

A Measure  
of  
Restraint:

**The Palestine Police and the End of the British  
Mandate**

MPhil Thesis, Modern Middle East Studies

by

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## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One – Prelude to Revolt .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Early Signs of Rupture.....	8
The Settlement Raids .....	12
The ‘Revolt’ Begins .....	17
The United Resistance Movement (URM) .....	25
<b>Chapter Two – ‘Honour Killings’ .....</b>	<b>31</b>
Determining the Scope and Nature of Police Violence.....	36
A Legacy of Violence: The Black and Tans in Palestine.....	44
The Wickham Report.....	46
The Causes of Police Violence: I) Stress.....	53
The Causes of Police Violence: II) ‘Distance’.....	56
The Causes of Police Violence: III) ‘Honour’.....	62
The Shift Towards a Culture of Revenge.....	68
<b>Chapter Three – Revenge.....</b>	<b>69</b>
Uncovering Evidence of Revenge Attacks .....	72
“Terrorist Methods” .....	85
The ‘Winged Dagger’ Strikes .....	88
Official and Unofficial Violence.....	92
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Select Bibliography.....</b>	<b>102</b>

## Introduction

The last years of British rule in Palestine were marked by a breakdown in relations between the Mandate Government and the *Yishuv*, the pre-State Zionist community. In the initial phase of the British Mandate, the Zionist colonists relied on the British for protection from the increasingly hostile native population and for various forms of material support (e.g. assisting in the expulsion of Palestinian tenant farmers from their land). The British tolerated, and at times actively assisted, the arming of the Zionist settler population, and used Zionist paramilitary units in the suppression of the Arab rebellion of 1936-39. Following the outbreak of the Second World War the British, concerned at the prospect that Axis forces might overrun Palestine, established and trained Jewish irregular units to resist German occupation and harass German troops. However, the White Paper policy of 1939, designed to placate the Palestinian Arab elite and, coupled with the ruthless use of force, end the Arab rebellion by imposing strict immigration quotas to Palestine, marked a fundamental shift in Zionist-British relations. Such quotas, combined with the lack of a clear British commitment to establish a Jewish state in Palestine in the short-term, led to calls for armed resistance against the British and their forced withdrawal from the country.

The British had sought to foster Zionism on their own terms, and whilst this had been possible for the first two decades of British rule, it ceased to be the case by the early 1940s. The broad consensus among much of Britain's elite had been that nurturing a white settler project in Palestine, in the form of the Zionist movement, would bring great economic and political benefits to the Empire and would assist in the aim of strengthening and maintaining British hegemony in the Middle East. This was precisely the kind of settlement project that the British had used to great effect across Africa, from

Kenya to Rhodesia and South Africa, and provided it did not lead to greater tensions in Britain's other Middle East colonies, it could work in Palestine too. The stability of British rule was fatally weakened, ironically, by the successful suppression of the Arab revolt. The fundamental tensions between Zionist desires to supplant the indigenous people of Palestine and British concerns about the effect of this in the wider Arab and Muslim world, now came out into the open. The British had greatly weakened the Palestinian nationalist movement and cleared the path to Zionist victory in 1948. Furthermore they had helped to train and equip the Zionist militias at the start of the Second World War, and then turned a blind eye to the Jewish Agency's continued efforts to build an underground army. The Zionists were in an increasingly strong position, largely thanks to Britain's efforts. To the Zionists the British were rapidly becoming an obstacle rather than an asset, and as the extent of post-war British decrepitude became apparent, the Zionists pushed home their advantage and forced out their erstwhile protectors.

Early signs of rupture came at the beginning of the 1940s, when most of the Zionists still saw Britain as an important ally. The extremist factions on the far right of the Zionist movement began to argue that Britain was in fact an enemy of the Jewish people, and the restrictions placed on Jewish immigration to Palestine were a sign of this. A splinter faction from the main right wing militia, the *Irgun Zvai Luemi* (National Military Organization), led by Avraham Stern and known by the British as the 'Stern Gang', began a bloody campaign against the British security forces and British installations. By 1942 Stern was dead and the campaign ground to a halt, only to be rekindled in early 1944 by Menachem Begin, the leader of the Irgun. Following the disappointments of the new British Labour government of 1945 which decided, fearful of a further erosion of Britain's Middle East position, to retract a pre-election promise to establish a Zionist

state as soon as possible, the insurgency enjoyed support across all sections of the Zionist movement. As the death toll among the British security forces rose, and Britain was forced to rely on young, raw recruits to battle the insurgents, discipline and morale collapsed and the police and army began to take violent reprisals against non-combatants.

This thesis will examine the processes which led teenage boys (75% of the Palestine Police force was 18-19 years old in 1946) to commit violent acts against the Zionist civilian population. Chapter One will provide historical background to the insurgency and will examine some of the key events of its early phase, the 'mini-war' between the police and Stern's fighters and the violent settlement raid at Ramat HaKovesh, which helped to shape the course of the insurgency. Chapter Two will look at the evidence for security force indiscipline and detail some of the major acts of police violence, before discussing some of the key factors which produce such violence. The premise of Chapter Two will be that, contrary perhaps to popular belief, humans have a deep-rooted aversion to killing that can only be overcome by a specific set of factors. This chapter will demonstrate how many of these factors were in place during the Zionist insurgency. The final chapter, Chapter Three, will discuss revenge attacks which occurred in the final twelve months of the Mandate, beginning with the establishment of special police counter-insurgency units, which in fact functioned as a virtual private army, and culminating in the activities of British deserters from the security forces in the spring of 1948 as the final war for Palestine unfolded.

Much of the evidence used in this thesis, in addition to British government documents, press reports and secondary literature, is in the form of oral history. Beginning in the spring of 2006, an oral history project was initiated at the University of Oxford with the aim of collecting testimony from surviving British members of the Palestine Police force.

By the spring of 2007 twelve interviews had been conducted with around twenty hours of conversation recorded, and a number of additional interviews planned.<sup>1</sup> These interviews, coupled with a number of talks given by former Palestine Police officers, provide an invaluable source for the historian of late-Mandate Palestine and offer insights into the functioning of the British security forces and life in the Mandate after the Second World War. The use of oral history is not uncontroversial, especially within the context of the conflict over Palestine, and there has been heated debate about the use of such material.<sup>2</sup> I do not intend to engage in this debate here, but would simply state that wherever possible factual claims made in oral history interviews are corroborated by other sources of evidence, and in many cases oral history is used to illuminate prevailing attitudes and beliefs among members of the security forces, rather than to make specific claims about dates, places or events.

I hope that this thesis will make a modest contribution to scholarship on the end of British rule in Palestine and the debates surrounding colonial policing and counter-insurgency warfare in the era of British imperial decline. There is much which remains unclear about the final days of the British Mandate in Palestine, especially in the period following the United Nations' Partition Resolution of November 1947 up to the declaration of the State of Israel in May 1948, and I hope I have been successful in shedding some new light on this crucial period in Palestinian and British Imperial history.

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<sup>1</sup> These interviews, conducted by Oxford graduate students, are stored at the Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony's College, Oxford and are, for the most part, freely available to researchers. It is anticipated that by the end of 2007 the first batch of 25 interviews will be complete.

<sup>2</sup> See for example the controversy over the research by Haifa University student Teddy Katz which exposed the massacre (to Israeli audiences at least) at Tantura during the 1948 war. Katz's research was primarily based on oral history interviews with former members of the Alexandroni Brigade which carried out the massacre. He was sued in court and later retracted his research claims under pressure. See Pappé, I (2001) "The Tantura Case in Israel: The Katz Research and Trial" *Journal of Palestine Studies* Issue 119 (Spring 2001)

## Chapter One – Prelude to Revolt

*“The flood of memoranda published by the Jewish Agency is of no interest to anybody; paper protests with no action behind them are ridiculous...The actual historical period of extraordinary trials and exceptional catastrophes claims a fighting spirit and revolutionary methods.”*

Pamphlet issued by *Irgun Zvai Luemi*

British rule over Palestine, ordained by the League of Nations Mandate and officially granted in September 1923, was marked by periods of major instability, particularly from the mid-1930s onwards. Beginning with the Arab rebellion of 1936-39, during which large swathes of Palestine became ungovernable for the British colonial government, and ending with the Jewish insurgency of 1944-48, when the Zionist colonists who had previously relied on British support turned on their imperial protectors and forced a British withdrawal from Palestine, the Mandatory Government struggled to maintain effective control. Of the many factors which contributed to instability, the most fundamental was the very nature of the Zionist colonial project, premised as it was upon the displacement of the indigenous population. Britain’s continual inability to completely suppress native opposition to this process of dispossession left the country increasingly volatile as the nationalist struggle against the British and the Zionists deepened. Although the British were able to suppress the major Arab uprising of 1936-39, with considerable bloodshed and brutality (10% of the adult male population was killed, wounded, imprisoned or exiled<sup>3</sup>), this victory paved the way not only for the ultimate triumph of the Zionist movement over the native inhabitants of the country in 1948, but also presaged the ignominious withdrawal of Britain herself, as the Zionists realised that, with the Palestinians fundamentally weakened, British power was becoming more of an obstacle than an asset.

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<sup>3</sup> Khalidi, R (2001) “The Palestinians and 1948: The Root Causes of Failure” in Rogan & Shlaim (eds) *The War for Palestine* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge) p27



British aid to Zionist colonization in Palestine manifested itself in a number of ways. Firstly and fundamentally, Britain provided a relatively secure framework in which settlements could be constructed and material and settlers brought into the country. The Mandatory Government used a variety of means to hold in check the increasing opposition of the local population, and thus allowed space for the Zionist project to gestate in a way that would have been impossible without British support. Some of these mechanisms of control involved the use of tried and tested colonial practices, such as the creation of 'proxy' figures or groups to assist in the policing of the subject population. In Palestine the British established the Supreme Muslim Council and created the position of 'Grand Mufti of Jerusalem' for Haj Amin Al-Husseini, a post which had no real precedent in local Islamic tradition<sup>4</sup>. The role of Haj Amin, a member of the powerful aristocratic family, the Al-Husseinis, was to control and contain the extent of anti-British and anti-Zionist opposition among his compatriots, a function he was able to discharge with some success until the 1930s, when the tension between his dual roles as British proxy on one hand and leader of the Palestinian nationalist movement on the other, became too great and he was forced to choose the latter in order to maintain his dominant position among the 'notable' class. He was exiled by the British during the 1936-39 uprising and was rapidly sidelined in the nationalist movement following the catastrophe of 1948.

In addition to the use of proxies to channel power more effectively against the Palestinians, the British also applied coercive force directly, most notably in 1936-39, but at other times as well, for instance in the aggressive dispersal of nationalist

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid* p22

demonstrations and rallies. During the Arab Revolt the British brought formidable military power to bear against the Palestinian community, including the use of air power. Villages were bombed and raided, and collective punishment, internment without trial, house demolitions, and torture and executions were all routine practice for the British security forces. In addition counter-insurgency units, the ‘Special Night Squads’, trained by Orde Wingate, were established in order to employ ‘non-conventional’ methods in the suppression of the revolt, terrorizing and torturing Palestinian peasants and attempting to break the will of the insurgents<sup>5</sup>.

Despite disagreements within the British state bureaucracy about the extent to which the Zionists should be supported, in general, British support for the Zionist project in Palestine was unwavering. London was, however, keen to limit its destabilizing effects, especially as war in Europe loomed. With military personnel and resources desperately needed for the war with the Axis powers, maintaining a large garrison in Palestine was unfeasible. It was necessary therefore to pay lip service at least to Palestinian nationalist aspirations, and so as a complement to the aggressive military campaign against the local population, in 1939 the British issued a White Paper which proposed limiting Jewish immigration to 75,000 over the subsequent five years. This was, of course, deeply unpopular with the Zionist leadership, and David Ben-Gurion described British Colonial Secretary Ramsey Macdonald as “the greatest crook in England”<sup>6</sup>. There were demonstrations on the streets of Tel Aviv and the Irgun, the violent right-wing dissident group within the Zionist community, stepped up its campaign of anti-British activities<sup>7</sup>. The immigration quotas were more or less adhered to by the British, but in private senior

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<sup>5</sup> Segev, T (2001) *One Palestine, Complete* (Abacus; London) p430-2

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* p440

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

figures such as Winston Churchill made it clear to the Jewish Agency that British support for a future Jewish state remained strong.<sup>8</sup>

### **Early Signs of Rupture**

As the early stages of the Second World War unfolded, Germany's victories in North Africa led to fears about British defeat in Egypt and Palestine. In the aftermath of the Arab revolt, the British had been keen to try and limit the flow of arms to the Zionists, but now, with Palestine under threat, they reversed their stance and began to equip and train Zionist guerrilla units to harass the German army and lead resistance to German occupation, should such an eventuality come to pass<sup>9</sup>. These guerrilla forces were trained in bomb making, sabotage, and other covert warfare techniques. In addition, members of Zionist paramilitary organizations served in the British Army. David Raziell, commander of the *Irgun* (short for 'Irgun Zvai Leumi' or 'National Military Organization') a breakaway faction from the *Haganah* (Jewish Defence Organization) which had close links to Vladimir Jabotinsky's Revisionist movement, was killed in May 1941 whilst on a British Special Operations Executive (SOE) operation in Iraq. Thousands volunteered to fight in North Africa and Italy, and in 1944, the British finally granted a long-standing Zionist request and formed a Zionist brigade that fought alongside Allied forces.<sup>10</sup>

But British cooperation with the more violent elements of the Zionist movement predated Germany's spectacular victories of spring 1940. Earlier that year, Alan Saunders the Inspector-General of the police, had struck a deal with Raziell, who was then in

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<sup>8</sup> Segev (2001) p450

<sup>9</sup> Newsinger, J (2002) "At War with Zion" in his *British Counter-Insurgency from Palestine to Northern Ireland* (Palgrave; London) p5

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* p5-6

prison. In return for an Irgun promise not to engage in attacks against the British and to provide intelligence and assistance in fighting the Axis powers, Irgun prisoners would be released and the movement would be immediately supplied with Pal£3000 to be followed by further British financial contributions.<sup>11</sup> Among those prisoners released was Avraham Stern, who nevertheless attacked the Saunders-Raziel agreement, arguing that it was a betrayal of the Revisionist movement and Zionist aims in general. For Stern and his followers cooperation with Britain was tantamount to ‘treason’ and they pushed for a more radical Irgun policy, which would include a ban on wartime service with the Allies, and an orientation towards the Axis powers, whom Stern believed were destined to be the victors in the war. By cooperating with Germany and her allies, the Jewish populations of Poland, Germany and elsewhere could be spared the worst of Nazi oppression and the Zionist state in Palestine could be made a reality, following the defeat of Britain and a German agreement to spare the Yishuv.<sup>12</sup>

As the war progressed, and a British defeat seemed a very real possibility following the German advances of spring 1940 and the onset of the ‘Battle of Britain’ during the summer, Stern’s frustration with Irgun policy deepened and he led his small group of followers out of the movement. His new organization, LEHI or Fighters for the Freedom of Israel as it later came to be known (it was also referred to as the Stern Group/Gang after its leader), identified the British, rather than the Arab population, as Zionism’s primary enemy and demanded radical action to force an end to the Mandate.<sup>13</sup> After a period of re-organization, Stern initiated a campaign of violence against the Mandatory authorities. Lacking a source of funds LEHI’s activities initially consisted

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<sup>11</sup> Heller, J (1995) *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics and Terror 1940-1949* (Frank Cass; London) p61-62

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* p68

<sup>13</sup> For more on the birth of LEHI, in addition to Heller’s work, see Brenner, Y.S. (1965) “The ‘Stern Gang’ 1949-48” in *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 2, No. 1 (Oct 1965)

primarily of bank robberies and extortion, a strategy which cost the group a number of key personnel to police arrests. There were allegations that the financial position of the group was improved considerably following the acquisition of funds from Mussolini's government in 1941, but this is highly questionable; there is no evidence that LEHI ever received funds from Italy.<sup>14</sup>

LEHI was unpopular within the Yishuv, thus enabling the police's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to gather intelligence and effectively target the group. This led to a violent 'war' between the police and LEHI, in which a number of police officers and LEHI activists were killed in a spiral of tit-for-tat violence.<sup>15</sup> This culminated in the death of Stern himself in controversial circumstances on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1942. He was caught hiding in a wardrobe in the flat of a LEHI activist and, according to the official version of events, was shot whilst trying to escape. CID Inspector Geoffrey Morton, who was leading the police campaign against LEHI, claimed in his own account of Stern's death that he had feared that Stern would try to detonate an explosive.<sup>16</sup> However, Morton's story was unconvincing and there are strong indications that Morton murdered Stern in revenge for LEHI killings of members of his CID team.<sup>17</sup>

In the period following Stern's death the police were able to push LEHI to the point of collapse. The group tried to avenge the death of its leader, but to no avail, and by May 1942 LEHI was effectively out of action, with over 150 activists jailed and numerous

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<sup>14</sup> Ted Horne makes the claim that LEHI received generous funding from the Italians (Horne, T (2003) *A Job Well Done* Book Guild: Sussex, p275). However, Heller (Heller (1995) p79 n12) finds little evidence of this, save a British intelligence report to the US of 1944, claiming LEHI was to receive Pal£2000 per month. There is no indication they ever received this money. LEHI did make contact with the Nazis however, via their field agent in Beirut. See Bowyer-Bell (1977) *Terror out of Zion* St Martin's Press: New York, p64-69 & Heller (1995) p85-6

<sup>15</sup> Horne (2003) p275-6

<sup>16</sup> Morton, G (1957) *Just the Job* (Hodder & Stoughton, London) p145-6

<sup>17</sup> Bowyer-Bell (1977) p72-3

killed.<sup>18</sup> However, LEHI's apparent defeat was illusory; the organization, and the Revisionist right in general, had been galvanized by Stern's downfall, and was merely regrouping and biding its time. This early phase of anti-British activity was a harbinger of things to come. It was also a formative experience for the police when it came to combating violent Zionist paramilitary groups. The short-lived battle between the CID and LEHI was violent and bloody and was characterised at times by lapses in police discipline. LEHI operatives were incensed by the ill-treatment of captives and there were allegations of torture. In addition to the slaying of Stern, there were other instances where unarmed suspects were shot. A few days before Stern's death, Morton led a team on a raid on LEHI headquarters on Dizengoff Street, Tel Aviv. Several senior figures were captured, and despite surrendering to the police, were shot by Morton. Two were seriously injured, and two others died later in hospital from their wounds. The shootings were apparently revenge for the deaths of CID officers killed by a LEHI bomb on January 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>19</sup>

LEHI were a small, unpopular group, who were prepared to seek aid from fascist governments and funding via extortion and bank robbery. A number of civilian bystanders were killed or injured during LEHI raids. Given this, the exigencies of wartime, the relatively short time span of the police campaign, and the police's (albeit temporary) success, the 'rough justice' meted out to LEHI by the police did not draw much attention. Questions were raised in the House of Lords about the manner of Stern's death<sup>20</sup>, but no serious investigation was launched and no action was taken against the officers involved in the affair.

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid* p73

<sup>19</sup> *ibid* p70-1

<sup>20</sup> Hansard 1942

## The Settlement Raids

A second crucial sign of rupture in the Zionist-British relationship, and one which had a profound impact on British security policy vis-à-vis the Zionist community in Palestine, came in the form of a number of police raids that took place in 1943 on rural Zionist settlements. From the very beginning of the war there had been incidents when British security forces had clashed with Zionist paramilitary units, in apparent contradiction to the open cooperation that was occurring elsewhere. In October 1939 for example, a patrol of the Trans-Jordanian Frontier Force surprised a Haganah unit training in the Galilee; all were arrested, tried and sentenced to 10 years in prison for illegal possession of firearms (one member of the group was sentenced to life imprisonment).<sup>21</sup> In September 1943 in a highly publicised trial a number of Haganah operatives were sentenced to long prison terms for the theft of thousands of rifles and hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition. The presiding judge at the trial talked of a “dangerous and widespread conspiracy” for stealing weapons from the British military.<sup>22</sup> Incidents such as these are often used as grounds for the charge that the British had begun to adopt a more specifically anti-Zionist policy following the publication of the 1939 MacDonald White Paper. David Ben-Gurion, head of the Jewish Agency, charged that the arms trials were part of a British plot aimed at “slandering Palestine Jews” and undermining the Zionists, as part of the ‘White Paper’ strategy.<sup>23</sup> Further evidence for such claims came from the remarks of senior British politicians. British Prime Minister

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<sup>21</sup> Hoffman, B (1983) *The Failure of British Military Strategy Within Palestine 1939-1947* (Bar Ilan University; Tel Aviv) p11

<sup>22</sup> New York Times, 30/09/1943, p5

<sup>23</sup> New York Times, 07/10/1943, p11

Neville Chamberlain stated in 1939 that “If we must offend one side, let it be the Jews rather than the Arabs”.<sup>24</sup>

However, undue focus on such statements and actions gives a skewed picture of British policy as it actually manifested itself. Following the trial of the Haganah unit in 1939, the military expressed deep dissatisfaction with the judgment. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Edmund Ironside, claimed the sentences were “savage and stupid” and ordered them commuted, as occurred in other similar cases.<sup>25</sup> In July 1940, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) in Palestine stated that no searches for hidden arms caches in Jewish settlements would be undertaken, and that on this issue it was best to let “sleeping dogs lie”.<sup>26</sup> This was very much in keeping with Churchill’s own view; he wanted to arm the Yishuv for the purposes of maintaining internal security in Palestine and withdraw much of the British garrison for use elsewhere.<sup>27</sup> The Arab population meanwhile had been forcibly disarmed and would remain so throughout the war. Similarly, although in 1939 Colonial Secretary Malcolm MacDonald had argued that the British could not afford to be more lenient to the Jewish population than they were to the Arab<sup>28</sup>, as Segev points out, this was not followed in practice. The treatment of Arabs convicted of possession of arms was far worse, with the death sentence often being handed down.

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Segev (2001) p436

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* p450. See also Trevor D (1948) *Under the White Paper* (Jerusalem) p88, n5 for sentences commuted by the GOC in 1942. Because the Haganah operatives were tried in military courts the GOC could intervene.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Zweig, R (1986) *Britain and Palestine During the Second World War* (Boydell; Suffolk) p22 n14

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* p21

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Hoffman (1983) p12



The difference was, of course, that unlike the Arab organizations, the Zionist paramilitary forces were playing a significant role in the British war strategy for the region. By the end of the war 30,000 Zionists had served in the British military, and in the crucial early phases when the British position in Egypt and Palestine was threatened by the German Afrika Corps' advance across North Africa, the military trained and equipped Zionist units to lead resistance to a potential occupation. Whilst the White Paper policy (which was opposed by many senior British politicians including Churchill<sup>29</sup>) was clearly aimed at limiting Palestinian and wider Arab hostility to Britain's position in the Middle East, prompted by her inability to maintain a large garrison in Palestine to suppress further revolts, and whilst the British were committed to immigration limitations, this did not translate into a cooling of enthusiasm for the Zionist project as a whole. As Zweig puts it, "Not even Chamberlain's government had considered totally abandoning the Jewish National Home, and Churchill clearly would not either".<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, despite ongoing British support for the Zionist project in Palestine, British security forces in the country found themselves increasingly dragged into violent confrontations with Zionist settlers, and under direct attack from the militias of the Zionist right. This was partly a consequence of ambiguous British policy towards arms possession by the Zionists, and the issue of Zionist recruitment to the British military. As the war turned in favour of the Allies, and fighting moved further away from Palestine and the Middle East arena generally, the British became increasingly eager to limit the Jewish Agency's ability to mobilize and arm the Zionist settlers. Again, it must be stressed that this should not be seen as part of a wholesale turn against the Zionists, but rather a desire to limit Zionist activity to conform to British interests in the region. In

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<sup>29</sup> Segev (2001) p450

<sup>30</sup> Zweig (1986) p31

other words, the British wanted Zionism on their terms. This explains the decisions in 1943 to aggressively prosecute Haganah operatives caught in possession of weapons (Haganah operative Avraham Saharov was sentenced to ten years imprisonment for possessing two rifle bullets without a permit<sup>31</sup>) and to conduct arms searches. The searches provoked a debate within the Zionist movement as to how to respond to British provocation, and similarly, the British themselves were concerned about provoking the very thing they were trying to prevent – a Zionist revolt in Palestine.<sup>32</sup>

Following the arms theft trial of 1943, a Palestine Police unit, commanded by veteran officer Raymond Cafferata, with support from the Army, raided the settlement of Ramat HaKovesh in order to search for weapons and deserters. The raid, a messy PR fiasco for the British, did not go well, and its aftermath had a significant effect on British security strategy. The number of police involved is contested with Horne claiming 60, with support from the Army later on<sup>33</sup>, whilst Hoffman claims 200 plus 360 soldiers.<sup>34</sup> The British personnel involved in the raid claimed they faced ‘fanatical’ opposition from the settlers. In his description of the raid, Horne (who was a participant) claimed that the British were provoked by the settlers into beating women and children, placed at the front of the barricades to deter police charges.<sup>35</sup> The military officer in charge during the raid claimed that the women in the settlement “behaved like demented wild beasts” and took part in “vicious attacks” against the police and army. He claimed, despite wide experience in Ireland and India, to have never seen such fanaticism.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, the accounts of the settlers, perhaps unsurprisingly, emphasize the brutality of the searches

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<sup>31</sup> Bauer, Y (1970) *From Diplomacy to Resistance* (Jewish Publication Soc.; Philadelphia) p271

<sup>32</sup> *ibid* p272

<sup>33</sup> Horne (2003) p279

<sup>34</sup> Hoffman (1983) p12

<sup>35</sup> Horne (2003) p279-80

<sup>36</sup> PRO WO 208/1702

and the aggressive tactics used by the security forces.<sup>37</sup> After a fruitless search (a small amount of ammunition was recovered, and 35 suspected *Palmach* members arrested – no deserters were found), the police retreated. Cafferata fired into the crowd as he withdrew (allegedly at the feet of the settlers), injuring two, one of whom, 37-year-old Shmuel Wolinetz, later died of his wounds. Altogether, twenty-four settlers were wounded. During the raid the male settlers were herded into wire cages whilst the settlement was searched, a process which allegedly caused considerable damage.

The raid on Ramat HaKovesh was widely reported in the Zionist press in Palestine and elsewhere. The version of events detailed in the Hebrew-language newspapers of the Zionist movement differed markedly from the official statement issued by the Mandate Government, which retaliated by ordering the suspension of ten papers. The raid plus the press censorship sparked rioting in Tel Aviv on November 20<sup>th</sup> 1943. Twenty-one civilians and eleven police officers were injured and a 15-year-old boy was hit in the chest by rooftop gunfire; the police denied firing any shots.<sup>38</sup> The whole affair was embarrassing for the British, and senior military officers became concerned at the prospect of a 'Jewish rebellion' in Palestine. Consequently, the High Commissioner and General Maitland Wilson, the British Commander in Chief in the Middle East, suspended all searches of Zionist settlements.<sup>39</sup> This was not the last time that British security forces undertook settlement raids however. Two years after the Ramat HaKovesh raid for instance, Cafferata led another operation against the settlement of Givat Haim in which seven settlers were killed.<sup>40</sup> However, these were relatively isolated incidents prompted by specific investigations, and there was never a blanket policy of

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<sup>37</sup> See for instance the account in Trevor (1948) p97-110

<sup>38</sup> New York Times, 23/11/1943, p10

<sup>39</sup> Hoffman (1983) p13

<sup>40</sup> Segev (2001) p456

large-scale arms searches in the rural settlements. In 1945 police tracking suspected insurgents were led once again to Ramat HaKovesh, but this time, following intervention from Police Headquarters, they retreated without entering the settlement.<sup>41</sup> It had become police policy to avoid confrontations with the settlers.

Bauer argues that the settlement raids helped to provoke a shift in the attitude of the Zionist movement, and particularly the major armed groups, the Haganah and the *Palmach* (the Haganah's elite brigade), towards the British. A more confrontational attitude was adopted and anti-British sentiments became widespread. Although the arms searches had been a failure, with few if any weapons being recovered, the British had signalled their desire to curb the Zionists, just at the moment that their position in Palestine was becoming stronger than ever. The Zionists became aware, more clearly than in the past, that British interests and Zionist aims did not converge completely, and that there was a danger that the British would become an obstacle to the progression of the colonizing project. There was therefore the very real possibility that an armed confrontation with the British would ensue, if Zionism was to come to fruition, and after the events of 1943, "preparations for battle began".<sup>42</sup>

### **The 'Revolt' Begins**

The Irgun officially declared war on the British in an announcement made by the movement's commander, Menachem Begin, on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1944. The war was now turning decisively in favour of the Allies, and the final defeat of Germany was surely only

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<sup>41</sup> Horne (2003) p290

<sup>42</sup> Bauer (1970) p272

a short time away. The direct threat to Palestine from German forces had receded and the British position in the Middle East generally was secure, for the time being. This change in the strategic situation provided the backdrop to the decision of the Revisionist groups to revive armed attacks on the British. 1944 was also the year in which the White Paper immigration quotas were scheduled to expire. By this point awareness of the fate of the European Jewish community at the hands of the Fascists was great, and the Revisionists claimed that the immigration quotas and the Nazi Holocaust were linked. Britain was culpable for failing to lift immigration restrictions and hence 'save' European Jews fleeing the genocide in Germany and Eastern Europe. This, concluded the Zionist right, made Britain an enemy of the Zionist movement and the Jewish people as a whole, and as such British imperialism in Palestine must be resisted forcibly.

This was of course a powerful rhetorical weapon. As the Zionist insurgency progressed, the British security forces faced an increasing barrage of gibes and slurs, which equated them with the Gestapo, the Nazis and European Fascism generally. Graffiti, pamphlets and the chants of protestors all echoed the same theme; the British do not support Zionism, are trying to undermine it, and hence are no different from Hitler and Mussolini. Fringe elements of the Revisionist right such as Avraham Stern, as mentioned above, went further still and claimed that the British were in fact worse than the Nazis, because they were preventing the re-establishment of the 'Hebrew nation', whilst the German Fascists were only acting against the Jews in the Diaspora. In a clandestine radio broadcast made by LEHI during the height of the war, Stern argued that Hitler was simply the latest in a long line of Israel's persecutors, whilst Britain was a true enemy, a foreign power occupying the Jewish homeland and preventing its rebirth.<sup>43</sup> Such a

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Brenner, L (1983) *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* (Lawrence Hill; Chicago) p266

notion, that Britain was worse than the Nazis, was not shared by the majority of the Yishuv, and most of the Zionist elite at that time viewed the British as an essential ally. Shortly before the war broke out, Moshe Shertok expressed indignation at the idea that the Zionists would seek to forcibly expel the British, whilst Ben-Gurion refused to express strong support for Gandhi because the Indian nationalists sought an end to British imperial power which Ben-Gurion still viewed as vital for the success of the Zionist project.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, elements of Revisionist discourse, in its ‘Sternist’ incarnation, did resonate with some of the fundamental themes of the Zionist project. The idea that anti-Semitism and the violent persecution of the Jewish people was an inescapable evil of life in the Diaspora, and that salvation could only be realised through statehood, was an underlying premise in the works of Theodore Herzl, the ‘father’ of Zionism. Only by re-establishing historic Israel could the Jewish people be saved from oppression and eventual annihilation, either by forced assimilation or by physical extermination.<sup>45</sup> During and prior to the war years, few members of the Yishuv would have agreed with the idea that Britain was a fundamental obstacle to the realisation of the Zionist project and that the British were one of the Jewish peoples’ greatest foes, but by the mid-1940s a greater proportion of the Zionist elite began to see the British as part of the problem rather than as part of the solution.

The issue of Jewish immigration to Palestine served a useful purpose. Those pushing for a more aggressive stance towards the British could use it to attack Britain’s supposed ‘abandonment’ of the Zionist cause and highlight the barrier she now posed to the

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<sup>44</sup> Segev (2001) p434-35

<sup>45</sup> See Herzl’s works, *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) and *Altneuland* (Old New Land)

realization of a Jewish homeland. And Britain's stance on the issue of immigration certainly left it open to easy attack. The 1939 MacDonald White Paper had restricted immigration to 75,000 over five years, with any illegal immigration to be deducted from that total. The Colonial Office was determined to ensure that these quotas were respected, arguing that this minimal gesture was necessary for placating Arab opinion and shoring up Britain's weakening position in the Middle East.<sup>46</sup> Churchill, however, was opposed to the whole White Paper policy and was determined to replace it eventually.<sup>47</sup> Thus the Colonial Office had to fight hard to get their way and various proposals were put forward for 'dealing' with the flow of immigrants to Palestine, most of which were unsuccessful. A policy of interning the refugees was eventually agreed,<sup>48</sup> and the number of Jews reaching Palestine fell during the war years, though this is likely to have been a consequence of wartime shipping shortages and the difficulties of escaping Europe, rather than the efforts of the British government. The immigration quota was in fact not reached until the end of 1945, almost two years after the end of the White Paper period.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the Zionist movement's frequent protests about Britain's attempts to restrict immigration to Palestine, and the ever more vehement condemnations of the Revisionist Zionists, who, as mentioned earlier, increasingly argued that Britain was an accomplice to Nazi crimes by blocking escape routes for Jews fleeing the Holocaust, the actions of the movement as a whole, and the Jewish Agency in particular, were far from commendable. As Lenni Brenner shows, even when the scale of Nazi atrocities became clear, the Zionists in Palestine did little to assist the Jewish population of Europe, despite

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<sup>46</sup> Zweig, R (1985) *Britain and Palestine During the Second World War* (Boydell, Suffolk) p26

<sup>47</sup> *ibid* p29

<sup>48</sup> The Colonial Office were keen that conditions in the internment camps should be as "punitive as possible" to deter immigrants – the CO was worried refugees would pick British concentration camps ahead of German run ones. See Zweig (1985) p51-2

<sup>49</sup> Segev (2001) p459

possessing the financial resources to do so, especially given the Nazis' apparent willingness to 'barter' Jewish lives in exchange for cash.<sup>50</sup> Yitzhak Gruenbaum, the head of the Jewish Agency's 'Rescue Committee' argued during a meeting of the Zionist Executive in 1943 that no funds should be diverted from the building of the Jewish state towards assisting those fleeing the Nazis in Europe; the Zionist project must take priority, he claimed.<sup>51</sup> There were also senior figures in the Zionist movement who argued that the spilling of Jewish blood in Europe was essential in order to enhance Jewish claims on Palestine after the war. Allied nations had lost many of their citizens in the conflict against Fascism, and the Jews must be prepared to do the same, claimed Nathan Schwalb, the representative of the Zionist Youth Movement in Switzerland.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Zionists in the United States refrained from putting serious pressure on the Roosevelt administration to do more to help the victims of Nazism, arguing that nothing should be done to divert resources from the war effort.<sup>53</sup>

The reality was that British policy with regards to Jewish immigration to Palestine worried Zionists not because of the barriers it erected in front of those striving to flee the horrors of the Nazi genocide, but rather because it showed how the British were willing to make concessions to the Arab population at the expense of the Zionist project. It was this fact more than anything else which led the Zionist right to resume their attacks on the British, with the aim of forcing an end to British rule in Palestine. The Irgun had argued in 1940 that the Arab Revolt and the 1939 White Paper it brought about, was clear evidence of the fact that, "England only makes concessions to those

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<sup>50</sup> Brenner, L (1983) p236

<sup>51</sup> *ibid* p234

<sup>52</sup> *ibid* p237

<sup>53</sup> *ibid* p250



who fight against her”.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, if the Zionists were to achieve their aims, they would have to pressure Britain to accede to their demands, and this could only be achieved by the use of force. The aim of Begin’s war on the British was to show Zionism’s erstwhile imperial sponsor the cost of trying to curtail the ambitions of the Jewish national movement.

The revolt began with a series of attacks on government immigration offices in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa. On March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944 there were a series of coordinated attacks by LEHI and the Irgun on police stations in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa which killed a number of police officers.<sup>55</sup> Whilst the British were slow at first to respond to the rising tide of violence, after the March 23<sup>rd</sup> attacks they began to take measures to combat the insurgency. However, whilst the war was still being fought in Europe, the British were limited in what they could do by way of counter-insurgency operations. At this stage dealing with Zionist terrorism was regarded as primarily a police problem, with the army in a strictly auxiliary role. However, just as during the Arab Revolt, the police were suffering from personnel shortages and were ill equipped to deal with the burgeoning violence and the deterioration of the security situation. The army units stationed in Palestine at that time were training and reorganizing before returning to Europe, and hence were not readily available to assist the police. The idea of engaging in large-scale arms searches was considered, but was ruled out on the grounds that it would require the diversion of troops from Europe, which was hardly practical at that time.<sup>56</sup>

In August High Commissioner MacMichael narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by LEHI operatives. Three months later, Lord Moyne, the British Minister-Resident in

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<sup>54</sup> Heller (1995) p68

<sup>55</sup> Hoffman (1983) p14

<sup>56</sup> *ibid* p15

the Middle East and a personal friend of Winston Churchill, was murdered in Cairo by two LEHI activists, Eliahu Hakim and Eliahaku Bet Tsouri. Moyne's death marked a turning point in the course of the insurgency, and there were strong reactions in London and from British officials in the Middle East. In a speech to the House of Commons, Churchill warned that the Zionists risked losing British support if such attacks continued.<sup>57</sup> However, despite calls from Colonial Secretary Oliver Stanley and the British Ambassador to Egypt, Lord Killearn, for aggressive retaliation against the Yishuv, a position which the previously hesitant Lord Gort (MacMichael's successor as High Commissioner) now adopted, Churchill was not disposed to authorising the stringent measures that were being urged on him. Gort argued that action was necessary in order to boost security force morale and to persuade the Jewish Agency to deal with the right-wing groups themselves,<sup>58</sup> but Churchill countered that an overly harsh response risked punishing the Yishuv as a whole for the actions of a minority, and would only boost support for the Revisionists and frustrate efforts to seek broad support for the counter-insurgency campaign.<sup>59</sup> The Chiefs of Staff concurred with Churchill's assessment. Recalling the aftermath of the Ramat HaKovesh raid a year earlier, they reasoned that there was every risk that tough measures would provoke a strong reaction with no guarantee of success in reducing armed attacks.<sup>60</sup>

Whilst the British deliberated on how to respond to the rising tide of Zionist violence, the Jewish Agency decided to take action of its own. On the day of Moyne's death the Jewish Agency executive met and agreed to cooperate fully with the authorities in the

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Newsinger (2002) p8

<sup>58</sup> Hoffman (1983) p16

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*

<sup>60</sup> Paragraph 8, PRO, FO 371/40138

investigation of the assassination.<sup>61</sup> Further meetings followed, and the outcome was the ‘Season’, a period lasting from November 1944 until March 1945, when the Haganah was instructed to destroy the Irgun and LEHI. Members of the right-wing groups were rounded up, and some handed over to the police. A number of Irgun activists, including Intelligence Chief Eli Tavin, were tortured and held captive for months. Lists of names were handed to the CID, thus enabling them to arrest hundreds of activists. By the time the ‘Season’ came to an end, the Irgun and LEHI had been driven underground, though the organizations were not completely destroyed. Begin refused to retaliate against the Haganah, arguing that a civil war between different Zionist factions was to be avoided at all costs as it could only be to the detriment of the overall Zionist project.

The Haganah campaign was motivated, at least officially, by a desire to protect the Zionists from British retaliation and to smooth over relations after Moyne’s death. The diplomatic atmosphere had been poisoned by LEHI’s operation and the Jewish Agency were keen to demonstrate their continuing allegiance to the British. Hoffman claims the Jewish Agency were pressured by the British into acting against the Revisionist groups,<sup>62</sup> but it is more plausible that a major factor behind the decision to attack Irgun and LEHI, was a desire to remove these actors from the political stage. From the very beginning of the insurgency some Haganah operatives had taken retaliatory action against Irgun and LEHI<sup>63</sup>, and the Jewish Agency viewed the right-wing groups as a dangerous threat to their hegemonic grip over the Zionist community. Before the ‘Season’ began in earnest, Moshe Sneh, the Haganah Commander-in-Chief, warned Begin against trying to seek

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<sup>61</sup> Heller (1995) p140

<sup>62</sup> Hoffman (1983) p17

<sup>63</sup> Newsinger (2002) p9

influence over the Yishuv. Begin denied trying to do this, but the Jewish Agency were not convinced and ordered the destruction of their rivals.<sup>64</sup>

The 'Season' was a perfect outcome for the British. Activity against British positions fell away to almost nothing and the CID were able to claim the arrests of hundreds of insurgent activists, a major boost to morale and to the image of the police's ability to deal with instability and violence. However, this lull in the Revolt was illusory, and the successes that the police achieved against the Irgun and LEHI were solely the result of active assistance from the Haganah, who provided much of the intelligence the police needed to seize key group members. By the spring of 1945, the 'Season' was coming to an end and in a matter of months the British had to face a major upsurge in attacks and a serious deterioration of the security situation.

### **The United Resistance Movement (URM)**

The Haganah's complicity in violent attacks against the British was a subject of some controversy. During a War Cabinet meeting in November 1944, Colonial Secretary Oliver Stanley claimed that, although the Jewish Agency denounced attacks on the British, they failed to cooperate with the security forces and continued to publish anti-British propaganda. The little information that the Agency did provide the police was of minimal value and did not lead to any results.<sup>65</sup> Lord Gort also expressed the view that ultimate responsibility for Zionist terrorism must rest with the Jewish Agency, as they were obliged to assist in the maintenance of law and order. He claimed that it was wrong

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<sup>64</sup> Segev (2001) p458

<sup>65</sup> War Cabinet Minutes, 24/11/1944, PRO CAB 65/48

to solely focus on the actions of the right-wing groups when “supporters of terrorists are to be found in all sections of the Yishuv”.<sup>66</sup> During the ‘Season’ the Agency did cooperate actively with the British and significant amounts of information were passed to the British, including hundreds of names of Irgun and LEHI activists. However, given the speed and relative ease with which the Haganah suppressed the nascent Irgun/LEHI revolt, it is unlikely that the impression among British officials that the Agency was, at best, turning a blind eye to Revisionist operations, and at worst was intimately involved in attacks, was much assuaged by the events of the ‘Season’. There is no evidence that the Haganah was involved directly in any operations (other than arms theft and illegal immigration) against the British prior to 1945, although armed actions certainly served a purpose in helping to increase pressure on the British to accede to Zionist demands. However, following the Labour Party’s election victory in mid-1945, the Haganah became directly involved in the insurgency.

The Jewish Agency’s decision to engage in armed attacks was precipitated by the Zionist movement’s bitter disappointment at the sharp reversal of the Labour Party’s stance on Zionism following its election victory in July 1945. The previous year, the Party’s election manifesto had strongly endorsed the Zionist project and the Party committed itself to furthering Zionist aims, including increasing Jewish immigration and ‘transferring’ the Arab population.<sup>67</sup> However, after achieving power, the new Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, made it clear that Palestine was not high on the list of British priorities and that, when it came to British policy in the region, securing Great Britain’s long-term position in the Middle East was of primary import. This was very much in keeping with British government policy prior to 1945, with elements of the state bureaucracy, the Colonial

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, Annex III, telegram from High Commissioner Gort to Secretary of State for Colonies, 21/11/1944

<sup>67</sup> Segev (2001) p482

Office and the Chiefs of Staff in particular, arguing that Zionism must be considered within the framework of Britain's broader Middle East position. However, the Zionist movement had been hopeful of a reversal of the White Paper policy and a commitment to large-scale immigration, along with clearer moves towards an independent Jewish state. But this was not to be. Bevin made a statement on Palestine in the House of Commons on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1945, in which he made it clear that immigration restrictions would continue and that the new British government could not afford to ignore Arab opinion. The reaction in Palestine was vitriolic. The following day the Zionist movement called a general strike and anti-British rioting erupted in Tel Aviv. Troops from the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division dispersed the crowd by firing live rounds; six civilians were killed and more than sixty wounded.

Even before these events the mood in the Yishuv had become openly hostile to the British, and those elements within the Haganah and Palmach who had been advocating action against British rule were strengthened by Bevin's obstinacy. Accordingly, the Jewish Agency decided in favour of the establishment of the United Resistance Movement (URM), an alliance of the Haganah, the Irgun and LEHI which would use armed attacks to pressure the British government into conceding to Zionist demands. Its first operation came on the night of October 31<sup>st</sup>-November 1<sup>st</sup>, when a series of coordinated attacks immobilised the railway network and hit police and other government installations, including a bomb attack on the Haifa refinery causing a fire which burned uncontrollably for weeks.<sup>68</sup> Bevin was unmoved by this display of force. He told Weizmann in London, "If you want a fight, you can have it".<sup>69</sup> But Bevin and the British government had to face some new realities in the post-war environment. The

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<sup>68</sup> Newsinger (2002) p11-12

<sup>69</sup> *ibid* p13

Zionists in Palestine were in their strongest position yet. In economic terms the Zionist project was surging ahead, with industrial output increasing fivefold between 1937-43 to Pal£37.5million.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, Britain was entering a period of major economic decline. The war cost 25% of Britain's national wealth, and the country was now insolvent. On 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1945, the US Government abruptly ended the wartime 'lend-lease' agreement thus forcing Britain to seek US loans or potentially face lower living standards than those during the war itself. The US exploited Britain's weak position to force adherence to the principles of economic liberalism, thus ending the tariffs and other protectionist measures the British had used to ward off economic collapse.<sup>71</sup> In short, just as Britain was becoming weaker and more dependent on foreign aid, the Zionists were becoming stronger and more powerful. The ability of the British to deal with an insurgency was therefore much more circumscribed than in the past.

In the first six months of the URM era there were 50 major attacks on British positions in Palestine, including a spectacular raid on RAF airfields on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1946, when LEHI and Irgun operatives destroyed a significant number of planes and caused an estimated £2million worth of damage. The British response to the insurgency, which will be addressed in detail in the following chapter, primarily consisted of 'cordon and search' operations. Resulting in part from pressure from the Chiefs of Staff in London, particularly the new Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Bernard Montgomery, the British government agreed to an aggressive retaliation against the Yishuv, and Operation Agatha was put into effect on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1946. Jewish Agency buildings were occupied and almost 2500 people arrested, including four members of the Agency executive.

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<sup>70</sup> *ibid* p12. See also Lockman, Z (1996) *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (UC Press, Berkeley) pp265-68

<sup>71</sup> Charters, D (1989) *The British Army and the Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47* (MacMillan, London) p18

Weapons searches were conducted in some of the rural settlements, with 600 weapons and half a million rounds of ammunition being seized. These arms searches resulted in the deaths of four settlers, with scores of others wounded.<sup>72</sup> Agatha was a blow to the Haganah and prompted their decision to withdraw from the URM.<sup>73</sup> However, a number of sensitive documents had been seized by the British during the raids, documents which revealed the Haganah, and hence the Agency's, involvement in the URM. These documents were believed to be being held in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, the headquarters of the Secretariat of the Palestine Government.

In order to destroy this potentially damaging evidence, Moshe Sneh, Haganah Commander in Chief, ordered the Irgun to attack the Hotel. On July 22<sup>nd</sup> a massive explosion destroyed one wing of the Hotel, killing 91 and wounded hundreds. The attack was roundly condemned both in Britain and by the Jewish Agency, but in private the operation was regarded with satisfaction by the Zionist leadership. According to Richard Crossman MP, in a private meeting with Weizmann after the bombing, the Zionist leader wept as he talked of the heroism of "our boys" and claimed that if the target had been German Headquarters then the Irgun operatives would have received the Victoria Cross.<sup>74</sup> This blow to the Palestine administration was a sign that the Zionists could now strike at any government target and that nowhere could be regarded secure. As far as the Agency was concerned, the evidence linking the Haganah with the URM had now been destroyed, thus protecting them from potentially damaging revelations about their intimate links to violent attacks. In fact the documents were being held elsewhere and the attack had not succeeded in achieving its primary aim. Nevertheless, the Agency and the

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<sup>72</sup> Newsinger (2002) p20-1

<sup>73</sup> Heller (1995) p161

<sup>74</sup> Crossman , *R A Nation Reborn, The Israel of Weizmann Bevin and Ben-Gurion* (Hamilton Hamish, London) p77



mainstream Zionist elite were deftly manipulating both the right-wing factions, who they privately relied on to carry out damaging attacks on British prestige whilst publicly condemning them in an attempt to delegitimize their acts and maintain their hegemonic grip on the Yishuv, and the British, with whom they publicly maintained links in order to try and neutralize the official reaction to Zionist violence and privately sought to weaken and undermine.

As the insurgency grew, members of the British government and the security forces increasingly endeavoured to widen the scope of the counter-insurgency to encompass the Yishuv as a whole. In a hastily written order to British forces in Palestine, General Evelyn Barker, GOC Palestine, deemed all Jewish businesses (cafes, bars etc.) off limits to the security forces, in order to “punish the Jews in the way the race dislikes as much as any by striking at their pockets and showing our contempt for them”.<sup>75</sup> The order created a major political storm and was rescinded two weeks later and Barker was soon transferred out of Palestine. But the general tendency of broadening the focus of responsibility for violent attacks continued, culminating in episodes like the ‘Farran Affair’ (discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three), which highlighted British frustrations and an increasing thirst for revenge. Violent reprisals by the security forces against the Zionist community also became an increasingly prevalent phenomenon, and discussion will now turn to one key event, the hanging of Army sergeants Martin and Paice and its aftermath.

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<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Segev (2001) p479

## Chapter Two – ‘Honour Killings’

*“An empire can permit itself to be unjust, even tyrannical and terrifying. It can permit itself defeats on the battlefield or in the diplomatic arena; but it cannot allow itself one thing: to lose prestige and become a laughing stock”*

Colonel Grey, Inspector-General, Palestine Police

On the 4<sup>th</sup> May 1947 the Irgun conducted a raid on the maximum security Acre prison which the British were using to detain captured insurgents. The Irgun militants blew a large hole in the side of the ancient fortress and successfully rescued a large number of Irgun and LEHI prisoners, with six Irgun members killed and three captured. The raid highlighted Britain’s increasing inability to effectively deal with the escalating insurgency. In an attempt to signal firmer resolve and to try and shore up Britain’s crumbling prestige, a military court sentenced the three captured Irgun operatives to death. In response, two army sergeants attached to the Field Security Section of Army Intelligence, Sergeants Marvin Paice and Clifford Martin, were captured whilst off-duty in Netanya. The Irgun indicated that if the death sentences handed down to the captured operatives were carried out, then the sergeants would be killed in retaliation. A major search was conducted by the army, the police and members of the Haganah for the sergeants, who were believed to be held in the Natanya area. However, despite an extensive search there was no sign of them; they were in fact being held in an underground chamber, beneath a diamond factory. Later CID investigations found evidence of the presence of the two sergeants in a number of diamond factories, but the police were never able to determine conclusively where they had been held.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See the final police report on the murder of Sgts Martin and Paice, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1947, PRO CO 537/2303

On 29<sup>th</sup> July the British, having signalled their intention not to yield to pressure from the Irgun, carried out the sentences on the three Irgun operatives, and in response the Irgun made good their threat. The following day Martin and Paice were removed from the underground chamber and hung from the ceiling of the factory.<sup>77</sup> They were then taken to a nearby eucalyptus grove, their bodies strung up to the branches of one of the trees and the area around them booby-trapped with mines. This last detail was communicated to the Haganah (who then informed the British) because of a fear that it would be they rather than the police or army who would discover the bodies and trigger the mines. However, possibly due to a miscommunication, the British apparently believed only the bodies themselves were mined, and as an army captain was cutting down one of the corpses it fell to the ground and triggered a large explosion, injuring the captain and severely mutilating the bodies, one of which disintegrated completely. The whole spectacle was witnessed first-hand by members of the press corps who were permitted to take photographs of the bodies, photographs which rapidly found themselves on the front pages of British newspapers.<sup>78</sup>

The response to the hanging of the two sergeants was dramatic. Within Palestine itself the event prompted a serious breakdown in police discipline. A contingent of police officers went on the rampage in Tel Aviv, killing and injuring civilians and causing extensive destruction. In some of the worst police violence, two buses were fired upon by police armoured cars, and grenades were thrown into a café killing and wounding

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<sup>77</sup> Anonymous information given to the police stated that the sergeants died due to the lack of an adequate air supply in the chamber in which they were being held. This was never proven.

<sup>78</sup> Accounts of the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Martin and Paice differ. This version is taken from the relevant army report ("Report on the Murder of Sgt Paice and Sgt Martin from 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Brigade" 1/8/47, Palestine Police Old Comrades Association Collection, GB 165-0224, Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony's College, Oxford), from the CID report ("CID Report on the Murder of Sgt M Paice and Sgt C.J.V. Martin" 2/9/47, PRO CO 537/2303) and from Harber, E (1978) *Menahem Begin* (Delacorte Press, New York) pp186-191

several civilians.<sup>79</sup> Over the following days civilians were abused at checkpoints and there were reports of taxi drivers being harassed and their vehicles vandalized. Within the UK the reaction was even more vitriolic. For five days between August 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> 1947, anti-Jewish rioting broke out across British cities, with Liverpool being one of the worst affected. Synagogues were burned down, Jewish-owned shops attacked and Jewish cemeteries vandalized. In the words of the *Jewish Chronicle*, these riots were “the first in living memory” in the UK.<sup>80</sup> Hundreds of properties were damaged and more than eighty people were arrested. According to reports published in the *Times* and *Jewish Chronicle*, “crowds of hundreds” cheered the stoning of Jewish shops in Lancashire,<sup>81</sup> and some non-Jewish shopkeepers were prompted to display signs stating that their shops were not Jewish-owned to avoid the wrath of the crowds.

The reaction to the hanging of Martin and Paice was significantly greater than to other insurgent attacks. The headlines in the British press were rancorous, and the incident was frequently described in hostile, inflammatory terms.<sup>82</sup> This episode also stands out clearly in the memories of surviving members of the police force, who consistently describe it as one of the key events of the insurgency, one which marked a turning point in British-Jewish relations, and often as one which affected them emotionally.<sup>83</sup> Thus former police officer Frank Jones, who served between 1946 and 1948, states that whereas he tried to treat Arabs and Jews equally, incidents like the hangings changed his attitudes towards

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<sup>79</sup> Hoffman, B (1985) “Jewish terrorist activities and the British government in Palestine, 1939-1947” (DPhil Thesis, Oxford) p85

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Bagon, P (2003) “The Impact of the Jewish Underground on Anglo-Jewry, 1945-47”, unpublished MA Thesis, University of Oxford, p131

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in *ibid* p128

<sup>82</sup> Carruthers, S (1995) ‘A Wordy Warfare’: Terrorism in Palestine, 1944-47 in her *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counter-insurgency, 1944-60* (Leicester University Press, London) p62. The British media often equated Zionist terrorism with Nazism.

<sup>83</sup> During the course of 2006 students and faculty at the Middle East Centre, St Antony’s College, Oxford conducted a series of interviews with surviving British members of the Palestine Police Force. Interviews are stored in the Middle East Centre Archive

the Jewish population and led him to ask, “What kind of people are these that would do a thing like that?”<sup>84</sup> Similarly, ex-Palestine Police officer Martin Duchesne claimed that the deaths of Martin and Paice were “the turning point” in relations between the Zionists and the British, and led to “a great deal of tension” between British and Jewish members of the police.<sup>85</sup> Whilst it is understandable that the two former police officers should recall this incident and cite its importance given the extensive press coverage at the time and Duchesne’s participation in the search for the sergeants, there were many other incidents in which greater numbers of police officers or soldiers were killed which do not appear to stand out as prominently in the minds of those who lived through the period. Chief Secretary Gurney remarked in a telegram shortly afterwards that the incidents were “no worse” than those which happen every day, and the outburst of retaliatory police violence and rioting was mystifying to him.<sup>86</sup>

The hangings of Martin and Paice were not the only act to produce a strong emotional reaction from the British. In December 1946, the Irgun responded to the arrest and floggings of two young Irgun operatives by kidnapping and flogging an army major and three sergeants in retaliation. As Begin himself acknowledged such attacks had a profound impact, undermining British morale and damaging Britain’s ‘prestige’. He claimed that the ‘whip’ was a potent symbol of British rule and for it to be turned on the colonial rulers themselves was a major upset of the ‘normal’ colonial order. Begin was angered at the use of this form of punishment by the British, which he considered inappropriate for use against Jews in their ‘homeland’. Irgun propaganda proclaimed, “For hundreds of years you have been whipping ‘natives’ in your colonies – without retaliation. In your foolish pride you regard the Jews of Eretz Israel as natives too... Jews

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Frank Jones, 16 March 2006

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Martin Duchesne, 23 March 2006

<sup>86</sup> Hoffman (1985) p355

are not Zulus. You will not whip Jews in their homeland.”<sup>87</sup> The impact of the floggings was expressed in a statement from the then GOC, General Evelyn Barker, upon leaving Palestine, “Our officers in Palestine were kidnapped, killed and *even* flogged”.<sup>88</sup> Clearly, as Begin noted with satisfaction, the floggings had exercised Barker greatly. The Irgun achieved a clear victory in this instance; following the floggings of the soldiers, the British did not use floggings again as a method of punishing captured insurgents.

Shortly after Martin and Paice were killed, the British Labour government announced its intention to withdraw from Palestine and hand over the mandate to the United Nations. The hangings were an important element in this decision. Colonel Nichol Grey, Inspector-General of the Palestine Police, stated in a interview he gave to Israeli journalists in the 1970s that, “When the underground killed our men, we could treat it as murder; but when they erected gallows and executed our men, it was as if they were saying, “We rule here as much as you do”, and that no administration can bear. Our choice was obvious. Either total suppression or get out, and we chose the second.”<sup>89</sup> The types of attack that the Irgun and LEHI engaged in were highly effective in breaking Britain’s will to fight the insurgency, and they were deliberately designed to do so. Begin stated that weakening British morale by attacking British prestige was the insurgency’s major goal. Once British pride was damaged, a withdrawal, or else an all-out assault on the Jewish population, was the only possible outcome, and the latter, as Grey indicated, was not an option for the British.

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<sup>87</sup> Begin, M (1979) *The Revolt* (Futura, Glasgow) p311

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in *ibid* p313 (my emphasis)

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Charters, D (1989) *The British Army and the Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47* (MacMillan, London) p63

The question of why weakening British morale and damaging the British Empire's prestige was so successful a strategy is partly also a question of why the British did not employ a greater level of violence against the insurgents. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the British were unable to deploy greater numbers of troops and police and use their usual methods (i.e. large-scale collective punishments against the whole population) against the insurgents, partly because Britain was economically weak after the war and could not afford the cost and did not possess the troops needed, and partly because of pressure from the United States on whom Britain now depended for essential loans. Thus the British Empire was, to a certain extent, surviving on its prestige alone during this period, its ability to employ lethal force to suppress revolt greatly reduced, and a fear of instability spreading to the rest of Britain's colonial possessions led her to withdraw from Palestine lest British weakness become all too apparent. Her image as a powerful global actor with the ability to maintain a tight hold over a vast empire had to be protected if British imperialism was to survive, and the Zionist right recognized this vulnerability and exploited it to maximum effect. This is only part of the story however, and the question of exactly how and why attacks of this type provoked retaliatory police violence will be discussed in more detail later.

### **Determining the Scope and Nature of Police Violence**

The extent of police violence, and the precise nature of it, is difficult to determine with any real accuracy. For obvious reasons, surviving former police officers are reluctant to talk about it openly and rarely admit to having known it was happening. Acknowledging that such activity was relatively prevalent in Palestine would have seriously undermined the 'mythology' of the Palestine Police, i.e. the select collection of beliefs, attitudes and

memories of the force that emphasise its professionalism, impartiality and its stoicism and bravery in the face of danger. This set of attitudes was not just with regards to the police; they were also about 'Britishness' and the norms of 'British' behaviour generally. Martin Duchesne states that "British people don't riot", unlike Arabs or Jews.<sup>90</sup> Similarly former police officers would emphasise the fact that the force just got on with the job, and was "remarkably well behaved". Seriously questioning this dominant myth is rare, even though the testimony of the former officers contains many hints and clues which contradict it, and provide an insight into the true scope of police and army violence.

There are numerous examples of this. For instance, in his testimony, former police constable Victor Cannings states that following an Irgun attack on British police stations, it was unsafe for the police to venture out into the area because British soldiers were firing at anyone who approached them:

[The Irgun] blew up headquarters in Jerusalem, Jaffa and in Haifa, more or less all at the same time. In the Jerusalem one there was a number of black soldiers from Africa, South Africa, and a lot of them got buried under there, and were killed. And in fact we were afraid to go out because the others had gone mad and just shot anyone.<sup>91</sup>

Whilst this violence was not being perpetrated by the police themselves, it is significant because it contradicts the consistently expressed notion that the security services as a whole were disciplined and well behaved, and because it provides evidence about how the morale of members of the British security forces was affected by insurgent

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<sup>90</sup> Talk given by Martin Duchesne, St Antony's College, Oxford, 23 Nov 2006

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Cannings, 27 Feb 2006



operations. In another telling incident Mark Russell describes an occasion during a posting in Tel Aviv when he heard gunfire in the night:

I was on duty one night, and you could hear machine gun fire going on, it wasn't unusual at night, there's [often] a little incident somewhere... I kept on hearing this and I opened the door through to the sergeant in charge of the armoured cars and said "Did any of your chaps say there was anything happening in Tel Aviv? There's quite a lot of noise around the place", and he said "No, they're all dead quiet"... I didn't believe this and I didn't know what to do so I rang up the boss and said, "Look, I think we've got a problem here". The District Commissioner came down, well a lot of people came down... and they decided they'd better call the armoured cars in and they did. They gave them twenty minutes before an arms inspection. Of course they'd been shooting at the Jews, there was no doubt about that.<sup>92</sup>

Russell's account is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it seems likely that the sergeant in charge of the armoured cars must have had some inkling as to what was really taking place in Tel Aviv, given that the gunfire was clearly audible to all. Coupled with Russell's later acknowledgement that the twenty-minute delay before the arms inspection was obviously designed to allow the crews time to restock their ammunition supplies so as to cover up any evidence, this implies that vigilante violence was, if not accepted, then at least tolerated to a certain extent. There was recognition that the violence had to be stopped, but it appears that the senior officials who were present at the time had little interest in seriously investigating the incident or in taking steps to prevent it happening again.

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Mark Russell, 16 May 2006

Indeed measures like the twenty-minute delay were an unambiguous sign that a nurturing environment for vigilante violence existed; if police officers committed acts of violence against the civilian population then, this episode suggests, they could escape unpunished. Russell himself was quick to argue that whilst such actions by the police and army were widespread, and that only some made it into the pages of newspapers, they were “bound to happen” given the persistence of violent insurgent attacks against the police and army. His discussion of police violence downplayed the significance of such attacks, or at least implied that they should be seen as unremarkable, given the context in which police officers and soldiers were operating, though his own decision to inform his superiors about the events he witnessed suggests that he did not condone them.

Further indications of indiscipline come from the account of Denys Hodson, a former constable who served in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem between 1947 and 1948. In his account, he mentions a bomb attack against the Jewish population, committed by a member of the police force:

There’s a man currently residing in Bristol, I’m not going to tell you his name... According to Gerald [Green – another surviving member of the police force] he was one of two men who planted a bomb on Ben Yehuda Street... which blew up killing Jewish people. And that was absolutely a straight terrorist act, it wasn’t an immediate response to anything, it was pure terrorism.<sup>93</sup>

This is possibly reference to one of a series of attacks committed by British deserters, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Hodson, who strongly condemned such violence, paints a vivid picture in his testimony of a force rife with anti-

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<sup>93</sup> Talk given by Denys Hodson at St Antony’s College, Oxford, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2005

Semitism and openly hostile to the Jewish population. The attack he refers to above is one of a number of incidents he discusses, incidents which, according to him, increased in frequency as the Mandate drew to a close.

The three incidents described above by Cannings, Russell and Hodson respectively, represent a 'sliding scale' of violence, ranging from the immediate, 'spontaneous' violence following an insurgent attack, to clearly pre-meditated crimes planned and executed over a longer period of time. The type of discipline breakdown described by Cannings is also referred to in the diaries of Sir John Fletcher-Cooke, a government officer in Palestine in 1946-48. He describes discussions with a Deputy Police Commissioner about whether to purchase a personal sidearm for protection. The Deputy Commissioner gives Fletcher-Cooke a number of reasons why purchasing a firearm would be a mistake, before adding a further, more fundamental reason:

'But it's even more dangerous than that,' the Deputy Commissioner went on ... 'My police boys are very trigger-happy. They have to be. If there was a shooting affray going on and they turned up at the scene, they'd certainly shoot on sight any civilian with a revolver in his hand'<sup>94</sup>

Fletcher-Cooke's account highlights the fragility of police and army morale, and the general acceptance of this type of police/military violence. It is important to recognize that 'trigger-happy' tendencies among police officers and soldiers are not simply something to be taken for granted but are symptomatic of low morale and poor discipline. Incidents of this type suggest a diminished capacity on the part of junior officers to control spontaneous outbreaks of violence and to maintain and boost unit

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<sup>94</sup> "The Compulsive Cuppa", Fletcher-Cooke Papers, Middle East Centre Archive, p10

morale, and as such can be an indication that other types of security force violence were likely to be occurring.

In addition to the testimony provided by the surviving members of the force, and in the diaries of former colonial officials such as Fletcher-Cooke, there are further indications of the nature and extent of security force violence and indiscipline to be found in newspaper coverage and in standard Zionist histories of the period. Newspaper reports, particularly from the US press, often painted a highly negative view of the behaviour of British security personnel in Palestine. For instance in a report published in the *New York Post* on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1945, the correspondent described how he had witnessed British soldiers “shooting at children” and “singing Nazi songs”.<sup>95</sup> Similarly a letter published in the *New Statesman and Nation* on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 1946, described how the author had personally witnessed a raid on a Zionist settlement:

In the course of the Ruhama ‘operation’, several fires were started, cattle feed was bulldozed into the ground, the water pump was smashed... and the dwellings plundered and damaged most seriously. The settlers, who did not attempt to resist, were beaten and prodded with bayonets, and at 2 o’clock one morning an attempt was made to rape a girl. More specifically anti-Semitic activities were the inscription of walls with swastikas and unspeakable insults.<sup>96</sup>

It is impossible to verify such accounts, and the British authorities certainly regarded them as insidious propaganda designed to aid the insurgents and damage Britain’s reputation. However, reports like those cited above were widespread, and tales of British

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<sup>95</sup> Cited in Carruthers, S (1995) ‘A Wordy Warfare’: Terrorism in Palestine, 1944-47 in her *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counter-insurgency, 1944-60* (Leicester University Press, London), p51

<sup>96</sup> “Outrage in Palestine”, Correspondence, *New Statesman and Nation*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1946

crimes against the Zionist settlers were repeated by numerous press correspondents across a range of media sources, making the idea of an organized conspiracy against the British somewhat less plausible.

A further source of evidence about British security force violence is provided by Zionist historical literature. There are obvious problems with the uncritical acceptance of the image of the police portrayed in Zionist histories of the period, particularly in accounts produced before the Mandate ended or shortly thereafter. One such account, Daphne Trevor's *Under the White Paper*, published in 1948, exhibits a very clear endorsement of the basic tenets of the Zionist project in Palestine and, given the time at which it was produced, a time when the British police were still engaged in a violent struggle with sections of the Jewish national movement, it must be approached with some caution. Nevertheless, Trevor's account is at least partly grounded in primary source material, such as British government documentation and newspaper articles, which lends some credibility to the claims she makes. The level of detail which she uses to describe certain incidents also gives some further weight to her account. Furthermore, the kinds of incidents she discusses are also mentioned elsewhere, in sources which are less obviously beholden to the interests of the Zionist movement. She discusses a series of incidents which occurred at the very early stages of the Jewish insurgency, at the beginning of the Second World War. At this stage, attacks on the police were relatively infrequent and the situation in the country was much more stable. Thus, although the kinds of police violence described happened earlier than the period that is of primary focus, they are significant because if such incidents were occurring at a time of relative stability, they raise the question of what kinds of violence occurred later, when stress levels among security force personnel were much higher.

The kinds of violence she describes vary significantly in type and extent, from spontaneous ‘unofficial’ brutality, to more pre-meditated, officially sanctioned violence. The first incident she describes concerns the dispersal of protestors participating in a violent demonstration on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1939, during which it was reported that aggressive police tactics left a large number of people injured.<sup>97</sup> This is consistent with policing methods of the period both in the UK and throughout the Empire, as well as in other similar incidents in Palestine recorded in other sources. In November 1945, for instance, British troops used live ammunition to disperse a crowd of Zionist protestors in Tel Aviv, killing and wounding more than sixty people.<sup>98</sup> This kind of response to demonstrations was standard practice in the colonies generally, though the use of live ammunition against Jewish demonstrators (though not Arabs) in Palestine was rare, and hence clearly falls under the category of officially sanctioned violence. Another incident of a similar nature involved the suppression of a labour strike in January 1940 by the police. According to Trevor<sup>99</sup> the police beat and abused the striking workers until they abandoned the protest, injuring a number of them.

An even more serious act of police violence occurred in March 1940. A 17-year-old boy, Menahem Privas, was beaten to death by police officers outside a cinema in Jerusalem; he had allegedly been participating in a demonstration, during which the cinema in question was badly damaged. The account of the incident that appeared in the *Palestine Post* does not mention how Privas died, other than stating that he died from injuries sustained during the demonstration.<sup>100</sup> According to Trevor the newspaper account was

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<sup>97</sup> Trevor (1948) p38

<sup>98</sup> Newsinger, J (2002) “At War with Zion” in his *British Counter-Insurgency from Palestine to Northern Ireland* (Palgrave, London), p13

<sup>99</sup> Trevor (1948) p38-40. Her account of the incident was based entirely on the testimony of the workers present.

<sup>100</sup> “Students and Women March in Jerusalem” *Palestine Post* 5<sup>th</sup> March 1940

heavily censored by the Mandate authorities, who removed details concerning the manner of Privas' death at the hands of the police. Trevor cites the report of the medical examiner at Hadassah Hospital where Privas was taken, who reported that Privas died from severe head injuries and that his skull had been completely smashed in, probably by a baton.<sup>101</sup> A complaint was filed by the Jewish Agency with the Mandate authorities who dismissed it as being without foundation. Chaim Weizmann tried to pursue the matter with the Colonial Secretary, Lord Lloyd, who again refused to seriously investigate further, stating that whilst "isolated events of an unfortunate character [may] have occurred" the allegations against the police were "greatly exaggerated".<sup>102</sup> Whilst the precise circumstances surrounding Privas' death remain unclear, even the British authorities conceded that his injuries "may have been inflicted by police in dealing with disorderly elements",<sup>103</sup> and the debate primarily centred on whether or not the police had been 'justified' in beating the boy.

### **A Legacy of Violence: The Black and Tans in Palestine**

These incidents, all of which occurred during the Second World War when Palestine was generally more stable, are just some of those mentioned by Trevor. Her narrative paints a stark picture of a force lacking in discipline and prone to outbreaks of violence against the civilian population. Sustenance for such an account can be found by examining the personnel problems plaguing the force at that time. As a result of war-time personnel requirements, few if any new recruits could be spared to serve in Palestine, and as a result the Palestine Police force was required to retain its existing personnel often far beyond

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<sup>101</sup> Trevor (1948) p45-6

<sup>102</sup> Letter from Lord Lloyd to Chaim Weizmann, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1940, quoted in *ibid* p48

<sup>103</sup> Letter from Chief Secretary to Jewish Agency, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1940, quoted in *ibid* p47

their original contracts. One consequence of this, aside from the toll this exacted on officers who had not enjoyed a period of leave for some considerable time, was that the force retained officers judged unfit for service, and some were even promoted.<sup>104</sup> One such example was Raymond Cafferata, referred to in the previous chapter in his role in the raid on the settlement of Ramat HaKovesh. Despite an unflattering appraisal by his superior officer, who recommended him for transfer away from Palestine, Cafferata was nevertheless promoted during this period. Cafferata had formerly served in Ireland in the early 1920s during suppression of the Irish nationalist uprising. He was one of many former Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC)/'Black and Tans'<sup>105</sup> officers who went on to serve in Palestine, and by 1943 five out of eight district commanders had previously served in the Black and Tans.<sup>106</sup>

The influence of the Black and Tans on the Palestine Police Force was pervasive and pernicious. During the Arab Revolt, High Commissioner MacMichael had noted the "occasional emergence of Black and Tan tendencies among the British section",<sup>107</sup> and police brutality and violence was widespread during the counter-insurgency campaign. Torture, the abuse of detainees and violent reprisals against civilians were all commonplace and thrived within a culture of tolerance for police excesses among the senior officer corps.<sup>108</sup> Such a permissive environment helped to shape the force into one which accepted violence as the norm and which practised it regularly without fear of serious consequences. The impact this would have later on, as the force began to face the

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<sup>104</sup> Hoffman (1985) p104

<sup>105</sup> The 'Black and Tans' were a paramilitary reserve unit of the Royal Irish Constabulary, notorious for brutality and poor discipline.

<sup>106</sup> Smith, C (1992) *Communal Conflict and Insurrection in Palestine, 1936-48* in Anderson, D and Killingray, D (eds.) *Policing and Decolonisation* (Manchester University Press, Manchester), p79

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in *ibid* p71

<sup>108</sup> See PRO files cited by Smith, n34-38



Zionist insurgency in the mid-1940s and its numbers were bolstered with young, inexperienced recruits was profound. Mark Russell's account with its insinuation of official tolerance for serious police crimes, implies that the force remained unwilling to seriously investigate and curtail aberrant behaviour among its officers. With 75% of the force comprised of 18-19-year-olds by 1946,<sup>109</sup> and with the remainder of the force, and particularly the upper echelons, being comprised of men whose experiences and practices had been shaped by a violent counter-insurgency campaign less than ten years before, the force was ill-disposed to dealing with a situation in which officers would be placed under conditions of extreme stress and would face a daily risk of injury or death at the hands of militants.

### **The Wickham Report**

The poor state of the Palestine Police and the serious problems which plagued it, led the High Commissioner, Sir Alan Cunningham, to invite Sir Charles Wickham, a former Inspector-General of the RIC, to conduct a review of the force. Wickham, with the assistance of a specialist in CID affairs, William Moffat (a former RIC Inspector), published his report on the training and organization of the Palestine Police in December 1946. The report was highly critical and drew attention to the prevalence of practices which left the young, inexperienced recruits who dominated the force at that time, ill-prepared to face the tasks they were expected to perform. Wickham began his report by pointing out that violent Zionist activity had “weakened the prestige of the Government” and that “no repressive or offensive measures have met with any marked

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<sup>109</sup> Smith (1992) p75

success”.<sup>110</sup> The police, he argued, had to take the lead in combating the insurgency, as it was essentially a policing and not military problem, and they had so far failed to do so. In fact they had been thrown onto the defensive and the insurgents had “forced the withdrawal of the police from duty on the streets in their area of operations”.<sup>111</sup> The primary methods being used by the force were “confined in most places to armoured car patrols and a reserve of mobile companies on military lines”. This, argued Wickham, had serious consequences, for it meant that the police “resemble too closely the Gestapo and are too inclined to forget the first lesson of a policeman – civility to the public”.<sup>112</sup>

After outlining his recommendations for the reorganization of the force and the disbanding of the Police Mobile Force (PMF), the paramilitary unit which was the primary weapon used to combat the insurgency and in which most new recruits served, Wickham went on to assess the training provided to new police officers. This was, he concluded, wholly inadequate. The first issue was the composition of the force and the predominance of “boys” rather than experienced men, thus limiting the scope for on-the-job training with experienced constables. Wastage was so great (during the first half of 1946, according to the report, it exceeded intake) that it would “take years to build up an experienced force”.<sup>113</sup> Wickham then went on to highlight and strongly condemn the type of training provided to recruits which was of a primarily military nature, and the fact that “for the last year or more, recruits have received no instruction in police duties”.<sup>114</sup> The force lacked the capacity to provide genuine police training argued Wickham, who cited the example of a (rare) policing lesson provided by a sergeant who had no actual policing experience and who was completely incapable of answering the questions of the

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<sup>110</sup> Report by Sir Charles Wickham, PRO CO 537/2269, paragraph 2

<sup>111</sup> *ibid*

<sup>112</sup> *ibid* paragraph 4

<sup>113</sup> *ibid* paragraph 6

<sup>114</sup> *ibid* paragraph 7

recruits in the class. In general the force was thoroughly militarised and the procedure for promotions and the application of disciplinary regulations were all in conformity with army rather than policing norms.

This “militarization of the force” and the military nature of the training provided to recruits was highlighted by almost all of the former police officers interviewed. Frank Jones, who had served in the Army Cadets prior to his service in Palestine provides a typical account:

The square-bashing I knew, I didn't need that. I knew about the small arms training, I didn't need that. What I would have liked, would have been to have more law training and more language training. But the course was cut to 6 weeks because they wanted us out manning the stations. So a lot of the time, to me, I'm not talking about the others who'd had no military experience at all, to me the square-bashing and the arms training, I didn't learn anything.<sup>115</sup>

Wickham was deeply concerned about this, and emphasized how poorly equipped new recruits were for facing conditions on the ground in Palestine, especially given the paucity of experienced, older officers who could guide new recruits and complete the process of training (or make up for its serious deficiencies). Unless fundamental changes were made, the force would be unable to deal with the rising tide of violence in the Mandate and would be forced to remain on the defensive.

Wickham's report is a highly valuable document and provides an extremely useful and relatively candid insight into the process in which recruits were crafted into trained

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with Frank Jones, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2006

officers by the institution of the police force. This process was clearly flawed in many fundamental respects and Wickham hints at the damage being done in terms of the force's relationship with the civilian population. Wickham's conclusions lend further credence to the view that the Palestine Police was moulding and shaping its new officers in such a way as to leave them more greatly disposed to committing acts of violence. The recruits were trained only in the most basic of military methods (weapons training, 'square-bashing' etc.), and spent very little, if any, time on legal or language training. According to the Force's Annual Administrative Report for 1946, for example, less than 4% of Palestine Police officers spoke Hebrew<sup>116</sup>, and whilst Arabic language training appears to have been better, it was still insufficient. Furthermore, even such training that was provided to recruits was often of a very poor nature, and for those individuals who had never received any military training prior to coming to Palestine, they were sometimes left, as a story told by former constable James Hainge highlights, barely able to operate the weapons they were provided with:

There was a gung-ho sergeant there [Kfar Vitkin, his first posting], we were firing out to sea... and he picked a Bren gun up and almost shot me because the thing ran away with him and I can remember the bullets... the change of air as they went over my head... I personally don't think the training we received, in retrospect, was very professional. I mean for things like that to happen.<sup>117</sup>

Denys Hodson's account of the training he received also underlines this point. In comparing the training provided by the army with that given to new Palestine Police recruits, he points out that the army anticipated it would take a considerably longer

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<sup>116</sup> Cited in Hoffman (1985) p123

<sup>117</sup> Interview with James Hainge, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2006

amount of time to prepare a prospective soldier to use the gun issued to him than did the police:

[The eight-week training period], at least three-quarters of it, was spent on what you might call standard military training. In the army eight weeks is considered your primary training at the end of which you can just about shoot a rifle and do elementary drill and nothing else. It's a very short period indeed. And then you learn the finer points of being an infantryman over another sixteen weeks. We were going to get eight weeks altogether... To attempt to train a person to be a good policeman in a very, very tough situation, eight weeks is totally inadequate.<sup>118</sup>

The disciplinary environment at the training depot was also extremely strict, in accordance with military practice. Bill Gibbons' impressions of Jenin training camp shed some light on the kind of experience a new recruit could expect:

We were split into groups and allocated a sergeants. They were ex-Army, Guards or Marine sergeants, and my impression was they weren't very nice to know. He interviewed each one of us separately, and he was bawling at everyone, at me... Some of the sergeants there, they were *sadistic* swines, they really were.<sup>119</sup>

Sadistic behaviour on the part of some senior officers was not confined to the training depot, as Gibbons' description of his superior at Jericho, Inspector 'Buck' Adams, demonstrates. According to Gibbons' account, the Inspector he served under was a particularly harsh and unforgiving officer, prone to cruel behaviour. Gibbons relates an encounter he had with another former Palestine Police officer, who had served with Adams before the Second World War, which illustrates this:

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<sup>118</sup> Talk given by Denys Hodson at St Antony's College, Oxford, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2005

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Bill Gibbons, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2006

He said, 'You've been to Palestine, haven't you Bill?... Did you ever come across a bloke named Buck Adams? Bastard... We used to do patrols with him during the Arab Rebellion... We went to this Arab village and [Adams] asked this young boy had he seen so-and-so, and the boy said 'No'. [Adams] said, 'Are you sure?', and he said 'No, ya seedi'... He took his foot out of the stirrup and kicked the boy in the face.<sup>120</sup>

Police and military forces are likely to contain a certain percentage of individuals who are prone to such behaviour and who exhibit sadistic tendencies. In a more efficiently organized unit, individuals like this are usually weeded out as their behaviour is disruptive to the process of crafting individuals who are totally obedient to authority, but because of the chronic personnel problems discussed above, the Palestine Police force was compelled to retain such officers.

The Wickham report and the testimony of former police constables provide an avenue into understanding how recruits were moulded and shaped by the force and the myriad ways in which training and organization were seriously deficient. New recruits, the majority of them boys of 18 or 19, some coming straight from school to perform their National Service in Palestine, emerged from the training depots after brief periods of highly ineffective training which left them inadequately prepared to face the dangers of active service in Palestine. Once out in the field, most of the British Palestine Police officers were drafted into the Police Mobile Force (PMF). Mark Russell's summary of the PMF is illuminating:

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<sup>120</sup> *ibid*

This PMF thing, this 'Police Mobile Force' we were all in, it was a nonsense thing really. They'd created it to get a body of men with police uniforms and not army uniforms, I think, but it was nonsense. There was nobody in that with any experience at all. They were ignorant about the country, they were ignorant about everything actually.<sup>121</sup>

The Police Mobile Force effectively acted as a paramilitary squad which was thoroughly alienated from the civilian population and which was officered by men who often had little exposure to more routine police duties. Older officers in the force at that time had been, as discussed earlier, shaped by the Arab Revolt and by service in places such as Ireland, episodes which were notorious for police brutality and indiscipline. Many of these young recruits then found themselves in dangerous, high stress situations. Denys Hodson, for example, recounts how after his training he and most of his squad were dispatched to Tel Aviv, one of the most dangerous postings:

There'd been no British Police operating [in Tel Aviv] except for an armoured car patrol. The Palestine Government had decided that this was a serious loss of face for the British occupying forces and we should return to do foot patrols in Tel Aviv. We were chosen as mostly fairly raw recruits, I think because we had no 'back history', we didn't know the situation and therefore [were] more malleable, to bring us into new ways.<sup>122</sup>

Whether or not Hodson's explanation of why he and the other young recruits in his squad were sent to Tel Aviv is accurate, it remains the case that individuals with no combat experience, in units which were poorly organized and inadequately officered were dispatched to high risk situations. This provides an important part of the explanation for police violence and indiscipline.

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<sup>121</sup> Russell interview, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2006

<sup>122</sup> Hodson talk, *op cit*

## The Causes of Police Violence: I) Stress

The root causes of police and security force violence are many and varied, and there is no attempt here to provide a comprehensive analysis of this issue. However, it is possible to identify some of the most important factors in the context of late Mandate-era Palestine, and to offer tentative explanations as to how and why those causal factors emerged and the consequences they produced on the ground. Security force violence is of course a widespread phenomenon, which is far from confined only to Palestine and as discussed earlier was a prominent feature of other British counter-insurgency campaigns. Indeed, police and military forces in a variety of historical and political contexts have engaged in brutality and violence towards civilian populations, but it is nevertheless possible to discern a common set of factors which produce such violence and which create an environment when armed men and women are induced to commit violent acts against non-combatants. This account of the situation in Palestine will therefore rely in part on insights gained in very different contexts, which nevertheless have parallels with, and which can help shed light on, the period of the Zionist insurgency.

Palestine Police officers operated in a risky and highly stressful environment. Although much of their daily routine could be relatively mundane and uneventful, there was nevertheless a constant threat of death or injury, often arriving with little or no warning. Partly because of the relatively small size of the Zionist militias fighting the British (according to one estimate the British outnumbered the Irgun/LEHI by 14-1<sup>123</sup>) the tactics employed by the insurgents were primarily designed to avoid direct confrontation with the security forces and thus minimize risk to their own operatives whilst maximising

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<sup>123</sup> Hoffman (1985) p48



British casualties. Hence they would often involve the use of remotely operated explosives targeted at British armoured car patrols or checkpoints, or the use of snipers. This required police patrols to be constantly vigilant and prepared for the possibility of an attack at any time. Insurgent attacks were also often designed to highlight the weakness of British security policy and the relative ease with which even police stations and army barracks could be penetrated and attacked. This meant that very few areas in which police officers lived and operated could be described as truly 'safe'. This was coupled with the increasing paucity of recreational opportunities for officers as the insurgency unfolded. It became increasingly dangerous for off-duty officers to enter civilian areas and many were forced to spend their time off confined to barracks with little to occupy their time. Frank Jones describes what life was like off-duty:

There was nothing to do, you couldn't go anywhere. You had to go out in no less than two, and you could never get two. Someone who was off duty was asleep or just coming off duty. There was nowhere to go and nothing to do, so you read, you had a chat, you went to the little canteen and had a beer.<sup>124</sup>

The possibilities for defusing the stress of the job were thus greatly restricted. Mark Russell provides a clue as to how this stress affected police officers:

You lived in fear all the time, you don't realise you do, do you?... But I'm told by my wife who I met when I went back to Cambridge and by a lot of other people who knew me before and after, that I was a terrible mess when I got back, terribly jumpy, you know twitchy about things. You spent a long time... when you never sat with your back to the

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with Frank Jones, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2006

door, you were armed all the time... Quite a lot of the people I knew were killed you know, it was a fairly dangerous job.<sup>125</sup>

Russell's description of his mental state upon returning to Britain helps to illuminate what conditions for officers serving in Palestine must have been like. Russell acknowledges that this stress was pervasive and relentless, to the extent that it was only the reaction of friends and family in the UK that alerted him to the degree to which the environment in which he worked had affected him.

It is not difficult to understand how dangerous stress can be in a volatile and potentially explosive combat environment. A field manual produced for the US Army outlines the negative consequences stress can have on combatants' behaviour:

The same physiological and psychological process that result in heroic bravery in one situation can produce criminal acts such as atrocities against enemy prisoners and civilians in another. Stress may drag [the double-edged sword] down in the direction of the misconduct edge, while sound, moral leadership and military training and discipline must direct it upward toward the positive behaviour. <sup>126</sup>

As we have already seen, adequate training and effective leadership were in short supply in the Palestine Police force during the Zionist insurgency, leaving police officers far more prone to what the manual terms "misconduct stress behaviours", or in other words, violent and undisciplined actions.

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with Mark Russell, 16th May 2006

<sup>126</sup> FM 22-51: Leaders Manual for Combat Stress Control, US Army Publication, (available at [https://atiam.train.army.mil/soldierPortal/atia/adlsc/view/public/9203-1/fm/22-51/22-51\\_toc.htm](https://atiam.train.army.mil/soldierPortal/atia/adlsc/view/public/9203-1/fm/22-51/22-51_toc.htm)), p3/6

[Violent attacks on civilians] are clearly reactions to cumulative combat stress. These combat stress reactions are likely, especially in guerrilla warfare... Misconduct stress behaviour is also likely when the sympathies of the civilian non-combatants have become suspect as they allow the soldiers' buddies to be killed or mutilated by mines and booby-traps which they themselves avoid.<sup>127</sup>

The kind of 'trigger-happy' tendencies discussed earlier were one sign of how stressed members of the British security forces were becoming and the toll the lack of proper training and organization was having on both officers and civilians. Whilst the implication in the field manual that civilians "allow" soldiers and police officers to be killed or injured is clearly highly questionable, it was nevertheless the case that members of the Palestine Police increasingly began to blame the Zionist population as a whole for the casualties they were suffering, a phenomenon which will be discussed in more detail below. In summary, as the army manual points out, "The fact is that overstressed human beings with loaded weapons are inherently dangerous."<sup>128</sup>

### **The Causes of Police Violence: II) 'Distance'**

Humans have a deep-seated aversion to killing. Counter-intuitive though this may seem, it is a fact confirmed in numerous research studies, including studies conducted by the British and American militaries. In a study conducted by the US Army during World War Two, researchers discovered that only 15-20% of infantry soldiers ever fired their weapons, whilst less than 1% of fighter pilots accounted for 30-40% of all enemy aircraft shot down. And, although the evidence collected by the Army during the Second World

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<sup>127</sup> *ibid* p4/6

<sup>128</sup> *ibid*

War led to changes in practice designed to encourage greater firing rates, soldiers would still routinely refuse to fire directly at the enemy. During the Vietnam conflict for example, US soldiers fired an average of 50,000 rounds for every enemy combatant killed, despite the lethal efficiency of the weapons used.<sup>129</sup> A range of factors are responsible for a combatant attaining the capacity to act aggressively in a combat situation. Among them, one of the most important is the ‘distance’ between the combatant and the ‘enemy’ (whether that is another combatant or an unarmed civilian). This takes two forms, the ‘physical’ separation and the emotional/psychological ‘distance’.

The two are of course closely interrelated with one another – physical separation leads to emotional distance. Physical separation, the distance between a combatant and his target, enables the combatant to separate him or herself more easily from the act of killing, especially if the target cannot be seen at all. Thus bomber pilots find it easier to kill than infantry soldiers engaged in hand-to-hand combat.<sup>130</sup> The officers of the Palestine Police spent much of their working time physically separated from the Zionist population. As the Wickham report cited above highlighted, Palestine Police officers were usually employed on armoured car patrols and thus often had little direct contact with the civilian population, especially in urban, Jewish areas. This, as Wickham acknowledged, left the police more greatly disposed to acting in an ‘uncivil’ manner towards the community they were policing.<sup>131</sup> During their time off-duty, police officers would rarely fraternize with Jewish civilians especially as the Zionist revolt took root. Similarly, the

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<sup>129</sup> Grossman, D (1995) *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Back Bay Books, New York) p3, 30

<sup>130</sup> *ibid* p107-8

<sup>131</sup> Report by Sir Charles Wickham, PRO CO 537/2269, paragraph 4

Tegart police stations were designed in such a way that British personnel were usually separate from Jewish and Arab members of the police force.

In addition to this physical separation from the Zionist settlers, British police officers also increasingly felt a deep sense of emotional distance from them. Some former officers, such as Martin Duchesne, did claim to view the Zionist community as akin to the white British colonial rulers:

[T]he Jews were essentially Europeans, and if one goes back into British colonial attitudes then East of Suez are an altogether different sort of person, especially those with brown skin. So there was a acceptance I suppose that the Jews were Jews, some of them were Palestinians, but they were essentially Europeans.<sup>132</sup>

Duchesne's description of the predominantly 'white' Zionist community in Palestine suggests that they had a status within the British colonial order somewhat distinct from and higher than that of the 'brown' Arabs of Palestine (and other subjugated peoples of the British Empire). However, this attitude appears to have been relatively rare, and a much more common attitude seems to have been one of distrust, hostility or undisguised hatred towards the Zionist community as a whole and sometimes towards Jewish people in general. Even Duchesne himself acknowledged that the British police sometimes treated their Jewish co-workers with contempt and generally perceived them to be of a lower status:

[T]he British police took precedence over everything, it was almost embarrassing. I've seen a British constable go out with a Jewish inspector and [the former was] unofficially in

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<sup>132</sup> Interview with Martin Duchesne, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2006

charge. I saw once where he wanted to sit in the front seat and put the inspector in the back, but he was dissuaded from that.<sup>133</sup>

In a similar vein, Mark Russell's view of the Jewish population was also highly critical and suffused with racist attitudes:

Particularly the recent immigrants, a lot of them were living very poorly... they were living in very confined blocks of flats. And that did impress on most of us how dirty they all were, and they still are. They're a dirty lot, the Eastern European Jews, they have a lot of very unpleasant habits I think.<sup>134</sup>

But as the conflict between the British security forces and the Zionist militias deepened, attitudes hardened from contempt to outright hostility and hatred. Frank Jones narrowly escaped serious injury during a bomb attack on Haifa police station in September 1947. He describes how it affected his view of the Jewish population:

That's when I knew what an evil people the Jews were. But I still tried, when I was a policeman, to be fair to everybody. But, not when I came out of the force, I thought, well, I wouldn't urinate on a Jew if he was on fire.<sup>135</sup>

As Jones' testimony makes clear, as the insurgency progressed there was increasingly little attempt to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants; the entire Jewish community, both inside Palestine and out, was responsible in some sense for the violence and bloodshed in Palestine. This was a view expressed and encouraged by senior military

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<sup>133</sup> *ibid*

<sup>134</sup> Russell interview, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2006

<sup>135</sup> Jones interview, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2006

officers and colonial officials. Members of the Palestine Government presented a variety of ‘theories’ to explain why the Zionist settlers had turned against the British, theories which usually located the cause in some flaw in the ‘Jewish character’. Sir John Shaw, a senior colonial official in the Palestine Government, argued that many of the Jews who had arrived in Palestine from Central Europe had:

[A] natural tendency to violence... further accelerated by a vengeance complex aroused by the repressive measures which the police have been compelled with the fullest justification, to take against their fellow terrorists.<sup>136</sup>

Similarly, the Middle East Land Forces (MELF) branch of Army HQ, argued that:

It is no longer possible to differentiate between passive onlookers and active armed members of the Jewish population, and the word ‘terrorist’ is no longer being applied to differentiate one from the other. All suffer from the martyrdom complex and instability of temperament, which makes their reactions in circumstances of any political stress both violent and unpredictable.<sup>137</sup>

This was one of the clearest official acknowledgements that the distinction between combatants and non-combatants in the Palestine theatre was increasingly viewed as somewhat spurious. Again, it is not difficult to see how such attitudes translate into an atmosphere in which individual members of the security forces feel they can commit violent acts against civilians without fear of serious consequences, given the pervasive view among senior officials and officers that the Zionist community as a whole was in some sense culpable.

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<sup>136</sup> Cited in Carruthers (1995) p31

<sup>137</sup> Cited in *ibid* p34

In a slightly different vein, Herbert Morrison, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, gave a speech in Parliament following the King David Hotel bombing in which he argued that some of the Zionists in Palestine had been ‘infected’ with Nazism:

Some of the victims fleeing from the ravaged ghettos of Europe have carried with them the germs of those very plagues from which they sought to escape – intolerance, racial pride, intimidation, terrorism and the worship of force.<sup>138</sup>

A deep-seated hatred of Jews had taken root among both colonial officials and rank and file members of the security forces. At the end of 1945 the Foreign Office received a letter from an officer in Palestine in which he stated that “Goebbels has many apt pupils wearing British uniform in Palestine” and that “suspicion and hatred of the Jews is being widely voiced with the bitterest venom”.<sup>139</sup> The point of highlighting this racism is not simply to show how pervasive it was, but to connect it to the outbreaks of violence by the security forces. By the final years of British rule in Palestine, a significant degree of emotional distance had been created between serving members of the security forces and the Jewish population. This population was increasingly seen by both police officers and soldiers as collectively culpable for the deaths or injuries of comrades, and it was ever more common to find individuals openly voicing hatred towards Jewish people generally. Thus the potential targets of police violence and brutality, Zionist non-combatants, were viewed by many members of the security forces as being in a separate category, emotionally and psychologically; ‘they are not like us’ and the prevalence of such sentiments, coupled of course with other key motivating factors, is an important step

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<sup>138</sup> *ibid* p32

<sup>139</sup> *ibid* p50



towards overcoming the aversion to kill and helps to explain the incidence of violent acts by the police and army.

### **The Causes of Police Violence: III) 'Honour'**

The third factor which helped to shape and encourage police violence in Mandate-era Palestine, was certain concepts of 'honour' and 'prestige', and more specifically violations of a code of 'honour', and insults to British 'prestige', by the Zionist insurgents. The British were highly sensitive to this and, as has already been discussed, Irgun leader Menachem Begin exploited it to maximum effect. He recognized that the British were vulnerable to a relentless assault on their honour and Irgun and LEHI operations were often designed to humiliate the British. Begin stated that:

History and our own observation persuaded us that if we could succeed in destroying the Government's prestige in Eretz Israel, the removal of its rule would follow automatically. Thenceforward we gave no peace to this weak spot. Throughout all the years of our uprising we hit at the British government's prestige, deliberately, tirelessly, unceasingly.<sup>140</sup>

Part of the explanation for why honour and prestige were so important to the British has already been discussed. The British Empire was entering a period of decline, and a powerful rival, the United States, was poised to exploit British weakness and elbow her out of the Middle East and elsewhere. The Second World War had pushed Britain to the point of financial ruin, and the British economy was now dependent on loans from the US. Hence, Britain's capacity to hold together a crumbling empire was greatly diminished

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<sup>140</sup> Cited in Bowyer-Bell, J (1977) *Terror Out of Zion, Irgun Zvai Leumi, LEHI, and the Palestine Underground, 1929-1949* (St Martin's Press, New York), p103

in the immediate post-war environment, and it was increasingly difficult to find the necessary personnel and resources to fight effective counter-insurgencies against nationalist and anti-imperialist forces. This, to a certain extent, left the British reliant on the 'prestige' of the Empire, or in other words, the fear that Britain would retaliate harshly if her rule was threaten, even if this were in fact no longer possible. Thus, attacks on that 'prestige' in Palestine were likely to be perceived as a grave threat to the stability and endurance of the British Empire generally, and, as the comments made by Nicol Gray cited at the beginning of this chapter make clear, senior government and security officials in Palestine did indeed see things in that way.

The issue of British prestige and honour manifested itself it different ways. The frustration felt by senior army and police officers eventually became a desire to take revenge on the Zionist population, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Throughout the period of the Zionist insurgency, military officers in London and in Palestine complained that the security forces were being prevented from acting effectively against the Zionist militias by an overly cautious colonial administration in Jerusalem, which was allowing Britain to be humiliated and so was putting the Empire as a whole at risk. As Hoffman points out, there is in fact little evidence that it was the colonial government that was holding back the security forces, but rather it was a problem of poor tactics used in fighting the counter-insurgency, coupled with a reluctance on the part of the British government in London to bring overwhelming force to bear on the Zionists for fear of upsetting Britain's new bankroller, the United States.<sup>141</sup> The failure of Britain's counterinsurgency campaign, the damage that it was felt to be doing to Britain's prestige, led senior members of the security forces to contemplate

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<sup>141</sup> Hoffman, B (1983) *The Failure of British Military Strategy Within Palestine, 1939-1947* (Bar Ilan University, Tel Aviv) p10

taking harsher measures, and this is what led to the creation of units that had little practical purpose other than to exact revenge for the deaths and injuries to British soldiers and police officers, and to seek recompense for the wounds inflicted on British pride. This was an instance where police violence against non-combatants was officially, or at least semi-officially, sanctioned.<sup>142</sup>

However, this was not the sole route by which a sense of ‘wounded pride’ and insults to British honour led to outbreaks of violence towards non-combatants. There was also a sense that the insurgents were ‘base thugs’ who did not fight fairly or honourably. The fighters of the Irgun and LEHI were sometimes compared unfavourably with the Arab insurgents who had fought the British during the Arab Revolt of 1936-39. Whilst the Arab rebels were often seen, in retrospect, in highly romanticized terms as simple ‘men of the land’ fighting for their homeland, and as fighters who fought fairly in open combat with the British, the Zionist insurgents were often seen as ‘sneaky’, cunning and dishonourable. The Irgun/LEHI operatives often launched sneak attacks on British positions, or attacked remotely with mines and explosives, and also engaged in operations which were regarded as dishonourable and despicable, such as the attack on the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division barracks in Tel Aviv in April 1946. The memoirs of Roy Farran (see Chapter 3) provide a good example of this. In the course of discussing the Zionist insurgency, Farran writes, “In the Arab Rebellion there had been no deep emotions, but here was the beginning of something different. The Jews were not fighting fair.”<sup>143</sup>

In this attack on the night of the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1946, a unit of LEHI operatives launched a raid on the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division encampment in Tel Aviv. During the raid seven

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<sup>142</sup> This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

<sup>143</sup> Farran, R (1948) *Winged Dagger* (Collins, London) p346

soldiers were killed, most of them unarmed in their tents. Afterwards, a serious breakdown in discipline occurred, and troops took revenge by beating civilians in the Jewish settlement of Beer Tuvya, though NCOs were able to restore order before further acts of violence were committed. In his memoirs, a senior officer in the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division, Major R.D Wilson, comments on the reprisals taken by the soldiers:

Much has been written and said about the measure of restraint shown by British troops in Palestine towards a community which condoned and frequently supported the murderous conduct of its extremists. This was attributed to the bonds of discipline and various qualities of the British character... Indeed some argued that this restraint was strongly tainted with apathy and carried to such an extreme that it no longer represented a virtue in which to take such pride. It should therefore be recorded at this point that, following the attack on the Tel Aviv car park [where the encampment was based], troops of the Division at Qastina took the law into their own hands for a short time the following night.<sup>144</sup>

Wilson's discussion of the reprisals is illuminating, firstly because of its implication that the Zionist community as a whole, both combatants and non-combatants alike, were collectively responsible for attacks on the British, and that only the discipline and restraint of soldiers and police officers prevented further outbreaks of violence, but also because of his reference to the notion of honour. Wilson makes it clear here that he considers that British pride had been wounded in this attack and that it would have been dishonourable for the soldiers *not* to retaliate. A sense of pride could only be justified if appropriate measures were taken to safeguard the honour of the security forces, Wilson implies, and whilst restraint was generally a positive and honourable characteristic, if not abandoned on occasion then British troops and police officers would suffer a 'loss of

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<sup>144</sup> Wilson, R.D. (1949) *Cordon and Search* (Gale and Polden, Aldershot), p48

face' and their sense of pride in themselves would be less warranted. It seems plausible to suppose then, that with such an attitude towards violent action against non-combatants on the part of senior officers, rank and file soldiers and police officers would feel that a somewhat permissive atmosphere existed and on occasion they could commit certain acts without fear of serious consequence.

Throughout the British security forces the idea that the Zionist groups, the Irgun and LEHI, committed certain "despicable" acts which were an insult to British honour and which entitled the British to retaliate violently against the Zionist settler community as a whole, was a widely held one. When 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne troops beat civilians in Netanya following the flogging of their major by the Irgun, Wilson makes clear that he considers this an acceptable reaction to an outrageous act, one which justifies the abandonment of the otherwise steadfastly adhered to practice of restraint. Mark Russell also describes how attacks on off-duty police officers were a major impetus for reprisals:

There were [insurgent attacks] all the time. I remember a couple of chaps getting shot picking up their girlfriends going to a dance at the mess. You know... this is the sort of thing...that's going to inflame the whole area isn't it? The national ones, the ones that hit the press headlines, ok they effect everybody, but the ones which [provoke the greatest police violence] are when it relates directly to those killed or wounded.<sup>145</sup>

Part of Russell's point here is about the proximity to those killed on the part of police officers who chose to take revenge, but there is also a point about the nature of some of the insurgent attacks, particularly those, like the one he cites, when police officers are killed off-duty. Russell makes clear in his testimony that he considers this kind of attack

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<sup>145</sup> Russell interview, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2006

to have been of a particularly inflammatory nature and one which naturally provoked a violent response from the police.

It is evident that a certain conception of honour and prestige was widely held among both rank and file police officers and soldiers and among more senior military and colonial figures. There is not the space to explore this concept fully here, but it was clearly related to ideas of what classed as ‘honourable’ conduct during the insurgency. Certain kinds of Irgun and LEHI attacks violated such honour, and for it to be redeemed by the British, as Wilson states, retaliatory attacks, against civilians if necessary, are required. But it is also related to ideas about Britain’s role as an imperial power and the place of its police officers and soldiers in relation to the subjugated peoples of the Empire. As was alluded to in the discussion of the hangings of Martin and Paice, there was a sense of a ‘normal’ colonial order in which British officials and police officers dispensed justice to the colonised peoples and held a monopoly on the exercise of force. The actions of the Zionist insurgents violated this order, as Nicol Grey made clear when he commented on the hangings and floggings.<sup>146</sup> The incoming Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery remarked on a tour of Palestine in June 1946 that “British rule existed only in name; the true rulers seemed to me to be the Jews”.<sup>147</sup> This could not be allowed to continue, he made clear, and “effective British authority” had to be restored for the sake of British honour and prestige.

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<sup>146</sup> See p5

<sup>147</sup> Cited in Newsinger, J (2002) *At War with Zion* in his *British Counter-Insurgency from Palestine to Northern Ireland* (Palgrave, London) p20

## **The Shift Towards a Culture of Revenge**

By 1947, the incidence of police and army violence towards non-combatants was increasing. The factors listed above are not intended to serve as an exhaustive list of the causes of such violence, but are some of the most crucial in shaping outbreaks of serious indiscipline on the part of the security forces. The increasing stress experienced by police officers and soldiers, coupled with a lack of opportunities to relieve that stress, left security force personnel more likely to act on desires for revenge following violent attacks. This was exacerbated by the separation that existed between the police and the civilian population, both physical separation as the police were often engaged solely in vehicle patrols, particularly in urban areas, and emotional/psychological separation as the police and the army began to see the entire Zionist community, armed insurgents and civilians alike, as the 'enemy'. This trend assisted some members of the security forces in overcoming an ingrained aversion to killing. Finally, there was a deeply held sense of British honour and of what classed as 'honourable conduct' generally. Violations of or insults to this honour system fuelled a powerful psychological drive to commit violent acts against those seen as responsible, in order to restore and preserve that sense of honour.

The third and final chapter will examine how a culture of revenge, that was in part officially sanctioned, took hold at the end of British rule in Palestine.

### Chapter Three – Revenge

*“It was to all intents and purposes a carte blanche and the original conception of our part filled me with excitement. A free hand for us against terror when all others were so closely hobbled!”*

Roy Farran, *Winged Dagger*

The previous chapter examined the scope and nature of police violence during the Zionist insurgency, and outlined some of the prominent factors which inculcated such acts. As British rule in Palestine drew to a close, the Mandate descended into chaos and ever more bloody violence as the Zionist movement, having bested their erstwhile imperial guarantors, prepared to forcibly establish a state and suppress indigenous desires for independence from foreign rule and Zionist colonisation. The British lacked the capacity to influence the course of events, and following the decision to abandon the Mandate in September 1947, and especially following the UN’s partition resolution of November 1947, British rule was generally confined to fortified enclaves referred to by the Zionists as ‘Bevingrads’ after the then Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin. Although the focus of Zionist violence became the Arab community, as part of a coordinated plan to terrorize the native population into fleeing<sup>148</sup>, the British remained a target for groups such as the Irgun and LEHI, and in turn police violence continued to flourish in an atmosphere of relatively lax discipline and increasing bloodshed. For some police officers, the breakdown of the British imperial order in Palestine in 1947 was an opportunity to indulge a desire for revenge, and prior to the final decision to quit the country, senior figures in the security forces were also keen to engage in operations of a purely punitive nature. A culture of revenge had emerged.

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<sup>148</sup> See Pappé, I (2006) *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oneworld, Oxford)



During the course of 1947, the British security forces had become increasingly frustrated at their failure to suppress the Zionist insurgency. The measures employed by the Palestine Government had failed to have any effect on the pace of the revolt, and attacks on the British continued, in ever more audacious forms, including the bombing of police stations, the kidnapping and flogging of British personnel and the hanging of Sergeants Martin and Paice. There was little, it seemed, that the British could do in response other than to continue a policy of 'cordon and search', a policy which, due to the paucity of reliable intelligence, produced little in the way of positive results. In fact, the Army implemented such measures for reasons that were at least as much to do with maintaining and bolstering security force morale as they were to do with effectively fighting the insurgency.<sup>149</sup> There was an increasing awareness at the senior level that police officers and soldiers engaged in combating the armed Zionist militias were starting to feel the strain of a protracted, low-intensity conflict which the British were struggling to control. Morale was low and stress-levels were rising; it was becoming ever more necessary to act in order to prevent serious outbreaks of disorder among the rank and file.

There is a significant amount of evidence that as the Mandate-period drew to a close, police discipline began to deteriorate markedly. One prominent manifestation of this was the theft and sale of arms, usually to Arab militias rather than Jewish groups. A particularly audacious incident is mentioned in the diaries of former Palestine Police Officer, Preston-Thomas (later Reverend Preston-Thomas), in which a police officer, identified as 'Brown' (this was apparently not his real name), plotted with another police officer to steal sixteen armoured cars and sell them to an Arab group for Pal£1000 each.

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<sup>149</sup> Hoffman, B (1985) *Jewish terrorist activities and the British government in Palestine, 1939-1947* (DPhil Thesis, Oxford) p77, 85

The plan, which required the cooperation of British and Arab staff at the police barracks and soldiers staffing relevant checkpoints, and which Preston-Thomas claims can be verified by “any one of the hundred or so of us in Carmelite billet at the time”, involved drugging the police officers at the Carmelite station and then stealing the armoured cars stationed there. According to the account, a sergeant was alerted to the plot early on and it was foiled at the last minute and the ringleaders apprehended.<sup>150</sup>

Whilst it is not possible to verify the story, as this particular incident is not mentioned in other sources, nevertheless, other incidents of arms theft are mentioned, and there seems to have been a general awareness that this practice was fairly widespread. Denys Hodson, for instance, was placed on guard duty at the armoury of the police station he served at, in order to prevent the theft of weaponry by his fellow police officers.

I was taken off my standard duties... and I was put in charge of the armoury... And I spent eight hours a day locked up inside [the armoury] without the key... I couldn't understand why I'd been chosen to do this... The officer in charge came round late one evening, well 'irrigated' after a very good dinner, and said 'I bet you don't know why you're here... Well my biggest problem at the moment is [finding] someone who is not going to sell the contents of the armoury to the first Arab or Jewish entrepreneur they come across.'<sup>151</sup>

Hodson's testimony provides a valuable piece of evidence about the state of the force during the last days of the Mandate. Other surviving members of the force provide further hints that discipline was deteriorating, confirming that the theft and sale of

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<sup>150</sup> “The GMC Plan” in “Diary of Events in Jerusalem, November 1947-May 1948” by B/Const 3171 Preston-Thomas in Palestine Police Old Comrades Association collection, MECA, St Antony's College, Oxford

<sup>151</sup> Talk by Denys Hodson, St Antony's College, Oxford, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2005

weapons from police stores was a widespread problem. There were also reports in the press about the arrest of police officers for attempting to sell weapons<sup>152</sup>, and on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 1948, the *New York Times* reported that the Palestine Government had acknowledged the theft of two police armoured cars and “more than 100 army cars and trucks”.<sup>153</sup> This adds weight to the argument that disciplinary structures generally were becoming lax, and hence, given the ongoing stress and danger police officers were faced with, this weakening of effective oversight of police behaviour helped to further nurture an environment where police officers felt able to commit violent acts without fear of serious consequence. Hodson also describes how anti-Jewish sentiments deepened and hostility towards the Zionist community as a whole increased as the insurgency progressed and attacks on the British were ever more frequent. The increasing incidence of police officers engaging in acts of revenge can be partially explained by this phenomenon.

### **Uncovering Evidence of Revenge Attacks**

Some of these acts of revenge were committed by deserters from the Palestine Police. Denys Hodson, whose account is in general extremely revealing about the conditions prevailing in Palestine at that time, describes how “the Arabs” were

offering very large sums of money for weapons and in some cases for skills, and towards the end when the Jews were starting to have problems getting supplies through from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv along a very vulnerable road... the Arabs were offering a hundred

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<sup>152</sup> See for instance the report in the *New York Times* about the sentencing of three police officers to four years imprisonment for the attempted sale of a rifle to an Arab, “Haganah Accord on Irgun Reported” *NY Times*, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1948

<sup>153</sup> “Blows at Britons go on in Palestine”, *NY Times*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1948

pounds, which was a lot of money, for one nights work by any qualified person who could operate a Bren Gun... I didn't personally know anyone who took it, but I'm afraid I'm almost certain that people did.<sup>154</sup>

This use of British deserters, usually by the Arabs, was not an isolated occurrence. Hodson goes on to mention a specific case that he was aware of involving a police officer named 'Stephenson' who served in the Jaffa Police Station, and who deserted and assisted the Arabs in attacks:

One British police officer deserted at this time to, quote, "join the Arabs". Another thing [the Arabs] were after was anyone with any knowledge of explosives. Most of us had done a very, very elementary thing about explosives...but we had no real knowledge of explosives and nearly all of them killed themselves that did this. Anyway, this chap deserted and was picked up later... after a shoot out with the police.<sup>155</sup>

Hodson describes how Stephenson was court-martialled for desertion and then sent back to the UK to serve a lengthy prison sentence, which was commuted however, following the intervention of a senior officer. This particular incident can be verified to a certain extent. The British National Archives in London contain files relating to the imprisonment of a Palestine Police Officer 'Godfrey Allan Stephenson', and his early release after serving only six months. Although the files remained closed, and hence it is not possible to use them to confirm other parts of Hodson's account, this story is also mentioned in the testimony of another former police officer, Gerald Green, to be discussed below. Other sources, particularly the press, do provide further evidence for

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<sup>154</sup> Hodson talk, 17/11/05

<sup>155</sup> *ibid*

the active presence of British deserters in the conflict. A report in *The New York Times* on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1948, for example, related how two British deserters, who had been recruited to fight for an Arab militia, were killed when the two-ton truck bomb they were attempting to dismantle exploded.

A number of sources make some striking claims about the extent of desertion from the police force and the active participation of large numbers of deserters in attacks on the Zionist settlers. Uri Milstein's *History of Israel's War for Independence* for example, describes how Abdul-Qader Husseini, the leader of one of the largest Arab guerrilla groups, launched a campaign at the beginning of 1948 to recruit disaffected British police officers and soldiers for use in his nascent bombing campaign against targets in Jerusalem and elsewhere.<sup>156</sup> Milstein's account is partially based on material from Collins & Lapierre's *O Jerusalem!*, who drew on interviews with key actors from the period. Husseini's bombing campaign followed a wave of bloody attacks by Zionist groups against Arab targets which killed large numbers of civilians. Husseini was keen to strike back, and hoped to terrorise the Zionist population into abandoning the city, but in order to penetrate the defences established by the Haganah around key strategic targets, it would be necessary to use British equipment, uniforms and, ideally, personnel, as the Hagannah were not stopping British vehicles at their checkpoints. The first target was the offices of the *Palestine Post* on Hasolel Street in the Zionist-controlled area of Jerusalem. Various other newspapers and the Mandate Press Censors Office were also located in this building. Across the street, the Hotel Himmelfarb housed a Palmach garrison, which was possibly an additional target.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Milstein, U (1998) *History of Israel's War of Independence: Volume III* (University Press of America, Maryland) p104

<sup>157</sup> *ibid* p106

According to the account of Abu Khalil Janho, allegedly in charge of the operation, which he gave to an Israeli journalist in the 1970s, the team involved in the attack included a police deserter, Eddie Brown, whose brother (he claimed) had been killed by the Irgun, and Peter Madison, a deserter from the British Army. The two deserters drove the stolen police truck containing the explosives, whilst Janho followed behind in another car to ensure the deserters carried through on the operation.<sup>158</sup> On arrival at the Palestine Post offices, the fuse was lit and the team escaped, shortly before the bomb exploded causing heavy damage to the *Post* offices and adjacent buildings.<sup>159</sup> More than twenty people were injured, many seriously, and one man died of his wounds later in hospital.<sup>160</sup> In the following days, there was widespread speculation about who was responsible for the attack. The Jewish Agency alleged that Britons had been involved in the attack and supplied a list of names to the Palestine Government. A top secret CID report into the bombings acknowledges the widespread belief that members of the Palestine Police were involved and includes extracts from telephone intercepts, one of which, a call placed by an anonymous English-speaking man, alleged that the British Police were responsible. However, the Palestine Government claimed to find no direct evidence to support the allegations of police involvement, though at least some of the evidence the Jewish Agency was relying on was in the form of informal testimony from British and Jewish police personnel, who may have been reluctant to repeat allegations to an official CID inquiry.<sup>161</sup>

The second attack allegedly involving British deserters occurred on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1948, and involved far greater loss of life. According to the accounts in Milstein and Collins &

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<sup>158</sup> Collins, L & Lapierre, D (1972) *O Jerusalem!* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London) p192

<sup>159</sup> Milstein (1998) p106

<sup>160</sup> PRO CO 537/3856 "Outrages: CID Reports" Pt II

<sup>161</sup> PRO CO 537/3859 "Explosion at Offices of Palestine Post, 1<sup>st</sup> February"

Lapierre, this time a convoy of vehicles, led by a stolen police armoured car, was organized in the Arab village of 'Emaus' and then driven into Jerusalem to Ben Yehuda Street. The primary targets were possibly the Atlantic and Amdursky Hotels which housed Palmach escort units. Prior to the attack, the British deserters were used to reconnoitre the target area and gather intelligence for the operation. Milstein alleges six British deserters were involved, Brown and Madison, and four police deserters who he names – George Anthony White, George Ross, Godfrey Allan Stephenson and a man named 'Harrison'.<sup>162</sup> The convoy successfully penetrated Haganah checkpoints,<sup>163</sup> and drove into the city, where a suspicious police armoured car patrol followed them to their target. This patrol described following a convoy of two military trucks led by an armoured car bearing the number 597. A second police patrol observed a police armoured car bearing the same number leaving the area following the explosion. The trucks, according to the patrol which followed them, contained men in army uniform, whilst in the turret of the armoured car was a man wearing a police overcoat and hat.<sup>164</sup> The trucks parked on Ben Yehuda Street, the fuses were lit and the team fled. Shortly afterwards a massive explosion devastated the street. Fifty-two people were killed and thirty-eight wounded, with six more dying later in hospital.

A third attack occurred on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1948, when a stolen US Consulate car, packed with explosives, was parked outside the headquarters of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem. It detonated destroying one wing of the building, which housed the offices of the Jewish

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<sup>162</sup> Milstein (1998) p110

<sup>163</sup> It is not clear exactly who was leading the operation and who negotiated passage through the checkpoints. According to Milstein's account, one of the British deserters, positioned in the turret of the lead armoured car spoke to the Haganah operatives at the checkpoint. Collins & Lapierre on the other hand allege a blond-haired Arab named 'Azmi Djaouni', disguised as a Palestine Police officer, spoke to the Haganah guards. This is significant because of the claims from some quarters that no Britons were actually involved, only Arabs in police and army uniforms. See Milstein (1998) p110, Collins & Lapierre (1972) p191-2

<sup>164</sup> PRO CO 537/3856 "Outrages: CID Reports", item (1), 22.02.1948

National Fund, and killed thirteen Fund officials.<sup>165</sup> This operation does not appear to have involved any British deserters and was probably carried out by an Armenian man employed as a driver at the US Consulate. By this stage, the men allegedly involved in Husseini's operations were in exile, dead or under arrest, according to the available sources. On March 11<sup>th</sup> British forces arrested three police deserters in a stolen police armoured car. According to the *New York Times*, the men, identified as Constables Ross, Stephenson and 'Akshurst' (British documents identify this man as Arthur Edward 'Ahehurst'), were participating in an Arab attack on the Jewish settlement of Neve Yaakov near Jerusalem.<sup>166</sup> Two other British deserters were, according to the newspaper report cited earlier, killed when a bomb they were dismantling exploding. These men were not named in the report, though they were described as men who had participated with others in the theft of an armoured car from Jaffa Police Headquarters on February 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>167</sup> Brown and Madison, according to Collins & Lapierre, escaped to Cairo after the Ben Yehuda Street bombing, where they sought payment from Haj Amin Husseini (Abdul-Qader Husseini's uncle) who sent them away empty handed.<sup>168</sup>

The testimony of former police officer Gerald Green provides further proof of the existence of this group of deserters and their participation in the Ben Yehuda Street bombing. According to Green:

There were one or two older, ex-service people particularly, who resented what the Jews were doing to us British and other people. A famous driver, a Scotsman, with another fellow, with two other fellows...he decided to abscond with this armoured car and join the

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<sup>165</sup> Milstein (1998) p117

<sup>166</sup> "British Deserters Seized with Arabs", *New York Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1948

<sup>167</sup> "Hagannah Accord on Irgun Reported", *New York Times*, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1948

<sup>168</sup> Collins & Lapierre (1972) p194-5



Arabs... This armoured car was wanted, we were to catch it. There was a tremendous explosion in Ben Yehuda Street... that armoured car was responsible for that.<sup>169</sup>

Green states that he knew the driver personally, having been stationed with him in Haifa. He also claims that it came as no surprise that this particular officer had engaged in such activity:

When we knew who it was, we weren't surprised, he was always going to do something. We weren't surprised, we knew instantly who it was before the names ever came out. I said, 'I know who that is, that's Old Jock Whatsit, and it was.'<sup>170</sup>

Green makes an interesting additional point about the capture and trial of the men involved:

There was some court of some kind, and they were brought to Warton [? – name unclear] Jail near Liverpool. They were only there a month. It was only done for their own safety apparently.<sup>171</sup>

If Green is correct about the reason behind the decision to prosecute these individuals, then this is further evidence that senior officers in the security forces lacked the inclination to seriously pursue and punish perpetrators of violent acts.

A further development in the Ben Yehuda Street bombing was allegations that fascist elements linked to Oswald Moseley's British Union of Fascists (BUF) were responsible.

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<sup>169</sup> Interview with Gerald Green, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2006, St Antony's College Oxford

<sup>170</sup> *ibid*

<sup>171</sup> *ibid*

In an article published in the *Jewish Standard*, correspondent A. Abrahams discussed a widespread belief within the Zionist community in Palestine that:

...There exists in the Army and Police an anti-Jewish organization pledged to wreak 'revenge' on the Yishuv... this body includes police and soldiers who are banded together for that purpose, who are in contact with the Arabs, who have access to arms and explosives, and are in a position to inflict grave damage on the Jewish population.<sup>172</sup>

Abrahams adds that it is also widely believed that the Palestine Government had, on occasion, "conducted to the efficient operation of the band in question."<sup>173</sup> Sustenance for these claims came in the form of a letter distributed to prominent Jewish residents in Jerusalem and then sent, via airmail, to a number of British MPs. The letter was from an organization calling itself the British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women (Palestine Branch)<sup>174</sup>, and claimed responsibility for the Ben Yehuda bombing which the League stated was part of a "crusade against the Jews" who "aspire to mastery of [Palestine]".<sup>175</sup> The UK-based British League denied that a 'Palestine Branch' of the movement existed and refuted any suggestion that British League members had been involved in the bombings.

But the notion that fascists were operating within the British security forces persisted. It had first surfaced a year earlier in the furore surrounding the 'Farran Affair' (discussed below), and fascist elements had been linked to a series of unexplained events, including the bombing of the Jewish Agency's press office on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> June 1947.

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<sup>172</sup> "Whose Explosion?" by A. Abrahams, *Jewish Standard* 27<sup>th</sup> February 1948

<sup>173</sup> *ibid*

<sup>174</sup> The British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women was a post-Second World War fascist organization, which at its peak claimed a membership of several thousand. It later merged with Oswald Moseley's new post-war fascist organization the 'Union Movement'.

<sup>175</sup> " 'We attacked Ben Yehuda Street' Claim by British League", *Jewish Standard*, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1948

Responsibility for the blast was never established and, because a nighttime curfew was in effect in Jerusalem greatly restricting the possibility of moving easily around the city undetected, elements of the security forces were blamed.<sup>176</sup> There were also a number of beatings and shootings of civilians which the Jewish Agency alleged were possibly the work of an underground fascist cell. On the 15<sup>th</sup> June the Agency requested that the Palestine Government “cleanse the security forces of any elements that may be responsible for a number of mysterious crimes that have taken place of late.”<sup>177</sup> There was never any definitive proof, however, that such a fascist cell ever existed, though suspicions persisted for the remainder of the Mandate. It also seems likely that some of the activities attributed to this ‘fascist cell’ were the work of the special counter-insurgency units established by the Palestine Police (see below).

On the 11<sup>th</sup> March 1948, High Commissioner Sir Alan Cunningham acknowledged that desertion from the security forces had become a problem. He released a list containing the names of 239 soldiers and 30 police officers who had deserted since the beginning of 1947 and who had not been apprehended. This had been a long-standing Jewish Agency demand and did little to dampen speculation surrounding British participation in Arab attacks on the Zionist population. On the same day, in a discussion over whether to prosecute a number of Zionist newspapers for libel, the High Commissioner admitted in a secret telegram to the Colonial Secretary that one reason for not pushing ahead with charges was:

...a long discussion in court as to the complicity of British personnel in the Ben Yehuda outrage would obviously be undesirable – the outcome of police inquiries tend to show

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<sup>176</sup> “Jerusalem Senses a Police Scandal”, *New York Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1947

<sup>177</sup> “Zionists Ask Purge of Palestine Police”, *New York Times*, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1947

that Britishers were involved, though there is, of course, no evidence that they were serving members of the force.<sup>178</sup>

From the wealth of available evidence discussed above, and Cunningham's statement about security force involvement, it seems likely that a group of British deserters were working with Husseini in his bombing campaign, though the suggestion implicit in the 'British League' letter that these former officers were acting on their own initiative seems less probable, if only because the funds and explosive equipment they needed would have been difficult to acquire without significant assistance, and it is unlikely the police deserters possessed the necessary skills to successfully assemble vehicle-borne explosives. Whether any of these men were affiliated with the British League is, as already stated, impossible to ascertain, but the allegation that they were tied in with the insinuations made by the Zionist movement that the only possible motives for police involvement in such activities could be financial gain or hatred of the Jews.

In fact, as a number of former Palestine Police officers have stated, there was a widespread belief within the force that the Arabs were being treated unfairly and that Zionism was precluding the possibility of the country's native population realising their goals of independence from foreign rule. Martin Duchesne, whose account is representative, stated that there was "an immense awareness that the Arabs had been let down".<sup>179</sup> Similarly, Frank Jones stated that:

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<sup>178</sup> PRO CO 537/3859 "Explosion at Offices of Palestine Post, 1<sup>st</sup> February"

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Martin Duchesne, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2006

The Jews had been given the best part of the land, the cultivated part. The Arabs had a really rough deal because it was their land. The Jews said it was theirs, it was promised to them by the Lord - who the hell said?!<sup>180</sup>

Given such beliefs on the part of at least some members of the security forces, it is possible that some of the deserters were motivated by a sense of injustice and wished to aid a cause which they saw as righteous. Although it seems likely that the deserters involved in the bombing operations described above were dead, imprisoned or outside Palestine by mid-March 1948, there were continuing reports of deserters fighting not just for the Arab side, but also for the Zionists. *Time* correspondent Eric Gibbs reported that during the Battle for Qastel<sup>181</sup> in April 1948, he observed a number of Britons fighting on both the Arab and Jewish sides.<sup>182</sup> There is no reason to suppose that these individuals were not in any way influenced by anything more than merely material factors, or hatred of either group, and given the apparently widespread belief amongst members of the Palestine Police that the Arabs had been unfairly treated in the Partition Resolution of November 1947, it is plausible to imagine that this may have contributed to the decision of some police officers to actively assist the Arab cause. Naturally, given the active campaign being waged to garner support for the Zionist project, the Jewish Agency would have been highly reluctant to acknowledge that this might have been the case and thus draw attention to the gross injustice entailed in what they were trying to achieve in Palestine. Hence the insistence on their part that only the prospect of financial

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<sup>180</sup> Interview with Frank Jones, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2006

<sup>181</sup> The fighting at Qastel was strategically important and its outcome determined which side controlled the vital road link into Jerusalem from the coast. The village changed hands several times, and Abdul Qader Husseini was eventually killed in battle there with Zionist forces.

<sup>182</sup> "War for the Jerusalem Road", *Time*, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1948

remuneration or rank anti-Semitism could possibly have been motivating factors for those individuals who defected to the Arab cause.<sup>183</sup>

The available evidence on late-Mandate Palestine is disappointingly fragmented and it is very difficult to determine with any conviction what exactly was occurring. Whilst the CID maintained daily reports of activity, some of this material has been lost and what is available sheds little light on events at the time. It is clear that by the final months of the Mandate the British were powerless to do much more than record the attacks that took place and police and army intelligence officers were unable to determine accurately who was responsible for what. As a result, a range of explanations for the events of late 1947 and early 1948 are possible. Whilst it seems highly likely that some police and army deserters were actively involved in assisting the Arab cause, precisely who these individuals were and exactly what assistance they provided cannot be ascertained.

It is also difficult to do more than speculate as to their precise motives. There is, however, good reason for thinking that vengeance was a key factor, though a belief in the justness of the Arab cause may have played some role in explaining why these individuals chose to participate in violent attacks on civilians. According to Denys Hodson, Godfrey Stephenson was motivated by a belief in the Arab cause, but this is impossible to determine for certain. In his testimony, Gerald Green describes a conversation he had with the armoured car driver he refers to above, shortly after Green was badly wounded in a bombing in Haifa:

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<sup>183</sup> Interestingly, Hodson, in the testimony cited above, also scoffed at the idea that Stephenson, the constable he referred to as a deserter, could have genuinely believed in the Arab cause as he claimed to do.

I bumped into him in Tel Aviv... 'Christ', he said 'they mucked you about, the buggers', you know like that. He'd really got it in [for the Jewish population].<sup>184</sup>

Green describes an increasing sense of resentment, particularly among some of the ex-service personnel in the Palestine Police towards the Zionist population, sentiments which some translated into violent action. Direct experience of Zionist violence may have motivated some. Eddie Brown claimed that the death of his brother at the hands of the Irgun sparked a desire for vengeance and his decision to desert. According to Collins & Lapierre, this gave way after the *Palestine Post* bombing to a simple desire for financial reward, though little evidence is presented to support this assertion.

To shed further light on the motives of men like Brown and Stephenson, and to support the assertion that revenge was the primary impetus, it is instructive to analyse the prevailing atmosphere in the Palestine Police in general at this time. It is clear from the testimony of many of the surviving members of the force that both frustration and stress, and indiscipline, became more prevalent in the latter months of British rule, and there was a widespread belief especially in senior circles, that the security forces were not being firm enough in combating Zionist violence. One highly revealing episode from 1947 reveals much about how internal security policy was shifting at this time, and how a desire to demonstrate greater 'toughness' in responding to the Zionists was increasing. This episode, the so-called 'Farran Affair', also helps to shed light on the prevailing attitudes among rank and file police officers towards the Zionist community generally and the insurgents in particular. Whilst the Farran Affair is sometimes portrayed as something of an anomaly, a strange final note in the tale of British rule over Palestine, it should in fact be seen as the culmination of a process set in motion by the clash of

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<sup>184</sup> Green, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2006

Zionist ambition and prevailing British policy towards the Zionist movement. As such, the Farran Affair is useful for providing a window into the thoughts and opinions of key actors of the period.

### **“Terrorist Methods”**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1947 a General Court Martial acquitted Captain Roy Alexander Farran of the murder of Alexander Rubowitz, a 16 year-old member of LEHI. The ruling brought to an end, at least as far as the British were concerned, an embarrassing series of events which had further tarnished the already tattered reputation of the security forces in Palestine. The origins of the saga dated back to the beginning of 1947 when, under pressure from the new Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, the Cabinet agreed to allow the security forces in Palestine to take tougher action against the Zionist population in a last ditch attempt to crush the insurgency. Montgomery had complained at a meeting at the Colonial Office on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January that the Palestine Government was preventing the Army from doing its job, an allegation which High Commissioner Alan Cunningham strenuously denied.<sup>185</sup> He argued that “the Army could not do anything” under present rules of engagement, and was “always on the defensive”, waiting for attacks to occur. Instead, the Army must be allowed to take the initiative and begin a full-scale search for weapons, even if that inevitably would lead to a clash with the population as a whole. Montgomery also argued, following Cunningham’s expression of concern that such a policy would swell the ranks of extremist Zionist

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<sup>185</sup> See “Note on Conference at the Colonial Office”, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1947, PRO FO 371/61762



groups, that if such moves led the Haganah to attack the British openly “he would welcome the opportunity to fight them”.<sup>186</sup>

During deliberations in late December 1946, the Cabinet had stuck to its previous line, repeated many times during the events of 1946 and supported by Cunningham, that the security forces should make every effort to avoid exacerbating tensions between the Zionist movement and the Palestine Government, and the directive issued to the High Commissioner on the use of force against the insurgents made clear that:

Action should so far as possible be avoided which is likely to involve the Administration in general warfare with either the mass of the Jewish or Arab population.<sup>187</sup>

The tone of a new directive to Cunningham following the meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, was much tougher, and the order stated that:

All possible steps will be taken at once to restore law and order in Palestine... There can of course be no question of taking reprisals which would merely bear hardly on innocent people. Apart from this efforts of the police and troops should be designed to take the offensive against breakers of the law and to ensure that the initiative lies with the forces of the Crown.<sup>188</sup>

It is not difficult to see how the above directive effectively gave the security forces the authorisation to use whatever methods they considered appropriate to break the Zionist insurgency, including the kinds of methods the British were accustomed to employing

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<sup>186</sup> *ibid*

<sup>187</sup> “Palestine: Use of the Armed Forces, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1946” PRO FO 371/61762

<sup>188</sup> “Annex – Directive to the High Commissioner, Note on Conference at the Colonial Office, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1947” PRO FO 371/61762

elsewhere in the Empire. This satisfied Montgomery, who had been distressed at the extent to which British rule in Palestine was beholden to the interests of the Zionists, and who clearly felt that aggressive action was necessary to stamp British authority onto the Mandate. In February the Palestine Police began to put into motion plans to set up special police units which would be given a 'freer hand' in fighting the insurgency. In a note to the Colonial Office, recently appointed Assistant Inspector General of Police, Colonel Bernard Fergusson, outlined the kind of individuals these squads should be comprised of:

It is imperative that these officers should have experience and knowledge of terrorist methods. They do not require police experience... There is in the Army a small number of Officers who have both technical and psychological knowledge of terrorism, having themselves been engaged in similar operations on what may be termed the terrorist side in countries occupied by the enemy in the late war.<sup>189</sup>

Such officers included Captain Roy Alexander Farran, a highly decorated Army officer who had served with the Special Air Service (SAS) during the war. He was one of three men selected to lead the new units (the identity of the other squad leaders remains unknown). It was clear from Fergusson's letter that what was being planned was a 'gloves off' policy, whereby methods similar to those employed by Orde Wingate's Special Night Squads during the Arab Revolt were to be used by the police against the Zionist population. In his autobiography, *Winged Dagger*, Farran makes the comparison explicitly:

Under the sacks at the back [of our vehicles] were tommy-guns, ammunition, rations and sufficient petrol to maintain our two civilian cars for a week. It was a "Q" ship [the units

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<sup>189</sup> "Secondment of Army Officers to Palestine Police" PRO CO 537/2270

were known as 'Q squads'] going into the heart of the enemy. The idea was not original, for Wingate had organized a party of Jews to operate on similar lines during the Arab troubles.<sup>190</sup>

Wingate's squads were little more than death squads charged with terrorizing the Arab population into submission, a mission they executed with ruthless efficiency. Fergusson who was in charge of the new police squads, to the extent that anyone had command over them, knew Wingate well, having served with him in South East Asia during the war, and was clearly aware of the kinds of methods that were employed in suppressing the Arab Revolt, methods which were used to suppress other insurgencies in the British Empire. In this vein, the decision to activate a new version of the Special Night Squads should be seen not as the employment of radically new methods, but rather the application of practices used elsewhere to the Palestine context, something for which officials such as Montgomery had long been hankering.

### **The 'Winged Dagger' Strikes**

Farran was an unusual choice to lead such a sensitive operation. By his own admission he had a serious alcohol problem,<sup>191</sup> in addition to a track record of insubordination.<sup>192</sup> He clearly perceived his role in fighting the Zionist insurgency to be of a similar nature to the daring SAS raids he participated in during his wartime service, even though the circumstances were vastly different. The men who comprised his squad, selected by him,

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<sup>190</sup> Farran, R (1948) *Winged Dagger* (Collins, London) p348. Later editions of Farran's autobiography do not contain the section on his experiences in Palestine after the end of the war.

<sup>191</sup> Farran (1948) p343-44

<sup>192</sup> Fergusson, B (1970) *The Trumpet in the Hall* (Collins, London) p225. Farran's obituary in the *Guardian* newspaper ("Major Roy Farran", *The Guardian*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2006) contains further details of his wartime career and his frequent disobeying of orders which often resulted in him receiving a medal rather than punishment.

were mostly former soldiers and many had served with Farran during the war. Thus they were much more suited to audacious commando-style raids than they were to delicate undercover police work. The wholly inadequate training that his squad received, under Farran's instructions, appears primarily to have involved learning how to put six bullets in a playing card at fifteen yards.<sup>193</sup> There was no training in urban conditions and no member of the squad was able to speak Hebrew fluently. As David Charters has pointed out, Farran and Fergusson's tendency to view Palestine through the prism of the recent conflict with Germany and Japan was dangerous, and they failed to appreciate that if this was at all valid, then Britain was clearly now in the role of Nazi Germany, an occupying power suppressing a revolt against its rule.<sup>194</sup>

One problem common to undercover units such as these was, as the War Office had come to appreciate in a study conducted into the management of such units in 1946, that, "There is an inevitable tendency for special units to become 'Private Armies' and so drift away from the normal channels of command".<sup>195</sup> This was certainly the case in Palestine. The squads reported directly to Fergusson, who had no real knowledge of what was happening on a day-to-day basis other than what the squad leaders chose to inform him about. The units were supposed to be operating secretly, though Farran acknowledges that in practice this was almost impossible to achieve,<sup>196</sup> and squads must have been highly conspicuous especially, given the linguistic limitations they faced. Charters argues that the squads were just badly managed and developed from a flawed conception of what was needed.

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<sup>193</sup> Farran (1948) p348

<sup>194</sup> Charters, D (1979) "Special Operations in Counter-Insurgency: The Farran Case, Palestine 1947" Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies Journal, Vol. 124, No. 2 (June 1979), p59

<sup>195</sup> PRO WO 232/10B, "Report of Working Party on Control of Special Units and Organizations"

<sup>196</sup> Farran (1948) p349

In fact, there is a good case for arguing that they were intended to be terror squads which would, much like Wingate's units less than a decade earlier, frighten the Zionists into submission and allow the authorities to exact revenge for the humiliating defeats at the hands of the Irgun and LEHI. Montgomery had persuaded the Cabinet that it was time to return to tried and tested 'imperial policing' methods, and they had acquiesced, giving the security forces a blank cheque to do whatever it took to break the will of the insurgency and the population which supported it. Every aspect of the design and execution of the special police units, the individuals selected to staff them and the training they were given, points to the conclusion that they were solely intended to terrorize with impunity. In this light, the factors Charters sees as weaknesses the lack of Hebrew, the unorthodox training routine, the lack of any definite strategic objective for the units, and the absence of an effective command structure were either irrelevant or an asset.<sup>197</sup> The British wanted units which would conduct a dirty war in secret against the Zionist population and they wanted the activities of the squads to be easily deniable. It was therefore essential that they be kept entirely separate from the regular security forces and as few people as possible should know what they were up to. Unfortunately for the Palestine Government however, Farran's dirty war soon become all too public and they were forced to disband the units.

The squads had not been operating long when their activities burst onto the public scene. Charters, who was not able to access the relevant files from the British National Archives, only declassified in the last few years, argues that Farran was a "sacrificial lamb" arrested and tried in order to prove British impartiality.<sup>198</sup> But the evidence against Farran is compelling, and it is likely that he did in fact murder Rubowitz. On the 7<sup>th</sup> May

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<sup>197</sup> Charters (1979) p58

<sup>198</sup> *ibid* p59

Jacob and Nehamia Rubowitz reported to the police that their brother had not returned home since the previous day. Enquiries were launched by the police and several witnesses came forward to testify that they had seen Rubowitz being forced into a car by English-speaking men in plain clothes. A hat which was left at the scene was examined by the CID laboratory and contained a partially legible name in ink inside the rim – “FAR?AN or possibly FARSAN”.<sup>199</sup> On the night of the 7<sup>th</sup> May Farran came to Fergusson and, according to the statement given by the latter to the police, confessed that on the previous evening he and members of his squad had:

...Arrested a youth in possession of illegal pamphlets. That he (Farran) had, with others of his squad, taken the youth by car down the Jericho Road for further questioning and gone further than he should in trying to make the youth talk. That he (Farran) had killed the youth by bashing his head in with a stone and that knife wounds had been added to the body after death.<sup>200</sup>

According to Fergusson, Farran told him the body had been stripped and dumped somewhere off the Jericho Road and Rubowitz’ clothes burnt. The logbook of the army checkpoint on the Jericho Road revealed that a police car driven by a man recorded as “Farrand” had passed through twice on the evening in question. A written confession was also found in Farran’s quarters in the Jerusalem barracks where he was briefly held before fleeing for the second time.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> “Report on the Alleged Abduction and Murder of Alexander Rubowitz, and Subsequent Police Investigation”, PRO CO 537/2302. A member of Farran’s squad confessed to borrowing Farran’s hat.

<sup>200</sup> *ibid* p2

<sup>201</sup> Farran fled initially to Syria after hearing murder charges against him were imminent. He was persuaded to return by Fergusson and placed under military arrest in the Jerusalem barracks. He fled a second time, this time to the Hejaz, and eventually returned voluntarily, apparently after receiving word that LEHI were taking reprisals on the police and army on his account. See Farran (1948) p352-68. Farran’s oral confession was ruled inadmissible, since Fergusson could not be forced to give testimony that could incriminate himself, and the written confession was similarly ruled unusable. With the key evidence against him dismissed, the case against Farran collapsed.

## Official and Unofficial Violence

Farran's confession regarding the treatment of Rubowitz, in particular the mutilation of the body after death, coupled with his alcoholism and history of disobeying orders, suggests that he was a disturbed individual. It would be misguided however, to dismiss Farran as an aberration, bearing no relation to the rest of the Palestine Police force. In fact, there are some interesting parallels between the manner in which Farran describes the prevailing climate in Palestine during his service there, and the descriptions provided by other officers who served at around the same time. Farran, for instance, makes clear that he feels there was a major imbalance in the way the security forces related to the Zionists as compared with the Arabs. In discussing security strategy he claims that "...such a curious policy... can be summarised as, 'Don't let's be cruel to the Jews. Whatever we do, we must not provoke them.'"<sup>202</sup> Such sentiments are echoed in the testimony of former Palestine Police officer, Frank Jones who asserted that, "You could have kicked the Arab up the bottom and nothing would have been said, but if you put a little finger on a Jew-boy Westminster would have gone crazy."<sup>203</sup> Farran had been in Palestine with the army prior to being given command of one of the special police units shortly after the end of the war, and in his memoirs he recounts some of the incidents, such as the attack on the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division encampment at Tel Aviv, which he considered to be an insult to the British, and for which, he clearly felt, retaliation was warranted. It seems likely then that much of Farran's motivation was a simple desire to exact vengeance for actions against the security forces, and in this respect, as Jones' testimony suggests, his thinking was in tune with that of at least some sections of the security forces and with the deserters discussed earlier. As such, the Farran case provides

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<sup>202</sup> Farran (1948) p349

<sup>203</sup> Interview with Frank Jones, 16 March 2006

a route to understanding the thoughts and predispositions prevalent in parts of the security forces during that period and can help shed light on the motivations of the individuals who deserted.

As the details of the Farran case received greater and greater press attention, speculation increased as to the extent of Farran's activity. Various newspapers and news agencies reported that during late spring/early summer 1947 there was a rash of cases of unexplained kidnappings and severe beatings. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency for example reported on 27<sup>th</sup> June a number of recent incidents which it alleged were the product of a "private war of English-speaking men against Jews".<sup>204</sup> The bombing of the Jewish Agency press office, referred to above, also occurred during this period on the night of 14<sup>th</sup> June. This was also linked by the press to the anti-terror squads. It is impossible to determine with any degree of certainty who was behind these incidents, or indeed if some of them ever actually occurred. During this period the Zionist movement still had a clear interest in discrediting the British, so lurid stories about security force violence served their interests well. There is also simply very little evidence to work on for many of the incidents cited, so reaching any conclusion is difficult. Nevertheless, there are some grounds for thinking that the squads, or elements associated with them, may have been responsible. It is plausible to suppose that in the several weeks of Farran's activity, Rubowitz was not the only person they apprehended and 'interrogated', though it seems unlikely that they could have killed many others, given the speed with which this case came to light.

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<sup>204</sup> "Farran's Gang Still at Work?", Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1947, from a series of press clippings in PRO CO 537/2302



It is also plausible that the destruction of the Jewish Agency's press office was the work of individuals involved in or linked to the squads. There is no evidence that the Arab groups were behind it, and indeed the first use of explosives in this way by Arabs was not until the following year. The Irgun and LEHI both strenuously denied responsibility for the explosion and there is no obvious reason why they would have carried it out. As the *New York Times* pointed out (see above), with a curfew in place restricting movement at night, elements of the security forces would seem to be the obvious suspects, and with all the damaging press speculation about the use of unorthodox methods by the police rifle during this period, there would have been many in the British security forces who would have been happy to see the Jewish Agency silenced, albeit temporarily. Whilst this does not, of course, add up to a watertight case, it is grounds at least for strong suspicion.

There were also allegations that Farran and his men were members of a Fascist organization linked to Sir Oswald Mosley, called the 'British Self Protective League'.<sup>205</sup> This has obvious parallels with the allegations about the British deserters that surfaced the following year, and indeed the Farran affair was probably the starting point for such rumours. The *New York Herald Tribune* alleged that British Intelligence had warned the Mandate Government earlier in 1947 that Mosley was trying to infiltrate the security forces in Palestine, and the emergence of the 'British League' was proof, the newspaper claimed, that he had succeeded. There is no specific mention of a 'British Self Protective League' elsewhere, though allegations of a fascist cell were widely repeated. Farran's memoirs certainly exhibit strongly nationalistic sympathies along with a plethora of references to strength, 'manliness' and 'discipline', and the glorification of combat and

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<sup>205</sup> "Britons Flee Palestine, Seek Lebanon Aid", *New York Herald Tribune* (Paris Edition), 13<sup>th</sup> June 1947

warfare.<sup>206</sup> This does not, of course, mean that Farran, or any member of his squad, was in fact a member of a fascist group, and it is very difficult to make any firm statements either way based on the available evidence.

The distinction between the anti-terror squads of 1947 and the British deserters of 1948 is not an absolute one. They represented a 'sliding scale' of police violence, from the more officially sanctioned aggression of Farran to the unofficial actions of Brown et al., largely motivated by a desire for revenge. By issuing a blank cheque to the security forces in Palestine the British Cabinet had set in motion a process which would weaken the restraints on retaliatory action and violence against non-combatants and which produced a nurturing environment for those who wished to act on a desire for vengeance. Indeed the British had established squads whose very purpose was effectively to terrorize and punish the Zionist population, and the acquittal of Farran, much like the decision to allow armoured car patrols time to restock their ammunition reserves before inspection (see Chapter 2), highlighted the reluctance on the part of senior officials to seriously pursue and punish perpetrators of police violence. With officially sanctioned violence as a model for what it was possible to get away with, the British deserters of spring 1948 knew that they could commit extreme acts of violence without fear of serious judicial consequences, and the Home Office decision to commute the sentences of the deserters Ross, Stephenson and Akehurst, is final proof of this.

This argument propounded in this chapter has been that British security policy, by authorising the creation of, in effect, private militias which could terrorize with impunity, set in motion a process which encouraged further acts of violence which were not

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<sup>206</sup> See for instance Farran (1948) p343, 373 & 382-4

officially sanctioned. In addition, senior officials failed to seriously investigate allegations of violence, and those cases that were dealt with, such as the deserters and Captain Farran, were given light sentences or acquitted. It is important to recognize that it was not the actions of the British authorities that prevented even more serious and prevalent outbreaks of violence among the security forces, but the inherent instinct not to kill discussed in Chapter Two which acted as the true break on police brutality. In fact the authorities, either directly or indirectly, acted in such a way as to promote greater acts of violence. They provided poor training, few opportunities to relieve stress, and by their public statements and actions, senior officials and officers blurred the boundaries between combatants and non-combatants (by arguing that all were responsible for the actions of the armed Zionist militias) and gave legitimacy to a desire for revenge, to name just a few examples. As such, it is these individuals, the leading figures in the Palestine Government, in the British Government in London, and in the security forces in Palestine, who bear the ultimate responsibility for the incidence of violence against civilians.

## Conclusion

Following Britain's final withdrawal from Palestine in May 1948, the Zionist movement completed its assault on the Palestinian population, successfully expelling 750,000 Palestinians and securing control of eighty percent of Mandate Palestine. The retreat from Palestine was among the first in a series of withdrawals from former colonial possessions, some preceded by violent and protracted insurgencies, in Kenya, Malaysia, Cyprus and elsewhere. Many of the key security and administrative officials from the Palestine Government went on to serve in other colonies. Chief Secretary Henry Gurney became High Commissioner in Malaysia (he was assassinated in October 1951), while former Inspector-General of Police Alan Saunders (1937-43) moved to head the colonial police force in Nigeria. The breakdown in discipline and the crimes committed against civilians in Palestine were repeated elsewhere, and they were often much more prevalent and conducted with a much greater degree of brutality. The suppression of the anti-British revolt in Kenya during the 1950s is a prime example of this, and some of the worst atrocities committed by the British during the course of the counter-insurgency campaign are only now coming to light as relevant material is declassified in the British National Archives.<sup>207</sup>

This thesis has been an attempt to assess and explain acts of violence committed by members of the British security forces against non-combatants during the Zionist insurgency. The first chapter provided a historical context for the Zionist insurgency and argued that the campaign against the British was largely the result of Britain's success in safeguarding the Zionist movement in its vulnerable early stages, and Britain's

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<sup>207</sup> For new scholarship on Britain's counter-insurgency campaign in Kenya see Elkins, C (2005) *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (Jonathon Cape, London)

comprehensive crushing of the Palestinian Revolt of 1936-39, which left the native inhabitants of Palestine weakened politically and militarily and prepared the ground for eventual Zionist victory in the war of 1948. Britain was increasingly less useful to the Zionist movement and the clash between Zionist aims and objectives, and Britain's desire to ensure stability in the wider Middle East region, inevitably led the Jewish Agency and the right-wing Zionist factions to perceive Britain as an obstacle to the implementation of the Zionist project. This chapter also outlined a number of key events in the early 1940s which set the stage for the insurgency and shaped British security policy towards the Zionists.

Chapter Two assessed the evidence for police and security force violence against non-combatants and provided some explanatory factors for such acts. Three primary factors were outlined, stress, 'distance' (both physical and emotional) and honour. As young, inexperienced recruits in a high risk environment with poor training and often poor equipment, the officers of the Palestine Police were under a great deal of stress, and lacked opportunities to deal with such tension constructively (e.g. through recreational activities etc.). For much of the time, recruits were deployed on armoured car patrols, and hence were physically separated from the Zionist population. This was coupled with an increasing emotional distance from the Zionists as the insurgency deepened and it became commonplace among all levels of the security forces to blur the distinction between combatants and non-combatants. The combination of these two processes, increasing stress levels and a greater feeling of separation from the civilian population, were important enabling factors for police violence.

In addition to these important causes, a deeply held notion of 'honour' was also instrumental in producing certain kinds of violence. This manifested itself in different

ways. In one incarnation, honour was tied up with a certain view of Britain's role in the world, and especially with her declining status as an imperial power. British power was at a historic low, a consequence of the punishing cost of war with the Axis powers, and Britain, now dependent on economic assistance from the United States, had only a sharply curtailed capacity to enforce its will through the exercising of military force. Hence it was necessary, if the Empire was to survive, for Britain to continue to project an image of strength and potency, even if this was now only a fiction. Humiliating attacks on the British security forces in Palestine undermined this effort and left British imperialism looking weak and impotent.

In a different, but related sense, the notion of 'honour' was also tied in to the idea of 'restraint'. This sense of honour was manifested most explicitly in the memoirs of R.D Wilson, quoted in Chapter 2. In the course of describing the aftermath of an attack on the 6th Airborne Division camp in Tel Aviv Wilson discusses the notion of honour and honourable behaviour. He argues that for British soldiers and police officers to have a justified sense of honour and pride in themselves, it is sometimes necessary to take reprisals, possibly against non-combatants, in order to preserve a sense of prestige in oneself and one's unit. This is closely connected with certain conceptions of masculinity and masculine behaviour, and whilst it is only been possible to briefly allude to this here, there is much scope for work on how what might be termed 'imperial masculinity' played a crucial role in fostering acts of police violence in Palestine.

The final chapter of this thesis dealt with acts of revenge in the final eighteen months of the Mandate. Firstly, the violence committed by deserters was examined and then more officially sanctioned acts were discussed, in particular the so-called 'Farran Affair'. The Palestine Police's decision to establish special 'anti-terror' squads was crucial in shaping

and nurturing police violence. These squads were given free license to act as they chose, divorced from normal channels of command and communication. When evidence of serious brutality arose in connection with these units, the British authorities ensured that the perpetrators were not ultimately held accountable, as the trial and acquittal of Captain Roy Farran aptly demonstrates. The increasingly laxity of police discipline and a spirit of unit solidarity which ensured that crimes would go uninvestigated and unpunished whenever possible reassured those officers and soldiers who acted on a desire for revenge that they could escape justice. The commuting of the sentences of the three deserters captured in a police armoured car, after serving only short periods of time in prison, is another example of this. The distinction between acts committed by deserters and those committed by individuals like Farran is a relative rather than absolute one, and in reality they represent different reactions to the same underlying factors and processes.

This attempt to explore police violence in Palestine has been relatively cursory and there is much more to be said about this period and about violence committed by colonial security forces in the era of decolonisation. In particular the relationship between honour and restraint is both interesting and illuminating and warrants greater scrutiny. From the historical perspective, there is still much that remains unclear about the last days of British rule in Palestine, for example in relation to the issue of police deserters and the infiltration of fascist organizations into the British security forces, and the collection of further oral history testimony could shed further light on these areas. In part what I have tried to show here is the consequence of a clash between two colonial projects, the Zionist and the British, and the bloody price such a clash can exact on members of the security forces and civilians alike. Primarily though, I have sought to demonstrate the fundamental culpability of senior colonial officials and security force officers who helped to cultivate an environment in which police violence could flourish, and then did little

when such acts occurred. The factors which lead to a decision to act on a desire to commit violence against non-combatants are not located at the level of the individual, but rather at the level of institutions and organizations as a whole, and unless proper mechanisms are put in place to prevent the emergence of violence-enabling processes, unarmed civilians will ultimately pay the price, as the crimes committed by coalition forces during the US-led occupation of Iraq aptly demonstrate.



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