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**The Unintended Contribution: From the British Mandate to the Jewish State**

Before 1917, the Zionists, with Chaim Weizmann as their leader, could not be sure whether the idea of ‘national home’ for the Jewish people is going to be realized. Their hopes arose, in 1914, and the start of the World War, when the idea of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which was in possession of Palestine, had now become a reality.<sup>1</sup> Through the efforts of the Zionists, and increased support of their case, the idea of creating a ‘home’ for the Jewish people have been realized, and in 1917, Arthur Balfour informed Lord Rothschild, that “His Majesty’s government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet, by 1947, the situation in Palestine has become so tense, that a British General, Sir Barker, when leaving Palestine, “urinated on the soil of Palestine” to symbolize his “disgust,” and, perhaps, weakness and helplessness of the British in Palestine.<sup>3</sup> Just a year later after his ‘symbolic’ departure, the British have evacuated from Palestine, the Mandate ceased to exist, and the State of Israel has been created. Willingly or not, the British, thanks to the Balfour Declaration, and thirty years of their rule over Palestine have significantly helped to create the State of Israel. The British enabled the Jews to settle and organize in Palestine, and in the second half of the 1940s, because of the outcomes of the Second World War, the Jews, through their efforts, international support, and the weakness of the British, could establish the State of Israel.

When the Balfour Declaration was issued, the British could not predict the effects of their influence on Palestine. The British Mandate of Palestine was supposed to “terminate sooner or later.” The question, of who is going to “govern Palestine,” was open-ended for the increasing

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<sup>1</sup> Schneer, the Balfour Declaration, 249.

<sup>2</sup> the Balfour Declaration.

<sup>3</sup> Louis, The End of the Palestine Mandate, 14.

numbers of Jews coming to Palestine in hope of creating a ‘national home,’ and for the Arabs, who have portrayed the continued British rule, and the Balfour Declaration, as a betrayal of the agreements made between Hussein and McMahon.<sup>4</sup> The tension between the Arabs, the Jews, and the British has been increasing year by year. The situation within the Mandate, by the end of the 1930s, has been called a “deep-rooted” disease, and the British could not find the right solution to the Palestinian problem.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as the Jews were increasingly settling and organizing in Palestine, “self-confidence and political ambition” of the Jews were expected to grow.<sup>6</sup>

The British Mandate in Palestine has seen it as a “duty” to “facilitate Jewish immigration,” and although the immigration was limited, it allowed the Jewish community in Palestine to grow. Churchill’s Statement of Policy of 1922, claimed it is “necessary” for the Jewish community in Palestine to “increase its numbers by immigration.” Yet, the immigration has been restricted to follow the criterion of economic absorptive capacity, that throughout the years, proved to be an elastic tool to measure the allowance of Jewish Immigration, as the Jews were able “to enlarge” it by the influx of capital. The other regulations that the British implemented, proved to be ineffective as well. These limitations, such as the required amount of capital to enter Palestine, could be misused, whereas the illegal immigration, especially in the 1930s, was not prevented by the administration of the Mandate, which controlled only a “quarter” of the Jewish immigration.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Peel Report, 371.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 368

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, 371.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 290-300.

The Arabs, who with a “close and anxious concern” looked at Jewish immigration, developed a hostile attitude to the growth of the Jewish community in Palestine; they have revolted several times, in the hope to affect the British policy on immigration. The Arab longing for the independent state, and the fear of being “overwhelmed” and “dominated” by the Jews, caused many tensions during the British rule of Palestine.<sup>8</sup> The government, became a government of “arithmetic,” as culturally different Jews and Arabs, who had a different national identity, and different interests competed in any possible way to level the distribution of any goods to be proportionate to the share of the total population.<sup>9</sup> In the early 1920s, in 1929, and 1936, the Arabs, who could not represent their cause before the British as effectively as the Jews, used violence in the hope to stop the growth of the Jewish national home.<sup>10 11</sup> The British, who hoped for maintaining peace within the Mandate, allowed the Arab violence to change affect their policies, and after each Arab revolt, the British issued the so-called White Papers, which, to some extent, limited, or slowed down, the growth of the national home. Yet, the Arab pressure on the British did not stop the Jewish national home from growing.

The Jewish population in Palestine has been growing due to immigration, that although restricted by the British, who were pressured by the Arabs, provided a large influx of Jews to Palestine over the years. In 1922, the 84,000 Jews still have been only a small fraction of the Palestinian population compared to the 670,000 Arabs. Yet, the growth of the national home, economic crises, such as in Poland, and increasingly anti-semitic Europe of the 1930s, caused the

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 280.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 139.

<sup>10</sup> Hoffman, *Anonymous Soldiers*, 34-35.

<sup>11</sup> Peel Report, 105.

numbers of Jewish immigration to grow. After waves of heavy immigration of 1924-26, and 1933-36, when the Jewish population “nearly doubled,” by 1941, the Jewish population of Palestine grew to 474,000, reaching nearly 30% of the total population of Palestine.<sup>12</sup>

The largest numbers of Jewish immigrants came from Poland, and in lesser numbers from Germany, Russia, Rumania, and the United States. The majority of the Jewish immigrants, who entered Palestine were those, who possessed more than £1,000, those who had secured employment in Palestine, and those who were dependents of permanent residents of Palestine. A lot of new immigrants were highly qualified or brought a large quantity of capital to invest in the Jewish community.<sup>13</sup>

Palestine, as a whole, prospered due to the increased Jewish activity and their influx of capital, that was brought by the new immigrants.<sup>14</sup> Compared to the Arab communities, the Jews in Palestine were much more urban. Nearly 85 percent of the Jews in Palestine lived in the cities, while only 33 percent of the Arabs lived in urban areas, where the Jewish activity and prosperity were mostly visible.<sup>15</sup> Jewish cities, such as Tel-Aviv or Haifa, experienced rapid development under the British Mandate. Tel-Aviv was compared to Los Angeles, while Haifa was expected to “eventually hold a million Jews.”<sup>16</sup> Cultural activities in Tel-Aviv were compared to the great cities of Europe, yet culturally very different than the neighboring Arab towns, which have not been as prosperous. The cities, that were Jewish by the majority, such as Haifa or Jaffa have been

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<sup>12</sup> Canvas, Jewish Immigration Graph.

<sup>13</sup> Peel Report. 279-284.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, 129

<sup>15</sup> Nashif, Arab and Jewish Leadership, 118.

<sup>16</sup> Peel Report, 299.

far more prosperous than the “purely Arab towns,” such as Nablus, Hebron, or Gaza. Jewish immigration and influx of capital had “fructifying effect” on Palestine, and helped the Jews, as well as the Arabs, who benefited from industries and agriculture more than before.<sup>17</sup>

Over the years of the British rule in Palestine, the Jewish school system has promoted the idea of the national home. The 15th Article of the British Mandate, guaranteed to each community a right to “maintain its own schools” with its “own members” and a right to teach “in its own language.”<sup>18</sup> The Jewish school system, with the Hebrew University as its “apex,” although with virtually no funds from the government, was able to work effectively. The Hebrew University, with the “well-known” instructors, could be compared to the universities in Europe, and while it did not teach the ideals of the national home, such ideals, perhaps, were shared by its students anyways. The schools have focused on Jewish history, traditions, and ideals, all of which were taught in Hebrew. The school system has been an “instrument of Jewish nationalism,” and taught the ideas that promoted the rebuilding of the Jewish nation.<sup>19</sup>

The Jews in Palestine were well organized and focused on the prosperity of the national home. Even before the establishment of the national home, the Jews, organized around the Zionist Organization, which effectively represented their interest before the British. During the British Mandate, however, more organizations have been created and helped the Jewish cause. Histadrut helped the new immigrants with settling in Palestine, by providing services ranging from cultural centers, which served as a “remedy for loneliness,” to the health care. Just as the Zionist Organization, the Jewish Agency, that did not officially affiliate with Zionism, from the

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 129.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, 36.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 335-337.

1930s, represented the interests of the Jewish community in Palestine before the British. The right-wing political party, such as the Revisionists, and para-military organizations, such as Irgun, Lehi, and Haganah have been created during the British rule and played a huge role in the 1940s. In the 1930s, the tension between the left and right-wing increased. Street violence between the members of different organizations has shaken the internal unity of Yishuv. The leader of the Jewish Agency Political Department, Chaim Arlosoroff, has been assassinated by the members of the right-wing movement, Betar. And although the organizations were ideologically ranging from far-left to far-right and caused an internal tension in Jewish communities, they were able to maintain a common language as the need for the national home, a few years before, during, and after the war has increased. The organizations have accepted the Jewish Agency as their leadership and united the Jewish community, which, in the face of the Second World War, has increasingly sought after a Jewish state.<sup>20</sup>

The Second World War has been an important factor in creating the Jewish state. In 1938, after the Kristallnacht in Nazi Germany, another pogrom of Jewish people in Europe, the need for a Jewish state has increased in the eyes of the Zionists. Yet, in 1938, after the Kristallnacht, the British refused to fulfill the recommendations of the Peel Commission. They saw the partition of Palestine, between the Jews and the Arabs, as “unrealistic” and diminished the hopes for the Jewish state, the hope that Zionists never lost. Despite the lack of support for the Jewish state from the British, the Zionists, who recognized the problem of growing antisemitism in Europe, stated that the only solution “would be Palestine,” the Jewish state. Facing the extermination of the European Jewry, the Zionists, such as David Ben-Gurion, tried to pressure

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<sup>20</sup> Shapira, *Yishuv as an Emerging State*, 123-128.

the United States and the British, to create the Jewish state. The survivors of the holocaust, who now have been placed in the camps in occupied Germany, became a problem for the British and served as a reason for the Zionists to create a Jewish state in Palestine, together with a growth of antisemitism in Europe, and the narration of “victimism” that the Zionists used to support their arguments of creation of a Jewish state.<sup>21</sup>

After the war, the British needed to face new, numerous additional problems that the war has created. The Zionists believed, that the British, who had a different plan for Palestine than the Jews, have to be “pushed out” of Palestine. The increasing pressure of the displaced Jews, who survived the holocaust in Europe, created an “anti-imperialist” attitude, from the United States and Soviet Russia, towards the British, who resisted the resettlement of Jewish people to Palestine. After the war, President Truman pressured the British to accept 100,000 Jews to Palestine. They refused, as it would not be consistent with the economic absorption criterion, nor it would be consistent with their plans for Palestine, and, at the time, lack of their agreement on the partition. The British tried not to fall under the pressure created by the Zionists, and their international supporters, such as the United States, who longed for the creation of the Jewish state. However, as time passed by, the British understood, that anyone working against the Jews is going to work against the interests of the United States, the support of which the British still needed.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, in Palestine, the Jews have become hostile to the British, and from a defensive approach, they started their offense for the Jewish state. The Jewish community in

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<sup>21</sup> Weitz, *Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust*, 351-366.

<sup>22</sup> Louis, *The End of the Palestine Mandate*, 1-16, 27.



Palestine, during the war, because of the news from Europe, and lack of clear intentions on the British side, intensified its efforts towards an independent state. The terrorist attacks started in 1939 against the Arabs, who remained hostile to the Jews and the creation of the national home. In 1944, however, the Jews have started to attack the British side, as in face of Jewish extermination of Europe, they did not issue a clear statement on their intentions of Palestine. The Stern Group attacked the British policemen, a radio station, attempted to assassinate the High Commissioner, and have assassinated Lord Moyne, who in their view was an opponent of the Jewish state, was believed to encourage the Arabs to attack the Jewish community and was also believed to be the author of the British anti-Zionist policies.<sup>23</sup> The right-wing Jewish communities decided to take a strategy of “reprisal,” they changed their approach from defensive, to the radical offensive against anything that could stop the Jewish state from becoming a reality.<sup>24</sup>

After the war, the British, facing the internal problems of the Mandate, the external, international pressure, and its domestic problems, had to leave Palestine. In 1946, the bombing of the King David Hotel, “stirred up” the British. General Barker issued orders to break the Jewish resistance by searching the Jews for any ties to the resistance network. Just a few months later, the orders given by the General have failed. Some British, such as Gen. Montgomery, believed, that the British could use their military power to strengthen their rule within the Mandate. Yet, their domestic problems allowed them neither for military intervention or the searches of the Jewish people, nor they could further maintain the Mandate. The internal problems of the British,

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<sup>23</sup> Cohen, Moyne Assassination, 359-361.

<sup>24</sup> Begin, the Revolt, 1-3.

the tensions within the Mandate, and international pressure have put the British rule over Palestine in question, and after Churchill's speech in 1947, the British were ready to withdraw from Palestine.<sup>25</sup>

From the beginning of the British Mandate of Palestine to the late 1930s, under the British rule, the Jews were able to create a "state within a state."<sup>26</sup> Under British rule, despite the British regulations and the hostility of the Arabs, the Jewish population in Palestine grew from under 100,000, to over 400,000 Jews. New Jewish immigrants brought a considerable amount of capital, which increased the prosperity of the Jews. The Jewish community in Palestine grew economically, as well as politically, and increased the prosperity of all Palestine. Their distinguished organization, that the British rule has allowed, helped them with developing a national spirit within the Jewish community. When the war emerged, by the end of the 1930s, the Jews in Palestine had developed the national home, to the extent, that they have been ready to create the state of their own once the opportunity arises.

In the 1930s, the anti-semitism in Europe grew and was followed by the Kristallnacht and the invasion of Poland; it raised the concern, first within the Zionist community, and then elsewhere around the World. David Ben-Gurion, like the other Zionists, has seen the Jewish state in Palestine as the only solution to the repression of the Jews in the 1930s. The question of the Jewish state has become a debate of a broader audition once the World learned about the massive extermination of Jews in occupied by Germany Europe. The sympathy, and efforts made towards

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<sup>25</sup> Louis, *The End of the Palestine Mandate*, 14, 20-21.

<sup>26</sup> Peel Report, 305.

the Jewish cause after the holocaust, created the State of Israel “at the feet of its ancestor’s graves.”<sup>27</sup>

Yet, by 1944, the British, after rejecting the recommendations of the Peel Commission, have not stated their intentions clearly enough for the Jewish side. The Jews, because of the tragic news from Europe, became increasingly united and focused on establishing the Jewish state, which could provide a shelter for all Jews, who could no longer feel safe in Europe. In 1944, the Stern Gang has conducted a series of terrorist attacks on the British. The Jews have changed their strategy and started to pressure the British by violence, that peaked in 1946 when the bombing of King David Hotel shocked the British. The Mandate became a heavy burden on British shoulders after the war.

The United Kingdom could no longer afford to rule Palestine and decided to withdraw. After the war, the British economy was suffering and could not afford to upkeep the administration of Palestine. Moreover, Jewish pressure and international opposition to British imperialism pushed the British to a decision to leave Palestine in September of 1947. Yet, they have not left Palestine until May 1948, while, the Jews have defeated the Arabs in Haifa, and established the State of Israel.<sup>28</sup> And while it can be said, that the British were not helpful to the Jewish cause in the 1940s, their support in previous years allowed the Jews to settle and organize in Palestine for long enough to create a state-like entity. Thanks to the outcomes of the war, the international support, and the efforts of the Jewish people, in 1948, the State of Israel could be

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<sup>27</sup> Weitz, *Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust*, 366.

<sup>28</sup> Louis, *the End of the Palestine Mandate*, 20-21.

established, yet, none of the above would be possible if not the British and their actions from 1917 to 1947, which enabled the Jewish community in Palestine to grow and develop.