems with Arabs or Jews in Palestine. Only one and two thirds of a division were available.<sup>172</sup>

Britain confronted a dilemma, which military intelligence well understood. Jewish immigration was a challenge which would force both an announcement, and a change, in policy. The Jewish Agency was liable to turn on Britain unless a policy favourable to Zionism was announced soon after the war ended. Heavy-handedness in the interim would hasten a revolt against British rule. Yet a policy favourable to Zionism was impossible, considering Britain’s strategic circumstances, while the restrictions on immigration were radicalizing the Yishuv towards sympathy with the Irgun and Lehi, as Jews still were trapped in Nazi-occupied Europe. It is no surprise that policymakers did not rush to solve this complicated and delicate problem.

Some statesmen did attempt to do so. Disappointed that his and Moyne’s views on partition had not been well received in Foreign Office circles, in July MacMichael wrote to the Colonial Secretary expressing “the views regarding future policy which I have formed as a result of continuous contact with the problem of Palestine during the last six and a half years.” MacMichael felt that “the interests of Jews and ‘Arabs’ alike are bound up essentially with our own, however little they may at present realise that fact.” MacMichael warned against wishful thinking, that Jews in liberated Europe would not want to come to Palestine. “The Jewish Agency is fully alive to this danger threatening

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<sup>171</sup> TNA. *Minute* 38. 15 August 1944. WO 208/1705.

<sup>172</sup> TNA. *Minute* 39. 17 August 1944. WO 208/1705.

the fabric of their political ambitions. They are exerting, and will continue to exert, the most strenuous and highly organised efforts in every corner of the globe to counteract it... the power of rhetoric, reinforced by funds which are seemingly inexhaustible, to sway the emotions of an imaginative and persistent people is very potent.” Therefore, partition was the only solution for Palestine, as it would ease Arab fears, appease Jewish demands, and British needs. Yet, MacMichael warned, British decision makers did not understand key aspects of the problem:

Unfortunately, the present situation is the logical outcome of the dubiety with which the ulterior intentions of the Balfour Declaration were originally shrouded...

Left entirely to its own devices the Levant, torn by the fissiparous forces of intrigue, ambition and inefficiency, will dissolve into chaos. We cannot afford that this should happen and some form of supervisory tutelage, in the form, perhaps, of an arbitral commission, together with the grant of full and ample facilities for our armies, navies and air-forces, is surely essential.

...there has, I venture to say, been a tendency to overlook the great changes which take place during each interim period [when Palestine and Levant policy are reviewed]. These have been more marked than ever in recent years in respect of the state of public opinion prevalent among the two communities primarily affected, and since the term “public opinion” is suggestive of the ephemeral, I hasten to add that I use it to mean no less than national determination. No one would assume that what might have been possible in 1918 would therefore be possible now, but I doubt if it is fully realised that what might have been possible, e.g., in 1943, may present graver difficulties in 1945 or 1946.<sup>173</sup>

MacMichael’s warning went unheeded; even by 1946 British decision makers barely understood the limits to their power to impose a solution.

So too, Churchill understood the policy problem and attempted to address it. On 29 June 1944, he recorded a note to the Foreign Office proposing Lord Gort as the next High Commissioner, and called for a discussion on a long term policy for Palestine. “It is well known I am determined not to break the pledges of the British Government to the

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<sup>173</sup> Middle East Centre Archive, Oxford. (MECA), *MacMichael to Stanley*, 17.7.44. GB165-0072. 6/1. fol. 1-3.

Zionists... No change can be made in policy without full discussion in cabinet... As we have so little to do now, it should be easy to find an opportunity to do this.”<sup>174</sup> This view departed from the decision taken at the Cairo Conference to postpone any policy change, and offered a last chance for Britain to maintain a Zionist position, and close ties with the Yishuv, at the cost of problems with Arabs. However, when the cabinet next discussed Palestine in August, it was immediately after an assassination attempt on the High Commissioner, and so the issue was still further postponed.<sup>175</sup> Any prospect of intervention by Churchill in favour of Zionism was killed along with Lord Moyne in November 1944. That murder, in turn, stemmed from the evolving relationship and escalation of violence between British security and its competitors.

### **Rising Terrorism and Assessments on the Threat of Revolt**

Cooperation in intelligence between Britain and the Jewish Agency continued despite a worsening security situation in Palestine. On the afternoon of 8 August 1944, Harold MacMichael, soon to end his term as High Commissioner in Palestine, left Jerusalem for a function in Jaffa to honour his departure. Escorted by the PMF, MacMichael’s convoy was attacked on the road down from Jerusalem. MacMichael was lightly wounded, his wife unhurt, but his aide-de-camp was seriously wounded, and the outcome could have been far worse.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> TNA. Prime Minister’s Personal Minute FO 954/19. Microfilm slide 59.

<sup>175</sup> TNA. *War Cabinet 104 (44)*. 9 August 1944. CAB 65/43/20.

<sup>176</sup> TNA. *Report on the Attempt to Assassinate the High Commissioner of Palestine*. 12 August 1944. WO 201/189.

In reaction to this attack, Lieut. Colonel Kirk of SIME visited Palestine, where he discussed terrorism with the DSO and CID. He described the impossibility of penetrating a terrorist organization:

...to penetrate small fanatical and intensely loyal terrorist organisations of this kind is infinitely more difficult than penetrating an intelligence organisation, which in its efforts to obtain intelligence must employ sub agents of uncertain loyalty and therefore lay itself open to penetration. It is obvious that Jewish organisations can only be penetrated through Jewish agents.<sup>177</sup>

Equally, interrogation of prisoners often led nowhere. Kirk understood that both movements were urban, and the Irgun had a cellular structure. He described how the population, although opposed to terrorism, still saw Britain as hostile. SIME understood that the support of the entire Yishuv was necessary to fight terrorism. Jews in Palestine faced a moral dilemma of handing over resistance fighters for whom they held some sympathy. They also faced great risk to their lives. "...a sufficient number of Jewish informers employed by DSO and CID have come to violent ends or received strongly worded hints in the past few years to deter Jews generally from acting as informers for the military authorities."

British administrators, however, failed to consider the issues which SIME had been raising, and recommended steps which would further alienate the Yishuv. Lord Moyne complained to the Colonial Office that the reaction to the attempted assassination of MacMichael was insufficiently stern. Inaction was liable to create the perception amongst both Jews and Arabs that Britain was weak. The Arab world in particular, Moyne warned, was sure to attack Britain for its weak response, given its harsh reaction to

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<sup>177</sup> TNA. *Kirk, SIME to Lt. Col. BF Montgomery, Mi2*. 19 Aug 1944. KV 5/34. 31A.

the assassination of a British official during the Arab Revolt in 1937.<sup>178</sup> Oliver Stanley replied that “...every possible step is being taken by the police to trace those responsible for the attack...”<sup>179</sup>

Moyne probably was right about these consequences, and to claim that sterner measures were needed to preserve Britain’s position in the Middle East, yet so too, they were impossible – Britain was strategically paralysed from acting. Intelligence had emphasized for several months that sterner measures could provoke a Jewish rebellion. This fear inhibited the development of effective policy and discouraged the stern actions which Moyne had called for.

Re-emphasizing the need for action, Moyne noted that on 21 August 1944, Ben-Gurion had publically declared, “We shall migrate to Palestine in order to constitute a majority here. If there be need – we shall take by force; if the country be too small – we shall expand its boundaries.”<sup>180</sup> Moyne considered this speech to be an incitement to violence, “Statements such as this... by high Jewish circles in Palestine following so shortly on attempt on High Commissioner’s life, can hardly pass unnoticed in the Middle East, and opinion here may begin to wonder if HMG are either impotent to resist such threats or even willing to condone them.” Moyne failed to appreciate that His Majesty’s Government actually was impotent to act, even though he noted that Paget was “much disturbed at his possible military commitments,” referring to the lack of forces available

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<sup>178</sup> TNA. *Moyne for Colonel Stanley*. 18.8.44. FO 921/153.

<sup>179</sup> TNA. *Colonel Stanley to Moyne*. 23.8.44. FO 921/153.

<sup>180</sup> TNA. *Moyne to Stanley*. 26.8.44. FO 921/153.

to enforce British policy.<sup>181</sup> Paget was the only decision maker willing to say aloud the basic fact that the situation simply had fallen from Britain's control.

MI5 continued to blame a lack of policy for the weakness on Palestine. In September, Liddell met with Giles of the Palestine CID. After discussing political solutions (Giles advocated the imposition of a joint legislative assembly with equal representation for Jews and Arabs), Liddell concluded "The urgent necessity is that the Govt. should make up their minds and that some plan should be put through."<sup>182</sup> The lack of policy frustrated the security establishment; without a political solution to pursue, all they could do was try to keep the peace. This was a difficult task considering Britain's strategic limitations during the war, and the constant warnings about prematurely provoking a Jewish revolt.

MI5 noticed this problem while working with Gort before his arrival in Palestine on 31 October 1944. He had been prepared for months by the security service for his new job, "Kellar seems to have established a complete bond of confidence with Gort who is popping in and out of the office every day. He even rehearses with Kellar what he is going to say to Shertok."<sup>183</sup> Gort was introduced to ISPAL and briefed on leading political and military personalities in the Yishuv.<sup>184</sup> Despite the preparation, Gort still had "no firm indication of British policy in Palestine." Before leaving, the Prime Minister reportedly told him, "Look after our friends and see that they are treated well. The Jews have rendered us great service in this war."<sup>185</sup> Churchill certainly favoured the Jews in

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<sup>181</sup> TNA. *Moyne to Stanley*. 26.8.44. FO 921/153.

<sup>182</sup> TNA. *Guy Liddell Diary*. 7 September 1944. KV 4/195. pp.30.

<sup>183</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/195. 191.

<sup>184</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/195. 30, 108.

<sup>185</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/195. 201.

Palestine, but he could not form a policy which would set his opinions in stone. While one can never know what the Cabinet would have thought had it discussed the topic, terrorism by Irgun and Lehi wrecked whatever chances were left in favour of a Zionist approach. British administrators in the Middle East vehemently opposed such a pro-Zionist position, and, while the war was still being fought, Britain lacked the force to impose one opposed by the Yishuv.

The security situation continued to worsen after the attempt on MacMichael. On the night of 22/23 August, the Irgun attacked the District Police headquarters and three police stations in Jaffa and Tel Aviv with bombs and automatic weapons, and ambushed a police vehicle on the Tel Aviv-Jaffa road. At one station, policemen were held-up and fourteen rifles were stolen. Mines were laid in the road, marked by cloth posters with the Irgun's logo and the words "danger- mines." In response, the police and army arrested several wanted men, including a member of the Lehi who had escaped from the prison camp at Latrun in 1943, and the man who printed Lehi pamphlets. The DSO concluded:

The affair at Tel Aviv is said to have been in the nature of a tryout against the strength of the Police. If this were found to be successful attacks would be staged on police stations, among other targets, simultaneously in Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. A pamphlet issued by the Irgun Zvai Leumi stated that the arms captured would be held until they could be handed over to the Jewish [Inspector General Police] of the Jewish Independent State.<sup>186</sup>

The limits to British intelligence in Palestine were most obvious when terrorists were able to assassinate its senior members. Detective Constable Thomas Wilkin of the CID's Jewish branch, had served in the Palestine police since 1931. He spoke fluent Hebrew, understood Yishuv politics, held a wide range of important contacts, and was

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<sup>186</sup> TNA. *Extract fortnightly intelligence summary no.86 Defence Security office. 27.8.44. KV 5/34. 301.*



known as a “walking archive.” On 29 September 1944, while walking to work in Jerusalem, two Lehi gunmen killed Wilkin and escaped arrest. Lehi was on the hunt for CID members involved in killing Abraham Stern two years prior. Wilkin’s death, according to Catling, was a massive loss – his expertise on the Yishuv died with him. He never recorded it for fear of leakage.<sup>187</sup> The mere fact that Wilkin was so vulnerable to attack illustrates the British sense of politics in the Yishuv, as well as its confidence in 1944. His death also damaged the CID more than Lehi could have hoped. It eroded British ability to understand terrorism. This attack, and others on police targets, showed that neither CID nor intelligence personnel were secure, like their counterparts in Ireland during 1920. In British colonies, the CID or its equivalent was its main line of defence against political subversion to attack them was to damage its normal mode of work. The danger of such situations had been defined by Sir Charles Tegart, a British colonial policeman, experienced with terrorists and revolutionaries in India, and having survived assassination attempts himself, who helped suppress the Arab Revolt in 1938. In 1929, while Police Commissioner in Calcutta, Tegart told the Secretary of State for India:

... the one thing he required was that he should be able to deal promptly, and before they occurred, with actual outrages. His reason, in a word, was that his counter-outrage organisation must be made to feel, in its personnel, that it was top dog. The moment outrages occurred and were not punished, his organisation began to crumble.<sup>188</sup>

To provide the Palestine Police with such confidence in 1944 would have required extraordinary measures. Since 1936, Jewish settlements were policed and guarded by the Jewish Supernumerary Police and the Jewish Settlement Police, which had since become

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<sup>187</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918–1948," 212-13. and TNA, *Jerusalem to Cairo*. 29.9.44. FO 921/153.

<sup>188</sup> India Office Records and Library, British Library. *Wedgwood Been to Lord Irwin*, 21.11.29. C. 152/5. My warm thanks to John Ferris for his contribution here.

a legal cover for the Haganah.<sup>189</sup> Even in the cities, the Haganah had considerable power over law and order in the Yishuv. To strip the Haganah of its institutionalized strength and make the police “top dog” would have been impossible, as the war limited the British garrison in the Middle East and the PMF’s ability to recruit. Moreover, politics limited Britain’s ability to act against the official Jewish police. Both intelligence and the military had long held that strong anti-terrorist measures would provoke a Jewish revolt, which Britain could not suppress without endangering its war effort. Thus, the police began to crumble without means to recover authority.

In these circumstances, to focus on violence rather than sedition seemed more effective and impartial. John Shaw, the acting governor of Palestine, concluded that the curfews and arrests were insufficient responses to terrorism. The swelling numbers of imprisoned terrorists at Latrun was a growing problem, especially as “rumours and scraps of information” indicated that a jailbreak soon would be attempted. Shaw and the GOC recommended that the prisoners be removed from Palestine as a security precaution and a response to terrorism.<sup>190</sup>

This wave of attacks hardened the British position. Until that moment, British authorities in the Middle East had been divided on how to react to terrorism. The attacks on MacMichael, the police and Wilkin, enabled the tough stance which Moyne had sought.<sup>191</sup> Shaw emphasized the indoctrination of youth in Jewish schools and social movements, and the growing danger in the “aggressive nationalism accompanied by scarcely disguised hostility to the Mandatory Government.” He also effectively identified

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<sup>189</sup> Bowyer Bell, *Terror out of Zion: the Fight for Israeli Independence*, 33.

<sup>190</sup> TNA, *Jerusalem to CO*. 29.9.44. FO 921/153.

<sup>191</sup> TNA, *Jerusalem to CO*. 2.10.44. FO 921/153.

one of the cultural gaps between the Yishuv and Britain. Eastern Europeans, who made up most of the Yishuv leadership and much of its population, regarded the government with hostility.

...The public towards whom all this effort is focus is not phlegmatic, sensibly critical and good humoured like a British crowd: it is emotional, sentimental and excitable; a large proportion of the people comes from countries where popular conceptions of law and order, constitutional methods, and the sphere of the police in the body politic differ radically from our own. Thousands of Palestine Jews have friends and relatives in Europe who are suffering persecution or whose fate is unknown. This is a very material factor in raising the emotional temperature of the community to a high point.<sup>192</sup>

The enforcement of law and order by sterner means could not help to alter this attitude. However, lacking the force needed to impose its will, Britain had to change tactics or lose control of Palestine. The transfer of the prisoners in Latrun to Eritrea, a British possession far from the Zionist underground, aimed to lessen this pressure on the security services.

Henry Hunloke was having revelations similar to those of Shaw. As a demonstration of his improving understanding of the Yishuv, Hunloke sent SIME, PICME and MI5 a list of leading personalities in the various Jewish political factions in Palestine. "It will be noticed how far stronger the Eastern European influence is in Jewish politics over the Western and this fact alone possibly enhances the difficulties with which the British Administration has to contend."<sup>193</sup> Of the 52 leaders mentioned, 19 were Russian and 19 Polish. Hunloke identified a principal reason for British misunderstanding of the Yishuv, whose political heritage was Eastern European. Differences in political culture between Britain and the Yishuv often led both sides to mistakes and confusion, even though differences in interest were the basic source of conflict.

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<sup>192</sup> TNA, *Jerusalem to CO*. 2.10.44. FO 921/153.

<sup>193</sup> TNA. *List of Jewish personalities in Palestine*. 28.8.1944. FO 921/147

On 19 October 1944, 251 male prisoners detained for complicity in terrorism were sent to Eritrea. The operation went smoothly, under heavy security.<sup>194</sup> Before this measure was enacted, the Palestine Government and the C-in-C Middle East implored the public “to assist the forces of law and order in eradicating this evil thing within their midst” through “actual collaboration... especially the giving of information leading to the apprehension of the assassins and their accomplices.”<sup>195</sup> This statement was well timed, because the Irgun had just executed an impressive heist at a Tel Aviv textile factory, stealing £P100,000 of material from its Jewish owners. The British government knew that to acquire help from the Yishuv, it must appeal to core Jewish values. Thus, the public statement called on the public “... not to allow the good name of the Yishuv to be prejudiced by acts which can only bring shame and dishonour on the Jewish people as a whole.” The CID appreciated the political limitations to cooperation that existed within the Yishuv, and also expressed confidence that the public would tolerate the “blind sweep” arrest operations which had been ongoing since September, with some success. It could not, however, help the authorities to form a strategy able to win public assistance in fighting terrorism.

A few days after the deportation to Eritrea, Shaw proposed guiding the press on its reporting, with the aim of emphasizing the civic and moral duties of the Yishuv. Perhaps alluding to his earlier assessment of the Yishuv’s disposition, he felt there was public “confusion” as to the meaning of the statement issued one week prior.<sup>196</sup> A week later, however, Shaw reported that the Yishuv’s attitude had noticeably shifted.

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<sup>194</sup> TNA. *Jerusalem to CO, Minister Resident Cairo*. 19/10/44. FO 921/154.

<sup>195</sup> TNA. *Jerusalem to Washington*. 10/10/1944. FO 921/153.

<sup>196</sup> TNA, *Jerusalem to CO*. 20.10.44. FO 921/154

the population as a whole have been noticeably impressed by official communiqué on lawlessness and duty of the public to assist in promoting law and order; also deportation order of 251 detainees... After appeals by Hebrew press for guidance, Vaad Leumi on 26<sup>th</sup> October (16 days after communiqué) issued statement denouncing terrorism and protesting at terms of communiqué. Emphasis was on political expediency rather than moral and civil duty of outlawing terrorists.<sup>197</sup>

The Palestine government was not the only side to change its tactics. The Haganah also began independently to take action against terrorism. On 18 October, one day before the deportation, Eliyahu Golomb publically demanded an end to terrorism and called for the Yishuv to struggle against it. The CID, however, concluded that the Jewish Agency was divided on this issue, while certain officials were enraged by Golomb's actions. Indeed, the leaders of the Jewish Agency feared a civil war within the Yishuv, which, as the CID understood, damaged any prospects of cooperation against terrorism. Golomb nonetheless pursued this policy. On 18/19 October, Haganah posters were distributed throughout Palestine which denounced the Irgun, and the damage it was causing to Zionism. Another source, Y.31, confirmed Golomb's activities for the CID,<sup>198</sup> proving that the Haganah officially had started a propaganda war against terrorism. How far British efforts or those of the Haganah moved the Yishuv is difficult to measure, but it is fair to assume that a bombardment of propaganda from both sides had the effect of rallying anti-terrorist feelings. So did actions by the terrorists.

### **The Assassination of Lord Moyne**

Two Lehi members assassinated Moyne in Cairo on 6 November 1944. This event reshaped the Zionist movement and the relationship between Britain and the Yishuv. It

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<sup>197</sup> TNA, *Jerusalem to CO*. 27.10.1944. FO 921/147.

<sup>198</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918–1948," 220.

drove the Jewish Agency to cooperation with Britain, even though opponents of that move in the Executive, like Rabbi Fishman and Yitzhak Gruenbaum threatened to resign in protest. Ben-Gurion declared the new policy at a press conference, where he called on journalists “to turn to the Yishuv in calling for assistance to the government, just as the British public would do in England.” In London, feelings were high. Churchill only at the last minute removed a threat to stop all further Jewish Immigration from a stern warning to the Yishuv. He realized this would consolidate the Yishuv against Britain. For the same reason, Churchill also rejected proposals from Cairo to increase the garrison in Palestine.<sup>199</sup> Guy Liddell wrote, “I believe that the PM has been considerably moved by the assassination of Lord Moyne and that in consequence he is not quite so favourable to the claims of the Zionists as he was.”<sup>200</sup> He also credited Kellar’s influence for the content of Churchill’s stern warning to the Yishuv.

Kellar has had a talk with Stanley and is to see him again after he returns from Mid east. Stanley is apparently giving us full backing in the work that we are doing in Palestine. Apparently he is making good use of the material which we have given him and has binged up the PM to make the statement he did the other day about terrorism, and its effects on any Jewish settlement. He is working to get the President to make some similar statement.<sup>201</sup>

This evidence demonstrates MI5’s influence on key decisions. Kellar influenced Churchill’s statement, while he and Liddell had collaborated closely with Gort, who had only been in Palestine for a week when Moyne was assassinated. In the Cabinet, although not in Cairo where tempers were fuming, Britain’s limitations were acknowledged. Gort and the Chiefs of Staff advised against a widespread crackdown on the Yishuv. Gort

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<sup>199</sup> Gelber, "British and Zionist Policy in the Shadow of the Fear of a Jewish Uprising, 1942-1944 (Hebrew)," 390.

<sup>200</sup> TNA. *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/195. 249.

<sup>201</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/195. 281.

feared alienating the Jewish Agency by taking any stern measures – indeed, he sought greater cooperation with the Agency against terrorism. The assassination also caused the indefinite deferral of the Cabinet’s consideration of its Palestine Committee’s proposal, which had adopted Moyne and MacMichael’s calls for partition, to give the Jews a small but sovereign state.<sup>202</sup>

Instead, the Cabinet demanded full and unconditional cooperation from the Yishuv against terrorism, even though Cairo rightly feared the Yishuv would strive to use Britain’s dependence and its aid as a means to strengthen its own position while weakening the British.<sup>203</sup> This demand came in the form of an ultimatum from by Gort to Weizmann: unconditional cooperation, or a complete suspension of immigration.<sup>204</sup>

PICME and the staff of the Minister Resident wanted to extend Whitehall’s pressure on Weizmann, and make him publically denounce and refute practically every Irgun or Lehi pronouncement.<sup>205</sup> Anything less, Cairo felt, would be tantamount to condoning terrorism. These authorities failed to appreciate the disposition of the Yishuv, and how far its leadership could condemn anything other than the White Paper. Weizmann’s influence rose with public outrage at Moyne’s assassination. Cairo’s desire to further pressure him showed their weak understanding of the Yishuv. SIME had a better appreciation for the Jewish Agency’s predicament, torn between two sides: Not wanting to sabotage the Zionist effort in Britain and the United States; and fear of losing its authority within the Yishuv. Unlike PICME, SIME acknowledged the Yishuv’s

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<sup>202</sup> Cohen, *Palestine to Israel*, 171-72.

<sup>203</sup> TNA, *Cairo to FO*. 19/11/44. FO 921/154.

<sup>204</sup> TNA, *CO to Jerusalem*, 27.11.44. FO 921/154.

<sup>205</sup> TNA, *Croft to Shaw*. 4.12.44. FO 921/154.

cooperation while still appreciating that it was opportunist.<sup>206</sup> Britain badly needed this cooperation, and having received it, the situation improved.

Where MI5 deplored a lack of policy, the Minister Resident's staff complained that His Majesty's Government did not adopt their own policies. After the assassination of Lord Moyne, Bennett quietly criticized Churchill's position. Commenting on political problems in Greece, the Prime Minister had told the House of Commons, "The armed forces in Greece must be responsible to the Greek government. No Government can have a sure foundation so long as there are private Armies owing allegiance to a group, party or ideology instead of to the state and nation." Bennett thought it worth recording this comment in the Palestine file.<sup>207</sup> Obviously, he felt that the same argument ought to apply to the Haganah, whose arms were now safe only because of the Jewish Agency's cooperation.<sup>208</sup> There was a key contradiction in his view: Bennett was right to see the Haganah as a threat to British Authority, but wrong to assume Britain could do anything about it. Without a long-term commitment to a pro-Zionist policy, Britain could only attempt to slow the erosion of its authority as it fought terrorism. Paradoxically, cooperation with the Jewish Agency hastened that process. After Moyne's murder, Bennett hoped to cripple the Zionist challenge in Palestine. Instead, the Jewish Agency's position was strengthened, as it proved its value in helping the fight against terrorism.

On 29 January 1945, Edward Grigg, Moyne's replacement in Cairo, wrote with despair to Churchill and Eden about the problem of developing policy on Palestine. "I am finding it more and more difficult to believe that we shall find any real solution of our

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<sup>206</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918–1948," 222.

<sup>207</sup> TNA, *Minute by Bennett*. 6.12.44. FO 921/154.

<sup>208</sup> Cohen, *Palestine to Israel*, 172.



troubles in partition on the Cabinet Committee's plan... I am beginning to think that Palestine and Syria will show pretty soon whether our hopes of international collaboration have any substance in them or are just another dream." He called for clarifying British policy before exploring the American "trusteeship" scheme, lest the two allies come into conflict over British imperialism in the Middle East.<sup>209</sup> By February 1945, the 75,000 certificates granted by the White Paper were expected to be exhausted within months, and the end of the war was in sight. All subordinates agreed that a government decision on policy was urgent. The Colonial Office saw the issues of immigration and partition as inseparable, and felt that division of Palestine was the only remaining option.<sup>210</sup> The founding of the Arab League presented a new problem, as it created a strategic partner for Britain which completely rejected partition. Meanwhile, even moderates in the Yishuv, such as Weizmann, were moving towards support of the Biltmore Program. Grigg's proposal, which combined elements of the American trusteeship idea with the added benefit of ongoing British control, sought to redress the "defects" in the partition scheme. Grigg aimed to have an international body control Jewish immigration; to eliminate the "shadow government" status of the Jewish Agency; to institute a single, strong government; and establish a collaborative system to finance the country.<sup>211</sup> Grigg hoped that Jewish wealth would ease British costs in the development of Palestine.<sup>212</sup>

Grigg and his colleagues took a colonialist approach to the Middle East. It was Britain's right and duty as the "higher civilisation" to develop the lesser. His proposals

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<sup>209</sup> Cohen, *Palestine to Israel*, 153-54.

<sup>210</sup> Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat from the Mandate*, 179.

<sup>211</sup> Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat from the Mandate*, 180.

<sup>212</sup> TNA, *Grigg to Eden*. 29.1.1945. FO 921/19a.

ultimately were accepted by the British ambassadors in the Middle East. A conference about these issues in May echoed the attitudes of the previous year. Palestine was important to British strategy; Britain needed support of the Muslim world, particularly the 90 million in India, where the British position also was weak. When Weizmann caught wind of the Grigg's scheme, he complained to the Prime Minister that it threatened the Jewish National Home.<sup>213</sup> After VE day, however, Churchill's 'caretaker' cabinet postponed a decision on Palestine policy until after the elections.<sup>214</sup>

## Intelligence and Counterinsurgency

### Begin's Revolt

Paralysis was the key characteristic of British policy from 1944 through to the end of the war. Weakness in intelligence, especially dependency on Yishuv assistance to fight terrorism, was fundamental to that paralysis, and an important obstacle to British authority in Palestine. The first quarter of 1944 witnessed major changes in the security situation of Palestine, as the Irgun declared a revolt against Britain. Of this declaration, Begin said, "It was against this background that the Jewish Revolt... broke out. The two fundamental facts – the campaign of extermination of the Jews of Europe and the barred gates [to Palestine] in the very days of that campaign – were the immediate cause of that outbreak."<sup>215</sup> For the Irgun and the Revisionist movement, the Yishuv's failures at rescue or in changing British policy, provided the reason for revolt. Rescue actions by the Jewish Agency were kept secret for the security of wartime operations, and fear of

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<sup>213</sup> TNA, *Weizmann to Martin*. 9.5.45. PREM 4/52/3. 320.

<sup>214</sup> Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat from the Mandate*, 181.

<sup>215</sup> Begin, *The Revolt*, 75.

upsetting Britain and the Arabs, which left the Jewish Agency open to criticism for inaction. According to the CID, a tendency towards the extreme within the revisionist New Zionist Organization enabled the Irgun to decide to “‘propagate’ the Jewish cause by means of the bomb and pistol.”<sup>216</sup> Starting in February 1944 the Irgun launched renewed acts of violence and frequently made illegal radio broadcasts.

At the end of January, the Government Transport Agency lost some trucks to an explosion in Jaffa. A young cell member of Irgun was arrested near the scene with pamphlets. More propaganda was distributed in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem a few nights later, announcing the end of the “armistice” with Britain. On 5 February 1944 in Jerusalem, a pro-American demonstration expressing gratitude for the President’s action on refugees turned, with Irgun agitation, into an anti-government demonstration, which had to be dispersed with gunshots. A week later, the offices of the Department of Immigration in Haifa, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv were bombed. In addition, Lehi staged a prisoner escape from an internment camp at Latrun, attempted to bomb the Anglican cathedral in Jerusalem, and killed two CID officers in Haifa.<sup>217</sup> The CID reported that a source, “well-informed on Irgun matters,” said that its aim was to “bring notice to the democratic world the fact that the Jews had received or were receiving unjust treatment...,” but despite its willingness to damage the government, it had ruled out personal terror. Lehi had fewer scruples.

The most interesting part of this CID report is its underlying (and correct) view that the Irgun was directing its efforts as much towards the Jews of Palestine, as Britain and the rest of the world. The NZO could not prevent terrorism and “although Jewish

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<sup>216</sup> TNA. *CID Intelligence Summary No. 3/44*. 18 February 1944. FO 921/153.

<sup>217</sup> TNA. *CID Intelligence Summary No. 3/44*. 18 February 1944. FO 921/153.

public opinion is outraged by the murders and the contemplated attack at the Cathedral, practical assistance in tracking down the perpetrators is yet to materialise.” Terrorism continued on 24 February, when several roadside bomb attacks were carried out against the CID in Haifa. Four days later, the Irgun bombed the income tax offices in Haifa and Tel Aviv; the bomb at the Jerusalem office was disarmed.<sup>218</sup> The situation looked dim, especially to the CID, which started grasping for solutions. Arthur Giles, head of the CID, was so suspicious of the Jewish Agency that he asked Catling whether or not it had initiated the armed actions. By the end of February, however, Giles changed his mind: It was time to seek help from the Yishuv.<sup>219</sup>

In March, the CID faced an onslaught of assassinations by Lehi and bombings by the Irgun, although it scored one success when it captured the Irgun’s wireless equipment on 5 March and arrested fifteen Irgun and five Lehi suspects.<sup>220</sup> The worst of these assassinations occurred on the 23 of March when John Scott, commander of the Arabic Department of the CID’s Special Branch, was killed during a bombing of the CID headquarters. The CID, down on its luck, then received some.

### **Agent Y.32 – The CID’s Irgun Informant**

Around the end of March, Britain scored its first major successes against this new wave of terrorism. A source, “Y.32,”

...a man known for his close connections with the Irgun, but insisted he was not a member, met with an officers from CID headquarters in Jerusalem on the initiative of that officer. The man explained that he was ready to supply names and addresses of the current leaders and of important members of the Irgun to the extent of his knowledge. He was ready to do so because he thought that the

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<sup>218</sup> TNA. Jerusalem to CO. 28/2/44 and 24/2/44. FO 921/153

<sup>219</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918–1948," 201.

<sup>220</sup> TNA. Jerusalem to CO. 5/3/44. FO 921/153

Irgun's policy is damaging the war effort and the Jewish question and will lead to unnecessary spilling of blood..."<sup>221</sup>

On 31 March at 21:00, Catling and his force began an arrest operation, based on this hot information. For an ad hoc operation, it was extremely successful. Once obtained, Catling disseminated Y.32's list to his staff and planned the operation with them. The list contained the names of the Irgun's leadership, including Menachem Begin, Eliyahu and Yacov Meridor, Arieh Ben-Eliezer and Shlomo Levi. Between 31 March and 2 April 1944, 50 arrests were made.<sup>222</sup> For all of his subsequent boasting that Irgun immediately had a copy of the list, luck alone saved Begin, who happened to be out of the house when the British arrived to arrest him, and did not return home that night. Several senior members of the Irgun, however, were arrested and despatched for interrogation. On 4 April the list was sent to the chief secretary of the Palestine government, the DSO, and the MLO. Catling had demonstrated the CID's capabilities to his harshest critics at the DSO and MI5.

Y.32, known in Hebrew as Yaacov Chilevich and in Lithuanian as Jankelis Chilevicius, had worked for the Irgun's fundraising arm in Palestine before he turned. In *The Revolt* Menachem Begin named Simon Tsorros as the traitor, though in the Hebrew version of the book, Chilevitch is named.<sup>223</sup> His work with Britain was just beginning. The CID had intelligence suggesting that the Irgun knew of Chilevitch's presence in Cairo, where they had sent him for his protection. The British thought of sending him to South Africa, but dropped the idea because of the threat to his safety by Revisionists in that country. After spending several weeks in Cairo, Chilevitch was sent to the United

<sup>221</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918–1948," 204.

<sup>222</sup> TNA. *Extract from top secret telegram No. 409 from Palestine*. 2.4.44. CO 733/457/5. item 1.

<sup>223</sup> Begin, *The Revolt*, 149-51. Perhaps Begin was ready to bury the hatchet by the 1970s.

States as an agent of the CID.<sup>224</sup> The Irgun demanded, meanwhile, that Chilevitch return to Palestine. According to its “laws,” the Irgun put Chilevitch on trial *in absentia* and sentenced him to death. They believed the British had sent him to Canada. Chilevitch was unusual as a CID agent –paid by a colonial police force and operating in the United States. There, he eventually made contact with Eri Jabotinsky, son of the founder of Revisionist Zionism, and other revisionists with Irgun connections. Eri, in Turkey working on illegal immigration, cabled Hillel Kook, a.k.a. Peter Bergson, using veiled language, to inform him that Chilevitch was a British informant. The message, however, was not understood by Jabotinsky’s movement in the United States.<sup>225</sup> There, Chilevitch contacted Kook, who led a small number of Irgun activists known as the “Bergson Group” which organized propaganda for Jewish independence in Palestine. The Bergson group organized the “American Committee for a Jewish Army,” which sought to organize a Jewish fighting force for the war and took credit for American support of the Jewish Brigade, “The American Emergency committee for saving Jews in Europe,” and “The National Committee for Hebrew Liberation,” which were the illegal immigration organization and propaganda arms of the revisionist movement.

Britain’s estimation of the value of Chilevitch is easily demonstrable. In September 1944, the CID’s two central figures in the fight against terrorism, Arthur Giles and Richard Catling, both were in England on leave. At the same time as a wave of terrorism struck Palestine, an important lead on the Irgun emerged in Washington. Chilevitch wanted to speak with Catling personally about “plans for [a] major Jewish

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<sup>224</sup> TNA. Co 733/457/5 items 5/6 and 7/8 demonstrate that while he was not a British “official” he was travelling under the CID’s auspices.

<sup>225</sup> Yehuda Lapidot, "Part two: The revolt: Chilevitch Chapter", in *In the Heart of the Revolt (Hebrew)* <<http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/history/belahav/2c-2.htm>> [accessed 4 May 2010]

uprising in Palestine.”<sup>226</sup> Although both Catling and Giles were “urgently required for duty in Palestine,” the Palestine Government was “prepared to agree that one or the other should be sent to America.”<sup>227</sup>

On 15 September, as arrangements to send Catling to the United States were underway, Kellar was brought into the picture.<sup>228</sup> The two men informed the FBI representative in London of the situation, and Catling departed by plane for America on 23 September.<sup>229</sup> His visit to the United States was to remain a secret.<sup>230</sup> He arrived in New York on 1 October, and met Chilevitch immediately. His agent gave him vague information about the Bergson group, its activities, and fundraising. He was unable to explain how the Bergson group sent this money to the Irgun, but he was sure it did. Chilevitch eventually had been dropped by Bergson after, he presumed, further correspondence from Jabotinsky. He continued to obtain information, however, from Shmuel Merlin’s mistress, Ruth Kaplan, with whom Chilevitch also had an affair. He gave Catling an elaborate account of the Irgun’s plans for revolt after the defeat of Germany. While the overall scheme is inaccurate, many of the targets he described were indeed struck within a short time after Germany’s defeat. Y.32 was unable to provide information of immediate value as before, but did paint a vague picture of the Irgun’s plans. He also provided an opening for the CID to confront international terrorism. Catling believed Y.32, but was wary of the sketchy information. “We know that what

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<sup>226</sup> TNA, *From British Colonies Supply Mission to High Commissioner via Secretary of State for Colonies*. 4 September 1944. CO 733/457/5. 10.

<sup>227</sup> TNA, *From Palestine to Secretary of State for Colonies*. 5 September 1944. CO 733/457/5. 11.

<sup>228</sup> TNA, *Christopher Eastwood to Kellar*, 15.9.44. CO 733/457/5. 17.

<sup>229</sup> TNA, *Washington to CO*, 19.9.44. CO 733/457/5. 22.

<sup>230</sup> TNA, *Washington to CO*, 6.10.44. CO 733/457/5. 26. And *Minute 27*, 26.10.44.

Y.32 told us regarding the Irgun in march this year was correct and I believe that what he communicated to me in New York has basis in fact, although the information is sketchy. It is sufficient to indicate, in my opinion, that the Bergson Group is connected with the Irgun in Palestine and seemingly supplying funds for the terrorist activity...”<sup>231</sup> The High Commissioner agreed, emphasizing that “...what is wanted from Y.32 is intelligence, – not his appreciation of the terrorists’ plans, derived from deduction or ‘intelligence anticipation,’ which he passes on as intelligence.”<sup>232</sup>

During his trip, Catling held meetings with the FBI and State Department. At the State Department, he met a group of experts on Palestine, including a Jew who had studied there and, to Catling’s amazement, received free access to the American consulate’s files for his studies. The FBI, on the other hand, had little to offer. Bergson had broken no Federal or State laws. The State Department held the same view, and added that financial connections to Irgun would have to be proven. Deportation of Kook because of his illegal status was possible, but complicated. Kook was fighting the draft, which would give him citizenship, but also preoccupy his time.

In November, Y.32 again contacted Catling, asking for \$2000 so to continue receiving information from Kaplan. Meanwhile, Gort cleared up another matter- the Irgun received no direction from Bergson. None the less, he called for the arrest and internment of Bergson and his associates.<sup>233</sup> In December the Colonial Office sent a copy of Catling’s report to David Petrie, Director of MI5, and asked his staff to discuss

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<sup>231</sup> TNA, *Note on Visit to the United States. Sept. 29<sup>th</sup> – Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>. 1944.* CO 733/457/5. 34.

<sup>232</sup> TNA, *High Commissioner to Secretary of State, 23.11.44.* CO 733/457/5. 35.

<sup>233</sup> TNA, *High commissioner to secretary of state. 23.11.44.* CO 733/457/5. 34.



whether the \$2000 requested by Y.32 was worth the expense.<sup>234</sup> Guy Liddell, unsatisfied with Y.32's reliability, felt that he ought to be encouraged, but closely watched. He rejected any effort to arrest the Bergson group, although he suggested trying to obtain the FBI's cooperation in watching Bergson and in allowing Britain to continue running agent Y.32. He also proposed monitoring Bergson's committees and, although it is blanked-out in the diary, one can plausibly assume that the words "Home Office warrant" fill the sentence "I am suggesting... that we... also should get \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ on one Halperin said to be the representative of the organisation here."<sup>235</sup>

On 13 December, Rymer-Jones, several Colonial Office officials, and the MI6 officer (and Soviet mole) Kim Philby, accepted Liddell's suggestion. Arrest was impractical; Bergson's financial channels to Palestine must be discovered. American assistance would be sought, with full disclosure and shared decision making on whether to pay Y.32, MI6 would monitor Jabotinsky in Turkey, MI5 would watch Bergson's associates in the UK, and Rymer-Jones would coordinate all the information.<sup>236</sup>

This liaison was strained, but did lead to the arrest of Jabotinsky at the Palestine border, after MI6 arranged for the Americans and Turks to force him in that direction.<sup>237</sup> Catling, after interrogating Jabotinsky, described him as "a naive person who suffers from what is colloquially known as 'bees in his bonnet.'" Jabotinsky revealed some general information about Bergson and was open, except when grilled on his connection

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<sup>234</sup> TNA, *Dawe to Petrie*, 8.12.44. CO 733/457/5. 38.

<sup>235</sup> TNA. *Guy Liddell diaries*. KV 4/195. 323-324, 336-337, 339.

<sup>236</sup> TNA, *Eastwood to Liddell*. 19.12.44. CO 733/457/5. 40?

<sup>237</sup> TNA, *various*. CO 733/457/5. 45-47, 51, 59, 70.

to the Irgun. Jabotinsky claimed that the Irgun should be financing Bergson, not the other way around.<sup>238</sup>

The liaison between MI5 and FBI on Bergson was tense because Catling had not told the FBI about Y.32, or even that he was in their country. According to Kellar, when briefed on the situation by Catling, the FBI had been irritated, though “In fairness to Catling it should be pointed out that he had a difficult task in carrying out his mission as it was by no means obvious which of the various American departments concerned should properly handle the case.”<sup>239</sup> In March 1945, the Americans agreed, in principle, to run Y.32. The CID, however, soon felt he was no longer of use. None the less, the FBI still investigated the Bergson group, using Chilevitch, and shared information with British intelligence.<sup>240</sup>

In the summer of 1945 Bergson’s suspicions of Chilevitch had not abated. He hired “Interstate Industrial Protection Co.” to check up on him. The private investigator’s report lacked any details other than that the G-2 service of the United States Army facilitated his transport to New York from Cairo in May 1944.<sup>241</sup> As for Ruth Kaplan, the Zionist movement became aware of her role. One secretary in the Jewish Agency wrote to Tuvia Arazi, “And with Ruth K. I nearly came to blows in Paris. She is a complete fraud in my view. I wouldn’t trust her with anything. I’m surprised that our people didn’t find her out much sooner.”<sup>242</sup> This extraordinary story reveals volumes about the limits to

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<sup>238</sup> TNA, *CID report on Jabotinsky interrogation by Catling*, 2.3.45. CO 733/457/5. 91?

<sup>239</sup> TNA, *Kellar to Eastwood*, 14.3.45. CO 733/457/5. 78.

<sup>240</sup> TNA, *Petrie to Giles*. 22.8.45. CO 733/457/5. 93?

<sup>241</sup> Ben-Gurion Archive, Hillel Kook Collection. *Interstate Industrial Protection CO. Client: Miss King. Subject: Jacob Chilevicius*. 29.6.45. Reel 1 Part 2. pp. 259.

<sup>242</sup> TNA, *Extract from letter from Ruth Goldsmidt to T. Arazi, New York*. 6.10.46. KV 2/2262. 65b.

British intelligence, its strengths, and the difficulties involved in fighting an underground terrorist movement with international connections.

The impact of Y.32's information is measurable. For example, concern about the possibility of a prison break at Latrun, which led to the transfer of 251 detainees to Eritrea, can clearly be traced to intelligence passed from Y.32 to Catling. Nearly all the operations which Y.32 described to Catling occurred in one form or another during subsequent years. While his warnings had little tactical value, they did improve British understanding of the enemy, and outlined main targets for attack. Most importantly, the information reinforced the fears of British intelligence of the threat of a general revolt.

### **Alec Kellar's Visit to the Middle East, Counterterrorism and Cooperation**

Without cooperation from the Jewish Agency, Britain could not go far in its fight against Irgun and Lehi. Agents like Y.32 were few and far between, and his actions simply drove the terrorists deeper underground. Thus far, differences on greater political issues blocked cooperation between the Jewish Agency and Britain. Neither side was prepared to approach the other, in order to fight the threat which Irgun and Lehi posed to each of them. The British believed that the Yishuv would use force to achieve its political aims, especially in illegal immigration, although in fact it did so only to protect its arms.

With Y.32's help, Britain won an important battle in April 1944. That month was quiet, but intelligence knew that the war was not over. The DSO remarked, "though the situation has temporarily quietened, it is possible and not unlikely that further outrages will be committed. Both IZL and the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel continue to issue

subversive pamphlets...’’<sup>243</sup> Lehi and Irgun still posed a threat, and would recover. This tense time coincided with Alec Kellar’s review of security in the Middle East, which ultimately improved its effectiveness in Palestine.

In his meetings with security officials from Palestine, Kellar had three main objectives: to review their system so to help improve it; to securely open ISPAL, including ‘ISPAL 3 – communications between Zionists and their European contacts,’<sup>244</sup> to all relevant consumers; and to advise MI5 about the situation. Kellar met with the C-in-C Middle East, the High Commissioner for Palestine, the GOC Palestine, the head of SIME, and Hunloke. Presumably some method was agreed to securely share ISPAL. In any case, the accuracy of DSO and SIME reporting on political and security matters improved markedly.

Kellar evaluated Hunloke’s performance with marked fairness. Hunloke had to cover Arab and Jewish threats, and, although Kellar did not mention it, communists too. The DSO’s role also overlapped with that of Army security and counter-intelligence, GSI (a) and (b).<sup>245</sup> To remedy the situation, Kellar sent Hunloke a deputy.<sup>246</sup> Kellar emphasized Hunloke’s keenness for his work, as well as another important quality, “...his relations with the Agency are good and its officials respect him for his detachment, a virtue difficult to attain in a country where sympathies so generally run to extremes.”<sup>247</sup>

This praise for Hunloke’s rapport with the Jewish Agency political department

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<sup>243</sup> TNA. *DSO Extract*. 30 April 1944. KV 5/29. Item 23B.

<sup>244</sup> KV 4/193. pp. 256. ISPAL 3 from February 22 1944, KV 4/193 pp. 216.

<sup>245</sup> TNA. *Report on Visit to SIME and CIC Organisations*. Alec Kellar. May 1944. KV 4/384. pp. 11.

<sup>246</sup> TNA. *Report on Visit to SIME and CIC Organisations*. Alec Kellar. May 1944. KV 4/384. Minute 3.

<sup>247</sup> TNA. *Report on Visit to SIME and CIC Organisations*. Alec Kellar. May 1944. KV 4/384. pp. 11.

overshadowed doubts about his abilities. Hunloke did indeed have strong links with the Agency. Kollek later said, “The man I liked best among the British... was Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Hunloke, chief of Military Intelligence... He was a very pleasant man and a wonderful raconteur...,” although, “not particularly in sympathy with the Jewish community in Palestine...”<sup>248</sup>

Kellar also assessed the cooperation of the Yishuv against terrorism. He expressed confidence in the Jewish Agency’s denunciation of the Irgun and Lehi, and told of further assistance offered by it.

This fact [assistance from the Yishuv] was stressed by Captain J. Rymer-Jones, the Inspector General of Police, in a long and interesting meeting I had with him when, in illustration, he told me how, in search for two members of the Stern Group [Lehi] at Yavniel (later tracked down and killed in a running fight) the Police were given every assistance by the Muktar of the village and its committee and even guided by them to the suspected house. Another example of this unusual collaboration was seen in the Agency’s proposal – made personally to Hunloke and Rymer-Jones – to detain in certain settlements, not to be disclosed to the authorities, some twenty members of the Stern Gang known to the Agency as responsible for the recent terrorist outrages. Conditions now appear to have been attached to the proposal which prevent the police agreeing, as they had at first thought of doing, to this unconstitutional measure which would have been of some considerable assistance as few of the Stern Gang are known to our own Authorities.<sup>249</sup>

These steps marked the beginning of cooperation between the British and the Yishuv on terrorism. Although the British disliked any condition which supported the Jewish Agency’s status as *Imperium in Imperio*, Kellar was willing, at least temporarily, to tolerate it, so to neutralize Lehi. Kellar was not naive about the Jewish Agency’s intentions, and understood the weak position to which cooperation was leading British security.

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<sup>248</sup> Kollek, *For Jerusalem: A Life by Teddy Kollek*, 39.

<sup>249</sup> TNA. *Report on Visit to SIME and CIC Organisations*. Alec Kellar. May 1944. KV 4/384. pp. 9-10.

...so far as the Agency is concerned, [this cooperation] must be assumed to be purely opportunist. For the time being, it suits the purpose of the Zionist hierarchy in Palestine to discourage violence- they hope their political aims will be met in Palestine without the need of resorting to force – and to oppose the independent actions of bodies, such as the Stern Gang, which dispute the Agency’s leadership. What is equally certain is that if Zionist demands for autonomy in Palestine are not met, there will be widespread disturbances in which the different Zionist bodies and their para-military organisations will not only participate but may well be brought together under one leadership...<sup>250</sup>

Kellar offered a shrewd, accurate and nuanced picture, especially compared to the political analyses offered by PICME, which assumed that a revolt was imminent and ignored the tensions between Haganah and the terrorists. He predicted how and when the Yishuv would use force against Britain with accuracy. Kellar understood the Yishuv; he had been reading its communications. To Kellar’s regret, however, the Jewish Agency’s proposal was rejected. SIME suggested that HQ Palestine rejected it because of the many conditions attached, especially that if the police were searching for a fugitive, they “would not, while looking for him, search for arms at the same time.”<sup>251</sup> PICME, conversely, concluded that “the Agency [is] believed to have taken steps to prevent recurrence [of] outrages to [the] extent of warning settlement headmen to refuse sanctuary to terrorists should they present themselves and hand them over to authorities... it appears that Agency must know [the] identity and possibly hideouts of principal terrorists.”<sup>252</sup>

Suspicion of Jewish intelligence rose in May 1944 when the British suspected it of assisting the Greek mutiny in Egypt. SIME investigated and rejected the possibility, concluding that this support derived from the Palestine Communist Party (PKP) and the

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<sup>250</sup> TNA. *Report on Visit to SIME and CIC Organisations*. Alec Kellar. May 1944. KV 4/384. pp. 10.

<sup>251</sup> TNA. *Extract from SIME no. 181*. KV 5/34. 25a.

<sup>252</sup> TNA. *PICME to Troopers*. 8 May 1944. FO 921/153.

Zionist communist party.<sup>253</sup> While the Jewish Agency was not implicated in the matter, this development could not have come at a worse time for the Yishuv, which had just established a new liaison between its political department and the DSO Palestine.

Teddy Kollek's liaison with the DSO began after 17 May, when 33 Irgun fighters seized the broadcast station building and tried to spread propaganda on radio, only to find there was no microphone on the premises. Rymer-Jones met with Ben-Gurion at the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, requesting "more cooperation and less poison."<sup>254</sup> Ben-Gurion, despite some reservations, was eager to promote cooperation. Other people, particularly Reuven Zaslani (Shiloah), had held liaison positions with the CID for many years, and Kollek's position was created with Zaslani's direction.

Cooperation led to success against the Irgun on 22 June 1944, when police seized a large cache of explosives and weapons in Jerusalem. Intelligence also warned of joint plans by Irgun and Lehi to destroy government and police offices. The Polish military, which shared the same compound as police headquarters in Jerusalem, learned of the plot and informed the British authorities. The military court was named as another target. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, a "representative of [the] Jewish Agency warned military authorities that attacks were timed for that evening. Special police precautions were taken on the following day[.] Agency source informed police that owing to these measures [the] terrorists had postponed attack to 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup> [of June]."<sup>255</sup> The Agency source was presumably Kollek – providing such information was his job. Record of this cooperation was sent to PICME, but does not seem to appear in its discussion of events in Palestine.

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<sup>253</sup> TNA. WO 201/2538. 10B

<sup>254</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918–1948," 209.

<sup>255</sup> TNA. *Jerusalem to CO*. 25/6/44. FO 921/153.

During this period, SIME's assessments of the Yishuv markedly improved in accuracy, likely because of Kollek's guidance on that matter, and SIME and PICME began to offer contradictory reports.

### Cooperation and British Security After Moyne's Assassination

Moyne's assassination drove the Yishuv to deepen its cooperation with Britain, which until then, was limited, and also to strengthen the resources of local security. The Palestine Police received raises in pay, so to improve recruitment, and a modification of their rules of engagement. The Colonial Secretary also offered help in strengthening the CID.<sup>256</sup> Guy Liddell summarized the development:

Rymer-Jones of the Palestine CID came in today. He seems very pleased that his force has at last got the order to go ahead and clean up the terrorists. His only trouble is shortage of men. I gather too that he has succeeded in getting an increase of pay. He says this will make an enormous difference to the efficiency of his force. He expects trouble but appears fairly sanguine about being able to deal with it.<sup>257</sup>

Meanwhile, the Police Mobile Force (PMF), the equivalent of a mobile infantry brigade equipped with armoured cars, trucks and heavy weapons, was reinforced.<sup>258</sup> By early July, it was just shy of 2,000 men-strong, but still required another 1,258. Recruitment was slow, although the Police wisely decided to recruit members of the mobile striking force from the Arab rebellion in the 1930s.<sup>259</sup>

The beginning of the "saison" was another important step in Britain's fight against terrorism. Yishuv intelligence intensified its activities against the Irgun and Lehi,

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<sup>256</sup> TNA, *CO to Jerusalem*, 27.11.44. FO 921/154.

<sup>257</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/195. 282.

<sup>258</sup> Cesarani, *Major Farran's Hat*, 21.

<sup>259</sup> TNA. *High commissioner to secretary of state*. Wo 208/1705. 39A.



both in Palestine and abroad.<sup>260</sup> On 28 November, Gort reported that the Police had arrested 119 suspects, mostly known members of Irgun and Lehi. In one particularly successful raid in Haifa on 22 November, the Police, acting on specific information, arrested “a known Jerusalem terrorist and seized incriminating documents” which led to more arrests of Irgun members.<sup>261</sup>

In early December, Liddell recorded that a source codenamed *Snake* had given the CID “over 500 names and addresses of terrorists and dumps of arms.” The police already had made 250 arrests. “There is no doubt I think that the more moderate elements in the Zionist Movement are afraid that the actions of the extremists may jeopardize the whole future of Zionism.”<sup>262</sup> Could *Snake* have been Kollek? The CID record appears to be missing, but the imaginative nickname fits that of Kollek’s cut-out contact in London in 1946-1947, *Scorpion*.

On 26 November Alec Kellar left for the Middle East again and reviewed its security intelligence organization. His report provides the best description of the intelligence activity behind the *Saison*. He reported on the political crisis posed by Moyne’s assassination to the Zionist leadership. Weizmann’s ultimatum, combined with his standing, had a moderating effect on the Jewish Agency Executive.<sup>263</sup> Cooperation, however, was opportunist, conditional and limited.

[Cooperation] will continue as long as the Agency believe that we will ultimately lay down a policy for Palestine which will meet their demands; it is circumscribed in that the Agency is in general only passing lists of names to the Police for the latter to make arrests... The Police, handicapped as they are by inadequate

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<sup>260</sup> See, for example, Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*, 554.

<sup>261</sup> TNA, *Jerusalem to CO, rptd Cairo*. 28.11.44. FO 921/154.

<sup>262</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/195. pp320.

<sup>263</sup> TNA, *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384. pp. 4.

records, are unfortunately left with no alternative but to act on the Agency's information for what it is worth and prejudiced though it may be.<sup>264</sup> Both through the evidence it provided, and did not provide, the Jewish Agency was manipulating British security. It withheld information, Kellar correctly charged, on the organization of Irgun and Lehi, which reinforced the CID's dependence on the Yishuv. Meanwhile, the Jewish Agency independently fought Irgun and Lehi. Haganah units kidnapped terrorists, who were interrogated by SHAY agents using methods "which were openly admitted to me [Kellar] by Edward<sup>265</sup> Kollek, one of the Agency's principal security officers, as being on occasion "unorthodox" but fruitful of result." Suspects detained by the Haganah either would be returned to their homes, handed to the police, remained in custody so to supply information which the Haganah preferred to vet before passing to the Police, or held in custody without passing information. Kellar disliked the situation: "This extra-constitutional action which the Agency is now allowed to take in Palestine has in fact given it something of the status of an imperium in imperio."<sup>266</sup> Kollek openly told Kellar that the Agency's counter-terrorist contribution mainly focused on the Irgun, its greatest rival for authority in the Yishuv, even though Lehi was behind Moyne's murder.

SIME assisted "the Jewish Agency in tracking down suspected terrorists among Jewish service personnel stationed outside Palestine and more particularly among units in Egypt. Trusted members of the Agency already serving with the British forces are, with SIME's connivance and after special briefing by the Agency, being planted in units

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<sup>264</sup> TNA, *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384.

<sup>265</sup> An error; probably derived thusly: Teddy>Eddy>Edward.

<sup>266</sup> TNA, *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384. pp. 5.

where suspected terrorists have thought to be.”<sup>267</sup> No results had yet been achieved but further efforts were pressed by Kellar, who had to persuade Allied Forces Headquarters in the Mediterranean (AFHQ) to plant agents of Yishuv intelligence in the Jewish Brigade.<sup>268</sup> The first results on record of this proposal, occurred in 19 March 1945, when SIME prepared a list of “Jewish personnel in the three Services who are alleged to be connected with the Stern gang.”<sup>269</sup>

Information from the Jewish Agency enabled another coup for Britain when, on 13 February 1945, the CID captured Yaacov Meridor, Begin’s deputy in the Irgun.<sup>270</sup> In his interrogation Meridor revealed some new information, but kept the most important details to himself. He described the organization of the Irgun, without naming names, some of its history, its past commanders, and his former roles. He noted how Irgun cells, generally limited to three fighters, were activated without knowing their district commanders or other cells working on the same objective. Meridor claimed responsibility for certain operations, and described how Irgun raised funds, although he glossed-over its practice of extortion from Jews. He also confirmed SIME’s vague estimates on the size of Haganah, at anywhere between 30,000 and 80,000 underground soldiers. He accurately described the governance of the Haganah, which British intelligence only thus far had been able to deduce from SIGINT with mixed accuracy. Meridor described attempts by the Haganah to absorb Irgun, and the latter’s intention to attack civil and military targets, including the oil pipeline terminating in Haifa, should relations with Britain become

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<sup>267</sup> TNA, *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384. pp. 6.

<sup>268</sup> TNA, *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384. pp. 23.

<sup>269</sup> TNA, *British Embassy Cairo to ?*. 19.3.1945. KV 5/29. 34a.

<sup>270</sup> TNA, *DSO to Roberts, Kellar*. 13.2.45. KV 5/34. 39a. 40a.

unacceptable by the end of the war.<sup>271</sup> SIME cautioned that all this information could be false, as there was no “good reason why Meridor should be willing to assist” Britain.<sup>272</sup>

Kollek also opened his department’s Arab material to his British counterparts. In December 1945, Kollek wrote to Clayton, head of PICME and adviser to the Minister of State in Cairo, “During our last conversation in Cairo I realised how carefully you were following the Palestinian press. For about two years we have been publishing a weekly press digest, of which I am enclosing the last two copies. As you will see, this covers cultural and economic items as well as reviews the Arabic press. If you are interested in being put on our mailing list, please let me know.”<sup>273</sup> Kollek ended the letter on a warm and personal note. Clayton soon signed PICME up for distribution. Kollek sent similar offers to his friend Maurice Oldfield at SIME, as well as to the MI6 representative in the Middle East who had taken over ISLD from John Teague. Even the DSO Palestine offered warm thanks for the material.<sup>274</sup>

While Kollek aimed gently to persuade his new partners of the Yishuv’s strength through cooperation, his actions had another and greater effect: they fostered Britain’s dependence on the Yishuv. The combination of ISPAL and the Agency markedly improved the understanding by British security of attitudes within the Yishuv and its leadership, and guided heavy blows against Irgun. Its coercive power also was rising steadily. These developments, however, masked weakness, such as Britain’s inability on its own to predict and prevent terrorist attacks, or to strike their organization, or to determine how and when Jewish leaders would turn on Britain. The Jewish Agency

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<sup>271</sup> HA, *SIME to DSO*. 47/21. microfilm roll 3, 346-347.

<sup>272</sup> HA, *SIME report No.1 - Yacov Meridor*. 47/22. microfilm roll 3, pp. 348-357.

<sup>273</sup> CZA S25/8939. Kollek to Clayton. 5/12/1945.

<sup>274</sup> CZA S25/8939. DSO to Kollek. 23/10/1945.

became essential to British security, which in turn, became a principal source for the erosion of British authority. This phenomenon happened silently and only became apparent when it was too late, after the VE-Day, when Ben-Gurion declared a secret war against Britain.

### **Organizational Weakness, Organizational Changes**

The security services could not determine with certainty the impact of arrests based on Jewish Agency information. They relied on the Agency for such assessments. When Kellar left Palestine in February 1945, however, the Agency felt that Irgun would lose its striking power after the police received the next round of names. Kellar's criticism of the CID acknowledged their personnel shortages, as well as the fact that in order to penetrate the underground, "agents must ordinarily be Jews with every chance that their information will be conditioned by a primary loyalty to their own race..."<sup>275</sup> Those weaknesses shaped the disagreements within British intelligence about how to improve its position. All agreed that dependence on the Jewish Agency was fundamentally unacceptable, if temporarily necessary. Thus, British rule in Palestine hinged on moving intelligence from dependency to mastery. To achieve this objective would be difficult.

Kellar understood that without complete inter-service cooperation, including the integration of top secret material, British intelligence never could escape its dependency on the Agency. Kellar also described the working relationship between Giles and Hunloke in unfavourable terms, perhaps distorted by his own interest in making the DSO his unofficial representative. According to Kellar, Giles was difficult to get along with;

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<sup>275</sup> TNA, *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384. pp. 8.

he did not like working with Hunloke and had a “noticeable inferiority complex.” Giles resented the fact that Hunloke, but not he, briefed met the High Commissioner on security matters, although their relationship was professional.<sup>276</sup> “Resentment” also was felt within the ranks of the CID regarding the DSO’s work in their field.<sup>277</sup> While Kellar disliked Giles, he worked well with the CID’s commander, Rymer-Jones. Despite the CID’s reservations and the DSO’s weaknesses, the latter remained MI5’s sole liaison in Palestine. Consequently, some of the CID’s best intelligence never left Palestine until 1947, when CID reports were sent directly to London.

Practically prophesising Middle East politics for the coming sixty years, Kellar remarked that “with the Palestine situation as it is, it is difficult to disassociate security matters, however carefully defined, from questions of general politico-security interest”<sup>278</sup>

[Catling] took the line that material in this latter class of general [politico-security] intelligence could equally well be supplied, and indeed was, by the police from their own original sources. This was, of course, something of a misrepresentation of the situation since not only are Police sources not nearly so authoritative or extensive as they might be but it is true to say that in Hunloke’s experience the police do hold back information from him and his staff, a fact which the War Office here has also noticed and commented upon.<sup>279</sup>

Catling wanted to protect his sources from the leaky DSO office, but Kellar was right to encourage both sides to cooperate. This inter-service competition debilitated Britain’s early effort against the Irgun and Lehi, and its attempts to maintain authority in the Mandate.

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<sup>276</sup> TNA. *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384 pp. 9-11.

<sup>277</sup> TNA. *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384 pp. 9.

<sup>278</sup> TNA. *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384 pp. 9.

<sup>279</sup> TNA. *Report by Kellar February 1945*. 1945. KV 4/384 pp. 9.

Kellar concluded that Hunloke, in spite of the improvement in his performance, must be replaced. The C-in-C Middle East wanted “fresh blood” and Roberts, of SIME, wanted to establish a replacement within six months. Kellar called for recruiting a new officer immediately, who could have time for training at home before heading Palestine.<sup>280</sup> Kellar proposed Tony Simonds for this post – a potential coup for the Jewish Agency, who had a close relationship with him, and perhaps also for British intelligence. Liddell dismissed allegations that Simonds was “partial to the Jews,” but recommended against his appointment because he was “quarrelsome.”<sup>281</sup>

Kellar’s visit prompted reorganization within SIME, which reoriented its B-division (counter intelligence) towards local threats. By April, it was divided into BC, BG and BJ, handling interrogation, Arab affairs and Jewish affairs. Maurice Oldfield controlled that last position.<sup>282</sup> Kellar also provided a badly-needed audit of security procedures in government facilities. He understood that these offices had been penetrated, but underestimated the full extent of the problem. CID reports regularly found their way to the Jewish Agency. For example, one of February 1945 detailed arrests of illegal immigrants in Palestine during the second half of 1944, their countries of origin, their overland routes, and steps taken to have Syrian and Lebanese police interdict their Arab guides.<sup>283</sup> This information was important for the *Mossad L’Aliyah Bet*. It was precisely such leaks which Kellar aimed to stop.

In particular, Kellar reviewed security at the King David Hotel, which housed the government in Jerusalem.

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<sup>280</sup> TNA, *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384 pp. 12-13.

<sup>281</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diaries*, KV 4/196. 275.

<sup>282</sup> TNA, *Roberts to Kellar*. 12.4.45. KV 4/234. 52A.

<sup>283</sup> CZA, *Illegal Immigration*. 7.2.1944. S25/22396.

To illustrate the slackness of security precautions previously existing, it may be mentioned that at a snap inspection I picked up under a nearby bush an immediate and secret military signal on convoy movements which, although admittedly some months old, did illustrate the carelessness with which the burning of secret waste was being done.<sup>284</sup>

Kellar worked with Hunloke and the new GOC, General D'Arcy, on these elementary improvements. New rules were put in place governing the handling of secret documents, and of visitors, who until Kellar's visit were free to roam about the corridors. Native (ie, Jewish) NAAFI personnel, previously allowed access to officers' rooms, now were excluded.

Kellar improved security at the CID, and addressed the "dangers of telephone insecurity." He brought in experts from London who improved the capacity, quality and security of police listening facilities, though he could not change some problems:

While I already knew that Police monitoring was operating by Jewish personnel with every possibility that the latter doctored what they handed in, it came as a surprise to me to learn that both the Military and Secretariat switchboards were also entirely manned by Jews. Manpower difficulties, however, make the problem for the moment insoluble since to employ British personnel on military lines alone would require approximately 180 persons.<sup>285</sup>

To mitigate the risk, Kellar's specialist installed a "warning signal" which would sound whenever an operator tried to interfere with listening. This probably had little effect, as the SHAY was free to adapt to the new measure. Kellar and his crew swept the DSO's office and Government House (the High Commissioner's residence) for listening devices. Kellar also addressed the High Commissioner's executive Council, the Service Chiefs, Army area commanders, and senior GSI personnel, on counter-intelligence and security precautions.

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<sup>284</sup> TNA. *Report on visit to Middle East*. KV 4/384 pp. 14.

<sup>285</sup> TNA. *Report on visit to Middle East*. KV 4/384 pp. 14-15.



Kellar recommended the immediate interrogation and “mapping” of arrested terrorists, who until then, had not even been grilled. Only then, were they were to be sent to Eritrea. Kellar also improved “mapping” facilities in Palestine as well.<sup>286</sup> Presumably, “mapping” refers to a procedure where evidence is compiled to retrace a criminal’s steps before and after the crime, revealing safe houses, caches, collaborators and other intelligence. Despite Kellar’s advice, the Jewish Agency continued to acquire CID documents and SHAY listening posts functioned as before. Kellar raised consciousness about security, but control over these matters was left to the authorities. Information security in Palestine remained weak while it depended on Jewish Agency cooperation and on local Jews with technical skills.

Nor was the danger simply from Haganah. A year later, Liddell thought, based on information from Peke, that Irgun’s intelligence organizations had a “highly developed system of espionage inside the Government and Police offices.” “They state that they know exactly when and where searches are to be made, and make their arrangements accordingly. They are in a position to tap telephones, open mail, and even to have access to official correspondence between government departments.”<sup>287</sup> This risk was unavoidable, since members of the Yishuv held almost all positions in the local administration and urban economy. This breach of security exposed the British to a triple threat: a lack of success against Irgun, the potential that it might deceive Britain, and assistance to its attacks on British forces.

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<sup>286</sup> TNA. *Report on visit to Middle East*. KV 4/384 pp. 10.

<sup>287</sup> TNA, *Liddell to Vivian (MI6)*, 21.2.46” KV 5/34. 77A.

## Terrorist Threats Abroad

In contrast to the problems in Palestine, cooperation had a positive effect on British security against terrorism abroad. The Jewish Agency told Kellar that it believed, although it lacked specific evidence, that Irgun and Lehi were planting agents abroad under covers such as merchant seamen or Army personnel in units which were likely to leave the Middle East. This danger worried Kellar, considering that in 1944 pamphlets signed “National Military Organization” were posted on the doors of Whitehall departments, criticising Britain for its refusal to form a Jewish Army. Kellar also worried about British establishments in the United States; the Bergson group recently had sent a terrorist (possibly referring to Arieh Ben-Eliezer) to Palestine, who was arrested upon arrival and was under interrogation. Kellar concluded, “The Agency have undertaken to provide Hunloke with any convincing evidence they may receive on the matter [of terrorism outside of Palestine] and he will signal this to MI5 immediately. It is, however, for consideration whether, without awaiting for this later information from Palestine, we should warn the Police here without delay of the facts as we know them at present.”<sup>288</sup>

British authorities in the Middle East and London took these threats of terrorism seriously. On 10 March, the DSO in Cairo warned Petrie of “notice from Police sources and also from the Jewish Agency, that there might be reprisals taken in the form of further assassinations, should the execution of the two Moyne murderers be promulgated and carried out.”<sup>289</sup> The Agency had handed over a list of dangerous suspects known to be in Egypt. This was insufficient evidence for arrest, but all subjects were put under surveillance. On 19 March, Lord Winterton and Sir Edward Spears were named as

<sup>288</sup> TNA, *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384. pp. 8.

<sup>289</sup> TNA, *Jenkins to Petrie*. 10 March 1945. KV 5/29. 35a.

potential targets for assassination in the United Kingdom, but the CID source for this intelligence had no specific information.<sup>290</sup> Petrie informed the Home Office of the threat, though cautioning against creating a scare by circulating it too widely.<sup>291</sup>

Kellar and Liddell discussed the issue with Albert Canning, the head of the Metropolitan Police Special Branch. They shared intelligence on Zionist organizations in Palestine, and the possibilities of assassination attempts in Britain. Liddell recorded:

It seemed to us desirable that we should have the names of all Jewish seamen and civilians arriving here from the Mid East and if necessary we should obtain their particulars from [the] Mid East. There was notification regarding seamen but a time lag of a week or 10 days existed and very often the man had left before we heard anything about it. We suggested that the ports should be asked to telephone direct to ourselves and S.B. [Special Branch]. I undertook to make the necessary arrangements with H.O.<sup>292</sup>

Port security in the Middle East and the United Kingdom became an important check on terrorism. On 16 June 1945, the Port Security Officer Middle East reported that Lehi pamphlets had been found on board a ship which conducted a shuttle service between the Levant and Egypt. Further improvements in security were promised. In the UK, Liddell arranged for port security to call the security service when Palestinian seamen arrived in the UK, and to check all Jews arriving from the Middle East, whether sailors or civilians.<sup>293</sup> A few days later, at Kellar's suggestion,<sup>294</sup> he confirmed arrangements with censorship to check outgoing mail from Zionist agencies in the UK, Jerusalem and the

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<sup>290</sup> TNA, *Palestine to CO*. 19 March 1945. KV 5/29. 36a

<sup>291</sup> TNA, *Petrie to Maxwell*. 2 April 1945. KV 5/29. 41a

<sup>292</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diaries*, KV 4/196. 312-313.

<sup>293</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/196. 326.

<sup>294</sup> TNA, *Minute 86a*. 30.4.45. KV 2/1435.

United States, despite the risk of discovery.<sup>295</sup> For whatever reason, however, the warrant was deferred, and only implemented in October 1945.

In Egypt, success was achieved through different means. SIME captured a well-informed and loose-lipped Lehi member, Raphael Sadowsky, on 22 March 1945, in a Cairo cemetery while looking for the graves of Moyne's assassins. The precaution of watching these graves was a simple means against an ideologically motivated group likely to visit its martyrs. This was an important catch; Sadowsky arranged accommodations, meetings and other logistical tasks for Lehi agents. He named several Lehi fighters in Egypt, including Josef Sytner, Lehi's Cairo chief, who managed the publication of *Front de Combat Hébreu*, forged leave passes for party members in the three services and documents for them to enter various camps, and tried to threaten the Pan-Arab conference in Alexandria of September 1944. Sytner was arrested when the Jewish Agency warned that he might make such an attempt, but without evidence he had been released. Sadowsky confirmed that the attack had in fact been planned. SIME requested that Sytner be posted to an RAF station in Palestine in November 1944, but on the day after Sadowsky's arrest, he disappeared. So too, Benjamin Gepner, an MI9 commando was arrested after Sadowsky confirmed reports, perhaps by the Jewish Agency, that he was a member of Lehi.<sup>296</sup>

Calder Walton and Christopher Andrew have described Britain's effort to fight terrorist threats to the United Kingdom and in Europe. These measures included

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<sup>295</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diaries*. KV 4/196. 329.

<sup>296</sup> TNA, *Appendix "A" to SIME summary no. 229*. 9.5.45. KV 5/29. 44a.

surveillance and liaison with Zionist groups, and censorship.<sup>297</sup> These steps prevented what could have been a serious wave of terrorism in the United Kingdom, despite some close calls.<sup>298</sup> There also were failures, like the bombing of the British Embassy in Rome by the Irgun. By and large, however, British security at home and in Europe was more successful than counter-terrorist efforts in Palestine and the Middle East.

The enhanced cooperation with the Jewish Agency after Moyne's murder was the root cause of British success in counterterrorism outside of Palestine. In the United Kingdom, advanced warning combined with security measures controlled the dangers. Palestinian passports stood out at border crossings. MI5 and Special Branch's "index of terrorists"<sup>299</sup> allowed them to keep dangerous people out of their own home ground. In Palestine, conversely, terrorists could avoid random checks and remain underground until necessary. They did not need to communicate electronically. Catching one cell did little harm to the group as a whole. The British relied on Jewish Agency information in order to dismantle Irgun and Lehi, but found themselves doing so brick by brick. To a large degree, the Jewish Agency used Mandate authorities as a tool for their own politics against dissidents within the Yishuv.

### **Palestine Security after V.E. Day**

Intelligence cooperation produced a quiet winter in Palestine, but security officers knew that this situation could not last. By April 1945, the CID reported on the potential

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<sup>297</sup> Walton, "British Intelligence and the Mandate of Palestine: Threats to British National Security Immediately After the Second World War".

<sup>298</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: the Authorized History of MI5* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 357.

<sup>299</sup> Walton, "British Intelligence and the Mandate of Palestine: Threats to British National Security Immediately After the Second World War," 447.

for a future union between Haganah and Lehi, and even possibly the Irgun. The somewhat accurate report,<sup>300</sup> was based on numerous sources. Giles reported “a distinct feeling in many quarters that the Irgun is about to renew activity. What is believed to be a reliable source states that early this month a meeting of representatives of the Hagana, Irgun and Stern Group met... at the instigation of the Haganah.” The Haganah asked for an indefinite suspension of hostilities. Lehi, according to Giles’ source, agreed because it was fully under Haganah control. The Irgun, however, insisted on a definite “D-day” to strike at British targets.<sup>301</sup> Haganah had attempted to come to terms with Irgun and Lehi, and to postpone hostilities, but failed. MI5 shared the CID’s assessment that Irgun planned to reopen hostilities on V.E. Day.<sup>302</sup>

These predictions came true. Victory in Europe marked renewed violence by the Irgun. One attack was averted when settlement watchmen from Kibbutz Yagur, near Haifa’s industrial sector, detained four Irgun fighters who were attempting to sabotage telegraph poles and their truck filled with explosives on the night of 13/14 May.<sup>303</sup> On the same night, Irgun leaflets warned civilians to keep away from government buildings.<sup>304</sup> Three nights later, a more successful mortar and bomb attack directed at the CID failed to kill or cause much damage. Hunloke was unimpressed: “... IZL usually more efficient. Cannot help wondering if left wing implicated in order to try and frighten authorities into acceding to certain requests such as immigration and Jewish Police force... all parties can

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<sup>300</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918–1948," 231.

<sup>301</sup> TNA, *CID to Chief Secretary*. 24.4.45. CO 733/457/12.

<sup>302</sup> TNA, *Guy Liddell Diaries*, KV 4/196. 245.

<sup>303</sup> TNA, *Hunloke to Kellar*. 14.5.45. KV 5/34. 46d?

<sup>304</sup> TNA, *DSO extract 105*. 20.5.45. KV 5/34. 48B.

do better than this... Further irritating aspect intend getting married Saturday.”<sup>305</sup> On 29

May, one of the few intercepts from the Yishuv to survive in the KV series was received.

To Nethaniel (Jerusalem) from BRZYLY (Tel Aviv). The (?Terrorist) activities in the next few days will be directed against the pipeline and telegraph poles. Also against the pipe line in Transjordan. The intention is to harass the police. They may try to blow up the Benot Yaakov Bridge.<sup>306</sup>

Since Guy Liddell initialed this message, obviously he thought it important. Its meaning, however, is unclear. Either it was a message from within the Irgun, or more likely, the Haganah, warning about attacks. This evidence, however, shows that British intelligence had some ability to know when the Jewish Agency was hiding information. The Irgun soon did attack the strategic oil pipeline, which stretched from Iraq to Haifa, as well as the telegraph poles in the area.<sup>307</sup>

The police were uncovering mortars and bombs with increasing regularity, but both British and Yishuv intelligence services became caught up with illegal immigration. In May, the CID and SIS began to improve their intelligence on the organizers of illegal immigration in Europe. The CID sent an officer to Syria, Turkey, the Balkans and Europe in order to coordinate British intelligence sources against illegal immigration. However, SHAY acquired the document on this matter.<sup>308</sup> By August it had records of coast guard security, their coordination with the RAF, and preparations for detaining illegal immigrants on the beaches. As illegal immigration renewed in the summer of 1945, the Haganah widened its wireless listening to include police channels, and communication

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<sup>305</sup> TNA, *Hunloke to Kellar*. 17.5.45. KV 5/34. 47A.

<sup>306</sup> TNA, *untitled, "top secret" document*. N.D. for original message. Its position in the file suggests a date between 21 and 25 of May, 1945. KV 5/34. 50A.

<sup>307</sup> TNA, *DSO extract summary 106*. 3.6.45. KV 5/34. 52A.

<sup>308</sup> CZA, S25/22396 includes various copies of CID reports on illegal immigration, as well as several unaddressed and unsigned reports (typical of MI6) titled *mission to Greece* and *mission to Turkey*, ca. April 1945.

between patrol boats. The SHAY took two days to decipher British signals at this time, too slow for tactical purposes but enough to demonstrate their procedures.<sup>309</sup>

Meanwhile, based on a human source,<sup>310</sup> the DSO reported on a major meeting of Palmach leaders which discussed the recent wave of attacks. Moshe Sneh, chief of the Haganah's National Command, described the Jewish State as "no longer a slogan, but an ideal near fulfillment. He described the officials of the Palestine Administration as Fascist and anti-Zionist, supported in their outlook by anti-Jewish intrigue of General Spears in London." Ben-Gurion's reports of the Colonial Office's attitudes led Sneh to doubt that the immigration limit would be eased. The document describes Sneh's orders to the Palmach on how to conduct mass illegal immigration, and perhaps a conflict. It included great detail on the organization of the Palmach, its relation to its youth corps, the *Khagam*, a Hebrew acronym for "expanded physical education," and its connection to certain politicians and intelligence officers.<sup>311</sup>

This report represents the most detailed information which the DSO had yet provided on the Haganah but, unfortunately, it was inaccurate. The names are faked, irrelevant or misspelled, the locations are irrelevant, and the description of the organization of the Palmach was imaginary. Perhaps the document was invented to extract money from the handler, or to impress him for future deals.<sup>312</sup> The only accurate point was that a struggle over illegal immigration was imminent. It is also unclear whether the document was taken seriously. Either way, little was to be done. Britain still

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<sup>309</sup> Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*, 569-70.

<sup>310</sup> This can be gleaned from the second page of the report, with the line "it is hoped source will be able to obtain further details to clarify this."

<sup>311</sup> TNA, *Reports on Palmach from DSO Palestine*. 4.6.45. KV 5/33. 68G.

<sup>312</sup> I am grateful to Yoav Gelber for his assistance with this document.



was in a weak position, with its policy undefined. It was better to watch than to fight the Haganah shorthanded.

This underlying tension did not stop the Jewish Agency from protecting British targets against terrorism, nor was Britain impotent against Irgun and Lehi. Independent efforts and intelligence passed by Kollek prevented mortar attacks on the King David Hotel in June.<sup>313</sup> In August, he revealed an Irgun training site at Binyamina in August, leading to the arrest of 27 members.<sup>314</sup> In July, British efforts, seemingly independent of the Agency, led to the confiscation of Irgun propaganda, the capture of documents, the discovery of more mortar plots, and some important arrests, including Josef Sytner, who had been wanted since Sadowsky's capture.<sup>315</sup> None the less, the police failed to prevent damage to a rail bridge after an explosives truck was hijacked and its police driver killed. The Irgun also renewed its illegal broadcasts in July, against which direction-finding was unsuccessful.<sup>316</sup>

Perhaps it was because the Yishuv's attention had turned from the internal threat to the external struggle for immigration, that the Irgun resurged during the summer of 1945. Kollek told the DSO of Haganah's attempts to reach an arrangement with Irgun and Lehi, and its resolve to fight terrorism.<sup>317</sup> Yet Irgun did not recognize the Jewish Agency's authority, and refused to hold its fire until after the August Zionist conference in London. Shortly after the conference, the DSO produced a worrying report:

reports and censor intercepts reveal the waning of Weizmann's influence and the gradual squeezing out from power of the Left Bloc in the counsels of the Zionist

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<sup>313</sup> TNA, *DSO extract 107*. 17.6.45. KV 5/34. 58a.

<sup>314</sup> Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: the Authorized History of MI5*, 356.

<sup>315</sup> TNA, *various entries*. KV 5/34. 57Z, 57Y, 56A, 53a.

<sup>316</sup> TNA, *DSO extract, summary 45*. KV 5/34. 57B.

<sup>317</sup> TNA, *DSO extract from report on interview with Kollek*. 18.8.45. KV 5/34.

Organisation. The period of quiet during which the British government is being 'given a chance' continues, and earlier forecasts that it might end on 8 Sept, the Jewish New Year, may prove incorrect, as far as the Jewish Agency is concerned, in view of the unexpected meeting of Middle East Ministers in London, and the Council of Foreign Ministers which will follow.<sup>318</sup>

Weizmann was a moderating force. With his influence declining, the Jewish Agency was expected to refuse to discuss immigration. There also were increasing signs that the Irgun would intensify its revolt. In late August the DSO predicted that should this trend materialize, so would an alliance or merger of Haganah, Irgun and Lehi.<sup>319</sup> With regard to British policy, the CID knew that "while the Agency is hoping for the best, they are preparing for the worst..."<sup>320</sup>

None the less, British intelligence misconstrued the threat of revolt. The cause is rooted in Kollek's liaison with British intelligence. Months earlier, Kellar reported that

The police, handicapped as they are by inadequate records, are unfortunately left with no alternative but to act on the Agency's information for what it is worth and prejudiced though it may be... The Agency are only too well aware that the Police have signally failed to penetrate these two organizations and that the CID are now to a very large extent dependent on the Agency's security Officers for most of the evidence upon which the arrests of terrorists can be effected. Tactically, the Agency have thereby become very well placed and in their collaboration are quite certainly following their own interests rather than ours. The more the Police are made dependent on them, the more authority the Agency consider they acquire, and indeed do, in the Civil Administration of Palestine."<sup>321</sup>

By fall 1945, this situation had not changed at all. As they were discussing long term policy in Palestine, the Cabinet received a memo from John Shaw:

In a recent interview with a police officer of the CID a representative of the Jewish Agency said that 'he wished to make it clear that the Agency was not co-operating with us (the Government) to exterminate the terrorists...' (i.e., that the Agency's interest was to suppress terrorism but not to immunise the terrorists.

<sup>318</sup> TNA, *Palestine fortnightly summary 113*. 9.9.45. KV 5/34. 63z.

<sup>319</sup> TNA, *Extract Palestine fortnightly summar 112*. 26.8.45. KV 5/34. 62b

<sup>320</sup> Harouvi, "The CID in Palestine, 1918–1948," 238.

<sup>321</sup> TNA, *Report by Kellar February 1945*. KV 4/384. pp. 5.

This can only imply that the Jewish Agency envisages a time when the existence of these two organisations may be useful to Zionist policy and when they may be required to act as allies of the Haganah in a common campaign against the government.<sup>322</sup>

Shaw drew this conclusion intuitively and correctly: at precisely this moment, Ben-Gurion, Sneh, the Haganah, Irgun and Lehi were moving toward precisely such an alliance. The security services, however, lacked the evidence to prove this point. Despite the danger posed by the liaison, with which intelligence had lived for almost a year, the DSO and CID still relied on Kollek to catch terrorists and to help interpret the politics of the Jewish Agency. On 19 November 1946, when the consequences of this weakness were understood by MI5, Guy Liddell recorded in his diary that Kollek and the Agency “always endeavoured to keep the strings in their own hands and to imply that they were the people who were governing Palestine and not the British Government.”<sup>323</sup> Short of provoking a rebellion, or developing superlative new sources, there was nothing Britain could do to reshape the situation, despite Kellar’s determined drive to improve intelligence.

This issue also is connected to that of long term policy. In September 1945, the colonial secretary reported on the security conditions in Palestine. He included Shaw’s letter, but also evaluated the implications of the “grave and threatening internal situation in Palestine.” Revolt by either Arabs or Jews was likely, principally because the immigration quota under the White Paper was soon to be completed. “On the Zionist side emotions have been deeply stirred by the appalling sufferings of the Jewish communities in Central Europe and the wretched plight of their survivors, while exaggerated hopes have been excited by the change of Government. Extremists appear for the moment to be

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<sup>322</sup> TNA, *Annex* - in CP (45) 165, *Security Conditions in Palestine*, 10.9.45. CAB 129/2.

<sup>323</sup> *Guy Liddell Diary*, 19 Nov. 1946, Security Service Archive. Taken from Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: the Authorized History of MI5*, 356.

in control of the Zionist camp... Meanwhile, apart from the terrorist organisations, material preparations for an armed revolt by the Jewish community in Palestine are proceeding on a formidable scale... The return of demobilised soldiers will add new trained men to its ranks.”<sup>324</sup> Meanwhile, the police were still only at about 65% of their establishment strength. The Chiefs of Staff reported that the Palestine garrison would need an additional two divisions and 9,000 administrative troops in order to handle the threat of revolt, and to enforce a policy decision that the Yishuv disliked. Britain, accustomed to governing bigger colonies than Palestine with far smaller forces, faced an almost unprecedented condition of weakness against the population of a colony. With the Jewish Agency in control of security intelligence, and therefore security itself, only massive military force could strip the Agency of the authority it had surreptitiously obtained. Another British colonial habit took precedence over such an extreme measure: Negotiations with Arabs and Jews, it was hoped, would achieve a peaceful and equitable settlement.

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<sup>324</sup> TNA, CP (45) 165, *Security Conditions in Palestine*, 10.9.45. CAB 129/2.

## Chapter 3

### Showdown between Britain and the Yishuv

When Atlee's new government was elected in the summer of 1945, Zionists waited anxiously for it to announce a new Palestine policy. They hoped that Labour would continue the pro-Zionist promises made at its annual conference in 1944, which were, however, the sentiments expressed by a few unelected members. This hope was disappointed. The Middle East policy of the Labour Government had several roots. One was a continuation of its positions of the interwar years, which favoured decolonization among the most advanced possessions, and Zionism. Another, a departure from these anti-imperialist attitudes, was the belief that development in the Empire could strengthen Britain's destitute economy. Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, believed that economic development in the Middle East would benefit local peoples and Britain. Atlee believed that only through exploitation of the empire could Britain keep-up with the United States and Soviet Union. Britain still saw itself as a great power, which shaped how it saw Palestine. Strategic necessity highlighted the centrality of Palestine as an alternate base to Egypt, from which Britain would depart completely by 1956. Bases throughout the Middle East were essential bulwarks to Britain's global position. Were Britain's position in that region to weaken, Soviet influence, already pressing in Iran, simply would take its place, with disastrous consequences for British interests.<sup>325</sup>

As its diplomats emphasized throughout the war, Britain's strategic position in the Middle East was linked to the settlement of the Palestine question. The military agreed,

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<sup>325</sup> Cesarani, *Major Farran's Hat*, 16-17. and Owen, "Britain and decolonization: The Labour governments and the Middle East, 1945-51," 4-5. c.f. Devreaux, *The formulation of British defence policy towards the Middle East, 1948-56*.

The worst political feature of partition, namely its alienation of the whole Arab world, is almost equalled by its military defects, which are the alienation of the Palestine coast, the dependence upon treaty rights for the defence of Haifa and the pipeline, and the reduction of British tenure to a land-bound Jerusalem State possessed of highly controversial frontiers and surrounded on all sides by uncertain friends if not by positive enemies.<sup>326</sup>

The Labour government considered several approaches to the problem. One, which emanated from bureaucrats rather than politicians, was the 'provincial autonomy' plan, rooted in the Colonial Office, which would partition Palestine into semi-autonomous parts. Bevin and the Foreign Office favoured federal union under Abdullah's throne, comprising three units: an Arab and a Jewish Palestine, and Transjordan. As in 1944, however, authorities realized that no solution could make all parties happy, and chose to delay a decision. At a conference in September 1945, British authorities from the Middle East and the Colonial and the Foreign Offices, approved a temporary continuation of the White Paper restrictions on immigration, maintaining an average quota of 1,500-2,000 immigrants per month until a long-term policy could be reached. Washington had vocally pressured Britain to allow 100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine. This pressure gave Britain a reason to further delay a decision, as Bevin sought Truman's cooperation for a joint policy through the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry on Palestine (AACE).<sup>327</sup>

Britain had not defined a clear policy on Palestine, but one point was clear, it was prepared to confront outrage from the Yishuv, but not the Muslim world, which could hurt its position more. The Chiefs of Staff warned that Britain had "to choose between the possibility of localized trouble with Jews in Palestine and the virtual certainty of widespread disturbances among the Arabs throughout the Middle East and possibly

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<sup>326</sup> TNA, *Imperial Security in the Middle East*, 2.7.44. CAB 66/67/5

<sup>327</sup> Sela, "Britain and the Palestine question, 1945-48: The dialectic of regional and international constraints," 223-26.

among the Moslems in India. *The latter represented a military commitment twice or three times as great as the former.*”<sup>328</sup> Therefore the Chiefs of Staff sent two divisions and 9,000 administrative troops to Palestine, including the battle-hardened British 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne, which they believed, finally would provide the force needed to maintain British authority and back whatever policy it chose to pursue. However, this may still not have been enough, as the C-in-C Middle East reported to the Chiefs of Staff, “Sooner or later it will be necessary to disarm the whole population Arab and Jew in Palestine. This applies especially to the Jewish illegal organisation and cannot be effected through consultation with Jewish leaders.”<sup>329</sup> The C-in-C mistakenly believed that “the acquisition and holding of illegal arms for any purpose has never been condoned by HMG,” as arms for settlement defence were legal. Therefore, the Haganah’s arms were in a shadowy legal area, a problem which the High Commissioner understood as he noted the C-in-C’s claim with a question mark. The C-in-C recommended holding action until terrorism made it “obviously necessary and justifiable” and concluded that

Reaction in Palestine will be violent in any event. Searches for arms will lead to bloodshed and will probably take several months to complete. The more resolute we are from the start the shorter will be the period of operations and the smaller number of killed and injured on both sides. There are sufficient troops in the Middle East to carry out this task if kept up to strength.<sup>330</sup>

Here the Chiefs of Staff and the C-in-C Middle East misunderstood the nature of the problem. Army tactics for counterinsurgency had not developed since 1939. The Arab rebellion was rural, involved obvious military formations, and had been supported by

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<sup>328</sup> TNA, *CP(45)156*. 8.9.45. CAB 129/1. taken from Cohen, *Palestine to Israel*, 179. Cohen’s emphasis.

<sup>329</sup> MECA, *GHQ Middle East to Cabinet Offices*, 14.11.45. Cunningham papers GB165-0072. 5/4/9. (Cunningham’s emphasis, in pencil)

<sup>330</sup> MECA, *GHQ Middle East to Cabinet Offices*, 14.11.45. Cunningham papers GB165-0072. 5/4/9.

most of the population. This problem was easier to tackle than that posed by an urban Jewish terrorist underground, supported by a small part of the population.<sup>331</sup> These tactical issues became even more complicated when the Haganah, both a rural and urban organization, with mass support, joined in the insurgency. Never the less, the salient wartime problem, when Britain lacked the force to fight armed rebellion in Palestine, appeared to be fading. British strategy was determined: if a fight must happen, it would be with the Jews of Palestine, not with the Arabs.

In essence, British policy was more of the same: 'procrastination and delay' while trying to appear blameless and impartial.<sup>332</sup> Bevin's diplomacy sought to reconcile Arabs, Americans and the Yishuv all at once. He failed. The AACE called for the immediate introduction of 100,000 immigrants. The Yishuv rejected the AACE's recommendation for a bi-national state, and the Arabs rejected any Jewish immigration.<sup>333</sup> No party cooperated with Bevin's diplomacy, yet Britain's approach was not revised until its position was so weak, that little could remedy the situation. While this problem was extraordinarily complex, and Britain faced a host of difficulties of equal or greater importance, none the less, the actions it took regarding Palestine in 1945 invited a failure of policy.

While the policy toward Palestine was not officially announced until November 1945, Ben-Gurion, who was in London and consulted with the government during Bevin's conference, saw the writing on the wall. The policy of the Yishuv, like that of the

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<sup>331</sup> Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence*, 260.

<sup>332</sup> Sela, "Britain and the Palestine question, 1945-48: The dialectic of regional and international constraints," 221.

<sup>333</sup> Sela, "Britain and the Palestine question, 1945-48: The dialectic of regional and international constraints," 227-28.



Britain, remained unclear, but Ben-Gurion knew what he wanted it to be. He long had interpreted the “Jewish Commonwealth” proclaimed at the Biltmore conference to mean statehood, still a seemingly distant objective. This issue was divisive within the Jewish Agency, but while most British observers thought his position extreme, they underestimated his ability to pursue it.

### The shot *unheard around the world*

While on a short outing from London to Paris, David Ben-Gurion sent the following message to Moshe Sneh, chief of the Haganah’s National Command.

London 1.10.45

- a) I will not return home until I finish main preparations in Europe.
- b) At the centre of these preparations is Aliyah C, in addition to Aliyah B, which is armed Aliyah that will face the [British] police on its own at sea or on the beach. In each convoy there will be a company equipped with machine[guns], grenades and pistols. There are great difficulties in carrying this out, but it is not impossible. The needed training is being organized. The command on each ship for Aliyah C will have one of our men from [Palestine].
- c) Operations in Europe (acquisition, training, funding, radio communications, movement and recruitment for Aliyah B and C) need a central headquarters in France. Ehud should be transferred to Paris immediately. He should arrive while I’m still here. Shaul also must come immediately for consultations either to London or Paris (whichever is easiest and quickest). Signal immediately an answer to the two requests.
- d) There is no need to wait to react to the declaration [on a new British policy for Jewish immigration to Palestine, which had not yet been announced]. It is possible that there won’t be any declaration. The declaration is in effect set to a continuation of the White Paper. The existence of the White Paper is a declaration of war on the entire Jewish nation, and it is upon our nation – lacking a government and oppressed – to fight with all the means at our disposal.
- e) The reaction should not be confined to Aliyah and settlement [the first was limited and the second was forbidden in the White Paper]. It is necessary to undertake S[abotage] and retribution. Not individual terror, but payback for every Jew murdered by the White Paper regime. Each S[abotage] operation must be significant and impressive. Caution must be taken as much as possible to avoid human casualties.
- f) We must invite the two rival factions [IZL and LHI] to full cooperation, on condition of a single authority, and complete discipline. A persistent effort is

required in order to ensure unity in the Yishuv and first and foremost amongst the fighting forces, for the sake of the war.

- g) The reaction must be persistent, daring and calculated for a long fight. This is not a final battle, and there should be no expectation for quick and easy victory. Maximum protection for our constructive enterprise, without flinching from necessary sacrifices and losses.
- h) Explaining<sup>334</sup> our reaction to world opinion (and first of all in England and America, as well as France and the Arab countries) is of almost equally important weight to the reaction itself. Here lies the importance of broadcasting stations in Palestine and Europe and if possible in America.
- i) Our comrades in France have important plans for funding by different administrative operations. For that we need agents in Palestine, Switzerland, Paris, London and in America. They are proposing Barfel in Palestine, Baruch Rozenthal in London, Mina and Dickenstein in America. For that, they are demanding urgent consultation. Also for this it's necessary that Shaul will come for consultation. According to the comrades, the possibilities are enormous.
- j) You [or possibly 'they'] don't know how much we are losing from not sending people to America. Reuven [Shiloach] is leaving tomorrow on a ship for New York, and in his hands are instructions. However without people from Palestine, the whole operation will be sabotaged. Hurry the departure of the "engineer." Why don't people leave by ship when there is no plane?
- k) I am afraid of renewing "Kol Israel" [Haganah radio broadcasts] for the following reason: the broadcast network between Palestine, England, France and America is a vital necessity, and almost a condition of effective operation. "Kol Israel" is liable to bring about searches of the type which are liable to endanger broadcasts outside Palestine; and only if you are absolutely sure that there is no foundation for my fear – then do it.<sup>335</sup>
- l) Track the coast guard's patrols, and inform immediately the comrades in France how many patrols there are, how many police officers there are on each boat, and what equipment and weapons the policemen have, and if they are assisted by the navy, and so forth. Confirm immediately receipt of this letter.<sup>336</sup>

-Avi-Amos [Ben-Gurion]

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<sup>334</sup> The Hebrew word "Hasbarah," which literally means 'explanation,' in Zionist terminology refers to persuasion through advocacy.

<sup>335</sup> At about the same time, the Haganah was establishing radio communications to Zionist offices in Europe. Ben-Gurion feared that renewing Haganah propaganda broadcasts in Palestine could threaten the security of his new network. c.f. Adam and Rivlin, *Keshet amits: Me-'alilot sherut ha-keshet shel ha-"Haganah"*.

<sup>336</sup> Ben-Gurion Archives. "Avi-Amos [Ben-Gurion] to Sneh" 01.10.1945. Correspondence file October 1945 306/183944. My warm thanks to Richard Steinitz for his assistance in translation.

Ben-Gurion thus ordered a secret war<sup>337</sup> on British immigration restrictions, although most of the tactics never materialized, with the aim of destroying the White Paper policy, but not necessarily the Mandate itself. To Ben-Gurion and many of his colleagues, that policy amounted to a war against the Jewish people. In taking these actions, Ben-Gurion outmanoeuvred himself in the short term, Irgun and Lehi saw his overtures as an opportunity to turn their struggle into a popular revolt to destroy British rule in Palestine. The Jewish Agency Executive, however, was divided on the question of force as well as policy. In order to keep this move secret, Ben-Gurion gave his orders to the Haganah behind the backs of the Executive. Without consultation, this decision was taken by the ‘triumvirate’ of Ben-Gurion, Shertok and Sneh.<sup>338</sup>

*Tnu'at HaMeri Ha'Ivri*, or the Jewish (lit. Hebrew) Resistance Movement (JRM), authorized by Ben-Gurion, was a formal agreement between the Haganah, Irgun and Lehi to coordinate operations. In Charters' words, it was a loose “marriage of convenience.”<sup>339</sup> The JRM was headed by a three man high command that had to approve Irgun or Lehi operations before they could be conducted. Irgun and Lehi received legitimacy through the JRM, while the Haganah sought to exert authority over its new partners and show its strength to Britain. This authority, however, was limited; the two groups were free to acquire arms and funds on their own so long as their operations did not endanger Haganah. Planning and coordination for the JRM was done by the “X Committee” which consisted of two Haganah representatives; Moshe Sneh and Palmach commander, Yisrael Galili; Menachem Begin from the Irgun; and Natan Friedman-Yellin from Lehi, aided by

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<sup>337</sup> “War is merely the continuation of a policy by other means.” certainly applies here. Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.

<sup>338</sup> Heller, *The Birth of Israel*, 114-15.

<sup>339</sup> Charters., *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47*, 53.

an operations headquarters which included Sadeh, Eitan Livni, and Yaacov Eliav.<sup>340</sup>

Despite the fact that the JRM was a coordinating body, Begin insisted in *The Revolt*, that “as far as Irgun was concerned, the “Resistance Movement” and the “Haganah” were synonymous...”<sup>341</sup> Irgun’s stubbornness on this point added to British confusion about what the JRM actually was. While joint operations were limited, the movement represented the united opposition of the Yishuv to British policy, and a consensus that military action alone could reverse it. By ordering this secret war on Britain, Ben-Gurion bet that a change of immigration policy could be achieved.

The possibility of a Jewish revolt after the war, or of armed immigration, had been long examined by British intelligence. Yet the formation of the JRM and the ensuing eight months of chaos surprised both British intelligence and decision makers, for three reasons. First, Yishuv intelligence misled its British counterpart on this issue; an act of deception by means of omission. Second, any observer would have been confused by the mixed messages emanating from the Yishuv. The Jewish Agency, and the wider Zionist movement, remained divided on the issue of force. Only observers who appreciated Ben-Gurion’s authority could have concluded that the Jewish Agency was involved in armed outrages. Finally, hard proof alone could demonstrate that Haganah had reached a secret agreement with the terrorists. British intelligence lacked such evidence, at least at the start.

On 2 October, a day after Ben-Gurion sent his orders to Sneh, Kellar suggested the re-imposition of the Home Office Warrant on Jewish Agency letters and traffic, which had been deferred when he first applied in April. Premature news reports

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<sup>340</sup> Livni, *I.Z.L. - Operations and Underground*, 139.

<sup>341</sup> Begin, *The Revolt*, 185.

describing Britain's policy on Palestine had caused "very unfavourable reactions amongst the Jews," and disturbances might occur before an official declaration was made.

It may be taken for granted that no drastic action will be taken by the Agency in Jerusalem without reference to the Zionist leaders who are at present in London. It is therefore important that we should endeavour to discover what instructions are passed out to Jerusalem for future action by the Agency Executive in Jerusalem, and its underground army, the Hagana.<sup>342</sup>

Kellar was absolutely right, but the HOW was taken out one day too late, although when the letter was sent, Ben-Gurion was in Paris – a choice probably made from caution.<sup>343</sup> In the summer of 1946, Ben-Gurion was spared from charges of implication in terrorism.

The British government prepared a White Paper justifying its closure of the Jewish Agency, based in large part on SIGINT, which included incriminating evidence such as Sneh's proposal to stage a "grave incident," but not Ben-Gurion's orders. MI5 lacked key evidence because Ben-Gurion was security-conscious.<sup>344</sup> Kellar's instinct was correct, but without hard evidence, intelligence could only guess what was happening.

## Two Replacements Enter Palestine

General Sir Alan Cunningham, the last High Commissioner of the Palestine Mandate, arrived in Palestine in the second half of November, with experience in unconventional warfare and the use of intelligence. In 1940–41 he controlled a campaign in Ethiopia which featured signals intelligence, deception, subversion and guerrilla warfare. He was among the first British commanders to use ULTRA, during the

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<sup>342</sup> TNA, *Minute no.100*. 2.10.45. KV 2/1435.

<sup>343</sup> Ben-Gurion Archive. *Complete Diaries* (56). 29.9.45.

<sup>344</sup> TNA, *First Draft amdt to Lord Chancellor's rewrite of 19/7*, n.d. CO 537/1715. 48.

preparations for and the early stages of the Crusader campaign in November 1941.<sup>345</sup>

Though primarily a soldier and increasingly enraged at the Jewish Agency's seditious and subversive stance, he had a tolerably sophisticated grasp of politics in the Yishuv.

Cunningham received massive amounts of information from various sources. As with his predecessors, his security conferences included the DSO, CID, military and other typical sources.

Cunningham had two main tasks: to control and defeat terrorism, and to make the Yishuv accept British policy, which would not, however, be formed until after the AACE's report was received. In effect, this prevented Cunningham from playing politics with the Jewish Agency. Nevertheless, he and most decision makers believed they could and would achieve these aims, and understood that in order to do so, they must overcome great Jewish resistance. Some intelligence personnel, such as an MI9 officer sent to establish an escape organization in Palestine in late 1945 and early 1946, thought that British policy would cause 'war' with much of the Yishuv.<sup>346</sup> From the start, Cunningham himself appreciated that, in the end, partition might be unavoidable. In February 1946, he concluded "There are increasing signs that the Jewish leaders would accept partition as a solution though any other solution would probably not result in an easement of the tension for it is the extremist tail that wags the dog."<sup>347</sup> He thought partition a viable solution to the Palestine problem, and the Agency reasonable enough to speak on those terms, but that such negotiations could not happen until the extremists were eliminated.

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<sup>345</sup> John Ferris, "The 'Usual Source': Signals Intelligence and Planning for the Eighth Army 'Crusader' offensive, 1941", *Intelligence and National Security [Great Britain]*, 14(1) (1999): 84-118.

<sup>346</sup> TNA, "re: escape organization Palestine" in *Palestine Escape Organization*, 14.11.45. WO 208/3398.

<sup>347</sup> MECA. *Cunningham to CO*, 19.2.46. GB165-0072. 1/1.

He was charged with imposing British policy on the Yishuv, and refused to negotiate under threat. Elimination of terrorism was high on his immediate priorities, because peace would restore conditions for negotiations with the Yishuv, though to what end would be determined only after the AACE produced its findings.

When Cunningham began his tenure as High Commissioner for Palestine, the hot-button issues were illegal immigration and the 1939 White Paper. On 10 November the Colonial Office reminded him of ways to stop illegal immigration, especially prevention at the points of embarkation. The message was clear: stop this flow now. Three days later, Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin issued the government's policy on immigration and the AACE.<sup>348</sup> It was up to the security services to prevent illegal immigration and other subversive activity from further eroding British authority while the AACE was conducting its investigations. A month before Cunningham, the new DSO, Sir Gyles Isham, arrived in Jerusalem. Curiously, the two had some shared history, when Cunningham commanded the Eighth Army, and Isham served in its intelligence staff. If further explored, this connection might reveal key points about both personalities.

Born in 1903, Isham came from an aristocratic background. He was educated at Oxford where he rose to the status of a "star" as a Shakespearean actor. After a successful career at Stratford and London, he moved to Hollywood, where he appeared in a number of films, including the spy thrillers *I Married a Spy* and *Under Secret Orders* (both 1937). At the outbreak of the Second World War, Isham returned home and, quickly commissioned, served in Eighth Army Headquarters in Cairo. In 1943-44 he was

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<sup>348</sup> MECA, *Cunningham to CO*. 1.12.45 GB165-0072. 1/1.

reposted to intelligence at HQ 9<sup>th</sup> Army, and later at the War Office.<sup>349</sup> Presumably there, he was scouted as a Middle East expert by MI5 as a suitable replacement for Hunloke.

Isham spent September 1945 preparing for his departure. Among the reading material given to him were two documents, one describing the role of a security adviser and the other on Palestine itself, including a detailed overview of politics and British policy. The document emphasized that the Jewish Agency was “worried at the activities of the terrorists and wishes to stop them. Unlikely to use Haganah against the terrorists as we should then find out too much about it. Agency anxious to get the goodwill of London as it has been felt that rather pro-Arab reports were being sent by the Government to London.”<sup>350</sup> Isham arrived in Palestine 1 October 1945, and served as DSO until November the next year.<sup>351</sup> Before his departure to Palestine, a contact serving in British Troops North Levant wrote to Isham, “I understand you are taking on Henry Hunloke’s old job. This surprises me, for I imagined you would be declaiming Shakespeare to this world just as soon as you could get out of the army. I much admire you at taking on this job. It will, of course, enable you to look at Levant Lunacy from a new angle.”<sup>352</sup>

Isham’s arrival in Palestine coincided with important structural changes within British intelligence. Rymer-Jones and Petrie had been corresponding on these matters, as both were concerned about the relationship between the DSO and the CID. The police feared that the problems experienced under Hunloke would return with Isham’s arrival. Petrie eased Rymer-Jones fears; SIME, to whom the DSO reported, soon would be

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<sup>349</sup> Hawkes, "Twenty-three Skidoo: Bringing Home the Bard," 66. for Isham’s filmography see "Gyles Isham", in *Internet Movie Database* <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0410861/>> [accessed 21 June 2010]

<sup>350</sup> NRO. *Palestine*. n.d. Gyles Isham papers. I 176/2.

<sup>351</sup> NRO. *Isham to H. While*. 25 October 1974. Gyles Isham Papers I/184.

<sup>352</sup> NRO. *Schooling to Isham*. 3.9.45. Gyles Isham papers. I /215.



absorbed by MI5, and thus come under Petrie's responsibility. Rymer-Jones and MI5 had a good relationship thus far, and Petrie hoped that trust would smooth matters over. Even if these structural changes did not come through, Petrie told Rymer-Jones,

Isham should enjoy your and my own full confidence. As the responsible link between Palestine and London on certain matters of high importance, of which you are aware, and which are principally dealt with in London by my department, it is obviously necessary that, at any rate on questions relating to this aspect of his work, we should deal direct with him. While we are not the custodians of this Top Secret source, Isham's status in its handling has been agreed here on a high level. Any suggestion, therefore, that he should be short-circuited is most unlikely to commend itself to the responsible authorities in London. On other matters, too, I feel there is everything to be said for keeping Isham in the picture. He was attached to my office before he left for Palestine, as any future DSO going to that country will be, and was thereby able to acquire not only knowledge of the problems with which we have to deal, but also to gain the added advantage of coming personally to know those officers in my Department...<sup>353</sup>

Petrie assured Rymer-Jones that top-secret intelligence, referring to ISPAL, would be safe in Isham's hands, who would be an able interpreter and liaison of that information. As the DSO held MI5 ciphers, Isham would be the only channel for urgent and secure messages between Palestine and MI5. Petrie promised Rymer-Jones that the misunderstandings of the past would not continue under Isham.

### **The Jewish Resistance Movement**

On 15 September the acting DSO reported on a conversation with Kollek about terrorism. Kollek noted upcoming meetings between Haganah and Lehi, and that Haganah had asked both terrorist groups to abstain from activity during the conference in London on the Palestine issue. Kollek warned that Lehi and Irgun were working together. They might rob banks because they were broke, or attack the Latrun prison camp, because police raids had left them shorthanded. Kollek also stated that the Haganah might

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<sup>353</sup> TNA, *Petrie to Rymer-Jones*, 10.11.45. CO 733/457/5. 94.

seize territory by force if the White Paper policy continued, and probably could not much longer restrain Irgun and Lehi, to whom some of its members would defect. Kollek also mentioned attempts by the Haganah to absorb Irgun and Lehi.

When Haganah asked Irgun and Lehi how they would react if British policy was adverse to Zionism, Kollek said they did not respond. On this point, the DSO made a significant comment:

This question struck me as particularly interesting as it seemed rather strange that Hagana should want to know what the terrorists would do in the event of an adverse decision by HMG if, as it generally thought, they themselves would take some kind of action in the event of such a decision. It would hardly seem from this that there is any question of an (sic) pre-arranged plan of concerted action by all illegal military organisations of the Yishuv against the Administration.<sup>354</sup>

This was precisely the conclusion which the Haganah would have wanted British security to form, considering that, in anticipation of a change in policy, Haganah was in negotiations with Irgun and Lehi. Kollek gave the DSO some good information, some misleading material, and some silence on key issues. The DSO was right to be suspicious of Kollek's report, and to assume that the Haganah also would act if Britain announced an unfavourable policy.

This pattern continued when an 'Agency official', told the DSO that Haganah's policy was to use arms only to protect immigration. This assessment appeared true, especially given two incidents within a month of the report. On 6 October, illegal immigrants crossed from Lebanon into the border settlement of Kfar Giladi. Haganah members prevented the Transjordanian Frontier Force (TJFF) from stopping the operation. When it cordoned the settlement, Jews from a neighbouring Kibbutz, armed

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<sup>354</sup> TNA, *Extract from report on interview with Kollek no. 4. 15.9.45. KV 5/29. 54B.*

with sticks, attacked the TJFF; the latter opened fire, wounding six or seven Jews.<sup>355</sup>

Moshe Sneh, having received his orders from Ben-Gurion only days earlier, used the incident to remind the Jewish Agency of the importance of the Haganah in protecting illegal immigration.<sup>356</sup> On 8 October, Kollek visited the DSO to discuss the incident, among others. They discussed who did what or was right and wrong, but Kollek revealed an important sliver of information. The DSO reported,

...he did give me one opening by saying that he felt that the Jews in Kfar Giladi Colony had acted with the utmost restraint in not using the arms which they had in their hands to fire on the TJFF when they saw their own brethren being set upon outside the perimeter. I said... that I had always understood that Jewish arms were purely for Colony defence.<sup>357</sup>

Kollek warned that if troops' were to shoot on slight provocation, the government could only expect more trouble.

The next incident was carefully planned by the Haganah, which sought to avoid a confrontation with British forces, but used arms when necessary. At 0100 on 10 October, a Palmach unit broke into the Atlit detention camp for illegal immigrants and staged an escape without firing a shot - a secondary unit filed-down the firing pins of all rifles in the camp armoury, so that when the guards discovered the operation, they were powerless to stop it.<sup>358</sup> 208 Jews escaped through the forest on Mt. Carmel. Police detachments tried to close down the vast Carmel range; one was ambushed by the Haganah, killing a British constable. 50 illegals were intercepted on their way north-east, nine of whom were arrested. During their interrogation, however, a group of Jews armed with pick helves,

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<sup>355</sup> TNA, *Situation in Palestine: CIGS Summary No. 1*. 8.10.45. WO 106/3107.

<sup>356</sup> Heller, *The Birth of Israel*, 115.

<sup>357</sup> TNA, *Extract from letter DSO to SIME*, 10.10.45. KV 2/2261. 21A.

<sup>358</sup> Dekel, *Shai: The Exploits of Hagana Intelligence*, 93.

freed them and forced the police, who were under orders not to fire, to withdraw.<sup>359</sup>

These two operations helped to crystallize the notion amongst British intelligence officers that the Haganah was not preparing a rebellion, but using arms only to defend illegal immigration – a logical move that was in-step with the policy of the Jewish Agency.

The DSO, moreover, reported that the Jewish Agency was concerned about the negative consequences of terrorism on British policy. The Agency and Haganah were unlikely to “ever openly take the offensive against the government.” If anything, the Haganah might fracture in the event of a disagreeable British policy.<sup>360</sup> This view was consistent with the assessments prepared for Isham before his departure. Like MI5, the DSO thought the danger lay in unauthorized actions by elements of Haganah, rather than its official policy. The next day, Kollek informed the DSO, “with great glee,” that two or three boats of illegal immigrants had recently reached the shores of Palestine. These were only trial runs meant to test British patrols.<sup>361</sup> In an extraordinary gesture, Kollek offered his counterpart the chance to witness an illegal landing by sea. The DSO concluded, “his invitation needless to say was not in any endeavour to help us to put an end to illegal immigration, but rather more to show us how efficient their organisation was.”<sup>362</sup> On 12 October, Kollek said that the Haganah had “almost decided to blow up the railways and the launches used against illegal immigration whether the Jewish Agency agreed or not” and that “some sop had to be given to those who called for action by the Agency.”<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> TNA, *CIGS Summary No. 3.12.10.45*. WO 106/3107.

<sup>360</sup> TNA, *Extract from DSO summary 47*. 30.9.45. KV 5/34. 67B.

<sup>361</sup> TNA, *Extract from letter DSO to SIME*, 10.10.45. KV 2/2261. 21A.

<sup>362</sup> TNA, *Extract from letter DSO to SIME*, 10.10.45. KV 2/2261. 21A.

<sup>363</sup> TNA, *Top Secret Memo*, n.d. attached to CO 537/1715. not numbered. between 50 and 51.

On 20 October, Kollek led the DSO to believe that Haganah could not control or work with the terrorist organizations, despite its efforts to break them up and negotiate their absorption. Both parties refused to lose their identities or independence. Kollek claimed, however, that the Haganah had asked them to wait for a declaration of policy by the government before taking action.<sup>364</sup> This testimony contradicted accurate intelligence from a SIGINT source called *Peke*, based on journalistic contacts in Tel Aviv with Haganah. Peke reported that the Irgun, with certain reservations, was willing to accept Haganah orders, if the Yishuv would resort to armed resistance.<sup>365</sup> British intelligence, however, was inclined to be cautious with intercepts from sources of unproven reliability, and to trust Kollek's statements, while the Haganah's actions supported the view that it still had a policy of restraint.

Indeed, the Haganah had offered Menachem Begin an agreement to absorb the Irgun as a part of a united effort against Britain.<sup>366</sup> Rather than pursuing terrorists, it was trying to ally with them. An agreement on these lines was concluded by the end of October. While Kollek did not hold a senior position in either the Agency or the Haganah, he was well-connected and given his role in intelligence, would have been among the first to know of the policy pursued by Ben-Gurion and Sneh. It is hard to believe Kollek was ignorant of the situation, hence, by giving much useful intelligence while withholding key facts, Kollek misled the DSO in an improvised but intentional manner about the Haganah's actions. This judgement, however, rests on a balance of probabilities. Even more, the record contains other cases where deception (conducted

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<sup>364</sup> TNA, *DSO Extract from report on interview no. 8 with Kollek*. 20.10.45. KV 5/34. 67ab.

<sup>365</sup> TNA, *SIME Extract*, 15.10.45. KV 5/34. 68a.

<sup>366</sup> Yehuda Lapidot, "The United Resistance", in *Irgun Website* <<http://www.etzel.org.il/english/ac08.htm>> [accessed 15 June 2010]

through elementary means of disinformation) may have been attempted or executed, though at present they cannot be proven, instead of being normal cases of failures of intelligence.

The DSO was not the only authority to misread the situation. On 30 October, the C-in-C Middle East concluded that the Jewish Agency policy was to check extremism, so not to prejudice the upcoming announcement by Bevin.<sup>367</sup> On the next night, however, the JRM executed its first joint operation. Operation “Party,” known since as “The Night of the Trains,” saw the complete disruption of Palestine’s rail lines. Attacks occurred at 242 sites in the country’s rail network, damaging 14 locomotives and paralyzing the system for two days.<sup>368</sup> Two police launches in Haifa were damaged by explosion, and a third sunk in Jaffa.<sup>369</sup> Casualties were small, but the impact huge. The Haganah, leading the JRM, intended to signal its power to Britain. The message was received; British intelligence believed the Palmach was involved because of the widespread nature and good organisation of the attacks, and its care for casualties. Even the English *Palestine Post* claimed that the Jews as a whole were on the offensive; the attacks could not be attributed to the terrorists alone.<sup>370</sup> Despite this knowledge, British intelligence still failed to understand that there was an agreement between the three underground groups, for the same three reasons as before: lack of hard evidence, deception and a confusing political situation.

When asked to assess Agency’s intentions, including widespread military use of the Haganah, the C-in-C Middle East replied that the attack probably was meant to

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<sup>367</sup> TNA, *C-in-C ME to WO*, 30.10.45. WO 106/3107.

<sup>368</sup> TNA, *CIGS summary no. 14*. 7.11.45. WO 106/3107.

<sup>369</sup> TNA, *CIGS Summary no. 9*. 2.11.45. WO 106/3107 and Heller, *The Birth of Israel*, 116.

<sup>370</sup> TNA, *CIGS Summary no. 13*. 4.11.45. WO 106/3107

coincide with an announcement in Parliament, which the Agency wrongly had assumed would be on 1 November. The Agency, however, had no role in the JRM, which was authorized secretly by Ben-Gurion, who still was overseas. The C-in-C further stated that a split had occurred in the Agency ranks, with the moderates opposed to active resistance, while some, if not all, Executive members might resign. "This indicates that the Agency is losing control over the Hagana and that the moderates may have to resign unless they are willing to co-operate with the extremists. The Agency may therefore follow an increasingly extremist policy." Intelligence believed Haganah possibly had formed an agreement with the terrorists, which, if true, still needed the approval of the Jewish Agency, upon Ben-Gurion's return to Palestine. Therefore, military intelligence recommended against widespread searches or actions, because it would be 'unwise' to force the issue and cement the rifts within the Agency.<sup>371</sup> Thus, even the War Office was misled by its misunderstanding of Yishuv politics.

Catling concluded that the "night of the trains" had come as a complete surprise to the Yishuv, who had believed that calm would persist until Bevin's policy announcement was made.

The magnitude of the attacks is reported to have astonished the majority of Jews and to have left them mystified as to the motive and perpetrators, but not, as was the case when terrorists acts were committed by the Irgun and stern Group in the past, hostile. Having digested the news, the Jewish public is alleged to have reached the conclusion that the attacks were carried out by a combination of Hagana, Irgun and stern Group.<sup>372</sup>

A source close to the Jewish Agency reported that this action was supposed to be a demonstration of the Yishuv's displeasure to British policy, which they had expected to

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<sup>371</sup> TNA, *Situation in Palestine – note by MI3*. 6.11.45. WO 106/3107.

<sup>372</sup> HA, *CID Intelligence Summary No. 23/45*. 12.11.45. 14/198. (microfilm roll 13 slides 420-3).

be announced on 1 November, while the sinking of the police launches simply was another blow in the fight against immigration restrictions. The CID reported that the Haganah had persuaded Irgun and Lehi to postpone and coordinate their attacks, believing they would have greater effect if done on 1 November. The source reported, and Catling agreed, that no firm agreement existed between these parties, despite Haganah's efforts. Curiously, Catling also cited a Haganah illegal broadcast, *Kol Israel*, which stated, "The Jewish Resistance Movement will not have patrol boats guarding the coast and forbidding Jewish refugees from coming home..." This is the first reference to the JRM in British intelligence records, but Catling seemingly did not believe it to be anything other than, perhaps, an extremist faction of the Haganah. He concluded the Jewish Agency was divided on the question of violence. He detailed the three schools of thought on the matter, and named the Executive members in each group. His assessment, while generally accurate, had some mistakes, such as the inclusion of Shertok among those opposed to violence. This mistake perhaps contributed to Cunningham's frustration with Shertok in February, when the opposite was found to be true. Catling concluded:

It is apparent that future policy has been discussed by the Agency on the assumption that HMG's statement will prove unacceptable when announced, but most observers agree that beyond a determination to promote immigration and settlement by every means, legal or illegal, no hard and fast programme has been evolved. In the opinion of the majority of observers, anything of this nature cannot materialise without a plenary meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive.<sup>373</sup>

The Agency, Catling reported, was trending towards extremism, partly due to attacks on Jews in Egypt and Libya, where hundreds were killed. There was also evidence that Agency control over the Haganah had come into question, but Catling offered no conclusion on that point.

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<sup>373</sup> HA, *CID Intelligence Summary No. 23/45*. 12.11.45. 14/198. (microfilm roll 13 slides 420-3).



The conclusions of the C-in-C and Catling demonstrate how easily Jewish politics could confuse British assessments. Few outsiders could have appreciated the political culture of the Jewish Agency, or its attitudes toward Ben-Gurion's new policy. One DSO report of December recognized the power concentrated in Ben-Gurion, "whose decisions are not now open to question by the Elected Assembly, or Jewish bodies located outside Palestine."<sup>374</sup> However, the report failed to appreciate that Ben-Gurion had already made up his mind on issues said to be awaiting discussion, such as the Haganah's action against the White Paper. Executive members, such as Eliezer Kaplan, were angry that the Executive had not been consulted about the JRM in advance. Rabbi Fishman's return to the executive indicated a trend towards extremism. In fact, a serious split was averted only by Bevin's declaration itself, which all factions opposed.<sup>375</sup> All organs of British intelligence in Palestine had a poor grasp on the impact of politics on the security situation. The evidence against the Jewish Agency, compiled in the summer of 1946, however incomplete, painted a different than that which British authorities understood as events were unfolding. British SIGINT had intercepted a cable from an unspecified individual in Jerusalem to another in London on 1 November, reporting on the 'Night of the Trains.' It stated clearly the terms of agreement for the JRM, and described in detail the Jewish Agency's involvement including the political disagreements over the campaign.<sup>376</sup> However, British intelligence failed to interpret this data correctly, because it misunderstood the civil-military relationship within the Yishuv, and the power held by Ben-Gurion, Shertok and Sneh.

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<sup>374</sup> MECA, *Isham (DSO) to CID and CIO,RAF*. 18.12.1945. Cunningham papers GB165-0072. 5/4/19.

<sup>375</sup> Heller, *The Birth of Israel*, 116-17.

<sup>376</sup> TNA, *MIS copy, 19/7*. CO 537/1715. item 47. no. 5.

Kollek met the DSO after these events, arriving in an apparently bad temper. He said that he had submitted his resignation to the Jewish Agency. It had been accepted but he had been asked to stay until 1 December. An intercept from 15 October confirmed this claim; Shertok asked Kollek, by cable, to wait until Ben-Gurion's return before his resignation was decided.<sup>377</sup> Kollek rambled to the DSO about 'fifteen years of failure' by the Agency, and how the "worse (sic) thing the Jewish Agency ever did was to impose 'restraint' on its forces during the last disturbances." The DSO concluded, "[Kollek] seemed to feel that if an all-out aggressive policy had been adopted, the Jews would have achieved their end long ago."<sup>378</sup> It is unclear what provoked his attempt to resign, but Kollek's correspondence consistently shows his frustration with the inconsistency between the words and deeds of the Jewish Agency, and the restrictions imposed upon his work.

By stressing frustration with the Jewish Agency and about Haganah's restraint, Kollek left the impression that neither body had any connection to the JRM. He led British intelligence away from the reality that the Haganah was working to bolster the Yishuv's position by the use of force. British intelligence had some evidence about the convergence of Haganah, Irgun and Lehi, but nothing concrete. Furthermore, it had been monitoring this possibility for two years without result. Thus, MI5 still doubted that the Agency and Haganah would openly attack the Palestine government. Further misleading evidence reinforced this view. On 21 November, the DSO reported that Lehi had broken away from Haganah and Irgun, and would attempt to assassinate 6th Airborne

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<sup>377</sup> TNA, *Note*, n.d. no signature. KV 2/2261. 23a.

<sup>378</sup> TNA, *Extract from report on interview 9 with Kollek*. 10.11.45. KV 2/2261. 22G.

commanders, and the GOC. These threats were taken seriously in intelligence circles.<sup>379</sup> 147

Meanwhile, Kollek's role did change. He saw the DSO with less regularity, and MI5 stepped-up its efforts to determine his actions, with plenty of errors on the way.

In late December, the DSO reported on a meeting between Begin and the Palmach in Tel Aviv, and that the Haganah subsequently had asked Lehi to inform it of future operations, so it could prepare for British reactions.<sup>380</sup> At the same time, SIS reported that

An important decision concerning co-operation is expected to be taken in the next few days as a result of a meeting between Hagana and the deputy leaders of the IZL. The leader, Menahim (sic) Begin, continues to conceal his whereabouts even from his closest associates. Earlier this year a tendency towards unity became apparent and negotiations between the two groups were opened. When agreement was almost reached, however, the IZL refused to hand over its armouries to the Hagana on the ground that, if at any time the agreement broke down, it would be left unarmed and would not be able to operate on its own. The only terms agreed upon, therefore, were that the IZL should accept Hagana military discipline in any act connected with immigration matters and also in demonstrative attacks against the White Paper designed to rouse world opinion. The Stern Group kept aloof from these negotiations preferring independence of action.<sup>381</sup>

SIS seems to have believed this inaccurate information, which was characteristic of the sort of material which Kollek had given the DSO. The picture was distorted by errors in key details: the nature of the agreement for cooperation, its terms, purpose, organization, and above all else, timing. In fact, the three underground groups already were cooperating generally, and the Haganah was able to vet IZL and Lehi operations outside of immigration matters. While it is unclear how SIS came to this conclusion, one may assume that it derived from the DSO's conversations with Kollek, because SIS typically received those reports.

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<sup>379</sup> TNA, *from DSO*. 21.11.45. KV 5/29. 58A.

<sup>380</sup> TNA, *DSO extract*. 27.12.45. KV 5/29. 70AA.

<sup>381</sup> TNA, *SIS extract*, 27.12.45. KV 5/34. 70B.

By 1 December, however, Cunningham thought that the Jewish extremists expected Ben-Gurion to pursue an aggressive policy against the British, and concluded that Haganah might work with the Irgun and Lehi.<sup>382</sup> Thus, Cunningham understood Jewish politics better than his intelligence officials, who had been less clear on this point. All failed to see, however, that these steps already had happened. Cunningham's correspondence also indicates that the military reactions to the JRM's sabotage on 31 October/1 November were conducted without much intelligence. The police conducted 123 searches. At one settlement to which their tracking dogs led them, they encountered resistance and fought a gun battle in which six Jews were killed. The police lacked the intelligence needed to predict attacks, or to apprehend attackers.

Cunningham, like his intelligence advisers, fell victim to the confusing politics of the Yishuv. He had received report after report suggesting that Haganah would use arms only to protect immigration. The CID and DSO shared this view, which was confirmed with attacks on police stations at Givat Olga and Sidna Ali in response to the detention of the Aliyah Bet ship, the *Berl Katznelson*, and passive resistance to the cordons at nearby settlements.<sup>383</sup> To any outside observer, the Haganah's actions would appear consistent with the DSO's reports. Indeed, a 'linked struggle' between armed action and illegal immigration was a Haganah policy, but so were arrangements with Irgun and Lehi.

Through December, Cunningham told Whitehall that up to half of the Yishuv supported armed opposition to Britain, and that he wished actively to disarm the population. By January 1946, he concluded that the Jewish Agency indirectly condoned terrorism, and for the first time, expressed the desire to occupy its building. He believed

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<sup>382</sup> MECA, *Cunningham to S of S*, 1.12.45. GB165-0072. 1/1.

<sup>383</sup> Heller, *The Birth of Israel*, 118.

that the Jewish Agency had some control over the Haganah, none over Irgun and Lehi, yet that its funds supported terrorist groups.<sup>384</sup> Cunningham did not know precisely what was happening behind closed doors at the Jewish Agency, yet he had a good sense of Jewish sentiment there and in the Yishuv as a whole. He was right to be suspicious.

Cunningham based his assessment on terrorist incidents such as the attacks which destroyed the Palestine CID headquarters in Jerusalem and damaged that in Jaffa, and on public statements by members of the Jewish Agency. When Ben-Gurion warned Cunningham he could not control the Yishuv's reaction to British policy, the High Commissioner wished to respond by closing the political side of the Jewish Agency; he could not 'ignore [its] defiant attitude'.<sup>385</sup> He abandoned the idea, however, because he realized that such an action would look bad politically and cause 'widespread disorder', especially since British and international media already thought the immigration policy was oppressive. Bevin's diplomacy depended on the support of American public opinion, and the AACE. Meanwhile, to Cunningham's surprise, Shertok and Ben-Gurion denied any connection to the attack on the CID, and refused to cooperate as they had done before. Ben-Gurion appeared to be losing control of the situation.<sup>386</sup> Aware that he lacked the intelligence to defeat terrorism, Cunningham still thought that the Jewish Agency generally opposed terrorism, though some of its elements aided it.

British intelligence and Cunningham also were confused by indications of disagreement within the JRM, including some from their best source. Sometimes intercepts presented important information which any outsider would find difficult to

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<sup>384</sup> MECA, *Cunningham to S of S*, 1.12.45. GB165-0072. 1/1.

<sup>385</sup> MECA, *Cunningham to S of S*, 30.12.45. GB165-0072. 1/1.

<sup>386</sup> Heller, *The Birth of Israel*, 122.

interpret. After the New Year, MI5 collected as much intelligence as possible on the CID bombings. Circus intercepts gave valuable information on this matter, which often was accurate but required a suspicious and knowledgeable interpretation. For example, Circus reported a rumour that when Sneh learned of the impending attack on the CID, he tried to phone Ben-Gurion and Bernard Joseph to halt the operation, but was too late. This probably was not true, but yet it still raised suspicions about those three leaders. The final point of the telegram derived from Circus is most revealing.

The Irgun is believed to have sent an ultimatum to the Jewish Agency and Hagana [sic] command demanding that the next operation should be a joint undertaking, as was the attack on the railway on 31<sup>st</sup> October. The Irgun threatens to increase its sabotage activity unless the Hagana co-operate.<sup>387</sup>

This shows that the DSO had good evidence about the Haganah's 31 October offensive and the nature of the JRM, which indicated that the alliance was weak – not a strong partnership, but rather a quarrelsome relationship centring on single operations. The next 'Circus' report noted that the Haganah command had decided on closer collaboration with the Irgun: 460 Palmach men would transfer to the Irgun in January, while during the next two months the Haganah would pay the Irgun £300,000.<sup>388</sup> These assessments ought not to have been believed, and more scrutiny of Circus intercepts might have helped the DSO to filter nonsense from the good sense. The mixed messages, all of which were misleading, and in the same direction, indicate that British intercepts may have been picking up disinformation deliberately set-out by Yishuv intelligence, though this is difficult to prove. In any case, confusion over decision making in the Yishuv crippled

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<sup>387</sup> TNA, *DSO to CO*, 10.1.46. KV 5/34. 70d.

<sup>388</sup> TNA, *DSO extract*, 25.1.46. KV 5/34. 72ab.

Britain's ability to use the best source under its direct control, communications intelligence.

Other Circus information received during January point was equally misleading. For instance, MI5 gave the Colonial Office Circus reports that Haganah would use arms only to support illegal immigration, that representatives of Haganah and Palmach would visit Europe to spread propaganda, that these bodies were pressuring the Agency for an aggressive policy while feareding defections to terrorist organizations. Kollek also warned Isham that he was concerned about splits in the Agency policy.<sup>389</sup> Since the JRM began, Kollek fed a consistent line to the British, that Haganah would use arms only to support illegal immigration. A sliver of dishonesty in otherwise accurate reports threw the DSO off of the Haganah's scent.

Cunningham, still concerned about the attacks on the CID HQ, received a warning from MI5 that future potential targets included administrative and military headquarters and Government House. The King David Hotel was deemed to require "special precautions."<sup>390</sup> The DSO replied that the steps already taken on that matter "should be adequate," while he and the GOC implicitly recommended a forceful suppression of Jewish insurgents, along the lines of the Arab Revolt in 1936.

We are trying, in between outrages, to carry on a normal administration under 'peace' conditions. The conditions are however nearer those of war than of peace. Most of the Jewish population is against the Government in sentiment, while the terrorists and the unlawful organizations, heavily armed, equipped, well-trained and holding the initiative as is necessarily the case, periodically exploit the situation by force of arms . . . So long as these conditions persist it is inevitable that risks have to be taken which might be susceptible of elimination if the Government could come out into the open and face the situation by giving up all pretence of normal administration (as was indeed done to some extent in the Arab

<sup>389</sup> TNA, *DSO to CO*, 10.1.46. KV 5/33. 87Z.

<sup>390</sup> MECA. *Kellar to Isham*, 17.1.46 and *Isham to Kellar*, 26.1.46. GB165-0072. 1/1.

rebellion of 1938/39), concentrating essential activities . . . and directing all its resources and energies to the forcible suppression of the armed opposition to the Government.<sup>391</sup>

The subsequent attack on the King David Hotel provides some justification both for MI5's analysis and the GOC's preference for the use of force, though proving that security was less good than Isham believed. The fact that the CID had taken extra precautions its offices were first attacked in March 1944, but still suffered a serious blow in December 1945, should have offered a clear lesson for security. Nevertheless, Isham's report to Kellar fit into MI5's frustration with the root cause of Palestine's security issues: a lack of policy. Bevin's diplomacy, which deferred decisions to the AACE and prevented stern action while it reported, effectively continued the stalemate of policy during wartime, and crippled British security.

In February 1946, however, the situation appeared to be calming. The British promised to bump the immigration quota from 500 to 1500, though Cunningham considered the outraged Jewish reaction to this offer 'ungracious'. Also, he recognized public support for a 'maximalist programme' within the Yishuv, and increasingly thought the Agency complicit in terrorism. Cunningham believed that "Kol Israel" had confirmed Haganah's responsibility for the 21 January attacks on the Coast Guard, and an abortive raid on an RAF radar station. This situation, incidentally, shows that for over 10 days neither he nor his subordinates knew who was responsible for those attacks, clearly indicating the limits to their information. It also marks the point where Cunningham began to doubt Haganah's alleged policy of restricting the use of force to the support of immigration. Cunningham noted a speech by Shertok, a known dove, which seemed to confirm the guilt of the Jewish Agency.

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<sup>391</sup> MECA. *Isham to Kellar*, 26.1.46. GB165-0072. 1/1.



The continued existence of the White Paper . . . causes people to despair of peaceful ways and abolishes the public basis for a stand against terrorism. Unable to subdue those who fight against it, Government retaliates by murderous and atrocious laws, which threaten the public as a whole. Elementary ideas of law and justice are trodden down. In a regime of suppressing the freedom of the individual and outlawing human life, peaceful Jewish citizens are being shamelessly murdered by military forces. Official communiqués hush up the bloody facts in distorted descriptions. Jews who have been abducted from their homeland by force and sent to detention abroad, are being abandoned there to acts of murder by human beasts who have been put in charge of them.<sup>392</sup>

Cunningham asked his legal advisors whether the speech was seditious enough to justify arrest or detention. He did not pursue the matter, but the Jewish Agency and Shertok were in Cunningham's sights. He believed that Ben-Gurion and Shertok had led the Agency to pursue anti-British agitation, which motivated much of the Yishuv to support terrorist organizations, and could not "draw back without losing their authority over the Jewish Community."<sup>393</sup> This assessment, made personally by Cunningham, rather than his intelligence officers, was correct. Ben-Gurion, Shertok and Sneh were actively and secretly supporting anti-British terrorism. Despite these suspicions, Cunningham clearly was unaware of the Agency's role in the JRM, informing Whitehall that "the extent to which they cooperate with terrorist organizations is in some doubt."<sup>394</sup>

On the night of 25 February 1946, the Irgun and Lehi attacked RAF bases at Kfar Syrkin and Lydda,<sup>395</sup> destroying five aircraft and damaging 17.<sup>396</sup> Four days earlier, the Palmach attacked a PMF camp, losing four insurgents.<sup>397</sup> Cunningham observed that the attendance of Jewish Agency leaders at the Palmach fighters' funerals, where they were

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<sup>392</sup> MECA. *Cunningham to CO*, 19.2.46. GB165-0072. 1/1.

<sup>393</sup> MECA. *Cunningham to CO*, 19.2.46. GB165-0072. 1/1.

<sup>394</sup> MECA. *Cunningham to CO*, 19.2.46. GB165-0072. 1/1.

<sup>395</sup> Yehuda Lapidot, "The United Resistance", in *Irgun Website*

<<http://www.etzel.org.il/english/ac08.htm>> [accessed 15 June 2010]

<sup>396</sup> Charters., *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47*, 189.

<sup>397</sup> Charters., *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47*, 189.

eulogized as “martyrs of the Jewish Resistance Movement,” indicated their support for terrorism. This was the first time that Cunningham recorded the term ‘JRM’, but whether he realized what it meant is uncertain. The Jewish Agency publically was using seditious language and showing moral support for dead Palmach fighters. Cunningham believed that, sooner or later, those supporting terrorism must be arrested and terrorist organizations destroyed.

In February, Zeev Sherf took Kollek’s place as liaison with British intelligence. In his first meeting with the DSO, he estimated that Lehi had 300 militants and 200 youth members. Soon, Sherf said that he believed Lehi would not attack the Anglo-American Commission.<sup>398</sup> J.C. Robertson at MI5 took this report seriously. This intelligence on Lehi’s restraint was accurate, though the accuracy of the membership estimate is hard to gauge. Despite the changing political situation, British intelligence still trusted its liaison with the Jewish Agency to a degree, though it was in no position to verify much of what they said.

Furthermore, Peke reported that Irgun was aiming to win the support of the Yishuv and to use violence to force political concessions from Britain. “In the event of an adverse Government policy, the IZL leaders are confident that the Hagana would join forces with the IZL and the Stern Group in joint action under a single command.”<sup>399</sup> The accurate report referred to unity between the three underground organizations, but only after British policy on Palestine was determined. In reality, the underground already was subject to loose coordination by the JRM, but unity was limited, although its prospects may well have seemed good to the Irgun. Nobody could have predicted that increased

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<sup>398</sup> TNA, *DSO to Kellar*. 11.2.46. KV 5/29. 72b.

<sup>399</sup> TNA, *Liddell to Vivian (MI6)*, 21.2.46” KV 5/34. 77A.

terrorism would destroy the Haganah's will to participate in the JRM. Nevertheless, throughout March, British intelligence still lacked hard proof about the JRM, which was the most important piece of information they could have had at that stage, especially if they wanted to delegitimize the Agency before the AACE.

Captured documents revealed a Lehi-Irgun agreement on the nature of their war with the Mandate, assassinations abroad, the military character of attacks and a rotational political council with a permanent military staff.<sup>400</sup> This description fit the way the JRM worked, but excluded mention of the Haganah. It is difficult to tell whether the document was a plant, part of a general deception of British intelligence, or a separate agreement between Irgun and Lehi. In any, case it confused assessments.

In April 1946, MI5 began to assess political happenings in the Yishuv more accurately. It followed the World Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency elections and assessed the implications on the ground. It was surprised by an increase in support for revisionists, which it also expected to see reflected within the Yishuv, meaning increased support for the Irgun. MI5 also followed the actions each group and their fundraising efforts, revealing that Mizrahi had dedicated 75% of its funds to Irgun.<sup>401</sup> Buttercup accurately revealed that Lehi was responsible for the 25 April attack on a car park of the British 6th airborne, where seven soldiers were killed, and indicated that the Haganah was considering strong action to stop these attacks.<sup>402</sup> Cunningham, however, infuriated by the incident, his frustration growing, still wanted to hold the Haganah and Jewish Agency responsible. They had prevented terrorism in the past, and now were guilty of

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<sup>400</sup> TNA, *Robertson to Jones*, 28.3.46. KV 5/29. 82a.

<sup>401</sup> TNA, *DSO Extract from report on Jewish affairs*. 18.4.46. KV 5/34. 84b.

<sup>402</sup> TNA, *DSO[Isham] to B3A [Roberts and Kellar]* 29.4.46. KV 5/29. 88a.

complicity in it. MI5 knew that attack was not a Haganah operation. but it exaggerated Haganah's willingness to act against Irgun. The 'hunting season' was long over, though a political divide within the Yishuv remained. The Haganah newsletter, 'Eshnav', denounced the Irgun for blackmailing Jews.<sup>403</sup> Haganah increasingly was irritated at Irgun's violence against Jews, and Lehi's attack on the car park. These political complexities reinforced the confusion over the relationship between Haganah, Irgun and Lehi.

On 8 May 1946 the DSO made his first reference to the JRM, an inaccurate one, describing it as an alliance between Irgun, Lehi, and a separate, extreme element of the Haganah.

The announcement by the Jewish Resistance Movement, IZL and Stern regarding their pledge not to disturb the peace of the country did not have the official blessing of the Hagana as the JRM constituted only a small section of the organization. This, however, must not be interpreted that the groups have decided to abandon terrorism and it is the universal conviction that the surrender of arms to the government would be madness. The IZL and Stern would certainly not obey and would probably be supported in this by the JRM, as the latter represents the more extreme elements of Hagana.<sup>404</sup>

This error derived from the DSO's long belief, initiated by conversations with Kollek, that Haganah would not use arms except to support illegal immigration. Further reinforcing this view, Robertson learned of a meeting from early May where Haganah, Irgun and Lehi agreed to take no offensive action until the 100,000 immigrants recommended by the Anglo-American Commission reached Palestine, but to resume terrorism if the British government pursued its demand for disarmament.<sup>405</sup> This was

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<sup>403</sup> TNA, *DSO to Kellar*, 30.4.46. KV 5/34. between 85A and 86A [item not numbered].

<sup>404</sup> TNA, *DSO extract*, 8.5.46. KV 5/34. 89b.

<sup>405</sup> TNA, *Robertson to Trafford Smith*, 14.5.46. KV 5/34. 87C.

false information which damaged British security; in May the JRM began to plan for its June operations.

Despite such confusion, DSO intelligence on terrorism began to improve. He reported on plans to attack the petrol dumps and military installations at Ramat David aerodrome, which specifically indicated participation by Haganah and Palmach. One report mentioned that when Ben-Gurion gave the orders, the Irgun and Lehi would attack British military installations in the same area.<sup>406</sup> There is no indication that Cunningham received this information, as he never referred to it, but threats taken seriously were passed to him. The DSO reported on a briefing by Moshe Baron, a senior officer of SHAY, to leading members of Irgun intelligence at a Haifa café on the organization of British intelligence in Palestine. The source must have been a surveillant, since the report detailed the discussion but gave no analysis, no background on the subjects, nor on the Hebrew terms used. For example, the following intelligence was surely confusing to non-natives: “Baron then claimed that he had been appointed by the High Command of the United Irgun to work on Behalf of ‘RAN’ ...” The United *Irgun*, in this context, simply refers to the “united organization” of the JRM. *RAN* is a Hebrew acronym for *Rigul Negedi*, or ‘counter-intelligence.’ Baron’s briefing even named X2, saying that “All information emanating from any of the above offices<sup>407</sup> is delivered to X2. The HQ of the office was in Egypt, serving as the centre for the Near East, but from 15.6.46. it will be in Jerusalem.” Baron noted that a list of names of 26 young men and women suspected of

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<sup>406</sup> TNA, *DSO extract Jewish Affairs*, 18.5.46. KV 5/35. 91Y.

<sup>407</sup> “Special Service Offices of the RAF, Secret Intelligence Branch, Security and Defence Offices, Field Security, Naval Intelligence Offices, Foreign Intelligence Offices, a special office named ‘X2’, and ‘a special branch of Scotland Yard which controls only the activities of British subjects living in Palestine.’”

working for British intelligence had been handed to the Haganah command.<sup>408</sup> This report, amongst the best evidence the DSO had produced on the collaboration between Irgun and Haganah, also highlighted the weakness of British security. However, no further reference to Baron or this meeting appears in the documentation. Perhaps British intelligence did not understand that it had uncovered a gold mine.

From the beginning of 1946, Cunningham was determined to strike the Jewish Agency and was just waiting for a suitable opportunity. He saw the Jewish Agency as being in a position to lead the Yishuv away from terrorism, and that by striking them, he could stop the terrorists. Despite improving intelligence, British security still did not know exactly what the JRM was, although they knew of some form of collaboration between Irgun, Haganah and Lehi.

The plans detected by the DSO never materialized, but other unexpected attacks involving the Haganah and Palmach, Irgun and Lehi, did. Most likely, the JRM scrapped these plans once they were captured, and turned to other ones. On 16 June 1946, the Haganah and Palmach destroyed all bridges connecting Palestine to neighbouring countries. On the next day, the Lehi seriously damaged rail workshops in Haifa. Finally, in the most outrageous of attacks, on 18 June Irgun kidnapped six British army officers, one of whom escaped; two were released after four days and the remainder after 12 days, when the death sentence of captured Irgun fighters was commuted.<sup>409</sup> The timing of the attacks clearly was coordinated by the JRM. They provoked Alan Cunningham to outrage.

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<sup>408</sup> TNA, *DSO to SIME, Kellar*. 3.6.1946. KV 5/35. 94a.

<sup>409</sup> Charters., *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47*, 185.

On 19 June at 02:00, an hour suggesting that Cunningham was in ‘crisis-mode,’ he reported these events to the Secretary of State. Cunningham placed most importance on recovering the kidnapped soldiers, but doubted his ability to do so. He asked Whitehall to cease discussions on the issue of 100,000 immigrants and requested permission to ‘put into effect a full plan against Jewish illegal organizations and [the] Jewish Agency’,<sup>410</sup> where he believed that Sneh and the extremists had won the debate on terrorism. Later that morning, Chaim Weizmann, anticipating a harsh response from the British, met Cunningham. Weizmann expressed his disgust at the publication of a British military plan to close the Jewish Agency and to arrest its leaders. The fact that even the most moderate of Jewish leaders opposed British policy probably reaffirmed Cunningham’s notions about the Agency. On 15 June, a team of SHAY agents, helped by a British officer with Zionist motivations, had stolen the plans, which were made public. Efraim Dekel, the chief of the operation, described the British reaction as follows:

The British CID were beside themselves with rage . . . They blamed the army for the leakage, while the army vented their rage on the police . . . The most careful and painstaking work of dozens of years – the collection of thousands of names and addresses, the compilation of information, reports, and maps referring to arms caches and training fields, the offices and headquarters of the Hagana – all suddenly were worthless. Years of work by the British police and CID in Palestine had collapsed like a house of cards.<sup>411</sup>

This publication embarrassed Cunningham, and damaged his hopes. The Secretary of State denied Cunningham permission to close the Jewish Agency building, and authorized arrests only of those individuals ‘against whom there is clear evidence’ of responsibility for terrorism. Bevin’s diplomacy still sought to bring the Jewish Agency to negotiate over the future of Palestine, which would be impossible after such an assault.

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<sup>410</sup> MECA, *Cunningham to S of S*, 19.6.46. GB165-0072. 1/1.

<sup>411</sup> Dekel, *Shai: The Exploits of Hagana Intelligence*, 138.

This decision, however, put British security in Palestine at great risk as the situation spun out of control.

This exchange reveals key points about the intelligence available to Cunningham. He had a blacklist of Agency members whom he wanted to arrest, probably based more on public information than secret intelligence. Second, military security was poor enough to allow a theft of military plans two weeks before D-day. Third, despite the existence of an MI9 escape organization,<sup>412</sup> British authorities had no success in recovering the kidnapped officers. MI5 hoped for an anonymous tip on the kidnappers which led nowhere.<sup>413</sup> Fourth, there was little discussion of how to pursue the terrorists, and a focus on the Jewish Agency, demonstrating that Cunningham and the GOC had no idea who to arrest or how to destroy Irgun and Lehi. Had they known more about the JRM, they would have understood that the Agency could provide few answers on how to destroy Irgun or Lehi, whose security had improved since the *saison*, and that the point was not to gather information on terrorists, but political: how to deal with the united opposition of the Yishuv to British policy. Cunningham and his staff acted more on suspicion and anger rather than intelligence.

### Operation Agatha

In the early hours of Saturday 29 June 1946, the British Army in Palestine began Operation Agatha, which aimed to end armed resistance to British rule by seizing Jewish Agency, Haganah and Palmach members and their arms. “Black Sabbath,” as it was known to the Yishuv, was perceived as a disaster for the Jewish Agency. However, it also

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<sup>412</sup> It is described in good detail in TNA, *Palestine: Escape Organisation*. WO 208/3398.

<sup>413</sup> TNA, *MI5 to SIME and DSO*, 22.6.46. KV 5/34. 98a.



had an effect which Ben-Gurion long had sought: to demonstrate the Yishuv's power to resist Britain. An hour before troops entered Tel Aviv, a woman phoned British Military HQ, inquiring when the curfew would begin. This was the first sign that Jewish intelligence had breached British security and knew of the operation. In the weeks before the raid, special reconnaissance was taken to locate specific targets, like the Haganah General Headquarters and its chief, Moshe Sneh. The office was raided by the army and many individuals were arrested, but Sneh slipped out of the country.

Elsewhere, an intelligence typo sent elements of the 6th Airborne Division, one of Britain's best combat units, on a wild goose chase searching for the head of the Jewish Agency Executive, David Ben-Gurion. 107 Keren Kayemet Avenue, Tel Aviv, did not exist. Ben-Gurion's house was at house number 17 (today, 'Ben-Gurion avenue'), but more importantly, intelligence failed to inform the army that Ben-Gurion was in Europe. When the army found David HaCohen, he used the opportunity to impress his British captors of the strength of Yishuv intelligence, and told his captors that he was glad not to be disappointed, as he had been expecting this raid for two days. This arrest illustrates a security breach of a different kind. Later in life, HaCohen recounted in an interview that he was at his Tel Aviv apartment, away from his family when their house was searched. After the army left his home, his family called him at the Tel Aviv apartment at 6am warning him of the searches.<sup>414</sup> Such a phone call represents yet another security problem – the lines were supposed to have been shut down for the operation. HaCohen, as with many of his colleagues in the leadership of the Yishuv, had assisted British intelligence for a decade in its fight against Arab rebels, Vichy France, Nazis and communists. Now

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<sup>414</sup> MECA, *Interview with David HaCohen*, in Thames TV GB165-0282. Box 2 File 7.

he was to sit in an internment camp with about 2700 other Yishuv politicians and employees. Meanwhile, the main military and political leaders remained free to fight Britain, as did most of the terrorists.

The 6th Airborne Division took the lead in Operation Agatha, which began at 04:15 on 29 June 1946. The original plan, Operation Broadside, was scrapped after it was made public by the Haganah. Planning for Agatha began on 23 June. It was a broader assault on the Yishuv, whereas Broadside was limited to the Haganah Command Headquarters. The operational objectives of Agatha were to occupy the Jewish Agency building and capture documents there, detain politicians suspected of complicity in terrorism, occupy suspected headquarters of illegal armed organizations and to arrest their members. The seizure of arms, while not officially an objective, in effect became a major part of the operation. Agatha was covered by improved security precautions. The 'Bigot' security system was used for electronic and paper communications, meetings were held secretly and in disguise, and normal life in the Yishuv was maintained as best as possible. Planning was, however, difficult because there were no accurate or modern town maps or plans. A Jewish guide map from 1942 was the main source of addresses and whereabouts of officials. The locations of Haganah GHQ and other targets were discreetly reconnoitred before the operation. During the operation, reconnaissance aircraft provided air cover against any movement of Jewish columns.<sup>415</sup> Despite all this effort, a tip-off at the last-minute from a pro-Zionist British police officer allowed the

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<sup>415</sup> TNA, *Operation AGATHA*. 1.7.46. WO 275/30.

Haganah to keep its most senior commanders from arrest and to save most its arms from confiscation.<sup>416</sup>

This operation began with little intelligence on the Jewish Agency and virtually none on the illegal armed organizations. It ended with three 3-ton truckloads of documents on the Agency, which did illustrate unknown and important elements of its policy; 2700 individuals under arrest; and virtually no information on illegal armed organizations. Those men responsible for the kidnappings which started Agatha were still at large. The entire Agency was in detention except Sneh, its most guilty member, and David Ben-Gurion, a close second. Cunningham requested that Ben-Gurion, who was in Paris, be apprehended, but this was not done. All the armed organizations continued to function, and the Yishuv declared a general strike in protest. The only leadership of the Yishuv which could bring the JRM to an end, by cutting off support for terrorist groups, was locked up in detention camps. The terrorists, still at large, had provoked the overreaction they sought, enabling them to defeat both the British and Ben-Gurion.

Outrage among the opposition in Parliament prompted the Secretary of State to have Cunningham forward all evidence against the Jewish Agency.<sup>417</sup> After reviewing the evidence against the Jewish Agency, most of it was deemed unusable, as the Palestine government feared entering a propaganda battle with Zionism:

...it is not entirely out of the question that disclosure of papers found [on?] the Agency's premises might even give rise to bitter controversies of the type that rect[?] France during the Dreyfus case. The Jewish question now is, indeed, immeasurably more weighty in international affairs than was either the Home Rule issue in the eighties or the Dreyfus case. The world is also more explosive to-day than it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the issues correspondingly graver.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Dekel, *Shai: The Exploits of Hagana Intelligence*, 144-46.

<sup>417</sup> MECA, *S of S to Cunningham*, 2.7.46. GB165-0072, 1/1.

<sup>418</sup> TNA, *Shaw to CO*, 12.7.46. CO 537/1715. 53.

Shaw called for handling the case against the Jewish Agency with care, and unwittingly gave an argument for the Zionist position that Herzl would have admired!

British intelligence was wrong about important things. By 18 June, MI5 believed a CID assessment that Irgun, Lehi and Haganah soon would work together, based on circumstantial evidence such as reactions to Bevin's speeches, not hard intelligence. British intelligence had no clue about the real relationship between these organizations, that they had supported each other's attacks over the previous two days, and eight months. Their assessment was further confused by 12 June report from Circus, which emphasized "the concern of the Jewish Agency at recent events" and suggested that at meeting on 10 June, the Irgun had threatened to abandon their agreement, intensify its fight, and declare a Jewish state.<sup>419</sup> MI5 intercepted mail from a Lehi member in Palestine to a friend in London which mentioned how the Yishuv was united against Britain.<sup>420</sup> In general, MI5 was getting mixed reports, some indicating a split between Irgun and Haganah, others suggesting that a non-cooperation campaign would commence at the end of June and Haganah would support the Irgun in the Kibbutzim.<sup>421</sup> MI5 did know, however, that Irgun and Lehi were united.

This contradictory and confusing (and possibly deceptive) intelligence made an accurate analysis of the JRM impossible even through its final days. On 29 June, the Irgun attacked the Haganah in the media, perpetuating the myth that the organizations could not work together. Even after documents captured in Agatha revealed that the

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<sup>419</sup> TNA, *Robertson to Trafford-Smith*, 18.6.46. KV 5/33. 124a.

<sup>420</sup> TNA, *int. letter to Smertenko, American League for Free Palestine, NYC*. 18.6.46. KV 5/30. 98z.

<sup>421</sup> TNA, *DSO extract Jewish Affairs*. 15.6.46. KV 5/35. 96b.

SHAY (mentioned by name) had penetrated the Government, and that the Agency was deeply involved in espionage and subversion, British intelligence was not clear on the nature of the JRM. Concluding that it was possibly another name for the Haganah, a summary of evidence stated:

...after the formation of the Jewish Resistance Movement on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1945, the tendency has been for the three Jewish armed forces to come together and collaborate in schemes of violence. This trend is the natural result of the removal of restrictions which the more right-minded of the community imposed upon itself during the war and of the disillusionment which the community felt when the Labour Government failed to give it what it hoped for.<sup>422</sup>

Even with all this evidence at hand, British intelligence in Palestine still had key matters wrong – and not just trivia such as dates. Intelligence lacked hard evidence; even after it examined the documents confiscated in Agatha, only hearsay and circumstantial evidence implicated Ben-Gurion and Shertok in complicity with terrorism.<sup>423</sup> Deception played a part as well. Kollek gave the DSO an insider's appreciation of what was going on. From the beginning of October, when Ben-Gurion gave Sneh his orders for the JRM, Kollek began to intensify the quality and quantity of information which he gave the DSO, while still withholding key details which he surely knew. Deception was a matter of turning off the tap – the British were reliant on Kollek's guidance. Without it, they failed to appreciate key issues and events in Yishuv politics, such as the level of initiative and power possessed by Ben-Gurion, Shertok and Sneh.

### **The King David Hotel Bombing**

Through July, neither MI5 nor the DSO had good information on any illegal armed organizations. Lehi initially was believed to be responsible for the King David

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<sup>422</sup> TNA, *Top Secret Memo*, n.d. CO 537/1715. not numbered. between 50 and 51.

<sup>423</sup> TNA, *Top Secret Memo*, n.d. CO 537/1715. not numbered. between 50 and 51.

Hotel bombing on 22 July 1946, when the attacker actually was Irgun.<sup>424</sup> MI5 continued to believe that the Agency and Irgun were negotiating an agreement, when in fact Irgun, Lehi and Haganah were discussing how to respond to Operation Agatha, which they considered an act of war. Three days before the King David Hotel bombings ‘a most secret source’, which usually meant a form of signals intelligence, indicated that Irgun was believed to be planning an attack against the British officials in Beirut.<sup>425</sup> This threat was taken seriously and all relevant authorities were warned. Both Isham and Giles travelled to Beirut to consult, leaving Jerusalem without its two leading security intelligence officers. Later in life, Isham thought this was a deliberate move by the Irgun.

Neither the government nor the Army had any sort of warning... on the Saturday two army trucks were stolen, and this was usually the prelude to some form of terrorist activity. Accordingly, I warned General Barker, yourself [John Shaw], and London. Of course we had no idea what was going to be attacked. On the Sunday Morning the High Commissioner was informed by the Colonial Office that it was possible there would be an attack made on [Terrance] Shone, at that time Minister to the Levant States. As a result Giles and myself were asked to go to Beirut to warn Mr. Shone and to see what we could do with the Lebanese police. We did know that a number of the members of the Irgun were in Beirut. I could not help feeling that the Foreign Office report was somehow inspired by Begin...<sup>426</sup>

It is impossible to say for certain whether or not the threat was real. Since Moyne’s assassination, terrorism abroad was considered a real threat, and was common.

If British intelligence was deceived, then Cunningham and his administration were incompetent. Poor security at the King David Hotel was a condition for the bombing. The threat had been evident for years. Even on 29 June, MI5 received

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<sup>424</sup> TNA, *DSO extract Jewish Affairs*. 24.7.46. KV 5/30.101B.

<sup>425</sup> TNA, *FO to Beirut*, 19.7.46. KV 5/36. 107?. *Isham to Kellar and Oldfield*. 19.7.46. KV 5/36. 107z. *Philby to FO*. [1]9.7.46. KV 5/36. 108b.

<sup>426</sup> NRO, *Isham to Shaw*, 15.1.72. Isham Papers I 184.

indications that Irgun would attack the military and government offices.<sup>427</sup> Sherf warned the DSO point-blank that the Irgun “would not wait” to act on its plans.<sup>428</sup> The destruction of government headquarters is inexplicable. With one warning after the next, how could it have happened? How many warnings are needed to put extra guards at the entrances? Perhaps it was due to the fact that Giles and Isham were not present to interpret those warnings.

### **The Development of British Policy and Counterterrorism**

British intelligence in Palestine, during the period of the Jewish Resistance Movement in 1945-46, lacked two crucial things. First and foremost was security, and second was good intelligence on terrorist organizations. Not until August 1946 did military intelligence discover that its telephone conversations routinely were being tapped.

On 8 Aug direct evidence showed that a very important pair of telephone wires between NORTH PALESTINE and the SOUTH had in actual fact been tapped. The degree of technical knowledge necessary for the Jews to be able to single out this particular line, shows that the amount of information available to them must be considerable and that their intelligence organization is very active and of a high order.<sup>429</sup>

This was only the start of British realization of the success of Jewish intelligence. Again, during this period, British intelligence and policy-making clearly suffered from confusion multiplied by deception. The involvement of the Haganah at all, or as an institution, constantly was left out of any description of the JRM. Because British intelligence had learned little about Haganah since the disbandment of the Palmach, and its subsequent

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<sup>427</sup> TNA, *SIME (Sales) to MI5 (Kellar)*, 29.6.46. KV 5/35. 103a.

<sup>428</sup> TNA, *Extract from conversations with Sherf 11 and 12 July*. 13.7.46. KV 5/30. 100ab.

<sup>429</sup> TNA, *6AB Intelligence Summary No 6*. 23.8.46. WO 275/58. pp 5 of report, pp 169 in file.

retreat underground in 1942, it could believe that the JRM involved merely a faction of that body, which rejected the policy of restraint in settlement defence. Such confusion left Britain ignorant of key political developments in 1945 and unprepared for major JRM operations in the summer of 1946.

These operations caused frustration and political missteps for Cunningham and General Barker, the GOC. Their policy was problematic – was the aim of Operation Agatha to stop terrorist operations, or to force the Jewish Agency into negotiations? JRM operations, designed to defeat Bevin over the issue of immigration, backfired on both the Jewish Agency and the British. The Agency was shut down temporarily, and the Irgun doubled in strength. Neither effect was positive for the Agency or Britain. Ultimately, Cunningham achieved one of his aims, by forcing the Agency back to negotiations. However, he failed in the greater aims, by strengthening the organization most responsible for terrorism, and by producing political consequences of a counterproductive order. After the bombing of the King David Hotel, he concluded that “immediate partition is the only solution which gives a chance of stability.”<sup>430</sup> The Yishuv had forced the hand of British policy. Meanwhile, Bevin’s insistence that the Yishuv participate in negotiations helped to ensure their failure; nothing, especially not this mixed display of Britain’s military might, had changed the Agency’s demand to lift restrictions on immigration.

In these events, British intelligence was mediocre in quality, though its failures probably did not matter much to the policy Cunningham pursued. He had a decent sense of general matters; MI5 did not catch up to hidden developments until June. On the basis

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<sup>430</sup> MECA, *Cunningham to Secretary of State*. 24.7.46. Cunningham papers GB165-0072. 1/1. 41.



of his own reading of events, without much consultation with intelligence, and ignoring the warnings of the Colonial Office, Cunningham pursued the disruption of the Jewish Agency. MI5, among the best security services in the world, consistently mis-assessed important issues, with the DSO depending on assessments provided by liaison with an organization he did not realize was secretly hostile. Better intelligence could not have improved a policy which, in essence, did not exist, because of paralysis at the top. On the other hand, it might have informed decision makers of the real cost of trying to regain a control in Palestine which, Britain was unaware, had long been lost. Above all, it could have improved British counterinsurgency, allowing more time for Bevin to pursue his policy of delay. Cunningham, the police and the army needed operational and political intelligence on terrorist groups, to prevent attacks, capture wanted men and destroy their organizations. Such evidence did not exist. Vulnerability to terrorism made it hard for Cunningham to play calm and rational politics.

Cunningham and his military staff planned another operation, called 'Shark,' which began on 29 July 1946 and lasted for several days. It sought to disrupt and destroy the Irgun and Lehi, by uprooting them in Tel Aviv. The city, divided into several cordons, was methodically searched as every individual went through a screening process administered by the CID. This operation captured massive arms caches, including one in the basement of the Great Synagogue of Tel Aviv. Security precautions before the operation were improved, including a ban on the use of telephones, while aerial photographs were used as well as Tel Aviv city maps. The operation was considered successful and the Lehi was believed to be mostly rounded up.<sup>431</sup> This view was wrong.

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<sup>431</sup> TNA, *Operation SHARK*. WO 275/33a.

Save for future Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Ysernitsky (Shamir), whose disguise was spoiled when a CID inspector noticed a kink in his right eyebrow,<sup>432</sup> few important persons were actually arrested. Irgun and Lehi continued to function. Britain could not break their security or escape its own dilemma.

Cunningham's policy had successes, but they were overshadowed by the failures. It was a double-edged sword: Cunningham got the Agency to drop terrorism, but failed to crack the terrorists – indeed he strengthened them. Cunningham hoped in vain that moderates like Weizmann, and parties like the German *Aliyah Hadasha* might be bolstered in popularity over Ben-Gurion and “the extremists,” although he acknowledged that they could not lead the Yishuv until “militant Zionism” had been “eradicated.”<sup>433</sup> His desperate faith in *Aliyah Hadasha* was natural, and exhibits a key issue in British-Yishuv relations. For Britons, it was easier to identify with the German immigrants of *Aliyah Hadasha*, who did not integrate as well into Yishuv society as eastern Europeans.<sup>434</sup> They were continental, tended to be middle class, distrusted the political powerhouse of the labour movement, and in British eyes, were more “western” than the Russians or Polish. British officials found it culturally easier to deal with them than the mainstream Yishuv leadership, which also helps to explain the success of Teddy Kollek. None the less, these hopes were vain. After the bombing of the King David Hotel, Cunningham could appreciate Ben-Gurion's influence, but he still failed to grasp that little could be done to strip the Jewish Agency chairman of his status, or that neither diplomacy nor the military could “eradicate” militant Zionism.

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<sup>432</sup> TNA, *From the Press Section* 2.8.46. KV 5/30. 103b.

<sup>433</sup> MECA, *Cunningham to S of S*, 18.8.46. GB165-0072. 1/2.

<sup>434</sup> N.B. Yoav Gelber, "The Historical Role of the Central European Immigration to Israel", *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 38 (1993): 323-9.

By August 1946, British actions bore some fruit. The Jewish Agency had suffered a tactical setback. It dropped terrorism as a policy because that no longer paid, and took up negotiations, however limited, with the British government. The King David Hotel incident hurt the Agency's negotiating power with the British and Americans. It wanted to cut its losses, have its employees at work, and stop the plan to transfer illegal immigrants to Cyprus. The Agency debated limited participation in the London Conference of September 1946, but decisions were frustrated by typical divisions. The Agency had lost power to the Irgun while the Yishuv was increasingly unwilling to follow Britain's lead at the London Conference, which was Bevin's last chance for a diplomatic solution. Progress in Palestine, however slight, was stymied by the AACE's call to allow 100,000 immigrants into Palestine. Bevin amalgamated the AACE's recommendations with the "provincial autonomy plan," offering less than full sovereignty to the Jewish province. He hoped that Operation Agatha might have forced the Yishuv into compliance with such a compromise, but the opposite happened. Truman did not support Bevin's plan. The Zionists agreed only to 'unofficial' participation at the conference of September 1946, which was meant to strike a deal between Britain, the Yishuv and the Arabs. When the conference reconvened in January 1947, the Zionist movement supported partition, with Truman's support. With no place left to turn, Bevin deferred the Palestine question to the United Nations, which formed the "Special Committee on Palestine" (UNSCOP) to research the problem covered by the AACE the previous year.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Cesarani, *Major Farran's Hat*, 19-21, 113.

Ceserani characterizes these developments, as a case of policy undercutting the military effort. This view is true, but this problem was not new. Since 1944, British authorities never produced any policy which could have guided British security in Palestine. All that happened in 1946 was open proof that British policy and power were uncoordinated. During and after the war, the use of force always was deferred for fear of prematurely provoking a rebellion. Ceserani emphasizes that even if the entire garrison in Palestine was used to fight the underground, it was outnumbered: 25,000 British combat troops faced at least 45,000 Haganah forces.<sup>436</sup> The army understood something of this problem, though it also overestimated its own power. As the C-in-C Middle East reported to the Chiefs of Staff after meeting Cunningham in December 1945:

Although we consider that sooner or later it will be necessary to disarm the Arab and Jew population in Palestine the degree of success attained would be problematical. At worst prolonged search might produce meagre results. At best search might produce substantial results at the cost of armed conflict. Plan likely to achieve greatest success is to combine search for arms with seizure of leaders of Hagana and Palmach. In any case it is considered that seizure of leaders in order to break up the illegal organisation is of primary importance and seizure of arms is secondary to this.<sup>437</sup>

For fear of provoking an armed conflict, and already uncomfortable with existing emergency regulations, Cunningham initially was wary of implementing martial law. He recommended doing so only in the event of a general uprising, or a concerted campaign to disarm both Jews and Arabs.<sup>438</sup> Only a few weeks after the December 1945 bombing of the CID, Cunningham was glad to introduce stricter regulations.<sup>439</sup> Meanwhile, Bevin asked Cunningham to try to negotiate the surrender of the Yishuv's arms through the

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<sup>436</sup> Ceserani, *Major Farran's Hat*, 21-22.

<sup>437</sup> MECA, *GHQ Middle East to Cabinet Offices*, 14.11.45. Cunningham papers GB165-0072. 5/4/9.

<sup>438</sup> MECA, *Cunningham to C.S.* 29.11.45. Cunningham papers GB165-0072. 5/4/18.

<sup>439</sup> Ceserani, *Major Farran's Hat*, 36.

AACE.<sup>440</sup> His naiveté forced a delay in counterinsurgency, and weakened Britain's authority to determine policy.

By 30 April 1946, the C-in-C Middle East reported that the illegal organizations will not be persuaded to disarm or dissolve voluntarily... [The] best chance of breaking up illegal organisation is to deceive and harry leaders starting at the top and to institute punitive measures. Such action, provided there are no restrictions, together with possible revulsion of feeling more moderate Jews who wish for peaceful life might cause all except extremists hard-core to lay down arms in course of time. But it will need severe measures and there is likely to be considerable bloodshed. It will probably take at least one year to achieve.<sup>441</sup>

This view was overoptimistic. Even Barker knew that it was not in Britain's advantage either to try to dissolve the Haganah or confiscate its arms. Rather, he sought to hold the Jewish Agency responsible for these events.<sup>442</sup> After Operation Agatha, the evidence implicating the Agency leadership in subversion still failed to prove their connection to terrorism; only the most intimate intelligence on the Yishuv could have accomplished this end. As a consequence of these failures in intelligence and policy, the subject of negotiations turned away from terrorism and focused on the Jewish Agency's 'conditions' for participating in Bevin's negotiations, especially its demand for the release of its members who were arrested in June. The only remaining leverage possessed by the Agency was its cooperation with Bevin's negotiations, which the Foreign Secretary insisted was necessary to reach a solution. In doing so, he gave the Agency political ammunition which it desperately needed and sabotaged his own plans for diplomacy.

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<sup>440</sup> MECA, *Minute in secretariat file by A.C.* 10.12.45. Cunningham papers GB165-0072. 5/4/13

<sup>441</sup> TNA, *CinC Middle East to CIGS.* 30.04.1946. CAB 121/644. 732.

<sup>442</sup> MECA, *Military Action to be Taken to Enforce Law and Order in Palestine.* E. Barker. 22.6.46. Cunningham papers GB165-0072. 5/4/54

Agatha had another effect on British policy. The new Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), Bernard Montgomery, used that operation to demonstrate that tough measures and political resolve, and those matters alone, could enforce law and order in Palestine. He did not like Cunningham, whom he felt was indecisive and handing authority to the Jews. Cunningham could not shake the reputation he earned during 1941, when similar characteristics cost him command of the Eighth army. Nevertheless, in Palestine the contrary was true: Whitehall consistently limited Cunningham's ability to act, making it impossible for him to succeed against terrorism without extreme measures. Montgomery and Barker thought that Agatha would reclaim authority in Palestine. They quickly were disillusioned, especially by the King David Hotel operation. Whitehall's moderate line after the bombing, designed to salvage sympathy in the Yishuv, achieved none of its aims. The Yishuv remained alienated from Britain. Montgomery failed to appreciate the balancing act imposed upon Cunningham by civil and military interests, and so picked a fight with the High Commissioner and the cabinet. He wanted to unleash the army on the Yishuv; given the growing terrorist scare in the UK, Whitehall revisited the issue.<sup>443</sup>

The authority of the High Commissioner over military affairs remained poorly defined until Cunningham and Montgomery debated counterinsurgency strategy in 1946. As High Commissioner, Cunningham had to coordinate military and civil functions of the government. A general himself, however, his authority over the GOC Palestine was unclear and challenged by the CIGS. Montgomery told the Cabinet that its policy of appeasement had failed. The Police was 50% below its full strength. The High

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<sup>443</sup> Cesarani, *Major Farran's Hat*, 40-44.

Commissioner must use “all the forces at his disposal to maintain strict law and order in Palestine.”<sup>444</sup> He gave examples where British authority had been lost: death sentences for terrorists had been dropped, and an officer was fired after shooting a Jewish civilian. Montgomery’s message was implicit, but clear. British policy in Palestine had failed because of weak leadership. Only extra-democratic measures and an abandonment of appeasement could reclaim law and order. He wanted to seize the initiative, which he believed had been lost since August. Cunningham rejected Montgomery’s claims. He argued that Agatha had aimed only at the Jewish Agency and had torn it from the terrorists. He “emphatically” denied the “outrageous” suggestion that he had prevented the army from acting on usable intelligence. He and the GOC agreed that current regulations were sufficient, and maintained that since the change in Haganah policy, terrorism was a police matter. Army action would not end terrorism. “It is my immediate policy, therefore, to encourage to the greatest possible extent the growing tendency amongst the Jews to deal with the matter themselves, and to see whether police methods cannot be improved.”<sup>445</sup>

Cunningham seems to have hoped to encourage another *saison*, while bolstering the police. The best way to deal with terrorists was “to kill them,” but Cunningham feared that to do so through the army would further alienate the population. The squabbling between Cunningham, Barker and Montgomery distracted attention from a more serious issue. Their common assumption was that Britain could regain its authority, either through cooperation with or coercion of the Yishuv. Neither assumption was correct. The police had failed to suppress terrorism or to win the public’s heart. In

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<sup>444</sup> TNA, *Extract from COS (46) 169*. 20.11.46. CAB 21/1686.

<sup>445</sup> TNA, *Cunningham to CO*. 23.11.46. CAB 21/1686. 5.

December 1946, Montgomery visited Palestine, and coordinated a policy which gave unprecedented power to the Police and Army. Their relationship became so close that the police opened undercover units led by ex-commandos with a free hand against terrorists – hit teams. The process of militarizing the police caused real policemen to resent commanders imported from the army, while the actions of a paramilitary force with few restrictions on its power further damaged law and order. Both deferral to the UN and a heavy-handed counterterrorism marked the start of the spiral towards the end of the Mandate.

## Conclusion

From 1942, British policy could not handle the problem of Palestine. Bevin's policy extended the situation wherein the military, police, and intelligence had no objective towards which to guide their efforts. If the sole aim of their policy was to preserve British authority, then martial law had to be implemented early, the Haganah broken, and Irgun and Lehi destroyed. During the war, this course of actions was impossible. Intelligence accurately warned that to attempt to dismantle the Haganah would result in its rebellion, though exaggerated assessments of Haganah's willingness to fight Britain during the war dissuaded the formulation of a coherent policy which may have prevented conflict. Paralysed by a lack of both force and policy, Britain relied on the Jewish Agency's assistance to enforce law and order. That cooperative relationship had developed slowly since the early 1930s, and intensified during the war. Terrorism challenged the authority of both Britain and the Jewish Agency, and so a common threat further united the two, despite bitter differences over immigration and rescue. Cooperation produced positive results for both sides: British security improved, but its



authority eroded. The assistance of the Jewish Agency was better for Britain than the alternative, but costly.

With the war's end, that situation changed. The Jewish Agency and Haganah exploited Britain's dependency on their intelligence, a phenomenon calculatingly nurtured since 1944. In 1945, British intelligence was unable to determine the strength of the Haganah. It still lacked the force to impose its policy, but did not realize that fact. In order to control, let alone disarm the Jewish forces in Palestine, Britain needed far more soldiers than it could deploy there and a willingness to use them in a heavy handed fashion. More importantly, intelligence was unable to determine the Haganah's intentions, just as it was forming the JRM with Irgun and Lehi. It failed to understand who led the Yishuv, and what their intentions were.

One man was central to the mechanism for these events. From the fall of 1945 until the summer of 1946, events unfolded the way they did because the guidance and intelligence which Teddy Kollek earlier had provided British intelligence slowly was cut off. Throughout fall 1945, Kollek gave fairly detailed and true assessments of events, but left out details which implicated the Haganah's connection to the terrorist groups. Some of his deception was calculated, such as withholding key facts. The rest stems from the fact that neither Kollek's bosses nor the British let him to play the game he wanted. He consistently favoured strengthening an alliance with British intelligence, and also consistently complained that the Jewish Agency had not made its point: were they at war, or not? To Kollek's frustration, Yishuv policy remained obscure to the British. MI5 became wary of his role, as attacks on British targets increased and Kollek's role became unclear. When he retired, any successor was sure to offer less to British intelligence. In

August 1946, Kollek summarized the cumulative effect of the Jewish Agency's disjointed policy on its negotiating position, a criticism which, incidentally, illuminates Britain's difficulties in handling the Yishuv.

I do accept violence as an argument in politics but specific threats of violence not carried out defeat their purpose. The Resistance Movement has, I think, failed in its policy by what has or has not happened in Haifa when the first immigrants were sent to Cyprus. If on this day people would have gone with their bare hands against British soldiers, and a great number would have been killed, maybe this would have made an impression and even stopped the transfer. However, that refers only to that special day, and that special hour, and it has passed.

Generally it is difficult for us as a people to carry on the double line which we are working on at the present. On the one hand we have a Resistance Movement plus terrorist groups and use violence on the other hand we try peaceful negotiations. The fact these two things are not connected with each other organisationally does not matter to the outside world. People, even those who are in closer contact with affairs, throw all this into one pot...<sup>446</sup>

Kollek could not have seen that the disconnection between policy and force, which he found frustrating, hampered British intelligence assessments of the Yishuv's intentions. It put Britain in a position where it sought to negotiate under fire, and enabled the Jewish Agency to set conditions for those negotiations, or scuttle them.

Throughout 1945-46, the British government failed to produce a policy. In handing responsibility for this matter to the AACE, Britain, in a bloody struggle to preserve its authority in Palestine, gave it away. British policy could never have worked while it simultaneously sought to preserve Britain's status in the Middle East and, with American support, to balance Jewish and Arab claims. Indeed, short of a willingness and ability to conquer the Yishuv by force, it never could have worked at all. Britain had allowed the Yishuv to develop its own state and military, contradicting its standard policy in the Middle East, which was to minimize the size and quality of allied armed forces.

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<sup>446</sup> TNA, *Kollek to Sherf*, 22.8.46. KV 2/2261. 42C.

Britain overestimated its own strength and resolve, and underestimated that of the Yishuv. Bevin's diplomacy damaged Cunningham's counterterrorism efforts, but less than did the fact that intelligence failed to understand that the Yishuv had launched a secret revolt against Britain, or above all, the simple fact that it was doing so. It is difficult to imagine the Yishuv continuing to cooperate with Britain on any terms short of open immigration to Palestine, which would have caused serious problems with Muslims within the empire. Due to its weakness in intelligence, power and policy, Britain could not possibly have reconciled its interests with those of Zionism. Thus, it lost a protracted conflict with the Yishuv and the Mandate, and also damaged its prestige in the Middle East and the world.

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APPENDIX A: THE STRUCTURE OF BRITISH INTELLIGENCE

