Routledge Studies in Second World War History

JERUSALEM IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Daphna Sharfman

Jerusalem in the Second World War

This book is the first to present the unique story of the city of Jerusalem during the events of the Second World War and how it played a unique role in both the military and civilian aspects of the war.

Whilst Jerusalem is usually known for topics such as religion, archaeology, or the politics of the Israeli–Arab conflict, this volume provides an in-depth analysis of this exceptional and temporary situation in Jerusalem, offering a perspective that is different from the usual political-strategic-military analysis. Although battles were raging in the nearby countries of Syria and Lebanon, and the war in Egypt and the Western Desert, the people who came to Jerusalem, as well as those who lived there, had different agendas and perspectives. Some were spies and intelligence officers, others were exiles or refugee immigrants from Europe who managed at the last moment to escape Nazi persecution. Journalists and writers described life in the city at this time. All were probably conscious of the fact that when the war came to an end, local rivalry and mounting conflict would take the centre stage again. This was a time of a special, magical drawn-out moment that may shed light on an alternative, more peaceful, kind of Jerusalem that unfortunately was not to be.

This volume seeks to find an alternative approach and to contribute to the development of insightful research into life in an unordinary city in an unordinary situation. It will be of value to those interested in military history and the history of the Middle East.

Dr. Daphna Sharfman is the author of books and articles in the fields of human rights, human rights and foreign policy, gender studies, and the British mandate in Palestine. Publications include *Palestine in the Second World War: Strategic Plans and Political Dilemmas – the Emergence of a New Middle East* (2014), *Refugees, Human Rights and Realpolitic* (2019) and *Clandestine Immigration from Italy 1945–1948* (Hebrew) (2020).

Routledge Studies in Second World War History

The Second World War remains today the most seismic political event of the past hundred years, an unimaginable upheaval that impacted upon every country on earth and is fully ingrained in the consciousness of the world's citizens. Traditional narratives of the conflict are entrenched to such a degree that new research takes on an ever important role in helping us make sense of World War II. Aiming to bring to light the results of new archival research and exploring notions of memory, propaganda, genocide, empire and culture, Routledge Studies in Second World War History sheds new light on the events and legacy of global war.

Recent titles in this series

Warlord Hitler
With Reference to the Campaign in Southern Russia in 1942
Alan Donohue

Escaping Nazi Europe
Understanding the Experiences of Belgian Soldiers and Civilians in World War II
Bernard Wilkin and Bob Moore

Memories of the Second World War in Neutral Europe, 1945–2023
Edited by Manuel Bragança and Peter Tame

Evacuee Encounters on the Soviet Home Front During the Second World War
Natalie Belsky

Jerusalem in the Second World War
Daphna Sharfman

For more information about this series, please visit: https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Studies-in-Second-World-War-History/book-series/WWII

Jerusalem in the Second World War

Daphna Sharfman

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2024
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-032-01048-9 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-01757-0 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-17985-6 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003179856

Typeset in Sabon
by MPS Limited, Dehradun

Contents

Map

Figures

Preface
Jerusalem in the Second World War

During the Second World War, Jerusalem was in the centre of events in the Middle East, but not directly involved in the war. The city turned into an island of refuge, and we have here the opportunity to view Jerusalem from a very different perspective.

We wish to provide a comprehensive picture of many sides of life in wartime Jerusalem, as seen by British, Arabs, and Jews, and also aim to focus on the development of the exceptional social and cultural life of the three communities living in the city on what was a borrowed time.

Jerusalem was playing a unique role in both the military and civilian aspects. While battles were raging in the Middle East, the people who came to Jerusalem, as well as those who lived there, had various agendas and viewpoints. Some were intelligence officers and spies, others were royal exiles, and many were refugee immigrants from Europe who managed at the last moment to escape Nazi persecution. Thousands of Allied soldiers arrived on leave from the fighting, visiting a city that was living in peace. Journalists and authors described life in Jerusalem at that time, probably conscious of the fact that when the war came to an end, local rivalry and mounting conflict would again be paramount. This was a place and a time termed as 'never never land', and this era represents a special, magical drawn-out moment that may shed light on an alternative, more peaceful, kind of Jerusalem.

This book includes five parts that aim to display the comprehensive view of Jerusalem at war – starting from the strategic and political background in Palestine, and followed by the daily war developments like civil defence, rationing and censorship, the German Templers community, intelligence organisations and spies, radio broadcasts, and propaganda. The vibrant social and cultural life in the city described as experienced by locals and visitors, the planning of New Jerusalem and its neighbourhoods shows an important aspect of Jerusalem people's lives and hopes for the future. The analysis of the Arab leadership sheds light on Jerusalem Arab society and the political events in the war period. The experiences and artworks of writers and poets who lived in Jerusalem during these exceptional days can augment the reader's perspective of historical times. And, finally, a short

review of dramatic events in Jerusalem and Palestine from the end of the war until the termination of the British Mandate contributes an added insight to the city's history.

Chapter Abstracts

Part 1 Introduction and background

1. The Second World War: The strategic situation in Palestine and military operations in the Middle East (1939–1945). The analysis of the major developments in Palestine and the region: The British invasion of Lebanon and Syria, the campaign in Iraq, and primarily the war in the Western Desert and the danger of German invasion to Palestine. The role of Palestine: its strategic assets, enlistment to the British army and clandestine British-Jewish cooperation.
2. Political background: The Jewish–Arab conflict and the British government. By 1939, the conflict between the British and the Jewish community was intensified following the publication of the British government's White Paper on 17 May 1939. In the first years of the war, the grave situation and the danger to Palestine led all sides to relative cooperation and the postponement of their political objectives. Nevertheless, the struggle over clandestine Jewish immigration and tragic events such as the sinking of the refugee ship *Struma* in the black sea brought to the fore a bitter British–Jewish conflict that intensified after the war.

Part 2 Living in wartime

3. Civil defence, rationing, and press censorship. Preparation for civil defence, economic measures and food rationing. Arab and Jewish press and British censorship. The Hebrew University in Jerusalem: science and war research.
4. Anxious days, 1941 and 1942. The German victories in the Western Desert threatened the British military position in Egypt and presented a grave danger to Palestine and especially to the Jewish community. The British final evacuation plans did not include the local population who was to stay and face the German occupation. By mid-1942 the Germans were planning a holocaust in Palestine.
5. The Templers in Palestine in the Second World War, The end of an era: The majority of the German Templers community in Jerusalem, as in the rest of Palestine, supported the Nazi regime and a part also joined the Nazi party. When the war broke out many were arrested, put in detention camps and later deported to Australia.
6. Spies and counterspies. Palestine at war was an opportune arena for several espionage organisations: The British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and the Special Operations Executive (SOE) were stationed in Jerusalem, and also the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS), all involved in various

operations in the Middle East. The stories of Paul Fackenheim and Asmahan reveal the intriguing human face of two very different spies.

7. The German–Arab parachuted mission, October 1944 (Operation Atlas). Operation Atlas was the landing of German and Arab paratroopers near Jericho in October 1944. The story of their mission, capture and interrogations is detailed here as presented in the British Intelligence files.
8. State control of radio and propaganda. The Palestine Broadcasting Service (PBS) was founded in 1936. It was part of the growing realisation of the radio role in modern society, and the importance of controlling and censoring the news broadcasts especially during the war. German and Italian propaganda reached the Arab population in Palestine and led the British to establish a special station broadcasting in Arabic-al Sharq al-Adna.

Part 3 Living in Jerusalem

9. Communities and social life. The British presence in Jerusalem strongly influenced the development of cultural and social life. It was greatly enhanced during the war when the city became a cosmopolitan centre hosting military, exiled royals and journalists. Two renowned hostesses symbolised the elite's social life – Katy Antonius and Anni Landau. Meanwhile, the Jewish Yishuv made efforts to host the stream of soldiers stationed, visiting or convalescing in Palestine.
10. Hotels, cafés, cinemas, and tourism. A detailed story of the daily activities in the city. Cafés and hotels such as the Palace Hotel, The King David Hotel, and YMCA. Wartime tourism that included mainly Allied soldiers also encouraged Arab and Jewish efforts to present to the visitors their historical-political points of view.
11. The New Jerusalem: A history of two neighbourhoods. The British view and aspirations of Jerusalem's urban planning. The story of two neighborhoods: Arab Talbiya and Jewish Rehavia as symbols of the new communities in the modern city.
12. The Arab leadership in the war: Prominent families and politics. Arab aristocratic families were living in Jerusalem for hundreds of years, and struggled among themselves over positions of power and prestige. Following the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt a considerable number of anti-British leaders left the country, primarily Haj Amin al Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem. The Nashashibi family and their Defence Party supported the war effort, but were viewed by the British as unpopular in the Arab community. Arab support of Italy and Germany went through several phases before and during the war.

Part 4 Writing on Jerusalem

13. Writers and poets: Seeing the city through their eyes. Authors and poets lived in or visited war-time Jerusalem, among them Olivia Manning, Arthur Koestler, Freya Stark, Amos Oz and Elsa Lasker Schüler. They described the city in their writing, giving a new viewpoint to historical events.

Part 5 History moves on

14. Jerusalem 1945–1948. The war ends in 1945, leading to the restored political and military struggle for Jerusalem and Palestine. The two rivalling communities hoped to create new political reality in Palestine. The Anglo-American Committee presented its report in April 1946, but the recommendations were not implemented. The situation continue to deteriorate as expressed especially by the bombing of the King David Hotel on 22 July 1946 with 91 dead. In 1947, the British government requested that the United Nations General Assembly make recommendations concerning the future government of Palestine. The General Assembly accepted a resolution calling for the partition of Palestine with Jerusalem a separate entity with special status. The ensuing Arab-Israeli war formed a new reality of a divided Jerusalem.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank primarily my friend and colleague Mr. Russell Harris, an author and scholar, for his advice and assistance. His extensive knowledge and expertise were very helpful to my research and writing.

Professor Ami Ayalon for his kind advice.
Mr. Ron Hasin – Training manager, King David Hotel.
Ms. Ilana Dayan, Office Director, Photography Department
Israel Government Press Office.
Ms. Sarit Erin Petersen, Publications Editor & Photo Archive Manager Division for Advancement and External Relations. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
Ms. Dikla Alon, Coordinator, Israeli Friends of The Hebrew University.
Division for Advancement and External Relations.
Mr. Ofer Tzemach, Head of the Hebrew University Central Archive.
The website British Mandate Jerusalemites Photo Library.

To the publishing house of Yad Ben-Zvi for the assistance in locating the copyright holders of the map of places of entertainment for British soldiers in Chapter 10. To the Jerusalem City Archive for their consent to the inclusion of the map.

Archives included in the research:
Israel State Archive
The Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem

The Ben-Gurion Archive and Library. Ben-Gurion University. Sede Boker Campus
The National Archives, Kew
The Middle East Centre Archive, St. Anthony's College, Oxford
The American State Department – FRUS. University of Wisconsin Digital Collections

Part 1

Introduction and background

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

1 The Second World War

The strategic situation in Palestine and military operations in the Middle East (1939–1945)

Britain's strategic policy regarding Palestine in the 1930s and during the war years aimed to continue the British rule that was viewed as indispensable for imperial defence. The mandatory government invested in the strategic construction of airfields in the region, the port at Haifa, and the oil pipeline from Kirkuk in Iraq to Haifa. Following the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, that led to a part withdrawal of British troops in Egypt, except in the area of the Suez Canal, the Chiefs of Staff attached great importance to the strategic military value of Palestine for the protection of air and sea routes and oil pipeline terminals. The Munich crisis of 1938 strengthened British resolve to retain control of the whole of Palestine.[1]

While the world crisis was developing, the first land reinforcements were sent from England in the spring of 1938. In case of war, Palestine's role would be to provide reserves and strategic depth for the defence of Egypt, Suez, and British interests throughout the Middle East. Palestine was the path for air communication to India, the overland route to Iraq, and a potential staging post for military reinforcement from India to Egypt. The existence of the Mediterranean terminus and refineries of the Iraqi oil pipeline in Haifa made its port, opened in 1933, a potential base for light naval forces.[2]

The strategic situation was rather challenging during the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt, when, in addition to the military uncertainties, the Foreign Office and some of its representatives in the region warned against a serious threat to British interests in the Arab countries unless they agreed to the Arab political demands.[3]

The strategic military developments and political uncertainties concerning the position of the Arab states in the coming war led to a new British approach in Palestine. The revised policy was published in the White Paper of 17 May 1939—severely limiting Jewish immigration and land purchase, and promising an independent Palestinian state within ten years—was viewed by both Arabs and Jews as a fundamental change in Britain's strategy for Palestine's future[4] (see Chapter 2).

DOI: 10.4324/9781003179856-2

War in Palestine

The High Commissioner of Palestine, Sir Harold MacMichael, reported that Britain's 3 September 1939 declaration of war on Germany had brought demonstrations of Arab support in the region. The Jews naturally declared cooperation with the Allies, 'laying aside the bitterness of their political difference with recent British policy'. MacMichael added a profound observation on the intricate Jewish state of mind:

> 'To them this war has a personal horror which the non-Jew cannot fully appreciate. In Palestine there lives the most concentrated Jewish community in the world; it has its links in all parts of the world. Thus, there are few Jews in Palestine into whose lives this war has not actually brought the tragedy of relations or friends suffering at the hands of the Nazis – in Poland, in Austria, in Moravia, and in Germany itself – treatment which they believe to have been intensified because they live in Palestine under British rule'.[5]

The Palestine Administration's course of action following the declaration of war included an effort to control supplies and regulate prices. MacMichael reported that the problem of supplies, and the government's wish to prevent profiteering and hoarders, had created 'for the first time in the history of Palestine since the Occupation' the common support of both Arab and Jewish public opinion.[6]

The war came to the Mediterranean when Italy joined Germany in fighting against Britain and France on 10 June 1940. The fall of France on 22 June 1940 marked a change in the strategic situation in the north of Palestine: on 3 July 1940, General Eugène Mittelhauser, commander of the French army, declared his loyalty to the Vichy government and a German–Italian armistice committee was sent to Beirut to supervise the French military.[7] The Chiefs of Staff's report presented to the War Cabinet shortly before the fall of France, entitled 'British Strategy in a Certain Eventuality', anticipated that Italy would join the war and thus close the Mediterranean to the British, except for the eastern end and, to a limited extent, the coast of North Africa; the only remaining British naval bases would be at Alexandria and Haifa. The report predicted a major setback to Britain's prestige in the region, 'which is likely to involve us in serious internal security problems in Egypt, Palestine and Iraq'.[8]

The first air raid on Palestine was on 15 July 1940. Five Italian aircraft that took off from Rhodes reached Haifa at 7 in the morning. Approaching from the southwest, the aircraft dropped more than 50 bombs on and near the Iraqi Petroleum Company installations, of which 25 fell in the target area, including six direct hits on oil tanks, setting three ablaze. A hit on the power station resulted in a temporary interruption to the city's electricity supply. Two days later, an Italian reconnaissance flight reported that 'Haifa was still burning'. Two Arab civilian were injured – one of them later died – and an American foreman was slightly injured. The Italian aircraft suffered no losses.[9]

The second raid was on the morning of 24 July, also aimed at the oil refineries and storage facilities. This raid was much more lethal: 28 Arab and 15 Jewish civilians, along with one British constable, were killed. Most of the casualties worked at the Shell petroleum installations, but civilians on the street were also hit.

The deadliest air raid of the war was on Tel Aviv, carried out at 3:15 p.m. on Monday, 9 September 1940. Aircraft dropped nearly four tons of bombs, targeting Jewish and Arab residential areas. Tel Aviv, unlike Haifa, did not have early warning sirens or anti-aircraft guns. One hundred and seventeen Jews, seven Arabs, and one Australian soldier were killed during the raid. Thousands of people took part in the funerals of the victims, shocked – at that early stage of the war – by the enemy's deliberate attack on civilians.[10] A month later some 87 men from the Haganah[11] were drafted, trained, and deployed around Haifa at anti-air batteries, as well as near the electricity plant at Naharaim and the factories of the Dead Sea chemical works. Another attack on Haifa on 21 September, set fire to an Admiralty oil tank containing 90,000 barrels of benzene. A few bombs fell on an Arab neighbourhood in eastern Haifa, destroying houses and shops, a mosque, and a Muslim cemetery – 40 Arab civilians were killed and 78 were wounded. The attack caused a temporary suspension of work at the oil refineries.[12] The following raid, on the morning of 26 September, again attacked the refineries and Haifa port; one Italian plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire, but managed to return to its base in Rhodes.[13]

The Iraqi campaign

On the night of 1–2 April 1941, an Iraqi army officers' group called the 'Golden Square', supported by Germany, mobilised their troops in a revolt and forced the resignation of Prime Minister Nuri al-Said. A National Defence government was proclaimed, headed by Rashid Ali al-Gaylani,[14] which deposed the regent Abd al-Ilah in favour of an aged relative of King Faisal II, Sharaf bin Rajeh from Hejaz.[15]

On 30 April, Iraqi commanders moved artillery and troops to the heights overlooking the British Royal Air Force (RAF) air base at Habbaniya, 50 miles west of Baghdad. The base was to be under siege for several days of fighting. The British War Cabinet decided on 4 May, to send a relief force ('Habforce') from Palestine, under the command of Major-General J. G. W. Clark of the British Tenth Armored Division, to the aid of the troops at Habbaniya – a distance of over 800 kilometres. Habbaniya was captured on 18 May by 'Kingcol' and British and Arab Legion forces arrived within a short distance from Baghdad on 30 May. Rashid Ali and his supporters, including the exiled Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, fled the country, and Prince Abd al-Ilah and some of his ministers returned to Baghdad on 1 June. On the same night, a pogrom (named the 'Farhud') took against the Jews of Baghdad – 179 people were killed and about 2,000 wounded, besides much damage to Jewish property.[16]

The Syria–Lebanon campaign

Reports received in April 1941 by British Intelligence, confirmed a concentration of German airborne forces in Greece and led to Britain's focus on Syria as a prospective target – a strategy further influenced by the Rashid Ali coup. The British government sent a note on 3 May to Marshal Henri-Philippe Petain's government, via the American ambassador in Vichy, in which it expressed its hope that France would not act beyond the armistice agreements. However, British Intelligence received information about the arrival of German planes in Syria on their way to Iraq, and Air Marshal Arthur Tedder warned that, apart from the threat to Egypt and the Suez Canal, overland communication from Palestine to Baghdad would also be in danger without effective air cover. On 14 May, the Cabinet Defence Committee authorised the bombing of German aircraft at Syrian airfields. General Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East Command, informed the War Cabinet on 22 May that he was moving reinforcements to Palestine in preparation for action against Syria and, on 25 May, sent an outline of his plan for the invasion, code-named 'Exporter', to be approved by the Defence Committee. The outline stated that the invasion force's small size was not planned to occupy the whole country, but could reach the Beirut-Rayaq-Damascus line.[17] Meanwhile, the Vichy government requested the evacuation from the Levant of German and Italian air force personnel and materiel returning from Iraq. Hitler agreed, and the units were ordered to depart the country, apart from a small liaison mission requested by the French that was also ordered to be withdrawn when the invasion began.[18]

On 8 June 1941, Allied forces (Australian, British, and Free French) invaded Syria in operation Exporter. General George Catroux, the representative of the Free French, who was nominated as Delegate-General after a dispute with the British, broadcast a proclamation promising the end of the mandatory regime with freedom and independence to be assured by the Allies, and justified the invasion as preventing the Levant from becoming a base of enemy offensives, even though it was much less valid at that time. The invading force was about 34,000 strong and confronted some 45,000 French and Syrian troops. The fighting took five weeks. Damascus fell on 21 June, and on 26 June, General Henry Dentz informed the Vichy government that his forces were unable to continue the fight.[19] On 8 July, Dentz began to negotiate for an armistice. British terms guaranteed the independence of the Levant states, complete amnesty for the Vichy authorities, and full liberty for the soldiers involved in the campaign, who were given the option of either joining the Allied forces or returning to France with their families. War materiel had to be handed over, along with the French warships, which would be returned after the war. The Vichy government resisted the British attempt to emancipate Syria and Lebanon at that time, and refused any negotiation with Generals de Gaulle and Catroux, describing both as

'traitors to their country'. The armistice agreement, reached by Britain and Vichy, was signed in Saint Jean d'Acre on 14 July 1941.[20]

The war in the desert and the defence of Palestine (1941–1942)

The desert war began when the Italian army in Libya invaded Egypt in mid-September 1940 and advanced 80 kilometres to Sidi Barrani. The British successful counteroffensive (operation 'compass') beginning on 7–8 December, had forced an Italian withdrawal from Egypt while British forces advanced into Libya, capturing Bardia on 5 January 1941 and Tobruk on 22 January. They reached Benghazi on 6 February – thus controlling the whole of Cyrenaica. Hitler moved to support the Italian army and in February 1941 sent the first German units to North Africa under the command of General Erwin Rommel. The British confident situation changed when General Wavell was ordered to send forces to the campaign in Greece. Rommel's forces captured Benghazi on 4 April; by 14 April, all British forces had been driven out of Libya, except for the besieged Tobruk. The war was again at the Egyptian border, and a closer threat to Palestine. Operation 'Battleaxe', the British counteroffensive of 15–17 June, failed, leading to Wavell's replacement as Commander-in-Chief Middle East by General Sir Claude Auchinleck.[21] Operation 'Crusader', launched on 18 November and concluded by the end of December, relieved the Axis siege of Tobruk and set the front line at Al Aghaila. After the Allies resisted Rommel's counterattack in January 1942, the battlefront was determined at the Gazala line, west of Tobruk, and remained stable from February to May 1942.[22]

The new detailed defence plan prepared in early 1942 and known as 'Palestine Final Fortress' or 'Defence of the Last Position Palestine', aimed to block all gateways to the coastal plain in preparation for the retreat of British forces from Syria in the face of attack by six German divisions. Six fresh battalion-size battle groups were to delay the German advance by raids, ambushes, and sabotage while the retreating forces regrouped in new, pre-prepared positions. The plan covered the north of Palestine from the Bet Shean Valley in the east, through the mountains around Nazareth in the centre, to Acre in the west. The retreat was planned along the main line held by one division and stretching from the Mount Carmel range to Jericho. The reserves included an armoured division and three artillery regiments based in Hadera, north of Tel Aviv; this division was to block gaps in the line and to counterattack the enemy forces brought to a halt by the main defence arrangements.[23]

Rommel's advance and the British withdrawal shifted Britain's defence strategy from preventing the Germans to reach Suez from the north to stopping German forces from moving eastwards towards Palestine and Syria. Auchinleck ordered General Henry Wilson, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of British forces in Palestine and Transjordan,[24] to plan the defence of southern Palestine and the Sinai Peninsula against a German attack from

Egypt. Wilson's plan was completed by the end of July, but the new commander General Sir Harold Alexander, who took over on 8 August 1942, was against strategies for any further retreat.[25]

On 26 May 1942, Rommel attacked the British defence system in the Ain ul-Gazala–Tobruk–Bir ul-Qubi–Bir Hakeim quadrilateral area, inflicting heavy losses on the Allies' armoured formations. On 17 June, Rommel's forces pushed the British further east and on 20 June attacked Tobruk, which surrendered the following day. Auchinleck decided to withdraw from Mersa Matruh (290 km west of Alexandria on the north coast of Egypt) and to establish his next defence line at El Alamein before 30 June. On 1 July, Rommel launched an attack on the Eighth Army. The first battle of El Alamein was fought from 1 to 27 July, and halted the German forces just over 100 kilometres from Alexandria. On 10 July Auchinleck reported to London that his forces 'had arrested the German advance to the [Nile] Delta', but further counterattacks had failed, and suggested that operations could be resumed by mid-September. The situation caused severe alarm in Egypt, and had a considerable effect on morale in Palestine.[26]

Following his visit to the front on 8 August, Churchill decided to replace Auchinleck as Commander-in-Chief Middle East with General Sir Harold Alexander as noted. The new commander of the Eighth Army was Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery, appointed after the death of the intended commander, Lieutenant-General William Gott, whose plane was shot down by the Germans on 7 August. Rommel's final attack on the British southern flank in the direction of the Alam ul-Halfa ridge was halted by 1 September as a result of fuel shortages and the ensuing German withdrawal lasted until 5 September. This battle, described as the 'last throw of the German forces in Africa', marked the turn of the war in the desert.[27]

The British assault was launched at 10:00 p.m. on 23 October; by 26 October, it managed to create a breach directly threatening the centre of the enemy communication. Montgomery paused the attack for two days and resumed it on the night of 28–29 October. The principal attack, on the night of 1–2 November, was delivered westwards. By 4 November, the battle of El Alamein had been concluded and the Axis defeat was decisive – less than a third of its original force managed to escape.[28]

The Palestine regiment

The War Office, in cooperation with the Colonial Office, prepared a comprehensive scheme to further the goal of raising a Palestine regiment in the hope of providing a response to both calls in Parliament and an American publicity campaign for a Jewish army. The proposed regiment was to consist of separate Jewish and Arab battalions, incorporating the companies of the Palestine Buffs with a common insignia.[29] The role of Palestinians in the army and the local defence and police services was discussed by the War Cabinet on 5 August 1942, at which was presented a joint memorandum by the Secretary

of State for War, Sir James Grigg, and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Cranborne. The ministers agreed that it would not be understood either in Britain or America if preparations were not now made to enable Palestinian Jews to defend their homes should the situation require it. There were two main sources of danger to Palestine – an invasion by the Axis powers and, in the event of a serious setback to the Allies' military position in the area, an Arab rebellion in Palestine involving attacks on Jewish settlements. The authors recognised the Palestinian Jews' demand to let them be armed as having political as well as military aspects, and warned against the extreme political Zionists who dominated the Jewish Agency. Lord Cranborne suggested that the new unit should engage in active combat rather than be employed, like the companies of the Buffs, on guard duties. However, the British military intended the regiment to fulfil its usual roles and argued that it would be inadvisable to raise false hopes in Zionist circles that their proposal for a Jewish fighting force was going to be accepted. The Cabinet decided that the announcement should state only that it was being created 'for general service in the Middle East'.[30] The Minister of State for War made the announcement in the House of Commons on the following day.[31]

Jewish units in the British army in Egypt, were instructed by the Haganah that in case of a British retreat from Egypt, they should try to reach Palestine, making every effort to bring as many weapons as possible. The danger of their capture by Axis forces became quite real after the fall of Tobruk, with German propaganda broadcasts falsely claiming that hundreds of Jewish soldiers had been taken prisoner. On the eve of the fall of Tobruk, 300 soldiers of the 601st Pioneers were evacuated by sea. It was later discovered that only a few medical personnel and some drivers from the 5MT Water-Tank Company, who were in the city at the time of its surrender, had actually been captured. There was grave concern, especially regarding the fate of the women soldiers and the local Jewish community, primarily those who were involved in Zionist activity and acquainted with the Jewish soldiers.[32] A group of Jewish women, who served as assistant nurses and ambulance drivers at the 64 Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) field hospitals in Alexandria, were offered evacuation to Sudan, but refused because, as one of them wrote in her diary: '[we] were needed and wanted to take part in the effort to hold the front line'.[33]

By July 1942, the Yishuv did not have any real operational defence programme; its plans for fortifying Mount Carmel, also referred to as 'Massada on the Carmel' suggested in March 1942, had not been executed.[34]

Clandestine cooperation

In May 1941 a Special Operations Executive (SOE) office was established in Jerusalem, in charge of Syria and Transjordan as well as Palestine, and under the command of Middle East headquarters in Cairo. By the summer, the SOE

was involved in preparations for a 'scorched earth' policy including sabotage of the oil installations in Haifa and the pipeline from Iraq, as well as plans drawn up in consultation with the Jewish Agency that concerned Jewish industry, such the power station in Naharaim or the potash works at the Dead Sea.[35]

The 'Palestinian Scheme'

The program started in the summer of 1941, when there emerged the danger of an Axis occupation of Palestine and Syria-led British Intelligence, to ask the Jewish Agency to establish a clandestine network of intelligence and radio transmitters. Moshe Dayan was to head the network, planned to comprise of independent cells, to collect and transmit information.[36] Each cell would include two wireless operators, a dispatcher to edit the information, transfer it to a coded message, and receive enquiries from the centre, and an agent responsible for a network of spies and informers. It would also include men who could assume an Arab identity and obtain information in Arab areas (an alternative proposal was to use men dressed in German uniforms). In autumn 1941, a three-month wireless course took place in Tel Aviv. An operations centre was established at Jerusalem, with four cells in Tel Aviv, Hadera, Haifa, and Kibbutz Maoz Haim near the River Jordan. This network existed until the danger of an Axis occupation was over, and the operation was officially closed by the British in early 1943.[37]

Rommel's victories strengthened British–Yishuv cooperation. In January 1942, Moshe Shertok (1984–1965) the first foreign minister and the second prime minister of Israel (1954–1955) head of the Jewish Agency Political Department, met the heads of the SOE in Cairo to discuss plans for a Palestine underground infrastructure. The first draft of the scheme, presented to the British on 20 January, and later amended as per SOE suggestions, proposed 'terrorist-style' operations by small groups, sabotaging major transportation junctions, and detailed plans to destroy vital posts after a British withdrawal. The Jewish Agency's Advisory Emergency Committee decided to use the Palmach (strike force), founded in May 1941, as an elite force to defend the Yishuv against Arab terrorists, and to defend the country against Axis invaders. In April 1942, the British initiated the training of 150 Palmach scouts in sabotage and sharpshooting skills, taught by British military instructors at a special camp in the woods of Kibbutz Mishmar Haemek. In March 1943, the programme was officially closed, but SOE cooperation continued with the training of three special Palmach units – the 'Arab platoon', the 'German platoon', and the 'Balkan platoon' – to assist British missions outside Palestine and in the Western Desert.[38]

The Haifa Interrogation Bureau

The Haifa Interrogation Bureau was established on 15 July 1940, following Italy's declaration of war. The Jewish Agency was asked by Colonel John

Teague, Secret Intelligent Service (SIS) head in Cairo, to assist in investigating refugees from enemy countries as well as some suspicious Jews who had been handed over to the British authorities. The Bureau was originally intended to operate for only a few months, but the British acknowledged the quality of its information and it continued to work until June 1944. During its four years of activity, 4,400 people were interrogated and 1,786 reports were prepared, along with 530 files on European targets. The Bureau's responsibility was expanded beyond the original mandate to include acquiring information on economic targets in Germany, Austria, and Italy, as well as intelligence on military, naval, air, and transport sites, and economic, political, and Jewish issues. Directives on these topics were received from the SIS, usually requesting information on strategic installations such as power stations, dams, depots, and industrial areas. Immigrant engineers who used to work in those facilities were able to supply a great deal of information, in some cases, providing photos or sketches, while information collected on transportation systems in the occupied countries was used to update British maps and target lists, and to verify data from other sources.[39] Towards the end of 1942, with news emerging of the extermination of European Jews, an investigation was undertaken into the problems faced by underground organisations, such as safe houses, documentation, and escape routes. A special bureau was established in April 1943, responsible for Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe, in order to provide the British with information vital for expanding contacts with partisans, secret agents, and resistance movements; to supply travel arrangements, documents, currency exchange, and merchandise price data; and, to prepare reports on conditions in countries such as Bulgaria and Hungary.[40]

The parachutists

On 15 January 1943, the head of MI9 office in Cairo, Lieutenant-Colonel Anthony Simmonds, signed an agreement with Reuven Zaslani (Shiloah), head of the Jewish Agency Intelligence Service (who later became the first Director of the Mossad in 1951) and Zeev Shind, head of the Mossad for Aliyah Bet (clandestine immigration) in Istanbul, for Jewish paratroopers from Palestine to parachute into occupied Europe in coordination with MI9. The mission proposed the dual task of smuggling Jews from Romania to Turkey and preparing hiding places for escaping British aircrew on their route from Europe via the Balkans to the safety of Turkey.[41] Twenty-six men and women were selected and sent on missions, of whom 12 were taken prisoner and 7 were executed. Those parachuted into Yugoslavia managed to rescue 124 British and American aircrew, and organised partisans and the local population to take the men to the Adriatic, and on to Italy.[42]

The British–Yishuv clandestine cooperation added much insight and knowledge of secret warfare to the Haganah and its organs: Shai (the information service), the Mossad for Aliyah Bet and the Palmach. The British

controlled operational planning and tactics, and their strategic implications. There was however a continuing conflict of views between the SOE and officials in Cairo and London, in addition to the suspicious attitude of the Palestine High Commissioner and his Administration. They were concerned, with some justification, that the Haganah was gaining experience and knowledge that would soon be used against the British.[43]

Abba Eban[44] a British–Jewish officer was nominated as Liaison Officer between SOE and the Jewish Agency for Palestine on Special Operations from February 1942 to April 1943. He wrote about his difficult assignment:

> Even in 1942–1943 my task of liaison was not easy. Almost every day one or another of our trainees would be arrested by the British police and charged with illegal possession of firearms. Word of this was flashed to me in Jerusalem, and off I would go into action, attempting to intimidate the civil police with an impressive array of documents (somewhat like modern credit cards) indicating that the defendants might be praised for their valor rather than condemned for crime.[45]

Notes

1 Gavriel Sheffer (1983) 'Principles of Pragmatism: A Reevaluation of British Policies Toward Palestine in the 1930s' (Hebrew). *Katedra* 29, 113–144.
2 Martin Kolinsky (1999) *Britain's War in the Middle East: Strategy and Diplomacy 1938–1942*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 66–68.
3 Lawrence Pratt (1988) 'The Strategic Context: British Policy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1936–1939'. In *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919–1939*, edited by Uriel Dann, pp. 12–26. New York and London: Holmes & Meier. The Arab Revolt was a nationalist uprising by Palestinian Arabs against the British administration of the Palestine Mandate. Their demands were independence and the end of the policy of Jewish immigration and land purchases.
4 *Palestine: Statement of Policy* (CMD 6019). London: HMSO, 1939.
5 Report of Sir Harold MacMichael to the Colonial Secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, 29 December 1939, FO 371/24563.
6 Ibid.
7 Yoav Gelber (1990) *Massada* (Hebrew). Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, pp. 15–19. Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*. p. 137.
8 British Strategy in a Certain Eventuality, report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, 25 May 1940, WP (40) 390, CAB 66/7/48. The authors emphasised the danger of fifth-column activities, described alien refugees as 'a most dangerous source of subversive activity', and recommended cutting to a minimum the number of refugees admitted to Britain.
9 Nir Arielli (2010) '"Haifa Is Still Burning": Italian, German and French Air Raids on Palestine During the Second World War'. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3, pp. 331–347.
10 *Davar*, 10 September 1940, Tel Aviv City Archive.
11 Haganah (Defence) was the main Zionist paramilitary organisation of the Jewish community (Yishuv) in Mandatory Palestine. Established in 1920 and was active until 1948, when it became the core of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

12 Arielli, "Haifa is Still Burning".
13 Ibid.
14 Iraqi lawyer and politician (1982–1965) who was prime minister of Iraq (1933, 1940–41), https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rashid-Ali-al-Gaylani.
15 George Kirk (1954) 'The Middle East in the War'. *Survey of International Affairs 1939–1946*. London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, pp. 65–68. Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, pp. 156–157.
16 Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, pp. 160–162; Geoffrey Warner (1974), *Iraq and Syria 1941*. London: Davis-Poynter, p. 117. British troops were not permitted to enter the city to restore order – the result, according to one of their officers, of instructions from the Foreign Office, apparently worried about the dignity of the regent 'if he were seen to be supported on arrival by British bayonets'. Warner quotes from the memories of Somerset de Chair (1944) *The Golden Carpet*. London: Faber & Faber, p. 118.
17 Warner, *Iraq and Syria 1941*, pp. 135–139.
18 Ibid., pp. 141–142. General Henry Dentz, Commander-in-Chief of the French Army of the Levant and High Commissioner of the Levant, took a last-moment step to hinder the Allied invasion of Syria by ordering Vichy aircraft to drop leaflets, written in French, over cities in Palestine on 6 June, denying British and Free French allegations that Syria was controlled by the German air force. Arielli, "Haifa Is Still Burning"
19 Warner, *Iraq and Syria 1941*, pp. 144–147.
20 Ibid., p. 154.
21 Ibid., pp. 67, 88, 139.
22 Gelber, *Massada*, p. 38.
23 Ibid., pp. 40–41. Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, pp. 198–200.
24 Wilson was made commander of the Ninth Army in Syria and Palestine in October 1941.
25 Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, p. 201; Gelber, *Massada*, p. 63.
26 Kirk, 'The Middle East in the War', pp. 215–220, quote on 220.
27 Ibid., pp. 221–224, quote of General Alexander, p. 224.
28 Ibid., pp. 225–227. Thousands of German and Italian prisoners from the desert campaign were detained at Latrun detention camp B in Palestine.
29 Michael J. Cohen (1979) *Palestine: Retreat From the Mandate*. London: Paul Elek, pp. 118–121.
30 Palestinians in the Forces and Local Defence and Police Services, joint memorandum by the Secretary of State for War and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1 August 1942, WP (42) 332, CAB 66/27/12.
31 Conclusions of a Meeting of the War Cabinet, 5 August 1942, WM (42), CAB 65/27/20. The Jewish Agency for Palestine was established in 1929 by the World Zionist Organization, provided for in article 4 of the League of Nations' Palestine Mandate. It served as the governing body of the Jewish Yishuv and its representative before the British mandate authorities.
32 Yoav Gelber (1979) *Jewish Palestinian Volunteering in the British Army During the Second World War*, vol. I: *Volunteering and Its Role in Zionist Policy 1939–1942* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, pp. 561–563. About half of the 10,000 Jewish soldiers in the British army, including 1,000 women, were stationed in Egypt. When danger approached, the soldiers took it upon themselves to help the Jewish community and suggested possible emigration, resistance, or the evacuation of refugees. The British agreed to permit young Jews in Egypt to join Jewish units of the British army on condition that the soldiers would not be discharged in Palestine and the campaign would not be made public to avoid complicating the political situation in Egypt.

33 Ibid., pp. 551–556.
34 Haviv Canaan (1974) *Two Hundred Days of Anxiety: Eretz Israel vs. Rommel's Army* (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Mol-Art, pp. 172–178. Gelber, *Massada*, p. 67.
35 Gelber, *Massada*, p. 42.
36 Moshe Dayan (1915–1981) was Chief of Staff and Minister of Defence of Israel.
37 Yehuda Slutsky (1973) *History of the Haganah,* vol. 3 (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Am Oved, p. 368.
38 Yoav Gelber (1992) *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis: The Intelligence Services of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine 1918–1947*, vol. 2 (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence, pp. 483–488. Stephen Russell Cox (2015) 'Britain and the Origin of Israeli Special Operations: SOE and PALMACH During the Second World War'. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 8, no. 1, pp. 60–78. He observed that 'To SOE the Jews were known as the "Friends" because they were the only community in the Middle East that the British believed could be trusted'. He noted that during the war SOE and the Zionists attempted to use one another for their own ends: while SOE wanted Jewish manpower for its post-occupational scheme, the Jewish Agency wanted to use the opportunity for training and obtain more weapons.
39 Eldad Harouvi (1992) *British Intelligence Cooperation With the Jewish Agency During the Second World War* (MA Thesis) (Hebrew). Haifa: University of Haifa, pp. 144–157.
40 Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*, pp. 460–463, 467–489. In 1943–44, the front office of the Haifa Interrogation Bureau was based in Istanbul. It was divided into two sections – the general section and the Jewish section – that interrogated refugees coming to Turkey from the Balkans in the hope of expediting the process and receiving new intelligence on events such as Allied bombing raids. Military information was passed on to British Intelligence and to SOE agents planning missions in the occupied countries. See also for example reports in the Central Zionist Archive S25/10631,3.12.1941 Memorandum on the present state of interrogation of new arrivals in Palestine and S.25/ 10757; 24.3.43 'Notes on interrogations (Guide)'.
41 Haggai Eshed (1988) *One-Man Mossad: Reuven Shiloah, Father of the Israeli Intelligence* (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Edanim, pp. 78–81.
42 Ibid., pp. 83–88.
43 Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis*, pp. 495–496. Reuven Zaslani report on 'Cooperation with the British secret services in the war against Germany and Italy. 27.11.44, Central Zionist Archive-S25/7902.
44 See Chapter 6.
45 Abba Eban (1977) *An Autobiography*. New York: Random House, pp. 41–45, quote on p. 45.

Bibliography

Arielli, Nir (2010) '"Haifa Is Still Burning": Italian, German and French Air Raids on Palestine During the Second World War'. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3, pp. 331–347.

Canaan, Haviv (1974) *Two Hundred Days of Anxiety: Eretz Israel vs. Rommel's Army* (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Mol-Art.

Cohen, Michael J (1979) *Palestine: Retreat From the Mandate*. London: Paul Elek.

Cox, Stephen Russell (2015) 'Britain and the Origin of Israeli Special Operations: SOE and PALMACH During the Second World War'. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 8, no. 1, pp. 60–78.