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Bloody years of the Jewish Insurgency in British Mandatory Palestine 1939-1948: From the White Paper to the State of Israel

Krvavá léta židovského povstání v britské mandátní Palestině 1939-1948: Od Bílé knihy ke Státu Izrael

Ľubomír Zvada, Jiří Lach

Abstract: This review article focuses on Jewish insurgency under the British mandate for Palestine from 1939 to 1948. The Jewish guerrilla campaign represents a successful case study in the field of the research on small wars and insurgency, proxy wars. The authors analyze the early phase of the British Mandate in 1918-1939, referred to as the prelude to the subsequent Jewish uprising; a period when Jewish paramilitary groups including the Haganah, Irgun, and Lehi emerged and developed, emphasizing their ideological underpinnings, operational and tactical strategies of warfare, and the material capacities that these organizations possessed. The authors primarily emphasize the period from the initiation of the White Paper in 1939 until the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948. British restrictions on Jewish immigration and the beginning of the Second World War stimulated the Jewish forces to a massive terrorist campaign against the British resulting in an unprecedented Zionist victory.

Abstrakt: Tato přehledová studie se zaměřuje na židovské povstání v rámci britského mandátu pro Palestinu v letech 1939 až 1948. Židovská guerillová kampaň představuje úspěšnou případovou studii v oblasti výzkumu malých válek a povstání, tzv. proxy wars. Autoři analyzují ranou fázi britského mandátu v letech 1918-1939 označovanou jako předeheru následného židovského povstání; období, kdy vznikaly a rozvíjely se židovské polo-vojenské skupiny včetně Hagany, Irgunu a Lehi, přičemž autoři akcentují především ideologická východiska, operační a taktické strategie vedení boje, či materiální kapacity, kterými tyto organizace disponovaly. Autoři kladou důraz především na období od iniciace Bílé knihy v roce 1939 do vzniku Státu Izrael v květnu 1948.

Keywords: British Mandatory Palestine; Jewish Insurgency; Irgun; Lehi; Haganah.

Klíčová slova: Britský mandát Palestina; židovské povstání; Irgun, Lechi, Hagana.

INTRODUCTION

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emphasized in his 2018 speech commemorating 70th anniversary the birth of the State of Israel: “the Declaration of Independence was neither carved on a scroll nor written in ink. It was written in the blood of our sons and daughters and in the bravery of the defenders of our nation from 1948 until today.”¹ B. Netanyahu did not forget to mention David Ben Gurion, the father of modern Israel, when he evaluated his willingness to announce the birth of Israel, even though he had known that it would have brought a war and uncertain future for Israelites.² Symbolically, Netanyahu’s words of thanks and respect were dedicated to soldiers of Israel Defense Forces (IDF). He advocated at the Mount Herzl, one of Jerusalem’s hills named after Theodore Herzl, one of the fathers of modern Zionism.³

The questions concerning the relationship between a nation and its (military) history represent complex discussion depending on historical narratives serving to define shared identity of a given nation. Since the 1970s and 1980s, Israel has been going through heated debate between the traditional ‘Zionists historiography’ versus so-called ‘Post-Zionism’, or revisionist’s approaches, proposed by the Post-Zionists, a new generation of Israeli historians and a group of critical sociologists.⁴ The relationship between nation and history in Israel is more complicated than in the other cases given “mixed political-religious character.”⁵ Already Martin Buber, a well-known Jewish philosopher and proponent of spiritual Zionism, described Zionism as a national concept “which differentiates it from all other national concepts” because “[zionism] was named after a place

1 PRIME MINISTER OFFICE. Address by PM Netanyahu Israel’s 70th anniversary Torch -Lightning Ceremony. Available from: https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/speech_masuot180418. Accessed April 18, 2021. See also for instance BACHNER, Michael. On 70th anniversary, Netanyahu says Israel’s light will beat enemies’ ‘darkness’. *The Times of Israel*. Available from: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/on-70th-anniversary-netanyahu-says-israels-light-will-beat-enemies-darkness/>. Accessed April 18, 2018.

2 PRIME MINISTER OFFICE, ref. 2.

3 Term *Zionism* includes many interpretations. The common sign for all definitions is fact that Zionism is a Jewish national movement trying to connect Jews all over the world to establish the state entity in a Land of Israel (see above). Zionism as a national movement was, and still is, a very heterogeneous. There are various wings of Zionism such as *Labor Zionism*, *Revisionist Zionism*, *Cultural Zionism*, *Liberal Zionism*, *Green Zionism* or *Religious Zionism*. Terms such as *Neo-Zionism*, or *Post-Zionism* respectively, also entered the discourse during the second half of 20th century and at the beginning of the new millennia. To the issues related with the most influential thinkers and practitioners of Zionism see ELON, Amos. *The Israelis: Founders and Sons*. New York: Bantam Books, 1972. AVINERI, Shlomo. *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State*. New York: Basic Books, 198. WINER, Gershon. *Founding Fathers of Israel*. New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 2001.

4 GELBER, Yoav. *Nation and History: Israeli Historiography between Zionism and Post-Zionism*, 2011, pp. vii-xiv. SHAPIRA, Anita – PENSLAR, Derek J. (eds.). *Israeli Historical Revisionism: From Left to Right*. London: Frank Cass, 2003.

5 WALZER, Michael. History and National Liberation. In SHAPIRA, Anita – PENSLAR, Derek J. (eds.). *Israeli Historical Revisionism: From Left to Right*. London: Frank Cass, 2003, pp. 1-9.

and not, like the others, after a people, which indicates that it is not so much question of a particular people as such but of in association with a particular land, its native land.”⁶

The importance of the Jewish fight for Israeli freedom in Israeli history is embodied in statement of Menachem Begin, one of the main figures of Jewish resistance and insurgency against the British in Palestine and Irgun commander. Begin wrote in his guerilla manifest *Revolt*: “whatever position I may hold, It will never be comparable to the national and human importance of what my friends and I did in the underground during our fight for the liberation of our people.”⁷ He added: “there was no other way. If we did not fight, we should be destroyed. To fight was the only to salvation.”⁸ The Jewish insurgency in the British Mandate and the fight for liberation is an inherent part of Jewish modern history; the history of *Yishuv*⁹, and became an undivided subject of the Israeli history as such.¹⁰ Also some Czech or Slovak authors have dealt with the former or modern Czech-Israel relations,¹¹ military aspects of Israel’s security,¹² however, the period of Jewish insurgency is still on the margin of the research interest.

The main purpose of this review article is to deliver, albeit in a limited length, a discussion of how the Jewish insurgency and guerilla campaign had been led against the British administration in Palestine. The core of the analysis focuses on the period from the

⁶ BUBER, Martin. *On Zion: The history of an idea*. New York: Schocken, 1973, p. xvii.

⁷ BEGIN, Menachem. *Revolt*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1978, pp. 8-9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁹ *Yishuv* is a Hebrew term for a Land of Israel during the British Mandatory Palestine. *Yishuv* represented a pre-state entity for Jews before the State of Israel was established.

¹⁰ See a comprehensive history books by SEGEV, Tom. *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2000. SHAPIRA, Anita. *Israel: A history*. Brandeis University Press, 2012, pp. 67-133. SCHINDLER, Colin. *A History of Modern Israel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, chapters 1-2; PAPPÉ, Ilan. *A History of Modern Palestine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, chapter 3. ZADKA Saul. *Blood in Zion: How the Jewish Guerillas Drove the British Out of Palestine*. London: Brassey's, 1995. CHARTERS, David. British intelligence in the Palestine campaign, 1945-1947. *Intelligence and National Security*, 1991, Vol. 6, No.1, pp. 115-140. CHARTERS, David. *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989. HELLER, Joseph. *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics and Terror 1940-1949*. Oxon: Routledge, 1995. YAHIEL, Ido. Jewish resistance movement in Mandatory Palestine. *Israel Affairs*, 2018, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 318-331. HOFFMAN, Bruce. The rationality of terrorism and other forms of political violence. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 2011, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 258-272. CESARANI, David. British counterinsurgency in Palestine 1945-1947 and the 'Farran Affair'. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 2012, Vol. 23, No. 4-5, pp. 648-670. SHPIRO, Shlomo. The Intellectual Foundations of Jewish National Terrorism: Avraham Stern and the Lehi. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2013, Vol. 25, No.4, pp. 602-620.

¹¹ TATEROVÁ, Eva. Československá zahraniční politika vůči Izraeli v první polovině padesátých let 20. století. *Mezinárodní vztahy*. 2016, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 52-72. TATEROVÁ, Eva. Proměny přístupu československé diplomacie k arabsko-izraelskému konfliktu v letech 1948-1967. *Mezinárodní vztahy*. 2022, Vol. 57, No. 1, pp. 43-77. ČEJKA, Marek. The narrative of the Czech-Israeli strategic relations in the European context. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*. 2017, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 24-43.

¹² KULHÁNEK Ladislav. Modely proliferace raketové techniky hybridních aktérů středního východu. *Vojenské rozhledy*. 2019, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 73-84.; TICHÝ, Lukáš. Energetika jako strategický nástroj hnutí Hizballáh v konfrontaci s Izraelem. *Vojenské rozhledy*, 2017, Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 14-30. KUTĚJ, Libor. Bezpečnostní rozměr izraelské námořní hranice. *Vojenské rozhledy*, 2014, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 53-64. KUTĚJ, Libor. Sinajské bezpečnostní souvislosti. *Vojenské rozhledy*, 2013, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 58-70.

White Paper ratification in 1939 until the founding of Israel in May 1948. Even though the main period of Jewish violence is falling to the period of the WWII and post-war years of 1945–1948, the first part of the paper will scrutiny the early years at the beginning of the British Mandate where are the roots of the conflict. The authors will depict the problematic relations in the British-Jews-Arabs triangle. The motivation beyond ideology of the main Jewish paramilitary underground groups fighting the British, the impact of the most violent Jewish actions against them, and the impact of liberation fighting for the future of the State of Israel, its society, and politics will be characterized.

Finally, we argue that some historical parallels from the Jewish guerilla campaign against the British Mandate (but with different interpretations) could be seen after the foundation of the State of Israel during the Cold war, especially in the First and Second Intifada, respectively it should be seen in current Israeli's security challenges related to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, or Lebanon and Syria after the Arab spring.

1 BRITISH MANDATE 1920-1939: FROM SAN REMO TO WHITE PAPER

Several attractive promises were given to the Jews and Arabs by the British in the course of the World War One in order to defeat the Ottoman Empire. During the McMahon-Husain correspondence between July 1915 to March 1916, Arab independence in Palestine was promised by the British.¹³ Yet the Balfour Declaration¹⁴ from November 1917 recognized a connection between the Jewish people and Palestine, which *de facto* meant that the Jewish people had the right to rebuild its National Home in *Eretz Israel*.¹⁵

The British gave the same promise to Arabs through cooperation with France in Sykes-Picot Agreement aiming to divide the Middle East into British and French spheres of influence. At the closing of the Paris Peace Conference the borders of the Middle East were redrawn and discussed. This was further cemented by the San Remo conference, held in 1920, where Palestine was placed under British Mandate.¹⁶ What might be seen as an honest promise to the Jews and Arabs to support their independence during the war was to morph into a false pledge in the light of post-war considerations. This reality

¹³ SEGEV, ref. 11, p. 46; KEDOURIE, Elie. *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and its Interpretations 1914-1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 17.

¹⁴ For a full version of the Balfour Declaration see e.g., RABINOVICH, I. – REINHARZ, J. (eds.). *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics, and Foreign Relations: Pre-1948 to the Present*. Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2008, p. 29.

¹⁵ Eretz Israel is the term from modern Hebrew; associated in English such a *Holy Land*, *Land of Israel*, or *Promised Land*. Geographically included historical and biblical region Levant, Southern Levant, Canaan, and Palestine. See e.g., MAZUR, Yosef. *Zionism, Post-Zionism & Arab Problem: A Compendium of Opinions About the Jewish State*. Bloomington: WestBow Press. 2012, p. 2; SHAPIRA, ref. 11, pp. 70-73.

¹⁶ SHAPIRA, ref. 11, pp. 75-76; SEGEV, ref. 11, pp. 142-144; MAZUR, ref. 15, p. 33. FROMKIN, David. *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*. New York: Owl, 1989, p. 286, p. 288.

complicated the British administration in Palestine for the entire existence of the British Mandate. The British found themselves confronted with “conflicting commitments” that were irreconcilable.¹⁷ On the one hand, the Balfour Declaration meant some kind of “salvation” for the Jews, but on the other hand, for the British, according to Elizabeth Monroe it represented “one of the greatest mistakes in its imperial history.”¹⁸

The first Higher Commander of the British Mandate for Palestine, Herbert Samuel, wrote in his memoirs of the moment he arrived in Palestine. He clarified his strategy as an “administer of the country, not for the benefit of one section of the population only, but for all; not commissioned by the Zionists but in the name of the King.”¹⁹ In his work dedicated to Herbert Samuel, Bernard Wasserstein remarked about Samuel’s approach toward rebuilding the Jewish National Home that “he pursued a deliberately passive policy, believing that the government was to facilitate rather than actively encourage or direct Jewish immigration and settlement.”²⁰ Towards the Arabs, Samuel noted that it is “a clear duty of the mandatory power to promote the well-being of the Arab population, in the same way as a British Administration would regard it as its duty to promote the welfare of the local population in any part of the Empire.”²¹

For the British cabinets and administration in Palestine, the existence of the Mandate represented a permanent conflict with the Jewish and Arab leaders. For Samuel and for all his successors, it was one of the biggest challenges within the policy-agenda, especially when considering the increasing numbers of Jewish immigrants to the Holy Land (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: The Evolution of the Jewish Immigrants

Aliyah	Years	Jewish Immigrants
First	1882-1903	35,000
Second	1904-1914	40,000
Third	1919-1923	40,000
Fourth	1924-1929	82,000
Fifth	1929-1939	250,000

Source: Based on the Jewish Virtual Library

The acceptance of Jewish immigration to Palestine, accompanying very effective purchasing land by Jewish National Fund (*Keren Hakayemet*) gave rise to a feeling of British betrayal of Arab leaders. The growing pressure that had been caused by the Jewish

¹⁷ CHARTERS, ref. 11, p. 12.

¹⁸ MONROE, Elizabeth. *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914–7*. London: Vintage, 1981, p. 43.

¹⁹ SAMUEL, Herbert Viscount. *Memoirs*. London: Cresset Press, 1945, p. 168.

²⁰ WASSERSTEIN, Bernard. Herbert Samuel and the Palestine Problem. *The English Historical Review*, 1976, Vol. 91, no. 360, p. 763.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 764.

immigration was also confirmed by the Haycraft Commission established in reaction to Jaffa riots in May 1921. After the investigation of the bloodshed between Jews and Arabs, final report approved that it was based on “the Arab discontent due to the political and economic causes linked to the Jewish immigration.”²² This early restlessness was following by another one in the end of 1920s stressing the religious issues over the Western Wall in Jerusalem, respectively the violence in Hebron. The dynamics of Jewish population inflow had increased with Nazi seizure of power in 1933. Arabs in Holy Land held the British authorities responsible for this trend and responded with a massive rebellion against the British and Jews during the Arab Revolt 1936–1939. Even though, as we demonstrate in Table 2, Arabs have had a comfortable majority throughout the British Mandate, the numbers of Jewish immigrants to Palestine had continuously increased since the end of the First World War.

Table 2: Total numbers of Jews and Arabs lived in Yishuv

Year	Jews	Arabs	Others
1915	83,000	590,000	17,000
1922	83,794	590,890	82,498
1945	553,600	1,061,270	149,650

Source: Based on the Jewish Virtual Library

The result of insurgence mentioned above has brought a change in the British policy toward the Jews in Palestine. The British restricted Jewish migration to Palestine up to 75,000 within five years period and called as well for bi-national solution of Jewish-Arabs problems, *ergo*, it pursued the establishment of the Jewish national home within an independent state of Palestine.²³ Jewish leaders in *Yishuv* were in conflict with the British administration on many instances, mainly regarding the issues related to (a) the Jewish rights to immigrate to Palestine (b) the Jewish acquisition, import and storage of arms and (c) the training of Jewish self-defense forces.²⁴

Moreover, there were significant differences within the Jewish community and the struggle between the old settlers in *Yishuv* and newcomers, between the left and right represented mainly by D. Ben Gurion's socialist's policy and V. Jabotinsky's rightwing ideology. Although the Jewish leaders such as D. Ben Gurion, Ch. Weizmann, and V. Jabotinsky realized that any form of alliance with the British is the one and only solution how to reach for a Jewish state. Yet among the Jewish elites, there was no strict consensus over the British false promises and “vague political rhetoric and soft political action,” and

²² ARCHIVE.ORG. Haycraft Commission Transcript. *Archive.org*. Available from: <http://www.archive.org/stream/palestinedisturb00grearich#page/58/mode/2up>. Accessed November 13, 2021.

²³ SEGEV, ref. 11. See also SHAPIRA, ref. 11, p. 87.

²⁴ HOFFMAN, ref. 11, p. 260.

some of them, called *Porshim* (separatists), preferred an “active and violent struggle” against the British.²⁵

2 JEWISH PARA-MILITARY FORCES: HAGANAH, IRGUN, LEHI

The Jewish para-military groups in Palestine had already been formed in the Ottoman Empire, and they had experienced many splits until 1948. Generally, the main Jewish insurgency against the Arabs and then the British included three main resistance actors: Haganah, Irgun, and Lehi.²⁶ These three Jewish para-military groups came from different Zionists backgrounds of *Yishuv*, they had various organization structure as well as dissimilar combat strategies and willingness to fight against British.

Haganah was established by the leftist, socialists – Zionists leaders and members of the *Achduth Ha'Avodah* party that did not rely on the British administration or Jewish security issues. Haganah followed the legacy of its predecessors, the organization of *Bar-Giora*,²⁷ established by Yitzhak Ben Zvi in 1907 or *Hashomer* founded in 1909.²⁸ The self-defense of the Jewish *kibbutzim*²⁹ after the 1920s Arab riots, like in Jaffa in 1921, was the key motivation for setting up Haganah. As the Y. Bauer quoted, Haganah was not based on any intention “to aspire a political role [...] Hagana’s aims was not to become a military wing of a political body.”³⁰ This position stands in contradiction to some representatives of *Histadrut* (Workers union) who planned that Haganah should “develop into a real military force in a future.”³¹ Haganah was organized as a “territorial militia” from the beginning, and its goals were formulated in the *Havlagah* (The Restraint) doctrine based strictly on defense operations. Haganah denied providing revenge against innocent Arabs after the Jewish settlement was attacked by them.³² This approach changed dramatically since 1929 Arab riots when a process of Haganah’s reorganization

²⁵ SHPIRO. ref. 11, p. 201.

²⁶ *Haganah* in Hebrew means „The Defence“; *Irgun* (Organization) is a shortened version of *Irgun Zvai Leumi* (National Military Organization). Very often is also used Hebrew acronym *Etzel*; *Lehi* is a shortened version of *Lohamei Herut Israel*, it is means „Fighters for the Freedom of Israel.“ By British very often named as „Stern gang.“

²⁷ *Bar-Giora* was named after the Simon Bar Giora one of the Jewish leaders fought in uprising against the Romans.

²⁸ HAGANAH. Prior to the Haganah. *Irgoon-Haagana.co.il*. Available from: http://www.irgon-haagana.co.il/show_item.asp?levelid=61005&itemid=49695&itemtype=3&prm=t=4. Accessed July 7, 2021. BAUER, Yehuda. From Cooperation to Resistance: The Haganah 1938-1946. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1966, p. 182.

²⁹ Hebrew term for the Jewish settlers.

³⁰ BAUER, ref. 28, pp. 183-184.

³¹ Ibid.

³² CHARTERS, David. *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, p. 44.

had begun and the National command was established as well as after the Arab revolt 1936-1939 continued with the outbreak of the World War Two when new combat forces were established.³³ A shift from defense to offensive was the main change in military approach, a strategy brought by Orde Charles Wingate, known also as 'Lawrence of the Jews'. Special Night Squads under the Wingate's command targeted Arab terrorists in the middle of the night. There are various estimates of Haganah's membership numbers, but it was the largest and most principal Jewish paramilitary group in *Yishuv* without a doubt. According to Bauer "[...] in 1937, Haganah was comprised of 17,000 men, 4,000 women, 4,500 rifles, 10,000 small arms, and 230 light machine guns, meanwhile in the half of 1942, the number of combatants was estimated between 30,000-100,000. Then, on the eve of the War of Independence, Haganah consisted of 46,000 combatants."³⁴

Irgun, another Jewish para-military organization, possessed much lesser military power than Haganah, even though Irgun's terrorist activities against the British were the most substantial during the insurgency in comparison with other three Jewish paramilitary groups. While Haganah was succumbed to the Labor Zionism's left-oriented influence, Irgun followed a right-leaning orientation in his legacy which was a revisionist stamp on Zionism of its political leader Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky. From a military angle, it was David Raziel. Menachem Begin, future Prime Minister of Israel, became Irgun commander after Jabotinsky's death. Begin symbolized a true wing of resistance opposing the British, and thus representing one of main persons fighting for freedom. Irgun was founded in 1937 and consisted predominantly of members of Beitar, a youth movement, meaning mostly non-Labor Jews. The ideological inspiration may be seen in Pilsudski's Poland and other national emancipation or resistance movements such as Mazzini's Young Italy, the anti-Nazi movement in France, the *Maquis*, or the Irish and Greek rebellious groups.³⁵

The crucial aspect that differentiates Irgun from Haganah is a strong willingness to fight and carry out the attacks. Main objective of the group illustrates that: "[they] wanted a military organization that would have initiated attacks on both Arab and British targets."³⁶ Menachem Begin noted in one interview that "Irgun resumed warfare with 338 members, but during the war of liberation, the numbers grew and reached thousands."³⁷

According to the evidence of Ben-Yehuda, Zadka or Charter, the estimated size of Irgun's membership varied from 300 at the beginning to 600 men and women, of whom only 200 were combat fighters in early 1944, respectively, about the 1,500 combatants in 1945.³⁸ J. Bowyer Bell characterized Irgun members as "part-time insurgents leading

³³ Since this time was established e.g., *Hish* – Field Combat Corps, *Chim* – Home Guard, *Gadna* – Youth Corps, *Palmach* – Hagana Mobile Striking Forces, *Shai* – Hagana's National Information Service.

³⁴ BAUER, ref. 28, p. 183.

³⁵ KAPLAN, Eran. *The Jewish Radical Right*. Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 2005, p. 9.; ZADKA, ref. 11, p. 22. For Israeli revisionism see also WEITZ, Yechiam. The Revisionist Movement and Democracy. *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 2011, Vol. 10, No.2, pp. 185–204.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁷ Begin's interview in ZADKA, ref. 11, p. 196.

³⁸ BEN-YEHUDA, Nachman. Conflict resolution in an underground group: The Shamir-Giladi Clash. *Terrorism*, 1989, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 202. CHARTERS, ref. 32, p. 46.

secret life from parents, friends, and children.”³⁹ The tactics, methods and operations by Irgun grew from four sources: surprise factor, duration and the withdrawal of the operation, intelligence information gathering and providing different military methods.⁴⁰ From this point of view, Irgun represented a “new form of guerilla organization – cross between a large terrorist group and small army (...) made its strongest impact through ‘hit and run’ activities.”⁴¹ Despite the fact that Irgun’s terrorist activities plotting against the British were coming from all of the three Jewish paramilitary groups, shortly after the Irgun’s genesis, there was no anti-British agenda as such.

The last paramilitary organization, Lehi, nicknamed ‘Stern gang’ by the British, was the smallest, though the most radical operating unit in Palestine. As Shlomo Shpiro claimed in his study, for Avraham Stern, the main figure of Lehi⁴², was the “armed struggle the only natural way to achieve independence and national liberation.”⁴³ Stern linked the history of Jewish wars and revolts essentially to religious elements and he saw the Jewish nation as a “unique creation with a special role to history.”⁴⁴ The Stern gang, consisting of 200 members approximately, did not share the same opinion about cooperation with the British against Nazi Germany.⁴⁵ Subsequently, owing to a dispute with Commander Razieli, the gang seceded from Irgun in 1940. The original name National Military Organization in Israel was transformed to Lehi in September 1940. Afterwards, Stern and his gang called themselves terrorists and they openly emphasized and justified the violent practice as a legitimate instrument to free the Jewish nation.⁴⁶ Nazi Germany or fascist Italy had been then perceived as a possible ally whose power could have helped the Jews in their fight against the British oppression. As the only organization in liberation fights, Lehi employed a religious ethos through mixed Stern’s religious-philosophical approach. After becoming the commander-in-chief, Stern issued the first ideological manifesto of Lehi fighters, the *18 Principles of Rebirth*. Stern stressed, besides other issues, the Jewish eternal right to the Palestinian land or even mentioned the creation of the “third Jewish Temple.”⁴⁷ Lehi specified this issue as a secular motif with respect to the terrorist attacks committed by Haganah and Irgun. Ben-Yehuda notes that

³⁹ BELL, B. John. *Terror Out of Zion: Fight for Israeli Independence 1929-1949* New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009, p. 109.

⁴⁰ ZADKA, ref. 11, p. 65.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴² Yitzhak Shamir, Boaz Evron, Binyamin Zeroni, Yitzhak Tzelnik, Avraham Vilenchik, Eliyahu Giladi were other later well-known commanders or members of Lehi.

⁴³ SHPIRO, ref. 11, pp. 609-610.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ BEN-YEHUDA, ref. 38, p. 203.

⁴⁶ BEN-YEHUDA, Nachman. *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Wisconsin: Wisconsin Uni Press, 1995, p. 322. ROSENFELD, Jean. *Terrorism, Identity, and Legitimacy: The Four Waves Theory and Political Violence*. London: Routledge, 2011, p. 161.

⁴⁷ BEN-YEHUDA, ref. 38, p. 203.

Lehi had transformed into a “small, unique type of organization, almost a sect” after departing from Irgun.⁴⁸

As David Charters mentions correctly “the Jewish underground was divided on the issues of methods and legitimacy of violent rebellion. These divisions were reflected in the different organizational structures, strategies, and tactics of the three ‘illegal armies’ (...) these different approaches to rebellion exerted a significant influence on the course of the insurgency.”⁴⁹

3 METHODS OF JEWISH INSURGENCY AGAINST BRITISH 1939-1945

Yishuv and Jewish leaders were in a state of permanent conflict with the British administration over many cases since the White Paper ratification and the beginning of the Second World War. Except for the Jewish land purchase, the reason was rooted mainly in the issues related to the (a) Jewish rights to immigrate to Palestine (b) acquisition, import and storage of arms by Jews (c) the training of Jewish self-defense forces.⁵⁰ With the outbreak of the Second World War, the Jewish separatist groups had dramatically changed and radicalized their position towards the British administration.

Haganah was unwilling to cooperate with Irgun and Lehi in their military actions against the British even after the plans to annihilate the Jews were revealed. However, Haganah's greatest power was concentrated in the Palmach troops that were helping the British during the Second World War. Consequently, it was the most striking unit fighting against the British, and moreover, they even fought against the members of Irgun and Lehi to keep a pragmatically beneficial relationship with the British. Under the patronage of the Jewish Agency, Haganah concentrated on fighting against the British after the White Paper had been published aiming to carry out illegal Jewish immigration operations.

Organization contributed to the growth of the Jewish population in Palestine to save the European Jewry and to increase the Jewish population and protect this population during the settlement activities in the Palestinian territory.⁵¹ Haganah's attacks were frequently aimed at various military targets of the British administration, for instance, the “roads and bridges, patrol boats and naval vessels, police stations, radar stations and airfields.”⁵² Sabotage against the *Patria* ship in 1940 is the best known Haganah's action. *Patria* was tasked with deporting 1,800 Jews from Palestine to Mauritius. Even though the initial plan was to prevent the ship from leaving the Port of Haifa, Haganah planted

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ CHARTERS, ref. 32, p. 41.

⁵⁰ RABINOVICH, I. – REINHARZ, J. (eds.), ref. 15, pp. 48-53; HOFFMAN ref. 11, p. 260.

⁵¹ CHARTERS, ref. 32, p. 45.

⁵² Ibid., p. 45.

a bomb causing a mass killing of more than 260 people, 170 were wounded, and the ship sank.⁵³

After the outbreak of the war, Irgun under Jabotinsky's leadership forced some members to leave the organization and return to Haganah or join more radical Lehi. Irgun's members were helping the British in fighting against the Nazis not only after Jabotinsky's death but until the official declaration of the open rebellion of Irgun against the British. This was announced by the new commander-in-chief Menachem Begin⁵⁴ on February 1, 1944, since he did not wish to accept Haganah's passive attitude anymore, nor the consequences resulting from the acceptance of the White paper. One of Irgun's initial attacks on immigration offices in Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem on February 12, 1944, was an embodiment of this attitude. Number of similar actions against the British administration occurred throughout 1944: assaults on the Inland revenue offices in Tel Aviv on February 27, the bomb attacks on Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) centers in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa on March 23.⁵⁵ Although there were not many casualties in these assaults, they were of a great symbolic value. Quoting Begin: "we would not tolerate an office which kept Jews out of Palestine at the time when our brothers were being dragged to death in Europe".⁵⁶

A far more extremist mode of attacks against the British appeared among the representatives of Lehi, the smallest and most radical group. As Brenner wrote: "this very small organization could not hope to achieve its objectives (...) the Lehi's strategy contributed to the deterioration of the security situation in Palestine, to what one author called the 'dialectic of repression, resistance, terror and reprisal'."⁵⁷ Stern's vision, known as the 'individual terrorism', had been based on the fact that the "assassination of key individuals was supposed to bring down the whole government structure."⁵⁸ The 1944 terrorist attacks committed by members of Lehi on the British military and civilian services were financed through to bank robberies especially.⁵⁹ The most serious action took place on November 6 when they murdered Lord Moyne in Cairo, Egypt, who had served as the British Minister of State in the Middle East.⁶⁰ A resolute answer from the British came in cooperation with Haganah.

Joint effort of Haganah and the British against a growing number of terrorist actions represents so-called *The Saison* ⁶¹, the period between November 1944 to March 1945.

⁵³ BAUER, Yehuda, *From Diplomacy to Resistance: A History of Jewish Palestine*. Varda Books, 2001, pp.108-109.

⁵⁴ ZADKA, ref. 11, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 191.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁷ BRENNER, Y. S. The Stern Gang, 1940-48. *Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 2, No. 1, 1965, p. 20.

⁵⁸ CHARTERS, ref. 32, p. 51.

⁵⁹ BEN-YEHUDA, ref. 38, p. 203.

⁶⁰ Assassination is carrying out to Lehi members Eliyahu Hakim and Eliyahu Bet-Zuri. For detailed info see e.g., PEDAHZUR, Ami – PERLIGER, Arie. *Jewish Terrorism in Israel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, pp. 18-22.

⁶¹ Also mean as a 'Hunting season'.

Yishuv, led by Ben Gurion, implemented a new policy approach against Irgun and Lehi. It consisted of four main aspects: expel any supporter of those gangs; deprive them of any shelter or hiding places; resist their threats and intimidation; inform the authorities about their whereabouts.⁶² The British administration remarked in the end of this action in March 1945 however: "(...) unfortunately, the Jewish Agency's lists of so-called terrorists continues to include numerous people who have no terror connections, but politically speaking are undesirable to the Jewish Agency".⁶³ By the end of *Saison*, Haganah and the British had arrested a total of "830 suspects, of whom 337 have been located and detained so far. Of these, 241 are being held under the Emergency Regulations."⁶⁴ Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention that the final say of the commander-in-chief Begin not to intervene in case of Haganah and thus not to employ violent actions after member of Irgun and Lehi had been captured, helped the troops of Palmach and Shair in their operations.⁶⁵

In the context of following events, the Jewish insurgency in Palestine was influenced by domestic development in Britain, the end of the war in 1945, and worsened relations between the British and Jewish leadership. The victory of Labor Party and the fact that Ernest Bevin, one of the great nemeses for the Jews⁶⁶ became the Minister of Foreign Affairs, made the relations between Great Britain and the Jewish leader in *Yishuv* even worse, especially when Bevin questioned the Jewish claims about their national homeland based on the Balfour declaration.

4 JEWISH INSURGENCY AGAINST THE BRITISH IN 1945-1947: FROM THE JEWISH RESISTANCE MOVEMENT TO ITS DISSOLUTION

Development discussed above brought certain level of disillusionment among the *Yishuv* leaders, so they rather accelerated negotiations on creating so-called Jewish Resistance Movement (JRM). As Zadka clarified, "it was the first time that *Yishuv* leadership had been prepared to take up arms."⁶⁷ The Jewish elite found itself in a paradoxical situation. While a year before, representatives of Haganah had assisted the British in capturing Irgun and Lehi leaders, for this moment Haganah's commanders such as Sneh and Gilali requested further cooperation with Begin's Irgun and Stern's followers from Lehi. Representatives of all the three paramilitary groups operating in Mandatory Palestine finally agreed to coordinate their actions on the basis of separate guerilla activities,

⁶² ZADKA, ref. 11, p. 54.

⁶³ LAPIDOT, Yehuda. The Hunting Season. *Jewish Virtual Library*. Available from: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-ldquo-hunting-season-rdquo>. Accessed December 15, 2021.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ BAUER, ref. 53, p. 333.

⁶⁶ SEGEV, ref. 11, p. 483.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 57. See also YAHIEL, ref. 11, p. 8.

excluding confiscations of arms and money.⁶⁸ Actions were subject to mutual approvals, and every organization had its leader in the command board: Yitzhak Sadeh (Palmach), Yaakov Eliav (Lehi), and Eitan Livni (Irgun).

Despite the fact that Haganah joined fighting against the British for the first time, the strategy accepted by the leaders of Haganah with the Jewish Agency, known as *constructive warfare* “was supposed to satisfy both the militant elements in the Haganah and the Zionist movement, who wanted to take action against the British, and the moderates, who were opposed in principle to the use of terrorism.”⁶⁹ Moreover, “Haganah and the Palmach were directly involved in eight military operations, meanwhile The Irgun and the Lehi together carried out more than 30 during the same period.”⁷⁰ On June 16, the JRM, led by the Haganah forces, launched attacks on 11 bridges in the country in order to block the British troops from entering the area. This action became known as the Night of Bridges or Operation Markolet and created two critical problems. First, an escalation of tensions among the fighting groups, and secondly, it forecast the breakdown of the JRM because Haganah and the representatives in *Yishuv*, similarly as the World Zionist Organization reflected the success of Anglo-American Commission that allowed 100,000 Holocaust survivors to move to Palestine.

Operation Agatha, also known as Black Sabbath, was the British reaction following the coordinated violence. Meantime, the British forces compromised of 17,000 soldiers captured around 2,700 members of JRM. Subsequently, this step paralyzed next activities because a vast majority of members were of Haganah origin or former Palmach troop fighters.⁷¹ British attack against the JRM and *Yishuv* leaders was unprecedented. Counterattack from Irgun and other organizations brought the most violent incident of the Jewish Insurgency in the entire existence of the Mandate of Palestine. This took place at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem on July 26 which was selected because it used to be the headquarters of the British administration for Palestine.⁷²

While members of Haganah and representatives of *Yishuv* accepted the UN's endeavors to solve the situation in Palestine after the UNSCOP⁷³ was formed, and thus they and tried to eliminate Irgun and Lehi's operations, the Jewish resistance continued even after this dissolution. Open fire actions did not cease, and furthermore, their resistance crossed the borders after an attack on the British embassy in Rome. The peak of violence came in 1947 when the member of Irgun took part in liberating fellow combatants in the Acre Prison Break. Both Irgun and Lehi kept bomb attacks as the main instrument for fighting against the British. These attacks then occurred in public areas, streets, and cafés and even in front of the Damascus gate.⁷⁴ Shortly before the British has left Pa-

⁶⁸ ZADKA, ref. 11, p. 59.

⁶⁹ CHARTERS, ref. 32, p. 44.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 48.

⁷¹ PEDAHzUR–PERLIGER, ref. 61, pp. 23-24.

⁷² YAHIEL, ref. 11, p. 10; ZADKA, ref. 11, chapter 5, pp. 86-100.

⁷³ United Nation Special Committee on Palestine.

⁷⁴ For detail list of attacks by Jewish paramilitary forces see Appendix 3 in CHARTERS, ref. 32, pp. 182-196.

lestine and the UN decided and recommended that two independent states would be created, members of Lehi still tried to kill higher British representatives but failed. The letter bomb sent to British Major Roy Faran was opened by his brother, who was killed instead of him.⁷⁵

CONCLUSION: OUTCOMES OF JEWISH INSURGENCY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STATE OF ISRAEL

The Jewish Insurgency campaign of which it had aimed to form a new state in the territory of Palestine represent a par excellence example of successful guerilla fighting in a history. Jewish fights for liberation against the British had to leave the area after the pressure from Jewish paramilitary groups, and it even forecast the decline of the British Empire in the Suez crisis a couple years later.

To summarize the Jewish rebellion, it is necessary to illustrate some data concerning the Jewish Insurgency in some data findings. In this period, when the Second World War was nearly over, at least 363 documented instances of violence took place (17.2 attacks per month). The most violent phase lasted from June 1946 to July 1947.⁷⁶ Operations in the name of the Jewish resistance appeared throughout the territory of Palestine, and among the most frequent tactics of this guerilla fight, there were mostly mining incidents (119), bombings (87) in minor raids and mortar attacks (54), shooting incidents (31) or assassinations (21). Predominantly, the assault operations were directed at Security Forces (212), or eventually logistic areas, such as railways (61) and oil refinery (12).⁷⁷ As demonstrated by the findings of the High Commissioner to the British Embassy, which Charters presented in his study, the violent period between August 1945 and August 1947 also meant 616 British casualties, out of which 141 were killed, 475 were wounded, whereas “just” 40 Jewish insurgents were killed and 23 were wounded.⁷⁸

The era of liberation fighting against the British left its legacy to the State of Israel in several ways. To consider implications for Israeli politics, despite the huge Irgun's impact on expelling the British, it was leftist Yishuv representatives led by Ben Gurion, and Haganah who dominated Israeli politics after the 1948, and Begin's Likud took power just in 1977. However, since this time, the revisionist vision of Zionism, led by Likud and politicians like M. Begin, Y. Shamir, or B. Netanyahu, has dominated Israeli politics. These politicians favored and enforced Jabotinsky's vision of *Eretz Israel* undermining any attempts to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, Begin, a leading figure of the anti-British underwent a metamorphosis into a “peacemaker” and was honored Nobel

⁷⁵ CESARANI, David. *Major Farran's Hat: Murder, Scandal and Britain's War against Jewish Terrorism 1945–1948*. London: Vintage Books, 2010.

⁷⁶ CHARTERS, ref. 32, p. 196.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 197–198.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 205.

Peace Prize for so-called “cold peace” with Egypt, or Y. Shamir, a former Lehi commander, served as Prime Minister during the Madrid peace conference, held in 1991. Finally, Jewish fight for liberation and against Arabs inspired also a several extremist activities such as *Gush Emunim*’s settlement actions based on Rabbi Kahane’s ideology, or the incidents at the Cave of Patriarchs massacre in Hebron committed by Baruch Goldstein, Kahane’s sympathizer, or Yigal Amir’s **assassination** on Prime Minister Rabin, also inspired by radical Jewish religious elements.

G. Aran and R. Hassner reflected figures of Jewish political violence between 1932 and 1977 and compared them with the period of 1978 and 2008. Between 1932-1977, there were overall 150 recorded incidents, and a vast majority of these cases were part of the national liberation struggle in *Yishuv*. They were represented by the Zionist underground movements in Palestine against the British namely, but also against the Arabs. Thus, secular terrorism had prevailed in that period. In the second period, after the 1977, from out of 170 terrorist attacks only 3 per cent accounted for secular terrorism. An increase appeared in the Jewish religious terrorism.⁷⁹ The Jewish guerrilla fighting, especially the Irgun’s terrorist campaign embarked “an evolution and development of modern, contemporary terrorism”⁸⁰ because the ability of Irgun mobilized tendencies of sympathy and support for Jewish statehood across the world, especially in places where the Jewish diaspora was settled.

Finally, we would like to highlight two closing thoughts yet. First, in the Czechoslovak context, not only the Czechoslovak weapons delivered to Israel have helped to newly established state to survive, but it is necessary to emphasize that also Jews born in the present-day territory of the Czech and Slovak Republics contributed significantly to Jewish guerilla warfare. There is a well-known Hugo Marom’s story; however, there are a few overlooked stories of the two important figures, Yaakov Weiss, an Irgun member born in Nové Zámky, and Mordechai Schwarcz, Palestine Police Forces and Haganah member, born in Komárno. Both were executed in Acre prison at different times; Schwarz in 1938, Weiss in 1947 after the Irgun’s operation, Acre prison break, and both became members of *Olei Hagardom*⁸¹, a group of Irgun and Lehi’s fighters who are broadly commemorated in Israel as national heroes for their pre-state military activities in *Yishuv*.⁸²

Second, we consider that some historical parallels from the Jewish guerilla campaign against the British Mandate (but with different interpretations) could be seen after the

⁷⁹ ARAN, Gideon – HASSNER, Ron. Religious Violence in Judaism: Past and Present. *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Vol. 25, No. 3, 2013, p. 357.

⁸⁰ HOFFMAN, ref. 11, p. 267.

⁸¹ Originally a group of 12 Irgun and Lehi’s members (Mordechai Alkahi, Moshe Barazani, Shlomo Ben-Yosef, Eliyahu Bet-Zuri, Dov Gruner, Yehiel Dresner, Eliezer Kashani, Avshalom Haviv, Meir Feinstein, Meir Nakar, Eliyahu Hakim, Yaakov Weiss) which were expanded about the four others (Eli Cohen, Mordechai Schwarcz, Yosef Lishansky, Naaman Belkind) after the former Irgun commander, Menachem Begin, became a Prime minister of the State of Israel.

⁸² see SHELEG, Jair. The Good Jailer. *Haaretz*. Available from: <https://www.haaretz.com/2007-04-07/ty-article/the-good-jailer/0000017f-e225-d75c-a7ff-feaddde60000>. Accessed August 10, 2022; see also LAPIDOT, Yehuda. Yaakov Weiss. *Etzel.org.il*, Available from: <https://etzel.org.il/english/people/weiss.htm>. Accessed August 10, 2022.

founding of the State of Israel during Cold War, or later in the First and Second Intifada, respectively it should be seen in current Israeli's security challenges related to the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon, and Syria after the Arab Spring uprisings. Israel has recently experienced a similar situation as the British when serving as the governing authority of Mandatory Palestine. Thus, Israel has to face a constant rise of conflicts and attacks from the Palestinians, who are fighting against the occupation forces of Israel, in the same manner as Haganah, Irgun, and Lehi had fought against the British in Mandatory Palestine.

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Authors: ***Ľubomír Zvada**, born 1989, is finishing his PhD. at the Department of Politics and European Studies at the Faculty of Arts of the Palacký University in Olomouc. His dissertation thesis deals with role theory and Israeli foreign policy. The author's academic interests concern not only a foreign policy analysis (FPA), theory of international relations, Zionism, Israel, and the Middle East, but also the contemporary history and the current politics of East Central Europe. During his studies, he visited universities in Israel (Hebrew University in Jerusalem, University of Haifa) and Poland (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Białystok University of Technology).*

***Prof. Jiří Lach, M.A., PhD**, born 1971, is a professor at the Department of Politics and European Studies at the Faculty of Arts of the Palacký University in Olomouc. His research interest is relatively broad and covers topics from historiography to various aspects of international relations. J. Lach's recent teaching and research interest focuses also on problems of violence and genocide and persistence of nationalist myth in contemporary politics. J. Lach's foreign academic and research experience includes besides long-term stays in the USA (United States Military Academy West Point), Germany (Friedrich-Schiller University Jena), and many other stays in Great Britain, Taiwan, or Israel.*

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