

## British-Zionist Military Cooperation in Palestine, 1917-1939

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**Abstract:** The essence of the British military and security formula in Palestine was the smooth establishment of the Jewish national home with minimum costs of lives and money. However, this British pro-Zionist policy created a continuous security problem, and opened the door to all possibilities of Palestinian revolts and uprisings of both national and religious nature. The British were very active in disarming the Arabs and adopted stringent measures to crush their uprisings and revolts. But, they turned a blind eye to the Jewish arms smuggling and Jewish military organizations, especially, the *Hagana*, which later became the backbone of the Israeli Army. During Palestinian uprisings of 1920, 1921 and 1929 against the Zionists, most of the Palestinian casualties were inflicted by the British forces despite the fact that the Palestinians avoided attacking the British. The British-Zionist cooperation reached its peak during the Palestinian revolt of 1936-1939, and took different forms, including allowing the Jews to establish a military force of twenty two thousand men under the pretext of protecting the Jewish community.

Winston Churchill, when he was the Secretary of State for the Colonies, summarized, on 9 March 1922, in the House of Commons, the British policy in Palestine. He stated that the British policy is based on moderation, as it tried to persuade the first party [the Arab] “*to concede*” and the second party [the Jews] “*to forbear*.” To achieve this goal, the British would keep “a certain modicum of a military force available in order to prevent violent collisions between the two sides.”<sup>1</sup> The statement clarifies the British role during their occupation of Palestine, i.e., concessions should be taken from the Palestinian Arabs, while the Jews should not be hasty in fulfilling

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their dreams. As such, the “British moderate policy” will not be in giving the same political and economic rights to both sides, but in adopting a gradual systematic programme of establishing the Jewish national home, under the protection of British forces.

The British forces were, initially, welcomed by many Palestinians as liberating forces. Notwithstanding the Balfour declaration on 2 November 1917, the Palestinians were bearing in mind the Hogarth Assurance to Sharif Husain in January 1918, the British Declaration to the Seven Syrian leaders in June 1918 and the Anglo-French Declaration on 7 November 1918. All these declarations, coming after the Balfour Declaration, committed the British to the uncompromised political and economic rights of Palestinians and other Arabs and clearly understood as abolition or positive modification of Balfour Declaration. However, the Balfour Declaration became, and continued to be, the pillar of the British policy in Palestine. Furthermore, the British policy concentrated on the implementation of the first half of the Balfour Declaration that dealt with the *Jewish National Home*, but ignored its commitment not to prejudice the rights of the Palestinians. They disregarded the essence of the British role as a mandatory power in developing the political, economic and social institutions to enable Palestinians to rule themselves.

The wishes and the legitimate aspirations of self-determination and political rights of the Palestinians were not of much significance to the British government even though the Palestinian Arabs, in 1918, constituted 92 percent of the total population. In the words of Balfour:

In Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country... The Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is ... of far profounder importance than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.<sup>2</sup>

Even though the Balfour Declaration was ambiguous, Balfour was clear and stated on February 7, 1918: “My personal hope is that the Jews will make good of Palestine and eventually found a Jewish State. It is up to them now; we have given them their great opportunity.”<sup>3</sup>

The British adoption of the Zionist project created continuous security problem, and opened the door for revolts and conflicts of both national and religious nature. The Palestinian political leadership, however, pursued the struggle from 1918 to 1929 through political and peaceful means hoping to convince the British to abandon the Zionist program. Palestinian hostilities were mainly directed against the Jews, while the British enjoyed the position of the “Judge” or the “referee.” However, since the early 1930s, the frustrated Palestinians adopted a more aggressive attitude against the British whom they accused of being “the origin of the malady and the essence of every ordeal.”<sup>4</sup>

### **The Security Formula: Zionist Rashness and British Containment**

The period of the British military rule (December 1917 - June 1920) was predominantly a period of uncertainties. The military administration was “in a position of a trustee awaiting a decision regarding the fate of the country.”<sup>5</sup> The British had to solve their contradictory commitments towards the Arabs, the French and the Jews. Since the beginning of the British occupation the Palestinians were very much disturbed with the Zionist project. Resentment and dismay towards the British quickly replaced both Palestinian pro-British and neutral feelings. British military commanders and political officers, alarmed by the grave situation, advised the British government to curtail the aggressive and reckless Zionist activities which could be disastrous to the Zionists themselves and to British interests. The Chief Administrator of Palestine, Major-General H.D. Watson, among others, reported on August 16, 1919 that:

unless a very limited programme for the Jews National Home be started in the first instance, the Mandatory Power will not only have to keep for many years a large force of troops in the county, but will lose the lives of many of her sons in a war which will be fought against the principles of the League of Nations, in forcing upon a small country a population of aliens.

The antagonism to Zionism of the majority of the population is deep rooted - it is fast leading to the hatred of the British - and will result, if the Zionist program is forced upon them, in an outbreak of a very serious character...

...For the sake of Zionism, for the sake of the National Home for the Jews, I urge most strongly that the present Zionist activity be greatly curtailed and the work of the establishment of the Jews in Palestine be done very slowly and carefully, peaceful penetration over a long period of years will bring about the desired result.<sup>6</sup>

Two months later, Watson was replaced by Major-General L.J. Bols, who wrote to Sir Henry Wilson (Chief Imperial General Staff) on 21 December 1919 assuring that he would not be bothered with difficulties regarding enmity to Zionism resulting from Jewish immigration and promised a country of “milk and honey” within ten years.<sup>7</sup> Bols was shocked by the realities on the ground, especially after the Palestinian uprising in Al-Quds (Jerusalem) from April 4 to 10, 1920.

General Bols was ignorant of the activities and influence of the Zionist Leadership (Commission) in Palestine. He found that the Zionists have developed an administration within an administration “dealing with self-same administrative questions and problems as my own administration ... in fact its departments correspond in numbers exactly to my own.... The Jewish population look to their administration and not to mine, and the Moslems and Christians can only see that privileges and liberties are allowed to the Jews which are denied to them.”<sup>8</sup>

General Bols disclosed that the Zionist commission “did not loyally accept the orders of the administration, but from the commencement adopted a hostile, critical and abusive attitude.... They seek not justice from the Military Occupant but that in every question in which a Jew is interested discrimination in his favor must be shown.”<sup>9</sup>

General Bols noted that the letter sent to him by Ussishkin (Acting Head of the Zionist Commission) on April 13, 1920 was “peremptory and dictatorial and incompatible with the respect due to myself as Chief Administrator.”<sup>10</sup> He reported that the Zionist Commission “has already taken up a very uncompromising attitude with regard to the Police and Gendarmerie” and insisted on all Jewish personnel in the sensitive branches be recruited through her. Exasperated, Bols reached the conclusion that “this state of affairs cannot continue without grave danger to the public peace and to the prejudice of my

administration". He said that there is no use in telling Muslims and Christians that the British are committed to the "status quo" because "facts witness otherwise"; these privileges granted to the Jews "has firmly and absolutely convinced the non-Jewish elements of our partiality."<sup>11</sup>

Bols, at the end of his 16-page report, recommended "that the Zionist Commission on Palestine be abolished."<sup>12</sup> Expectedly, two months later, Bols and his Administration were "abolished", and the Zionist movement continued to flourish under the new Jewish Zionist High Commission, H. Samuel.

The Zionists were not so appreciative of the political situation and legal position of the Military Administration. They resorted to extortion and blackmail. As admitted by Norman Bentwich: "If an officer resisted the pressure, he was regarded as anti-Semite or at least an enemy of Zionism."<sup>13</sup> They "corrupted" the security system by subsidizing Jewish policeman and clerks, a fact which was admitted by Ronald Storrs, the Governor of Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> They exerted all kinds of pressure during the mandate to force the British to comply with their demands.

The British authorities realized that the establishment of a Jewish National Home would not be abrupt or by force. Therefore, they devised a formula that would not provoke the Palestinians but ensure a good environment for the Zionist program. "Tacit approval" was given to many illegal Jewish activities, especially in security and military matters.

Many of the policies which favoured the Zionist programme, were not necessarily written or declared. Samuel did not mind if he was accused (by the Zionists) of being weak as long as he could avoid disturbances in Palestine. He added "as long as there is peace and security in the land, Zionism will be able to take root."<sup>15</sup>

The essence of the British military and security formula in Palestine was the smooth establishment of the Jewish national home with the minimum costs of lives and money. Though partly successful in the 1920s, the British faced much more difficulties and complications in the 1930s and onwards.

## **British Military and Security Policies**

The British policy of establishing a Jewish National Home in Palestine angered the Palestinians and that led to continuous uprisings and revolts against both the Zionist project and British colonization. They adopted special military policies to cope with the situation. The British tried to crush the revolts and disarm the Palestinians but were silent on the growing military activities of the Jews, and were even involved in the recruitment and military training of tens of thousands of Jews, especially from 1936 to 1945. The British military and security policy can be summarized as follows:

1. Direct Colonization. The general tendency of the British imperialism was to apply indirect colonization through treaties and governments through local agents. In Palestine, the British government adopted a direct colonization method controlling all aspects of life. It did not accept the establishment of a Palestinian government or a freely elected representative council. The High Commissioner was the sole “Master” and “uncrowned King” of Palestine.

2. No Palestinian military force. The British government did not create an official Palestinian military force. To ensure internal peace and security, they established a mixed Palestinian police force under British senior officers. A third to half of the total number of the Force comprised the British police. The British Government – as a mandatory power – shirked the responsibility of establishing a Palestinian military force to defend the country after independence.

3. Distinguished Military High Commissioners. Palestine was put under military rule during the period December 1917 – June 1920. Generals Mony, Watson and Bols were, consecutively, the Chief Administrators of the country. The establishment of the civil administration (in 1920) and the approval of the British Mandate over Palestine (in 1922) initiated the period of British High Commissioners (1920 – 1948). However, the British Government reserved the position of High Commissioner for officers with distinguished military career or strong pro-Zionist sentiments or both.

Lord Blumer (1925 – 1928) was a retired Field Marshal in the British army. Sir John Chancellor (1928 – 1931), who was appointed with a strong recommendation of the Zionist movement, was a captain

in the Intelligence Department in the War Office in 1903. Sir Arthur Wauchope (1931 – 1938) was a retired full General in the British army with a distinguished military record. Also, Lord John Gort (1944 – 1945) was a retired full General, who was the Commander in Chief (C-in-C) of Imperial General Staff from 1937 to 1939. The last British High Commissioner was Sir Alan Gordon Cunningham (1945 – 1948) who was also a full General.

There were two exceptions to this long chain of military commanders. One was Herbert Samuel (1920 – 1925) who was a staunch Zionist Jew. The second was a well-known Orientalist, Harold Mac Michael (1938 – 1944). Shortly after his appointment, much of the authorities of the High Commissioner were delegated to the General Officer Commander of the British forces in Palestine, who was busy crushing the Palestinian Revolt.

Senior British officials and higher administrative cadres were selected from amongst pro-Zionists loyal to the “Jewish National Home” policy, or at least, committed to the British policies in Palestine. Those with pro-Arab sentiments were “eliminated.”<sup>16</sup> Norman Bentwich, the Attorney General (1920-1930), mentioned that those selected from the British army to serve in the Mandatory Civil Government were required to loyally carry out the British polices regarding the Jewish National Home.<sup>17</sup>

4. Restructuring the Judicial System. The British government restructured the judicial system to tighten control over Palestine and to give the military and security forces the “legal” cover to crush Palestinian uprisings and to impose severe punishments on those who challenged the British pro-Zionist policy. Norman Bentwich, as Attorney General, passed more than 350 ordinances in the 1920s, “nearly as many laws” passed by the Imperial parliament for the Great Britain. The Arab leaders derided the “law factory” which manufactured “new measures without rest.”<sup>18</sup> Many laws, including the “infamous” “Collective Punishment Laws,” were enacted which authorized administrative governors or police officers to impose collective punishments on the people of an area if a “crime” or “disturbances” took place there.<sup>19</sup> These laws gave the authorities the right to arrest anyone for one year or so (administrative arrest) without trial on suspicion of breaching public security. The Palestine (Defence) order in council for the year 1931, for instance, authorised

the High Commissioner (or his representatives and assistants) to confiscate properties, impose forced labour, establish military courts, deport, destroy houses etc., whenever he feels this to be in “the public interest.”<sup>20</sup>

5. Active and aggressive policies towards Arab Military Organizations and passive (sometimes direct) support to Jewish armament and military organizations.

6. Reducing military costs and to cover these expenditures by the Palestinian tax payer. This was in tune with the general British Colonial policy of forcing the colonies to cover all expenditures. Therefore, the defence of Palestine (and Trans Jordan) was transferred in 1921 from the war office to the Air Ministry to minimize the military costs.<sup>21</sup> Though partly successful, this policy was revised after the eruption of the Palestinian Revolt in 1936 when the War Office (W.O.) resumed this responsibility in September 1936.<sup>22</sup> The Palestinian tax payer, consequently, became heavily burdened with security costs. It is worth noting that the annual security expenditures comprised 20.6 percent to 35.9 percent of the budget during the period 1920-1935 and varied between 29.1 percent and 47.2 percent during the Palestinian Revolt from 1936 to 1939.<sup>23</sup> This can be compared with the expenditures on education for the same period (1920-1939) which varied between 4 and 6.64 percent of the budget.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the Palestinian budget was exhausted on security matters rather than on welfare and educational development of the people.

### **British-Zionist Military Cooperation**

After the occupation of Jerusalem in December 1917, Major-General Hill, the British Commander of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Division, met the Jewish local representatives and advised them to establish a Jewish Legion. He said: “We had come to give back your country, but we should not be always here to protect you.”<sup>25</sup> This is just one example of British cooperating with the Zionists.

In fact, British-Zionist military cooperation started before the British occupation of Palestine. The “Zion Mule Corps” was formed in Egypt in 1915, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel John Patterson, an Irishman, and Captain Joseph Trumpeldor (a Zionist Jew). Almost



all the soldiers of this corps were Jews who were expelled by the Ottoman authorities from Palestine, because of their alien (Russian) citizenship. Some 562 Jews joined this British Expeditionary force which was defeated by the Ottomans at Gallipoli in the Dardanelles (1915). Eventually, this corps was dismantled.<sup>2</sup>

After several petitions to the British by Zionist figures, i.e., Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, Rutenberg and Trumpeldor, the British War Office agreed in September 1917 to the formation of a new infantry regiment called the 38<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers, and was commanded by John Patterson, the former commander of the Zion Mule Corps, with Jabotinsky as his deputy. Despite the objection from the majority of the Russian Jews, the Zionists succeeded in recruiting some Jews to the newly established regiment. In February, 1918 (two months after the fall of Jerusalem), this regiment was transferred to Egypt. It participated in the British invasion in September, 1918 which ended with the occupation of Northern Palestine, East Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.<sup>27</sup>

A second Jewish regiment, the 39<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers, was formed in Britain immediately after the shipping of the 38<sup>th</sup> Fusiliers. It was composed of Jewish volunteers from the United States and Canada, and Jewish immigrants from Russia. It was sent to Egypt in April 1918 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Eliezer Margolin (a Zionist Jew). This regiment absorbed many Jewish volunteers coming from Palestine, who later, after the British occupation of South Palestine, were enlisted in the British army.<sup>28</sup>

The 40<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers was the third Jewish regiment composed of Jewish volunteers from the United States and Canada. The prominent Zionist leader and the future first Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, who was staying in the United States, played a major role in establishing this regiment, and many of its members were recruited by Ben-Gurion himself. Ben-Gurion and other important Zionist figures like Dov Joseph and Nehemia Rabin joined the regiment. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Samuel, this regiment reached Egypt in August 1918 and recruited Jewish volunteers from Palestine including Eliyahu Golomb (the first commander of the Haganah), Dov Hoz and Berl Katznelson. It was transferred to Palestine, but too late to participate in the Battles.<sup>29</sup>

The official Jewish recruitment committee in Palestine was established on 14 June 1918. The Jews of Palestine were very enthusiastic, and within three weeks, about 1000 volunteers were enlisted. They were sent to Egypt to join the abovementioned Royal Fusiliers regiments.<sup>30</sup> The British-recruited Jewish regiments were significant politically in that they succeeded in recruiting leading Zionist political and military figures. The actual role of these regiments in the battlefield was insignificant. The British expeditionary force which invaded Palestine totalled more than 467,000 soldiers.<sup>31</sup>

By the end of the war, approximately 11,000 Jews were recruited in British military units (mostly conscripts). However, only 1,500 served in the British invasion of Palestine, while 5,000 were part of the post-war occupation and another 5,000 were in training when the war ended. These were in addition to the 562 volunteers for the Zionist mule corps mentioned above.<sup>32</sup>

The Jewish regiments were discharged at the end the World War in November, 1918. However, based on the demand of the Zionist Executive Committee, British authorities established in 1919 a new Jewish volunteer regiment (commanded by Eliezer Margolin), as part of their garrison in Palestine, known as the First Judeans.<sup>33</sup> The Palestinians were never given such an opportunity, and the Palestinian documents bitterly recorded the provocative and hostile behavior of the Jewish soldiers, including desecrating mosques. The British authorities did nothing to stop or even curb these activities.<sup>34</sup>

## **Haganah**

On 15 June 1920, a Zionist military organization was established during a meeting of *Ahdut Avodah* party. It was regarded by its founders, who were also the founders of the *Histadrut* (the General Federation of Jewish Labour), as a full-fledged “national” armed force to defend the Jewish community in Palestine and its interests. Haganah absorbed and replaced another Jewish military organization, *Hashomer Hatzair*, founded on April 4, 1909.

For its first eleven years *Haganah* was subordinated to the *Histadrut*, since the political leadership of the Zionist Organization was not in a position to accept responsibility for this illegal military

organization. In 1931, the Zionist political leadership (representing all political trends) took a more direct and active part in directing the *Haganah*. It was a popular military organisation. Every Jewish town neighborhood, settlement, moshav or kibbutz was affiliated with the *Haganah*. The identity of the *Haganah* district commander was known to most Jewish inhabitants. The first General Commander of the *Haganah* was Eliyahu Golomb, an ex-soldier of the British 40<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers Jewish regiment.<sup>35</sup> Such an active organization was definitely known to the British authorities, whose conspicuous silence amounted to a “tacit approval.”

*Haganah* was active in military training and in successful arms trafficking. After the 1921 Palestinian uprising, the British authorities provided the Jewish Settlements with arms, in sealed boxes, to be used in case of a sudden attack.<sup>36</sup> In the face of Palestinian anger, the authorities decided to gradually withdraw the arms by 1926.<sup>37</sup> However, till August 1929 there were 16 or 17 Jewish settlements with British-supplied arms.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Intifāḍat al-Quds (Jerusalem Uprising) 4-10 April 1920***

The Jerusalem uprising of April 1920 erupted at the time when the Muslims were celebrating the annual religious festival of Prophet Moses (Musā) in Jerusalem. Apparently, it started when a Jew defiled one of the Muslim flags. The uprising continued for one week during which five Jews were killed and 211 injured as against four Palestinians who were killed and 24 injured.<sup>39</sup>

A week before the uprising (27 March 1920), a group of Jews conducted a provocative military training in public in the lower part of Mount of Olives and marched through the streets of Jerusalem. The British authorities overtly supported this as they did nothing to stop the display of force.<sup>40</sup> The Zionists made use of their well-trained military forces. Two hundred members of the first Judean Battalion were already in Jerusalem. A group of them wore the British military uniform and supported their co-religionists (the Jews). Japotinsky led an organized Jewish military unit towards Jaffa Gate, where they engaged with the Arabs. This further inflamed Arab anger. To avoid a wider Palestinian explosion, Major-General Bols recommended that the Judean Battalion be sent to Qantara to be

dissolved there, but this was rejected by the higher military authorities. Instead, he was ordered to deal with the “undisciplined” elements in the usual military manner. Japotinsky was found guilty and sentenced to 15 years jail with hard labour. The sentence was reduced later to one year, though he was released after three months (on July 7, 1920) when Samuel declared general amnesty.<sup>41</sup> The *Palin Report* on the Jerusalem uprising, made public in 1968, accused the Zionists “whose impatience to achieve their ultimate goal and indiscretion are largely responsible for this unhappy state of feeling... They are ready to use their powerful foreign and home influence to force the hand of this or any future administration. If not carefully checked, they may easily precipitate a catastrophe....”<sup>42</sup>

### ***Intifādah Yafa* (Jaffa Uprising) 1-15 May 1921**

The Jaffa Uprising or *Intifādah Yafa* caused by Jewish provocations, resulted in the killing of 47 Jews and injuring another 146. On the Palestinian side, 48 Arabs were killed and 73 injured. British documents show that most of the Arab casualties were due to bullets used by the British army with the connivance of the Jews whereas most of the Jewish casualties were caused by the Arabs using knives and sticks.<sup>43</sup>

Colonel Margolin, the commander of the First Judeans Battalion, convinced the British authorities to provide 18 rifles to Jewish soldiers under the pretext of protecting Jews in Tel Aviv. Another 17 soldiers of the First Judean Battalion left their camp at Ludd and proceeded with their arms to Tel Aviv.<sup>44</sup> The Arabs complained that the Jews were given rifles, dressed in British military uniform patrolling Jaffa streets and markets and shooting the Arabs indiscriminately.<sup>45</sup> There were other signs of British connivance with the Jews like the placing of Jewish guides in British armoured cars, Jewish civilians getting British soldiers to forcefully enter Muslim houses, a Jewish civilian ordering British soldiers to fire on the crowd, and the body search of Arabs by Jews in front of British soldiers.<sup>46</sup>

Captain C.D. Brunton, at the end of his report on Jaffa uprising, (written on May 13, 1921) warned the British authorities that “the troubles in Jaffa and other parts of the country are only the expressions of a deep-seated and widely spread popular resentment

against the present British policy. If that policy is not modified, the outbreak of today may become a revolution tomorrow.”<sup>47</sup> W. Churchill, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, submitted Brunton’s report to the British Cabinet and admitted that he did “not think things are going to get better in this part of the world, but rather worse.”<sup>48</sup> However, no serious action was taken by the British authorities except a temporary halt of Jewish immigration and a pacifying statement to the Arabs by H. Samuel on June 3, 1921 stating that Britain will not impose a policy which may be contradictory to their Muslim religious, political and economic interests.<sup>49</sup> This statement gave some hope to the Arabs but within a few months they realized, as mentioned by Chief Secretary in Palestine (Deeds), that His Majesty’s Government was tied in both her hands and legs and that Samuel’s speech was a matter of throwing dust in the eyes of Arabs and that both British administration and Zionism were one.<sup>50</sup>

### **Gendarmerie 1921 – 1925**

Gendarmerie was a semi-military force which was established in 1921. Initially, in June 1920, it was decided to absorb the Jewish Battalion in a bigger defence force to protect the borders of Palestine.<sup>51</sup> The Arabs wanted the force to be composed of personnel on population basis (88% Arabs, 12% Jews). The British Administration, after negotiation with Jewish representatives “Vaad Haldumi”<sup>52</sup> decided that one third will be Jews, one third Palestinian Arabs and one third for non-Palestinians.<sup>53</sup> The Gendarmerie scheme was approved on July 19, 1921,<sup>54</sup> and it consisted of about 500 personnel under British officers. The Jews were almost the third till 1923, but their numbers decreased in time to a fifth, as conditions of service were not attractive to them. It was dissolved in 1925 when Palestine enjoyed relative stability.<sup>55</sup>

A British Gendarmerie Branch was also established parallel to the Palestinian Branch. It arrived in Palestine in April 1922. In the beginning, it consisted of 762 men, but it was reduced to 469 by 1925.<sup>56</sup> Most members of this British Gendarmerie were recruits in an Irish semi-military force known as “Black and Tans” which had a bad reputation of being brutal and using excessive force to crush the Irish Revolution, 1920-1922. Major-General Tudor, the

commander of these forces in Ireland, was selected not only to be their commander in Palestine but also the commander of the entire police force and the British garrison. Tudor lamented that they had to leave Ireland because of Irish self-determination and they were sent to Palestine to resist Arab attempts at self-determination.<sup>57</sup> In 1925, the government decided to dissolve the British Gendarmerie and absorb 217 of its personnel in the Police force with effect from April 1926.<sup>58</sup>

### ***Al-Burāq* Revolt: August 1929**

*Al-Burāq* Wall is the western wall of *al-Aqṣā* mosque. The Jews called it the Wailing Wall and considered it a remnant of the Jewish second Temple. The Jews escalated their claims in September 1928 while the Muslims insisted on the Islamic identity of the wall as an Islamic endowment. The situation was aggravated in August 1929, when the Jews tried to change the “Status quo.” An inevitable Muslim wave of anger erupted and spread all over Palestine, especially in Jerusalem, Hebron and Safad, where 133 Jews were killed and 339 injured in the hands of the Arabs. However, 116 Arabs were killed and 232 injured by the Police and British forces.<sup>59</sup> The British police cooperated with the *Haganah* in defending Jews in Jaffa and Haifa from Arab attacks.<sup>60</sup>

The Jews complained that the Arabs massacred them in Hebron and Safad, whereas the Arabs complained of the discriminating attitude of the British army and Police in addition to the Zionist atrocities. Arabs also complained that a Jewish police, called Simha Khankis, broke into the house of Abdul Ghani al-‘Onn and killed him and his family. Jews defiled the dead bodies and cut open the abdomen of two pregnant women. Muslims in Haifa protested the attack of the Jewish Police on them. According to Arab sources, British soldiers killed six innocent Arabs and injured eight, including women and children in Sur Bahir village.<sup>61</sup>

About 1300 cases, 90% of the Arabs, were brought to courts. Arabs complained bitterly of the injustice and pro-Zionist bias of the Attorney-General, N. Bentwich, who himself was a staunch Zionist Jew. He was accused of victimising the Arabs and releasing the Jews, even murderers, with or without bail. An Arab attempted

to assassinate Bentwich, but he escaped with an injured thigh. Later (in September 1930), the British authorities asked him to resign ending his ten years “burdensome” service as an Attorney-general.<sup>62</sup>

### **British – Zionist Military Cooperation in the 1930s**

The 1930s witnessed an increasing support for the Zionist project in Palestine. They had a pro-Zionist A. Wauchope as the British Higher Commissioner for Palestine (1931-1938). The Zionists program enjoyed the strong support of many British prominent political figures like Ormesby Gore, Hore-Belisha and Churchill. The rise of the Nazis in Germany gave (directly or indirectly) a powerful drive to the establishment of a Jewish Home in Palestine. Within five years, (1930 -1935), the number of Jews doubled in Palestine, with the arrival of 152,000 Jewish immigrants (the total number of the Jews in 1929 was 156,000).<sup>63</sup> Large parcels of Palestinian lands were transferred to the Jews.<sup>64</sup>

The Zionists succeeded in smuggling big amounts of arms. However, only two cases of smuggled Jewish arms were discovered. The first was detected by an Arab custom officer, in March 1930. But, the Jewish smuggler was released the same day on bail and the case was effaced.<sup>65</sup> The second was discovered by chance from a cement shipment from Belgium, in October 1935. The ship carried 537 barrels of cement of which 359 contained arms. British authorities simply “failed” to arrest the importer.<sup>66</sup>

By mid 1930s, all Palestinian peaceful political activities reached a deadlock, as the British Government blatantly ignored the recommendations of J.H. Simpson with regard to purchasing land and halting of Jewish immigration. The government abolished the Passfield White Paper and brutally crushed the Arab demonstrations in Jerusalem and in Jaffa on October 13 and 27, 1933, respectively, killing 26 Arabs and injuring 187.<sup>67</sup> Wauchope admitted on October 23, 1933 that “Arab feeling in Palestine is becoming definitely anti-British and anti-Government. Without the British Government, the Arabs think they would have nothing to fear from the Jews.”<sup>68</sup> He further stated on December 18, 1933 that “our difficulties ... are liable to be far more formidable in the future than they have been in the past.”<sup>69</sup>

In such circumstances, the Arabs became more active in establishing secret military organisations, such as Al-Jihādiyyah under the leadership of Sheik Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam and Al-Jihād Al-Muqaddas under the leadership of Abd Al-Qādir al-Husaini.

### **The Palestinian Revolt 1936 – 1939**

The Palestinian Revolt erupted in the mid of April 1936 and continued till September 1939. It was the most serious Arab military challenge to the British hegemony during the Mandate. Arab fighters targeted both the British and the Jews. The Palestinians declared a historic nationwide general strike which lasted for 175 days (April 20 to October 11, 1936). The revolt reached its peak in the summer of 1938. British Civil Authority had practically collapsed and the revolt had briefly “liberated” several Palestinian towns.

The British government sent huge reinforcements under some of her best military commanders, i.e., Dill, Wavell, Haining and Montgomery. The Palestinian resistance executed 10,595 military operations according to British sources. According to various sources, an estimated 3,200 Palestinians were killed and 8000 were injured. On the Arab side, almost 500 Jews were killed and 1400 injured, while the British army and police forces casualties were estimated at about 1,800 killed or injured.<sup>70</sup>

The British forces caused a lot of destruction and misery to the Palestinians. Collective punishments were used extensively against villages or areas “suspected” of supporting the “rebels.” Demolition of houses was a common practice. As an example, the Old Quarter of Jaffa was destroyed and this included 220 houses and 825 wooden huts between June 29 and 30, 1936. When the airport of Lydda was attacked and damaged by men of resistance, the British blew an entire row of Muslim houses in the vicinity with dynamite. More than half of the houses of Jenin, Sha’ab, Baqah al-Gharbiyyah, al-Fraidees and al-Ras al-Ahmar were destroyed.<sup>71</sup> Some of these destructions are well captured in a booklet by Frances Newton, a British lady living in Palestine.<sup>72</sup> The authorities imposed collective fines on villages without any proof of “guilt.” In 1936, about 250 villages were made to bear the heavy burden of fine.<sup>73</sup>



From November 1938 to November 1939, the British authorities occupied and searched an average of 37 villages per week.<sup>74</sup> Palestinian documents are filled with evidences about British-Zionist acts of destruction, burning and looting of houses and properties, torturing and killing of innocent people, and desecration of holy Muslim and Christian places. British authorities denied these “alleged” atrocities but refused to send an independent committee to investigate the “unbeatable facts.”<sup>75</sup>

More than fifty thousand Palestinians were arrested during the revolt; many of them were not tried. British forces admitted arresting 23,405 Palestinians during November 1938 to November 1939, of whom about 4000 were detained in the first two weeks of November 1938.<sup>76</sup> The military courts, established in 1937, tried about 1000 of whom 200 were sentenced to death (80 of them were commuted), 550 jailed for different periods, while 250 were found not “guilty.”<sup>77</sup> These figures do not include about 10,000 who were convicted in the “regular” courts.

The courts discriminated against the Palestinians. The Arabs and the Jews were handed different sentence terms for similar accusations. For example, on January 21, 1938, two Jews were sentenced to five years jail for possession of weapons, which were subsequently reduced to six months on one and three the other. In contrast, on January 25, 1938 the court sentenced three Arabs to death for the same charge of possessing weapons.<sup>78</sup>

Another savage practice was the usage of Palestinians as human shields. Such cases were reported in both Arabic and Israeli references. Relatives of rebel commanders, local dignitaries and prisoners were put in trolleys ahead of trains to ensure the safety of the railways. British soldiers forced Arabs to accompany them in their cars, to travel ahead of them to clear the roads or to be used as shields when storming into areas or houses. The detainees of *al-Mazra'ah* and Bethlehem prisons, to cite two examples, were used as human shields.<sup>79</sup> Yigal Lossin's *Pillar of Fire* contains a picture of two Arab detainees in a trolley ahead of a train, as an example of human shields.<sup>80</sup>

During the Palestinian Revolt (1936-1939), the Zionist-British cooperation reached its peak. In its zeal to crush the Revolt, the

British cooperated openly with the Zionist “secret” military organization, the *Haganah*, which later constituted the backbone of the Israeli army. This official cooperation was a decisive factor in protecting the Jews in Palestine and in developing the Jewish military forces. As a result, *Haganah* developed from a modest local militia to a well-organized military force of almost 50,000 members by the middle of 1938.<sup>81</sup>

Under the guise of recruiting supernumerary police to protect Jewish areas and settlements, 22,000 Jews, mostly *Haganah* members, were enlisted. In the first phase of the Palestinian Revolt (April – October 1936), about 3,000 Jews were recruited as supernumerary police. Many British officers, including General Inspector of Police Spicer, believed that the establishment of a Jewish state was imminent and that the Jewish supernumerary police is the initial step to establish a Jewish army. In the spring of 1937, the British authorities recruited 732 Jews to protect the railways, and not just the Jewish settlements as previously agreed. *Haganah* itself took the task of supervising their military training under the same cover of supernumerary police. British authorities gave the permission to the *Haganah* to protect the workers of *Solel Boneh* Company who were building the “Tegart Fence” to prevent infiltration of “rebels” from north western Palestine.<sup>82</sup>

Another important development was the implementation of a recommendation of a study conducted by Army Officer G. Brunskill and police officer Harington, namely the transfer of the Jewish supernumerary police to police units organized on a military basis. Brunskill wrote that this Jewish supernumerary police were nothing but a military force disguised in a police branch. British authorities approved the plan and the process started in January 1939. As a result, Jewish supernumerary police was reorganized in ten battalions, in tune with *Haganah* division to the areas, and were given Hebrew names. Recruits were given military uniforms and rifles. A British military commander was appointed for each battalion. He was to be assisted by an Inspector appointed by the Jewish Agency. The total number of this police force, in the beginning of 1939, was 14,411. In addition, there were another 1,800 special police and members of *Haganah* who were assigned the duty of guarding Tel Aviv and Haifa. Also, another 1,628, mostly Jews, were working as

supernumerary police to protect public utilities. In March 1939, the committee for defending Jewish settlements was composed of three groups of members, one representing the British army, another representing the British Police, and the third the Jewish Agency.<sup>83</sup>

As such, the Jewish supernumerary police expanded to cover different fields, and by July 1939 its total number reached 22,000.<sup>84</sup> This force continued to exist till the end of the British mandate and provided a “legal” cover to develop Jewish forces.

### **Charles Orde Wingate and Special Night Squads**

Charles Orde Wingate (1903-1944) was a firm British believer in the Bible. He embraced the prophetic vision of the “Jewish redemption” and the “Jews’ ultimate return” to Palestine. He was also dreaming of heading the army of the future Jewish State. Wingate arrived in Palestine in 1936 as an intelligence officer in the British army. With the approval of British authorities, he established the Special Night Squads (S.N.S.) which consisted of more than one hundred soldiers, mostly from the *Haganah*. These squads were mobilized forces working on the principles of surprise and night attacks. The Jewish recruits were trained as a striking force and they worked as if they were part of the British regular army and executed operations not related to the defense of Jewish settlements. The Squads were a glaring example of the British-Zionist military cooperation. Zionists admitted that Orde Wingate had a strong effect in shaping the core of the Israeli military forces’ doctrines of deterrence and independent initiative. Wingate continued his command of these squads till autumn 1938, and many of his trainees became the heads of the *Palmach* (the striking force of the *Haganah*), and later the commanders of the Israeli army, such as Moshe Dayan.

Eventually, the British Empire managed to crush the poorly equipped Palestinian guerilla fighters. The period of the Second World War 1939-1945 witnessed more active military cooperation between the British and the Zionists. In 1941, the *Haganah* established its striking force *Palmach*. There were evidences that the British Military Intelligence MI4 and another British Intelligence Institution called special operations EX., SOE, played an important role in organizing and training the *Palmach*. The British government also allowed, in 1944, the Zionists to establish their own Jewish separate military

units, in support of the military drive of the British and the Americans. The Zionists made full use of this golden opportunity and, by the end of the war, 32,000 Jewish soldiers were trained by the British army. Indeed, this was another contribution of the British Government towards the formation of the forthcoming Jewish state.

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## Notes

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