

# The Forgotten Friendship

Israel and  
the Soviet Bloc  
1947-53

Arnold Krammer



## THE FORGOTTEN FRIENDSHIP

Israel and the Soviet Bloc, 1947-53

*Arnold Krammer*

In May, 1947, after supporting the Arabs for thirty years, the Soviet Union astonished the diplomatic world by endorsing the Zionist aspirations for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. This opened a remarkable two-year period of Soviet-Zionist cooperation, during which Russia supplied Israel with considerable military aid.

Krammer examines in depth the events leading to Russia's decision and the tremendous impact of this two-year period. He bases his account on information from official and private archives and interviews with most of the surviving participants of the 1948 Israeli mission to Prague, former diplomats, and military leaders, as well as newspapers and memoirs.

Thoroughly examining the Kremlin's complex motives, Krammer provides new insight into the role of international power politics in the Arab-Israeli conflict. He furnishes the first detailed examination of the Haganah's activities in Czechoslovakia, especially the purchase of weapons and their transport to Israel. Russia not only supplied munitions and fighter planes to repel the impending Arab attack, but also secret training areas for Israeli troops in Czechoslovakia and even a brigade of Czech "volunteers." In tracing Stalin's change of outlook in the fall of 1948 and Russia's gradual return to support of the Arabs (from 1949 to 1952), Krammer emphasizes Soviet press reports and broadcasts as signs of

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ARNOLD KRAMMER

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ISRAEL AND THE SOVIET BLOC, 1947-53

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*To my parents, David and Eva—  
and to Louis Nagy, my friend and teacher.  
I owe them everything.*

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## Preface

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What men call friendship is only a reciprocal conciliation of interests, an exchange of good offices; it is simply a form of barter. . . .

La Rochefoucauld, *Reflections, or Sentences and Moral Maxims*, 1678

THE SOVIET-ISRAELI friendship of 1947 and 1948 witnessed the astounding turnabout of Soviet policy from the Arab world to Israel and back again. The disintegration of that alliance, beginning in 1949 and continuing through the early 1950s, evolved into a hostile relationship which enormously complicated the preparation of this study. Any recollection of that alliance of 1948 is today a source of political embarrassment to both parties, a situation which often severely hampered my research, especially in Eastern Europe. Three research trips to the Middle East and the Soviet bloc in 1966, 1968, and 1969 provided the opportunity to examine official and private archives, as well as to interview the majority of surviving participants of the 1948 Israeli mission to Prague, former diplomats, and military leaders. I am sincerely grateful for their help.

The reader should be aware that due to the irregularity and clandestine nature of the Czech-Haganah agreements, the Czechoslovak government's desire to avoid international diplomatic censure, and the later destruction of relevant records (and participants) during the Slansky trial, very few of the original records of this episode remain in Prague. The other member of the relationship, however, Israel, has long followed a policy of collecting and storing all data relating to its War of Independence, including the taped recollections of participants in all areas, and has recently made this information available to scholars. While the Czechs may perhaps be maintaining a vigil over a sheaf

of classified memos or list of weapons sold to the Palestinians, the Israelis are making available the very same information—as the buyers rather than the sellers. It makes no difference, however, with regard to the amount of material transacted.

Individuals who contributed to this study in Eastern Europe, especially in Prague during the temporary thaw of the so-called Dubček Spring, requested an anonymity which I must respect. In addition, I am indebted to a number of other individuals both in the Middle East and the United States, in particular: Moshe Dor of *Ma'ariv*; Mordechai Oren and Shimon Ornstein, early Palestinian representatives in Eastern Europe and survivors of the Slansky trial; Shmuel Mikunis, member of the Knesset; Ehud Avriel, head of the 1948 Israeli mission to Prague, and former Israeli ambassador to Italy and Malta, Ghana, Liberia, and Congo; Munya Mardor, former Haganah commander and director of the Israeli Weapons Research and Development Authority; Professor Josef Korbel of the University of Denver; Professor Gene Fitzgerald of the University of Utah; Captain Steven Krammer, U.S.A.F.; Peter Rordam; Ted Cohan; Professor Dennis Brennen; Fredrick Warman; Howard Golden; and Nathan Nudelman.

Much of the credit for the preparation of this study must be divided between two friends and advisors whose penetrating criticism and indefatigable effort made possible the success of this book. Professor Alfred E. Senn launched me on this voyage and Professor John A. Armstrong, also at the University of Wisconsin, guided it throughout, to completion. Support of a different nature, for which I am equally grateful, was provided by the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Philosophical Society, and the Jewish Community Council of Rockford, Illinois, for research and archival work abroad.

The final acknowledgment, an understatement in its brevity, goes to my wife, Rhoda, whose unstinting assistance and endless patience made the preparation for this study possible.

## Prelude to 1947

RUSSIAN involvement in the Middle East follows a national tradition that predates the czars. It has transcended the problems of internal struggles, ideology, religious differences, and the innumerable failures interrupted by occasional dazzling success. In the decade following World War II, Soviet Russia found itself in a position to begin serious entry into what had become recognized as an enormously strategic area, critical to the course of the Cold War. Among the Soviet Union's early postwar ventures was a secret and halting program to sell captured and surplus German arms and ammunition through Czechoslovakia to interested parties in the Middle East. Although several Arab governments, notably Syria, sent representatives to Prague to negotiate for arms, Czechoslovakia sold the majority of military equipment to the underground Jewish army, the Haganah, in the British Mandate of Palestine.

Since 1947 Russia's policy toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli dispute has been dramatically contradictory. In 1946 and early 1947 Moscow supported, albeit halfheartedly, Arab independence movements and their demands for withdrawal of Western troops from the area. In May of 1947, the Soviet Union then astonished the diplomatic world by reversing its three-decade support of the Arab world and placed itself on record as a supporter of the Zionist aspirations for the establishment and consolidation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Equally astonishing was its ideological rationalization regarding the Zionist movement, a major focal point of Soviet distrust as an ideology inconsistent with the Communist system. This totally unorthodox reversal

in Soviet foreign policy lasted less than two years before deteriorating into a period of "indifferent neutrality," and following a series of internal Communist party purges, culminated in the formation of the Czech-Egyptian Arms Agreement of 1955. The tremendous impact of this two-year period, the motives for decisions by both parties, and the political and military results of those decisions are dramatically evident when viewed in the historic perspective of the foundation upon which Russian policy had been based.

The Bolshevik Revolution in October, 1917, had inaugurated a major reorientation of Russia's Eastern policies. Traditionally, Russian policy had been based upon a preoccupation for territorial inroads to the Near and Middle East bordering, at times, on an obsessional single-pronged program—a design historically treated as the "Eastern Question." This program can be considered to have been institutionalized through the reigns of Peter I and Catherine. In this pursuit, Imperial Russia would use interchangeably, diplomacy, military force, and ideological weapons, these methods being most visible in the Pan-Slavic movement and the Russian Orthodox Church. After 1917, however, territorial annexation ceased to be the prime motivating factor, and emphasis shifted to ideological conversion.<sup>1</sup> Since Russia now formed the seat of international revolution, her instrument for extension of political aggrandizement changed to tactics geared to ideological conversion: the conversion to socialist and, eventually, communist societies which might then form part of the international Communist movement.

After exactly three decades of ambivalence and mild interest in the lower Middle East, interrupted only briefly by its transient concern with the 1929 Palestinian riots, a smaller uprising in 1933, and the great Arab revolt of 1936–1939,<sup>2</sup> Soviet Russia found itself without a single ally in the potentially explosive area. Following the end of

1. For concise and detailed explanations of Russia's historical designs in the Middle East, see Geoffrey Wheeler, "Russia and the Middle East," *Political Quarterly* 28 (London, 1957), 127–36; Geoffrey Wheeler, "Colonialism and the USSR," *Political Quarterly* 29 (London, 1958), 215–23; and George Lenczowski, "Evolution of Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East," *Journal of Politics* XX (February, 1958), 162–86.

2. The first serious conflict between the Arabs and Zionists occurred in Jerusalem during the summer of 1929, and accounted for some 249 deaths. A growing dispute, originally religious rather than territorial in nature, followed years of maneuvers and scuffles, compromises and truces, culminating in the bloody Arab uprisings of 1936.

World War II, Britain's control in the area was weakening: her mandate over Palestine was drawing to a close; her far-flung empire, over which "the sun could never set," was torn by colonial independence movements; and her armed forces and home economy—drained by the war—now faced the additional problem of holding back a raging civil war in Greece.

At the foundation of Russia's neglect and unsuccessful ventures in the Middle East before World War II lay the basic problem of establishing ideological guidelines: a definitive evaluation of the revolutionary role of the semifeudal Moslem states versus the early Zionist movement which was beginning to rally in Palestine. The guidelines to all attempts at Soviet penetration of the Middle East were based, of course, on the ideological precepts of Lenin and Stalin, and revolved around the initial task of establishing internal unity against the "oppressive colonial yoke," Britain. The primary ideological issue to be faced at the outset, then, was the official Soviet attitude toward these internally unifying national movements. Could the promise of success, for example, justify a Soviet alliance with nonsocialist groups? Could an Arab feudal movement bridge the gap to socialism without first passing through a capitalist stage? The answer to both problems, in the light of potential success and considering the "unusual conditions of the East" was in the affirmative. The resulting new theoretical innovations were then introduced by Lenin into legitimate Marxism and formally adopted by the Second Congress of the Communist International in July and August of 1920.

An elaborate attempt to appeal to the Arab masses occurred when the Comintern summoned a Congress of the Peoples of the East in September, 1920, at Baku to rally the Moslem world to the embryonic Soviet Union. While the First Congress of the Third International had convened the year before during a period of dire emergency for the Bolsheviks, ostensibly to devise successful ways to defend themselves against the White counterrevolution and foreign intervention, the Congress of the Peoples of the East at Baku met in a mood of heady optimism in the face of disintegrating foreign and domestic opposition. The purpose of convening a Moslem congress was basically twofold. First, it was a summons to the Moslem world to organize a counterattack against the foreign invaders of Russia, which at the same time would benefit the Moslems, for success against the great powers

—Britain, France, and Turkey—might lead to the withdrawal of their troops from the lands adjacent to the Soviet republics. Second, and perhaps most basic, the Soviet government hoped that by rallying the Moslem world against the peripheral areas which had been occupied so easily during the period of foreign intervention, they might successfully consolidate Soviet power among the Moslem minorities and perhaps even fill the void created by the withdrawal of foreign troops. There is little question that this second purpose became readily evident to the Moslem representatives, especially following the overzealous and blundering speeches of the Comintern president, Grigory Zinoviev, for the Congress of the Peoples of the East marked a turning point of revived suspicions against Soviet motives as well as the alienation of Turkey.<sup>3</sup>

The congress was important, however, in that it established the ideological principles by which the Soviet Union would henceforth conduct its efforts against “imperialism” in the Middle East. The guidelines established by Lenin and Stalin emphasized the fact that national movements under the colonial yoke were, in fact, facing a struggle against two forces: the external yoke of the colonial power, and an internal yoke of their landowner and capitalist class which owed its existence to the colonial ruler. Following this decision that the struggle against a colonial structure necessitated a two-pronged offensive, the strategy of priorities was then made clear. National independence must come first; once the external yoke was thrown off, all efforts could then be directed toward a victory of the internal yoke. An entire program eventually appeared, uniquely published in Japanese, which answered all the ideological questions necessary to justify Soviet support of the Arab world.<sup>4</sup> “The Communists are duty bound,” the program stated, “to wage a struggle for national independence and

3. For a definitive documentary survey of the Soviet regime’s early attempts to appeal to the Moslem world, including pertinent excerpts from the Second Comintern Congress and the Congress of the Peoples of the East, see Xenia Eudin and Robert North, *Soviet Russia and the East, 1920–1927* (Stanford, 1957). The Soviet Union’s ideological decisions were later discussed in G. S. Akopian, *Borba Narodov Blizhnego i Srednego Vostoka za Natsionalnyu Nezavisimos’t i Mir*, ser. 1, no. 35–36 (Moscow, 1953), p. 27.

4. Reasons for the publication of this program in Japanese are discussed by Ivar Spector in his authoritative study *The Soviet Union and the Muslim World, 1917–1958* (Seattle, 1959), p. 179.

national unity, not only within the narrow and artificial boundaries created by imperialism and the dynastic interests of certain Arab countries, but on an all-Arab scale, for the national unification of the entire East.” Regarding association with nonsocialist groups, the solution is reduced to a short directive: “The Communist parties must try to attract to the side of the anti-imperialist struggle, not only the workers and peasants, but also the broad strata of urban *petite bourgeoisie*.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, within a decade of the Revolution, Soviet policy toward the Arab world had undergone a relatively long period of hesitant decisions, ideological rationalizations, and fruitless ventures which finally culminated in the solidified guidelines established in the 1928 program as published in Tokyo.

The Zionist movement, on the other hand, was far more quickly dealt with by Soviet policy makers. Zionism, that is, the movement to establish a Jewish national homeland in Palestine, emerged in Russia long before the publication of Theodore Herzl’s *Judenstaat*.<sup>6</sup> On the eve of World War I, there were six million Jews in the Russian Empire—the largest single Jewish community in the world. Nearly every second Jew alive lived in Russia. The first conference of the *Hovevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion) met at Kattowitz, more than a decade before Herzl summoned the First Zionist Congress to Basel, and pioneer emigration to Palestine had long been in progress. While Zionism was illegal under the czar, and its related organizations severely restricted, small advances were won following the 1905 Revolution. It was not, however, until the Revolution of February, 1917, that all restrictions were removed from the Zionist movement, which presented the suc-

5. “The Tasks of the Communists in the All-Arab National Movement,” *Marxism* (Tokyo), March, 1928, reprinted in Spector, pp. 129–40. See, also, *Thesis on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies*, adopted at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, Moscow, 1928, which appeared in *International Press Correspondence* (Imprecorr) VIII (December 12, 1928), 1659–76.

6. As a result of the anti-Semitism generated by the Dreyfus affair, Theodore Herzl published, during the summer of 1896, the pamphlet *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) which advocated the establishment of British-sponsored Jewish colonization of Argentina or Palestine with a view to the eventual creation of a sovereign Jewish national state. One of the best short analyses of the Zionist movement in Russia may be found in the pamphlet by Joseph B. Schechtman, *Zionism and Zionists in Soviet Russia: Greatness and Drama* (New York: Zionist Organization of America, 1966).

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cessful Bolsheviks, eight months later, with a powerful and dynamic Zionist mass movement.<sup>7</sup> Russia's new rulers were anything but pleased, and looking at the early positions taken by the Bolshevik leaders, the Zionist movement ought not to have been surprised.

The Zionist movement had been opposed by Marxist theorists and revolutionary leaders at every opportunity, as *déclassé*, spiritually "strangers in their own country," and "deserters" from the battlefield of class conflict. As early as 1903, Vladimir Lenin wrote in the party's newspaper, *Iskra* (The Spark), that the very idea of a Jewish nationality was "manifestly reactionary" and "in conflict with the interests of the Jewish proletariat." Ten years later, this opinion was substantiated by Joseph Stalin in the pamphlet *Marxism and the National Question*. Only once did Bolshevik and Zionist leaders meet and talk about their respective views toward each other's movements. A relatively little known personal reminiscence by Chaim Weizmann, world Zionist leader and Israel's first president, has recently disclosed a discussion which he had with Lenin. In April, 1910, the two leaders, both on the threshold of their political careers, chanced to meet in a Paris café where they spoke, at some length, of political theory and Jewish nationalism. While unmoving in his opinion regarding Zionist-Communist compatibility, Lenin took great pains to assure Weizmann that anti-Semitism played absolutely no part in his political decisions, and that the incompatibility he spoke of was based strictly on political theory.<sup>8</sup> The political use of the virulent anti-Semitism deeply ingrained in Russian history and, in fairness, Eastern European history as a whole, was only later employed in nearly every phase of Bolshevik anti-Zionist campaigns.

Following the October, 1917, Revolution, however, the Bolsheviks were too preoccupied with enormous problems of securing power to enforce policy decisions on the growing Zionist movement; in any case, the government temporarily required the support and goodwill of any and all organizations. Yet persecution of the Russian Zionist movement was not far in the distance, and despite official pronouncements

7. See *Kniga o Russkom Yevreistve* [Book on Russian Jewry] (New York, 1960); and Aryeh Leib Tsentsiper, *Eser Sh'not R'difot* [Ten Years of Persecution] (Tel Aviv, 1930).

8. Boris Guriel, "Lenin and Weizmann," *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), November 3, 1967.



like that issued by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK) on July 21, 1919, which stated that “. . . since the cultural and educational activities of the Zionist organization do not contradict the decisions of the Communist Party, the Presidium of the VTsIK instructs all Soviet organizations not to hamper the Zionist party in its activities, . . .” severe anti-Zionist repression began with the new decade.<sup>9</sup> By 1931, a clear program outlining the attitude of the Communist International toward Zionism was published in Arabic, in *Ila al-Aman* (Forward), the organ of the Communist party of Palestine. This program stated that

“Zionism is the expression of the exploiting and great power oppressive strivings of the Jewish bourgeoisie, which makes use of the persecution of the Jewish national minorities in Eastern Europe for the purpose of imperialistic policy to insure its domination.” (Open Letter of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, November 26, 1930). To achieve this goal, Zionism has allied itself via the mandate and the Balfour Declaration with British imperialism. In return for the support extended to it by the British imperialists, Zionism has turned itself into a tool of British imperialism to suppress the national liberation movement of the Arab Masses.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, from 1930, the Soviet position toward both the Arab world and the Zionists was perfectly clear and ideologically secure.

The penetration of the Middle East held its historic fascination for the Soviet government as strongly as it had for the preceding czars. The Communist party of Palestine, founded in 1919 and admitted to the Comintern in 1923, was strictly advised, in concurrence with the formulation of anti-Zionist legislation, to “support the nationalist freedom of the Arab population against the British-Zionist occupation.” After the first bloody riots in 1929, the Palestinian party appointed an Arab majority to its Central Committee, and thereafter continued to represent official Soviet policy in support of the Arab population.<sup>11</sup> It was not, however, until the dissolution of the Comin-

9. Tsentsiper, *Eser Sh'not R'difot*, pp. 50–51.

10. *The Tasks of the Communist Party of Palestine in the Countryside* (Resolution of the VIIth Congress of the CCP). *Ila al-Amam* (Forward). See also, U. S., Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Communism in the Near East*, 80th Cong., 1948, p. 23.

11. For an excellent insight into the Arab-Zionist conflicts within the Palestine Communist party, see Judd L. Teller, *The Kremlin, the Jews, and the Middle East* (New York, 1957), pp. 148–58.

tern in 1943 that the Palestinian party was permitted to divide into two major groups, one Arab and the other Jewish. This sudden concession came as the result of several wartime changes: Russia's desire to publicly recognize Jewish efforts following the increasingly alarming news of Nazi atrocities, and the Soviet government's increasing concern over the Arab attraction to German political advances in the area.

The period immediately prior to World War II saw a slightly increased, though still decidedly pro-Arab, interest by the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Interest peaked, initially, as a result of the wave of violence which had spread through Palestine in the summer of 1936, and while the Soviet position undertook support of the Arabs as they had during the 1929 riots, no detailed policy was established. The Communist world was entering the Stalinist purges, and by 1937 the majority of Middle East experts had been "cleansed," leaving their survivors enormously unwilling to make any statement which might clarify Russia's position in the Arab-Zionist conflict. Aside from this general interest during the 1936 unrest, the Soviet Union was becoming increasingly anxious over German penetration of the Arab world, which not only forced the two countries into competition in many areas, but forced the Russians to revamp their ideological position in regard to those Arabs—most notably the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem—who actively supported the Nazis in the Middle East.<sup>12</sup> The rationalization was that in reality there were actually two groups of insurgents in the Arab world, the majority of Arab fighters who were striving for national liberation and a small group of "Fascist provocators" whose actions could not reflect upon those of the "healthy" overwhelming majority.<sup>13</sup>

As a by-product of this German-Soviet competition in the Middle East, and the resulting loss of many important Arab leaders to the Nazi cause, the Soviets found themselves with little alternative but to support nearly every antifascist organization, however ideologically

12. See Lukasz Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East* (London, 1966); Spector, *Soviet Union and the Muslim World*, pp. 186–87, 200; and Joseph B. Schechtman, *The Mufti and the Fuehrer: The Rise and Fall of Haj Amin el-Husseini* (New York, 1965).

13. A. Goodman, *International Press Correspondence* (Imprecorr), 1937, p. 1156.

repugnant. During the spring and summer months of 1939, the Soviet Union found itself lauding the antifascist and anti-British Zionist position at the International Zionist Congress in Switzerland in August. Within only a week, however, the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact radically altered the Communist position toward the Zionists as a by-product of closer ties with Germany. The Zionists' desire to join a united antifascist front was no longer considered a virtue; this Soviet position was to remain unchanged for the following year. After June, 1941, of course, this pro-German position was reversed again as ideology struggled desperately to justify Russia's changing position in the arena of warring powers. The Soviet attitude toward the Zionists in particular, however, remained relatively unchanged during the war years, reduced in intensity from the vehemence before 1938, through the fluctuations leading to the outbreak of the war, to the total neglect of the issue in the face of overwhelmingly more important wartime problems.

The end of the war brought a great upsurge in communist activity in the Middle East. The main reason was, of course, Russia's emergence in 1945 as one of the two great world powers. Russia was now in a position to exert its influence as never before. The second major factor in the Soviet Union's renewed interest in the area was the feeling that the Middle East itself, after decades of stagnation, was beginning to move at last. The war had brought economic and especially industrial progress, which, in turn, gave rise to the emergence of embryonic workers' organizations and strong nationalist movements. From the Soviet point of view, these conditions began to appear potentially promising as the fulcrum on which the lever of invested capital and military aid might move the political structure of the Arab world. The question remaining was simply, which revolutionary movement would provide the best political return on such an investment?

Russia's ultimate objective in 1945 and 1946, however, did not concern the Arab-Zionist issue, but rather the grandiose plan to bring Greece, Turkey, and Iran into the same satellite status to which the USSR was reducing the countries of Eastern Europe. The long-range goal, as earlier envisioned in Molotov's conversations with Nazi leaders in November, 1940, was to establish a belt of protective buffer areas extending to the eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf which

would serve to screen the industrial regions of southern Russia and Transcaucasia.<sup>14</sup> The immediate objectives in pursuit of this plan were to obtain the return of territory on the Transcaucasian frontier from Turkey, extort oil concessions in the five northern provinces of Iran, and establish Soviet bases on the Black Sea Straits.<sup>15</sup> That these Soviet efforts did not meet with success was due not only to the determined resistance of the Turkish and Iranian governments, and to the fact that the Soviet Union itself seldom escalated its methods beyond heavy diplomatic pressure and military intimidation, but to Western opposition provided, in the face of an as yet uncommitted American position in the area, by the British government. It was at this point that Soviet postwar policy began to crystallize. The recurring theme of friendly coexistence which was at its height in the public declarations of February, 1945, were gradually being replaced by growing assertions of the profound differences between Soviet socialism and the capitalist world, signaled most concisely by Stalin's speech to the Supreme Soviet in February, 1946, and by the movement which began with the publication of Yevgni Samoilovich Varga's book, *Change in the Capitalist Economy After World War II*, early in 1946. The symbol of the capitalist world, and Russia's main enemy in the Middle East, was still Britain.

The British, meanwhile, had their hands full in the Middle East. The conflict between the Arabs and Zionists in Palestine was reaching the boiling point. The British general election of July, 1945, which had placed the Labour party in the government, provided the hopeful Zionist movement with an opportunity to press their maximum demands for a favorable settlement in the proposed partition of Palestine, as well as for the immediate immigration to Palestine of 100,000 Jewish survivors of the Nazi holocaust then being held in displaced persons camps in Germany and Austria. The Arab world, on the other hand, was certainly not prepared to concede any more than a minority status to the Zionists in Palestine. Both sides pressed the new Labour government for a prompt commitment to their respective positions.

14. George Kirk, *Survey of International Affairs: The Middle East in the War, 1939-1946*, ed. Arnold Toynbee (London, 1954), p. 449.

15. See Wheeler, "Colonialism and the USSR"; and Wheeler, "Russia and the Middle East."

The Zionists, determined to salvage the small remaining European Jewish community, were especially enraged at Britain's painfully slow progress in establishing, in November, 1945, the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine. The increasingly violent cycle of hostility between the British and the Zionists which would eventually erupt in the 1948 struggle for independence had already begun. Ignoring the slow progress of the Anglo-American committee, the Zionists began to organize unauthorized immigration of refugees. These efforts brought countermeasures by the British, and retaliatory attacks, in turn, by the Jewish Resistance Movement.<sup>16</sup>

Within the remaining three-year period of the British Mandate in Palestine, this polarization led to the volatile atmosphere in which the thin veneer of law and order was maintained by the full weight of Britain's military and security forces.<sup>17</sup> To complicate slightly Britain's position in Palestine, the Egyptian government was meanwhile pressing for the complete withdrawal of British forces from Egypt as the condition for entering into negotiations for a new Anglo-Egyptian alliance, thus forcing Britain to place her hopes for a principle future base on the pressure cooker of Palestine, her final major holding in the Middle East.

Moscow's initial reaction to this postwar atmosphere was to pick up the threads of its prewar policy and support the Arab position. Only two Russian publications appeared on the subject in the immediate postwar period, both reiterating socialism's traditional and

16. The Jewish Resistance Movement, commanded by the Jewish Agency under David Ben-Gurion, was divided into underground armies: the Haganah (the general military structure with approximately 75,000 people) and the Palmach (the fighting units of the Haganah with between 20,000 and 26,000 combat troops, under the immediate command of Yigael Allon). In addition, the right-wing Zionist Revisionist party, led by Menahem Beigin, organized its own terrorist group, called Irgun Zvi Leumi (IZL); it consisted of about 4,000 people and was based on Jabotinsky's concept of Jewish Youth Defense groups (Betar). Following a violent split during the early 1940s over the Irgun's decision to postpone its struggle with the British forces until after the defeat of fascism, an extreme anti-British terrorist group of about 200 people comprising the Stern Group was established.

17. The full extent of this polarization can be seen in the British casualty figures; between the end of World War II and October 20, 1947, 127 British soldiers had been killed and 331 wounded, including 8 killed and 82 wounded within the last three months of that period. Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th ser., vol. 443, coll. 72-73 (October 29, 1947).

fundamental antipathy toward Zionism.<sup>18</sup> The author of both volumes, V. B. Lutsii, emphasized the progressive character of the Arab leadership in Palestine, minimizing the importance of the “small reactionary factor” among them. Soviet readers were further told that Zionism’s aim was not, in fact, independence, but rather the maintenance of the British Mandate, under which the Zionists could continue their exploitation of the Arab population. Sharp criticism was leveled at those left-wing circles in the West which “naively” supported Zionist aspirations.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting that in a later volume, published after Russia’s decision to support the creation of Israel, this same Lutsii described the Soviet Union as “the only true friend of Jewish national independence.”<sup>20</sup>

The Soviet solution to these increasingly polarized Arab and Zionist demands within the deteriorating framework of the British Mandate was the advocacy of a unified Arab-Jewish state. Soviet policy through 1946 and 1947 firmly opposed all proposals to partition Palestine into two separate states. The communist movements in the Middle East, both Arab and Jewish, took up the cry and denounced the efforts of the ill-fated Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine, calling instead for the “immediate recognition of Palestine as an independent Arab-Jewish state, and the withdrawal of the British Army from this country.”<sup>21</sup> Speaking in the name of the Communist party of Palestine, in Jerusalem on March 25, 1946, Meir Vilner summed up the party (and Soviet) position in the following way:

We feel it is our duty to sound a warning against all intrigues aiming at the partition of this country. . . . The plan for partition is an imperialist program designed to find a new form for the continuation of the old British rule and for the increase of tensions between Jews and Arabs. . . . The colonial power is interested in having the Jews demand a Jewish State and the Arabs an Arab State. The inevitable result of both these demands is the continuation of colonial rule over Jews and Arabs alike.<sup>22</sup>

18. V. B. Lutsii, *Palestinskaia Problema* (Moscow, 1946); and V. B. Lutsii, *Liga Arabskikh Gosudarstev* (Moscow, 1946).

19. Lutsii, *Palestinskaia Problema*, p. 28.

20. V. B. Lutsii, *Angliski i Amerikanski Imperializm na Blizhnem Vostoke* (Moscow, 1948), p. 62.

21. Meir Vilner, “Arab-Jewish Unity for the Solution of Palestine’s Problem,” *Political Affairs* (June, 1946), p. 565.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 564–65.

In answer to Moscow's three-decade policy of hesitant, often uninterested, but always pro-Arab involvement in the Middle East, Meir Vilner went on to state that

The fact that the Soviet Union has been excluded from the working out of a solution for our country's problems is further proof that the initiators of this Committee [Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry for Palestine] lack any interest in advancing the freedom of the peoples of Palestine. As is widely known, the Soviet Union has been the only one among the Great Powers which, in the most consistent manner, has defended, at each of the international conferences, the right of colonial peoples to self-determination and independence.<sup>23</sup>

The Communist newspapers around the world attacked the findings and partition proposals of the Anglo-American Committee. The *New York Daily Worker* stated that the committee was evading the immediate issues while compounding the effectiveness of any long-range solution. *Izvestia* claimed that the committee had been "established outside and in spite of the United Nations Charter . . . and . . . had only one aim: the strengthening of British domination in the countries of the Middle East."<sup>24</sup> Even as late as January and February, 1947, representatives to the communist British Empire Conference, which met in London, vigorously protested all proposals to partition Palestine as camouflage behind which British imperialism could continue to flourish. Emile Touma, speaking for the Arab Communists at the conference, joined the ranks, saying that "Zionism is trying, by promoting immigration, to keep its hold on the masses of Palestine and thereby to promote imperialism, especially American imperialism."<sup>25</sup> Even as the day of decision drew closer in the United Nations Assembly, the official publication of the combined Syrian and Lebanese Communist parties, *Sawt esh-Shaab*, issued a proclamation warning against "the danger of partition and the establishment of a Jewish State." The two Arab parties ended the proclamation with the following statement: "Long live your courageous solidarity today with your brothers, the people of Palestine. Your strikes and demonstrations are fitting blows against the imperialists and the Zionists. . . . Today the whole world will see the strength of the true spirit of nationalism in

23. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

24. *Izvestia*, August 10, 1946.

25. *New York Times*, February 27, 1947.

the Arab countries. Long live a free and independent democratic Palestine!”<sup>26</sup>

It must be mentioned, however, that on several occasions Russian officials took contradictory positions on the Palestine Question. In May, 1946, for example, the Soviet minister to Syria told the Syrian premier, Sa-Abdullah Jabry, that the Soviet government had decided to back the Arab case if the issue were brought before the United Nations. At the same time, at a Tel Aviv meeting with leaders of the League for Friendly Relations with Russia, M. N. Agronov, the Soviet consul in Beirut, denied reports in the Arab press that Moscow Radio had criticized the recommendations of the Anglo-American Committee.<sup>27</sup> While the Soviet official's statement to the Arab leader was plausible, although highly optimistic, the denials made by the Soviet official in Tel Aviv, in light of Russia's aggressive campaign against the committee, were a transparent falsehood.

The Soviet Union, however, began toning down its own propaganda machinery as the Palestine Question began gaining momentum in the diplomatic arena of the United Nations.<sup>28</sup> While encouraging national Communist parties, particularly those in the Middle East, to continue an unrelenting campaign against any proposal aimed at the partition of Palestine, the Soviet Union adopted a policy of studied neutrality toward the complex and unstable problem. Articles and newspaper accounts on the Palestine Question decreased sharply during the early months of 1947 as interest shifted to the diplomatic efforts leading to a final decision by the Great Powers. The slight amount of material which the Soviet government did release during the beginning of the year carefully avoided the substance of the Arab-Jewish issue, and concentrated instead on the responsibility of Britain for

26. *Sawt esh-Shaab*, March 10, 1947, as quoted by Ammon Kapelink, "When the Communists Supported the Jewish State," *New Outlook* (Tel Aviv) V, no. 9 (November–December, 1962), 87–88.

27. Jewish Telegraphic Agency, *Daily News Bulletin*, May 15, 18, 1946. The periodical was later called the *Jewish Agency's Digest of Press and Events* (published by the information department of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization, Jerusalem).

28. For the definitive work in the chronological analysis of the Soviet Union's press and radio view toward Israel, see Mary Newcomb Allen, "The Policy of the USSR Towards the State of Israel, 1948–1958" (Ph.D. dissertation, London School of Economics, 1961).



the whole crisis. An article representing Russia's cautious new position appeared in *Izvestia* on February 8. It soundly rejected a then current British proposal to partition Palestine into four sections, including two autonomous regions—one Jewish and one Arab—under the guidance of a British governor. The article claimed that this project was simply another effort of “British imperialism to fan the flames of conflict between Arabs and Jews as an excuse for remaining in Palestine.” The only hope for peace in the Middle East, the article maintained, was in the swift and total evacuation of British forces.<sup>29</sup>

The British government, for different reasons, had come to the same conclusion. Its mandate over Palestine had become generally unpopular and, in the light of a drained postwar economy and an increasingly untenable commitment in Greece, enormously costly as well. Casualties among the British forces in Palestine were mounting steadily with no solution or colonial recompense in sight. On April 2, 1947, the British government publicly acknowledged its failure to control the mounting tension in the area and its inability to find a viable solution to the volatile Arab-Zionist issue, and requested a special session of the United Nations to consider the future of Palestine. Although the British were not to announce their final decision to evacuate Palestine until September,<sup>30</sup> all parties involved, including the Soviet government, immediately recognized the importance of the next few months in shaping the destiny of the Middle East. The diplomatic chess game began in earnest. Three days before the opening of the special session, the Soviet government published an article which, while congratulating the British on their wise decision to admit their failure in Palestine, went on to predict the total discreditation of British colonialism and the establishment of “democratic regimes” based on national self-determination.<sup>31</sup> Russia was, in essence, serving notice that her position in the matter would take the role of an “objective arbiter” whose three-

29. “On International Themes,” *Izvestia*, February 8, 1947, p. 4. For the reader's convenience, articles from the Soviet press will be cited in English in the body of the text. A transliteration of the original Russian title is included in the Bibliography.

30. United Nations, General Assembly, *Official Records*, Ad Hoc Political Committee, September 25, 1947, pp. 2-4.

31. “Notes on International Life: the Palestine Question before the United Nations,” *New Times* (English edition of *Novoye Vremia*) no. 17 (April 28, 1947), p. 14.

decade predictions about the ultimate failure of British imperialism were coming true, and whose only interest was in the rights of the Middle East peoples to establish their own government.

The special session of the General Assembly convened in an atmosphere of high tension and anticipation which slowly turned into frustration as a variety of proposals were suggested only to be summarily abandoned. With Britain excluded as a potential arbiter by her own acknowledgment—having called for the special session in the first place to assume that responsibility—all eyes were turned to the Great Powers, the United States and Russia, for an ultimate solution. Neither, however, expressed any decisive position; the State Department was seemingly caught unaware and hesitant in the extreme, and the Soviet deputy foreign minister, Andrei A. Gromyko, simply stressed Russia's desire to proceed as quickly as possible toward a solution which favored the early termination of the Mandate. The representatives of the Jewish Agency gloomily awaited a negative decision while the Arab delegates appeared justifiably confident in the influence of huge oil interests on Western policy as well as a three decade pro-Arab policy by the East.

In view of the many decades of established Soviet policy, firmly cemented by the necessary ideological adjustments, it seems safe to say that the sudden and totally unexpected announcement of a policy change in the Middle East came as a surprise to all diplomatic parties, to the Communist movement, and, of course, to the Palestinian Jews and Arabs. On May 14, 1947, Gromyko launched into a long speech reiterating the Soviet Union's endorsement of a single federated union of Arabs and Jews, but that if such a bi-national state was unrealizable, a viable alternative—the division of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states—would be supported by the Soviet government. Russia's support of a partition plan was, he stated, clearly a second choice, and "would only be justified if relations between the Jewish population and the Arab population of Palestine were, in fact, so bad that it was impossible to reconcile them and to insure the peaceful coexistence of the two peoples in that country."<sup>32</sup> If this were no longer feasible—and the new consideration was based on the assumption that

32. United Nations, General Assembly, *Discussion of the Report of the First Committee on the Establishment of a Special Committee on Palestine*, 1947, (A/307 and A/307/Corr. 1), p. 127.

it was not—then Russia would support partition as the second-best solution to the problem. While still far from committing herself, Soviet Russia had raised the possibility of partition and had gone one step beyond: Gromyko emphasized the Jewish historical claim to the same area, dwelled at some length on Jewish suffering during World War II, and caused a bit of apprehension among the Arab delegates by rejecting “any unilateral Arab solution to the Palestine problem.”<sup>33</sup> With the completion of the discussion of the various solutions, the special session created an investigatory body, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP),<sup>34</sup> and on the day following Gromyko’s speech, the special session was adjourned to meet again for the final decision during the regular sessions in September.

The reaction of Zionist leaders in New York and Jerusalem to Gromyko’s declaration ranged from great satisfaction to jubilation. A Jewish Agency spokesman at Flushing Meadow hailed it as “paving the way for the establishment of the Jewish State,”<sup>35</sup> a sentiment similar to that used by David Ben-Gurion in his diary of the period.<sup>36</sup> A lengthy report of the reactions of the various Palestinian organizations enthusiastically concluded with the statement that “It is obviously an event of extraordinary importance when one of the three major powers that share in the policymaking of the world makes public a declaration in which a number of basic principles that have guided us in our analysis of the Jewish position and in our work are accepted and underlined.”<sup>37</sup> In Palestine, the newspaper *Ha’aretz* emphasized that Gromyko’s reference to Jewish suffering during World War II “stands out against the coolness of the speeches of the Anglo-Saxon representatives.”<sup>38</sup> Yet the prevailing mood was one of restrained expectation, for

33. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

34. Created by the special session on May 15, 1947, UNSCOP was composed of eleven states: Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, India, Iran, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay, and Yugoslavia. For the complete summary of the activities and documents of the UNSCOP, see *International Conciliation*, no. 454 (October, 1949).

35. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Daily News Bulletin*, May 14, 1947.

36. Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion: The Armed Prophet* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1968), p. 93.

37. Clifton Daniel, “Palestine Excited Over Soviet Stand,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1947, p. 3.

38. *Ha’aretz* (Tel Aviv), May 15, 1947. The statement refers to the ignoble war-time policies of the British and American governments toward saving Europe’s Jews, such as the State Department’s efforts to suppress evidence that Hitler had

after the initial effects of the unexpected Soviet support had been absorbed, an aura of suspicion toward Russian motives and a feeling of pessimism in calculating the odds of continued and additional support began to rise.

Russia's new position as outlined by Gromyko's speech was received with deep resentment in the Arab press. The majority of papers admitted that the special session was a serious defeat to the Arab cause, and attributed the failure to a "well-contrived Anglo-Zionist or rather Anglo-American conspiracy."<sup>39</sup> On May 19, the daily *Falastin* wrote that the Arab defeat in the United Nations was a victory for the American dollar. Gromyko's speech, which had been contrary to all Arab expectations, was singled out for special embitterment in the press. In its editorial of May 16, *Ad-Difa'a* stated that "We were not surprised at the attitude of Britain . . . but what did cause astonishment was the statement . . . by which . . . the Russian delegate sold the principles of his country and the United Nations at a cheap price, i.e. pleasing Poland which wants to get rid of the Jews and disturb the atmosphere of the Middle East. . . ."<sup>40</sup> Again on May 20, *Ad-Difa'a* wrote that "Gromyko, the Soviet delegate, spoke and has appeared to be exactly like the representatives of the imperialist states."<sup>41</sup> Only one editorial, appearing in *Falastin* on May 26, placed the blame for the Russian attitude on the Arabs. "The delegates," it wrote, "as well as the Arab Higher Executive representatives tried to avoid Russia in the same way as a healthy person avoids an itchy one. . . . This made Soviet Russia believe that the Arabs were attendant on the British."<sup>42</sup> The Arab Communist press alone saw any optimism in Russia's new position, although it was careful to avoid any reference to those passages in Gromyko's speech which referred to the Jewish problem. In its editorial of May 22, *At-Ittihad* wrote: "It is our duty to admit that our national cause has achieved gains at this special session despite all the

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ordered the extermination of the Jews, their combined refusal to bomb the Nazis' extermination camps, and Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long's fight against lowering of immigration restrictions that might have saved even a small number.

39. *Ad-Difa'a*, May 16, 1947, as quoted by the *Arab News Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.), no. 6 (June 21, 1947), p. 4.

40. Quoted by the *Arab News Bulletin*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

difficulties raised by British Imperialism with the backing of American Imperialism. . . .”<sup>43</sup>

During the summer months of 1947 between the special session and the beginning of the regularly scheduled meeting of the General Assembly, the Soviet propaganda machine maintained its earlier position of neutrality in the Arab-Jewish issue, while slightly increasing its campaign placing the responsibility for all problems on Britain’s colonial policy and emphasizing the prediction that Britain may decide to remain in Palestine indefinitely. In addition, Russia stepped up a propaganda campaign to alleviate any misgivings held by the Arab world as a result of Gromyko’s May 14 speech. While never repudiating any part of their United Nations statement, the Soviet government successfully regained the confidence of the Arab world, primarily by focusing attention on British failures in the area. An excellent example of these efforts may be seen in a typical broadcast in Arabic, from Moscow Radio, directed to the Middle East on May 23.<sup>44</sup> The theme was basically fourfold: first, that Britain had historically prevented any settlement of the Palestine Question; second, that the very nature of the colonial structure was based on exploitation and greed; third, that the idea of an irreconcilable conflict between Jews and Arabs was totally a British fabrication designed to continue the exploitation of both parties and therefore must be rejected as such; and fourth, that the single solution to the British-created problem in the Middle East was a bi-national state of Arabs and Jews based on the working model of Yugoslavia.<sup>45</sup> This Soviet position continued until after the General Assembly met in regular session in September to consider the findings of UNSCOP. Evidently Russia’s summer campaign had so obscured her original, though undeniably specific, statements, that both the Arabs and Zionists looked forward to the sessions with a certain degree of hope regarding Soviet support.

The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine reported back to the General Assembly in September of 1947 with its majority and

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Summary of World Broadcasts*, British Broadcasting Corporation monitoring service, part I, the Soviet Union, no. 1 (May 23, 1947), p. 38.

45. An example of this expanded theme may be seen in the mimeographed pamphlet by the Palestine Communist Union, *Memorandum of the Problem of Palestine to the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine* (Tel Aviv, June 1947).

minority proposals, and on September 25, an ad hoc committee on the Palestine Question was selected to deal with the five-volume report of UNSCOP.<sup>46</sup> The minority proposal, supported by India, Iran, and Yugoslavia, envisioned the establishment of a federal, bi-national union of Arabs and Jews, with Jerusalem to remain under United Nations control with special international status. The majority plan, which concluded that the hostility between the two populations made any proposal for a union impossible, called instead for the partition of Palestine into two independent states—in essence providing for the establishment of the State of Israel—and a period was set aside for debate before the Assembly took its crucial vote on the motion. On October 13, the Soviet Union made its first statement since the special session on May 14. Gromyko praised the work of UNSCOP and intimated Russia's support of the majority plan, an endorsement which was immediately censured by the Arabs, who claimed that the result would bring about an "unnatural and illegal partition plan which would subject hundreds of thousands of Arabs to Jewish domination."<sup>47</sup> The Soviet position was further defined shortly after Gromyko's historic speech by Professor Semyon Tsarapkin, counsellor of the Soviet embassy in Washington. On October 13, he also spoke before the General Assembly, and after describing the partition plan as the best alternative, under the circumstances, to the failure of Arab-Zionist reconciliation, he hailed the entire decision as "a great step forward in the solution of the whole Palestine question."<sup>48</sup> In the 125th Plenary Meeting on November 26, 1947, three days before the General Assembly's 33 to 13 vote of approval, Gromyko defined the Soviet Union's position with regard to the establishment of the State of Israel, and in doing so, marked an historic and perplexing reversal in traditional Soviet policy. He stated:

The representatives of the Arab States claim that the partition of Palestine would be an historical injustice. But this view of the case is un-

46. United Nations, General Assembly, Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestine Question, *Meeting Records*, 1947 (A/AC. 14/SR. 1-34 and A/AC. 14/1-46).

47. Statement by the Lebanese representative, General Assembly, *Official Records*, Ad Hoc Committee, 14th Meeting, October 15, 1947, p. 90. It is almost comical that the enraged Arabs employed the ultimate threat of allying with the Soviet Union if the West continued to consider supporting the partition—right up to the day that the Russians themselves endorsed the partition plan. See the report by H. Metz, *Christian Science Monitor*, October 8, 1947.

48. *New York Times*, October 14, 1947, p. 8.

acceptable, if only because, after all, the Jewish people has been closely linked with Palestine for a considerable period in history. Apart from that—and the USSR delegation drew attention to this circumstance originally at the Special Session of the General Assembly—we must not overlook the position in which the Jewish people found themselves as a result of the recent world war. . . . The solution of the Palestine problem into two separate states will be of profound historical significance, because this decision will meet the legitimate demands of the Jewish people, hundreds of thousands of whom, as you know, are still without a country, without homes, having found temporary shelter only in special camps in some Western European countries.<sup>49</sup>

Following the immediate Arab rejection of the Partition Resolution and a series of loud, fist-shaking speeches, the Arab delegates stormed out of the United Nations Assembly with the final reminder that they retained the right “to act freely in whatever way” deemed fit.<sup>50</sup>

Not one to burn irrevocably all bridges with the past, Gromyko included a message to the Arab world in the midst of his passionate speech in support of a Jewish homeland. Designed to placate the enraged Arab delegates, Gromyko’s prophetic gesture saw reality within a few short years. In the same speech in which he lamented the plight of European Jewry and spoke of their “legitimate historic demands to Palestine,” he said: “The USSR delegation is convinced that Arabs and Arab States will still, on more than one occasion, be looking towards Moscow and expecting the USSR to help them in the struggle for their lawful interests, in their efforts to cast off the last vestiges of foreign dependence.”<sup>51</sup> In addition, Soviet delegates approached individual Arab representatives during the General Assembly sessions, assuring them privately that “the Arabs will soon find out that the Soviet Union is their friend.”<sup>52</sup> History in this case would prove Gromyko correct.

49. General Assembly, *Official Records*, Second Session, 125th Plenary Meeting, November 26, 1947, pp. 1360–61.

50. See the statements by the Syrian and Saudi Arabian representatives, *ibid.*, 125th Plenary Meeting, November 26, 1947, pp. 1425, 1427.

51. *Ibid.*, 125th Plenary Meeting, November 26, 1947, pp. 1360–61. See, also, *United Nations Document A/364*. It was, incidentally, common knowledge among the various United Nations representatives, that the Soviets were being approached by the Arabs with offers designed to encourage the Russians to change their stand on Israel, but which they demonstratively refused. David Horowitz, *State in the Making* (New York, 1953), p. 282.

52. Letter from Professor Sami Hadawi, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, Lebanon, to the author, April 23, 1966.

At this point, the Soviet Union, at the propaganda level, embarked upon a campaign to solidify its United Nations position. Arabic broadcasts from Radio Moscow insisting upon the appropriateness of the Soviet position were beamed at the Middle East from November through the early months of 1948. The old line placing the total responsibility for the problems involved in the Palestine Question still remained the basis of the campaign, and Russia's new official position in support of the partition resolution was repeated often as an "integral effort to rectify the British damage." While the just treatment of both the Palestinian Arabs and Jews was emphasized by the Soviet decision, Moscow reminded the Arabs that the Jews also had rights.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the broadcasts condemned "all Arab reactionaries," particularly the Arab League, as "tools of the imperialists" for deliberately distorting Russia's objections in supporting the partition resolution.<sup>54</sup> The new Soviet position was echoed by those Communist parties which were able to adjust to support of the partition plan (several simply splintered themselves out of existence) or survive the waves of militant nationalism which swept the Arab world in preparation for the invasion of Palestine after the evacuation of British forces. The official organ of the multisplintered Egyptian Communist party published a series of daring editorials criticizing the Arab League for considering the Palestinian dispute "a struggle between Arabs and Jews and not a struggle of Jews and Arabs on one hand and imperialism on the other."<sup>55</sup> One of the issues of the Iraqi Communist party newspaper, *Al-Kaida*, published an article signed by the party's general secretary, Yussef Salman Yussef (who wrote under the name of "Fahd"), which contained the demand for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine and a Marxist-Leninist analysis of the Palestine problem supporting partition.<sup>56</sup> The rising tide of pre-invasion hysteria and chauvinism, however, broke the back of the Arab Communist movement, and following a series of anticommunist outbreaks on November 30 and December 1 in Aleppo, Syria, the Arab parties all but collapsed.

53. *Summary of World Broadcasts* I, no. 74 (November 14, 1947), pp. 17-18; also A. Belokon, "True and False Friends of the Arab Peoples," *Pravda*, November 13, 1947, p. 4.

54. *Summary of World Broadcasts* I, no. 80 (November 26, 1947).

55. *Al-Gamahir*, February 15, 1948, as quoted by Kapelink, "When the Communists Supported the Jewish State," p. 89.

56. "Fahd," "Light on the Palestine Problem," *Al-Kaida*, January 3, 1948.



The Arab world's leading Communist party, that of Syria, was officially banned eight days later on December 18, 1947.

At the same time, the Soviet Union embarked upon an energetic program to convince world Jewry, through Yiddish broadcasts beamed from Moscow, that Russia was an asylum for its Jewish minority, and the happiness of the Jewish inhabitants of the province of Birobidjan in the Soviet Far East and their gratitude to Stalin was continually stressed.<sup>57</sup> Following Gromyko's speech of November 26 before the General Assembly and the adoption of the resolution three days later, the Moscow Radio broadcasts in Yiddish expanded to emphasize that the Soviet Union would continue in its unending effort to formulate a just and speedy solution to the Palestine problem. A broadcast on December 6 stressed that "the only solution that can secure peace and calm on the banks of the Jordan" is partition. The responsibility for the crisis in the area was, as always, placed on British colonial policies, and the current "sword-rattling activities" of the Arab League were also traced to those policies.<sup>58</sup> Later broadcasts described the suffering of the Palestinian Jewish population at the hands of armed Arab bands, and charged American and British authorities with provoking the Arabs and supplying them with arms and military advisors.<sup>59</sup> Overriding all other themes was the constant Soviet claim that

57. *Summary of World Broadcasts* I, no. 15 (June 28, 1947), p. 21; no. 32 (August 5, 1947), p. 7; no. 47 (September 9, 1947), p. 1.

58. *Ibid.*, no. 85 (December 6, 1947), p. 22.

59. *Ibid.*, no. 88 (December 22, 1947), p. 21. There was a great deal of credence to the Soviet charge of British military support to the arming of Arab armies. British foreign secretary Bevin repeatedly encouraged King Abdullah of Jordan to send his British-officered Arab Legion into Palestine as the Mandate expired. Bevin was made to defend his position later before Parliament. See Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th ser., vol. 451, Coll. 186-89; also *The Times* (London), May 27, 1948; United Nations, Security Council, document S/1201, January 11, 1949; Lillie Shultz, "Britain's Stake in Arab Victory," *The Nation*, May 29, 1948, pp. 595-98; and Harry Sacher, *Israel, the Establishment of a State* (London, 1952), p. 235. Britain was also charged by both American and Israeli sources with using more than 6,000 German mercenaries and POWs to bolster the strength of the Arab armies. See *The Nation*, January 22, 1949, p. 89, for the first such report. The full-page declaration also included a list of former high-ranking Nazi officers which had been recruited into the Arab armies. See, also, *Al Hamishmar* (Tel Aviv), June 1, 1949; *The Jewish Agency's Digest of Press and Events* (Jerusalem), no. 14 (234), January 14, 1949, pp. 20-21; and no. 15 (235), January 21, 1949, p. 16. (*The Jewish Agency's Digest* will be referred to hereafter as JAD.)

The appearance of former Nazi officers in the Arab armies was first noticed long

Soviet support of the partition plan was the only viable alternative to a Jewish-Arab civil war, and that Russia had no desire to ferment unrest in the Middle East nor lay eventual claim to any territory. Still later broadcasts, in late January, February, and March of 1948, correctly predicted the extreme hesitation of the American delegation in implementing the Partition Resolution leading to its momentous *volte face* in the Security Council.

The American authorities became more uneasy over the way in which relations with Britain were being injured by the sharp differences over Palestine, by mounting mistrust of the Soviet reasons for favoring partition, and by a flare-up of anxiety over the consequences of alienating the Moslem countries.<sup>60</sup> An additional suspicion was gaining support, in light of other very important issues of 1948 such as the Berlin Blockade and the Czech coup d'état of February, that perhaps Soviet officials were trying to gain entry into the Middle East, either by participation in a United Nations "peacekeeping force," or by taking advantage of the chaos and conflict which the partition plan would produce. American and British officials, anxious to avoid any further disagreements with the Arab world and inclined to believe the worst in analyzing Russia's motives, willingly gave unwarranted credence to anti-Zionist rumors that the Soviet Union saw in the establishment of a Jewish state a colony of potentially grateful believers. Soviet government denials of such charges began appearing at the turn of the year, and may be typified by an article which appeared in *Trud*. The article explained that Soviet propaganda was expanded to deride the Arab accusations that the Soviet Union had ulterior motives for its involvement in the Middle East. The absurdity of such charges, the Russians explained, were only logical in the light of the standard Soviet thesis that certain Arab ruling circles themselves, working with Great Britain, had set Arabs against Jews in order to draw attention away

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before the outbreak of hostilities. See *Palcor News Agency Cables* (New York) XIV (January 13, 1947), 4-5.

60. See, for instance, the admonishment by Alford Carleton, president of Aleppo College, Syria, which was read before the House of Representatives, December 18, 1947 (U.S., Congress, House, *Congressional Record Appendix*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 93, pt. 13, A4872-3); as well as the detailed warning by Representative Frances P. Bolton of Ohio upon her return from the Middle East (*Congressional Record*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., Vol. 93, pp. 11003-06).

from their own imperialist exploitations.<sup>61</sup> A similar article appeared in *Izvestia* several weeks later.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, unfounded rumors emanating from Cairo and Damascus were quickly published in the hope of influencing the State Department and the British Foreign Office.<sup>63</sup> On February 4, 1948, for example, the Foreign Office gave official confirmation to earlier reports that a considerable number of Communist party members had been found among some 15,000 Jewish immigrants attempting to enter Palestine without visas aboard the ships *Pan Crescent* and *Pan York*, which sailed from Burgas, Bulgaria, on December 27. Jewish spokesmen denied the charge, while the Arab Higher Committee supported the accusation.<sup>64</sup> Similar fears were being expressed in the United States, bolstered by such opinions as those of Harold B. Hoskins, chairman of the Near East College Association, who stated that "In supporting partition we opened a back door for Communist infiltration through Palestine into the Arab world. . . ."<sup>65</sup> Military strategists led by Secretary of Defense James Forrestal and the president's representative on the Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Leahy, began to mobilize pressure within the administration to change the position on the partition resolution.<sup>66</sup> This pressure was enough to

61. M. Alexeev, "The Palestine Problem," *Trud*, January 7, 1948, p. 3. These charges involving Russia's motives will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two of this study.

62. S. Belinkov, "Imperialist Intrigues in the Arab East," *Izvestia*, January 20, 1948, p. 3.

63. See, for example, Fayez A. Sayegh, *Communism in Israel*, Information Paper No. 4, Arab Information Center (New York, n.d.); "Russian-Zionist Alliance in the Middle East," *Bulletin of the Institute of Arab-American Affairs* (New York), May 15, 1948; and "What They Think of Us . . . : Soviet Russia and Palestine," *Islamic Review*, October, 1949.

64. *Summary of Developments in Major Problems of United States Foreign Policy*, no. 6 (February, 1948), p. 69.

65. Dr. Harold B. Hoskins in a letter to the editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, March 28, 1948. During a debate in the House of Representatives on the United States position in the United Nations on the Palestine Question, Representative Edward Gossett of Texas stated: ". . . It seems to me to be ironic and tragic that we should be fighting communism on one hand and encouraging it with the other. I refer to what seems to me a stupid, if not criminal, act on the part of our delegation to the United Nations in the partition of Palestine and in the delivery of that part of the world to Communist influence." *Congressional Record*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., vol. 93, p. 11304.

66. Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York, 1951), pp. 344-49, 356-57, 359-61. See, also, Secretary of Defense Forrestal's testimony before the

cause the already hesitating American delegation to return to the regularly scheduled Security Council sessions in February with every intention of withdrawing support for the partition resolution.

The early sessions of the Security Council saw additional discussions and interpretations of the partition resolution, with Gromyko as one of the first to firmly and formally re-endorse the Soviet Union's support of the plan.<sup>67</sup> It was not until March 19 that the American representative, Warren Austin, officially announced the withdrawal of his support for the implementation of the partition resolution, suggesting instead that Palestine be placed under a temporary United Nations trusteeship "until a second special session of the General Assembly could be convened for further consideration on the future of Palestine."<sup>68</sup> Pandemonium seized the delegates of the Council. The British and Arab delegates were understandably pleased; the Jewish Agency representative, Rabbi Silver, regarded the American decision as "a shocking reversal";<sup>69</sup> and Gromyko immediately launched into a tirade, stating that, unlike Rabbi Silver, the Soviet Union was not at all surprised by the American reversal which, he claimed, could easily have been predicted. The tirade also ushered a new aggressiveness into Moscow's support of the Jewish state which culminated soon after the British troops left Palestine in the spring of 1948.<sup>70</sup> On March 30 Gromyko further expanded on the Russian position, and compared his consistent support for the "majority decision" with that of the "Anglo-American bloc." He further hinted that another Soviet prediction might yet be realized, that British troops had no intention of

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House Armed Services Subcommittee on the possibility of jeopardizing American strategic oil interests in the Middle East. U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Petroleum*, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., January 19, 1948.

67. United Nations, Security Council, *Official Records: Third Year*, 260th Meeting, March 2, 1948, p. 405.

68. *Ibid.*, 271st Meeting, March 19, 1948, pp. 157-68. Austin was unable to raise much enthusiasm for the trusteeship scheme, with the result that American influence in the Palestine Question became largely ineffective.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 168-70. Also, see *ibid.*, 274th Meeting, March 24, 1948, pp. 244-45. It appears that President Truman himself was caught unaware by Austin's announcement, learning about the United Nations reversal in the morning newspaper. Jonathan Daniels, *The Man of Independence* (New York, 1950), pp. 318-19.

70. Security Council, *Official Records: Third Year*, 271st Meeting, March 19, 1948, pp. 171-72.

evacuating Palestine on their declared date of May 15.<sup>71</sup> The remaining two months leading to the termination of the British Mandate were spent in fruitless discussions, truce proposals, tirades from the polar extremes, and behind-the-scenes political maneuvering. On May 15, the General Assembly simply adjourned in an atmosphere of impotence after appointing a United Nations mediator, a position assumed by Count Folke Bernadotte of Sweden, whose duty and authority were left totally unclear.<sup>72</sup>

On the propaganda front, however, activity was reaching a fever pitch. Soviet government broadcasts and press reports quickly adapted to the lack of progress in the United Nations and pounced on the new American reversal with a vengeance. The Soviets gloated in their prediction of Western insincerity, and reminded their audiences that Jewish and Arab blood was paying for the delays and inefficiency in reaching a solution.<sup>73</sup> The consistency of the Russian position was stressed as the only viable and democratic solution to the problem, in comparison to the influence of oil and oil monopolies in the formulation of American and British foreign policy. In an attempt to discredit Western intentions in the Middle East, especially among the Arabs, Radio Moscow broadcasts explained in Arabic that the Anglo-American bloc could have never seriously considered supporting a plan from which its colonial interests and oil monopolies would have certainly suffered.<sup>74</sup> As the termination of the mandate grew closer, Soviet press and radio announcements expanded to include condemnation of King Abdullah as joint commander of the British-led Arab Legion, and predicted that, far from leaving as planned, the British were simply using the Legion to deliver Palestine back into their hands.<sup>75</sup>

The mandate ended on May 15, 1948, and at midnight of the fourteenth the Palestinian Jews, surrounded by six huge Arab armies and

71. *Ibid.*, 275th Meeting, March 30, 1948, pp. 246, 248–53. The secretary general of the United Nations, Trygve Lie, emphasized Russia's overwhelming steadfastness in support of the partition plan, as opposed to the same position supported by the United States. Trygve Lie, *In the Cause of Peace* (New York, 1954), pp. 164, 169, 174.

72. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 186 (S-2).

73. "Document of Impotence and Hypocrisy," *Izvestia*, May 21, 1948, p. 4.

74. *Summary of World Broadcasts* I, no. 115 (May, 1948), pp. 30–31; no. 124 (May 3, 1948), p. 18.

75. M. Marinin, "What is Concealed behind the Palestine Crisis?" *Pravda*, May 4, 1948, p. 4.

distrustful of American and British recommendations to adopt a “wait-and-see” attitude, declared themselves an independent state. Soviet recognition of the State, and even its accordance of full de jure diplomatic status on May 18, was no surprise to diplomatic leaders or the parties involved.<sup>76</sup> What did catch all sides unaware, however, was a sudden about-face in American policy. President Truman was surprisingly sympathetic to the Zionist cause, both by personal conviction and apparently for domestic political reasons.<sup>77</sup> During the critical period of 1947 and early 1948, the Palestine Question appears to have been an issue between the president and the majority of military and State Department advisors. Informed by the Jewish Agency on the thirteenth of the Palestinian Jewish population’s decision to declare their independence at midnight on the fourteenth, Truman “out-voted” his cabinet members to “confer with various governments” and instructed his press secretary to announce, at once, that the American government would extend de facto recognition to the Jewish state. The announcement was on the air only eleven minutes after Israel had declared its independence in Tel Aviv.<sup>78</sup> The next morning the American delegate, Philip G. Jessup, arose with an apologetic air in the General Assembly to announce President Truman’s totally unexpected decision. The long odyssey leading to the creation of the Jewish state, which only at the last moment had settled upon the name “Israel,” was finished.<sup>79</sup> Yet the most crucial element was not the academic deliberation in progress in the United Nations, nor even

76. For the full text, see *Izvestia*, May 18, 1948, p. 2.

77. A full examination of the pressures, both emotional and political, which caused President Truman to recognize the state of Israel may be found in Ian J. Bickerton, “President Truman’s Recognition of Israel,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, December, 1968, pp. 173–239.

78. Harry S Truman, *Memoirs*, Vol. II: *Years of Trial and Hope* (New York, 1955), p. 164. At the end of the Truman administration, the president stated at a testimonial dinner that “Six-twelve P.M. on Friday, May 14th, when I recognized Israel was the proudest moment of my life.” The reason for his haste appears to have been to regain the enthusiastic support of American Jewry, and the wish to be the first to grant recognition, especially ahead of the Soviet Union. But a reading of his *Memoirs* suggests that he felt more satisfaction because he finally “outfoxed” those officials of the State Department who had tried so hard to circumvent him. See, also, Lillie Shultz, “Israel: Truman Versus His Delegation,” *The Nation*, November 20, 1948, p. 565.

79. See Walter Eytan, “The Search for a Name,” *Zionist Review*, January 30, 1948, pp. 5–6.

the basically essential matter of diplomatic recognition, but the primary ability of the embryonic state to preserve itself against the prepared invasion of six huge British-advised Arab armies poised on its borders, intent on "restoring security and order to Palestine."<sup>80</sup>

With the outbreak of the Palestine war on May 15, 1948, the Soviet press and radio campaign supporting the new state went into high gear. Following Russia's *de jure* recognition of Israel,<sup>81</sup> both Mr. Molotov's telegram of diplomatic support and a telegram from Israeli foreign minister Moshe Shertok (now Sharett) expressing deep appreciation for Russia's stalwart support, were reprinted side by side in a majority of Russian newspapers, and their texts were broadcast by Radio Moscow in both Russian and English.<sup>82</sup> The Soviet press gave even more attention to the publication of the telegrams of the two foreign ministers which pledged their mutual agreement to exchange diplomatic legations—a decision which would, at a later time, give rise to a series of events causing the Soviet government to begin reversing its support of Israel.<sup>83</sup> In the United Nations, Gromyko joined a "world public which has already condemned the action of certain Arab circles who

80. Statement by Egyptian and Arab Higher Committee representatives, Security Council, *Official Records: Third Year*, 292nd Meeting, May 15, 1948, pp. 3, 4, 7–10. Trygve Lie, the secretary general of the United Nations, stated that "... the Arabs had continually maintained that they would oppose partition by force. They seem determined to put their words into practice by attacking the Jewish population of Palestine." Lie, *In the Cause of Peace*, p. 163. The vice-president of the Arab Higher Committee, Kjamal El-Husseini, did not hesitate to tell the Security Council that "we have never hidden the fact that it was we who started the hostilities." Security Council, *Official Records: Third Year*, 287th Meeting, April 23, 1948, p. 14.

81. The Soviet Union claimed that even though she was second to recognize the State of Israel, her *de jure* recognition was more official than the American *de facto*. U.S., *Department of State Bulletin*, May 23, 1948, vol. XVIII, p. 673. Philip Marshall Brown clarified the subtle implication of the Soviet argument in this way: "Mr. Molotov explicitly recognized the 'State of Israel and its provisional Government' while President Truman limited his act of recognition to the 'Provisional Government as the *de facto* authority of the new State of Israel.' The Soviet Union, acting as a kind of godfather, accorded a diplomatic baptism to the newborn infant and thus assumed by implication a benign interest and responsibility for the child's welfare. President Truman did not imply anything more than the acknowledgment of the child's existence and of its *de facto* guardians." Philip Marshall Brown, "The Recognition of Israel," *American Journal of International Law* XLII (July, 1948), pp. 621–22.

82. *Summary of World Broadcasts* 1, no. 127 (May 17, 1948), p. 9.

83. For texts, see *Izvestia*, May 26, 1948, p. 3.

attacked the Jewish State. . . .”<sup>84</sup> Moscow was quickly supported by its Soviet satellites, as Tarassenco, the Ukrainian delegate to the U.N., told the Security Council on May 27, 1948, that “an armed struggle is taking place in Palestine as a result of an unlawful invasion. . . .”<sup>85</sup>

With the British finally out of Palestine, the Soviet press was faced with the necessity for a reorientation of its anti-imperialism propaganda theme. A three-column article in the May 25 issue of *Pravda* gave illustration that Moscow had wasted little time or rhetoric in re-directing its reprehension from the failures of Britain’s Middle Eastern policies to the increasing activity of the United States in the area. Zhukov’s lengthy article examined U.S. foreign policy in some detail, emphasizing the extreme hesitation of the Americans in the United Nations with regard to the Palestine Question and assigning an ulterior motive for each different proposal offered by the American delegates.<sup>86</sup> Several days later another lengthy article in *Pravda* examined the Palestine problem in the following way: The legitimacy of the November 29, 1947, United Nations resolution was unimpeachable since it was based on the national self-determination of both populations involved and arranged for the final removal of the “hydra” of British colonialism, and the Soviet Union’s firm support of that resolution was not only absolutely correct but highly admirable considering it was the only Great Power with no ambitions in the area. The resolution should have been acclaimed by the Arab world; instead, prompted by the governments of Britain, America, and the Arab States, the Arabs invaded the Jewish state. In reality, the article stated, the Arab masses were only fighting to preserve the “hydra” which held them. The closing paragraphs acknowledged the long sympathy felt by the Soviet people for the Arabs in their quest for national liberation, but concluded that “it could not but condemn the aggression of the Arab States . . . against the State of Israel, and against the right of the Jewish people to establish its state in accordance with the General Assembly resolution.”<sup>87</sup> The following day, May 30, saw the publication of another article in *Pravda*, this time a rather harsh attack on the Arab League and its transparent false explanation of invading Palestine “to

84. *United Nations Document S/PV 331.*

85. *United Nations Document S/PV 306.*

86. J. Zhukov, “Failure of American Policy in the Palestine Question,” *Pravda*, May 25, 1948, p. 4.

87. “Events in Palestine,” editorial, *Pravda*, May 29, 1948, p. 1.



restore law and order.” Radio broadcasts from Cairo, Damascus, and Amman exalted the “Liberation Army” for months, and swore that the Jews would be massacred. The article concluded with a stern warning to the Arab world, stating that “The Arab States, in attacking the State of Israel, have entered upon a path fraught with dangerous consequences. . . . The unprovoked aggression against the young Jewish State will encounter the harshest judgment of the people of the Soviet Union and progressive peoples of the whole world.”<sup>88</sup>

The tone and theme of Soviet press and radio support for the State of Israel would remain basically unchanged for many months to come. At the same time, beneath the veneer of official diplomatic support, the Soviet Union had already responded to the Jewish underground’s dire need for military aid and training to survive the Arab build-up which began immediately after the United Nation’s approval of partition, which was fully unleashed following Israel’s declaration of independence. A sales network of surplus German equipment, designated by the Haganah code name of *Rechesh* (Purchase) was already established since December, 1947, and shipments of arms and munitions, sanctioned by the Soviet government, were being funnelled to the Haganah through Prague.

Yet a basic question remains unanswered: what were the Soviet motives which prompted the total reversal of its three decades of Arab support against the Zionist movement in the Middle East? As late as January and February of 1947, the Zionists were still classified as “bourgeois lackies of British imperialism” who were planning to “make Palestine a Jewish state as an ally of the imperialist powers.”<sup>89</sup> A scant three months later, Gromyko’s first official consideration of the partition plan led to a reversal so complete that November saw Gromyko emotionally linking the birth of Israel with the Jewish past in Palestine and with the extermination of millions of Jews in Europe. Whether the question of Russia’s motives resulted from the shifting global conditions, the promise of a socialist, anti-British foothold in the Middle East, competition with the United States for the future allegiance of an emerging nation, or a combination of numerous factors, it is certain that the sudden decision to abandon traditional policy, for however short a period, was neither an idle decision nor an unimportant one.

88. J. Viktorov, “Military Activities in Palestine,” *Pravda*, May 30, 1948, p. 3.

89. *New York Times*, February 27, 1948.

## Soviet Motives in Support of the Partition Resolution

THE SOVIET UNION had never appeared to show any real interest in the events of the Arab Middle East. There had been moments of minor involvement in Arab affairs during the three decades following the Revolution, but it was not until 1947 that Soviet representatives publicly aligned behind one of the conflicting parties in the Palestine Question. While their motives for supporting one side over the other will be examined later in some detail, the Soviet Union's general aims in the Middle East, following World War II, can be reduced to four basic issues.

Primarily, Russia was anxious about her open Middle East flank, and the fear that Iran and Turkey, dangerously close to the metallurgical industries of southern Russia and the Caucasian oil fields, might serve as potential springboards against the Soviet Union. A second, though equally important, motive for Russia's interest in the area was the traditional urge to secure a warm water port. Despite all the territory which his wartime diplomacy obtained, Stalin was unable to gain access to a year-round port and an outlet direct to the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The Soviet Union's third motive involved the future of Middle East oil. Its aims in this regard arose as early as the Teheran Conference of December, 1943, when Roosevelt rejected Stalin's suggestion that Middle East oil should be administered by the Big Three. The destruction of Russia's oil industry by the German occupation, coupled with the growing fear that the Middle

Eastern fields might fall under total Anglo-American control, galvanized Soviet strategists to action. In addition to these motives which can be regarded in a sense as "positive," extensive Western interests in the Middle East made it a vulnerable area for Soviet diversionary tactics, especially against Great Britain.

The Palestine Question, which provided Soviet Russia with an opportunity to implement these basic drives, however, was far from Moscow's vital interests and must be placed in the proper perspective with regard to Soviet foreign policy in the arena of international affairs.

The several years following the end of the war found Russia embroiled in a variety of fruitless ventures and dangerous potential confrontations with the West. The rapid process of satellization of Eastern Europe had brought dire economic consequences to the Eastern bloc as well as the challenge of Western reaction in the form of the Marshall Plan of June, 1947, and the extension of American military forces in Europe which were to crystallize in the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in April, 1949. Communist involvement in the Greek civil war had led to the creation of the Truman Doctrine of March, 1947. Stalin's harsh attacks on Tito to force diverging Yugoslavia under Moscow's control only made the Yugoslav leader more obstinate and was soon to lead to his excommunication from the world Communist movement. Soviet strangulation of Berlin was being resolutely met by the West. The Soviet postwar drive in the Middle East was also relatively unproductive, for it had overestimated the amount of support it would receive from the local population and decidedly underestimated the tenacity with which the British Labour government would defend its interests. When the war had ended, Great Britain was firmly established as the dominant power in the Middle East with overwhelming military force and political influence. At the beginning of 1946 the Soviet Union appeared to be able to absorb all of Iran into its orbit, by the summer it had been forced to reduce her demands to a series of oil concessions, and by the end of 1947 the Iranian parliament, aided, interestingly, by their retention of the well-connected American law firm of Covington and Burling,<sup>1</sup> had slammed the door in Russia's face. In 1947 the governments of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon began applying strong repressive measures to local Communist organizations and their affiliated groups. In the light of these

1. Joseph C. Goulden, *The Superlawyers* (New York, 1971), p. 42.

fruitless investments, it appeared that the Soviet Union faced a basic tactical decision: the exploitation of differences between the newly emancipated Arab states and Britain, or the abandonment of the Arabs as irrevocably committed to the bourgeois West, with a view toward undermining the area from within. The eruption of the Palestine Question in 1947 provided an unexpected opportunity to pursue an entirely new tactic with regard to the Middle East. Yet there is little question that the Palestine issue occupied but a very small portion of the Kremlin's interests in the world of Cold War politics.

Despite Russia's sudden support of the creation of Israel in the United Nations in 1947, there are a number of indications that the Soviet Union had not only been approached on several earlier occasions by Palestinian Jews anxious to find a champion for the Zionist cause, but that the Soviets often appeared intriguingly interested. There is a strong indication that Jewish overtures during these early meetings between Palestinians and Communist leaders included a variety of personal promises and prophecies regarding the future political direction of the Israeli government. The Soviet Union, in effect, entered the United Nations debates on the Palestine Question in May and November of 1947 with a number of personal assurances from relatively important, though left-wing, individuals who might have risen to prominent positions in the future government of the created state. The Soviets had certainly not received any similar assurances from members of the Arab world.

One such occasion, shrouded in mystery to this day, involved a prominent and respected figure in Israeli politics, Dr. Moshe Sneh. A man of extraordinary intellectual alertness and journalistic and oratorical skill, and a Zionist leader since his youth in Warsaw, Sneh went to Palestine in March of 1940 following a short enlistment in the Polish army in an unsuccessful effort to prevent his country's fall to the Nazis. Three months after his arrival in Palestine, and at the age of thirty-one, Sneh was appointed to the position of commander-in-chief of the Haganah, a post he held for six years. Late in 1946, he became the Jewish Agency's director in Paris, with the primary assignment of representing the agency throughout Europe in the pursuit of support for the eventual partition of Palestine. According to one observer, "He held probably the third most important position in the

Zionist movement. . . . He might have been Premier today had he played his cards wisely and imposed a rein on the pace of his ambitions.”<sup>2</sup> It appears that this period marked the beginning of Sneh’s view of the Jewish struggle with the British in Palestine as “part of a struggle against Western imperialism.”<sup>3</sup> After revisiting his native Poland under its Communist regime a year later, in mid-1947, Sneh declared that “the young Jewish state could gain more by orienting itself toward the Soviet Union than it had achieved by attachment to London and Washington.”<sup>4</sup> At the same time, he broke with the Jewish Agency, helped to found the broad socialist party, Mapam,<sup>5</sup> six years later led a left-wing faction from that party into the Israeli Communist party, and is today the secretary of the party.

The Soviet Union received assurances from other quarters. One of the most unusual and persistent sources came from an Israeli representative of the strictly Marxist-Zionist Hashomer Hatzair (Young Guard) movement, Mordechai Oren. Still a controversial figure in the Israeli political spectrum, Oren had spent most of his adult life, since his emigration to Palestine in 1929, lobbying throughout the world to enlist support for the Zionist movement. Oren described his activities in the following way: “My activities from 1945 . . . were of a pioneering character in the political and diplomatic fields (although in a non-official capacity) and even in the field of mass-propaganda of press and radio. . . . I did my job on behalf of Hashomer Hatzair . . . and my work may have been more effective than that of the official

2. Teller, *The Kremlin, the Jews, and the Middle East*, p. 142.

3. Winston Burdett, *Encounter with the Middle East* (New York, 1969), p. 135. It is conceivable, though improbable, that Sneh might have been influenced by a figure as remote to the Palestine situation as Ho Chi Minh. Ho arrived in Paris from Hanoi on May 30, 1946, to negotiate an agreement with the French government over the independent status of Viet Nam. He converted his suite in the Royal-Monceau Hotel into an informal embassy where he spent whole days talking to influential representatives about a variety of subjects. A list of individuals with whom Ho talked, given in a detailed biography of him, includes the name of David Ben-Gurion, who, like Sneh, was also staying at the same hotel. See Jean Lacouture, *Hô Chi Minh* (Paris, 1967), pp. 119–21.

4. Martin Ebon, “Communist Tactics in Palestine,” *Middle East Journal*, July, 1948, pp. 266–67.

5. As will be described in greater detail elsewhere, Mapam was formed in late 1947 from the fusion of two socialist splinter groups, and stands for *Mifleget Poalim Meuchedet*, or the United Workers Party.

people, because I spoke the ideological and political language of those [East European] regimes. . . .<sup>6</sup> Oren makes the very interesting claim, uncorroborated by any other Israeli source, that he “knew the Russian attitude on Israel as early as 1944, . . . from a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador to London, Fedor Gusev.”<sup>7</sup> While it is unlikely that the Soviet Union had even considered the Palestine Question as early as 1944, and that any statement of support was purely Ambassador Gusev’s, there is little doubt that Mordechai Oren, as will be discussed later, had a considerable influence on the Soviet Union’s ultimate decision to back the creation of Israel in the United Nations.

Israel’s left-wing parties, particularly Oren’s Hashomer Hatzair, dispatched a number of other unofficial “roving ambassadors” to influence Communist officials throughout the Eastern bloc and in the United Nations. One such delegation, headed by the political secretary of Mapam, Natan Peled, was sent to influence the Soviet representatives in the United Nations at the beginning of 1947. Peled later recalled that while the Russian delegates “showed the coolest attitude toward our problem,” he arranged to be invited to an official cocktail party where he struck up a friendship with Alexander Krasilnikov, a member of the Russian delegation.

He didn’t know much about the Palestine problem, so that our future meetings became briefings about Zionism and Socialist-Zionist Nationalism. . . . Generally, Krasilnikov and his colleagues would write their requests very precisely, asking information about a few specific questions (the social pattern of the Jewish settlement in Palestine, parties, economic enterprises, underground organizations, and Jewish victims of the Second World War). I knew that the information was going directly to Moscow and that it would determine their future attitude about us, but I couldn’t even guess what that attitude would be. I don’t conceal the fact that Gromyko’s speech was a surprise even to me.<sup>8</sup>

In a meeting with Krasilnikov, several weeks before Gromyko’s May, 1947, speech, an argument developed over the fate of the Jews if the Soviet Union chose to support the Arabs, and “Krasilnikov grinned

6. Letter from Mordechai Oren to the author, March 7, 1969.

7. *Ibid.* See, also, Mordechai Oren, *Prisonnier Politique à Prague, 1951–1956* (Paris, 1960).

8. Habib Canaan, *Betzeit Ha’Britim* [When the British Left], (Tel Aviv, 1958), p. 44—hereafter cited as ‘When the British Left.’

and confided 'You'll see that our policy leads to a completely different end. We shall not only support the Jewish "Aliah" [immigration], but we shall support the right of the Jewish nation to self determination.'"<sup>9</sup> The elated left-wing delegates rushed to check with Gromyko, who told them enigmatically, "The important thing now is to keep your positions. If you succeed in holding a bit more, there will soon be a change in both military and political fields. . . . Keep in touch and report any changes in developments." At the end of the meeting, the self-assured Palestinians raised the question of military supplies from Eastern Europe to defend the potential state against the imminent Arab invasion, and Gromyko's answer is a critical factor in determining Russia's role in supplying Israel with weapons through Prague. He stated: "I think that some steps have already been made in that direction. In any case I shall talk to the Czech delegate."<sup>10</sup>

One final example of Palestinian representatives who helped influence the Soviet Union's decision occurred at about the same time as the appearance of the leftist delegation. Officials of the Jewish Agency at the United Nations, Moshe Shertok (Sharett), Eliahu Epstein (Elath), and David Horowitz, entered into a series of talks with the Soviet representative Semyon Tsarapkin and his advisor, Boris Stein. After a number of meetings at the Consulate-General of the USSR in New York, which had covered a variety of subjects related to the future of Palestine, Tsarapkin suddenly "got up and went out of the room for a few minutes and returned with a bottle of wine and some glasses. It was at the outset of the U.N. discussions and the future was still beclouded. Consequently we were inwardly elated and delighted when Tsarapkin filled the five glasses and, raising his own, gave the toast: 'To the future Jewish State!'"<sup>11</sup> There is evidence to indicate, therefore, that representatives of the Soviet Union had been influenced to take a closer look at the Palestine Question by a variety of Palestinian Zionists, official and unofficial delegates of the Jewish Agency,

9. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48. It is interesting that despite all of the supposed advanced knowledge about the future Soviet stand, the Israeli Communist party's newspaper, *Kol Ha'am*, as well as Hashomer Hatzair's paper, *Mishmar* (later Mapam's paper) were caught completely unaware and on May 14, 1947, published a standard editorial calling for a federated Arab-Jewish state, while Gromyko had already announced the new Soviet position.

11. Horowitz, *State in the Making*, pp. 271-72.

whose portrayal of the future Jewish government was made most favorable to Soviet interests.

The Soviet Union may also have been influenced by information obtained from several secret Communist operatives. A well-worn source of information might have been the fantastic Harold (Kim) Philby, then the first secretary of the British embassy in Istanbul, whose double life as a member of Britain's secret intelligence service and Foreign Office while at the same time a successful Soviet agent, would have provided easy access to Britain's Middle Eastern plans. A second, though far less reliable, source of information might have been Donald Maclean, soon to become head of the chancery in Britain's embassy in Cairo. A third, and seldom considered source of information, concerns a high-ranking member of Ben-Gurion's ministry of defense, Lt. Colonel Israel Beer. Arrested by the Israeli secret service (Shin Bet) on March 31, 1961, in the midst of the tension of the sensational Eichmann trial, Beer was charged with passing Israeli secrets to East Germany's Wilhelm Zaisser and to "a contact . . . who enjoys diplomatic immunity in Israel."<sup>12</sup> Beer appears to have been a classic Soviet "sleeper," an agent who remains dormant for years before his activation. He emigrated to Palestine in 1938, offering a long, but unsubstantiated, history of military experience, to the Jewish Agency.<sup>13</sup> He rapidly became the chief of training and operations of the Haganah, the Jewish underground, and by 1948 had become the deputy chief of operations of the Israeli army. Beer was prevented from further advancement by Moshe Dayan, Israel's chief of staff. Dayan had slowly begun to suspect the colonel, whose theatrics far exaggerated his military successes. His bizarre dress, Prussian manner, shaven head, and especially his efforts to take credit for the successes of others alerted Dayan to the point of impeding Beer's promotion. Dayan had no idea that treason was in the making; rather he simply sought to control the ambition of an unstable foreigner—an act which

12. *New York Times*, April 16, 1961. For a complete investigation of this case, see Arnold Krammer, "Espionage: The Strange Case of Colonel Israel Beer," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Beirut), XII, Fall, 1974.

13. Beer claimed that he was a graduate of the officers' school in Vienna, a *Schutzbunder* in 1934, a member of the Thaelmann Battalion of the International Brigades during the Spanish civil war, and a holder of a Ph.D. in military strategy from the University of Vienna. He was consequently sought after by the Jewish Agency as one of the relatively few men in Palestine with vast military experience.



may, in fact, have caused Beer to turn resentfully toward the East, thought it is more conceivable that he entered Palestine as a Soviet (or temporarily unaligned) agent.

Although he was prevented from advancing, Beer nonetheless remained Ben-Gurion's military advisor and confidant, was permitted to attend high-level military meetings, and had access to archival material and confidential files.<sup>14</sup> Colonel Beer was reported to have made a full confession following his arrest and explained "that he had come to the conclusion that the system of the Communist power he worked for would in the end conquer the world and that Israel should try to adjust herself to the plans of that country."<sup>15</sup> He did not take the public suggestion of one minister that he "should be given a pistol and permitted to end his life as a means of minimizing the damage the country would suffer through publicizing of his espionage activities,"<sup>16</sup> and on June 2, 1961, he was tried and convicted of espionage at a closed trial.<sup>17</sup> Beer was sentenced to imprisonment in El Shatah, Israel's maximum security prison, where he died in 1966. Although Israelis today view him as a pitiful and misguided individual, whose activities, judging by the success of Israel's Sinai campaign of 1956, did not seriously endanger the security of the country, it is more than reasonable to assume that his position in 1947 and 1948 made him a desirable source of information to Moscow, and that the suspicions which soon after prevented his continued advancement were well founded.

The investigation of Russia's motives in casting its lot with the creation of Israel, a tiny strip of land on the Mediterranean whose Jewish population only slightly exceeded half a million people, in the face of a potential ally numbering millions of Arabs, must begin with a basic axiom: "As far as the Soviet Union is concerned," Russia's foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, once said, "there is only one kind of logic in foreign affairs: the logic of what is best for the Soviet Union."<sup>18</sup> What was "best for the Soviet Union" with regard to its

14. When Beer's arrest began to become a political football, Ben-Gurion was reported to have denied that he "had even been his military advisor or enjoyed his confidence." *New York Times*, April 18, 1961.

15. *New York Times*, April 17, 1961.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, June 2, 1961. See, also, Israel Beer's memoirs, *Bitahon Yisrael: Etmol-Hayom-Mahar* [Israel's Security: Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow] (Tel Aviv, 1966).

18. Quoted in Lester Velie, *Countdown in the Holy Land* (New York, 1969),

support of the Jewish Agency's claims in Palestine was a single limited objective: to immediately end British control in Palestine, and create an independent state whose future allegiance, either as the result of gratitude or diplomatic pressure, might be directed toward the Eastern bloc. The eventual conversion of that state into a pro-Soviet entity, as prophesied by a variety of left-wing Palestinians, involved a number of other tactics and objectives.<sup>19</sup>

Britain emerged from World War II as the sole power in the Middle East. Strengthened by the prestige of victory armed with treaties with Egypt, Trans-Jordan, and Iraq, and a mandate over Palestine, and in control of the Arab Legion, Britain's position in the area appeared unassailable. Yet the Soviet Union was also aware of Britain's underlying weaknesses: the war had left Britain drained financially and psychologically, the great empire was beginning to pull apart with recent independence having been granted to Ceylon, Pakistan, India, and Burma, and its military position in Greece and Turkey was proving untenable. In addition, Foreign Secretary Bevin was coming under increasing public pressure, as described earlier in this study, to cut colonial costs and to reduce the size of the British forces in the Middle East, especially in view of the heavy casualties resulting from terrorist activity against them in Palestine. None of these problems was unknown to the Soviet Union, which could only view the dissipation of British strength in the Middle East with hidden satisfaction. Russia's only fear involved Britain's potential appeal for American partnership in an area it was becoming less able to maintain, an appeal which was made by Attlee in the fall of 1946. Britain decided, as it would again with regard to Greece, that the United States had to be persuaded to share the responsibility for continued defense of the Middle East. An astute analysis of the period declared that "It was probably this decision of Attlee's, more than any other, that persuaded Stalin into the surprise decision to support the establishment of a Jewish State in Pal-

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p. 19. For a fuller investigation of the Soviet position, see Arnold Krammer, "Soviet Motives in the Partition of Palestine, 1948," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Beirut), Winter 1973, pp. 102-19.

19. See Arnold Krammer, "Soviet Motives in the Partition of Palestine, 1948." An excellent, though cursory review of possible Soviet motives is mentioned in Avigdor Dagan's *Moscow and Jerusalem* (New York, 1970), pp. 19-27, though a far more detailed analysis may be found in Mary Newcomb Allen's dissertation, "The Policy of the USSR towards the State of Israel."

estine.”<sup>20</sup> In an effort to prevent the United States from actively entering the area at Britain’s request, Stalin utilized the earliest opportunity, a foreign ministers’ conference in Moscow in March, 1947, to neutralize British fears. At the end of the conference, on March 24, Stalin engaged Bevin in a series of informal but secret conversations during which the Russian leader intimated that the Soviet Union would make no difficulties for the British nor aid those who sought to do so; “. . . the USSR, in conformity with its invariable policy of non-interference, did not intend to interfere. . . .”<sup>21</sup> Bevin was not only pacified, but according to his colleague in the Foreign Office, Lord William Strang, he “continued to cherish the hope that what he interpreted as Stalin’s appreciation and even recognition of the British position in the Middle East . . . would be reflected in Soviet policy.”<sup>22</sup> Having thus isolated British policy in the Middle East from any potential American involvement, the Soviet Union was able to chart its course in the Middle East with the knowledge that its single opponent, Britain, would soon be forced to face the realities of its tenuous position and place the question before the United Nations for a solution.

The strong, albeit vacillating, support given the partition plan by the United States provided another reason for the Soviet Union to cast its lot with the Jews rather than with the Arabs. There was a good chance that, in addition to breaking the Anglo-American front and weakening Western unity, the United States might be made to become the chief target of Arab national resentment. This is exactly what happened, for despite a number of hostile demonstrations against the Soviet Union in Arab capitals following Gromyko’s November, 1947, speech, the Soviet partition stand, obscured by skillful propaganda from Radio Moscow, was quickly forgotten. As early as December 1, 1947, less than a week following the passage of the partition resolution in the United Nations, an official spokesman of the Arab Information Office in Washington informed a press conference that Russia’s stand on Palestine was in no way as serious as American support for the same issue. He declared that “the attitude of Russia is more comprehensible than that of the United States, because the

20. Jon and David Kimche, *A Clash of Destinies: The Arab-Jewish War and the Founding of the State of Israel* (New York, 1960), p. 275.

21. *New York Times*, May 8, 1947; George Kirk, *The Middle East, 1945–1950, Survey of International Affairs*, ed. Arnold Toynbee (London, 1954), pp. 130–31.

22. Lord Strang [William Strang], *Home and Abroad* (London, 1956), p. 260.

Russians have nothing to lose in the Middle East. . . . Obviously they are interested in a solution that is no solution . . . so it seems to us either extremely naive or extremely wicked of the United States to have come to an agreement with Russia on this one issue.”<sup>23</sup> American observers were quick to analyze what appeared to be Russia’s motive, and in the *Washington Evening Star* on December 3, columnist Constantine Brown stated that “Moscow’s eagerness to join the United States in the plan for a Jewish State is considered by many military observers as a skillful operation to bring about a permanent break between the United States and the Arab states bordering on Palestine. Russia needs neither strategic air bases nor oil from the Arab countries. If she has alienated the Arabs from the United States, she can rejoice in a permanent strategic victory.” Arab resentment did in fact turn toward the United States, and since the Jewish state would continue to remain an obstacle to any reconciliation of Arab-American relations, Soviet Russia had only to begin exploiting the resentment of Arab nationalists to play both sides of the Palestine issue until events dictated the necessity for a commitment.

American opponents to its support of Israel in the United Nations quickly envisioned another motive in the Soviet Union’s Middle East position: the possible influx of Russian troops as a result of the deteriorating situation in Palestine. It was unlikely that the outraged Arab states would simply stand aside to watch the partition resolution implemented as passed, and in the event of an Arab invasion to reclaim Palestine, military estimates did not hold much hope for a Jewish victory. Such an immediate and flagrant violation of a United Nations decision would, it was assumed, force Palestine’s supporters to demand the dispatch of a United Nations peacekeeping force to aid the Jewish state. A number of State Department officials, congressmen, and newspaper editorialists began to see in the situation Russia’s original motive for supporting the partition plan, and speculation ran high concerning the participation of Red Army forces in the defense of the Jewish state. The lead editorial of the *Christian Century* of December 17, 1947, which was introduced into the *Congressional Record* during a debate on the subject, ended with the following foreboding words: “Will an American Army be sent to enforce a United Nations Security

23. Quoted in the *Arab News Bulletin* (Washington,) no. 18 (December 6, 1947), p. 2.

Council directive? Will we allow a Russian army to be sent for the same purpose? It is too late to turn back now. The die has been cast. But the future is dark, very dark. And there is the smell of blood in the air.”<sup>24</sup> The *Washington Evening Star* of December 2 stated that “the possibility that Russia will offer to intervene is being freely discussed in Washington today. A highly-placed officer, who could not be quoted, said, ‘It can be expected within 90 days. . . .’ ” The *New York Times* on the following day also quoted an anonymous army officer who said “the General Staff was gravely concerned about a possibility that Soviet troops would move into the Holy Land. . . .” Columnist Stewart Alsop, writing in the *Washington Post* of December 4, declared that if the Russians did dispatch a military force to Palestine, “there is little doubt that the Soviet contingent would consist of a very special type of soldier.”<sup>25</sup> Within several weeks, however, tensions began to subside as the Arab world’s inability to mount a decisive offensive in the face of unexpected Jewish resistance became clear. As early as December 12, the *Washington Daily News* carried an editorial by Peter Edson, entitled “Disposed of, Not Settled,” in which he cautiously stated that “the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff fear that Russia, which backed partition, will take the initiative and move troops into Palestine in case disorders get worse, has been discounted. It is said to have caused guffaws in the State Department.” While there is no way of knowing whether the Soviet Union, in fact, was motivated in its support for the Jewish state by visions of dispatching troops to enforce a United Nations decision and protect the joint Soviet-American creation, the motive must be considered. The situation would not have been difficult for Moscow to prophesy; Russia’s knowledge of the strong Jewish vote in the United States may well have assured the Kremlin of a joint American-Soviet venture in the creation of Israel, a partnership which would have legitimized her efforts to send units of the Red Army to protect the embryonic state

24. U.S., Congress, House, *Congressional Record*, December 18, 1947, p. 11653.

25. The anxiety over a Russian potential military invasion of Palestine was only part of an overall Western anti-Communist concern which exaggerated the dangers of Soviet military aggression (at least in the short run). The fear of a general Soviet military offensive against the West increased sharply following the Czechoslovak coup in February, and reached its peak the next month with a top-secret cable from General Lucius Clay in Berlin to General Stephen Chamberlin on the Army General Staff, in which Clay predicted an imminent war with the Russians. Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries*, p. 387.

from the Arab offensive which could only have been normally expected. "Once Russia sends its military men to Palestine no force on earth, short of war, can expel them from it. Thus, Russia, as a participant with the United States in insisting upon partition will demand a dominant part in military occupation," predicted one congressman.<sup>26</sup>

When it became evident that neither American nor Russian troops would be dispatched to defend Palestine against an Arab invasion, opponents of America's pro-partition stand began to see in Russia's support still another motive: Communist infiltration. The Soviet Union was, of course, fully aware that the Jewish Agency's very existence was based upon the unlimited immigration of world Jewry to a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. Since more than 3,000,000 Jews lived within the Soviet bloc, Russia might well have planned to influence the neutrality of the new state by using this mass as a political lever and, perhaps as a last resort, utilize those refugees allowed to leave for Israel as a Trojan horse in which to smuggle Communist agents into the Middle East. As early as March, 1947, reports to the State Department from the U.S. military authorities in charge of displaced persons camps in Germany began to describe the specter of Communist agents infiltrating the swelling numbers of refugees from Eastern Europe. An example of such information is the "priority" report, dated March 19, 1947, from an undisclosed Allied occupation official in Bremen, marked "confidential":

Every Zionist-indoctrinated Jew who arrives in the American zone is an unconscious asset to Moscow. . . . We are serving as cover of Russian secret agents. Some agents are destined to remain hidden within pockets of Jews until they reach the promised land of Palestine and there to work for Soviet objectives in Near East while others are to remain in Germany at different assignments. . . . Any Russian agent who reaches Palestine as 'persecutee' would possibly enjoy open sesame to anti-British underground. . . . [But the] great bulk of Russian or Polish Jews [should not] be identified as anything but unwitting pawns in this affair.<sup>27</sup>

The argument that Jewish infiltrators were masking a silent offensive of Soviet influence into Palestine became more vocal as the partition

26. Representative Lawrence Smith, Wisconsin, U.S., Congress, House, *Congressional Record*, December 18, 1947, p. 11653.

27. Quoted in Joseph B. Schechtman, *The United States and the Jewish State Movement, The Crucial Decade: 1939-1949* (New York, 1966), pp. 341-42.

issue gained prominence in the United Nations throughout the year. Just as tensions over a possible Soviet military involvement began to decrease at the start of 1948, a series of news stories about Soviet agents among a large group of Palestine-bound refugees brought speculations about Russia's motives for her U.N. position into sharp focus. Two vessels, the *Pan York* and the *Pan Crescent*, carrying a total of more than 15,000 Rumanian refugees to Palestine, were first spotted on the high seas by the British on January 1, 1948. The sensation arose, however, from a series of dubious and contradictory British intelligence reports, which were reprinted by the *New York Times* as early as December 31, 1947—the day before the ships were even sighted—that the refugee ships contained a large number of hand-picked Communist agents and potential fifth-columnists. By February 1, 1948, the *New York Times* reported the British intelligence figures of 1,000 active agents, and further indicated that “one thousand of the 15,000 immigrants aboard spoke Russian, many belonged to militant Communist organizations, some may have been non-Jews, and some had documents showing that they had served in Soviet forces during World War II. . . .” The issues of February 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 carried further British reports, unsubstantiated and denied even by the British commissioner of Cyprus, where the ships were interned, that hundreds of abandoned Rumanian Communist party cards had been found among the hastily discarded items of evidence aboard the two ships. On February 20, excitement was heightened by the publication of information submitted to the House Subcommittee on Un-American Activities by a Bulgarian refugee to the United States, one Georgi M. Dimitrov.<sup>28</sup> Beginning his testimony with the declaration that “Communists everywhere are now one vast force bent upon a universal plot for violent seizure of power in all countries,” he strongly supported the British intelligence accusations that Communist agents had been among the Jewish immigrants aboard the *Pan York* and the *Pan Crescent*. “Speaking of my Jewish friends,” he added, “I think they must not deny that Communist agents are among the Jews being sent into Palestine from various countries under Communist control. My

28. The witness, described as an “exiled Bulgarian peasant leader” (*New York Times*, February 20, 1948) was in no way related to the veteran Bulgarian Communist, former general secretary of the Communist International, and premier of Bulgaria since 1946, of the same name.

friends, the Jews, will suffer later by trying to cover the Communists among them.”<sup>29</sup>

One of the most radical proponents of the argument of infiltration as Russia’s motive for aiding in the creation of Israel was the noted reporter and foreign correspondent, Ray Brock, whose book *Blood, Oil and Sand* wholly reflects the fears of the McCarthy era. While Brock does not mean “to imply that the Israeli state is a growing, ticking time bomb in the Middle East epicenter,” he does state that “despite the most rigorous screening, the waves of immigrants into Israel contain men and women dedicated to the eventual anarchical overthrow of the Israeli government and the establishment of a desperate Communist state in the heartland of the Middle East. Israel’s swelling population is drawn from Central and Eastern European areas where Communism alone afforded the organization and arms enabling limited resistance to the former enemy.”<sup>30</sup> Events soon disproved any danger of Communist infiltration into Israel, a fact which was reflected by the Communist party’s dismal failure in Israel’s national elections. In an interview with C. L. Sulzberger of the *New York Times*, Ben-Gurion correctly stated that “in the regions where there were so many recent immigrants from East Europe, the Communist [vote] had dropped. . . .”<sup>31</sup> Immigrants from the Soviet bloc did pose a problem later, not by carrying Communism from Eastern Europe, but rather as the result of the exploitations, by the native left wing, of their difficulties following their arrival. In a penetrating analysis of Israel’s Communist party, the author, A. Hiram, states that “another sector of the population among whom Communists are likely to win votes are the new immigrants, especially those from Eastern Europe. . . . The majority of these are opponents of Communism as a result of their own experiences with it in post-war Europe. But their own encounter with Communism is rapidly receding into the past, whereas their hardships as newcomers to Israel in the manner of housing and appropriate employment are of the present.”<sup>32</sup> A

29. *New York Times*, February 20, 1948.

30. Ray Brock, *Blood, Oil and Sand* (Cleveland, 1952), p. 69.

31. *New York Times*, March 20, 1950.

32. A. Hiram, “The Communist Party in Israel,” *Jewish Frontier*, July, 1951, p. 18.



second argument concerning Russia's motives for supporting the Jewish state was the anticipation of Israel's gratitude as a factor in its political direction. The contemporary Western and Arab press emphasized the fear that the Jewish Agency, desperately seeking support from any source, would be demonstratively grateful to the Soviet Union for its stalwart and unexpected stand on the partition resolution. If Soviet strategists had, indeed, looked toward potential gratitude as adequate profit on their diplomatic investment, they were soon to realize that they had overestimated the degree to which Israel was willing to be influenced by Russia's support. For one thing there can be little doubt that, despite the many promises offered to Moscow by left-wing Zionists in an effort to obtain Russia's support, the Soviet Union was fully aware (if indeed they were interested at all) that the Jewish Agency had long been an exponent of "political nonidentification." Ben-Gurion's speeches, as will be discussed later in connection with Israel's foreign policy, had always been based upon the single premise that while world Jewry was concentrated in both Eastern and Western Europe, a homeland created by the Jewish Agency would not endanger either group with policies of partisan politics. The Soviet Union must also have been aware, as mentioned earlier, that America's large Jewish vote would have influenced the United States to join in the creation of a Jewish state, and that such a partnership of East and West, regardless of Russia's motives, would have strengthened Israel's neutrality. Israel would not have abandoned either camp, and its Jews, over a show of gratitude. In discussing this issue with the American ambassador to Israel, James McDonald, Ben-Gurion declared that "Israel welcomes Russian support in the UN, but will not tolerate Russian domination. Not only is Israel Western in its orientation, but our people are democratic and realize that only through the co-operation and support of the U.S. can they become strong and remain free. Only the West, by humiliating and deserting Israel in the UN and elsewhere, can alienate our people."<sup>33</sup> Events were to show that while Israel was enormously grateful for Russia's support, and more especially for Czechoslovakia's military aid,<sup>34</sup> the purity of

33. James G. McDonald, *My Mission in Israel, 1948-1951* (New York, 1951), p. 257.

34. For an example of Israel's continued gratitude for Czechoslovakia's help, see

the Soviet Union's intentions was never taken for granted. Israel's gratitude to the Eastern bloc in no way prevented her from allying with the West in the United Nations on issues such as the Korean War, while at the same time trying to maintain friendly relations with the Soviet Union for the sake of its Jewry. It is doubtful, therefore, that Soviet strategists could have considered the Jewish Agency's potential gratitude a deciding factor in casting its lot with the partition plan.

A more convincing argument for Russia's support may lie in the Soviet Union's basic concept of the Jewish leaders and the socialist structure of Zionism's pioneer movement in Palestine. While Communism has always regarded the Jewish movement as a typical development of the bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeois mentality, the Zionist movement's links with revolutionary militant socialism were undeniable. The militant socialist branch of the Zionist movement, represented by Ben-Gurion's Poale Zion (Workers of Zion) organization and Joseph Sprinzak's non-Marxist labor party, Hapoel Hatzair (Young Workers), which had united to form the Mapai party in 1930, became strong enough to capture the leadership of the world Zionist movement at their Congress of 1933, and in 1935 gained control of the unofficial government of Israel, the Jewish Agency. The close ties between socialism and Zionism<sup>35</sup> might well have attracted Moscow's closer attention in 1947. In addition, the East European origin of a large number of Palestinians (estimated as high as 85 percent), and the fin de siècle Marxist idealism of many of their political leaders, no doubt helped to foster the hope in Moscow that Israel might eventually join the orbit of satellite nations.<sup>36</sup> The Zionist leaders of

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President Chaim Weizmann's welcoming speech to the new Czech ambassador to Israel, Dr. Edouard Goldstücker, on January 18, 1950. Full text quoted in *The Jewish Agency's Digest* II, no. 18 (288), February 27, 1950, pp. 782-83.

35. Norman Bentwich, "The Soviet-Jewish Conflict," *The Commentary Review* (London), May, 1953, pp. 261-66; see especially Ferdynand Zweig, *Israel: The Sword and the Harp* (London, 1969), pp. 279-90; and David Ben-Gurion, "Socialist-Zionism," *Furrows* (New York) V, no. 9 (October, 1947), pp. 19-22.

36. The Zionist movement was vocal in its rejection of any argument implying a link between Israel's Russian-born population and the Soviet Union's aggressive designs on the Middle East. "If Russian soldiers roll through Iran and Syria they will meet at the borders of Israel the sons and daughters of Russian Jews . . . defending a society which is a personification of the by-products of both Eastern and

distinction, almost without exception, were born in the Russian Empire (including before 1914 most of Poland): Vladimir Jabotinsky, Nahum Sokolov, Leo Ussishkin, Chaim Weizmann, and David Ben-Gurion (David Grün), as well as most of the other past and contemporary Palestinian Zionists. In addition, Jewish colonization in Palestine was predominantly socialist in character, built along communal or cooperative lines. An idealistic campaign of agricultural development and swamp reclamation in the outlying areas of Palestine began as early as 1909 with the initiation of the *kibbutz* (collective settlement) movement. The kibbutz, generally built on nationally owned land and rented to the members on a communal basis, is structured on the communal ownership of property, rotating leadership, self-sufficiency as a unit, disregard for money, and the equal distribution of the fruits of communal labor—"a society in which each gave according to his ability and in which each received according to his needs."<sup>37</sup> By 1944, the editor-in-chief of the Palestine News Service, Eliahu Ben-Horin, could state that "in fact, Palestine can boast of better achievements in the field of economic communism than the Soviet Union."<sup>38</sup>

It was, therefore, quite significant when in October, 1943, Ivan Maisky, former Soviet ambassador to London and now vice-commissar for foreign affairs, made the first official visit of a Soviet dignitary to Palestine. Maisky made a specific point of touring Palestine's industries and inspected a number of Jewish colonies and collective settlements, returning to Moscow impressed with their achievements and potentialities to present a comprehensive report.<sup>39</sup> During the same year, 1943, a leading Soviet diplomat made the following remarks to a Jewish

Western man. . . ." Thomas Sugrue, "The Jewish Return to Israel," *The American Zionist* 43, no. 1 (November, 1952), p. 9.

37. A. Mansbach, *An Introduction to the Kibbutz and Other Forms of Collective Settlement* (Melbourne, 1957), p. 5, quoted in Alan D. Crown, "The Changing World of the Kibbutz," *Middle East Journal*, Autumn, 1965, p. 424. The kibbutz movement gave rise, in 1917, to the *Hachshara*, the establishment of hundreds of agricultural training areas throughout Eastern Europe, where young Zionist pioneers learned to prepare for life on the kibbutzim prior to their emigration to Palestine. See Doodle Horowitz, "The Problem of Hachshara: Case History and Prognosis," *Furrows* (New York) VIII, no. 7 (March, 1951), pp. 6-10.

38. Eliahu Ben-Horin, "The Soviet Wooing of Palestine," *Harper's Magazine* 188 (April, 1944), 418.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 415; also discussed in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Arab-American Affairs* (New York) III, no. 11 (May 15, 1948), p. 3.

delegation, quoted by Ben-Horin, which would appear to shed a great deal of light on the Soviet Union's motives for supporting the creation of Israel. The diplomat is reported to have stated:

Back in the twenties, we could not but consider Zionism as an agency of British imperialism. And we were bound to treat you accordingly. Now, however, the whole situation has changed. Not only Britain and Zionism seem to be at a constant variance, but our outlook, too, has undergone a serious evolution. Should Soviet Russia be interested in the future in the Middle East, it would be obvious that the advanced and progressive Jews of Palestine hold out much more promise for us than the backward Arabs controlled by feudal cliques of kings and effendis.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, while Zionism's deep socialist commitments could logically have been an attractive, but secondary, motive for Russian support, the Soviet Union's long and irritating experiences with the Zionist movement in Eastern Europe (and vice versa) must certainly have made it apparent that the chances of Soviet communism's successful competition with Zionism were slight.

An additional influence on the Soviet Union's decision may well have come from the diplomatic pressure of its own satellites. In the proceedings of the First Special Session there is more than a subtle difference between the Soviet stand and those of Poland and Czechoslovakia. While both of these countries still had strong noncommunist elements in their governments in 1947, it may be assumed that their attitude had previously been cleared with Moscow. Yet Poland and Czechoslovakia went to much greater lengths than did the USSR in expressing their support of Jewish aspirations, and, they did so before Gromyko had made his stand known. The Polish delegate, Mr. Fiderkiewicz, in particular stressed his country's "full support" for Jewish immigration to a national homeland in Palestine.<sup>41</sup> By including in his

40. Ben-Horin, "The Soviet Wooing of Palestine," p. 415. Neither the "leading Soviet diplomat" nor the "Jewish delegation" are further identified. Interestingly, an editorial entitled, "Stealing a March" in the May 16, 1947, issue of the *Washington Post*, concerning the Soviet attitude to Palestine, contained, unquoted, the nearly identical statement. For instance, the editorial states that "it is obvious now that the Zionists are no longer what the old Bolsheviks used to charge, viz., 'the lackeys of British imperialists' . . . the advanced and progressive Jews hold out much more promise to the Soviet Government than the backward Arabs controlled by the feudal cliques of kings and effendis."

41. United Nations, General Assembly, *Official Records: First Special Session*. Vol. III, Main Committees, p. 246.

plea Jews of Polish origin. Fiderkiewicz differed markedly from Gromyko who had distinctly excluded Soviet Jewry from immigration: "... The Soviet Union is not directly interested in the Palestine problem from the point of view of the emigration of Jews to Palestine since the Jewish population of the Soviet Union does not show any interest."<sup>42</sup> The satellites' diplomatic leadership and difference in degree from the Soviet stand stemmed from the fact that the homeless Jews, who were such an important factor in making the Palestine Question an acute and pressing world problem, were mostly citizens of one of the states of Central Europe. Large numbers of Jewish refugees had returned to rebuild their former lives in Poland, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia, but in the face of continued hostility from the local populace, now preferred to go to Palestine. The governments of these countries realized that the traditional communist solution of the Jewish problem was not applicable, and that the enforcement of strict measures to assimilate them would only serve to bring upon the governments themselves the odium of anti-Semitism. Moreover, the native anti-Semitism which had existed before the war or which had been implanted by the Nazis was still rampant, and provided a rallying point for the anti-government forces. The satellite governments may well have reasoned, therefore, that the few Jews who were communists would remain anyway, and the majority who wished to leave for Palestine, taking with them any reminder of the now-embarrassing recollection of their Gentile countrymen's often enthusiastic collaboration with the Nazis in their systematic extermination, would be best settled elsewhere. That the Soviet Union was not under similar pressure to resettle returning Jewish refugees no doubt accounts for the differences in their diplomatic positions, and may well have influenced Moscow's decision to support the partition plan.

The final consideration in the Soviet Union's partition objectives was a fairly realistic appraisal of Anglo-American rivalry. In the Western press, Russia's entry into the Palestine Question was frequently considered to be an attempt to inflame the issues which might bring Britain and the United States to a confrontation. Stalin's March, 1947, pledge to Ernest Bevin regarding Russia's recognition of Britain's position in the Middle East, only as long as the United States remained out of the area, illustrates Russia's motive. Not only did the Russian

42. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

strategy serve to isolate Britain's deteriorating Middle East position from outside aid, but set the two Western powers at loggerheads on a variety of issues. Britain's uncooperative attitude in the United Nations, following her referral of the Palestine problem to that body in February, 1947, clashed with the joint American-Russian effort to find a reasonable solution in the partition resolution of November. Moreover, Britain backed the Arab states which invaded Palestine, hoping for Arab victory and reinstatement of British rule to protect the doomed Jews under her own terms. The Jordanian Arab Legion was, in fact, trained, financed, and officered by the British and commanded by Glubb Pasha, the British brigadier John Glubb. This military aid to the Arab forces, in the face of a United Nations arms embargo imposed on the Middle East, not only worked at odds with America's efforts to create a Jewish state in Palestine, but vastly increased Western fears that a British-led Arab victory over Palestine would cause the involvement of Soviet forces. The Palestine issue might well have been Moscow's opportunity to split the postwar Western alliance. It is also reasonable to assume that the obverse of this objective might also have been seriously considered by Soviet strategists. By increasing the chaos in the Middle East, and perhaps frustrating both Britain and the United States, the Soviet Union might be able to step into the temporary vacuum, or at the least to exploit the fertile political conditions which chaos generally creates.

The main underlying issue affecting the Soviet attitude toward the Middle East during the several postwar years leading to the creation of Israel was the search for anti-Western support. Moscow would probably have been willing to support any state or movement, regardless of its ideological persuasion, in order to break the Anglo-American front and to weaken Western unity. The Palestine Question provided the Soviet Union with a long awaited opportunity in the Middle East. Whether or not it was an expected opportunity is a moot question, depending on the seriousness with which Moscow viewed the variety of pledges and recommendations offered by left-wing Palestinian Zionists. In addition, there is the question of the information supplied to Moscow, regarding the potentialities for success, by at least two highly placed spies. Thus, when the Palestine issue came before the United Nations early in 1947, it must be assumed that Moscow had not been caught unaware.

Once the partition resolution had been passed in the United Nations, due primarily to the joint partnership of Soviet Russia and the United States, the legal groundwork for the creation of the Jewish state had been largely completed. Yet the situation in Palestine was far from secure, and regardless of Russia's motives the imminent Arab invasion prompted the Soviet Union, in the face of a United Nations arms embargo on the Middle East, to further support its position by providing a source of weapons to the beleaguered Jews. While it would not be accurate to state that the desperately needed arms were not also acquired from numerous sources in the West, the Soviet bloc was the only major area in which the governments themselves authorized the sale of arms to the Jews as an extension of foreign policy.

## Czechoslovakia and the First Arms Agreement

ISRAEL'S declaration of independence on May 14, 1948, was a spontaneous and emotional commitment made in the midst of international diplomatic maneuvering and fruitless negotiations. In fact, the war had begun many months before. As early as November 30, 1947, the day following the momentous partition resolution in the United Nations, armed Arab bands were active all over Palestine. Despite the presence of 100,000 British troops and the fact that a Jewish state would not come into existence for another six months, the widespread terrorist attacks on Jewish settlements reinforced the convictions held by David Ben-Gurion and the majority of Palestinian Jewish leaders that a full-scale invasion by six well-armed Arab armies was inevitable. The inescapable odds in population were 650,000 Jews against 40,000,000 Arabs.<sup>1</sup> An immediate campaign was initiated to bring the Haganah, the Jewish underground army, to fighting capacity to unify the various political factions it contained, and to augment its dismally small and antiquated supply of arms and munitions. In 1947 Ben-Gurion had made a thorough investigation of the Haganah's total underground arsenal, and found the following:

10,073 rifles (8,720 in the settlements for local defense; 336 in reserve; 656 with the Palmach Brigade; 361 with the field force)

1. An unofficial estimate placed the military strength of the Arab League armies at over 120,000 men, with Egypt alone allocating \$72,000,000 for defense. *Arab News Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.), no. 13 (September 27, 1947), p. 2.



1,900 submachine guns (785 in the settlements; 424 with the field force; 130 with Palmach; 561 in reserve)

186 machine guns (31 in the settlements; 35 with the field force; 5 with Palmach; 115 in reserve)

444 light machine guns (338 in the settlements; 37 with the field force; 33 with Palmach; 46 in reserve)

There was not a single cannon, and only one heavy machine gun. There was no anti-tank weapon, or anti-aircraft gun, no armored car, and nothing at all for naval or air combat. There was no communications equipment.<sup>2</sup>

As if the situation were not dismal enough, the Palestinian Jews were well aware that the six major Arab states were heavily equipped with modern weapons and were busily obtaining more, both on the open market and through the sympathy of the several British military commanders in the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> It became imperative to the very survival of the as-yet-unborn state to secure the arms—from any available source and at any cost—necessary to repel the imminent invasion. As chairman of the Jewish Agency executive body, Ben-Gurion turned to the dedicated and experienced Haganah to obtain the weapons.

The Haganah grew out of the early pioneer settlements in Palestine and expanded with the periodic influx of refugees as the only Jewish defense force against roaming Arab bands. Declared illegal under the British Mandate, the Haganah continued to protect Jewish settlers,

2. David Ben-Gurion, *Israel: Years of Challenge* (New York, 1963), p. 21. The rifles and Sten guns available to the Haganah had been assembled mostly from junked parts discarded by the British forces, or homemade in underground machine shops, and were for the most part unusable. A standing joke of the period was to ask, "What's the difference between a broom and a Sten?", to which the reply was, "There's more chance of the broom firing." See Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion: The Armed Prophet*, p. 99.

3. When asked in Parliament about Britain's policy of supplying arms to the Arab states, Bevin stated that "military equipment furnished by His Majesty's Government to Arab countries has been supplied to meet bona fide defense and internal security requirements. The strictest precautions are taken to prevent any smuggling of arms into Palestine." Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th ser., vol. 443, coll. 855. When asked, similarly, to account for Britain's involvement in arming the Arab governments, the secretary of state for foreign affairs, Hector McNeil, made what might be the most disingenuous diplomatic statement of the period. He said: "I have no evidence to suggest that arms supplied to the Middle East Governments in virtue of these treaties . . . are being made available for warfare in Palestine." *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th Ser., vol. 447, coll. 142. Written Answers. See, also, Sacher, *Israel, the Establishment of a State*, p. 235; Jon Kimche, *Seven Fallen Pillars* (London, 1950), p. 262.

and with the exception of its mass enlistment in the British army during World War II as the valuable Jewish Brigade, the citizen-soldiers of the Haganah formed the nucleus of the paramilitary movement leading to the independence of the state in 1948. In 1937, when Hitler's policies were clear to everyone except the Jewish communities in Europe, the Haganah High Command had decided to expand its activities, and it established the *Mossad le Aliyah Bet* (Committee for Illegal Immigration), which became responsible for the successful rescue of many thousands of European Jews and their illegal entry and absorption into the Palestinian population. The Mossad branch of the Haganah, with its headquarters in Istanbul, rapidly established a large network of secret operatives which worked actively through Eastern European partisan units and in a variety of dangerous assignments behind Nazi lines. As the war drew to a close, Ben-Gurion moved the Haganah headquarters to Paris to begin the immense task of aiding the more than one million Jewish survivors being held in liberated concentration camps and displaced persons centers throughout Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary. In addition, a large unit of the Haganah, appalled at the realization that the majority of "minor murderers" would go unpunished, moved freely through liberated German and Austrian cities (with the tacit consent of various Allied officers), summarily executing a considerable number of concentration camp guards and proven murderers, many of whom were disguised as displaced persons or had otherwise changed their identities.<sup>4</sup> The liberation of Europe in 1945, therefore, found the Haganah with hundreds of experienced members, with innumerable contacts throughout Europe and whose activities ranged from passport forgery to assassination. In an effort to meet the massive challenge of the postwar situation, Ben-Gurion reorganized the Haganah in mid-1945 into the following four categories: (1) *Ha'apala* or *Mossad* (immigration), (2) *Bricha* (escape), (3) *Rechesh* (arms and military equipment), and (4) *Haganah* (military training and home defense).<sup>5</sup>

4. See Michael Bar-Zohar, *The Avengers*, trans. from the French by Len Ortzen (London, 1968).

5. Jon Kimche, *The Secret Roads: The "Illegal" Migration of a People, 1938-1948* (London, 1954), p. 76. For an excellent investigation of the organized escape of the Jewish survivors of Eastern Europe, 1944-1948, see Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: BRICHAH* (New York, 1970).

In practice the related categories worked as single units, so that the escape and immigration sections proceeded as before to aid survivors. They continued to unite families, influence government offices to release the large numbers of refugees being detained in temporary camps, secure forged exit and transit visas, and arrange for the many thousands of homeless Jews to enter the underground railroad system which would take them, illegally, into British-held Palestine. While the work of the escape and immigration sections was critically important to the eventual independence of the State of Israel, especially in their early contacts with Eastern European governments following the official sanction of their efforts by the Czech foreign ministry, the prime concern of the Jewish Agency, especially after Gromyko's May, 1947, hint at Soviet support of partition, was to obtain drastically needed weapons through Rechesh.

Ben-Gurion dispatched dozens of special Haganah agents all over the world to buy anything they could—obsolete aircraft, machine guns, rifles that were barely usable, damaged tanks, and anything else that was for sale. The major problem revolved around the fact that the Jewish Agency represented an underground army and not a legitimate government. The FBI and British authorities, therefore, maintained steady pressure on these emissaries and made frequent arrests—a problem that did not face Arab buyers of military equipment. The young Haganah agents invented all kinds of stratagems to get their purchases out of the country of origin and to hide them in various places in Europe, ready to be dispatched to Palestine. In the United States, for example, the Schwimmer Aviation Company of Burbank, California, Service Airways, Inc. in New York, and an airline of Panamanian registry called Lineas Aereas de Panama, were used as cover organizations for purchasing planes and flying them to Latin America, from where they could be dismantled and smuggled into Palestine. In England, a legitimate film company was persuaded to make a war documentary in order that disguised Haganah pilots could obtain permission for a number of their planes to take off—planes which did not land again in England.<sup>6</sup> Fictitious companies were also established in South

6. The Haganah agents involved in the film company and their British accomplices were later tried and convicted for their parts in the illegal export of aircraft and arms to Israel, as well as a complicated side-issue involving the death of a

Africa, Spain, France, and South America.<sup>7</sup> The most important source of military supplies, however, came from Eastern Europe, and especially Czechoslovakia.<sup>8</sup>

The first indication that Czechoslovakia might aid the Haganah, despite heavy British pressure throughout Europe to prohibit the sale of military supplies to the Jewish Agency, was relayed to Ben-Gurion by a Czech-born Jewish businessman, Dr. Otto Felix (who later Hebraized his name to Uriel Doron), whose factory in Jerusalem necessitated frequent business trips to Czechoslovakia. Many of his early schoolmates had since risen to high positions in the Czech government, and they suggested to him on several occasions that the ministry of defense might consider selling arms to the Haganah if the transaction could be arranged under the guise of a purchase by a legitimate government. Ben-Gurion immediately alerted the Rechesh organization and appointed two of the most capable Haganah emissaries, Ehud Avriel and Munya Mardor, to proceed directly to Paris and Italy, respectively, from where they were to put out feelers for further developments. Neither were novices in such situations. Ehud Avriel had been the head of the illegal immigration organization in Istanbul, and as a result of his fantastic successes in arranging for the escape and transportation of many thousands of refugees from Eastern Europe, was considered Ben-Gurion's "chief agent in the provision of arms in Europe."<sup>9</sup> Munya Mardor was a Haganah fighter of equal status, having been the organizer of a majority of clandestine operations against

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Jewish car dealer and the disposition of his body. See *The Times* (London), April 26 and October 10, 1948; January 26 and December 23, 1950.

7. Colonel Benjamin Kagan, *The Secret Battle for Israel* (Cleveland, 1966), pp. 19-28, 33-40, 110-12.

8. See Arnold Krammer, "Arms For Independence: When the Soviet Bloc Supported Israel," *Wiener Library Bulletin* (London) XXII, no. 3 (Summer, 1968), pp. 19-23. Several Eastern European countries, notably Poland, sold consignments of obsolete military supplies and machinery to the Jewish Agency before World War II. Efraim Dekel, *SHAI: The Exploits of Haganah Intelligence* (London, 1959), pp. 74-77. For a description of the favorable postwar atmosphere discovered by the Escape and Immigration branches of the Haganah, see Jon Kimche, *The Secret Roads*, pp. 84-95.

9. Jon Kimche, "The People vs. Ben-Gurion's Government," *Commentary*, September, 1952, p. 243. Avriel, most recently Israel's ambassador to Italy and Malta, was originally Viennese, and following his early emigration to Palestine, changed his name from Ueberall to Avriel. At this writing Avriel has been drafted out of semi-retirement into Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

both the British Mandate forces and the Arab terrorist bands. Both emissaries immediately left Palestine to assume control of the Rechesh operation, armed only with an introduction from Ben-Gurion, scribbled by hand on a piece of notepaper about four inches by three inches,<sup>10</sup> which read:

To all our comrades in Europe:

30.9.1947

Please give Bearer all the help he may need in carrying out his mission, which, at this time and under the conditions likely to develop, is of primary importance and at the heart of everything we are striving for.

With Greetings from Zion,

David Ben-Gurion

Upon his arrival at the Haganah headquarters in Paris at the end of November, 1947, Ehud Avriel was approached by a number of individuals with grandiose promises to obtain the needed arms through a variety of hazy, though expensive, plans. The majority proved to be false leads with the exception of an offer proposed by the president of Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza, which would authorize the Rechesh officials to buy weapons as representatives of the Nicaraguan government in return for a mere 25 percent of each payment price.<sup>11</sup> While rather high, the Nicaraguan proposal was the first Haganah breakthrough to a steady supply of weapons offered on the world market, but as negotiations were being hurriedly completed on November 30, 1947, spurred on by Gromyko's United Nations speech the previous day, a new offer suddenly appeared. Avriel was informed by an old friend, Joseph Ilan, that a certain man-about-Paris, an entrepreneur whose only previous contact with the Haganah members had been to provide nearly priceless box seat tickets to the ballet during the current brilliant season of Serge Lifar, wanted to see him immediately. Elegantly dressed and carrying a briefcase, the man came into Avriel's hotel room and quickly explained that there was nothing easier than purchasing arms. He produced a factory catalogue and a variety of descriptive folders and, without waiting for comments or questions

10. A photocopy of the note was presented to the writer by Munya Mardor. Mardor became director of Weapons Research and Development for Israel, and at this writing is in private business.

11. Ehud Avriel, "Ha'emeth al Prag" [The Truth About Prague], part I, *Ma'ariv* (Tel Aviv), December 5, 1952—hereafter cited as "The Truth About Prague." The Nicaraguan negotiations were carried on through a British Jew, one Dr. Klinger.

from the stunned Haganah officials, proceeded through the lists giving explanations and price quotations. The man obviously knew what he was talking about, and only after completing his detailed description of available weapons did he take a moment to introduce himself. He was Robert Adam Abramovici, Jewish, from Rumania. Before the war he had been the Bucharest representative of *Československá Zbrojovka Brno*, the massive Škoda arms works in Czechoslovakia. He explained to Avriel, who was still awe-struck, that he would accompany him to the Škoda factory the following morning, and that they were already expected. He produced two plane tickets from his pocket which he had taken the liberty of buying on his way to the hotel, shook hands all around, and cordially took his departure. Avriel and Robert Adam Abramovici were on the 10 o'clock plane for Prague the next morning, and by 12 noon were in a conference at 20 Avenue Belchrida with the directors of the Zbrojovka Brno arms works.<sup>12</sup>

Before leaving Paris, Ehud Avriel packed three unused letterheads of official Ethiopian consulate general stationery, all that remained of a batch of one hundred sheets which were originally acquired at the cost of a thousand dollars, in order that the Bricha might secure transit visas and other vital documents for refugees and displaced persons illegally emigrating to Palestine. The stationery, it turned out, became a critical factor in sealing the first Czech arms agreement with the Haganah and formed the first step in Israel's ability to survive the imminent Arab invasion of Palestine.

Knowing full well that the "Ethiopian representative," Ehud Avriel, was a leading member of the Haganah and an official representative of the Jewish Agency, the Škoda officials began immediate negotiations for the sale of weapons, pausing only to help Avriel compose a more authentic looking "power of attorney" authorization on the remaining sheets of official stationery. A later meeting with the Czech foreign minister, Jan Masaryk, indicated that most of the government leaders were aware of the ruse and amusedly approved its continuation. The first Haganah-Czech arms contract, meanwhile, was concluded at 3:30 P.M. on December 1, slightly more than three hours after Avriel and

12. Conversations with Ehud Avriel at Kibbutz Neot Mordechai, Israel, August, 1969. See, also, Avriel, "The Truth About Prague," part I; Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *O Jerusalem* (New York, 1972), pp. 69-70; and Dan Kurzman, *Genesis 1948: The First Arab-Israeli War* (Cleveland, 1970), pp. 119-20.

the mysterious Abramovici had arrived at the offices of Československá Zbrojovka. The first contract included the following critical items: 10,000 Mauser P. 18 rifles, 4,500 ZB-37 heavy machine guns, and 3,000,000 rounds of 7.92 mm. ammunition.<sup>13</sup> The weapons, originally German, were manufactured for the Wehrmacht by the Škoda works, and were now considered obsolete since the Czechoslovakian army was already in the process of converting to Soviet armament. Following the completion of the purchase orders, Avriel made a frenzied call to Shaul Avigur and Pinchas Koslovsky, coordinators of the Haganah budget in Switzerland, and instructed them to relay instantly the agreed-upon price in dollars to Prague. The Czech officials intimated that the ministry of defense might also be willing to sell their "Ethiopian friends" a number of Messerschmitt fighter planes, British Spitfires, Mosquitoes, and a variety of other heavy items.<sup>14</sup> (The Spitfires and Mosquitoes had been flown by a contingent of Free Czech pilots in the RAF. At the end of the war, the Czech pilots were allowed to take their British planes back to Prague.) Having now found a stable source of arms, the elated Rechesh leaders now had to face the equally difficult problem of establishing the transportation network needed to smuggle the weapons through the British blockade and into Palestine. In an effort to help expedite matters, Masaryk instructed Avriel to meet with his deputy, Vladimir Clementis, whose job it would be to smooth out any bureaucratic obstacles encountered by "steady customers."

The meeting with Clementis took place the following week at the Czech foreign office in Prague. Avriel was startled to find that Clementis, like the majority of other government officials, knew exactly

13. David Ben-Gurion, *Medinath Yisrael Hamekhudesheth* [The Restored State of Israel] (Tel Aviv, 1969), pp. 102–3—hereafter cited as 'The Restored State of Israel.'

14. At the same moment that the Rechesh team was negotiating for arms, the Haganah organization was equally desperate for the funds to buy them. A frantic two-and-a-half-month tour through the United States by Golda Meir yielded the totally unexpected sum of 50 million dollars. While Mrs. Meir did not specify that the critically needed funds would be used for the purchase of arms, the tone and themes of her speeches left little room for misunderstanding. Marie Syrkin, *Golda Meir: Woman With a Cause* (New York, 1963), pp. 183–91. The United Jewish Appeal Foundation was also put into high gear, and a variety of independent organizations like the Friends of the Haganah, headed by the present mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, also raised large sums.

who he was, and that without bothering with introductions and “small talk,” Clementis promised the full support of the Czech government in aiding representatives of the Jewish Agency.<sup>15</sup> One of the first problems to be ironed out concerned the shipping crates in which the weapons were to be transported, for Czech (and international) law stipulated that an arms manufacturer cannot release weapons without special permits, without special packaging, and without marking on the outside of each crate the specific quantity and type of weapons being shipped. In addition, all weapons shipped by the Czech Škoda works were required to be sealed with a distinctive “Red Snake” emblem. These were the very things the Haganah were trying to avoid, as transportation of any material across Italy or the Balkans and through the British blockade of Palestine would be difficult enough without advertising the contents, but crates bearing the “Red Snake” seal would make the task impossible. At the end of the meeting with Avriel, Clementis understandingly issued a “special request” to the Škoda officials to dispense with the usual formalities and crate markings. Then came the problem of transportation.

Czechoslovakia is a landlocked country, without direct access to the sea, so that the means of getting the arms from the Škoda factories to Palestine were strictly limited. Cautious inquiries by the Haganah to the Polish government for permission to use the port of Gdynia were temporarily rejected. The only remaining solution was to send the cargo across Hungary to a Yugoslavian port, whence it might be dispatched to Palestine aboard some chartered vessel. Hungary, for her part, granted permission of transit, which allowed the shipment to be routed down the Danube from Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, to Vukovar in Yugoslavia. Avriel then went to Belgrade in the hope that his close wartime relationship with the partisans would now be of help, and found he was not to be disappointed. An old partisan friend, “Marko” Aleksander Ranković, was now the head of the Yugoslav ministry of the interior, and gave his blessing as well as protection to the transport of Czech weapons from Vukovar by rail, overland, to the port of Šibenik on the Dalmatian coast.<sup>16</sup>

15. Conversation with Ehud Avriel, August, 1969; Avriel, “The Truth About Prague,” part I. For a full investigation, see Arnold Krammer, “L’aide Militaire Tchécoslovaque à Israël, 1948,” *Revue de l’Est* (Paris), Spring, 1974.

16. According to Munya Mardor, the Yugoslav authorities initially refused to allow the Haganah to sail from their ports, but Shaul Avigur in Switzerland con-



Once the facilities through Yugoslavia had been arranged, the next concern became the acquisition of a ship from an Adriatic port. Avriel moved on to Italy where, together with Munya Mardor, they located a Jewish businessman, one Ephraim Illin, who helped them charter a suitable ship, the 500-ton *Nora*. Realizing the suspicion which would be aroused by any cargo entering Palestine, they decided to camouflage the unmarked crates beneath a huge delivery of Italian onions, a ruse which worked admirably and which would be used often afterward. The first shipment of Czech arms left Šibenik on March 28, 1948, concealed beneath a mountain of onions aboard the *Nora*, arrived in Palestine on April 3 in time to make possible the crucial major victory, called Operation Nachshon, which opened the highway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup> A breakthrough had also been accomplished in the search for weapons, for after the completion of the first Czech arms contract, a steady stream of shipments began to arrive in Palestine.

By a curious twist of fate, the arms aboard the *Nora* had not actually been the first Czech weapons to arrive in Palestine. When Ehud Avriel arrived in Prague with Abramovici on December 1, 1947, they found that a Syrian delegation of arms buyers, headed by Major Fuad Mardam, nephew of the former Syrian premier, had been there and left.<sup>18</sup> While it was true that the Czechs had no qualms about selling weapons to the Palestinian Jews, despite the strict embargo which had been imposed by the United Nations on the sale of arms to the Middle East, they were equally prepared to sell arms to the Arabs. The Syrians,

tacted Moshe Sharett at the United Nations with instruction to approach Gromyko for help. Moscow was then notified and in turn put the necessary pressure on Tito. Conversations with Munya Mardor, Tel Aviv, August, 1969.

17. Netanel Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword* (New York, 1961), p. 94. A humorous account of the arrival of the anxiously awaited *Nora* recalls that "... from the secret Haganah H.Q. in Tel Aviv, we could smell the onions even before the ship's arrival. We worked all night to unload the weapons, people fainting left and right from the smell, and by morning the surface of the sea from Tel Aviv to Herzlya was covered with a layer of floating Italian onions." Pinchas Vaze, "Haneshek She'ifsher et Haofensiva Harishona" [The Arms that Made Possible the First Offensive], *Al Hamishmar* (Tel Aviv), April 26, 1955.

18. Arab representatives had begun the process of buying arms long before the passage of the November partition plan. According to one observer, "The chairman [of UNSCOP], Karel Lisicky of Czechoslovakia, was turning red and pink over Cairo reports that the Arab League aimed to buy more anti-partition arms from—of all places—Czechoslovakia." Hal Lehrman, "Partition in Washington: An Inquiry," *Commentary*, March, 1948, p. 205.

only days before, had concluded an arms agreement for \$11,000,000 which included more than 8,000 rifles, 10,000,000 rounds of 7.92 mm. ammunition, and a large quantity of hand grenades and explosives. Stunned by the Arab world's quick response to what the Jewish Agency believed were private and sympathetic offers, and understandably anxious to prevent the weapons from reaching their destination, Avriel flew to Yugoslavia immediately following his meetings with Masaryk and Clementis on December 3. He enlisted the support of Marko Ranković and his intelligence section of the ministry of the interior to aid the Haganah in locating and delaying the shipment. Haganah agents throughout the Mediterranean area were alerted to the Syrian shipment, and it was learned that the arms had reached the Danube port of Bratislava and were enroute to the Adriatic. Although bribed officials delayed the consignments, Fuad Mardam succeeded in continuing and the shipment eventually reached the port of Rijeka (Fiume). Despite additional delays and minor crate switches by former Jewish partisans and Tito's officials, the Syrians managed to charter a ship, the *Lino*, and began the journey to Beirut on March 28, 1948. All Haganah agents in the Mediterranean area were ordered to stop the Syrians at all costs and were sent the following pertinent information by Avriel from Yugoslavia via a cable through Shaul Avigur in Geneva:

CRATE WITH GOODS FOR ISHMAELITES [Arabs] LEFT MORNING FIVE  
STOP NAME LINO FLAG ITALIAN STOP SIX KNOTS CREW OF SEVEN SKIP-  
PER VISOLO PIETRO STOP IF WEATHER GOOD COURSE THROUGH  
OTRANTO STRAITS AND CYPRUS BUT IF BAD COURSE VIA CAPO SAPI-  
ENTZA AS ALSO IF ENGINE TROUBLE STOP DESTINATION BEIRUT.<sup>19</sup>

Munya Mardor, rushing from Prague, where he had shared command with Avriel, to Italy, was placed in command of the operation. The ship was dogged by Haganah planes, blown off course by a chance storm, and sunk by Israeli frogmen (one of whom was Munya Mardor), only to have its contents salvaged and reshipped to Beirut aboard an Italian vessel, the *Argiro*, whose commander turned out to be a Haganah man. The ship was unknowingly being guided to a rendez-

19. Original in the private archives of Munya Mardor; also quoted in his memoirs of the period, Munya Mardor, *Strictly Illegal* (London, 1964), p. 202.

vous with two small Israeli vessels in mid-ocean, where the weapons were transferred and taken immediately to the Israeli battle zone.<sup>20</sup> On April 6, 1948, following the news of the Syrian failure to reach Beirut, Shaul Avigur in Switzerland received a cable from the Jewish Agency delegation at the United Nations which acknowledged the behind-the-scenes Soviet pressure on the Czech government to aid the Haganah. It read:

6 April 1948

0700 United States

SHARETT PAID A VISIT TO THE THUNDERER [Gromyko]. WAS VERY GLAD THAT HIS INTERVENTION HELPED THE PARCEL [Nora, which arrived on April 3] TO ARRIVE AT ITS DESTINATION. ASKED HIM TO INTERVENE WITH ORFI [the Czechs] TO STOP THEIR SALE TO THE BLACKS [Arabs]. HE LISTENED AND TOOK NOTES.<sup>21</sup>

The Syrians, in fact, did not purchase any more Czech weapons, but this seems to have been due more to hard economics than to the results of Soviet pressure or governmental sympathy with the Zionist cause. The simple truth was that the Haganah had access to a large, though heavily strained, budget of dollars under control of Shaul Avigur and Pinchas Koslovsky (today, Pinchas Sappir, Israel's minister of finance) in Geneva, whereas the Syrians could only hope to draw against "frozen accounts" of sterling. When the Syrian delegation, following the loss of their first shipment, persisted in badgering the Czech government to sell them another consignment against their frozen bank account, they were humorously but resolutely told by the

20. The Czech government quickly denied any reports that it had sold arms to Syria in violation of the embargo. *New York Times*, January 29, 1948, p. 8. For details of the *Lino* episode, see, especially, Mardor, *Strictly Illegal*, pp. 200–211; Joshua Tadmor, *The Silent Warriors*, trans. from the Hebrew by Raphael Rothstein (New York, 1969), pp. 56–70; and Collins, *O Jerusalem*, pp. 571–72. After the Arab-Israeli war, Major Fuad Mardam was tried by a Syrian court martial and found guilty of having been a traitor to the Arab cause. He was accused of having fallen in love with a "devil in the shape of an extremely beautiful Yugoslav woman named Palmas, a Zionist and a Communist who induced him to deeds of treachery." He was sentenced to death on April 23, 1949, but before the sentence could be carried out, the government was overthrown by Colonel Husny Zaim, and Mardam was freed. Mardor, *Strictly Illegal*, p. 211. See, also, *Cahiers de l'Orient Contemporain*, 1<sup>er</sup> trimestre, 1949, xvii. 50; and 2<sup>me</sup> et 3<sup>me</sup> trimestres, 1949, xviii–xix. 157.

21. Original in the private archives of Munya Mardor.

director of the Czechoslovak National Bank, Jan Sommer, that “*Wenn Sie haben kein Dollar, Sie sollen nicht Krieg machen!*” (If you haven’t any dollars, you shouldn’t make war!)<sup>22</sup>

What, then, were the motives behind Czech support of the Zionist cause? Why did they knowingly sell arms to the Haganah in direct violation of the United Nations embargo on the Middle East, and in the face of severe British and, eventually, American diplomatic pressure? How deeply were the Russians actually involved in the Czech decision to aid the Palestinian Jews, and what effects did the Communist coup d’état of the Czechoslovak government in February of 1948 have upon Czech aid to the Jewish Agency? There is little question that the Czechs were sympathetic to the plight of European Jewry at the end of the war. Tens of thousands of Jewish refugees were being moved aimlessly from liberated concentration camps, displaced persons camps, refugee centers, and detention areas to still more camps in other areas. Confused and rootless, they were treated with hostility upon returning to their own countries and, in turn, became embittered and contemptuous. No country on earth would accept them, except Palestine; and the British government, sensitive to Arab demands, restricted all efforts of the Jewish Agency to arrange for their emigration there. Although Prague was originally chosen by the Haganah as a key point in their rescue efforts because of its central geographical location, the Czech government, including National Socialists, Socialists, and Communists, quickly showed its sympathy.

The unprecedented equality offered to its Jewish citizens by the Czechoslovak republic between the wars, 1919 to 1939, is legendary. Even after its dismemberment in March, 1939, the new puppet state of Slovakia, for example, was nearly alone among its East European neighbors in its reluctance to cooperate aggressively in the deportation and liquidation of its Jews. While this reluctance did not prevent the extermination of more than sixty thousand Slovakian Jews at the hands of their fellow Slovaks and in German camps, the government in Bratislava, for several reasons,<sup>23</sup> dragged its feet despite strong German pressure. The Slovak ministry of defense, and later the ministry

22. Quoted to the writer by Ehud Avriel during conversations at Kibbutz Neot Mordechai, Israel, August, 1969.

23. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago, 1961), pp. 459–73.

of interior, interestingly, created labor battalions of young Jews and Gypsies which, while heavily exploiting their labor and pocketing the returns, nonetheless protected several thousand potential deportees behind Czech army uniforms, Aryan papers, and the continued cry for needed labor. The single written work on these units,<sup>24</sup> supported by this writer's interviews with several participants, discloses that the Jewish labor battalions stationed in Liptova Itrdok were, moreover, accommodately divided into a kosher (22nd Company) and a non-kosher (21st Company) unit!

As early as mid-October, 1945, Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk provided the Bricha branch of the Haganah with nine complete trains to carry Jews from the Polish border to the Austrian frontier and to the United States zone of Germany providing the trains by-passed Prague so as to prevent undue publicity or any inconvenient attention from the British embassy. At the all-party cabinet meeting of July 25, 1946, presided over by the new premier, Klement Gottwald, and Foreign Minister Masaryk, the Czech government voted to recognize officially the office of the Bricha and to legitimize its activities; the cabinet directed the ministry of social welfare to aid the Bricha in any way possible. This startling resolution in the face of increasing British pressure strongly influenced the Polish government, guided by Stanisław Mikolajczyk, Władysław Gomułka, and Jan Stanczyk, which, within a month of the Czech decision, rescinded its previous order and opened its borders to release the massive number of East European Jews being detained in its relocation centers.<sup>25</sup> The result of the Czech decision and its resulting effect on the Polish government saw an opening in the dike which allowed the daily exodus of between 2,500 and 3,000 Polish, Czech, Russian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Rumanian Jewish refugees to enter the Western European community.

There is no question regarding the personal sympathies of a large number of high-ranking Czech officials to the Zionists. Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk—the very symbol of Czech democracy as the son of the founder of the republic, Thomas Masaryk—was undoubtedly influential in officially recognizing the efforts of the Jewish Agency to

24. Emil F. Knieža, *Šiesty prápor, na stráž!* [Sixth Battalion, on guard!] (Bratislava, 1964).

25. Kimche, *The Secret Roads*, pp. 89–93; see also, Richard Crossman, M.P., *Palestine Mission: A Personal Record* (London, 1947), pp. 83–87.

maintain its tenuous hold on Palestine. On several occasions he showed his personal support for the Zionists. As early as November, 1946, Foreign Minister Masaryk stated, in regard to the Palestine Question, that "I don't know very much about oil pipelines, but I know of another pipe through which Jewish blood has been flowing for many long generations."<sup>26</sup> Only weeks before his death on March 10, he allowed a Haganah representative, Irma Pollack, to collect funds for Israel's defense from among Czechoslovakia's Jewish community, and then personally arranged for a license from the treasury ministry to allow her to take the funds out of Czechoslovakia.<sup>27</sup> The Rechesh delegation also received substantial support, private and official, from such varied members of the pre-Communist Czechoslovak government as the Social Democratic minister for industry, Bohumil Laušman, the eminent minister of justice, Dr. Prokop Drtina, and to a limited degree, the Communist deputy foreign minister, Vladimir Clementis, and the chairman of the Czech Communist party, Klement Gottwald.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps most important to the success of the Haganah mission in purchasing weapons and, as will be discussed, in obtaining the aid of the Czech army in training Israeli officers, pilots, and paratroopers, was the deputy minister of national defense, General Bedrich Reicin. Although Laušman, Reicin, and several others were Jews, ironically, the few Jewish ministers and officials who supported efforts to supply aid to the Haganah, did so in the face of vehement opposition by the large majority of Jews in the Czech government. Even more ironical, those Jewish officials—such as the secretary-general of the party, Rudolf Slansky; the powerful Communist writer and head of the international department of the Czech central committee secretariat, Bedrich Geminder; the despotic high official in the finance ministry, Otto Fischl (labeled the "Jewish Himmler" by the Ha-

26. Horowitz, *State in the Making*, p. 250.

27. Shimon Ornstein, *Lefi Pkudah Mi'moskva* [By Order from Moscow] (Tel Aviv, 1969), p. 256—hereafter cited as 'By Order from Moscow.' Masaryk was overruled in his decision to reject Syrian purchase offers out of sympathy for the Jews by the ministries of economics and foreign trade, which considered Czechoslovakia's need for Western currency more important than personal sympathies. Conversations with Shimon Ornstein, Tel Aviv, August, 1969.

28. Gottwald once decided, in the face of Israel's military loss of the old section of Jerusalem, to extend the Haganah credit for an additional six-month period on all purchases. *Ibid.*

ganah); and the deputy minister of foreign trade, Eugene Loeb—themselves became the star culprits in the infamous anti-Zionist Slansky trials in 1952.

The most overriding motivation in the Czech decision to supply weapons to the Palestinian Jews, however, was not sympathy for the Zionist cause or hatred of the British, but rather basic economics. Czechoslovakia's postwar economy was devastated, with a standstill in the flow of foreign trade complicated by catastrophically bad harvests. In addition, the government was beginning to feel heavy Soviet pressure to enter into markedly one-sided trade agreements which would eventually result in the subordination of Czechoslovakia's national interest to an unfavorable network of unilateral contracts with Moscow and the Eastern Bloc. Czechoslovakia's turning point, both economic and political, came in July, 1947, with the government's unanimous decision to accept an Anglo-French invitation to attend the opening discussions of the Marshall Plan which were being held in Paris. Czechoslovakia was desperate for an influx of Western currency; even the Communist faction of the government, bolstered by indications that Poland, Yugoslavia, and Rumania would also attend, supported Czechoslovakia's decision to participate. At the last minute, Stalin decided to reverse the decision of the four countries. A routine Czech trade delegation which had been called to Moscow—including Gottwald, Masaryk, Drtina, and Loeb—was summoned to a high-powered midnight conference with the Russian leader. Stalin's bombshell decision, heavily laced with threats, that Czechoslovakia reject any participation in the Marshall Plan caused a series of frantic calls to Prague, a middle-of-the-night meeting of the Czech government, and the total surrender to Stalin's decision by the following morning. On July 10, Czechoslovakia lost her independence to direct her own course of action, a loss which marked the turning point of increasing communist activity that would lead to the coup d'état the following February.<sup>29</sup> As Masaryk said to his friends upon landing in Prague on July 12: "It is another Munich. I left for Moscow as minister of foreign affairs of a sovereign state. I am returning as Stalin's stooge."<sup>30</sup>

29. Eugene Loeb, *Sentenced and Tried: The Stalinist Purges in Czechoslovakia*, trans. from the German by Maurice Michale (London, 1969), pp. 24-27.

30. I. Herben, "Comment Staline empêcha la Tchécoslovaquie de participer au

While Czechoslovakia remained the most industrialized country in the Eastern bloc, the overwhelming majority of her production was now funneled to Russia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Rumania under a new series of highly unfavorable trade agreements.<sup>31</sup> What Czechoslovakia desperately needed in order to restore a measure of economic stability and independence was an influx of Western currency, especially dollars. Such an opportunity presented itself in November of the same year when representatives of both the Jewish Agency and the Arab world began a worldwide search for a steady supply of weapons, in the face of the United Nations embargo on the Middle East, with which the basic issues of the Palestine Question would ultimately be decided. While it appears that the personal sympathies of influential Czech officials were with the Zionists, the economic situation left them little alternative but to sell to both sides.

The first shipment of Czech arms destined for Tel Aviv, in fact, left the Yugoslav port of Šibenik aboard the *Nora* on the very same day, March 28, that the Syrian consignment left Fiume aboard the *Lino* for Beirut. Whether the Czechs would have continued to sell further consignments of weapons to Arab delegates remains a moot question, for, due to a combination of circumstances (the Soviet pressure to support the Zionists in Palestine and the difficulty of the Arab states to buy with large sums of ready dollars), their first purchase was also their last. From the beginning of the year 1948, the Haganah was the only buyer of Czech weapons destined for the Middle East.

The final indication that Czech aid to the Haganah before February of 1948 was based primarily on economic considerations is evident from the fact that, although the majority of government officials were informed of the purchases by the Jewish Agency, all negotiations and contracts were carried out only with the representatives of the Czech army (primarily General Bedrich Reicin) and the individual factories such as the Czech Arms Factory in Strakonice; Československá-Kolben-Daněk in Prague; Avia, the aviation works in Prague; and the Škoda works in Plzeň and Brno. In addition, the Jews were sold only obso-

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plan Marchall," *Le Figaro*, August 12, 1948; Claire Sterling, *The Masaryk Case* (New York, 1969), pp. 8, 78.

31. Loebl, *Sentenced and Tried*, pp. 20–24; Radovan Šimáček, *Czechoslovak Economy in a Nutshell: 1948* (Prague, 1948), p. 59; William Diamond, *Czechoslovakia Between East and West* (London Institute of World Affairs, 1947), pp. 143, 186.



lete or surplus material (resulting from the Czech army's conversion to Soviet armament) such as Mannlicher-Mauser rifles, ZB machine guns, and, eventually, Messerschmitt ME-109 fighter planes. Ironically, the majority of military equipment being sold to defend the infant Jewish state was originally produced for use by the German military.<sup>32</sup>

The influence of the Soviet Union on Czechoslovakia's decision to support the Zionists is somewhat more difficult to analyze. As early as 1945 the Soviet Union had an unparalleled influence in the economic decisions of Czechoslovakia, and any project involving the sale of weapons required its final approval. The deputy minister of foreign trade, Eugene Loeb, later purged and since rehabilitated, recalls the following example:

I remember that in 1945 the head of the export department of Zbrojovka came to see me . . . and suggested that we should export a whole arms factory to Egypt. . . . Zbrojovka's director recommended the deal as the price was a good one and Egypt was ready to pay in dollars. The Defense Ministry had no objections to the plan, and I asked Clementis what the attitude of the Foreign Ministry would be. Clementis replied that Vyschinsky, the Soviet Foreign Minister, was touching down at Prague on his way back to Moscow and that he was going to meet him at the airport and would ask him "how the Soviet Union would feel about it." After his talk with Vyschinsky, Clementis told me that Vyschinsky had refused to hear anything about it, thus the Foreign Ministry would not give such a project its approval.<sup>33</sup>

From 1945 onward, Soviet influence on Czechoslovakia's economic policies gained continued strength, marking, at the same time, a steady decline of Czechoslovak political independence which culminated in their complete submission to Moscow.

The Soviet decision to allow Czechoslovakia to sell weapons to the Haganah appears to have been influenced, particularly, by two unusual Israelis, both of whom remain controversial figures in Israel's current political sphere. The groundwork leading to the Czech support of the Jewish state was built, as discussed in an earlier section, by the unofficial

32. It is interesting to note that one of the early Czech shipments of arms arriving in Tel Aviv contained rifles whose sights were graduated in script Arabic numerals, either a custom-made shipment following the first Syrian purchase, or, more likely, part of the weapons produced by the Nazis for pro-German Arab groups. Conversations with Netanel Lorch, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August, 1969.

33. Loeb, *Sentenced and Tried*, p. 44.

“ambassador,” representing the left-wing Zionist Hashomer Hatzair movement, Mordechai Oren. Since his emigration to Palestine in 1929, Oren had spent most of his adult life on political tours, lobbying in European capitals, meeting left-wing socialists, communists, and trade union leaders in various countries, in an effort to enlist support for the Zionist movement. Oren explained his activities in the following way: “In Prague in the middle of 1947, as a delegate of the Histadrut, I was participating at a meeting of the F.S.M. [Federation Syndicale Mondiale]. From there I left for other countries: Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria. During my stay in each country, I worked in three ways: I got in touch with various centers of our movement, I explained the meaning of our political fight in Palestine, and I spoke to government officials.”<sup>34</sup> As soon as it became evident that Czechoslovakia would continue supplying weapons to the Haganah, Oren began concentrating his efforts to utilize his political contacts behind the scenes in Prague. During the four-month period, from February, 1948, when Antonin Zapotocky was appointed deputy premier, to June when he became prime minister, Oren’s frequent consultations and political conversations with his office appear to have had an important influence on the increasing aid which Czechoslovakia was willing to supply to Israel. In his memoirs, Oren vividly recalled the first of these critical meetings: “I thanked him for the first-rate political support in the U.N. and for the concrete aid, in the form of arms, which his country had furnished to us. . . . I asked that this aid be increased as much as possible. During our meeting, the head of government showed a most friendly attitude, and talked about the just war being fought by Israel for her independence. . . . He promised me that Czechoslovakia would pursue her policy of maximum aid toward Israel, and he wished us a full and complete victory in our war.”<sup>35</sup> Later during the same meeting with Deputy Premier Zapotocky, Oren insisted particularly on three points:

the delivery of a certain number of fighters, the sale of which had already been decided on but that, for some reason, we still had not received; the sale of a larger number of a certain type of machine-guns, and finally the sale of tanks. . . . A few days later I was called by the Secretary who officially told me that, after a heated conversation with

34. Oren, *Prisonnier Politique à Prague*, 1951–1956, p. 188.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

the National Defense Officials, he had ordered them to do everything possible to satisfy my demands except in the matter of tanks. He gave me the name of a general [Bedrich Reicin] at the Ministry . . . [which] I forwarded to the chargé d'affairs [of the Israeli Embassy].<sup>36</sup>

By the beginning of 1948, Mordechai Oren, as a roving ambassador for the left-wing Zionist movement, could claim to have had interviews with nearly every Eastern European leader and with such Soviet diplomats, as Serge Mikhailov in Ankara, Fedor Gusev in London, Aleksandr Bogomolov in Paris, Mikhail Yakovlev in Warsaw, and Vasili Kuznetzov in Berlin. There is little doubt that Oren had a substantial influence on decisions affecting eventual support for Israel, and especially in building the groundwork for the negotiations resulting in Czechoslovakia's sale of weapons to the Haganah.

A great deal of friction arose between the separate levels of the Rechesh mission in Czechoslovakia, between the officially sanctioned team led by Ehud Avriel, the unofficial behind-the-scenes negotiator, Mordechai Oren, and, at the very end of the political spectrum, the officially disavowed secretary of the Israeli Communist party, Shmuel Mikunis—a friction which remains to the present day. The problem stemmed not only from the complications resulting from disunified efforts toward the same goal, along with the personal antagonisms over receipt of credit for the mission, but from the very real distrust felt by the official Rechesh members toward left-wing and Communist Palestinians who, a short time earlier, had collaborated with the “Soviet-approved” Arabs. Only once, on the occasion of Oren's arrest and imprisonment as a “Zionist witness” during the Slansky trials of 1952, did Avriel momentarily concede any credit to Oren's efforts, in a published rebuttal to the Czech government's fantastic charges. He recalled events such as the incident when he and Moshe Sharett were sitting in the outer office of the Yugoslav deputy foreign minister, Dr. Aleš Bebler, and “were absolutely stunned, when the door opened, to see Oren coming out after a political talk with Tito's second-in-command . . . he [Oren] was almost ‘at home’ in all offices of Eastern European leaders. . . .”<sup>37</sup> However, in the same rebuttal, Avriel also recalled about Oren that “. . . he never once reported to our Embassy about his talks. He furthermore annoyed our staff, during those tense

36. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

37. Avriel, “The Truth About Prague,” part I.

days, by seeming to forget the names of those officials with whom he had spoken, recalling only such chummy nicknames as 'Vlado'—obviously the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Clementis."<sup>38</sup>

The final behind-the-scenes negotiator in the Haganah's efforts to obtain the critically needed weapons was the secretary of the Israeli Communist party (Maki),<sup>39</sup> Shmuel Mikunis. While officially disavowed by Ben-Gurion in order to avoid any encouraging indications to the Communist leaders of Eastern Europe that a socialist revolution in the future government of Israel might be in the offing, Mikunis made unquestionable contributions to the Czech and Russian decision to aid the Haganah.<sup>40</sup> He had spent nearly a year in London, first as a participant in the 1946–47 World Congress of Trade Union Workers, and later in recuperation from an aggravated stomach condition; he left for Prague, without any authorization from Ben-Gurion, immediately after the coup d'état in February, 1948. Realizing that his close contact with various leaders of the Communist world might well benefit the Jewish Agency's search for arms, he arrived in Prague to accomplish three things: to aid illegal immigration from Eastern Europe to Palestine, to secure needed weapons, and to try to mobilize Jewish youth for the eventual formation of a trained unit to fight (and remain) in Palestine.<sup>41</sup> His short stay in Prague was met with cold formality by Avriel and the official team, who later recalled that "Mikunis heard that we were doing something about buying arms, but didn't know any details, and thinking that he was very 'in' with the Communist leadership in Prague, couldn't even bring himself to admit that he needed our help."<sup>42</sup> Mikunis soon left for Belgrade to obtain aid, and to "find out whether my efforts in the name of the

38. *Ibid.*

39. The Israeli Communist party is popularly known as Maki, for the initials of its Hebrew name: *Miflaga Kommunistit Isre'elit*.

40. "Ben-Gurion thought I wanted to bring the Soviet East over here. I didn't mean that; I only wanted Israel to survive" (Mikunis). Ze'ev Schiff, "Stalin Horah Lessapek Neshck Leyisrael" [Stalin Gave Orders to Supply Weapons to Israel], *Ha'aretz*, May 3, 1968—hereafter cited as "Stalin Gave the Orders." Mikunis afterwards claimed to have had Ben-Gurion's permission in May, 1948, to visit the Cominform countries for the purpose of obtaining arms. *Zionist Review*, May 11, 1951, p. 6.

41. Conversations with Member of Parliament Shmuel Mikunis, Tel Aviv, August, 1969.

42. Avriel, "The Truth About Prague," part IV, *Ma'ariv*, December 9, 1952.

Communist Party were 'legal' in Moscow's eyes. I had a bad feeling, for in 1947, when I talked about 'self-determination' at a meeting of the Communist Parties of the British Empire, I was shouted down as a 'Zionist.'"<sup>43</sup> In Belgrade, Mikunis appealed to Moscow's inner circle through D. Kraminov and P. F. Yudin, the editors of the new Cominform periodical which appeared simultaneously in French, Russian, English, and Serbo-Croatian and bore the cumbersome title of *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy*.<sup>44</sup> Yudin, a member of the central committee of the CPSU and an *apparatchik* personally selected by Stalin to head the Cominform newspaper, was a close link for Mikunis to Zhdanov, Malenkov and, eventually, Stalin. While awaiting an answer from the Kremlin regarding the ideological legitimacy of his call for the mobilization of East Europe's Jewish youth, Mikunis was asked to write an article for the newspaper, a sure indication that he was on the right track. On April 15, 1948, the first article ever published by a representative of the Palestine Communist party (and, since 1943, an all-Jewish party at that) appeared in an official international Communist organ.<sup>45</sup> In the meantime, Mikunis travelled to Sofia where he met with Georgi Dimitrov on March 8, 1948, to discuss the possibility of mass immigration from Bulgaria.<sup>46</sup> Mikunis was delighted with Dimitrov's unexpected enthusiastic support of

43. Schiff, "Stalin Gave the Orders."

44. Created directly by Stalin at the initial meeting of the Communist Information Bureau in September, 1947. Although it was planned to be published in Prague, a last-minute decision in the Kremlin moved the newspaper to Belgrade. Stalin personally prescribed the cumbersome name in the hope that it would carry propaganda appeal as it was cited in full by the Western press. Ironically, the West also found it unwieldy and always referred to it as "the Cominform organ." See Eugenio Reale, *Avec Jacques Duclos au Banc des Accusés à la Réunion Constitutive du Kominform à Szlarska Poreba* (Paris, 1958), pp. 47-48; and Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, trans. by Michael B. Petrovich (New York, 1962), p. 129. While policy-making editorials sporadically appeared under his by-line, Kraminov's name was never otherwise noted, not did it appear among the list of ten editorial representatives from the satellite states which was published only once. See the February 1, 1948 issue, p. 1. Kraminov is at this writing the editor of the Soviet weekly, *Za Rubezhom*.

45. Shmuel Mikunis, "The Peoples of Palestine Struggle for National Independence," *For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy* (Belgrade), no. 8 (April 15, 1948), p. 2.

46. During the course of the interview, Dimitrov amusedly showed him a batch of American and British diplomatic protests charging the Bulgarian government, "among others," with complicity in illegal armament and immigration policies with regard to the Jewish Agency. Schiff, "Stalin Gave the Orders."

Jewish immigration to Palestine, which went so far as a pledge to supply small-caliber pistols to random emigres. According to Mikunis, Dimitrov became so enthusiastic as to declare that were he younger he would himself volunteer to fight for Israel.<sup>47</sup>

Leaving Bulgaria on a successful note, Mikunis went the following week to Rumania for a series of meetings with the cautious Anna Pauker and Deputy Premier Joseph Chisinevski, and then on to Gomulka in Poland. As in the case with Rumania, Gomulka claimed that Poland had no weapons to spare the Jewish Agency, regardless of the profit, but did agree to establish a training camp for Israeli officers in the Dolny Slask region, and to accept a small number of its graduates into the Polish staff officers' school for further training.<sup>48</sup> Leaving Warsaw, Mikunis went to Belgrade in mid-March where he held a series of talks with Milovan Djilas, Nikola Kovačević, and the head of Yugoslav intelligence, Marko Ranković. Yugoslavia was in the process of navigating a very delicate and dangerous course away from Moscow's absolute leadership, and was in no mood to discuss plans for the creation of a Jewish brigade; but strangely enough, the Yugoslav leadership was one of the first to take action after Stalin gave his official permission for such a unit.

Satisfied with his efforts to enlist the support of the various Communist governments, Mikunis returned to Czechoslovakia where the Rechesh team had been in the process of daily negotiations for more arms. His only willing listener was General Ludvik Svoboda, head of the ministry of national defense; and it was probably due to Svoboda that the unit was eventually created once the proper permission had been granted.<sup>49</sup> Ehud Avriel's cynical recollection of Mikunis's efforts

47. *Ibid.* This enthusiasm, however, did not prevent Bulgaria from extorting money from the Jewish Agency when purchases of planes required a refueling field between Czechoslovakia and Israel. They demanded a \$10,000 landing fee per plane.

48. Conversations with Mikunis, August, 1969.

49. Svoboda joined the party late (in 1948), and was forced out of the Ministry (to become deputy prime minister) as the result of a power play between General Reicin and Gottwald's son-in-law, Dr. Alexej Čepička. Ruthlessly ambitious, Čepička, in September, 1947, had organized an abortive plot to assassinate National Socialist chairman Peter Zenkl, justice minister Prokop Drtina, and Masaryk himself. See Sterling, *The Masaryk Case*, pp. 51-54. It was not long before Čepička, resentful of Reicin's power and popularity, arranged for the liquidation of his partner and rose to become first deputy premier of Czechoslovakia. General Svoboda is today president of Czechoslovakia.

in Prague revolve around a meeting of the Rechesh staff in early March:

Mikunis came into the meeting with an aloof expression on his face, and said formally to me: "I fixed everything. In a few days you will be called up to a government office I cannot now mention and they will inform you that 'we' (meaning the Communists) shall sell weapons to Israel." At that very moment, the first delivery of light weapons was on its way down the Danube, and already on its way to Israel!<sup>50</sup>

Shmuel Mikunis remained in Prague throughout the spring of 1948, leaving only once to participate in the formulation of a provisional government cabinet in Tel Aviv on May 13, and in the declaration of the State two days later. He returned to Czechoslovakia on June 6, and two weeks later finally received an answer to his emigration-mobilization plan from the Kremlin. At 3 A.M. on June 20, Mikunis received a telephone call from Georgi Malenkov complimenting him on his recent article in the Cominform organ, and asking him to restate his ideological inquiry. Mikunis then asked if it was within the current international Communist policy for him to call for a press conference in an effort to organize and mobilize Eastern European Jewish youth to fight for Israel. Without hesitating, Malenkov uttered the single Russian word "*Zakonno*" ("It is legal") and the phone went dead.<sup>51</sup> The following morning, on June 21, Mikunis called a press conference and spoke to some eighty foreign correspondents for more than three hours "in the name of the State Council of Israel and not as the Secretary-General of Maki."<sup>52</sup> Within days, offers of volunteers from East European governments began to pour in, the first of which was a pledge allowing the release of 400 volunteers from the divergent Yugoslav government. The official creation of the unit, which (though including volunteers originating in several Eastern European countries) would be called the Czech Brigade, was not accomplished until September, 1948, long after Mikunis's return to Israel.

There is little question that the efforts of Mordechai Oren, working behind the scenes most effectively until the February coup in Prague, and Shmuel Mikunis, whose efforts came after February, were probably

50. Avriel, "The Truth About Prague," part IV.

51. Conversations with Mikunis, August, 1969; Schiff, "Stalin Gave the Orders."

52. *Ibid.*

critically influential in Czechoslovakia's decision to aid the Haganah. The major question is, did Stalin, in fact, have anything to do with that decision? The surviving members of the Rechesh mission to Prague insist that all agreements with the Czechs were strictly on a commercial basis with little or no sympathetic or political motives involved. The Czech factories, they maintain, had surplus stocks of obsolete weapons and desperately needed dollars—the Jewish Agency had the ready cash and was willing to buy arms anywhere to fight an imminent Arab invasion. According to the Rechesh members, the Czech refusal to sell a second consignment of arms to the Syrians was due, not to the pressure put on by Gromyko (though the majority of Haganah leaders today admit that Gromyko did exert pressure in favor of the Jews), but due to the Syrians' holdings in "frozen" sterling as opposed to a ready supply of dollars. They further maintain that if Stalin had had any hand in influencing the Czech government, their close contacts and sympathetic friends within the government and party who had kept them continually informed of each turn of events would have immediately told them of Stalin's role.<sup>53</sup> In the two decades since Israel's independence, the roles of both groups—the official Rechesh team, and the unrecognized left-wing negotiators—have polarized in memoirs, press reports, and public opinion, and range, in degree, from each charging the other with "trying to steal the credit" to charges of "planning to subvert the nature of Israel's government." The facts indicate, however, that Oren and Mikunis did have an effect on the arms agreement, particularly after the February Revolution, and that, regardless of how Stalin became influenced, his hand in the Czech decision is manifest.

No major economic project was effected in postwar Czechoslovakia without prior permission from Moscow, as evidenced by Loeb's experience with the sudden cancellation of an already approved plan to erect a Zbrojovka arms factory in Egypt in late 1945, Stalin's midnight rejection of Czechoslovakia's intention to participate in the Marshall Plan in July, 1947, and the tightening network of highly unfavorable

53. Interviews and extended correspondence with Ehud Avriel, Shimon Ornstein, Netanel Lorch (at this writing secretary-general of the Knesset), Lt. Colonel Itzhak Shany (now the executive director of the *Mogen David Adom* [Red Star of David], Israel's equivalent of the Red Cross), and Lt. Colonel Gershon Rivlin (today the commanding officer of *Ma'arachot*, the Israeli Army Publishing House).



trade agreements between Prague and Moscow. It is commonly assumed that the export of goods is simply trade, but the export of weapons is politics. There is little chance that the essence of this philosophy escaped Stalin to the degree that he could have been uninterested in Czechoslovakia's commercial sale of weapons to the Haganah. The history of Soviet-Czech postwar relations, moreover, abounds with examples of increasing Kremlin pressure culminating in the February Revolution, ranging from the repeated experience of Czech trade delegations which unexpectedly found themselves negotiating with the powerful Soviet deputy chairman of the Council of Ministries and minister of foreign trade, Anastas Mikoyan, to the sudden and oddly coincidental appearance in Prague during the crucial week of February 19, of the deputy minister of foreign affairs, Valerian Zorin.<sup>54</sup> When Zorin left Prague for Moscow on the twenty-fifth, the day which saw the Czech government pass into the hands of the Communist party, Stalin became the uncontested suzerain of Czechoslovakia.

That the Communist coup would in no way hamper the relationship between the representatives of Palestine and the new Czech government was made clear by Antonin Zapotocky, deputy prime minister and chairman of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, in March 1948. In a statement published in *Davar* on March 28, on the occasion of a visit by a delegation of the Histadrut—the Jewish Federation of Labor in Palestine—Zapotocky stated:

In my name and in the name of the workers of Czechoslovakia please convey cordial regards to the workers of Palestine. Czechoslovakia's new government will not only continue the traditional friendship for

54. See Loeb, *Sentenced and Tried*, pp. 26–30. Zorin's appearance in Prague on the nineteenth, a day before the non-Communist ministers made their decision to resign, was made under the guise of supervising a delivery of Russian wheat to Czechoslovakia. Whether Zorin actively participated in the technicalities of the coup is unknown, but his very appearance at the moment could not have but provided massive psychological support to the Communist party. The most authoritative analyses of the Czech revolution may be found in Josef Korbel, *The Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia, 1938–1948* (Princeton, 1959); and Paul E. Zinner, *Communist Strategy and Tactics in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1948* (New York, 1963). See, also, the mimeographed analyses issued monthly by the National Committee For A Free Europe, Inc., *Free Europe Press, Czechoslovak Section*, New York; the monograph by Ivo Duchacek, *The Strategy of Communist Infiltration: The Case of Czechoslovakia* (New Haven, 1949); and Sterling, *The Masaryk Case*.

the cause of Palestine, but believes that this friendship between Czechoslovakia and Palestine will grow still more. The government will not only remain faithful to its policy towards Palestine, but, moreover, will not prevent any Czech Jew from participating in the rebuilding of the country.

These events affected the relationship between the Haganah arms purchasers and the new Czech government in a way that would seem to solve the mystery of Stalin's role in the question of aid to Israel. Arms consignments to the Jewish Agency immediately multiplied manifold, and from this time involved the open sale of fighter planes, heavier weapons, and the establishment of training camps in Czechoslovakia for Israeli pilots and paratroopers. Stalin's knowledge and support of this new relationship was further revealed on several occasions. One such disclosure occurred before the momentous United Nations partition resolution. Czechoslovakia's support for the resolution was energetically pursued by Jewish Agency delegates, especially in light of Masaryk's sympathy toward the Zionist movement. The long-standing personal friendship between the Czech foreign minister and the agency's delegate, Moshe Sharett, often involved cordial meetings when the two happened to cross paths in a strange city. During one such evening, Masaryk told Sharett of a conversation he had had with Stalin about Czechoslovakia's special attitude toward Zionism. Stalin had replied "that he knew of Czechoslovakia's views in this connection and that it was not fettered nor was there any intention of imposing upon it a policy that would be contrary to its desires and opinions on the issue."<sup>55</sup>

Another disclosure occurred during a meeting in mid-June, 1948, between the Soviet ambassador to Czechoslovakia, Valerian Zorin; the new first deputy prime minister and chairman of the state planning office, Dr. Jaromir Dolansky; and the new prime minister of Czechoslovakia, Klement Gottwald. The meeting had been called to discuss the desperate situation of the Czech economy, and within a short time tempers began to flare as each successive analysis of the situation proved worse than the preceding. Suddenly Gottwald, according to Shimon Ornstein, screamed at the Soviet ambassador: "Think of what we could have done with ourselves if it had not been for Stalin's decision to forbid us to get Marshall Plan dollars—look how different

55. David Horowitz, *State in the Making*, p. 198.

our situation could be, and we would not have reached the point we are at!" Zorin, equally quick tempered, replied: "You claim that Stalin did not let you join the Marshall Program, but you neglect to mention that he made it possible for you to obtain good dollars from the Israelis, by selling arms which did not even belong to you—for arms that you had already been paid for by the Germans—isn't that enough compensation?"<sup>56</sup>

A third revealing disclosure, made public by Mikunis, occurred when he went to Bulgaria in July, 1949, to attend Dimitrov's funeral. "During the funeral," he recalled, "I stood next to Voroshilov, and within a short time the subject of Israel's war of independence came up in our conversation. Voroshilov told me that the 'living spirit' of the Eastern support to Israel was Stalin himself. Mikoyan made a similar statement to me later that day."<sup>57</sup>

What, then, can be concluded about the roles and motivations of the Czech and Soviet governments in supplying military aid to the Haganah? During the period between the first arms purchase in December, 1947, and the coup d'état in February, 1948, the Czech government offered to supply the Jewish Agency with surplus weapons, in defiance of the United Nations embargo and heavy British and American pressure. The decision was primarily based on economic motives as a solution to Czechoslovakia's dire need for Western currency following Stalin's rejection of the invitation to participate in the Marshall Plan. At the same time, the personal sympathies of a number of leading Czech officials (who ironically were non-Jews) helped to direct the decision in favor of the Haganah rather than to the equally anxious Syrians and were responsible for the clearing of a number of bureaucratic problems which would have otherwise prevented the Haganah from successfully transporting the arms consignment to Palestine. Based upon Stalin's previous influence over Czechoslovakia's economic affairs, there can be little question that, although it was opposed by most of the Communist members of the govern-

56. Letter to the author from Shimon Ornstein, March 15, 1969. Ornstein was a member of the official Rechesh mission in Prague whose close friendship with many high Czech officials enabled him to learn of the conversation within hours of the close of the meeting. Ornstein remained in Prague as a member of the Israeli embassy and, together with Mordechai Oren, became bound up in the Slansky Trials.

57. Schiff, "Stalin Gave the Orders"; conversations with Mikunis, August, 1969.

ment, the decision was allowed to become operational with the Kremlin's permission. It is further evident that the behind-the-scenes efforts by the "roaming ambassador," Mordechai Oren, had a decided influence on the Kremlin's adjudication. Following the February coup, however, the relationship between the Rechesh team and the Czech government underwent a change. Military supplies available to the Jews increased enormously as did the help they received in transporting the consignments from Czechoslovakia, through several Eastern European countries, to Palestine. The weight of evidence indicates that Moscow stood directly behind the new emphasis and that the Soviet leaders were influenced, perhaps by promises of an impending pro-Soviet socialist Israel government made by Shmuel Mikunis. Characteristically, Stalin implemented his decision to add critical military aid to Russia's earlier diplomatic commitment through Czechoslovakia rather than directly through Russian arms manufacturers. If at any time the current close relations between the Soviet bloc and the new Jewish homeland underwent a change, it would be the Czechs and not the Russians who would bear the responsibility for the "ideological error." The Slansky trials of 1952 were the hard results of that responsibility.

At the moment, however, the relationship between the Jewish Agency, represented in Prague by the Haganah Rechesh team, and the new Czech government, were at their closest point. From February through midsummer of 1948, the members of the Rechesh, under Avriel's leadership, were shown a new horizon in military hardware and their only real limitations revolved around their ability to pay the enormous costs in dollars and the myriad intrigues involved in their transportation to the hard-pressed front lines of Israel.

## Rechesh: The Haganah in Czechoslovakia

THE HAGANAH-CZECH arms relationship, which had been approved by Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk, was honored and extended by his Communist successors, having meanwhile won the blessing of Moscow. Key veteran Haganah members, acting on Ben-Gurion's orders, began to flock to Prague from all points in Europe to put themselves at Avriel's disposal. Unauthorized left-wing and Communist representatives, led by Mikunis's political colleague, Dr. Moshe Sneh, also began arriving in Czechoslovakia in the hope of utilizing their political contacts with the new government to expedite the purchase and transport of critical arms. Being unfamiliar with the delicate negotiations already in progress, and having little governmental support or access to funds, these unofficial representatives were largely unsuccessful in their efforts; they soon drifted to other Eastern European areas. Avriel's expanded Rechesh team, meanwhile, began to pursue aggressively every opportunity to purchase a wider scope of weapons, and driven by a growing sense of urgency with regard to Palestine's defense capabilities, threw off its nearly transparent cloak of Ethiopian accreditation and declared that its increased requests for more sophisticated weaponry were being made in the name of the "legitimate Interim Government of Palestine."

The Rechesh team's initial anxiety over the new Communist government's attitude toward Palestine and the Haganah was quickly dispelled when Avriel was called to a meeting with General Bedrich

Reicin, deputy minister of defense, during the first week of March. The son of a poor Jewish family in Pilsen and a Communist since his early youth, Reicin had rapidly risen from the rank of private to one of the most powerful positions in the Czech army and security system. In addition to being the deputy minister of defense, General Reicin was recently revealed to have been the director of the Czech army's dreaded Second Department of Counter-Espionage, and a high-ranking operative of Beria's Soviet Centrum in Prague. The implications of a Centrum operative in the Czech government are staggering, not only in relation to the Communist coup of February, 1948, but in the case of the Rechesh purchases, adding substantial evidence that Stalin directly authorized the sale of weapons to Israel.<sup>1</sup> Responding more from the logic of expanding Czechoslovakia's economic base through the sale of surplus weapons than from his own long-forgotten Jewish background, Reicin was to become, in the final analysis, the key figure in all continued purchases by the Haganah. He assured Avriel, during their meeting in March, that although his decisions could not be completed without the concurrence of Prime Minister Gottwald, Minister of Defense General Svoboda, and Minister of the Interior Vaclav Nosek, he expected little difficulty. He further mentioned that both guns and tanks, obsolete for the Czech army but in otherwise perfect condition, were readily available both through the army and directly from the factories.<sup>2</sup> The individual members of the Rechesh team were assured further by personal friends in minor governmental positions that "those who were friendly toward Israel before the coup still maintained their influential posts, and that all purchases would be handled through the Government and factories with no interference from the Party."<sup>3</sup>

In a series of rapid purchases, Avriel bought consignments totalling 5,040,000 rounds of 7.92 mm. ammunition, 4,500 rifles (Mauser P-18), and 200 light machine guns (ZB-34) throughout the last two weeks of March.<sup>4</sup> Even before the Rechesh leadership had time to consider the problem of transportation, an urgent telegram from Ben-Gurion arrived in Prague on the last day of March ordering Avriel and Dr. Otto

1. Sterling, *The Masaryk Case*, pp. 189, 222, 223, 225, 231, 233, 340.

2. Avriel, "The Truth About Prague," part I.

3. Letter to the author from Shimon Ornstein, March 15, 1969.

4. Pinchas Vaze, *Rechesh* (Tel Aviv, 1966), pp. 184-85.

Felix (Uriel Doron) to load as many rifles and machine guns as could be transported in a Dakota and fly them to Palestine immediately. The arms were desperately needed for "Operation Nachshon," the military designation for the spearhead offensive which would open the Arab-held canyon road to the besieged city of Jerusalem.

The code name given to all flight transports of weapons was "Balak" and was assigned a top priority status.<sup>5</sup> The entire Haganah organization, represented by Avriel in Prague; Mardor in Palestine; Yehuda Arrazi in Italy; Avigur and Koslovsky in Switzerland; and Al Schwimmer in the United States, went into high gear to locate immediate and direct transportation. A two-engine Dakota DC-3 was finally offered by a private company called the Overseas Airline Company. In order to compensate for the risk involved in running the British blockade with weapons, an astronomical price was demanded for the lease of the plane to the Jewish Agency. Anxious over becoming involved in any international incident, the Overseas Airline Company provided the plane with a complete non-Jewish crew, and chartered it under the guise of transporting scrap iron to Ethiopia. Then the Dakota flew empty to meet the Rechesh team in Czechoslovakia. Government officials in Prague overlooked the arrival of the plane, pretended not to notice the weapons being loaded aboard, and ignored a Haganah navigator, Ami Kupperman, joining the crew to help guide them to a secret airfield in Palestine. The plane took off on March 31, only thirty-six hours after the arrival of Ben-Gurion's urgent telegram, and flew directly to a British-built airfield in southern Palestine called Beit Daras. In preparation for the Dakota's arrival the airfield's official Arab guards had been garroted and torches brought to outline the runway. The DC-3 arrived at 10 P.M. that evening, and was being refueled even as the arms were being unloaded and placed on trucks bound for the front.<sup>6</sup> Exactly eighty minutes after its arrival in Palestine, the chartered Dakota took off for Prague, where it was greeted by enraged representatives from the American embassy who interrogated the crew and angrily ordered them not to become involved again with

5. The code name "Balak" was taken from the Biblical story (Numbers 22:2) in which the Moabite king Balak, son of Tsippor, was dissuaded from attacking the Israelites by a Divine messenger. Tsippor, furthermore, is the Hebrew word for bird.

6. Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword*, p. 94.

weapon transports to Palestine. The State Department now had, for the first time, actual confirmation of arms shipments from the Czechs to the Haganah, although public protests against such a relationship were not formally made until September.<sup>7</sup> The Overseas Airline Company, nonetheless, persisted in its right to deal with whomever it chose, and privately accepted one more delivery contract from the Haganah—at the same exorbitant price. The second delivery, called “Balak 2,” was made two weeks later, when the chartered Dakota landed at Beit Daras with 16,000,000 rounds of 7.92 ammunition, 1,500,000 rounds of 9 mm. Parabellum ammunition, 10,000 rifles (Mauser P-18), 600 light machine guns (ZB-34), and 815 medium machine guns.<sup>8</sup> From this point, an “air-bridge” was gradually established under the joint leadership of Avriel in Prague and Munya Mardor and Benjamin Kagan in Palestine. With the use of DC-3 planes chartered from the Czech National Airlines, as well as from several factories, ninety-five additional Balak flights were made during the spring and summer of 1948.<sup>9</sup>

At this time, a new and controversial figure appeared during Avriel’s attempts to obtain more substantial types of weapons: an American Jew by the name of Michael Alexander Taub. Avriel was currently living in the Esplanad Hotel in Prague when he was contacted by Taub, who happened to live in the same hotel, to discuss a series of proposals which might aid the Haganah. An elderly man, Michael Taub had worked for the General Motors overseas operations division, in the Vauxhall engineering department at Luton, England, until 1940. Obtaining a war service leave, Taub went to the United States and never returned to General Motors. While there is no way of knowing whether Taub was recruited by the Czech government in 1946 or volunteered his services and expert knowledge of the automotive industry, or even, for that matter, if he had entirely severed his relations

7. *New York Times*, September 2, 1948, p. 8.

8. Vase, *Rechesh*, pp. 184–85. The original bill of lading, as made out by the Czechs at the direction of the Haganah, contained the following cryptic terms: six cases each containing three “heavies”; three cases each containing six “feet”; one case containing three “feet”; one case containing eighteen “optical instruments”; one case containing four boxes of “A,” “AA,” and “SA”; one case containing twelve “direction indicators”; one case containing two “tripods.” *Ibid.*, pp. 178–79.

9. Avigdor Shahan, *Kanfei Hanizahon* [The Wings of Victory] (Tel Aviv, 1966), pp. 78–79—hereafter cited as “The Wings of Victory”; Schiff, “Stalin Gave the Orders”; Kagan, *The Secret Battle for Israel*, pp. 56–57.



with any Western firm, there is little question that he was immediately accepted into inner government circles and exercised no small influence on Czechoslovakia's postwar industrial policy.<sup>10</sup> From 1946 Taub was the technical consultant to Dr. Frantisek Fabinger, the director general of Czechoslovakia's machine and tool (heavy industry) sector, and was therefore in a position to offer Avriel a wide range of factory and government contacts. He particularly recommended the Kolben-Daněk works, from whom he had already learned that a large number of surplus tanks were available for dollar transactions. The factory offer was undoubtedly genuine and Taub's influence with key members of the Czech economy was every bit as reliable as boasted. Avriel had no sooner grasped the situation and begun to consider the enormous problems of transporting the tanks to Palestine, when Taub suddenly presented a different and totally novel scheme. Correctly gauging the anxiety of American Jews over the Jewish Agency's inability to secure arms, Taub suggested a plan to mobilize American Jewish influence upon its own government agencies to prevent an impending American boycott of Czech goods. "American Jews will help sell Czech goods with the slogan 'Buy Czech and Help Israel,'" said Taub, "and I am sure that Czechoslovakia will not only agree to that plan, but will know how to show their appreciation for such help by intensifying their support to Israel."<sup>11</sup> The idea sounded somewhat farfetched, but Avriel was in no position to question any offer of aid. The following week Taub called on Avriel again, bringing a plan of the program which had already been enthusiastically endorsed by both deputy ministers of foreign trade, Rudolf Margolius and Eugene Loeb.<sup>12</sup> The project, to be called the "Avriel Program," would knowingly expose the extent of Czech aid to Israel in the hopes of enlisting the economic support of American Jewry; the final memorandum was submitted to the Czech government for its formal approval on

10. Inquiry to General Motors resulted in the company's absolute assurance that a search through Taub's personnel files revealed little more than that "he definitely was not a General Motors representative, or employee after 1940." Letter to the author, February 18, 1970.

11. Avriel, "The Truth About Prague," part I.

12. This endorsement would later constitute the major charges of "economic treason" and "subjugation of the Czech economy to American imperialist interests" for which they were tried in the Slansky trial of 1952. Loeb, *Sentenced and Tried*, pp. 168-69, 186, 201-2.

June 18, 1948. A week later, his job in Czechoslovakia completed, Taub left for the United States in order to inaugurate the Avriel Program and, quite mysteriously, was never heard from again. The campaign never materialized and its failure was attributed by both the disappointed Czech government and the Haganah to the enthusiastic pipe dreams of an individual whose attention would be quickly attracted to another scheme. There was, however, an important by-product of Michael Taub's Avriel Program: it resulted in a very close rapport between Avriel's Rechesh team and the Czech ministry of foreign trade, which lasted from mid-April, when both groups began to get enthusiastic over Taub's grandiose plans, until late in the summer, when Taub's campaign failed to materialize.<sup>13</sup> It was this rapport that laid the groundwork which led to Avriel's success in buying consignments of Messerschmitt and Spitfire fighter planes.

The source of these fighter planes can be traced to the German military complex during the latter part of World War II. At that time, the German policy had been to use the capacity of the highly developed Czechoslovakian aircraft industry for the manufacture of fighter planes, especially by 1944 when most of the German plants were under constant attack by USAF and RAF bombers. A large complex of subcontractors in the Prague area had been ordered to tool up for the production of Messerschmitt Bf 109G-14 components, which were to be assembled at the Avia factory at Prague-Cakovice. However, actual deliveries to Germany were not scheduled to begin until May, 1945, at which time the war ended and the production complex fell into Czech hands virtually intact. The Cakovice plant continued the production of improved models, eventually developing the Avia-Messerschmitt S-199, which they hoped would appeal to foreign buyers. The Czech model, however, compared less favorably with other planes on the world market, and Czechoslovakia was unable to find a single foreign buyer for its Messerschmitt fighter planes—until the spring of 1948.

By mid-April, Palestine was already embroiled in fighting. The road

13. Prior to the enthusiasm over the Taub scheme, the Rechesh team had continued to purchase and stockpile weapon consignments from mid-March to mid-April. The majority of these consignments arrived in Israel aboard the Polish vessel *Gdynia* on May 14, 1948. The shipment included 10,000,000 rounds of ammunition, jeeps, and an undisclosed number of ZB machine-guns and 20 mm. guns, with a large amount of matching ammunition.

to Jerusalem was not yet open, and heavy Haganah offensives were under way to clear Tiberias on the sea of Galilee, as well as the area around Jerusalem and the port city of Haifa. In Prague, the Rechesh team was under daily pressure to buy as many weapons as possible and to fly them to Palestine immediately. The Balak flights which began on April 1 were still in the early stages of operation and would not comprise a regular “air-bridge” until after mid-May. Avriel and Dr. Felix now began to pursue a contract to purchase a consignment of fighter planes; the existence of the Messerschmitts, stored in factory warehouses, were well known. It was an ambitious plan, for not only was the Haganah treasury in Geneva ill-equipped to provide large and immediate cash payments in dollars, but the enormous problems of delivering to Palestine a consignment of fighter planes whose tanks held fuel enough for only two hours flying time had not yet even been considered. The actual negotiations were carried out through a go-between with the government and factory officials—an “influence-peddler” who was simply known to the Rechesh members as “The Indian.” Through this broker a number of Messerschmitt fighters were located, bureaucratic obstacles were by-passed, and a contract was drawn up for Felix’s signature. On April 23, 1948, the contract was signed for ten Messerschmitt-109 (Avia’s designation was S-199) fighter planes, an ironic beginning for the Jewish air force considering the regime for whom the planes were designed. The price agreed upon was \$44,000 per plane, including spare parts, cannon, machine guns, and bombs.<sup>14</sup> The Haganah agents realized that, although the Jewish Agency had large numbers of pilots available both as a result of war-time service with the British forces and through foreign volunteers

14. An ironic side issue to the purchase concerned a man named Rottenberg, a Russian engineer who, when emigrating to Palestine before the war, had stopped in Prague in the hope of obtaining some sort of sales post. Perhaps in a moment of levity, Rottenberg was made representative of the entire Middle East by Avia. He never sold anything until 1948, when the Czechs suddenly decided to honor his early contract as their representative in the Middle East. Avriel was elated to hear that a Palestinian Jew was involved, assuming that patriotism would motivate him to waive his 2½ percent commission—something which Rottenberg refused to do. Despite all efforts at persuasion, Rottenberg collected and kept his “salesman’s” commission amounting to \$115,000 for the total number of Messerschmitts purchased by the Haganah, and moved to Scandinavia. Later, in a rather audacious act, Rottenberg brought legal action against the State of Israel in 1969 to collect an additional \$30,000 for his commission on other Avia items sold to the Haganah—and won!

who were flocking to Palestine, few, if any, pilots were qualified to fly a Messerschmitt plane. As a result, the Czech contract contained a provision for the secret training of Israeli pilots and technicians in Czechoslovakia—a major concession by the normally cautious Czech government.

The secret airfield chosen by the Czech ministry of defense for the training of Haganah pilots—and eventually paratroopers and tank drivers—was approximately seventy-five miles west of Prague, near the town of Žatec. The entire field was turned over to the Haganah, which promptly renamed it *Etzion* (little tree), a name which became the official code word used by the Czech staff officers and in all official papers concerning the Haganah. The area, which was under the command of Yehuda Briger (later Ben-Hurin), soon became a beehive of activity, and by May and June of 1948 there were often no less than 400 volunteers present and as many as eight planes standing by the same time. The small town of Žatec, with a population of 15,000 people, contained only three hotels—all taken over by the trainees.<sup>15</sup> Since the ten Messerschmitt fighters, already bought, were still being overhauled and refitted with new parts by Avia mechanics as stipulated in the contract, the Rechesh team shifted emphasis momentarily to the establishment of a pilot's course which would produce the men to fly them.

On May 5, 1948, eight Haganah men were sent from Palestine to learn the intricacies of piloting Messerschmitt fighters from Czech army officers. Since the training camp at Žatec was temporarily occupied with the problems of assembling arms consignments for the near-weekly Balak flights, as well as experimenting with several completed Messerschmitts to determine the best way to transport them to Palestine, the student pilots were diverted to a training field in České-Budějovice on the Vltava River. Surprisingly, the over-eager Israelis did not perform well, and with the exception of three who had previously had flying experience during World War II and who were able to complete the Messerschmitt course, the remaining five were advised by their unsettled Czech instructors to learn to fly elsewhere. The training area at České-Budějovice was then temporarily turned over

15. Avriel, "The Truth About Prague," part I; Schiff, "Stalin Gave the Orders." See, also, the excellent book by Leonard Slater, *The Pledge* (New York, 1970), pp. 258–61, 287–302.

to the Jewish foreign volunteers (called *Mahal*), most of whom were former pilots, and placed under the command of Al Schwimmer.<sup>16</sup>

Now desperate for qualified pilots, the Haganah sent thirteen more potential pilots, including Motti Fein (who later, as Mordechai Hod, was commander of the Israeli Air Force and, after 1972, assistant to the minister of defense) in order that they might obtain their training in Italy. The Italian government had unofficially informed the Haganah representatives that they would be willing to allow, for a substantial fee, a number of Palestinian Jews to undergo flight training in regular air force training areas. Upon their arrival in Rome on May 13, however, the thirteen Haganah members met with a series of bureaucratic obstacles which forced more than half of them to proceed to Czechoslovakia instead. Since the Žatec camp was still concerned with problems regarding the Balak flights, and the eight Haganah men who had arrived in Czechoslovakia on the fifth were in the midst of an unsuccessful, but far from uneventful, training course at České-Budějovice, the new trainees were rerouted to the Czech Air Academy at Hradec Králové east of Prague. They were well received by the Czech officers, and although they were informed that an unusually high fee was required to enroll, the training would be shortened to fit the Haganah's critical timetable and that every effort, including training on Messerschmitts, would be made to shape the course to their requirements and potential combat terrain conditions. Within days the price had been agreed upon by the commander of the Haganah Air Force, Aharon Remez, via a cable from Tel Aviv

16. Shahan, 'The Wings of Victory,' p. 63. Al Schwimmer is today the director of Israel's aeronautic industry. While the exact number of foreign volunteers in the Israeli army during the 1948 struggle is unknown, Foreign Minister Sharett admitted during a luncheon of the Anglo-American Press Association in Paris that they formed "less than 10% of its numbers." *JAD*, December 17, 1948, pp. 16-17. Based upon the commonly estimated figure of 50,000 men under arms in the Israeli Armed Forces (*Zahal*), then slightly less than 5,000—most of whom came from the United States, Great Britain, and South Africa—were foreigners. The majority of volunteers were placed in positions of leadership, such as U.S. Army colonel Mickey Marcus (see Ted Berkman's *Cast a Giant Shadow*, New York, 1962), or were assigned as pilots and training specialists. The only available source regarding these civilian volunteers is the historical novel by Harold E. Livingston, *The Coasts of the Earth* (Boston, 1964). For limited information, see Lawrence Lader, "From Junk Heap to Air Might," *New Republic*, November 8, 1948, pp. 10-14; Don Cook, "Tough Little Army," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 18, 1956, pp. 26-27, 94.

through Avriel in Prague, and potential pilots began to flock to the Academy.<sup>17</sup>

According to all accounts, the training received by the Haganah pilots in Czechoslovakia, both at České-Budějovice and Hradec Králové, was excellent, as most of the instructors had served either in the RAF or the Red Army during World War II. In addition, it appeared that the instructors were deeply sympathetic to Israel's position in the Middle East struggle. A change in the training program took place in early June, however, when Israel's undersecretary of air affairs, Chai Issahar, came to Czechoslovakia to check on the training courses and, having never been consulted, was astonished at the fees being paid to the Czech air force training centers. It was quickly agreed, within the Haganah high command, that in order to avoid the possibility of a public disclosure of Czech military aid which might result from pointed questions in the Israeli Knesset, the amount of money being paid to the Czech schools would have to be sharply reduced. This was accomplished by replacing the Haganah's Czech instructors with several American volunteer flyers who were sent from Israel to continue the training of Israeli pilots at the same Czech schools. This method of training continued through the summer months; as each pilot finished the course, he was generally assigned a position in the flights going to Israel, either on the Balak trips ferrying arms and dismantled Messerschmitts, or with the later Velveta flights, piloting British Spitfires on the dangerous nonstop trips to Israel. By September, however, relations between the Czechs and the Israeli pilots, for reasons which will be discussed later, began to cool, evolving into a silent indifference which even the Czech instructors made plain. Haganah headquarters soon decided that there was little point in going on, and recalled all Israeli trainees and pilots.<sup>18</sup> The total number of Israeli

17. Shahan, 'The Wings of Victory,' p. 64. All Haganah trainees were required to wear Czech army uniforms to help camouflage their presence. Ben-Gurion, *The Restored State of Israel*, p. 128; Schiff, "Stalin Gave the Orders." An excellent contemporary account of both the pilot training program and the dispatch of Messerschmitts to Israel can be found in a collection of letters from Lt. Colonel Eliahu Saharov to Aharon Remez, commander of the air force in 1948, and cabinet minister Yisrael Galili, commander of the Haganah. The collection of letters was provided to the author by the foreign ministry of Israel.

18. "The Haganah youngsters weren't allowed to fly for weeks. At first, their [Czech] teachers wanted to help, but could not do anything without express orders from Prague. Officially, the Czech government did not ask us to recall our fellows

pilots trained to full qualification in Czechoslovakia between May and September, 1948, is estimated at between fifty and seventy-five, far more than there were fighter planes available.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to the pilot courses, the initiation of a paratrooper training program occurred somewhat spontaneously, with little planning on the part of either the Czechs or the Haganah. During a routine meeting with General Reicin in the last week of May, 1948, Rechesh leader Ehud Avriel casually suggested a program for training Israeli parachutists to which Reicin unexpectedly agreed. Since time was critically important to the Haganah, it was decided that rather than send to Israel for paratrooper recruits, members of various missions already in Eastern Europe would be called to Czechoslovakia. The matter passed from Avriel to Nahum Shadmi, commanding officer of the Haganah in Western Europe, and then to Yaakov Solomon, head of the Haganah's Balkan section, and finally to the officer who was to become the head of the paratrooper course in Czechoslovakia, Chaim Gury. Travelling under his real name of Gorfinkle, Chaim Gury was then working underground in Budapest, secretly conducting a military training course for young potential emigrants to Israel. Ordered to leave immediately for Czechoslovakia, Gury arrived in Prague on June 10, 1948, to find the city "loaded with Israelis, and a group of 50 fellows, among them two American volunteers, waiting to receive parachutist training."<sup>20</sup>

Under Gury's command, the group was taken to a training base in the Sudeten area called Strash Podarsk where they were turned over to two Czech paratrooper officers for training. As the appointed commander of the group, Gury was assigned the rank of captain, everyone was issued Czech army uniforms, and the rigorous training course began the same day. The program was as rugged as any of the men had ever undergone, with additional major emphasis on comman-

to Israel, they simply apologized, saying that they had no planes handy for training. It was a poor excuse, for the field was packed with 'Messers.'" Colonel Benjamin Kagan, "Magi'im" [Arriving], *Biton Chel Ha'veer* [Official Journal of the Air Force], 12th year, no. 52 (1960), p. 25—hereafter cited as *Air Force Journal*.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–68.

20. Michael Bar-Zohar and Eytan Habir, "Kfotz Juri!—Hatzanchanim" [Jump, Juri!—The Parachutists], *Yediot Aharonot*, no. 290 (August 8, 1969), p. 3. Chaim Gury is today Israel's poet laureate. A second participant who later achieved success is Shimshon Bar-Noi, one of Israel's popular singers.

do training, espionage, the use of explosives, and the ability to live off the land. The course was classified “Top Secret” and later talks between Avriel and various Czech officials indicated that even a number of senior officers in the ministry of defense not directly connected with the training program were unaware of its existence. To maintain continued secrecy from inquisitive members of the American and British embassy staffs, the Israeli trainees were instructed to wear civilian clothes on their infrequent weekends in Prague, and were forbidden to speak Hebrew at any time outside of the training compound.<sup>21</sup> The parachutist course lasted two months, ending in the middle of August, 1948, after which the men were “graduated” and released to Žatec airbase to be flown to Israel aboard various Balak flights. There they formed the nucleus of Israel’s paratrooper force, composed of select Israeli and foreign volunteers, and were ordered into combat in the fall of 1948.

Meanwhile the Balak flights continued to supply consignments of weapons to Palestine, delivering more than 107 tons of arms between March 31 and May 20.<sup>22</sup> During that period, the following shipments<sup>23</sup> arrived at Beit Daras:

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| Balak 2 | 10,000 rifles (Mauser P-18)                        |
|         | 1,415 machine-guns (600 light machine-guns, ZB-34; |
|         | 815 heavy machine-guns, ZB-37)                     |
|         | 16,000,000 rounds of ammunition (7.92 mm.)         |
|         | 1,500,000 rounds of ammunition (9 mm. Parabellum)  |
|         | Cost: \$2,528,000                                  |
| Balak 3 | 10,000 rifles (Mauser P-18)                        |
|         | 3,400 machine-guns                                 |
|         | 30,000,000 rounds of ammunition                    |
|         | Cost: \$4,467,000                                  |
| Balak 4 | 75 heavy machine-guns (ZB-37)                      |
|         | 1,000,000 rounds of anti-tank ammunition           |
|         | 5,000,000 rounds of ammunition                     |
|         | Cost: \$700,000                                    |

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

22. Shahan, ‘Wings of Victory,’ p. 144. Following the declaration of independence on May 14, 1948, the name “Palestine” was replaced by the name “Israel” and events occurring after that date will be referred to in that way.

23. Compiled from Ben-Gurion’s *The Restored State of Israel*, p. 103.



By May 17, the ten Messerschmitt fighters began to arrive at Žatec from the Avia plant at Cakovice. The Haganah officers were then faced with two initial problems: Could the variety of transport planes, Lockheed Constellations (C-121) bought in the United States, DC-3s chartered from the Czech Bata shoe factory, and Curtis Commandos (C-46) arrive in time to deliver the Messerschmitts to Israel, where an Egyptian armored column was already moving on Tel Aviv? And if so, could the 7,000-pound Messerschmitts be dismantled to fit, along with an additional 5,000 pounds of spare parts and armament per plane, into the transport planes?

The transport planes began to arrive at Žatec on May 16. Following an earlier request by Avriel for the use of a Czech transport plane, the ministry of defense suggested that he “charter a DC-3 from the Czech National Airlines or a Dakota from the famous Bata shoe factory.”<sup>24</sup> Agreements were quickly completed with both companies on May 13. In addition, two Commando transports left Panama on May 15,<sup>25</sup> piloted by American volunteers, and after a series of hair-raising midnight landings in Sicily and at Israel’s new military field at Ekron, they arrived at Žatec on the 17th.<sup>26</sup> The problem of fitting the Messerschmitts through the narrow doorways of the transports was far less difficult to solve, as Czech technicians assigned by the government to aid the Israelis worked feverishly to disassemble them in such a way as to make it possible for untrained individuals at Ekron to reconstruct them. By the nineteenth, the Messerschmitts were loaded aboard the waiting transports, with the wings and propellers removed and packed separately; as an added concession the Czech ministry of defense assigned a group of technicians to accompany each Messerschmitt de-

24. Kagan, *Air Force Journal*, p. 32. The Bata shoe factory at Zlin was willing to lease two obsolete Dakotas if payment were made in dollars, and was even persuaded to remove the Czech identification marks from both planes. Kagan, *The Secret Battle for Israel*, pp. 139–40.

25. The Panamanian government continued to maintain the cover organization, Lineas Aereas de Panama (LAPSA), established long before by the Haganah in order to evade the FBI, and all Israeli-bought aircraft leaving from Panama’s Tocumen Airport were so listed and bore the registration marks “R.X.” Kagan, *The Secret Battle for Israel*, p. 26.

26. Shahan, ‘Wings of Victory,’ p. 141. The foreign volunteers in the Israeli army (Mahal) quickly renamed Žatec “Zebra” and Ekron “Oklahoma,” and all letters and memoirs of the period use these names exclusively.

livery.<sup>27</sup> The spare parts, bombs, and armament were carefully crated and amusingly labeled “Fragile—Glassware.” When the transports took off for Ekron field in Israel the following morning, May 20, Shaul Avigur was notified by Yehuda Briger at Žatec and sent the following cable to Aharon Remez, commander of the Israeli Air Force:

20. 5. 48.

FROM O. R. [Avigur] TO JESSE [Remez]

TODAY YOU SHOULD RECEIVE THE FIRST KNIVES WHICH YOU WILL HAVE TO ASSEMBLE. THE GENTILE TECHNICIANS WILL BE ALONG, FIND A TRANSLATOR, AND TAKE CARE OF THEM. SEND BACK TO OFRI [Czechoslovakia] 2–3 MEN TO ESCORT COMING BALAKS. THEY DO NOT HAVE TO BE PILOTS.<sup>28</sup>

The Messerschmitt fighters arrived on May 21, just in time to halt an Egyptian armored column which had penetrated to within thirty miles of Tel Aviv.<sup>29</sup>

The first delivery of Messerschmitt fighter planes to Ekron was not without a variety of serious accidents and one fatal crash, however, and it became quickly evident to both the Czech and Israeli officials that some network of refueling bases would have to be established along the flight route. The Haganah had some months before accepted a private offer from the French government to utilize the Ajaccio airport on the island of Corsica, west of Italy and northeast of the French mainland, on the specific condition that the real object of the operations never be revealed. It was, in practice, a delicate situation, based on continued bribery of local airport officials and the exchange of passwords; and al-

27. Schiff, “Stalin Gave the Orders.” The release of these technicians was a major concession by the Czech government. Most of them “declined” to return to Žatec. The additional problem of secrecy was always present. One of the Haganah officers in charge of the Messerschmitt delivery later recalled that “there were many Arabs in Prague at the time, but we succeeded in concealing the whole deal from them. The U.S. Embassy tried to contact the crews of American Jews, but failed. The Czechs were somewhat frightened and notified us that the crews weren’t cautious enough in their behavior.” *Ibid.*

28. Shahan, ‘Wings of Victory,’ p. 140; Ben-Gurion, *The Restored State of Israel*, p. 128. The air force which Remez commanded was largely dismantled aboard the arriving transports. The arriving Messerschmitts were formed into the first fighter squadron of the Israeli Air Force, boldly named the 101st. (The word “Knife,” in Hebrew *sakinim*, is a translation of the German word *Messer*.)

29. Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword*, p. 266.

though it had been invaluable in the refueling of lightly loaded transport planes, the ponderously heavy Balak flights required a stopover field much closer to the direct route between Czechoslovakia and Israel.<sup>30</sup> Any hope that facilities in Greece might be available were quickly dashed when the Greek government absolutely forbid the Balak flights to land at its fields, and enforced its position by confiscating the consignments (and on several occasions imprisoning the crews) of flights which for safety or navigation reasons could not avoid landing. The Bulgarian government volunteered to place its facilities at the disposal of the Israeli government provided a fee of \$10,000 was paid for each landing, and although ten planes eventually landed (and paid the fee), the Haganah decided to look elsewhere for stopover points.<sup>31</sup> By the end of May, all eyes began to turn toward Yugoslavia for help.

Tito was currently engaged in controversy with Stalin which would explode like a thunderclap with Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform of June 28, and was in no mood to become involved in a new problem. The first request by Israeli authorities to obtain a landing field was summarily denied by the Yugoslavian government. With only Bulgaria as an alternative, the Haganah instructed Ehud Avriel and a new, highly qualified, officer, Yesha'ayahu Trachtenberg (now Yesha'ayahu Dan), to redouble their efforts in obtaining a field, and after besieging the authorities with requests and reminders of wartime friendships, Israel was finally granted landing rights on June 15. Trachtenberg was supplied with a Yugoslav plane, and together with the Haganah officer who would command the field, Gadi Schochat, flew over the countryside for a week before settling on the perfect field. They chose an abandoned airport in Montenegro, on the Albanian border—the southernmost field available—at the town of Podgorica (since renamed Titograd). A Yugoslav air force unit was put at Schochat's disposal to help both in the loading of the planes and in guarding the field. There was, however, no food or aviation fuel available, and both had to be supplied by Israeli tankers which docked at the nearby port, Kotor. The Yugoslav authorities insisted upon absolute secrecy, and although the Israelis were billeted in town, they were not allowed to buy

30. Kagan, *The Secret Battle for Israel*, p. 93; Schiff, "Stalin Gave the Orders." An additional consideration in locating a new field was the growing interest in the "Panamanian" traffic by British and American authorities.

31. Kagan, *Air Force Journal*, p. 26.

food or to converse with the local populace. Four days after their arrival at Podgorica, the Israelis put the field in operating condition, and with radio equipment flown in from Israel, established open radio communication with the embassy in Prague and with Haganah headquarters in Tel Aviv. The Yugoslavian base became the standard refueling point for all future flights between Czechoslovakia and Israel.<sup>32</sup>

When independence was declared on May 14 in Tel Aviv, and it suddenly became necessary for Israel to extend diplomatic relations abroad, it is not surprising that Israel's first official representative was its ambassador to Czechoslovakia. Since the Haganah had had no time to prepare a diplomatic staff, it seemed most logical to simply appoint those individuals already available; thus, on May 19, 1948, Ehud Avriel became Israel's minister plenipotentiary to Czechoslovakia, and later Israel's minister plenipotentiary to Hungary as well. In addition, the members of the Rechesh team in Prague were appointed as members of the embassy staff, positions for which nearly all the men (most of whom were urban and cultured Eastern Europeans) were more than qualified. Their new diplomatic positions also enabled the Israelis to pursue the purchase of arms as official representatives of a legal government. Avriel later recalled that "when I presented my credentials to President Gottwald, I hinted in my speech about our gratitude for Czechoslovakia's help to Israel and after the ceremony, when Gottwald, Clementis and I were left alone we had an informal talk about the weapons."<sup>33</sup>

The next day, on May 20, Avriel signed a new contract for fifteen additional Messerschmitt fighter planes, exported under the designation "C-210," at twice the original price, \$80,000 per plane. One week later, Avriel sent the following letter to Ben-Gurion:

26. 5. 48.

. . . the negotiations [for a loan] with the government are about to end, and according to the Deputy Minister of Finance, there is a 95% chance that we shall receive the loan within a few days. . . .  
The main acquisitions will be:

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

33. Avriel, "The Truth About Prague," part I. Avriel's appointment was a deep disappointment to Dr. Otto Felix, first contacted by the Czech government, and a central figure in most Rechesh purchases. He felt that the post should have been his.

- 1) Planes. We have been offered 30 Messerschmitts, 30 Spitfires (No. 9) (the Arabs have an older and less desirable model, No. 5) and 9 Mosquitoes. . . .
- 2) Tanks. We have been offered 30 16-ton tanks which we could get at once, and another 30 if we wait until the end of June. . . . Tomorrow we shall hear offers for heavier tanks. . . .<sup>34</sup>

The air-bridge between Žatec (Yehuda Briger), Podgorica (Gadi Schochat), and Ekron (Munya Mardor) was now in full operation with more than thirty Balak flights being completed between May 20 and June 10. In addition, Žatec was the base for Israel's single long-range bombing mission when, on July 14, three B-17 Fortresses piloted by American volunteers bombed Cairo, Gaza, and El-Arish.<sup>35</sup>

On July 15, the Czech government ratified a contract with Israel for fifty-nine British Spitfire IX fighter planes and spare parts, which had been turned over to Czechoslovakia by the RAF at the end of the war. The price agreed upon by the 1948 contract was \$23,000 per plane, far more reasonable than the prices asked for the Messerschmitts some months earlier. There were, however, some major problems involved in the undertaking. The contract for the Spitfires called for delivery and overhaul in a factory at Kunovice, a small town in Slovakia, 250 miles from Prague. All spare parts, ground equipment, and armament had to be gathered from airfields throughout the country and delivered to the same factory for packing. The job of tracking down all the equipment, supervising its delivery to Kunovice, and preparing the planes for transport to Israel fell to an American volunteer, Sam Pom-erantz, the Haganah's chief technician for its operations in Czechoslovakia.

A difficult task at best, the job of expediting the whole Spitfire operation was further complicated by the increasing tension between the Haganah and the Czech government. For reasons which will be dis-

34. Vaze, *Rechesh*, pp. 239-40; Ben-Gurion, *The Restored State of Israel*, p. 131. Instead of the thirty Messerschmitts, the Haganah increased the quantity of the less expensive Spitfires from thirty to sixty.

35. Mardor, *Strictly Illegal*, pp. 219-20. The raid was a "long-range bombing mission" in the loosest terms, for the planes were fortunate to have simply reached their targets. Most of the navigational instruments were not working, they were nearly shot down by anti-aircraft fire over Albania, and due to the failure of the hastily patched up oxygen system, seven of the nine crew members made the journey in various stages of unconsciousness.

cussed later, the honeymoon period was quickly drawing to a close and the Czech government began to hamper the continued operation of the Balak flights from Žatec and the training of pilots at České-Budějovice and Hradec Králové, and suspiciously restricted the movements of all Israeli personnel in Czechoslovakia. The Spitfire agreement, the Haganah's final and most ambitious purchase in Czechoslovakia, was obstructed at every turn. Commanding officers at various air bases, for instance, somehow did not consider the delivery of the required planes and parts to Kunovice among their first priority objectives. On one occasion, after landing at an airfield which was retroactively considered "restricted," Sam Pomerantz was accused of being an American spy and was the object of a half-hearted attempt by the Czech government to have him expelled from the country. The greatest obstacles, however, came from the factory at Kunovice where "unseen" technical problems and work halts brought the Spitfire operation to a near halt. The Haganah eventually traced the orders which had been issued to both factory personnel and airfield commanders to Otto Fischl, deputy minister of both the interior and finance. Learning that Fischl was deeply disliked by his own Communist colleagues in the government, the Haganah quickly created a minor governmental intrigue which successfully isolated Fischl's power and prestige.<sup>36</sup>

By mid-August, in an atmosphere of Czech antagonism which was reaching serious proportion, the Spitfires were finally being made available for delivery to Israel. Only days before, on August 12, the Czech government, submitting in part to American diplomatic pressure, ordered the immediate evacuation of the Žatec base.<sup>37</sup> Within a few days, the Haganah was given limited use of the field, but was ordered to maintain a total blanket of secrecy; its use of the field was restricted to a system of security passes and Czech officer escorts. The delivery of the Spitfires now became a very important matter to the Czechs, who were eager to bring their agreements with the Haganah to a close, as well as to the Israelis, who were receiving daily cables from Tel Aviv with warnings about Egypt's military build-up during the rapidly ending second United Nations truce. There were, basically, two conven-

36. Kagan, *Air Force Journal*, p. 26; Avriel, "The Truth About Prague," part III, *Ma'ariv*, December 8, 1952.

37. The pressure of increased British and American interest in Czechoslovakia's aid to Israel will be discussed later in this book.



Location of major training sites and weapons assembly areas.



Routes of the Balak and Velveta flights.

tional methods for the delivery of the Spitfires to Israel. The first was to dismantle them, as had been done with the Messerschmitts, and pack them aboard transport planes; but, since the Czech authorities continued to forbid the open use of Žatec, as well as any other field, there was little possibility of re-establishing an air bridge of Balak flights. The second method, proposed by the Czechs themselves, was to dismantle the planes, send them by train across Europe to the nearest port, and ship them from there by boat to Israel. While this would have been the most secret and secure method of delivery, it also would have been the slowest, and Israel was approaching another critical military offensive with the Egyptians over the future of the Negev desert. There was, however, a third alternative: somehow to fly the Spitfires, whose maximum flight time was two hours aloft, directly to Israel, a trip which would take between nine and ten hours!

The astonishing plan, proposed by Sam Pomerantz, consisted of stripping the Spitfires of all equipment that was not absolutely essential and fitting them with special auxiliary fuel tanks with sufficient capacity to allow them to make a nonstop flight to Israel. The Czech authorities, civil and military, were stunned by Pomerantz's plan, as were Haganah officials in Tel Aviv, and both rejected the scheme as foolhardy. When it became clear that Pomerantz remained undaunted by their skepticism and had begun preparing an experimental model, the Czech government sent several former Spitfire pilots to Žatec to convince the Haganah of the absurdity of the plan. After watching a triumphant demonstration of the Haganah's prototype in a four and a half hour flight, the longest recorded flight of a Spitfire, the Czech pilots themselves became enthusiastic and eventually helped to convince the ministry of defense to consent to the plan. The authorities in Prague were still very cold about the plan, reiterating their logical argument that it was sheer folly to attempt the distance between Podgorica and Israel, a distance of 1,400 miles, in a plane whose range had never exceeded 600 miles. Their main concern was that the Spitfires would inevitably have to make emergency landings either in Greece or Cyprus, which would lead to an international incident and a renewal of American intervention in Czechoslovakian affairs. Eventually a compromise was reached: the factory at Kunovice would revamp the Spitfires according to Pomerantz's plans and allow them to take off



from an airfield near the factory, but if such an international incident occurred as a result of a forced landing, the Czech government would immediately suspend all further deliveries. The Israelis dubbed the project "Operation Velveta."<sup>38</sup>

There were also some temporary problems with the Yugoslavian government at the beginning of September, 1948. The Podgorica airfield was suddenly shut down, and Gadi Shochat and the Haganah officers were placed under temporary house arrest. Belgrade stated that this action was taken because the Israelis were not being careful enough about their presence in the area, but it later appeared that the earlier heavy Balak traffic of American and Panamanian registered transports had provided Moscow and Albania with the opportunity to embarrass Tito with charges of "selling Yugoslavia to the West." Three weeks later, on September 20, the Yugoslavian authorities rescinded their decision when assured that all Spitfires would have only Israeli markings—a matter which had not been difficult to promise in light of Panama's cancellation of the artificial company, LAPSA (Lineas Aereas de Panama), under American pressure, on September 18. The first group of six Spitfires took off from Kunovice on September 22, and landed at Podgorica. Because the fighters had neither radio equipment nor navigational instruments, all of which were removed for extra fuel tanks, the Velveta operation was made in groups of six planes which followed a DC-4 lead ship from Podgorica to Ekron field in Israel. The inevitable happened on September 27 when two Spitfires were forced to make emergency landings at Rhodes, where the Greek authorities seized the planes and arrested the pilots. The long interrogations of the two Haganah pilots and the suspicions raised by their several forged and conflicting passports, each containing Czech visas, were based upon the premise that the pilots were supplying aid from Czechoslovakia to the Greek Communist rebels. After weeks of maintaining their cover story of being Israeli pilots on a Mediterranean test flight, they were released after Haganah pressure, although the Spitfires were confiscated by the Greek government.<sup>39</sup> The problem now centered on the

38. Mordechai Naor, *Al Hagovah* [On High] (Tel Aviv, 1965), pp. 136–40—hereafter cited as 'On High'; Kagan, *Air Force Journal*, p. 27. The name "Velveta" came from the suntan cream that was included in the rescue equipment to be used in case it became necessary to bail out over the ocean.

39. See Naor, 'On High,' pp. 134–35, 143–49, for the full description of the

Czech government's reaction to the incident, which proved to be unexpectedly mild. Not only did they continue delivery of the planes as contracted, but the ministry of defense even authorized Pomerantz's request to lengthen the Kunovice runway by an additional 120 yards. The more serious problem came from Belgrade, which again ordered the closing of the Podgorica field as a result of the publicity of the forced landings. Despite all pressure, it was not until December 7, 1948, that Ranković in Belgrade informed the Haganah that the field would be reopened on the strict conditions that no more than six planes arrive in one flight, that the pilots make no contact with the local civilians, and that the entire operation be conducted in the utmost secrecy. Two days later, on December 9, Gadi Shochat sent a cable to Haganah headquarters confirming the availability of the field, but mentioned an additional Yugoslav condition. The cable read:

HAVE MOVED TO FIELD READY TO RECEIVE YOU ANY TIME. LARGE FIELD TWO MILES SOUTH OF TITOGRAD. . . . AIRCRAFT MUST BE MARKED WITH YUGOSLAV FLAGS. . . .<sup>40</sup>

The painting of Yugoslav markings was a new surprise, and one which the Israelis feared would simply cause added problems, for although it would protect Yugoslavia from renewed accusations by Moscow, it would place the pilots in a very awkward position when they landed either in Czechoslovakia, whose relations with Yugoslavia were extremely strained, or, in an emergency, in Greece, which feared a resurgence of Yugoslav aid to the Greek Communist rebels. After lengthy discussions, the Yugoslav authorities reconsidered and all planes were allowed to land with Israeli markings. On December 19, Operation Velveta began in earnest, and by the end of the year, twenty-four Spitfires had been delivered to Israel. The only two accidents occurred during a snowstorm over Podgorica, incidents which were later discussed by Mordechai Hod during an interview following his promotion in 1966 to commander of the Israeli Air Force. He recalled that:

. . . I had five solo hours on a Spitfire to my credit. And there were six "Spits" we had bought that had to be brought home. . . . We flew

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Greek landing as well as a narrative of the interrogations. The two pilots were released on October 12, 1948, although the Spitfires were held until 1950. Kagan, *Air Force Journal*, p. 28.

40. Kagan, *Air Force Journal*, p. 33; Kagan, *The Secret Battle for Israel*, p. 135.

the planes to Yugoslavia, where one of my wingmen, Sam [Sam Pomerantz] crashed and was killed. Another had to make a forced landing in Yugoslavia. But the rest of us got through; landed, refuelled, and then took off again—this time behind a C-46 which served as a pathfinder, with the rest of us trailing behind like ducklings. It took us about six hours and then, on landing at Ekron, my engine gave out.<sup>41</sup>

Since the military situation in Israel had improved immeasurably by the turn of the year, and the Spitfire fighters were no longer in critical demand, the remaining thirty-three planes were dismantled and crated at the factory in Kunovice, taken by train to a Yugoslav port where they were loaded aboard two chartered Italian vessels. The *Arsia* arrived in Israel on February 18, 1949; the *Shiyo* arrived the following day.<sup>42</sup>

While the exact amount of military equipment which was bought from Czechoslovakia by the Haganah and Israeli government between January, 1948, and February, 1949, is difficult to determine, the following total has been arrived at through a detailed examination of openly stated and deciphered bills of lading and receipts.<sup>43</sup> The Czechoslovakian government supplied:

57,000,000 rounds of 7.92 mm. ammunition  
1,500,000 rounds of 9 mm. Parabellum ammunition  
1,000,000 rounds of anti-tank ammunition

41. *Ma'ariv*, April 27, 1966; *Jerusalem Post*, April 27, 1966. For an account of Pomerantz's fatal flight, see Naor, 'On High,' pp. 155-57.

42. Kagan, *Air Force Journal*, pp. 27-29; Naor, 'On High,' pp. 141-42, 150; Vaze, *Rechesh*, p. 199.

43. The amount of military equipment was determined through the relatively few figures published in Ben-Gurion's *The Restored State of Israel* (pp. 102-3, 126-29, 136, 139-40) and Vaze's *Rechesh* (pp. 184-85, 199, 277-78), and through the large number of bills and receipts which were made available to the author by individual Rechesh members. The majority of this equipment was reflected as normal trade in the statistical tables of both countries' commercial summaries. For example, Czech trade with Palestine (Israel) in 1938 was 1.7 million dollars, in 1948 it reached 16.1 million, in 1951, dropped to 2.6, and by 1952 was listed at .4 million dollars. See Robert Loring Allen, *Middle Eastern Economic Relations with the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Mainland China* (Charlottesville, 1958), Table 4, p. 80. In addition to essential military supplies, Czechoslovakia provided Israel with a variety of trade and communications programs, including nearly continual scheduled commercial flights (of the ČSR *Československé Aerolinie*), even when no other airline would risk landing in a combat zone. A complete file of ČSR cables and correspondence with Israel maintained by the Czech representative in Tel Aviv, G. P. Taussig, and entitled "History of the Czechoslovak Airlines in Israel," is on deposit with the *Archion Zahal* (Archives of the Israel Defense Forces), Tel Aviv.

24,500 P-18 Mauser rifles  
10,000 bayonets for the P-18 Mauser rifle  
5,015 (Light) ZB-34 Machine-guns  
880 (Heavy) ZB-37 Machine-guns  
250 9 mm. Zbrojovka pistols  
12 16-ton tanks with ammunition  
10 9.5-ton tanks with ammunition  
25 Avia-Messerschmitt 109 (S-199) fighter planes  
59 Spitfire IX fighter planes  
4,184 2-kg. bombs  
2,988 10-kg. bombs  
146 20-kg. bombs  
2,614 70-kg. bombs

In addition to this relatively large amount of military hardware and the equally critical, though less tangible, program of training courses, the Czech government initiated the organization of a volunteer brigade whose purpose was to satisfy Israel's need for both combat troops and immigrants.

## Czechoslovak Volunteers to Israel

IN SEPTEMBER, 1948, when it had become evident that Czechoslovakia was growing less enthusiastic about aiding the Haganah—the base at Žatec had already been closed down, the pilot training courses were rejecting new Israeli applicants, and the Spitfire agreement was being halted by bureaucratic obstacles at every step—the Czech ministries of the interior, finance, and national defense unexpectedly authorized a highly unusual project. The idea of a Czech Brigade, a unit of trained volunteers which would be allowed to fight with the Israeli army, was first suggested by the Communist leader Shmuel Mikunis during the months following the February coup in Czechoslovakia. Mikunis's project was based on the concept of the international brigades which came to the aid of the Spanish republic during the civil war of 1936, but in Israel's case would have a dual purpose: to supply the critically needed trained soldiers, and to become a source of new immigration, for it was hoped that the majority of volunteers would be Jewish and that following the war with the Arabs they would elect to remain in Israel.<sup>1</sup> The project was "legalized" by a midnight telephone call to Mikunis from Malenkov on June 20, 1948 (see page 77), and turned over to the Czech ministry of defense for further study. It was not until the first week in September that Ehud Avriel, by then Israel's minister plenipotentiary to Czechoslovakia, was informed by General Svoboda of the ministry of national defense that

1. Schiff, "Stalin Gave the Orders."

plans for the creation of the brigade were under way. The negotiations were carried out in secret to prevent renewed American and British interference, and quickly came to involve the deputy minister of finance, Otto Fischl, and the deputy minister of foreign trade, Eugene Loeb. The Czech government's motives in authorizing the creation of the brigade, while basically unimportant to the Israelis, were three-fold. The creation of such a brigade, and release of its members and their families, would, initially, allow for the expulsion of a large number of potentially dissident Jews—a policy which was already in force in Rumania and Hungary. At the same time, this expulsion policy could be carried out under the current communist position of supplying aid to Israel, for it was hoped that the inclusion of such a unit in the Israeli army might eventually affect the political composition of the state. The third, and possibly most basic, motive in creating the brigade involved the personal property which the emigrating Jews were forced to turn over to the Czech government. In a policy reminiscent of the 1935 Nürnberg laws in Nazi Germany which required all emigrating Jews to leave their possessions to the state, the Czech ministry of finance, represented by Deputy Minister Otto Fischl, stripped the exiting emigrants of every tangible possession. Avriel later recalled that:

Fischl fought his private little war against Zionism. . . . A Jew who received a check or actual dollars from relatives in the U.S.A., and did not bring it in to the National Bank on the same day, was arrested on Fischl's orders and sent to a concentration camp bearing Fischl's name, where they might often remain for years under "administrative arrest." He often appeared at the border personally, to prevent Jewish immigrants from taking out one more shirt than was permitted. There are Jews in Israel today, who remember how Fischl, himself, removed a Jew from the train because he had in his pocket a fountain pen.<sup>2</sup>

The Israeli government, represented in this case by Avriel and Shimon Ornstein, initiated a long series of compromise negotiations with the deputy minister of foreign trade, Eugene Loeb, to have a portion of the emigrant's property value—the Israelis began at one-third—returned to the Haganah to cover the cost of his transportation and integration into his new environment. Failing that, the Israeli

2. Avriel, "The Truth About Prague," part III. Ironically, Fischl was tried as a "Zionist spy" in the Slansky trials of 1952 and executed.

government hoped at least to receive the value in trade goods with which their economy might be boosted until the immigrants found satisfactory employment. In looking back on the negotiations with Loeb, Avriel states that "When we started the talks, we wanted 33% of the sum paid to the Czechs by the Jewish immigrants—Loeb wouldn't hear of it. We reduced our position to 25%. He kept on refusing, and we kept on conceding. The talks went on for a year because of him. At the end, he agreed to 17%, and still, for that 17%, we were to get second-grade products like ceramics, glassware. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

The brigade itself was organized by a Czech army officer, a non-Jew, Major Antonin Sochor.<sup>4</sup> Sochor, whose actual rank of major general was only recently revealed by the Czechs,<sup>5</sup> had been a member of General Ludvig Svoboda's First Czechoslovak Army Corps fighting with the Red Army during World War II. He had distinguished himself in the battles for Bila Cerkev, Zaskov, and Dukla, and was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union as well as the Order of Suvorov, First Degree, for his bravery in the battle for Kiev.<sup>6</sup> In 1948 more than a thousand officers, enlisted men, and potential emigrants, Jews and non-Jews, many of whom had fought as a unit in the Red Army under General Svoboda<sup>7</sup> during World War II, volunteered for additional training and possible emigration to Israel. By mid-September, Major

3. *Ibid.* Loeb was also tried as a member of the "anti-State conspiracy" in 1952, but was one of the three defendants not executed. Loeb was imprisoned for eleven years and "rehabilitated" in 1963, after which he was appointed the director of the state bank in Bratislava, and in May, 1968, was awarded the Order of Labor. Loeb escaped from Czechoslovakia during the Soviet invasion of August, 1968, and is currently professor of economics at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York.

4. Major Sochor is reported to have been involved in the assassination of Nazi SS leader Reinhard Heydrich in May, 1942. Shimon Ornstein, *Alilah b'Prague* [Adventure in Prague] (Tel Aviv, 1968), p. 75—hereafter cited as 'Adventure in Prague.'

5. *Prirucni Slovník Naučný*, IV díl (Prague, 1967), p. 174.

6. I. S. Konev, ed., *Za osvoboždenii Chekhoslovakii* [For the Liberation of Czechoslovakia] (Moscow, 1965), pp. 30–33, 290–91.

7. General Ludvik Svoboda is credited with building the postwar Czech army on the units which he commanded during the war in Russia. An old military leader, Svoboda holds the St. George Cross of czarist Russia for service with Czechoslovak forces which separated from the Austrian army in World War I, and is a Hero of the Soviet Union and a holder of the Order of Lenin for his leadership during World War II. Svoboda did not join the Communist party until after the February, 1948, coup, and later went through a series of demotions and rehabilitations. Svoboda is at this writing the president of Czechoslovakia.

Sochor's Czech Brigade had been assembled, and upon the arrival of a small group of Haganah officers sent to coordinate the training program, the unit was assigned to an abandoned Czech army training base at Velke-Schelba (called Gross-Walters-dorf by the Germans) in Bohemia. The nine-member team from Tel Aviv was originally headed by a David Reshev, who was transferred to Paris upon their arrival in Czechoslovakia, and the leadership was reassigned to a battle-hardened veteran in the Haganah high command, Itzhak Shany. Shany's job, from his arrival in mid-September, 1948, until the transport of the trained brigade to Israel five months later, was to supervise the training of the volunteers at Velke-Schelba, to coordinate the infantry tactics with those used by the Israeli army, and, perhaps most important, to settle the major political problems involving the brigade.

The overwhelming problem concerned the desirability of incorporating the brigade into the Israeli army as a unit—a position vigorously supported by the Czech government and the Israeli Communist party.<sup>8</sup> The Czech government further suggested that the Israeli army draw all Czech-born Israeli soldiers from their respective units and assign them to the new Czech Brigade. Haganah Commander Itzhak Shany's major concern in objecting to this plan was that, as an independent unit, the Czech Brigade would form an army within the army—a potential political time bomb. The danger of allowing nearly a thousand combat troops to be welded into a single unit and led by a Communist officer, Major Sochor, whose first loyalty was to Prague, was readily apparent to the Haganah. In addition, there were such problems as the unfamiliar terrain, Hebrew maps, the difficulty of placing Israeli enlisted men under the command of Czech officers, and the brigade's relative lack of training. The continuing arguments between Colonel Shany and Major Sochor over these problems during the training period at Velke-Schelba eventually led to the appointment of a Czech liaison officer, one Captain Parma, whose job was simply to keep the Czech ministry of defense informed of the daily arguments and to relay to Sochor the government's changing position.<sup>9</sup>

8. When asked in an interview in 1968 whether "the Czechs asked for the Brigade to be commanded by Czech officers and to fight in Israel as a single military unit," Mikunis reversed his earlier position and answered, "No. They did not put any conditions on the Brigade." Schiff, "Stalin Gave the Orders."

9. The liaison officer, Parma, arrived in Israel with the Brigade and elected to remain after the end of the conflict.



The dispute was finally settled by Avriel, who sent both Shany and Sochor to Tel Aviv for a week of consultation with the Haganah high command during the second week of November, 1948. At the end of that week, which included demonstrations of the potential difficulties which might be encountered by the Czech Brigade, Major Sochor returned to Prague and helped persuade the ministry to abide by Shany's decision.

The training of the brigade continued until the end of November, when, during a normal staff meeting, Major Sochor was called to the phone and, turning pale as he listened to the other party, suddenly announced that all training must come to a close. The brigade was ordered to leave for Israel at the earliest possible moment; it was further ordered that all weapons, such as the T-34 tanks, on which the soldiers had so diligently trained, must be left behind. Although the Czech ministry of defense offered no reason for its sudden action, it was quickly learned by Israeli officials that the United States, informed by Arab representatives of the activities at Velke-Schelba, had put the necessary pressure on the Czech government. The information which had motivated the American diplomatic pressure appeared in an exaggerated report one month later in the *New York Times*. The report stated:

Six hundred Jewish men and women, many of them trained for the Israeli army by Czech officers, are en route to Palestine, informed sources said today. Informants said approximately 1,500 others were awaiting transportation. Infantrymen, paratroopers, communications men, pilots and nurses were among those who left and are waiting to leave, informants said. Part of their training program was in Czechoslovakian Army Camps. . . .<sup>10</sup>

Within a week after the closing of the brigade training area, the Israeli government publicly acknowledged the existence of the unit, but to pacify the sources of diplomatic pressure, announced its decision—patently untrue—to “officially bar the Czech Jewish Legion from fighting with the Israel Defense Forces.”<sup>11</sup>

Following the defense ministry's order to evacuate the brigade, Ehud Avriel immediately began arranging for the necessary transports to Israel, during which time the Brigade members were sent home to

10. *New York Times*, December 26, 1948, p. 1.

11. *Ibid.*, December 9, 1948, p. 5.

pack. The unit reassembled on December 15, 1948, at a transit camp called Szt. Miklós, where they were divided into three groups and sent by train to Trieste where the chartered vessels were waiting. By the first week in February, 1949, the last transport ship had arrived in Israel and, as agreed earlier, the Czech troops were immediately scattered among Israeli units. Although the war was nearly over, a large number of the brigade members, including Major Sochor, saw limited action against the Arabs. As expected, the majority of Czechs elected to remain in Israel and settled, for the most part, on Kibbutz Kerem Ma'ha'ral (which they founded) and in the town of Rosh Pina.<sup>12</sup> Major Sochor, an officer in the regular Czech army, returned to Prague following the armistice agreement with the last Arab nation, Syria, on July 20, 1949, where he remained until his sudden and unexplained death in an automobile accident in 1950.

Czechoslovakia was not the only country in the bloc which saw the training of potential emigrants to Israel, although most of the programs were carried out in secret and were far less successful. Throughout the spring of 1948, teams of Haganah agents, under the leadership of Nahum Shadmi, commanding officer of the Haganah in Western Europe, and Yaakov Solomon, an Israeli military representative formerly assigned to Rumania and Hungary, traveled surreptitiously from their unofficial address at No. 7 Yosefovská Street, Prague, throughout the Eastern bloc. Their main task was to organize training areas for Eastern European Jews who were soon to enter Israel as refugees. These camps were often organized in remote areas under the guise of sporting events and physical culture clubs, often without the knowledge of local Communist officials.<sup>13</sup> As in the case of the Reches mission to Czechoslovakia, it appears that much of the ground-

12. The Israeli government rejected the original name of *Kibbutz Gottwald*; after that the current name was adopted. Only ten to twelve Czech officers, all of whom were communists, caused the Israeli government any difficulties. They refused to accept lower Israeli ranks during their service with the Zahal, demanded to be billeted in hotels rather than barracks, and complained bitterly. They repeatedly demanded to be repatriated to Czechoslovakia long before the unit's scheduled return date; the Israeli government granted their demand. At the last possible moment, however, three officers decided to remain. One of them is now the Israeli army's most famous surgeon and director of the Ashkelon Hospital, Dr. Alexander Levi.

13. Ammon Yona, *L'lo Akovot* [No Traces] (Tel Aviv, 1965), pp. 23, 44—hereafter cited as 'No Traces.'

work for the training of emigrants was accomplished by Mordechai Oren and Shmuel Mikunis. In his memoirs, Oren recalled a series of meetings in Poland with such dignitaries as Jakub Berman, General Komar from the defense ministry, and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Stefan Wierblowski, with whom he discussed his efforts to "... obtain permission for Jewish soldiers and officers to emigrate to Israel to take part in our combat ... and also to get the authorization to organize a camp of intensive training for young Jews willing to leave for Israel."<sup>14</sup>

The Israeli Haganah team, disguised as British businessmen or Allied officials registering displaced persons, moved freely through Czechoslovakia, organizing a youth training program near Bratislava, and then into the Tatra mountains where a series of summer camps were initiated. The program was eventually extended to include remote areas in Rumania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia as well. The entire program, however, fared rather badly. Local Communist officials, especially in Hungary, hounded these "British businessmen" who spent most of their time hiking in the remote mountain areas, and refused to extend their visas. It was not long before the Hungarian Jews, anxious themselves to avoid antagonizing the party, "... pressed the Haganah representative to leave, and often even threatened to report them to the authorities."<sup>15</sup>

The failure of the Eastern European refugees to participate in a planned program of military training before their emigration to Israel resulted in the unnecessary death of a large number of new arrivals in the war against the Arabs. A major case in point is the battle of Latrun, an area of high ground along the Jerusalem-Jaffa road. Several hundred Eastern European Jews were assigned to defend this plateau, a position which would prevent the severance of the critical lifeline between Jerusalem and the rest of Israel, on the very first day of their arrival. The majority of the volunteers claimed to have been given a few lessons in military training by Haganah officials while awaiting emigration orders in Eastern Europe. The Arab offensive against Latrun materialized as expected, and when the smoke of battle had cleared days later, a Haganah patrol including members of a United Nations truce mission found the majority of the defenders dead at their posts, many

14. Oren, *Prisonnier Politique à Prague*, 1951-1956, p. 208.

15. Yona, 'No Traces,' p. 39.

still holding their new rifles with the safety locks engaged.<sup>16</sup> After this, every European refugee entering Israel was given a basic military training course, despite any claims regarding previous military experience.

Despite the basic failure of the training programs in the bloc countries, large numbers of Eastern European Jews, after lengthy negotiations with the governments involved, did emigrate to Israel. Large-scale emigration of Jewish refugees was first supported by the Czech government at an all-party cabinet meeting on July 25, 1946, as previously discussed, followed shortly thereafter by Poland. By mid-1947, Rumania also reluctantly agreed to allow the emigration of a large number of Jewish refugees, but a snag developed when the Russians raised objections to the use of Constantza as an embarkation port. The Russians had no objection to the operation, but since the port was virtually a Soviet naval base, such a plan would certainly lead to diplomatic embarrassment. The Russians hinted, however, that they would have no objection to embarkation at one of the smaller Bulgarian ports. Thus contact was quickly arranged with the Bulgarian Communist deputy prime minister, Traicho Kostov, who proved to be forthright and sympathetic. He suggested the use of the port at Burgas in return for a fixed fee, per emigrant, to be paid in dollars to the Bulgarian government. It was from Burgas that the first two vessels, the *Pan York* and the *Pan Crescent*, sailed to become international incidents and political grist for the Arab propaganda mill in its United Nations battle against the partition plan.<sup>17</sup>

As the relationship between the Eastern bloc and Israel began to cool during the fall of 1948 (most visibly to Israel in its effect on the Spitfire operation and pilot training courses), the large-scale emigra-

16. Berkman, *Cast a Giant Shadow*, pp. 255–64.

17. The *Pan York* (carrying 7,557 passengers and crew) and the *Pan Crescent* (with 7,612) were quickly spotted enroute by the British and forced to land at Famagusta Harbor, Cyprus, on January 1, 1948. As early as December 31, 1947, the *New York Times* carried the British intelligence report that the two ships were packed with potential “fifth columnists”—hand-picked Communist agents with links to the Stern Gang. By February 1, 1948, the *New York Times* reported the British figures of 1,000 agents aboard. The following five issues of the *Times* carried further totally unsubstantiated British reports. See especially Jacques Soustelle, *The Long March of Israel*, trans. from the French by Shirley Tomkiewicz (New York, 1969), pp. 153–55.

tion of Jewish refugees to Israel began to decrease as well. Benjamin Kagan, a Haganah officer involved in the Velveta flights, later recalled that:

. . . Zionist activities in Czechoslovakia were gradually snuffed out. Emigration to Israel became difficult and Jewish institutions passed into Communist hands. Our Embassy found itself becoming more and more isolated from the Czech population, including Czech Jews. Nobody seemed to want to see us anymore, or to be seen with us; our friends, Jewish and non-Jewish, now begged us not to come to see them, not even to telephone them. Rumors, which were later confirmed, hinted at the arrest of certain friends we had in the Czech Army and Air Force.<sup>18</sup>

Even as emigration from Eastern Europe began to lessen, Mordechai Oren began a campaign to increase the number of refugees who would be allowed to leave for Israel. While enroute from Sofia to Belgrade at the end of the summer of 1948 to attend a Conference of Danubian Countries, Oren arranged several interviews with Anna Pauker, Rumania's foreign minister and delegate to the congress, to discuss the possible official sanctioning of the clandestine training areas as well as the question of increased emigration to Israel. He mentions:

"Thanks to Dr. Bebler and Clementis, I had a long talk with Anna Pauker and the Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Meginescu. . . . I had asked that the training Kibbutzim existing in Roumania, in which young Jews prepared themselves for a life of work in Israel, not be dissolved. I also asked that Jewish immigration be permitted once again. She took note of my observations, promising to study these questions with benevolence.

. . . In fact, the kibbutzim had been liquidated shortly afterward, and Jewish immigration continued only on a small scale."<sup>19</sup>

Although the number of Jewish emigrants allowed to leave the Eastern bloc for Israel was sharply reduced by the last months of 1948, several major exceptions occurred in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and, under conditions of extreme reluctance, in Hungary as well. On December 10, 1948, Radio Sofia conducted a special broadcast devoted to the anniversary of the United Nations partition decision (November 29, 1947) and announced that "the Government of Bulgaria

18. Kagan, *The Secret Battle for Israel*, p. 146.

19. Oren, *Prisonnier Politique à Prague*, 1951-1956, pp. 189, 326.

would give full moral support to all Jewish citizens who desired to emigrate to Israel.”<sup>20</sup> A total of some 7,500 Jewish emigrants arrived in Haifa, from Bulgaria, within four weeks of the broadcast. The Hungarian government, after exhaustive negotiations with the Haganah concerning the disposition of the refugees’ personal property confiscated by the Hungarians, agreed to close their eyes and allow small groups of Jews to leave illegally and cross into Czechoslovakia, from where they could more easily cross into the Austrian capitol of Vienna. The result, however, was that numerous groups of penniless Jews would reach the Slovakian border, only to be arrested by Czech guards. Within a short time, the prisons were crowded with Hungarian Jewish refugees. They could not be repatriated to Hungary, for the Czech authorities realized full well how they had been allowed to escape. The Czechs had basically two alternatives: they could bring the refugees to trial for illegal entry, sentence them to a few months in prison, and later expel them from the country; or the authorities could fine them a symbolic amount and immediately usher them across the Czech–Austrian frontier. The matter was brought before the party secretariat in Prague by General Viktorin, chief of the Slovak secret police, and his deputy, Ladislav Čermák, and following a series of discussions, in which the Israeli government was represented by Rechesh member Shimon Ornstein, party secretary Slansky, with one eye on the budget costs of imprisoning several thousand refugees, decided to impose the symbolic fine and expel them to Austria.<sup>21</sup>

As in the case of the emigration of the Czech Brigade to Israel, the majority of Eastern European governmental decisions to allow large groups of Jewish refugees to leave, were based on the economic advantages resulting from the confiscation of the refugees’ personal property. These arrangements became public knowledge when on

20. *JAD* I, no. 11 (231), December 24, 1948, p. 17. Bulgaria’s attitude toward emigration was quickly announced, through Israel’s legations, in all Eastern European capitals in an effort to influence other reluctant governments. See, for example, the press release, “Wzmosona Emigracja z Bulgarii do Israela,” *Biuletyn Informacyjny Poselstwa Israela* (Warsaw), no. 8 (December 10, 1948). Collected mimeographed reports of all embassies and legations are held by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

21. Ornstein, ‘Adventure in Prague,’ pp. 67–68; and Ornstein, ‘By Order from Moscow,’ pp. 209–11. See the announcement of the arrival of 996 Hungarian refugees in Vienna after their detainment by Czech authorities. *JAD* I, no. 46 (266), August 26, 1949, p. 23.

February 11, 1949, during an announcement of recently completed trade agreements, the Israeli government stated: "In the majority of cases, countries trading with Israel are willing to accept in payment a considerable percentage of their own currency. In the case of Hungary, this is understood to be as high as 30 per cent, the currency being provided by Israel from funds held in the country by Jews exchanging their Hungarian nationality for Israel citizenship."<sup>22</sup>

It was not until several years later, in the impatient exchange of diplomatic notes between Israel and Czechoslovakia following the severance of relations and the Slansky trial in 1952, that the official story of these negotiations came to light. Moshe Sharett, the foreign minister of Israel, in answer to a Czechoslovak note charging Israel with political intrigue, made the following statement before the Knesset on November 24, 1952:

At one stage Israel concluded a commercial agreement with Czechoslovakia, upon terms which proved suitable to both parties. Israel admitted thousands of Jews officially authorized to leave Czechoslovakia, after they left most of their property behind them. Under the terms of the commercial agreement, Israel paid for a small percentage of her imports from Czechoslovakia with a limited proportion of the emigrants' former possessions. None of these operations was carried out in the dark; they were all carried out in broad daylight. They were not the outcome of any underhanded manipulation, but of official and honorable negotiations between accredited representatives of the two countries. . . .<sup>23</sup>

By January, 1949, almost one year after the first agreement had been reached between Ehud Avriel and the officials of the Zbrojovka factory, military aid to Israel from the Eastern bloc had come to a close. The cooling of relations was the result, partially, of Russia's growing disillusionment with the Israeli government's policy of "non-identification with either the West or the East," a reaction which will be discussed in detail elsewhere in this study. An immediate and perhaps more compelling reason for the termination of military supplies came

22. JAD I, no. 18 (238), February 11, 1949, p. 25.

23. Israel, Jewish Agency, *Documents Relating to the Prague Trial, Diplomatic Relations of Israel with Czechoslovakia and Poland; The Moscow Accusations*, submitted by the Executive of the Jewish Agency to the Jewish World Emergency Conference Assembling in Zurich on March 10, 1953 (Jerusalem, March, 1953), pp. 10-11.

as the result of continual diplomatic pressure from the West, especially Britain and the United States.<sup>24</sup>

Although the entire Rechesh arrangement with Czechoslovakia was conducted under a blanket of complete secrecy from the outside world, it was not long before the American and British intelligence services began to pick up small fragments of information.<sup>25</sup> It was not, however, until a year after the first contracts had been signed and, in fact, the Czech-Israeli relationship terminated, that sufficient evidence had been collected to provoke an international incident. The fragments of information were probably first gleaned in Palestine, where it was public knowledge that the Czechs were supplying the critically needed arms and ammunition. One observer of Israel's first years, Hal Lehrman, vividly recalled that "everybody knew how weapons had flowed to Israel from Czechoslovakia. UN observers had stood by in comic helplessness while Haifa stevedores unloaded guns for Israel."<sup>26</sup> The weapons were quickly traced back to the Žatec airfield where the Haganah was working feverishly to continue the air lift of Balak flights, and by arresting a number of American volunteer pilots upon their return to the United States the State Department was rapidly able to compile a lengthy dossier on the Rechesh activities. By the middle of July, 1948, American planes had already made several flights over Žatec to photograph the base, and although the Czechs angrily protested, the State Department maintained its pressure on Czechoslovakia with private threats of bringing the matter before the

24. The reasons for the termination of Czech aid to Israel are today disputed by Ben-Gurion and Shmuel Mikunis. According to Ben-Gurion "there was no change in our true relations—it simply ended with the war; for after the war, we were well enough armed." In answer to the same question, Mikunis believes, differently, that "the crisis did not come from Czechoslovakia. They just surrendered to the Russians—an indirect crisis inspired by Moscow. It seems that Stalin became frightened by the [Soviet] Jewish outburst of admiration for Israel, and changed his mind. Then came the first American loan (\$100 million) to Israel. . . . That was the conflict between the Czech independent policy and the instructions that came from Moscow. . . and in the end, the Czechs surrendered completely to the Russians." Schiff, "Stalin Gave the Orders."

25. One of the early incidents was reported in *The Sunday Watun* (Teheran) on March 17, 1948, when it was disclosed that eight Jewish shippers, "part of a large Zionist ring in Teheran," were arrested for smuggling arms "from Russia to Palestine." Quoted in the *Arab News Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.) III (April 3, 1948), p. 3.

26. Hal Lehrman, *Israel: The Beginning and Tomorrow* (New York, 1951), p. 290.



United Nations. In addition, according to Colonel Benjamin Kagan, "the United States let it be known that certain measures restricting the export of American products to Czechoslovakia might be lifted if the Czechs proved cooperative."<sup>27</sup>

The Czechs, however, did not cooperate and the diplomatic pressure on them increased. Government officials, caught on the horns of a dilemma, usually reacted to the recurring charges by publicly denying the accusations and privately warning the Haganah to speed up their training programs and to increase their security measures. On several occasions, though, Czech authorities actively conspired with the Israelis to circumvent American, British, and Arab investigations. In his memoirs, Shimon Ornstein recalled one such occasion in the following way:

. . . when the U.S. Ambassador in Prague [Lawrence Steinhardt] complained to him [Foreign Minister Clementis] that Czechoslovakia was sending arms to Israel via its military airfield at Žatec, Clementis denied it and when the American diplomat stood by his charge, arguing that he saw, in person, what was happening, and had spoken with the pilots, who were volunteers from the United States, Clementis then agreed to go to Žatec the following day with the Ambassador to the airfield in order to show him that the story was fabricated. . . . He phoned the Czech office that was in contact with us, and asked them to notify us that we had to remove all traces from the field by the next day.

This was done. I will never forget that night and how, in a matter of hours we managed to erase all signs of our presence. I will never forget the American Ambassador's face, when he got there with Clementis and found an empty field. First of all the American rubbed his eyes and then he began cursing and swearing. Clementis enjoyed all of this and laughed.<sup>28</sup>

By the first weeks of August, 1948, the Czech government could no longer ignore pressure from the West. On August 11, Munya Mardor, in Israel, received the following cable from Yehuda Briger, commander of the Israeli detachment at Žatec:

AS YOU KNOW FROM PAST CABLES, THE U.S. DELEGATE IN CZ. IS INTERFERING AND HAS THREATENED TO BRING THE AFFAIR BEFORE AN INTERNATIONAL FORUM. TOMORROW AT 11 A.M., THE DELEGATE

27. Kagan, *The Secret Battle for Israel*, p. 117.

28. Ornstein, 'By Order from Moscow,' p. 149.

WILL TRANSMIT AN OFFICIAL PROTEST TO THE CZ. GOVERNMENT. WE HAVE BEEN ASKED TO TAKE ALL U.S. PLANES AND CREWS OUT OF CZ.<sup>29</sup>

The following morning, on August 12, the Czech government suddenly and officially closed down the Žatec base, and while the Haganah was restored limited use of the field, the majority of activity was shifted to other bases. One month later, American diplomatic pressure forced Panama to cancel the registry of the Lineas Aereas de Panama cover organization. On September 18, 1948, the president of Panama, Enrique A. Yimener, stated that his decision was based on information received from United States ambassador Monnet D. Davis which “proved” that the LAPSA planes used “bases in Czechoslovakia and Palestine, and transported bombs, airplane parts and arms of various types.”<sup>30</sup> Further evidence of Czech military aid to Israel was made public in the months that followed, leading quickly to American<sup>31</sup> and British<sup>32</sup> diplomatic protests. Finally, on November 6, 1948, the entire story became public, when the *Christian Science Monitor* published a somewhat distorted exposé of the activities at the Czech air base of “Cavetz” (sic) as divulged to the United Nations mediator, Dr. Ralph Bunche, by “a deserter from the Israeli Air Force,” a certain “Mr. X.”<sup>33</sup> While basically correct in most details, listing, for instance, the registration numbers of Panamanian aircraft involved in the Balak flights, the story falsely reports the involvement of Red Army personnel at the airfield. “Mr. X” goes on to describe the roles of “about 300 Russian military men involved in the transport operation” and maintains that “some of the younger and better [Israeli] pilots are now in Russia learning how to fly Soviet jet planes.”<sup>34</sup>

The allegation of Red Army personnel at Žatec and Israelis training on Soviet jets, while tantalizing to the reading public, was patently untrue. There is absolutely no evidence to indicate that Soviet military personnel—save on one occasion—ever appeared at Žatec or came into

29. Shahan, ‘Wings of Victory,’ p. 146.

30. Kagan, *The Secret Battle for Israel*, pp. 126–27.

31. *New York Times*, September 2, 1948, p. 8.

32. *Ibid.*, November 8, 1948, p. 10.

33. Homer Metz, “Mr. ‘X’ Links Israeli [i.e., Czech] Airfields to Palestine Arms Smuggling,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 6, 1948, p. 1. Benjamin Kagan solves one mystery with another in his comment about the exposé, in stating that Mr. “X” was, of course, Mr. “L.” *The Secret Battle for Israel*, pp. 78–80.

34. Metz, “Mr. ‘X’ Links Israeli Airfields,” p. 4.

contact with the Rechesh members in Czechoslovakia. The one occasion is reported by Benjamin Kagan, who describes his own amazement, for "it was the first time that we had met Russian officers on a Czech airfield." The officers simply toured the base, exchanged a few words with the startled Haganah flyers, and, led by their Czech military guide, left as suddenly as they had arrived.<sup>35</sup> Equally untrue were the many charges, leveled mainly by the losing Arab forces, that the Israeli army was commanded by Soviet officers.<sup>36</sup> Despite periodic Arab claims that they had captured Russian officers on the battlefield,<sup>37</sup> there is no concrete evidence to indicate, with the sole exception of the small Soviet embassy staff, that a single Soviet national entered Israel during the 1948 period, much less commanded a unit of Israeli soldiers.<sup>38</sup> Nor was there any truth, according to any available evidence, to the numerous allegations that groups of Soviet MVD agents entered Israel under the guise of Red Cross officials and emigrating refugees<sup>39</sup> and roamed around Israel under the protection of the Stern Group.<sup>40</sup> Neither Israel nor the Soviet Union commented on these charges until November 8, 1948, when Israel's Foreign Minister Sharett formally denied any military assistance by the Soviet Union and while he readily admitted that "we've bought arms wherever we could get them," he officially denied that any arms had come from the Soviet Union or that any Soviet nationals had fought in the Israeli Army.<sup>41</sup> Less than two weeks later, the Soviet Union, in an English language broadcast, categorically denied supplying arms or men to Israel.<sup>42</sup>

35. Kagan, *The Secret Battle for Israel*, p. 147. While Kagan does not mention the date of the event, circumstances indicate that it must have been in October or November of 1948.

36. See, for example, *Al Misri* (Cairo), May 19, 1948, as quoted in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs* (New York), June 15, 1948, p. 4.

37. See, for example, *La Bourse Egyptienne*, October 27, 1948.

38. An interesting rumor appeared later in the French newspaper *Le Monde*. The author of the article had been in Israel in order to create a commercial post for France and recalled the following: "I had also heard praise about a certain Jewish colonel of the Soviet Army coming to organize the Israeli artillery and who, having completed his task, was quietly returned to Moscow." Boris Eliacheff, *Le Monde*, June 1, 1967, p. 3.

39. *New York Times*, February 1, 1948, p. 1.

40. Frank C. Hanighen, *Human Events* (Washington), May 12, 1948, for example.

41. *New York Times*, November 8, 1948, p. 10.

42. *Summary of World Broadcasts* I, no. 180 (November 20, 1948), p. 27.

By the early months of 1949, the Arab-Israeli war was drawing to a close, and by the same period the Czechs had terminated their supply of military aid. American and British authorities, however, continued to level public and diplomatic protests against the possibility of renewed Czech aid through the spring of the year. On January 12, 1949, a British Foreign Office spokesman stated that "if there is a threat to the peace" in Palestine, it would come about as a result of Israel's violation of the arms embargo in purchasing weapons from Czechoslovakia. The American State Department quickly supported Britain's charges against the Czechs,<sup>43</sup> and minor events related to the subject, such as the location of a Czech arms cache destined for Israel, and the arrest of three Rumanians in Vienna for their parts in smuggling weapons to the Middle East, were occasions for further governmental comment.<sup>44</sup>

The intense American and British diplomatic pressure on Czechoslovakia and, for that matter, on all Eastern bloc governments involved in supplying aid, was only part of the reason for the cooling of relations between them and Israel. The political mood emanating from the Kremlin was changing. The editorials in the Communist press began to view the Israelis in a less enthusiastic light, which produced a slight change in attitude—a change which was not lost on Eastern European leaders whose continued well-being often hinged on gauging every nuance of the Kremlin's moods. Stalin's shifting outlook toward Israel was caused, in a way, by what the Israelis represented to Eastern Europe's Jewry—or more precisely, what Stalin thought they represented: a threat in awakening a potential resurgence of Jewish nationalism. His suspicions were compounded by the Israeli Communist party's failure to poll any significant figure in the first national election in 1949, which was followed quickly by Ben-Gurion's acceptance of a huge American loan. In Stalin's mind, the threat must have become a concrete problem of an American-supported Jewish state which maintained a certain emotional sway over Russia's Jewry; the period from 1949 until his death in 1953 denoted an increasingly belligerent Soviet campaign against Israel and a growing brutality against Jewry within the bloc to neutralize that threat.

43. *JAD* I, no. 15 (235), January 21, 1949, p. 16; *New York Times*, January 13, 1949, p. 3.

44. See, for example, *New York Times*, January 7, 14, 21, 22, 1949.

## Relations Begin to Deteriorate

THE MILITARY aid which had been supplied to Israel by Czechoslovakia and, to a far lesser degree, by the other Eastern bloc nations as well, came to a final end during the last days of 1948. The rapport between Israel and Eastern Europe, which lasted exactly one year, was certainly mutually beneficial; the Czechs profited handsomely from the sale of obsolete weapons, while the Israelis obtained arms, unavailable from any other source, desperately needed in order to survive the onslaught of the invading Arab armies. The relationship had been subjected to almost continual diplomatic pressure from Britain and the United States who, fearing that the rapport indicated a strengthening Soviet-bloc foothold in the Middle East, helped in part to bring about the deterioration of the alliance. Even more important than Western diplomatic pressure, in influencing Czechoslovakia to terminate its association with Israel, was Moscow's changing attitude toward the Jewish state for which, only months before, it had abandoned its long friendship with the Arab world to help create.

The first indication of the Kremlin's new attitude toward Israel can easily be traced to the events which took place in Moscow during September, 1948.<sup>1</sup> Several months following Russia's *de jure* recog-

1. Since the first incident leading to Russia's changing attitude toward Israel took place in September, 1948, it is plain that Czechoslovakia's gradual termination of aid was initiated by diplomatic pressure from the West, rather than upon orders

nition of Israel, the new government in Tel Aviv appointed its second official ambassador (the first having been Ehud Avriel to Czechoslovakia): Mrs. Golda Mèyerson (later Meir) was posted to Moscow.<sup>2</sup> The Israeli legation arrived in Russia on September 3, 1948, and immediately created a sensation, for not only was Golda Meir the second woman in the diplomatic corps—the first being Mrs. Pandit—but her presence caused an immediate and prophetic restlessness among Moscow's Jewish community. Within weeks, the Israeli legation established itself as an informal and convivial meeting place on Friday evenings and weekends for foreign Jews, other members of the diplomatic corps, and Western correspondents. At the same time, the legation maintained a busy weekday schedule of diplomatic functions designed to strengthen relations between Israel and the Soviet Union. Problems with their Russian hosts began when members of the Israeli legation attended, albeit infrequently, sabbath services at Moscow's only synagogue. Their appearance acted as a catalyst to Moscow's 500,000 registered Jews, many of whom jubilantly surrounded Israeli officials with messages of confidence for Israel's future and requests for information about family members abroad. One correspondent recalled that "they received a tremendous spontaneous ovation from the local Jews, first at the synagogue, then under the windows of their Metropol Hotel rooms—something without a precedent in Soviet history."<sup>3</sup>

Official Soviet reaction was a mixture of surprise and disbelief. It was inconceivable that citizens of a progressive socialist state could desire to leave the socialist paradise. Immediate government efforts were made to head off further restlessness through a series of factory and community lectures on Israel, but the disturbing questions raised usually turned the lecture into a confrontation. For instance, "after one such lecture in Moscow, a man in the audience got up and asked

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from Moscow, since the Czech government closed down the Žatec base as early as August 12, 1948.

2. Mrs. Meir was chosen for the job after the Israelis had discreetly sounded out a Russian diplomat at Lake Success as to the right person to represent them in Moscow. Arthur Koestler, *Promise and Fulfillment: Palestine 1917-1949* (New York, 1949), p. 276.

3. Edmund Stevens, "This is Russia: Jews Denied Jobs or Exit to Israel," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 10, 1950, p. 1; Syrkin, *Golda Meir: Woman with a Cause*, pp. 222, 224.

the speaker how Jews wishing to emigrate to Israel should make their applications. Instead of answering, the speaker launched a violent tirade, saying that such a question was unworthy of a loyal Soviet citizen, who should prize his birthright too much even to think of wanting to emigrate, and that the very idea was treasonable.”<sup>4</sup>

Faced with what appeared to be a reawakening Jewish national consciousness, the Kremlin became apprehensive lest things go too far. The signal which indicated that a halt was being called to further displays of Soviet Jewry’s involvement in the renaissance of Jewish statehood, was an officially inspired article by Ilya Ehrenburg in the September 21, 1948, issue of *Pravda*.<sup>5</sup> In a four-column article, he redefined the official distinction between the “mystic” Zionists, the Soviet Union’s current support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and total lack of relationship of the Zionists to the Jews in various countries. The tone of the message was emphatic, though relatively restrained, and in no way vitriolic. Most important, the article introduced an element of dualism with respect to the distinct difference between international and domestic policy. “The citizens of a socialist society,” stated Ehrenburg, “regard the peoples of any bourgeois country, including the people of the State of Israel, as wanderers who have not yet found their way out of the dark forest. . . .” Furthermore, true socialist citizens are “never attracted by the fate of people subjected to the burden of capitalistic exploitation. . . . The fate of the Jewish workers of all countries is connected with the fate of progress and socialism. The Soviet people are building up their socialist fatherland. They are looking not to the Near East; they are looking to the future. And I believe that the workers of the State of Israel, far from being mystic Zionists . . . , are looking now to the north, to the Soviet Union which is leading humanity towards a better future.”<sup>6</sup> The article was reprinted two days later, on September 23, in *Einikeit*, the Yiddish Communist paper, but it was a warning which,

4. Stevens, “This is Russia,” p. 1. For further examples, see the *Jewish Daily Eagle* (Montreal), March 18, 1949.

5. I. Ehrenburg, “On the Subject of a Certain Letter,” *Pravda*, September 21, 1948, p. 3.

6. *Ibid.* It is interesting that a section of Ehrenburg’s memoirs is devoted to his detailed explanation of the articles in *Pravda* and *Einikeit*, with particular emphasis on his lengthy denial of all accusations that he had any part in initiating the anti-Semitic purges which followed. Ilya Ehrenburg, *Post-War Years, 1945–1954* (New York, 1967), pp. 124–35.

like that published in *Pravda*, went largely unheeded by Moscow's Jewry. Ten days after *Einikeit's* reprinted warning, which disavowed any special relationship between Soviet Jews and Jews elsewhere, Itzik Feffer, poet and secretary of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, wrote in *Einikeit* that "the State of Israel is a matter that concerns the entire Jewish people, and not the [Israeli] Jewish people alone. The entire progressive world followed with sympathy the birth of the new state, and no progressive person can remain indifferent to what is happening on the soil of that state."<sup>7</sup> On December 2, Mordechai Namir, counselor at the Israeli legation in Moscow, was advised, during a conversation with Ehrenburg, ". . . to suppress all efforts to attract [Soviet Jews] to Zionism and to aliyah [Jewish immigration to Israel] if we do not want to bring upon ourselves the wrath of the authorities as well as of the local Jews."<sup>8</sup>

That the warnings did not make the proper impression on the Jewish community soon became evident, for on October 16, when Mrs. Meir and her staff went to attend the Yom Kippur services at the central synagogue in Moscow, tens of thousands of emotional worshippers packed the synagogue and overflowed into the streets. No comment appeared in the Russian press about the demonstrations during the Jewish high holidays, but the government's wrath must have been made known somehow, for after October, no similar open expression took place again. Private expressions of sympathy for Israel continued, however, and extended, most surprisingly, to individuals highly placed in the Soviet government. One such event occurred on November 7, 1948, at a diplomatic reception held by Foreign Minister Molotov to honor the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. Mrs.

7. Quoted in B. Z. Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union: An Analysis and a Solution* (New York, 1961), p. 99. Feffer was one of the first Jewish authors to "disappear" in November, 1948. In August, 1950, during a visit to England, Ehrenburg was asked about the fate of Feffer: ". . . 'Never heard of such an author,' he said. He was reminded that the question was about *Colonel* Itzik Feffer, member of the erstwhile Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee of Moscow, the very same Itzik Feffer who had been sent on a mission to England and the United States during the war. Mr. Ehrenburg thereupon regained his sense of humor. He said: 'Oh, you mean that Itzik Feffer? What did happen to him?' The questioners informed Mr. Ehrenburg that since Feffer's mysterious disappearance rumors were current that he had been shot. 'Haven't heard about it . . .' replied Mr. Ehrenburg." *Jewish Frontier*, September, 1950, p. 8.

8. Dagan, *Moscow and Jerusalem*, p. 38.



Meir was introduced to Mrs. Molotov, who astonished the Israeli ambassador by turning to Yiddish as a common language. Confiding proudly to Mrs. Meir that "*Ich bin a Yiddishe tochter*" (I am a Jewish daughter), Mrs. Molotov praised her actions at the Moscow synagogue and personally introduced her to the milling guests. At the end of the evening, Mrs. Molotov parted by saying that "*As eich wet gut sein, wet sein gut allen Yidden auf der welt*" (If all will be well with you [Israel], things will go well for Jews in the whole world").<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Molotov's public enthusiasm, of course, created a sensation, and from that evening until Mrs. Meir's recall to Israel on April 20, 1949, to assume the post of minister of labor, various diplomats of satellite countries often approached Mrs. Meir and confided that they had Jewish wives or relatives.

These public and private displays of enthusiasm for Israel must certainly have caused Stalin to reconsider Russia's support for the Jewish state. Russian Jews were naïvely beginning to apply to the Israeli legation for visas, and asking for its cooperation in obtaining exit permits from the Soviet authorities. Russia's several million "de-Zionized" Jews suddenly appeared revitalized by the presence of the Israeli legation. Stalin's fears were, perhaps, best illustrated by a heated discussion with his daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva, at the end of 1948. In answer to her protests that the younger generation of Jews cared nothing for Zionism, he answered, "No! You don't understand. The entire older generation is contaminated with Zionism, and now they're teaching the young people too."<sup>10</sup> Within weeks of this conversation and the various demonstrations of support for Israel among Russian Jewry which prompted it, the Kremlin embarked on a new dual policy which was based upon the impossibility of maintaining friendly and sympathetic relations with the State of Israel without somehow coming to terms with the Zionist ideology upon which it was founded. Such a policy revolved around two closely linked, and what appeared to be, opposing problems: how could the Soviet Union discredit Israel as a major force of Zionism and yet, at the same time, maintain its

9. Syrkin, *Golda Meir: Woman with a Cause*, pp. 230-31; "Mrs. Meir's Moscow Memory," *New York Times*, December 30, 1970, p. 25.

10. Svetlana Alliluyeva, *Twenty Letters to a Friend* (New York, 1967), p. 196. Polina Molotov's public indiscretion might well have been a critical factor in her later arrest as a "cosmopolitan." She was exiled to Kazakhstan from 1949 until after Stalin's death in 1953. *Ibid.*, pp. 109, 196.

position of political support for Israel within the context of the Middle East conflict? In order to solve this problem, the Soviet Union, as will be shown, restrained from pursuing an anti-Israeli policy in the United Nations, and for the next few years maintained a relatively pro-Israel outlook as far as the Arab East was concerned. At the same time, however, the Soviets chose to initiate a severe anti-Zionist program within the Soviet Union and the satellite countries—a program which reached its peak with the Slansky trial of 1952 and culminated in the fantastic “Doctors’ Plot” prior to Stalin’s death in March, 1953.

While there is little question that Ehrenburg’s September 21, 1948, article in *Pravda* was the first Soviet warning of the strained relations which were soon to follow, one piece of evidence, seldom considered, remains a puzzle. On September 16, 1948, the *New York Times* carried an article by its correspondent, C. L. Sulzberger, based upon “reports from London,” analyzing the numerous British and French intelligence reports “that a brand new Moscow policy toward the Arabs was contemplated.”<sup>11</sup> The article goes on to state that:

A few weeks ago Soviet Minister to Syria, Daniel S. Solod . . . had several secret conferences with Syrian leaders and it is believed that President Shukri al-Kuwatly was present at more than one of these clandestine gatherings. . . .

It was furthermore bruited about that an arrangement was now under discussion in the Kremlin whereby bases might be granted to the Soviet Union in Syria in exchange for tacit assistance against the new Zionist state of Israel. . . .

It is now believed that in both Lebanon and Syria there are many Communist agents situated in fairly important government posts, and furthermore that skeleton military organizations have been quietly formed. . . .

In addition, despite continual denials by diplomatic sources in Cairo and by Egyptian Government officials, it is known that the Communist network has spread considerably in Egypt. . . .<sup>12</sup>

The facts involved in the article are, of course, nearly impossible to corroborate. However, an analysis of the premises upon which the article is based, considering the date of its publication, indicates that while the Soviet Union might well have already begun considering a more elastic approach and active policy in relation to the Middle East,

11. C. L. Sulzberger, “Soviet Policy Shift Seen Toward Arabs and Trieste,” *New York Times*, September 16, 1948, p. 4.

12. *Ibid.*

and that Syria, whose communists had a considerable, if indirect, influence on their country's foreign policy, might have served as an adequate jumping-off ground in the area, the date places the initiation of this policy change before the events which are assumed to have changed it. There is no indication that Stalin considered expanding Russia's activities in the Middle East to include the Arab world, other than minor attempts to placate the Arabs following the partition decision, until Moscow's Jewry, reacting to the appearance of the Israeli legation during the Jewish holidays, substantiated his basic fears.

Stalin's disaffection with Israel during the fall of 1948 most certainly must have resulted from his observation of Mrs. Meir's effect on Moscow's Jewry, as well as his sudden realization that the outcome of the three-decade domestic anti-Zionist campaign since the revolution had been a failure. Nonetheless, several other factors which may have influenced Stalin's decision should also be considered. Such factors might include problems ranging from Israel's unexpected military victory over the Arabs to political shifts within the Kremlin.

Since Stalin's position and power at the head of the Russian monolithic structure was unchallengeable, his personal attitude toward Israel must have been of paramount importance in the decision to begin withdrawing support from Israel. His deep-seated suspicion and distrust along with his lifelong history of anti-Semitism are well documented.<sup>13</sup> Even his daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva, in a recently published memoir, pointed out that "he never liked Jews, though he wasn't as blatant about expressing his hatred for them in those days [1936] as he was after the war."<sup>14</sup> The historian Robert Payne more sharply reports that "he was a raging anti-Semite, and liked to introduce lengthy attacks against Jews in his speeches. . . . In Stalin's eyes, the Jews represented a mortal danger to his regime."<sup>15</sup> It is reasonable

13. See, for instance, Robert Payne, *The Rise and Fall of Stalin* (New York, 1965), pp. 112, 380-91, 509-12, 549, 568, 637, 669, 673-74, 691.

14. Alliluyeva, *Twenty Letters to a Friend*, p. 159. See also Roy A. Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, translated from the Russian by Colleen Taylor (New York, 1972), pp. 493-97.

15. Payne, *Stalin*, pp. 101, 666. Once, while reporting on the Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1907, Stalin (writing under the pen name of Koba Ivanovich) made the telling statement that "one of the Bolsheviks . . . jokingly made the observation that the Mensheviks are a Jewish [faction] but the Bolsheviks a pure Russian Faction, and that it would not be bad if we Bolsheviks

to conclude, therefore, that Russia's early support of Israel was a shift in foreign policy which, unlike Masaryk's support, contained no hint of personal sympathy, and that when that support unexpectedly awakened Russia's Jewish minority, Stalin's fear and hatred took precedence over foreign policy.

If Stalin's suspicious nature was a pronounced facet of his personality before 1948, Tito's withdrawal from Moscow's leadership brought that deep-seated suspicion to extreme proportions. Tito's refusal to allow Yugoslavia to become a vassal satellite began reaching the crisis stage during the early months of 1948, and Stalin's frustrated and menacing threats and commands only made Marshal Tito more obstinate. The final break, fraught with the danger of a possible Soviet invasion, occurred on June 28, 1948, when Stalin excommunicated Yugoslavia from the world Communist movement. Although the invasion of Yugoslavia did not take place for a variety of reasons, Stalin's wrath became ungovernable.<sup>16</sup> "When the name of Tito was mentioned in the Kremlin he would curse and fly into a rage, and then he would grow quiet and remorseful, thinking of the time when Tito had visited Moscow and supped at his table. He could have hanged Tito then. Now it was too late."<sup>17</sup> Stalin's experience with Tito brought the Russian leader's deep hatred and fear of hostile or deviationist plots and movements to a peak, and it was only a short time before his suspicions came to rest on the already despised mass of Russian Jewry. His attention focused on his close ambitious colleagues. Kaganovich was a Jew, Voroshilov had a Jewish wife, Beria's mother was rumored (apparently inaccurately) to be half-Jewish, Khrushchev's daughter had married a Jew (as had Stalin's own daughter, Svetlana), and Molotov's wife, also Jewish, had gone so far as to declare publicly her support for Israel's success to Mrs. Meir. Stalin's reaction to these suspicions not only involved the withdrawal of aid to Israel but caused his decision to initiate "a giant *chistka* [cleansing purge] which would

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organized a pogrom in the Party." *Bakinski Proletarii*, Nos. 1 and 2, June 20 and July 10, 1907, quoted by Hugo Dewar, *The Modern Inquisition* (London, 1953), p. 246. This was an interesting statement in the light of the 1949-53 purges.

16. Payne, *Stalin*, p. 644. See, also, Fitzroy Maclean, *The Heretic: the life and times of Josip Broz-Tito* (New York, 1957), pp. 316-54.

17. Payne, *Stalin*, p. 645.

cleansing the entire body of the nation"; the purge was to culminate, several years later, in the "Doctors' Plot."<sup>18</sup>

Stalin's decision to combine the "cleansing" of the movement's leadership, with the implementation of a growing anti-Zionist campaign, became immediately evident in the sudden series of East European party purges which were to last until 1953. The Hungarian foreign minister, Laszlo Rajk, was arrested in May, 1949, and placed on trial in the summer of 1949. He was charged, among other things, with complicity in a "Zionist conspiracy."<sup>19</sup> The trial itself was manipulated by the general secretary of the Hungarian Communist party, Matyas Rakosi. The official trial records, *Laszlo Rajk and His Accomplices Before the People's Court* (Budapest, 1949), describe mysterious conspiracies involving his activities with "Titoist deviationists" (despite the fact that Rakosi was probably more sympathetic to Tito before 1948 than was Rajk), veterans of the International Brigades in Spain, and "Zionist groups." In September of 1949, Rajk was found guilty and summarily executed.

The Bulgarian trials, aimed at the veteran Bulgarian Communist leader, Traicho Kostov, took place only several months before the purge of the Hungarian leader. The charges of participation in a "Zionist-Titoist" plot were initiated, as in the Hungarian Rajk trial, by a political rival, Vulko Chervenkov, and stemmed basically from his protest in an incautious moment against Soviet exploitation of his country. The Bulgarian trial was unique in that it was the first to use a Zionist witness—albeit absent and probably imaginary—against the accused, and that it was one of the very rare occasions that the accused, in this case Kostov, suddenly told a shocked courtroom that his earlier confession had been extracted by torture and that he was innocent of all charges.<sup>20</sup> The trials themselves indicated, however, that not only had Stalin begun his promised *chistka*, but that it was the beginning of a program to combine the growing anti-Zionist campaign with Stalin's recent decision to halt support to Israel.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

19. The editorial of the June 19, 1949, issue of *Szabad Nep*, the Hungarian Communist daily newspaper, declared that "Trotskyism, Fascism, and Zionism . . . were the ideological swamp from which . . . Rajk grew."

20. *The Trial of Traicho Kostov and His Group* (Sofia, 1949), pp. 66–68; also Dewar, *The Modern Inquisition*, pp. 170–97.

The atmosphere of increasingly virulent anti-Semitism, which most certainly affected Russia's willingness to continue support for Israel after October, 1948, was not an exclusive extension of Stalin's personal hatred. Anti-Semitism, as a political weapon, may well have been a product of the Byzantine maneuvering within the party. While most information in such maneuvers is highly tenuous, it seems certain that anti-Semitic biases were strong in the upper level of party officialdom. Given the intensity and ruthless nature of the power struggle, officials would scarcely hesitate to utilize anti-Semitism to undermine rivals whom the elite might perceive as implicated in Jewish interests.<sup>21</sup>

Several factors concerning the Soviet Union's early expectations in the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948 also deserve consideration as possible motives in the withdrawal of support. Initially, there is the question, as discussed earlier, of the Soviet Union's reaction to Israel's victory. Russian political jargon contains a word, *slozhnost'*, meaning "complication," which, when applied to issues of foreign policy, implies that a contradiction of plans or the temporary subordination of a valued Soviet goal to certain harsh realities is in progress. The Soviet Union may well have been faced with such a *slozhnost'* with regard to Israel's steady and decisive victories during the spring and summer of 1948. The basic contradiction involved the fact that while the Soviet Union had, through Czechoslovakia, supplied the Haganah with limited quantities of obsolete weapons, it may well have been hoping for a protracted conflict in the Middle East. Such an extended war, in view of the continued arms embargo on the area, would have made Israel nearly entirely dependent on the Eastern bloc for a continual supply of arms. The Soviet Union has always been skeptical of alliances with "bourgeois nationalist" countries, especially when ideological bonds are weak; and in such cases, Moscow generally subscribes to the view that its influence over the political direction of the regime can be maintained only as long as the ally is greatly dependent upon it. The unexpected halt of Israel's dependency could have motivated Stalin to seek other, and more potential allies. At the very least, an extended Arab-Israeli conflict would create the turmoil which best suits an established pattern of Soviet penetration and subversion or at least

21. See the excellent political analysis by Franz Borkenau, "Was Malenkov Behind the Anti-Semitic Plot? The Doctors' Frame-up and Its Reversal," *Commentary*, May, 1953, pp. 438-46.

would constitute a continuing irritation sapping British power. Although Israel's victory was not complete until the spring of 1949, when the Arab states signed a series of armistice agreements, it was becoming clear to the Soviet Union by the early fall of 1948, that, far from being dependent upon the Soviet camp for weapons in a war of attrition, Israel's victory was within reach. This realization might well have been a consideration in Stalin's decision to withdraw support.

One last possibility which demands consideration is that Russia might have been disappointed immediately upon the formation of Israel's provisional government in May, 1948, but that exaggerated promises by Israel's Communist party held out hope for a political coup. Ben-Gurion's provisional government, created on April 18, 1948, consisting of a provisional council of thirteen ministers, a national administration of directors, and a national council, included only a single Communist, Shmuel Mikunis. Such results could certainly not have justified continued Soviet support. Yet it was during the same months of April, May, and June that Mikunis was traveling from capital to capital in East Europe soliciting support for a Jewish volunteer brigade, and received the Kremlin's authorization through Malenkov's midnight telephone call on June 20, 1948. It is reasonable to assume that Stalin gave up on Mikunis's promises even before the official results of Israel's first national election in January, 1949, and, almost obsessed by fears of imaginary "Zionist-Titoist" plots against him as the result of other factors, simply wrote Israel off as an unprofitable investment.

At home, Stalin's reaction was swift and brutal. The anti-Zionist campaign, signaled by Ehrenburg's articles, grew in intensity and lasted nearly four years. In October, 1948, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, of which Ehrenburg had once been the most prominent member, was closed down as a center of subversion. The Yiddish publishing house, *Emes* (Truth), was also shut down. The Yiddish newspaper, *Einikeit*, the Yiddish theater in Moscow, and other assorted Jewish institutions were suspended. For the first time, small but critical changes appeared in the normal slogans; the adjective "homeless," never applied before the end of 1948, was added to "cosmopolitan," which was designed to leave no doubt that it was the Jews, rather than any other minority group, which were coming under indictment. Finally, before the year ended, Gerald A. I. Antonov, the chief-of-staff of

the Red Army, was “discovered” to be Jewish and was replaced by a non-Jew, General S. M. Shtemenko. One authority estimates that “from 1948 onwards, 238 Yiddish writers, 87 Jewish painters, 99 actors, and 19 musicians, a total of 443, were either executed or tortured to death or had otherwise perished in Soviet prisons and concentration camps.”<sup>22</sup>

Almost immediately, the satellite countries reacted to the Kremlin’s new mood, and as early as December 4, 1948, Zionist organizations in Bucharest and Jassy were disbanded and their leaders arrested. A week later, on December 12, the Rumanian Politburo published a violent attack against Rumania’s estimated 160,000 Zionists, branding them as members of “a political, nationalistic, reactionary current of the Jewish bourgeoisie, which strives to prevent Jews from fighting with progressive forces against capitalism and their own bourgeoisie.”<sup>23</sup>

The Jewish membership of Israel’s Communist party found itself, as it would many times in the future, on the horns of the Zionist-Marxist dilemma. The very foundations of Zionism, as will be discussed later, rested upon the “ingathering” of world Jewry to a national homeland in Palestine. Yet it was becoming obvious that Moscow had little intention of allowing the revitalized East European Jewish communities, totalling about 3,000,000 people, to become active Zionists or begin a mass exodus to Israel. The internal conflict to reconcile the two ideologies, emotionally charged and moving toward polar extremes, was best illustrated by the actions of Shmuel Mikunis.

The author Judd L. Teller implies that it was Shmuel Mikunis who relayed Moscow’s new phase of anti-Zionism to the satellites. He states that “three of his visits to Rumania were followed by the Bucharest governmental actions that had a shattering effect on Rumanian Jewry. These actions comprised the ban on Jewish emigration, the mass arrest of ‘Zionists, imperialists, and the bourgeoisie,’ and finally mass-scale deportations of Jews from Bucharest. It is rumored, without confirmation, that Mikunis’ counsel was directly responsible for the first two actions. . . .”<sup>24</sup> It appears that similar suspicions had arisen in Israel, for on June 26, 1949, the Knesset session was thrown into an uproar by a bellicose speech delivered by the Communist delegate, Meir Vilner,

22. Teller, *The Kremlin, the Jews, and the Middle East*, p. 78.

23. *New York Times*, December 4, 13, 1948.

24. Teller, *The Kremlin, the Jews, and the Middle East*, p. 159.



who raised the point in order to refute it. He categorically denied that Maki's leader, Mikunis, had ever declared in Rumania that no emigration should be permitted until a People's Democracy was set up in Israel, and he reaffirmed his party's platform that immigration was vital for the State of Israel.<sup>25</sup>

The charge against Mikunis was then dignified in a sensational public accusation in the Knesset, by Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett, which eventually forced the Israel Communist party, on the occasion of its eleventh party convention on October 22, 1949, to publish a full declaration of their position regarding the ideological conflict. Party secretary Mikunis admitted that he had, in fact, opposed immigration when it appeared that new immigrants threatened to displace local workers. "The situation had since changed," however, and he deplored the fact that his party had not stated its views earlier.<sup>26</sup>

Moscow's relations with Israel, on the other hand, continued in a normal, if slightly less enthusiastic, manner. Nearly six months earlier, in August, 1948, the Soviet diplomatic mission, composed of ten to twelve people and headed by Pavel Ivanovich Yershov, former chargé d'affaires in Ankara, arrived in Israel. He was warmly received: "... bands played the Hebrew and Soviet national anthems . . . a guard of honor stood at attention," and for the first time in their lives, "Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett donned high hats and striped trousers."<sup>27</sup> Arthur Koestler, an observer of Israel's first months of independence, noted that he "watched the arrival of the Russian diplomatic mission; acclaimed by a crowd of approximately a hundred people, the majority of whom cheered, while a minority booed. On his arrival in Haifa, the Soviet minister to Israel, Yershov, made the following laconic statement to the assembled press, local and foreign: 'We have arrived. Now we are here. That is the best news I can give you.' (Applause)."<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly, both the American mission, headed by Ambassador James G. McDonald, and the Soviet mission were housed, pending the availability of permanent quarters, in the same large Tel Aviv hotel, which gave rise to a variety of amusing confrontations and incidents.

25. *JAD* I, no. 38 (258), June 1, 1949, p. 24.

26. *Ibid.*, II, no. 6 (276), November 4, 1949, p. 221.

27. *New York Times*, August 17, 1948.

28. Koestler, *Promise and Fulfillment*, p. 273.

McDonald later recalled: "Whenever I was called to the public telephone, which was across the hall from our rooms, several of the Russian doors would open automatically. . . . Not infrequently our Russian neighbors would become mistaken about their room numbers. One day our Security Officer, Eugene F. McMahon, rapped on our door and was startled to have a Russian open it and walk out, murmuring that he was sorry to have been 'confused.' " <sup>29</sup> Several diplomatic incidents did occur between the Russian and American embassies, but all had erupted from oversights and clashes in matters of protocol, and were quickly smoothed over.

The presence of Yershov's embassy in Israel, however, does raise the important question of Russian infiltration into the new government, and their influence upon a society whose gratitude to the Eastern bloc for critically needed military supplies and diplomatic support was openly expressed. Ambassador McDonald not only realized the possibilities of such activities, but candidly admitted his inability to halt or counter them. In his memoirs, McDonald recalled that "it was more obvious to me that my Russian colleague, Yershov, would miss no opportunity to strengthen the tiny Communist movement and to buttress the romantic pro-Russians in Israel's left-wing labor. I could not hope to match Yershov in secret activities; indeed, I had none of his facilities for penetration of the Israel labor groups, and my Government would have forbidden me to try to improvise such facilities." <sup>30</sup> Arthur Koestler, on the other hand, recognized the insignificance of the Israeli Communist movement, but intimated that infiltration might take place in the lower ranks of the Stern Group, unknown to its leadership. <sup>31</sup> The specter of active Soviet penetration, however, quickly proved to be groundless, as was demonstrated by the results of Israel's first national election in January, 1949.

The Soviet embassy's failure to infiltrate to any degree can be attributed to several factors. Due to its sharp sense of political awareness, the Israeli population, and particularly its Labor party, soon understood the motive behind the Soviet gesture of support. Such an endorsement,

29. McDonald, *My Mission to Israel*, 1948-1951, p. 38. Koestler noted his opinion of McDonald in the following way: "He is a nice, donnish type, but I wonder whether an American don is the right match for the propaganda and infiltration experts of the Soviet Mission." *Promise and Fulfillment*, p. 280.

30. McDonald, *My Mission to Israel*, pp. 170-71.

31. Koestler, *Promise and Fulfillment*, p. 309.

from a country whose history included thirty years of anti-Zionism, could only be interpreted as a deliberate design to satisfy Russia's own political ends. Certainly, Israel's Communist party, Maki, had very little influence over the country's political direction, having made itself politically unreliable because of its former association with the Arabs, its early fight to halt immigration, and its denouncement of Zionism as a "bourgeoisie tool of Fascist imperialism." Their sudden reversal in November, 1947, to align with Russia's new Middle Eastern policy was an amusingly obvious maneuver which fooled no one. One final factor which brought the party into general conflict with the population, and which was never fully understood—after May, 1948—by the Kremlin itself, was its difference from other communist parties. This difference is best summarized in the following way:

Whereas West European Communist parties base their appeal largely on the socio-economic struggle, and Communist parties in developing areas or new states support the nationalist movements of the majority of the populations of these countries and have even attempted to place themselves at the head of such movements, the Israel Communist Party is unique in that its tactics are largely molded by deference to the nationalist tendencies of an ethnic and religious minority—the Arabs.<sup>32</sup>

As such, it represented a nearly useless infiltration and propaganda instrument for the Soviet Union.

Within a year of his arrival, Ambassador McDonald enthusiastically reported that "the Communist bogey in Israel . . . was without substance." He continued by stating that:

The alarmist rumors of Communist strength in the new State were shown—as we had repeatedly reported to Washington—to be gross exaggeration. But so fixed in many minds at home was the specter of a Communist menace in Israel that I constantly had to repeat the obvious fact that Communism, though perceptible, was unimportant. An amusing sidelight was the prompt split in the tiny Communist group of four in the Knesset; one of the four was denounced as a Titoist and read out of the Party by his colleagues!<sup>33</sup>

McDonald's report was later substantiated by the former British high commissioner in Palestine, Viscount Herbert Samuel, after a visit

32. Moshe M. Czudnowski and Jacob M. Landau, *The Israeli Communist Party and the Elections for the Fifth Knesset*, 1961 (Stanford, 1965), p. 2.

33. McDonald, *My Mission to Israel*, pp. 105, 134.

through Israel. He described the idea that Israel “will be Communistically inclined and ready to furnish a base for Russia in the Middle East” as a . . . “complete myth.”<sup>34</sup> The basis for these reports resulted from the outcome of the first national elections, in January, 1949, which will be discussed later.

The Soviet government, surprisingly, made very little effort to influence the direction of Israel’s political direction during the three vulnerable months leading to the first national election in January, 1949. Israel’s position in the international arena of the Cold War was one of “non-commitment,” as first outlined by David Ben-Gurion in an address to the executive of the Palestine Workers party (Mapai) on December 3, 1947:

. . . About two-thirds of our people in the Diaspora are scattered among the Western nations, and one-third in the East. This decisive fact, which will not speedily be altered, is enough in itself to compel us in the Land of Israel to follow a foreign policy of peace and goodwill towards all the nations in the world. . . . Any one-sided orientation, any calculation based on a new World War, any identification with one or another competing party—goes counter to the necessities taught by Jewish history, to the true independence of the Jewish State, to the vital interests of the people of Israel the world over, and to the most important and vital interest of all mankind: international peace.<sup>35</sup>

The idea of “non-commitment” is defined basically as a policy of examining each issue on its merits and its relationship to Israel’s policies without the commitment to automatically support the policies of the Eastern or Western blocs. With both sides competing for a commitment, Russia’s efforts to influence Israel were unexplainably light.

Standard broadcasts in Yiddish from Russia continued to extol the happiness of Jews living in Birobidjan.<sup>36</sup> The shocking assassination on September 17 of Count Folke Bernadotte, a United Nations mediator, by Jewish fanatics determined to halt his proposal to turn over the

34. Viscount Samuel’s radio broadcast on May 27, 1949, quoted in *JAD* I, no. 35 (255), June 10, 1949, p. 17.

35. David Ben-Gurion, “Principles for the Jewish State,” in *David Ben-Gurion, Selections* (New York, 1948), p. 80; also see Walter Eytan, “Israel’s Foreign Policy and International Relations,” *Middle Eastern Affairs*, May, 1951, pp. 155–60. Ben-Gurion’s estimate of the proportion of Jews in the Eastern and Western camps is exaggerated. Of the estimated 13,000,000 Jews outside of Israel, about 3,000,000, or slightly less than one-fourth, are in the Soviet bloc.

36. *Summary of World Broadcasts* I, no. 168 (October 6, 1948), p. 29.

Israeli-held southern Negev desert region to Jordan, received vigorous comments in an Arabic broadcast on September 30: "He was the victim, as he was previously the servant, of Anglo-American imperialism."<sup>37</sup> On October 8, 1948, another Russian broadcast predicted that the Arab League's "misadventures in Palestine" would lead to its own destruction, and pointed to the weakness which resulted from King Abdullah's willingness to hold Jordan's territorial gains and pull out of the combined Arab struggle to "liberate" Palestine.<sup>38</sup> One of the few items critical of Israel appeared in the form of a caustic article in the *New Times* of December 15, 1948. Heavy criticism was aimed at "certain groups and publications" in Israel, such as the independent journal *Beterem*, and the General Zionist party newspaper, *Haboker*, which had the ingratitude to "fabricate" suggestions that Jews in the Soviet Union were denied equal rights. These papers, the article continued, "were stuffed with [American-like] anti-Soviet slander"—unfair repayment for Russia's consistent championship of Israel's cause—and were cautioned that "the Jewish people are not served by those who take orders from the American monopolies."<sup>39</sup> The entire tone of the Soviet propaganda mill was surprisingly subdued, however, considering the proximity of Israel's first elections.

If the Soviet Union had any illusions as to the possible development of a Communist regime in Israel, or the establishment of a Soviet "toehold" in the Middle East (considering the absence of a Red Army or comparable force to support a potential bid, and the impotent condition of Israel's Communist party), its hopes rode on the potential strength of the left-wing parties in the election returns. The only major party in the rainbow of Israel's political spectrum which was left of Ben-Gurion's central Labor party (Mapai), the Communists aside, was the multisplintered United Workers' party, Mapam.<sup>40</sup> The party was formed in 1947 by the fusion of two socialist splinter groups, and, until the fall of 1947, even the stronger of the two, Hashomer Hatzair, opposed the idea of a Jewish state and advocated instead an Arab-

37. *Ibid.*, no. 165 (September 30, 1948), p. 25.

38. *Ibid.*, no. 168 (October 8, 1948), p. 27.

39. "Notes on International Life: Imitative Efforts," *New Times*, no. 51 (December 15, 1948), p. 16. For a synthesis and comparison of each newspaper's reaction to these charges and, in turn, their countercharges against the anti-Zionist policies of the Soviet bloc, see *JAD* I, no. 12 (232), December 31, 1948, pp. 15-16.

40. Mapam stands for *Mifleget Poalim Meuchedet*, United Workers' Party.

Jewish binational union. The ideological make-up of the groups which formed Mapam was a broad and often conflicting mixture of Socialism and Zionist Nationalism. The inherent contradictions in an alliance between Marxism, which advocates the absence of national loyalty, and Zionism, which is based upon the return of world Jewry to a homeland in Palestine, created a multitude of political factions and splinter groups. The central problem always hinged on which of the two ideologies would be most influential in determining the political direction of the new homeland's powerful labor parties, and although the parties which formed Mapam had close ideological ties with Soviet Russia, Zionism took precedence over Soviet policy whenever their divergence appeared irreconcilable.<sup>41</sup> As the parties were jockeying for support for the election of January 25, 1949, which would decide Israel's political direction at home and her position in the Cold War arena of world politics, an event occurred, like a sudden bombshell, to influence its entire outcome.

On January 19, 1949, the United States Export Import Bank announced its decision to grant Israel a loan of \$35,000,000 and to earmark an additional \$65,000,000 more for later use. The massive loan, totalling \$100,000,000, carried a 3.5 percent annual interest rate and was to be fully repaid in fifteen years, and was to be used to finance projects to stimulate transportation, communications, industry and construction.<sup>42</sup> While two-thirds (\$65,000,000) of the announced loan was withheld, to be eventually released in small amounts beginning on March 10, 1949, the gesture itself indicated that Western hesitations over the political and economic stability of the state had vanished. This impression was substantiated the following morning when a State

41. Such an irreconcilable split occurred with the disillusionment of the Slansky trial of 1952, and culminated in the Czech-Egyptian Agreement in 1955. As a result, a small group broke leftward from Mapam to form *Si'at Smol* (Left Faction) which later merged with the Communist party, while a much larger group separated to the right to form *Ahdut ha'Avodah* (Unity of Labor). " 'If Lenin were alive,' recently mused Jacob Riftin, leader of Hashomer Hatzair in Israel, 'he would realize that the Communist persecution of true Zionists was all a terrible mistake, but even though this realization is late in coming, it is not reason enough to turn one's eyes away from Moscow—or Bucharest. All one can do is promise to be a still better Marxist-Leninist and hope for a change in the stubborn beloved.' " Shlomo Katz, "MAPAM—A Case of Political Neurosis," *Jewish Frontier*, October, 1950, pp. 17–18.

42. *The Commercial and Financial Chronicle* (New York), 169, pt. I (March 17, 1949), p. 1188.

Department spokesman announced that the grant of the United States loan was a step toward the granting of full *de jure* recognition by America.<sup>43</sup> Soviet Russia's lack of comment on the subject and its failure to make any corresponding gesture, other than allowing a series of unilateral trade agreements involving the exchange of products with Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Rumania, to be completed, was not lost on Israel's potential voters. The influential independent newspaper *Ha'aretz* later reminded its readers that while "there is no reason why our neutrality should not be preserved even if we accept offers of aid; what must be pointed out, however, is that no country except the United States has yet come forward with any such offer."<sup>44</sup> Despite left-wing charges that "the only reason for granting the loan conditionally [is] that the U.S. is waiting to see whether we are sufficiently grateful for what has been given us," it became quickly evident that the main body of the Israeli electorate, while reserving judgment on American motives for the gesture, was impressed.<sup>45</sup> The reaction of the majority of Israel's population to the American loan, and its possible effect on the national elections, was best expressed by an editorial which appeared in *Haboker* on January 21, 1949. It stated that:

. . . even if the assumptions of those who declare that the American loan was granted on the eve of the elections in order to pre-judge them prove true, we now have concrete evidence that America is at least interested in achieving some influence over us and in gaining our friendship. All powers, be they Eastern or Western, had the opportunity of making a friendly gesture towards Israel on the eve of the elections in order to gain support, and if America has expressed her friendship in the form of financial aid, this cannot minimize the significance attached to her relations with Israel and cannot reduce the importance of the loan for us.<sup>46</sup>

On the evening of January 25, 1949, Israel's first national elections were over, and the results determined the future political direction of

43. *JAD* I, no. 16 (236), January 28, 1949, p. 8. See, also, Hal Lehrman, "Washington Comes to Israel's Economic Rescue," *Commentary*, October, 1952, pp. 297-307. The Soviet bloc later charged that the loan came as the result of a secret meeting between Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and President Truman in which Israel promised bases to the United States in return for the loan. Ornstein, 'By Order from Moscow,' pp. 229-30.

44. *Ha'aretz*, February 9, 1949.

45. *Al-Hamishmar*, January 21, 1949.

46. *Haboker*, January 21, 1949, p. 2.

the state. David Ben-Gurion's center party, Mapai, received the largest single vote: 155,274, or 34.70 percent of the total 440,080 votes cast. The Mapam coalition, representing Marxism-Zionism (with emphasis on the "Zionism"), polled only 64,018 votes, or 14.54 percent. The Communist party received a dismal vote of confidence, with 15,148 votes, or 3.44 percent.<sup>47</sup> Surprisingly, a large number of the Communist votes were cast by Israel's Arab population, and while only 7.6 percent of the Israeli Arab population cast their ballots for the central party, Mapai, more than 23 percent voted Communist.<sup>48</sup> Not unexpectedly, Britain, Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, Chile, and the United States quickly granted de jure or de facto recognition of Israel. Equally unsurprising, the United States chief delegate to the United Nations, Warren Austin, announced to a press conference in Washington on January 21 that he thought it very likely that Israel would be admitted to the United Nations in April.<sup>49</sup>

For the Soviet Union, of course, the election results were a shattering failure. On January 26, only days after the election returns were officially verified, *Izvestia* reported that the secretary-general of the Israeli Communist party, Shmuel Mikunis, declared that the elections were neither free nor democratic,<sup>50</sup> a charge based on their complaint that "the Arab voters were not given the opportunity of signifying their support for the Communist Party and that they were compelled by defective election arrangements to support the majority Socialist movements."<sup>51</sup> The Soviet press on the whole, however, accepted the election results as they had accepted the announced decision of the American loan; stoically and without much comment.<sup>52</sup> It is clear that

47. JAD I, no. 18 (238), February 11, 1949. For a detailed political and historical analysis of the Israeli Communist party's election results, ethnic composition, geographical distribution, issues and voting trends, appeal to various groups, and leadership, see Czudnowski and Landau, *The Israeli Communist Party and the Elections for the Fifth Knesset*, 1961.

48. *Ibid.*

49. JAD I, no. 17 (237), February 4, 1949, p. 14.

50. *Izvestia*, January 26, 1949, p. 4.

51. *Kol Ha'am*, January 26, 1949.

52. Only two short articles appeared in the Soviet press concerning the election results. See *Izvestia*, February 4, 1949, p. 4; and March 11, 1949, p. 8. As a result of this increasing lack of Soviet sources, the author has been forced to rely more heavily on Israeli material, particularly the relatively objective bulletins of *The Jewish Agency's Digest*.



the Soviet Union was at the crossroads of decision regarding its relationship with Israel, and there is little question that the events of January, 1949, were soon to bring about a Soviet withdrawal on all fronts and that the opportunity had arrived for the reinterpretation of Soviet policy in broader terms.

Despite what appeared to be Israel's shift toward the West, Ben-Gurion was determined to adhere to a policy of "non-identification." As early as January 31, 1949, he announced, in a broadcast to parties willing to join the government coalition under Mapai, that one of the principles to be followed was "a foreign policy aiming at friendship and cooperation with the U.S. and the U.S.S.R."<sup>53</sup> This policy of "non-identification" was not only the desire to remain politically and economically independent, but concerned the effects of Israel on the fate, particularly in Eastern Europe, of world Jewry. On a later occasion, Ben-Gurion stated that "as long as there are millions of our people on both sides, we must guard our independence."<sup>54</sup> Yet he admitted, in the same session of the *Knesset*, that in certain ways, Israel could not afford to be rigidly neutral, particularly when it might appear that Middle East tension would bring a renewed Arab-Israel crisis. Recalling Israel's experiences in buying weapons in 1948, Ben-Gurion stated that "they both [Eastern and Western countries] wanted dollars from us—and dollars are only to be had in one certain country. . . . Neither the United States nor the Soviet governments gave us arms. But when Soviet Government says 'No,' that goes for everybody in Russia. It is not so in America."<sup>55</sup> Whatever advantages lay in learning toward the West, however, the substantial pressure from the Leftist sections of the Israeli population, represented by 24 out of the 120 seats in the *Knesset* (the Communist party held 4 seats, Mapam held 20), helped play a significant role in making Israel adhere to its early policy of neutrality. On March 8, 1949, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion read before the *Knesset* the completed program of the coalition government, which stated that the first principle of the foreign policy of Israel would be: "Loyalty to the fundamental principles of the United Nations' Charter and friendship with all peace-loving States and especially with the

53. As quoted in *JAD* I, no. 18 (238), February 11, 1949, p. 15.

54. Israel, Parliament, *Divrei ha-Knesset* (Israel Parliamentary Proceedings), 2d sess., vol. 5 (May 31, 1950), 1580–81.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 1587.

United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”<sup>56</sup>

Within two months after the elections, on March 3 and 4, Israel applied for admission to the United Nations. Israel's position for membership had improved enormously since its provisional government first announced its intention of making a formal application for membership on August 21, 1948.<sup>57</sup> The American loan, the election results, the diplomatic recognition by a number of states, and finally, the recent conclusion of a general armistice with Egypt on February 25, weighed heavily in Israel's favor. The Soviet representative, Jacob A. Malik, after condemning the “imperialist forces” which had tried to create “enmity between nations,” urged prompt action on the approval of Israel's membership.<sup>58</sup> The question was passed on to the General Assembly with Malik's proposal that, since the Palestine Question was familiar to all delegates, the application might be most speedily accepted if the question were sent directly to the Assembly body without reference to preliminary committee discussion.<sup>59</sup> A second Russian delegate, A. A. Soldatov, announced in advance that Russia would vote in favor of Israel's admission without conditions.<sup>60</sup> The issue was sent to an ad hoc political committee, however, although it became quickly evident that despite continual Arab opposition the members shared Malik's view that Israel's application for membership should be readily accepted. Reflecting the general reassessment of Soviet foreign policy with regard to Israel, the Eastern bloc representatives of the committee utilized nearly every opportunity to recall their long-standing “unconditional support” for Israel, in contrast to the United States “which had arrived at its present position of support for Israel by very torturous means, in which a substantial influence was exerted by considerations of the last election.”<sup>61</sup> On May 11, 1949, the committee's recommendation was adopted and Israel was admitted to the

56. The entire document may be found in *International Studies, Israel: Documents, Facts, and Figures* (London, 1950).

57. *New York Times*, August 21, 1948, p. 5.

58. Security Council, *Official Records: Fourth Year*, 413th meeting, March 3, 1949, p. 4.

59. General Assembly, *Official Records: Third Session*, Part II, 191st Plenary Meeting, April 13, 1949, pp. 45-46; also, see *Izvestia*, April 14, 1949, p. 4, or the identical report appearing in *Pravda*, April 15, 1949, p. 4.

60. See *Izvestia*, May 12, 1949, p. 3.

61. *JAD* I, no. 31 (251), May 13, 1949, p. 13.

United Nations. Due to the Soviet government's dual policy of maintaining normal diplomatic relations with Israel while suppressing Zionism domestically, the Soviet press was forced to reduce the announcement of her championship of Israel's application to the United Nations to a terse twenty-five-word statement in *Izvestia*.<sup>62</sup>

Czechoslovakia's interest in Israel, at low ebb at the end of the Rechesh period in November and December of 1948 and January of 1949, suddenly sparked to life in February. Returning to Prague from a series of commercial negotiations in the United States and Holland, the Czech deputy minister of foreign trade, Eugene Loeb, unexpectedly contacted the Israeli embassy with an unusual proposal. During the first meeting with Loeb, Ambassador Avriel and the commercial attaché of the embassy, Shimon Ornstein, listened to a rambling recollection of Czechoslovakia's critical aid to Israel during the previous year, at the end of which Loeb outlined a plan by which they might show their gratitude. He went on to explain that Czechoslovakia was in desperate need of a variety of materials, such as lead, copper, and ball bearings, which were included on the West's list of embargoed goods to the Eastern bloc. Loeb then suggested that Czechoslovakia create a dummy company through which the purchases could be made from Israel. Since Czechoslovakia needed currency as badly as the materials it wanted to buy from Israel, Loeb implied that Prague was prepared to pay for the goods in Jewish emigrants and their property.<sup>63</sup>

The company was, in fact, created. It was called Merkuria and was headed by two Czech appointees named Penek and Chervienko. Negotiations dragged on, however, through February, March, and April of 1949, while both sides tried to agree among themselves upon the values of the purchases involved, the disposition of the emigrants' property, and the methods of transport. At one point during the secret meetings,<sup>64</sup> Loeb suggested a new plan to Ornstein, who, as commercial attaché, was appointed by Avriel to represent Israel in the Merkuria project. Temporarily shelving the Merkuria idea, Loeb proposed

62. *Izvestia*, May 13, 1949, p. 4.

63. Ornstein, 'Adventure in Prague,' p. 92.

64. Ornstein states that he was well aware that the STB (Czech Security Police) knew everything about the arrangements with Loeb, and that his suspicions were later confirmed during his imprisonment in Prague, 1951-54. Ornstein, 'Adventure in Prague,' p. 92.

that since Israel had recently received a \$100,000,000 loan from the United States (January 20, 1949), Israel could lend Czechoslovakia \$20,000,000 of that money to be repaid in five years, in return for which Czechoslovakia would release a large number of Jews together with their personal property. The proposal was immediately relayed to Israel for further study, and was accepted by the minister of finance, Eliezer Kaplan, before being passed on to Ben-Gurion for final approval. Ben-Gurion, however, rejected the Czech proposal, arguing that such a loan to Czechoslovakia would incur the immediate censure of the United States, one of Israel's few friends among the Great Powers.

Loebl then suggested another proposal in mid-June, also independent of the Merkuria idea. The Czech government had had little success in actually obtaining the property of the existing emigrants, since they generally either left their currency savings in the hands of relatives, somehow smuggled it out of Czechoslovakia, or, as a last resort, simply buried it. Loebl proposed that if the Israeli government encouraged the emigrants to surrender the Czech currency, for which they could be recompensated in Israel currency upon their arrival in Haifa, Prague would consider the money as a loan which would be repaid in trade goods in five years. The proposal, while somewhat complicated in its repayment schedule and currency parities, appeared ideal, and the plan was immediately relayed to Tel Aviv for authorization. When official approval for the project finally arrived from Israel, it appeared that Loebl had lost interest in the entire matter. When Ornstein later attempted to renew negotiations in September, he was told that Loebl had been taken for interrogation by the STB the night before.<sup>65</sup>

Soviet relations with Israel after May, 1949, were already showing signs of a policy reorientation. An early warning appeared during a friendly conversation between Namir and Deputy Foreign Minister Zorin on May 5 concerning Israel's remarkable military accomplishments during the past year. To Namir's modest reply about the value of Israel's foreign friends, Zorin answered that "Soviet support will continue all the time that Israel will continue on the right political

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-96; Ornstein, 'By Order from Moscow,' pp. 74-75, 162. Loebl was interrogated in September, released, and finally arrested on November 24, 1949, as a defendant in the Slansky trial of 1952.

line.”<sup>66</sup> Press and radio broadcasts were devoting a larger percentage of their coverage to anti-Israel themes, and any effort to appeal to the Israeli population in general was forsaken. Contact with Israel was limited to comments on the activities and pronouncements of the Israeli Communist and far-left parties. Soviet broadcasts concentrated mainly on repeating their reports concerning clashes between Israeli police and governmental agencies, unemployed workers who demanded “bread, work, and housing,” and protests by “war disabled men” against the General Demobilization Departments in Haifa and Tel Aviv.<sup>67</sup> Eager to emphasize the continued devotion of Israel’s left-wing to the Soviet Union, despite what was felt to be ingratitude on the part of the rest of the population, *Izvestia* carried a 275-word article, the text of which was broadcast the same day, reporting the celebration organized by the Israeli League for Friendly Relations with the USSR. The meeting was held to dedicate the second anniversary of Gromyko’s General Assembly speech, which first recognized Jewish rights in Palestine, and during the celebration it was reportedly stated that “the people of Israel would not permit their country to be converted into an Anglo-American military base.”<sup>68</sup>

Despite its gradual shift toward the West, Israel tried to continue

66. Dagan, *Moscow and Jerusalem*, p. 41–42.

67. *Summary of World Broadcasts* I, no. 7 (May 10, 1949), p. 27. On May 18, 1949, the Israeli Communist party was accused from the floor of the Knesset of having organized the series of anti-government demonstrations by new immigrants and disabled veterans to embarrass the Mapai coalition’s economic policies and to discredit the Ex-Servicemen’s Employment Bill of April 25. See *JAD* I, no. 33 (253), May 27, 1949, p. 22; *Haboker*, April 25, 1949; *Ha’aretz*, April 26, 1949; and *Davar*, April 26, 1949. A variety of other demonstrations involving alleged discriminatory practices of the Government Settlement Department in the allotment of land to Communist immigrants were also attributed to the Israeli Communist party.

68. *Izvestia*, May 17, 1949, p. 4; *Summary of World Broadcasts* I, no. 8 (May 17, 1949), p. 25. The League soon came under intense pressure from Mapai, and eventually split in mid-July. See the *New York Times*, July 14, 1949, and the statement issued by Mapai in connection with the withdrawal from the League for the Promotion of Friendly Relations with the USSR in *The Jewish Vanguard* (London), August 5, 1949, p. 3; *JAD* I, no. 41 (261), July 22, 1949, p. 17. The government parties disowned the League despite the fact that it had once been “seen as an instrument of stabilization of relations between our State and that Eastern power whose help we require . . . because hundreds of thousands of Jews live within its borders . . .” (*Hatzofeh*, July 26, 1949), and founded, instead, a League of Friendly Relations with the U.S.A., and a more conservative, government-sponsored Committee for Friendship with the Soviet Union.

along a path of “non-commitment,” and made a variety of efforts to placate Soviet irritability. In June, for example, Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett invited Gromyko to Israel, hoping that the visit—which certainly would not be to the West’s liking—would serve as proof of Israel’s neutrality. Another event occurred in early August when the director of the Eastern European division of the Israeli foreign ministry, Dr. Shmuel Eliashev, went on a mission to Moscow to reassure the Kremlin that Israel did not intend to deviate from its position of non-commitment. It was ventured that he would also discuss the resumption of Jewish immigration from Rumania and Hungary, as well as the possibility of obtaining assistance should the Security Council decide to abolish the embargo on arms shipments to the Middle East.<sup>69</sup> Israeli authorities quickly denied, however, that Eliashev had gone to Moscow with any intention of purchasing arms, and an official announcement on August 20, 1949, stated that “Israel had received no Soviet arms during the Palestine fighting and was not expecting or seeking any now.”<sup>70</sup> Still another example of Israeli efforts to maintain amiable relations with the Soviet Union took place during the same month when the Knesset, on August 24, unanimously passed a bill annulling the mandate’s Russian property order as the first step toward recognizing Soviet control over Russian ecclesiastic property in Israel. The original British bill, passed after the Russian Revolution, placed all Russian Orthodox property, consisting of a variety of monasteries and religious compounds in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Tel Aviv, Tiberias, and Haifa, under mandatory guardianship. Despite rumors that the head of the Orthodox Church, Archimandrite Leonides, was “working ‘hand-in-glove’ with the Soviet Ministry in Tel Aviv,”<sup>71</sup> Soviet claims to the property were recognized during the same Knesset session. While one authority states that “the Orthodox clergy . . . assisted in the grand-scale drive to win footholds in the Middle East,” there is no evidence to indicate that the several handfulls of ecclesiastical envoys who came to Jerusalem to claim the properties ever

69. *The Times* (London), August 8, 1949; *JAD* I, no. 50 (270), September 23, 1949, p. 23; vol. II, no. 3 (273), October 14, 1949, p. 86; vol. II, no. 4 (274), October 21, 1949, pp. 125–26. A year later, Eliashev was appointed Israel’s ambassador to Czechoslovakia.

70. *JAD* I, no. 47 (267), September 2, 1949, p. 10.

71. *Ibid.*, no. 46 (266), August 26, 1949, p. 5; no. 47 (267), September 2, 1949, p. 16.

crossed the secular line.<sup>72</sup> Evidently reassured by the Orthodox clergy's behavior in Israel, the Lebanese government, a year later—in July, 1950—recognized the legality of Soviet claims to Russian ecclesiastic property in Lebanon.

Israel also utilized every public opportunity to maintain stable relations with the Soviet Union. For instance, in a cable of good wishes to Stalin on the occasion of the thirty-second anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Ben-Gurion stated that “the Jewish People, which in building its State afresh in its historic homeland, will not forget Soviet Russia's courageous fight against the Nazi enemy, and in its faithful help in the establishment of the State of Israel.”<sup>73</sup> In addition, the leading officials of the government broke precedent in interrupting the opening session of the Knesset personally to attend the anniversary function at the Soviet embassy in Tel Aviv.

Russia's dual policy with regard to Israel, on one hand, and its domestic “anticosmopolitan” campaign, on the other, was not unique. In fact, Israel was carrying out a dual policy of its own in its relations with the Soviet bloc. While Israel's diplomats and trade representatives maintained normal relations at the governmental level, they were at the same time crucially involved in influencing their host country's immigration restrictions and expediting the process which would bring Soviet Jews to Israel. Walter Eytan, head of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, defined the role of Israel's ambassadors in this way: “It is commonplace of our Foreign Service that every Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Israel has a dual function. He is Minister Plenipotentiary to the country to which he is accredited—and Envoy Extraordinary to its Jews. This has come to be accepted generally: by other Governments in the “free” world, by the Jews of the Diaspora, and by everyone in Israel.”<sup>74</sup> After the very real problem of survival had been temporarily settled with the armistice agreements during the spring months of 1949, the crucial question became the

72. David Dallin, “Soviet Policy in the Middle East,” *Middle Eastern Affairs*, November, 1955, p. 342. It was later disclosed by the Israeli press that the new Moscow director of the Russian Orthodox property was A. Y. Kratchkowsky, an expert on Arab affairs and an anti-Zionist who had reportedly been a key figure in outlawing Zionist activities in the Soviet Union. *JAD* III, no. 21 (342), February 3, 1956, p. 818.

73. Quoted in *JAD* II, no. 8 (278), November 18, 1949, pp. 298–99.

74. Walter Eytan, *The First Ten Years: A Diplomatic History of Israel* (London, 1958), p. 179.

“gathering in” of Jews from the Diaspora who desired to make Israel their new home. Unrestricted immigration to Palestine is a basic tenet of Zionism, which now became interwoven with Israel’s real need for expanding a population which numbered a bare 655,000 on May 14, 1948. “Mass-immigration—” said Ben-Gurion in an address to the Knesset, “it was for this that the State was established, and it is by virtue of this alone that it will stand.”<sup>75</sup> On another occasion, he said that “immigration is not only Israel’s lifeblood—the guarantee of her security and future. It is her very essence, her soul: the sin against immigration is the one sin she cannot forgive.”<sup>76</sup> It is not surprising, then, that the greatest cloud over Israeli-Soviet relations from 1949 came as a result of the latter’s curtailment of free Jewish emigration from the Eastern bloc countries. The gradual shift of the Soviet domestic persecution, from anti-Zionism to anti-Semitism, only served to complicate relations. It is necessary to note, however, that the very existence of the more than three million Jews in Russia and East Europe was, and remains, a critical factor in Israel’s efforts to remain unaligned in the Cold War, and to adapt remarkable restraint in the face of periodical Soviet provocation.<sup>77</sup>

75. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion’s address to the Knesset, April 26, 1949, as quoted in *Israel: Documents, Facts and Figures*, p. 26.

76. Eytan, *The First Ten Years*, p. 190.

77. An example of this adaptation can be seen, for example, in June, 1957, when during a Knesset debate on the Eisenhower Doctrine, the left-wing government parties stated that a major problem involved identifying with the United States, which “might prejudice the possibility that the USSR might permit the emigration of Jews to Israel.” *Jerusalem Post*, June 4, 1957.





Golda Meir in Moscow, 1948, after presenting her credentials as Israel's ambassador. From left, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Vlassov, Bucharov, Mrs. Meir, Deputy Foreign Minister Zorin. *Israel Government Press Office*





Approximately 40,000 Russian Jews appeared outside the Moscow synagogue to hail Golda Meir (visible in center foreground) and the State of Israel as she attended Rosh Hashana services in September, 1948. This scene and the fear of a Jewish renaissance in Russia moved the Kremlin to reassess its relations with Israel.

*Lewin-Epstein Publishers*





Czechoslovakia's top military staff, Prague, 1948. From left, General Ludvik Svoboda, minister of defense; Premier Klement Gottwald, commander-in-chief of the army; Rudolf Slansky, Communist party secretary-general and chairman of the military commission in Parliament; and General Rudolf Bulander, the premier's military aide.

*Acme*





Israel's Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett on the right, with Russian Ambassador Pavel Ivanovich Yershov, Tel Aviv, September, 1948.

*Israel Government Press Office*





The original Rechesh team, instrumental in the negotiation of Czech military aid, became the officials of the first Israeli Embassy in Prague, 1948. From left, Dr. Otto Felix (Uriel Doron), Rafi Ben-Shalom, Ehud Avriel, Josef Ilan, Uri Naor.

*Israel Government Press Office*





A remote but dramatic memorial to Czech aid to Israel. One of the original Avia C-210 Messerschmitts which arrived in 1948, and which still bears the insignia of the 101st Squadron, the original unit of the Israeli Air Force. The inscription on the front of the pedestal was covered by the security-conscious military for the photograph.

*Israel Defense Force and James F. Craig*



Ehud Avriel in conversation with George Taussig (in airline uniform) representative of Č.S.R. Československe Aerolinie, first to serve Israel on a regular schedule. Photo taken at Haifa airport on June 20, 1948, as Avriel left to take up his post as Israel's first ambassador to Prague.

*Hans H. Pinn*





Israel between East and West, 1950. From left, American Ambassador James G. McDonald, President Chaim Weizmann, and Soviet Ambassador Pavel Yershov.  
*Israel Government Press Office*



Bombed Soviet Embassy in Tel Aviv, 1953, the final event in the deteriorating Soviet-Israeli relationship. The bombing of the embassy by unknown persons on February 9, 1953, added to the pressures of the Slansky trial and the "Doctors' Plot" and resulted in the severance of diplomatic relations.  
*Hans H. Pinn*





Shimon Ornstein, former commercial attaché in Prague and victim of the Slansky trial, in a tearful reunion with his wife at Lod Airport after spending three years in a Czech prison; October 29, 1954.

*Hans H. Pinn*



Leading Mapam representative Mordechai Oren upon his arrival in Tel Aviv after release from a Czech prison in May, 1956. Arrested and imprisoned with Ornstein in November, 1951, as an "American-Zionist agent," Oren was used as a witness against Slansky. From left, Oren's wife Rega; son Moshe, and daughter Pouah.

*United Press International*



## The Critical Question of Emigration

DESPITE the increasingly evident “anticosmopolitan” campaign in Eastern Europe, and the total silence by the Soviet press on the issue of emigration, Israeli officials looked toward the new year, 1949, with optimism. Until the end of 1948, Hungarian Jews could obtain an exit visa for Israel with comparative ease, yet by January 10, 1949, John MacCorman of the *New York Times* reported that emigration “has been made difficult.” By February 10, it became evident that the Hungarian government was in the process of restricting the emigration of Hungary’s 170,000 Jews to small groups of people over the age of fifty, whose usefulness to either nation was limited.<sup>1</sup> As a result of talks later that month between Ehud Avriel, Israeli ambassador to Prague and Budapest, and Matyas Rakosi in Hungary, a partial reversal of emigration policy was announced, and it was hoped that 30,000 Jews would be allowed to emigrate to Israel.<sup>2</sup> The negotiations between both government representatives continued through March and April, despite the intensifying anti-Zionist campaign around them. On March 21, for instance, the Jewish Agency executive in Jerusalem received notice that the Hungarian government was deporting a group of Zionist representatives,<sup>3</sup> and several months later, an

1. *New York Herald Tribune*, February 8 and 10, 1949. According to the *Manchester Guardian* (June 14, 1949), more than 75 percent of Hungarian Jewry wanted to leave for Israel, but the Hungarian government was reluctant to let any younger Jews leave the country.

2. *Ibid.*, February 22, 1949.

3. *JAD* I no. 25 (245), April 1, 1949, p. 16.

additional ten well-known Hungarian Zionist leaders were arrested and charged with organizing the illegal emigration of Jews from Hungary.<sup>4</sup> By the first week of May, Avriel reported that negotiations were proceeding slowly, but that "Hungary was understood to have no objection to the principle of emigration."<sup>5</sup> Despite the appearance of an unconfirmed report in the *Palestine Post* which stated that the Hungarian government was understood to have stated its intention to release from between 20,000 and 25,000 Jews who desired to go to Israel, negotiations came to a dead halt.<sup>6</sup> Hungary's attitude became so recalcitrant toward mass emigration that even the Israeli radical left-wing newspaper, *Al Hamishmar*, could not remain silent. On September 6, 1949, *Al Hamishmar* attacked the attitude of the Hungarian government as being in "direct contradiction to the Stalinist conception of national liberation," and "nothing more than an act of discrimination against the Jewish people." The situation in Hungary did not change, however, and the total number of Hungarian Jews allowed to emigrate to Israel during the entire year 1949 was 6,830.<sup>7</sup>

The situation with regard to Czechoslovakia, while basically similar, was a bit more optimistic. On March 10, 1949, the Israeli legation announced that following a series of negotiations with the Czech authorities, expanded immigration policies would remain in force until May 15.<sup>8</sup> On April 6, the first group of Czech Jews, some 460, left directly from Prague to Italy, enroute to Israel, "under an agreement with the authorities in Prague to allow the emigration of 25,000 Czech Jews before May 15."<sup>9</sup> Totally apart from the negotiations then in progress between Ornstein and LoebI over the question of expanding emigration policies in return for a five-year loan, and the creation of the abortive Merkuria company, some 10,500 Czech Jews were allowed

4. *Ibid.*, no. 37 (257), June 24, 1949, p. 19; no. 38 (258), July 1, 1949, p. 18; *New York Times*, June 19, 1949, pp. 1, 21.

5. *Ibid.*, no. 30 (250), May 6, 1949, p. 13.

6. *Palestine Post*, May 6, 1949.

7. *Israel: Documents, Facts and Figures*, p. 28. Immigration figures vary considerably, even among official Israel bulletins. Another source lists the number of Hungarian immigrants who arrived by December, 1949, at 10,307, and the total number of Hungarian Jews to have entered Israel between May, 1948, and December, 1951, at 13,631. Israel, Jewish Agency Immigration Department, *Sixteen Years of Immigration to Israel* (Jerusalem, 1964).

8. *New York Times*, March 10, 1949.

9. JAD I no. 27 (247), April 15, 1949, p. 29.

to leave before the end of April, with another 15,000 waiting for visas.<sup>10</sup> Just prior to the sudden shutdown of the Joint Distribution Committee during the last week of April, the legation in Prague reported that “no general restrictions exist on emigration to Israel . . . though medical personnel had recently been refused emigrants’ passports, and some works councils had objected to releasing experts needed in Czechoslovak industry.”<sup>11</sup> Although the flow of emigrants was sharply reduced after early May, the total number of Czech Jews to enter Israel in 1949 was 15,689.<sup>12</sup>

A similar pattern emerged in Poland. One month after the appearance of Ilya Ehrenburg’s attack on Zionism and Jewish nationalism in *Pravda*, the Jewish Communist newspaper, *Folks-shtimme*, published in Lodz, carried an article by M. Mirsky, one of the leading Communist theorists in Poland. Starting from the premises laid down by Ehrenburg’s article, Mirsky discussed the emigration question in Poland in the following way:

The “theory of emigration,” which has taken on the extremely reactionary character of an “Exodus from Poland” and an “Exodus from Europe,” was imported into Poland by reactionary Zionist circles. . . . The deceptive glitter of Zionism as an apparent liberation movement misled members of the Jewish community and some of the Polish people and has even penetrated into the labor movement. The development of the bourgeois class in the direction of reaction is so far advanced, however, that it did not require much time for Zionism to reveal itself in Palestine as a reactionary political movement selling out the national interests of the Jewish people and preparing to exchange the decision of November 29, 1947, regarding a Jewish State for a new ghetto.<sup>13</sup>

While the non-Jewish leadership of the Polish Communist party tended to remain somewhat aloof to the problem of emigration, the high-ranking members of Jewish background were divided into polar extremes. One group, dubbed by one writer the “Aryan” Jewish Com-

10. *Ibid.*, no. 30 (250), May 6, 1949, p. 13. The exit of the Czech Brigade, elements of which left as late as February, 1949, were most likely included in these figures.

11. *Ibid.*, II, no. 17 (287), January 20, 1950, p. 751; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 29, 1949.

12. *Israel: Documents, Facts and Figures*, p. 28.

13. *Folks-shtimme*, October 22, 1948, as quoted in Jacob Lestshinsky, “Anti-Zionism in Poland,” *Jewish Frontier*, March, 1949, p. 7.

munists, included Jakub Berman, Hilary Minc, and Roman Zambrowski; this group wanted to see the Jewish problem in Poland solved in a more radical manner than assimilation. Perhaps to break all connections with their backgrounds, or to prevent the reoccurrence of Poland's deeply rooted anti-Semitism, it was the "Aryan" Jewish Communists who were openly encouraging the emigration of Polish Jews. On the other hand, the "Jewish" Jewish Communists, including Zacharias, Mirsky, Lazevnik, and Smolar, evidently under the protection of Foreign Minister Zygmunt Modzelewski, preferred the continued existence of a Jewish community in Poland, which might continue to be a source of dollars from abroad, and in whose name they could continue to speak.<sup>14</sup>

During the second week in November, 1949, the Jewish members of the party held a conference to define their precise attitude toward Zionism, expanded emigration policies, and the general "Jewish Question" in Poland. Under the direction of the "Jewish" Jewish Communist leader Zacharias, a series of resolutions entitled "New Tasks in the Jewish World" were adopted and published in the *Folks-shtimme* of November 12. The document, which established the tone of future treatment of Poland's Jewry, was written in an attitude of repentance for the deviations from orthodox Soviet policy. The resolutions, which continued for more than four newspaper columns, stated in part, that:

Yielding to the pressure of Zionist nationalism has led some of our comrades, at least, to a Jewish version of rightist-nationalist repudiation of party leadership. This rejection . . . has manifested itself with particular prominence in:

- a) The identification of the struggle for national liberation of the masses of Palestine with the ideology of the Zionist movement; . . .
- b) In the erroneous concept that the Jewish communities in the countries of People's Democracy and Socialism are the hinterland of the State of Israel. . . .
- f) In insufficiently combating the criminal acts of the Zionist parties. . . .<sup>15</sup>

14. M. Sharf, "Exodus From Poland," *Jewish Frontier*, December, 1949, p. 9.

15. *Folks-shtimme*, November 12, 1948, as quoted in Lestshinsky, "Anti-Zionism in Poland," pp. 7-8.

As a partial result of these resolutions, the offices of the Jewish Agency were closed at the end of November, 1948, the Zionist Coordination Committee for Migration was liquidated, and emigration of Polish Jews to Israel came to a temporary halt. Officially, however, there was still no regulation forbidding anyone to apply for a permit to emigrate, and, in fact, from time to time during 1949 there were measures of great relaxation in the Polish government's emigration policies, and large numbers of passports were issued. The *Palestine Post* of May 6, 1949 was later able to acknowledge that "active Zionists are being permitted to emigrate, and the applications of relatives of families already settled in Israel are being given sympathetic consideration." A Polish announcement, quickly rescinded, that all restrictions would soon be dropped for anyone wishing to emigrate "provided, only, that they renounce their Polish citizenship," brought an elated response from Israel.<sup>16</sup> Lacking any firm directives from Moscow, the "Jewish" Jewish Communist leadership appeared unsuccessful in their efforts to halt mass emigration and force the assimilation of Poland's Jewry into the hostile fabric of general society, while the "Aryan" Jewish Communists, anxious to rid Poland of her Jews, were influencing the sporadically unrestricted emigration policies.<sup>17</sup> By the end of 1949, Poland had, in fact, released the largest number of Jewish emigrants, 47,343, of any satellite nation in the Eastern bloc; and emigration continued into the following year.<sup>18</sup>

Rumania, with the largest concentration of East European Jews outside of the Soviet Union (estimated at 350,000), was of critical importance to Israel as a source of immigrants. The situation appeared optimistic, at first, for a variety of reasons. The anti-Zionist campaign which was sweeping through the Soviet bloc nations was delayed somewhat in Rumania. Despite the earlier activities of Rumania's

16. See *Davar*, August 15, 1949; *Al Hamishmar*, August 15, 1949; *Hatzofeh*, August 16, 1949. Each emigrant, however, had to pay the government 5,000 zlotys for an exit permit. *JAD* II, no. 11 (281), December 30, 1949, p. 463. For personal property limitations, see *ibid.*, II, no. 17 (287), January 20, 1950, p. 751.

17. See *JAD* II, no. 10 (280), December 2, 1949, p. 408.

18. *Israel: Documents, Facts and Figures*, p. 28. Later Jewish Agency figures state that 76,132 Polish Jews entered Israel by December, 1949, and that the total figure between May, 1948, and December, 1951, rests at 103,732. See *Sixteen Years of Immigration to Israel*.

militantly pro-Communist Jewish Democratic Committee, which forcibly occupied the clubhouses of various Zionist organizations in Bucharest and Jassy, little headway was made in the face of Zionist resistance. It was not until December 12, 1948, that, partially due to pressure from the Jewish Communist leadership as well as to the increasingly intense campaign taking place in the other satellites, the Politburo of the Rumanian Communist party issued the first virulent attack on Rumanian Zionism. Another reason for optimism was that the majority of Rumanian Jewry had long been Zionists, and on several occasions after the war, the Politburo had been forced to make concessions in their behalf. The Politburo attack upon "reactionary Zionism which restrains the people from joining the progressive forces in a common struggle against capitalism," however, was made to appear as a concession to the "will of the people" and signaled the beginning of a long campaign of popular anti-Semitism.<sup>19</sup> By early March, 1949, it was becoming obvious that relations between Israel and Rumania were deteriorating rapidly.<sup>20</sup> Seven Israeli citizens, charged with involvement in illegal emigration activities, were arrested by Rumanian authorities and released on March 18, following a series of emergency talks between the Rumanian foreign minister, Anna Pauker, and Israel's ambassador to Bucharest, Reuven Rubin.<sup>21</sup> Israeli public opinion, normally cautious in its criticism of East European countries where large numbers of Jews remained, became outraged at Rumania's actions. The newspaper *Ha'aretz* (March 21, 1949) issued a "solemn warning that the anti-Zionist action on the scale instituted in Rumania is likely to arouse the hostility of Israel's public opinion"; *Haboker* (March 21, 1949) compared the actions of the Rumanian government with British policies in Palestine, and added the hope "that the Government of Rumania will understand how odious such comparisons are, and will change its present Jewish pol-

19. A. M. Bashby, "The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Rumania," *Jewish Frontier*, February, 1949, pp. 15-18.

20. See the *New York Times*, March 17, 1949.

21. Born in 1893, Reuven Rubin was perhaps Israel's most distinguished artist when he was unexpectedly approached by Sharett to represent the Jewish state in his native Rumania. For a highly interesting description of his tenure as Israel's first minister plenipotentiary to Bucharest, see Reuven Rubin, *My Life, My Art* (New York, 1969), pp. 211-19.

icy”; while the right-wing Revisionist party paper, *Hamashkif* (March 25, 1949), warned that “what has happened is that a declaration of political war has been made against us. And under the circumstances it is impossible for us not to reply.” Despite numerous conferences and meetings by Ambassador Rubin in Bucharest to expand the emigration policies, relations continued to deteriorate. On May 30, 1949, the Jewish Agency announced that “the largest group of immigrants to have left Rumania in recent months—142 persons—arrived in Haifa.” In June, the two officials of the Jewish National Fund in Rumania were brought to trial in Bucharest for allegedly violating currency regulations. In addition to a joint fine equaling \$500,000, they were sentenced to four months imprisonment, which was waived in light of the court’s own admission that they had already been detained for more than that period awaiting trial. Relations continued to deteriorate to the point that Prime Minister Ben-Gurion delivered a public attack against Rumania’s foreign minister, Mrs. Pauker. Speaking before a Mapai Labor party convention during the last weekend in October, Ben-Gurion declared that “this daughter of a Jewish rabbi now living in Israel is endeavoring to destroy the Jewish community in her country. . . . To her, any Jew is a Fascist. She would like to bring famine to this country in order to curb the wish of Jews to come here.” Continuing his attack, Ben-Gurion accused Mrs. Pauker of responsibility for the current series of anti-government demonstrations in Israel, promoted by Mapam and Maki. “She was interested in proving to the Jews in her own country that there was no point in emigrating to any state where work was scarce. . . .”<sup>22</sup> By the end of the year, only 13,596 Rumanian Jews (many of whom were elderly) out of a total of 350,000 were allowed to immigrate to Israel.<sup>23</sup>

Bulgaria, which pursued a relatively unrestricted emigration policy, allowed the exit of 35,000 Bulgarian Jews during 1949. Before the policy was finally reversed in 1952, the Bulgarian government had

22. Kenneth Bibly, “Anna Pauker, ‘Enemy’ of Israel Has Brother and Father There,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 1, 1949, p. 6. Pauker’s later fall from grace became the occasion for such vitriolic attacks as Shlomo Katz, “Run, Anna, Run! (A Letter to Anna Pauker),” *Jewish Frontier*, July, 1952, pp. 10–12.

23. *Israel: Documents, Facts and Figures*, p. 28. Again figures vary: 31,274 by December, 1949, and a total of 118,940 between May, 1948, and December, 1951. *Sixteen Years of Immigration to Israel*.

allowed the emigration of 40,000 of its total Jewish population of 45,000.<sup>24</sup>

The situation in Yugoslavia, affected perhaps by its ideological struggle with Moscow, was a welcome exception. From the end of the war, Yugoslavia had shown itself to be sympathetic and helpful to the Jewish plight. Tito repeatedly allowed the Haganah to transport thousands of illegal immigrants across its borders, sail munitions ships from its ports, and land Balak flights at its airfields. Internally, there appeared to be little restriction on the activities of its 11,000 Jews, even in governmental positions. For their part, the Jews had not established any significant Zionist organizations, nor produced Zionist propaganda. Perhaps as a result, the Yugoslav government not only allowed the nearly unrestricted emigration of those Jews wishing to leave, but maintained a *laissez faire* policy toward the activities of the Joint Distribution Committee which aided the emigration of Jews to Israel. Marko Ranković, the Yugoslav minister of the interior, told his Parliament on December 27, 1949, that Yugoslavia, unlike any other government, had consistently met the desires of those Jews who wished to emigrate to Israel and had, since the creation of the Jewish state, allowed 6,526 Jews to leave with their property. The emigrants left in three waves, and by 1951, totalled about 7,600 Jews.<sup>25</sup>

Russia's emigration policy, if it could be called that, was nearly nonexistent. Of an estimated 2,500,000 Jews in Russia, the Soviet government allowed the release of merely several elderly people. Nonetheless, the release of even a single emigrant from Russia was taken as a hopeful indication of things to follow. The first immigrant's journey enroute to Israel was followed with great interest, and on April 27, 1949, the Israeli legation in Prague announced that he had passed through Czechoslovakia. The next day, Radio Prague stated that the emigration of the first Russian Jew was not an isolated instance, and that other permits would soon be forthcoming.<sup>26</sup> Only a few other emigrants were allowed to leave for Israel, however.<sup>27</sup> Despite the

24. *Ibid.*; Ben-Gurion, *Israel: Years of Challenge*, p. 58.

25. See David Alkalai, "Tito's Record Toward the Jews," *Jewish Frontier*, January, 1953, pp. 20-23; *Sixteen Years of Immigration to Israel*.

26. JAD I, no. 30 (250), May 6, 1949, p. 13.

27. A total of four Russian Jews, three elderly women and a disabled war veteran, were allowed to emigrate to Israel. *New York Times*, September 21, 1949; JAD II, no. 10 (280), December 2, 1949, p. 408.



dismal outlook for the mass emigration of Russia's Jewry, the *Palestine Post* of May 6, 1949, reminded its readers that the Russian attitude in its German occupation zone was entirely favorable, and that no hindrance has been placed in the path of Jews wishing to emigrate to Israel.<sup>28</sup> Although only a single emigration permit for Israel was issued by the Soviet government for more than a decade afterward,<sup>29</sup> Israel has continued to structure her foreign policy with a view toward safeguarding the enormous mass of Russian Jewry and perhaps eventually coming to terms with the Soviet government for their emigration.<sup>30</sup>

More than any other event, the Soviet bloc's 1949 emigration policies helped to widen the growing chasm between them and Israel. If the Soviet Union had had any influence over the political direction of the Jewish State—and the first national election returns indicate otherwise—their advantage, by the beginning of 1950, was waning quickly. The far left wing paper, *Al Hamishmar* (June 22, 1949), summed up the situation by stating that "By their help to us at the U.N., the new democracies earned our sincere gratitude—but now, as a result of their refusal to permit their Jews to leave, they are inevitably losing the support of the left-wing movement in Israel." In addition, the very problem of mass immigration, which saw an unprecedented

28. Although the estimated figures of Jews who immigrated to Israel from the Allied zones of occupation are available (see, for instance, "Report From Germany," *Jewish Frontier*, February, 1949, pp. 12–15), no figures for Jewish emigrants, if any, from the Soviet zone are known.

29. In mid-1951, one Mrs. Tova Lerner, from Czernowitz, age 76, was issued a Soviet exit permit, as a result, she felt, of a letter she had written to Stalin some three years earlier. "Her passport had been stamped, on June 19, 1951, with the first immigration visa the Israel legation in Moscow had ever issued." Joseph Gordon, "Jews in the Soviet Union—A Survey," *Jewish Frontier*, December, 1951, p. 27. See *JAD* III, no. 46 (367), August 3, 1951, p. 1793; IV, no. 39 (409), May 23, 1952, p. 1120.

30. Several examples will illustrate Israel's attitude. During a Mapai meeting, for instance, Israel's foreign minister, Moshe Sharett, declared that Russia's Jews had not been forgotten, and that someday the second largest Jewish population in the world (after the United States) would be able to emigrate. A short time later, on August 19, 1951, Itzhak Raphael, director of the Jewish Agency's immigration department, stated, before the World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem, "that many thousands of Russian Jews might yet come to Israel." Gordon, "Jews in the Soviet Union—A Survey," p. 27. Israel's efforts to avoid antagonizing the Soviet government have continued to this day. Even current academic requests to any agency of the Israeli government for information concerning Israel's relations with the Soviet bloc, as this writer has discovered, are cautiously scrutinized and, if at all possible, discouraged or rejected.

influx of 700,000 immigrants enter Israel during the first four years after its independence—actually doubling Israel's original population—nearly broke the back of the country's economy. The fact that a huge number of immigrants were Arab and Oriental Jews, many of whom were penniless and unskilled, only added to the necessity for Ben-Gurion's austerity program. In the midst of this economic crisis, Israel applied to the Soviet Union for a long-term credit loan, during the fall of 1949, and was summarily rejected.<sup>31</sup> Russia's decision was a logical extension of her general abandonment of Israel, and caused a still further shift toward the West. Not only was Israel forced to lean toward a stable source of desperately needed funds, but Russia's 1949 policies had effectively rendered the counterbalance of Israel's once-influential left-wing parties impotent.

As official anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism grew in intensity throughout the East European nations, reports from the Arab world indicated that Soviet propaganda efforts were increasing, and that perhaps Moscow had already abandoned Israel and was considering mending its fences with the Moslem world. One such report was made by Glubb Pasha (John Glubb), the British commander-in-chief of the Jordanian Arab Legion, during a press conference in London at the end of May, 1949. He declared that Jordan was being flooded with "Soviet-inspired pamphlets," and suggested that communist infiltration had reached such proportions that a rebellion might easily take place in that country.<sup>32</sup> The following month, the (Israel) Arab Communist newspaper, *al-Ittihad*, reported that several demonstrators were killed when Communists, reportedly carrying signs calling for an independent Arab state in Palestine, clashed with Jordanian police in Nablus. In mid-July, 1949, the Egyptian parliament passed a sweeping bill initiating an anti-Communist drive, and in the middle of October, the governments of Turkey, Iraq, and Persia announced the signing of a joint agreement to participate in a concerted effort to round up fifth columnists, saboteurs, and all other "elements dangerous to public security."<sup>33</sup> Within the first few months of 1950, it was becoming obvious that the Soviet Union was allowing itself to appeal to a variety of powerful

31. Halford L. Hoskins, *The Middle East; Problem Area in World Politics* (New York, 1954), p. 116; see also, *JAD* II, no. 7 (277), November 11, 1949, p. 268.

32. As quoted in *JAD* I, no. 34 (254), June 2, 1949, p. 37.

33. As quoted in *JAD* II, no. 4 (274), October 21, 1949, p. 15.

Arab nationalist parties, most of which, interestingly, had had long traditions of fascist activity.<sup>34</sup> The most surprising Soviet advance into the Arab world occurred, however, in mid-July, 1949, when the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* disclosed that the government of Czechoslovakia had approached Egypt with a proposal to exchange \$5,000,000 worth of Egyptian cotton for Czech arms. The paper added that "the Egyptian authorities seem inclined to accept the offer."<sup>35</sup> No more than seven months had elapsed since the Czechs completed the final sale of weapons to the Haganah or closed down the training camp of Major Sochor's Czech Brigade and arranged for their transport to Israel. Czechoslovakia's startling proposal to the Egyptians not only indicated the scope of the Soviet bloc's growing estrangement with Israel, but it strongly reinforced the belief of Israel's general population that Soviet Russia's earlier support had been based upon pure self-interest and therefore warranted little gratitude. News of the proposed arms deal also further weakened Israel's far left-wing parties, enabling the state to shift Westward with relatively little effective opposition from within.

The Soviet Union's diplomatic shifts in the Middle East generally lagged somewhat behind her propaganda efforts and clandestine activities. The increasing Communist agitation in the Arab world led observers to look toward the United Nations for an expected change in her diplomatic support of Israel. They were not to be disappointed. The issue under consideration with regard to the Middle East was, as it had been since the passing of the original partition plan in November, 1947, the status of Jerusalem. The original United Nations proposal, as incorporated in Resolution 181 (II), called for the exclusion of the city and a considerable portion of the surrounding area from either the Jewish or Arab states—an international city to be administered by the United Nations Trusteeship Council.<sup>36</sup> The military events of 1948 and the inaction of the United Nations, however, sus-

34. Mark Alexander, "The Near East's Communist Fascist Front," *Commentary*, May, 1952, pp. 456–62. "Mark Alexander" was the nom de plume used by Middle East expert Walter Z. Laqueur.

35. *Al-Ahram* (Cairo) July 19, 1949.

36. See Paul Mohn, "Jerusalem and the United Nations," *International Conciliation*, no. 464 (October, 1950), p. 425; *Israel and the United Nations*, Report of a Study Group Set up by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (New York, 1956), Chapter 5, "The Jerusalem Question."

pendent further action, and when the Arab-Israeli conflict came to a close, during the spring of 1949, the city was divided between Israel and Jordan. The question was revived during the third session of the General Assembly, at which time a resolution was passed, on December 11, 1948, reaffirming the United Nations' desire to "internationalize" the city, and creating the Palestine Conciliation Commission to present detailed proposals at a later session.<sup>37</sup> Israel's position, as well as Jordan's, was that of firm opposition to any international interference with secular political status of the city, although Israel was agreeable to a measure of international supervision over the holy places in Jerusalem. The Soviet Union was relatively reserved about the issue, although it indicated that it supported a plan of internationalization. On August 3, 1949, the London *Times* correspondent in Tel Aviv declared that "Israel has already received assurances of support for partition from the Soviet Union," and noted that this unexpected support was directly involved with Israel's recognition of Russia's claims to Orthodox property. "It would appear," the correspondent continued, "that the value placed on these extensive properties is such that Russia does not want it prejudiced by possible interference from a United Nations agency."<sup>38</sup> Still, the Soviet Union appeared to make no firm commitment until mid-September. On September 17, 1949, the Israeli Communist paper, *Kol Ha'am*, published an open appeal to "include Jerusalem immediately in the State of Israel because American imperialist intrigues wish to internationalize the city." Israel's population was expectedly pleased with what appeared to be a sudden burst of patriotism by its far left wing and its evident support by the Soviet Union, although it was commonly assumed that the Soviet stand had occurred as a result of Dr. Eliashev's recently disclosed discussions with Gromyko in Moscow.<sup>39</sup> Israel's Communist party, finally at one with general public opinion, enthusiastically organized a number of demonstrations in Jerusalem against the internationalization plan and lauded Russia's past support for the Jewish state.

Suddenly the Soviet delegate to the United Nations, Semyon Tsa-

37. See U.N., Trusteeship Council Official Records, *Question of the Statute for the City of Jerusalem*, 2nd session, 1948.

38. *The Times* (London), August 4, 1949; JAD I, no. 46 (266), August 26, 1949, p. 506.

39. JAD II, no. 1 (271), September 30, 1949, p. 8.

rapkin, declared on November 29 that he, too, was in favor of internationalization.<sup>40</sup> The Israeli Communist party was forced to make a rapid turnabout, and on December 20, 1949, its paper, *Kol Ha'am*, published a lengthy resolution which attempted to explain its "opportunistic mistake" in attempting to solve one aspect of the Palestine problem alone without regard to how this would affect the party's stand in its war against imperialism. In addition, the newspaper *Hador* disclosed, on December 20, 1949, that a member of the Cominform had arrived in Israel to investigate the actions of the party's leadership, and particularly those of Secretary-General Mikunis. The paper concluded that the change in the party's stand on Jerusalem followed quickly after the visitor's investigation. There is little question, however, that the Cominform's representative was sent to investigate Maki's several-week delay in recanting the "opportunist mistake."<sup>41</sup>

By the end of 1949 it was becoming evident that the Soviet Union's policies regarding Israel and the Arab world were undergoing a realignment. Israel's noncommitment, which Moscow would rarely consider an adequate form of friendship, was slowly slipping away. Forced to turn to the West to ease the enormous financial and economic burdens which resulted from the unprecedented influx of immigrants, Israel made a variety of attempts to maintain its relations with the Soviet bloc, with little success. Moscow's rejection of Israel's application for a loan, its continued ban on emigration, its increased activity in the Arab world, and its withdrawal of diplomatic support for a partitioned Jerusalem indicated Russia's increasing lack of interest in supporting Israel's political demands or in increasing its power and thereby sharpening the anti-Soviet sentiments in the Arab world. In addition, this lack of interest rapidly nullified the USSR's single advantage in the Israel political spectrum by effectively weakening the far left wing parties. While Communist strength would increase slightly in the following elections, it would be the result of Russia's appeal to the Arabs, both inside and out of Israel, and to immigrants who were too new to recall Maki's ties with the Arabs, and not to the Palestinian

40. *Ibid.*, II, no. 10 (280), December 2, 1949, p. 397; no. 11 (281), December 9, 1949, p. 445; no. 16 (286), January 13, 1950, p. 684.

41. For interesting comments on *Kol Ha'am's* reversal, see *Haboker* and *Davar*, December 21, 1949. See, also, A. Hiram, "The Communist Party of Israel," p. 17; and S. Rimault, "Israeli Communists at Their Old Stand," *Jewish Frontier*, April, 1950, pp. 41-42.

Jews. The discordant events in Soviet-Israeli relations during 1949 were not in themselves the causes of that discord, but rather the symptoms of the ideological and political conflicts which the alliance created in both parties. The several years following would show the increasing momentum at which both the Soviet Union, and, in reaction, Israel would continue along the divergent paths first made apparent in 1949.

## The Final Stage

THE TRENDS which had appeared in the Soviet Union's relations with Israel during 1949 gained greater momentum during the beginning of the new decade. Israel's growing dependence on the West, in the light of her economically chaotic situation and the Soviet Union's lack of interest in providing an alternative, came to a head with Israel's position on the Korean conflict. Eastern Europe's failure to do more than slightly relax emigration policies served to complicate relations between the Soviet bloc and Israel. The lowest point of relations, however, came as a result of the Eastern European purge trials, culminating in the 1952 Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia, which saw Stalin's deep suspicion of a Zionist-infested party leadership openly erupt, and the fantastic Doctors' Plot two months later which brought the domestic anti-Semitic campaign to its peak. The events of 1950 in Israel, however, opened with governmental retaliation against its increasingly hostile Community party.

Throughout the latter half of 1949, the Israeli Communist party had vigorously exploited the chaos which resulted from the immigration of several hundred thousand Jewish refugees, organizing and publicizing a variety of demonstrations and protests for housing and employment. The temporary relocation camps, where immigrants were held pending the availability of employment, were ideal reservoirs of potentially disillusioned newcomers, and the Israeli Communist party wasted little time organizing them to embarrass Ben-Gurion's government. The party's reports in *Kol Ha'am* were used, in turn, by the Soviet Union's propaganda broadcasts to dissuade Eastern Euro-

pean Jews from considering emigration as an alternative to dedicated assimilation.

The Israeli party received a measure of public sympathy in mid-1949 when, as a result of strong political pressure, the government was forced to reopen a long-forgotten case involving the murder of an Israeli Communist leader. The government's Commission of Inquiry, whose results were published during the first week of September, 1949, found that the disappearance and murder of Sioma Mironiansky, secretary of the Communist party, on July 7, 1941, was a result of a local police conspiracy. Mironiansky had been arrested at his apartment by several Jewish police officers (who were exonerated after the crime) and it was claimed that the Communist leader had been killed (later that evening) at the Jaffa police station while attempting to "escape." The commission declared, however, that their investigation indicated that several of the policemen originally involved in the arrest had perjured themselves at the July, 1941, inquest, and would be tried on criminal charges, following a deeper investigation into the complicity in the murder.<sup>1</sup> The far left wing enthusiastically accepted the commission's findings, and attributed the crime to the persecution of Communists under the British Mandate, but warned that "the inheritance of the colonial regime had not yet been uprooted."<sup>2</sup> The Communist paper, *Kol Ha'am*, went one step further and declared that "the interests of the State and the public demand that the administration be cleansed of those who serve foreign [British] rulers."<sup>3</sup> The Israeli party, bolstered by what it felt was a political victory against the government's image, became more vociferous in its anti-Governmental activities and, within one month of their Commission of Inquiry, its enthusiasm had crossed the legal boundaries.

On October 14, 1949, *Kol Ha'am* exceeded the bounds of justifiable propaganda in charging Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, in reference to his address to a *Noar Haoved* (Organization of Working Youth) rally the previous day, with using words "that only traitors to their country and enemies of the workers would dare utter." Ben-Gurion, the paper charged, was "an American agent." The Israeli Communists, the government felt, had gone too far, and a libel suit against the daily

1. JAD I, 49 (269), September 16, 1949, pp. 26-27.

2. *Al Hamishmar*, September 5, 1949.

3. *Kol Ha'am*, September 4, 1949.



paper was immediately filed by the attorney general on the charge of defaming the prime minister. The hearing was set for January 15, 1950. While Soviet publications had been relatively silent about Israel over the past several months, the trial of *Kol Ha'am*'s editors (which was assumed by all involved to encompass a general indictment of the party's policies as a whole) brought sharp and detailed comments from Moscow. On January 17, 1950, *Izvestia* carried a lengthy report of the trial, based, for the most part, on *Kol Ha'am*'s own reports, in which the trial was compared to the McCarthy hearings in America and described as consisting of nothing less than "a campaign against the Communist party as a whole, and all the progressive forces in Israel." No sooner had the trial begun than Israel's (and *Izvestia*'s) attention was caught by a series of "sit-in" strikes in the Jewish Agency's offices in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv by Communist members of five cooperative villages. While protesting against what they felt was discrimination in the distribution of seed, strikers made clear their desire to form a separate Communist village within the Moshavim Co-operative Federation. The matter was raised in the Knesset on February 1, 1950, the protestors were evicted by police on February 4, and four days later, the settlement department of the Jewish Agency, headed by Levi Eshkol, and the Agricultural Workers' Union conceded the right of every settlement movement to establish one-party villages, and authorized the formation of a separate Communist village within the federation.<sup>4</sup> *Izvestia* quickly capitalized on the events and, using *Kol Ha'am*'s reports, published a lengthy indictment of Israel's alleged persecution of the Communist party.<sup>5</sup> Moscow's charges were strengthened when, on February 27, 1950, over howling protests by the far left wing parties, the Knesset ordered an inquiry into the growing intensity of the Communist activity in Israel.<sup>6</sup> The Soviet press pounced upon the opportunity to verify its prediction of an anti-Communist crusade in Israel, and expanded the theme to link Israel's every move to their supposed subservience to Washington. The Knesset inquiry appeared to have produced results, however, for within two weeks, in mid-March, two members of the Israeli party were arrested

4. *JAD* II, no. 19 (289), February 3, 1950, p. 839; no. 20 (290), February 10, 1950, p. 880; no. 21 (291), February 17, 1950, p. 914.

5. *Izvestia*, January 17 and 18, 1950.

6. *New York Times*, February 28, 1950.

by police and charged with “contravening the Official Secrets Act by being in possession of documents allegedly relating to the strength of the Army.”<sup>7</sup>

The extent of the Israeli government’s inquiry into the activities of the far left wing parties, specifically Mapam and Maki, was disclosed only later when, in 1963, the government brought official measures against the former omnipotent chief of the Secret Services (the Shin Bet), Iser Harel, to prevent him from revealing information in answer to a political charge by *Al Hamishmar*. In discussing his actions, Harel stated that during the early 1950s official surveillance was maintained over “suspect elements inside Mapam and the Communist Party, who were directed by a guiding hand inside the Soviet Embassy.” In his single public interview on the subject, Harel revealed that surveillance was initiated “after some boys from a *Hashomer Hatzair* branch had left an envelope in a Tel Aviv café, which the proprietor handed to the police, and which upon opening was found to contain classified political material from a Government office. . . . Later a Government official confessed that he operated on behalf of a secret Mapam agency and collected material for it.” When asked about listening devices which had been planted in the offices of the left-wing parties, Harel replied that such did exist, but had been placed to investigate “leftist elements conspiring with Maki and, above all, Meir Vilner, who was in close touch with the Soviet Embassy.” Harel assured the leaders of Mapam that the surveillance was never intended against them personally, but rather against the leftists who “were conspiring against the top Mapam leadership to drag the entire party into the Communist camp because, as they put it—the victories of the Communists in Korea indicated the impending triumph of Communism.” The former Secret Service chief also recalled, however, that every effort had been made to warn “the Zionist leadership inside Mapam . . . and regretted that Mr. Ya’ari [Mapam leader Meir Ya’ari, who had initiated the charges] had rejected the advice as a ‘Mapai provocation.’ ” He also recalled that “the entire Mapai leadership, which is now so upset at hurting Mapam’s feelings, was involved in the surveillance

7. JAD II, no. 25 (295), March 17, 1950, p. 1063. On May 24, 1950, a military court sentenced one Sergeant-Major Melech Reicher to ten years’ imprisonment for his part in conveying secret military information to the two Communists. *Ibid.*, II, no. 36 (306), June 2, 1950, p. 1441.

of that party's near-Communist elements."<sup>8</sup> The government's surveillance was apparently well founded, as Mapam continued its almost slavish admiration for the Kremlin. Its periodicals sang hymns to Stalin, "the sun of the nations," severely criticized Tito as a "lackey of American imperialism," and, in what probably stands as a high point in political self-delusion, proclaimed, on the day of Stalin's death, that "if there is one grave in the world to which the Jewish people ought to make a grateful pilgrimage, it is Joseph Stalin's." The inquiry into the activities of Mapam's extreme left wing continued until 1955 when the Czech-Egyptian Arms Agreement shattered what little strength remained, after the Slansky trial and Doctors' Plot, of both Mapam and Maki.

Soviet propaganda did not, surprisingly, dwell on the theme of Israeli persecution of its extreme left wing. The overriding subject in all Russian newspaper editorials and broadcasts with regard to Israel became the well-worn theme of "imperialist penetration in the Middle East." Israel's connections with the United States were exploited to depict the Jewish state as being in voluntary bondage to American wealth, and for the first time, on March 1, 1950, Israel was portrayed as the aggressor in the Arab-Israel War of 1948.<sup>9</sup> Every meeting between Israeli and British and American officials was interpreted by Soviet propaganda as a "closer harnessing . . . to the chariot of American imperialism."<sup>10</sup> The Soviet article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* went a step further and, for the first time, personally ridiculed

8. *Jerusalem Post*, August 17, 1969. Harel later attempted to publish his memoirs, which were to reveal the details of such actions as his personal capture and kidnapping of Eichmann, the assassination of former Nazi scientists working in Cairo, and a number of other heroic, but secret, episodes in the history of the Israeli intelligence forces. The manuscript, however, was instantly rejected by the government censors, a decision to which Harel patriotically bowed. Many of Harel's phenomenal exploits however were recently revealed in Michael Bar-Zohar's *Spies in the Promised Land: Iser Harel and the Israeli Secret Service*, trans. from the French by Monroe Stearns (Boston, 1972). Also see Tadmor, *The Silent Warriors*, pp. 129-52, 185-89. Iser Harel is, at this writing, a member of Knesset.

9. Y. Zvyagin, "Anglo-American Rivalry in the Middle East," *New Times*, no. 9 (March 1, 1950), pp. 3-9.

10. O. Prudkov, "A Tel Aviv Follower of Acheson," *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, March 25, 1950, p. 4. Soviet charges that Israel was inexorably bound to American imperialism increased sharply following the announcement that the American government, in reply to Israel's earlier request, accepted Israel's application to send a contingent of her officers for advanced training in U.S. Army schools. See *JAD* II, no. 29 (299), April 14, 1950, p. 1192.

individual Israeli leaders. This action, more than any of the charges of so-called "fawning before Washington," brought Israeli public opinion to a fever pitch. On March 27, 1950, *Davar* declared: "Don't they realize that by a calumnious attack on Mr. Sharett, who is honored by his people, they make themselves a laughing stock in this country and lessen what little influence they may have had on public opinion?" *Haboker* (March 28, 1950) pointed out that even though Israel was among the first states to recognize the new regime in China; still maintained normal relations with Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria and Hungary; and "in the U.N. . . . walks on stilts in order not to hurt Soviet susceptibilities, obviously nothing short of total subjection will ever satisfy the Soviets."

It was only a matter of time, therefore, until the Soviet Union hit upon a theme which was not only the logical extension of its growing antipathy with Israel, but which was to be, in the light of the undeniable plight of an Arab refugee population which had been disenfranchised by both the Israeli and Arab governments, the highly successful topic of Israeli discrimination against the Arabs. On June 24, 1950, both *Pravda* and *Izvestia* initiated a campaign against Israel's "racial and discriminatory policies," and basing their identical reports on an Arab petition presented to the Knesset three days earlier, called for the "abolition of the Arab ghettos . . . and the opportunity [for Arabs] to lead normal lives as citizens with equal rights."<sup>11</sup> These three themes—American penetration, Israel as the aggressor in the Middle East conflict, and Israeli discrimination against her Arab population—were to become interwoven and, with varying emphasis to fit the occasion, were to form the bulk of the Soviet Union's future propaganda campaign against Israel.

Communist activity in the Arab world, meanwhile, increased substantially.<sup>12</sup> Demonstrating for Arab-Jewish unity and calling for the

11. "A Petition from the Arab Population of Israel," *Izvestia*, June 24, 1950, p. 4. Israel had somewhat earlier admitted the difficulties faced by her Arab population. See, for instance, "Israel Arabs—Problems and Progress," *Jewish Frontier*, February, 1950, pp. 12–14.

12. The definitive works on this aspect are three by Walter Z. Laqueur: "The Appeal of Communism in the Middle East," *Middle East Journal*, Winter, 1955, pp. 17–27; *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East* (London, 1956); and *The Soviet Union and the Middle East* (New York, 1959). See, also, Faiz S. Abu-Jaber, "The Soviets and the Arabs, 1917–1955," *Middle East Forum* (American University of Beirut) XLV, no. 1 (1969), pp. 13–44.

end of the Arab League and the overthrow of King Abdullah and King Farouk, Arab Communists were arrested in Nablus (Jordan) on April 4, 1950;<sup>13</sup> and a week later, on April 11, Egyptian police raided a Communist meeting whose participants had been responsible for "distributing Communist literature throughout the country."<sup>14</sup> The Syrian government, however, far from suppressing its small Communist movement, was itself debating the value of an understanding with the Soviet Union. On April 30, the Syrian parliament took up the question following its introduction by Ma'ruf ad-Dwalibi, Syria's minister of economy and a one-time political secretary of the pro-Nazi Mufti of Jerusalem. The Syrian minister declared that the Arabs should adopt a pro-Russian orientation in order to be saved from the "Zionist rule that is being imposed on them by the United States."<sup>15</sup> Ma'ruf ad-Dwalibi was quickly supported by another powerful politician, and member of the Moslem Brotherhood, Sheik Mustafa Saba'i, who announced at a press conference on May 23 that "We will fight the West and cooperate with the East even if . . . [Anglo-American pressure on the Arab world] . . . should be discontinued . . . and I will, in the future, favor . . . [a religious union of the Moslem countries] . . . only if they are not directed against Russia."<sup>16</sup> By the second week in May, it was reported that Cairo appeared to be negotiating for arms with the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup> Within days, the Syrian economic minister, Dwalibi, confirmed the nearly completed economic agreement and a friendship pact between Syria and Moscow. It was

13. *The Times* (London), April 5, 1950.

14. *JAD* II, no. 30 (300), April 21, 1950, p. 1244.

15. *Ibid.*, II, no. 33 (303), May 12, 1950, p. 1343; Mark Alexander [pseud.], "The Near East's Communist-Fascist Front," p. 458. The following February, ad-Dwalibi was appointed minister to the Soviet Union by the Syrian cabinet. See, also, the *New York Times*, April 12, 1950, p. 14.

16. *Al-Ansha* (Damascus), May 23, 1950, as quoted in Alexander, "The Near East's Communist-Fascist Front," p. 458. The secretary of the Arab League, Abdul Rahman Azzam Pasha, also declared his support of Dwalibi's position. "Fawalibi's [sic] views express the sentiments of every Arab. His utterances were forced by the continued Anglo-American pressure on the Arab states . . . [and by] . . . the United States' insistence on its pro-Jewish stand." *New York Times*, April 23, 1950, p. 8.

17. *JAD* II, no. 34 (304), May 19, 1950, p. 1385. Four months later, Hussein Kamel Saleem Bey, director of the Arab information office at the United Nations, announced "that if the West ceases to help the Arabs militarily, the Arabs will be obliged to look to the East for assistance." *Ibid.*, III, no. 3 (324), October 6, 1950, p. 96.

further announced that the "Syrian Minister to Moscow is shortly expected to report the results of talks with M. Vyshinsky . . . [and that] . . . the Soviet Minister to Damascus has just left for Russia to take up the appointment of Director General of Middle East Affairs at the Soviet Foreign Ministry."<sup>18</sup> Later in May, Akram Hourani, Syria's defense minister, was quoted as saying that the Arabs would be friendly toward the Soviets "for the same reason that they were friendly with Germany during the war." Defining the type of friendship Syria was seeking with the Soviet Union, Hourani stated that, according to an Arab proverb, there are three types of friends: "your own friend, the friend of a friend, and the enemy of your own enemy. Russia," he declared, "was the enemy of the Arabs' enemy."<sup>19</sup> Lebanon's delegate to the United Nations quickly placed the blame for the increased Soviet appeal in the Arab world on the "deep political wound" suffered as a result of Western support of Israel, and warned that "the responsibility for such an [Soviet] assault [in the Middle East] would have to be shared by the West."<sup>20</sup> This theme of the West's responsibility for the Arabs' Eastward turn was reiterated by the Syrians, who declared that "for the Arabs, every danger, including the Communist danger, seems quite small compared to the Israel menace."<sup>21</sup>

Russia's first comment to these Arab pronouncements came in the May 24 issue of *New Times*. The Syrian suggestion for closer relations, the *New Times* stated, "has opened the floodgates of popular sentiment throughout the Arab world favoring friendly relations with the Soviet Union." Regarding Syria's proposed friendship pact with Moscow, the project showed "on whose side the sympathy of the Arab peoples lies in the struggle between the camp of democracy and the camp of imperialism." In an effort, perhaps, to gloss over Russia's original participation in the creation of the State of Israel several years earlier, the *New Times* editorial pointedly reassured their readers that "the whole Democratic camp has sincere sympathy for the Arab states."<sup>22</sup> Yet it must be emphasized that despite the increased Com-

18. *Ibid.*, II, no. 35 (305), May 26, 1950, p. 1422.

19. *Ibid.*, no. 36 (306), June 2, 1950, pp. 1461-62.

20. *New York Times*, May 11, 1950, p. 19.

21. *Ibid.*, May 13, 1950, p. 4.

22. *New Times*, May 24, 1950, as quoted in the *New York Times*, May 25, 1950, p. 12.

munist activity in the Arab world, which was far more anti-Western than pro-Soviet, and the inauguration of the campaign to suppress Zionism and discredit Israel within the Eastern bloc, Soviet Russia did not begin any radical turnabout with regard to the Middle East. If any general trend can be discerned over the next several years, it was an overall Soviet withdrawal from the whole issue.

Even as Communist activity increased in certain areas in the Arab world,<sup>23</sup> and the Soviet propaganda structure began concentrating its attacks on Israel's alleged discrimination of its Arab population and ties with "Anglo-American imperialism," Israel continued in an attempt to maintain a policy of non-commitment. In an interview with *New York Times* correspondent C. L. Sulzberger, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion stated that Israel's "relations with the Soviet Union were 'correct' but that the Moscow press was attacking Israel as 'sold to American imperialism.'" Declaring that Israel's two basic requirements were security and immigration, Ben-Gurion remarked that "supposing Rumania were suddenly to say, 'You can have all our Jews who wish to emigrate'? Our fundamental policy is one of unlimited immigration. We are especially interested in absorbing, as rapidly as possible, Jews from countries where they face persecution or the threat that their emigration will be restricted in the future." Israel would thus remain as neutral as possible as long as large numbers of Jews lived behind the Iron Curtain, although Ben-Gurion assured the West that Russia's lever of restricted emigration would never force Israel into the Eastern camp. "Israel," he continued, "stands for democracy and freedom of the individual and . . . will not submit to ideas foreign to [our] spirit, and communism is foreign to [us]." <sup>24</sup> A year and a half later, in a debate over Mapam's policies before the Knesset, Ben-Gurion again defined Israel's position of non-commitment, and stated

23. Communist activity increased primarily in prerevolutionary Syria and Egypt, while most of the Arab world remained firmly anti-Communist. During the first week of August, 1950, for instance, the cabinet of Jordan submitted to its parliament an anti-Communist bill, providing a penalty of three years imprisonment upon conviction. At the same time, official circles in Beirut claimed to have received the text of a letter from Jordan's King Abdullah to President Truman in which he requested aid, on behalf of the "natural economic and military unit of Syria, Iraq and Jordan," to fight Communist aggression in the Middle East. *JAD* II, no. 46 (316), August 11, 1950, p. 1828.

24. *New York Times*, March 20, 1950, p. 14. Also see Gordon, "Jews in the Soviet Union—A Survey," p. 26.



that while “we will not forget the aid we received from Czechoslovakia during the days of Masaryk, Clementis, Shiroki, and others . . . even the Soviet Union . . . will not dictate to us with whom we should maintain relations and whom we should shun. Neither will America dictate to us in this regard.”<sup>25</sup>

The Soviet Union’s relations with regard to Israel and the Arab world were, perhaps, most affected during 1950 by two events: the Tripartite Declaration of May, 1950, and Israel’s position on the Korean conflict, two months later. On May 25, 1950, Britain, the United States, and France issued a declaration which was designed to bolster the parties of the Middle East in an effort to prevent any acts of armed aggression by the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup> Nebulous and contradictory, the West’s decision called, at the same time, for “the maintenance of a certain level of armed forces . . . to permit them to play their part in the defense of the area as a whole, the maintenance of peace and stability in the area,” and finally for an end “to the development of an arms race between the Arab States and Israel.”<sup>27</sup> Aside from Israel’s fear of watching the West rearming the Arab world,<sup>28</sup> “the global struggle between East and West was now superimposed on the local tug-of-war between the Arab states and Israel, and the two were never again to be disentangled.”<sup>29</sup> The declaration forced Israel to reconsider its position of non-commitment, for its rejection or ac-

25. For the full text, see David Ben-Gurion, “Israel’s Foreign Policy,” *Jewish Frontier*, December, 1951, pp. 19–20.

26. The announcement was followed by the arrival in Cairo of British Field-Marshal Sir William Slim in June, 1950. In a series of secret talks with the Egyptian premier and foreign minister, the chief of the British general staff declared that a Russian invasion of Western Europe and the Middle East was expected and went on to describe Russia’s and Britain’s military strengths in almost unprecedented detail and honesty. Much to the embarrassment of the Foreign Office, the Egyptian government published the full text of the Slim conversations as a Green Book in 1952. Kimche, *Seven Fallen Pillars*, pp. 372–73.

27. *Department of State Bulletin* XXII, May 25, 1950, Tripartite Declaration, p. 886; *New York Times*, May 26, 1950, pp. 1, 6.

28. See, for instance, *Al Hamishmar*, June 1, 1950. Ben-Gurion announced before the Knesset on January 2, 1951, that “Only children believe that the Arab states are arming to fight for or against the Soviet Union or the United States. These arms—if they are used—will be used only against us, and our enemies do not conceal this fact.” *JAD* III, no. 17 (338), January 12, 1951, p. 654; IV, no. 7 (382), November 16, 1951, p. 185.

29. Eytan, *The First Ten Years*, p. 132; J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, vol. II (Princeton, 1956), pp. 309–10.

ceptance by the Knesset would eventually place Israel in one camp or the other. Israel therefore did neither, and Ben-Gurion told the Knesset that he regarded it as "a unilateral declaration which was not binding on Israel," although he welcomed it to the extent that it was designed to increase security and peace.<sup>30</sup>

Soviet reaction was swift. On May 28 and 29, both *Pravda* and *Izvestia* carried long editorials condemning the declaration as the initiation of an arms race under the pretext of preserving peace. On June 1, 1950, Radio Moscow described the arms declaration regarding Israel and the Arab States as "a new aggressive act directed against the Soviet Union . . . dictated . . . by the military interests of American imperialism."<sup>31</sup> Despite the general Arab rejection of the declaration as an effort to strengthen Israel and to accept, as status quo, the Palestine Question,<sup>32</sup> and Israel's most hesitant acceptance of the Western decision as "a unilateral" communiqué to which Israel did not intend to bind her foreign policy, the Soviet Union continued its propaganda attack. On June 4, *Pravda* declared that the three-power declaration only legitimized the arms shipments which the British had been supplying to the Arabs, and which the United States allegedly had also been selling to Israel. It was, *Pravda* continued, another American attempt to replace Britain as a mandatory power in the Middle East by laying the groundwork for new adventures and the eventual establishment of military bases. Russia's propaganda attacks against Anglo-American penetration into the Middle East had already subsided when Israel's first major diplomatic test occurred in the United Nations immediately following the invasion of North Korean troops across the 38th Parallel into South Korea. It was a test which her policy of non-commitment was unable to survive.

The Israeli government's immediate reaction to the outbreak of hostilities was to join the forty-five nations who voted for United Nations sanctions against North Korea on June 25, 1950. Anxious to prevent the appearance of any shift in its position of nonidentification, however, Israel emphasized that its support of the United Nations should not be interpreted as a stand with the West against the East,

30. *Divrei ha-Knesset*, 1st Knesset, 2nd Sess., vol. XXV (May 31, 1950), pp. 1571-72.

31. Quoted in *JAD* II, no. 37 (307), June 9, 1950, p. 1474.

32. See Isaac London, "Evolution of the USSR's Policy in the Middle East, 1950-1956," *Middle Eastern Affairs*, May, 1956, pp. 169-78.

but rather as a stand against any threat to world peace. This qualification was relayed to Secretary-General Trygve Lie by Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett on July 2, and stated that "the Government of Israel opposes and condemns aggression wherever it may occur. . . . In fulfillment of its clear obligations under the Charter, Israel supports the Security Council in its efforts to put an end to the breach of peace in Korea and to restore peace in that area."<sup>33</sup>

Realizing the delicacy of Israel's position in opposing the Soviet bloc on the Korean issue, the cabinet brought the matter before the Knesset on July 4 for a detailed reappraisal of its decision. The overwhelming majority of representatives agreed that it was Israel's moral duty to support the Security Council's resolution against North Korea, and despite the vigorous opposition of the far left wing parties,<sup>34</sup> the government's position was upheld.<sup>35</sup> A month later, on August 3, Foreign Minister Sharett notified Trygve Lie that after having "given serious consideration to the question of the assistance which it [Israel] can usefully render to the U.N. at the juncture," and considering Israel's own need for military preparedness, it had been decided that "the most effective assistance it can render is by offering medical aid to the U.N. forces in Korea."<sup>36</sup>

Russia's predictable reaction came in the July 12 issue of the *New Times* in an article entitled "A Toady of American Aggression." The paper stated that "by approving the unlawful resolution on Korea passed by the members of the Security Council," Ben-Gurion, "representing a virtual repetition . . . of Acheson and Truman" has "openly sided with the American aggressors." The seven-hour debate in the Knesset, the paper commented, evidenced the indignation of public opinion at this "support of the American aggressors, which was justly

33. Security Council, *Official Records: Fifth Year*, Supplement for June and August, 1950, p. 52.

34. See, for instance, the July 3 issues of *Al Hamishmar* and *Kol Ha'am*, and the July 6 issue of *Kol Ha'am*, 1950.

35. *Divrei ha-Knesset*, 1st Knesset, 2nd Sess., vol VI (1950), pp. 2057-87. For a short analysis of Israel's activities in the United Nations concerning Korea and Red China, see Moshe Sharett, "Israel's Stand on Korea," *Jewish Frontier*, June, 1951, pp. 12-13.

36. The full text of Sharett's cable is quoted in *JAD* II, no. 46 (316), August 11, 1950, p. 1791. Israel's contribution of more than 850 kilograms of penicillin and various vaccines was shipped to New York, to be forwarded to Korea aboard the S.S. *LaGuardia* on October 24, 1950.

characterized as an anti-Communist act and capitulation to the North Atlantic bloc.”<sup>37</sup> While Russia’s propaganda attacks did not pursue Israel’s position on the Korean crisis beyond the early summer months, it was clear to all parties concerned that the split in Soviet-Israel relations, long in progress, had widened to a chasm.

Emigration policies in Eastern Europe, meanwhile, were undergoing a change which reflected the growing estrangement of Soviet-Israel relations. The several satellite countries which had allowed even a relatively large number of Jews to leave were now closing their borders to further emigration. Rumania, with the largest Jewish population in East Europe outside of the Soviet Union, had sporadically allowed large groups of Jews to leave for Israel through the summer of 1950. Emigration came to a halt, however, even in Rumania, not long after Israel’s decision in the Korean crisis, and a new form of domestic propaganda (in addition to a growing anti-Zionist campaign) was initiated: anti-emigration. Starting in mid-May, Jewish Communist publication and the Rumanian press in general began carrying articles denouncing emigration, and the letters columns published daily accounts of the miseries which refugees had encountered in Israel. Factory meetings were held to condemn emigration, and a variety of laws were passed which prohibited Rumanian citizens, and especially relatives, from buying the property of those still considering emigration. On August 17, 1950, the *Jerusalem Post* carried a lengthy report on Rumanian press and radio anti-emigration propaganda which regularly reported horrifying stories of conditions in Israel, a country described as the “poisoned weapon of imperialism” where the workers were exploited for the benefit of a capitalism that “fattens on their misery.” The *Jerusalem Post*’s article, based on reports from Israel’s embassy in Rumania and on the experiences of arriving refugees, disclosed the recent unveiling of an “anti-Israel” exhibition in Bucharest which illustrated the alleged horrors of life in Israel. In addition, it was reported that in the port of Constantza, through which all emigrants to Israel had to pass, the government had erected large notice-boards warning the embarking Jews that this was the last chance to change their minds and so escape the terrors of homelessness, forced labor, and other exploitation in Israel. When these propaganda efforts failed to halt the

37. “International Life: A Toady of American Aggressors,” *New Times*, no. 28 (July 12, 1950), pp. 20–21.

sizeable number of Jews who persisted in applying for exit permits, a wave of arrests followed, extending even on to the boats carrying departing emigrants. Passengers from a boatload of more than a thousand emigrants from Rumania who arrived in Haifa on June 11, 1950, told of twenty of their number whose passports were confiscated at the final customs examination in Constantza, and of the arrest of two Zionist workers and a young woman who were arrested on board the ship and taken ashore. All property of value was confiscated, "and the last minute searches," they reported, "extended even to the soles of the emigrants' shoes."<sup>38</sup>

This theme of the "misery of Israel's population" gained rapid momentum in the propaganda campaign from Moscow and was quickly linked to the already well-worn charge of Israel's dependence on "American imperialism."<sup>39</sup> By 1951, Soviet articles about Israel included all the various charges which had been developed over the previous year and linked the themes of "miserably treated refugees" and "discriminated Israeli Arabs . . . who were being exploited by Jewish bourgeois and Arab feudal lords" by a country ("the poisoned weapon of imperialism") whose "mystic and bourgeois nationalism" had "become enslaved to American imperialism" whose only desire was the "penetration and exploitation of the Middle East." A representative example of this combination of themes may be seen in a letter published in the *New Times* of February 21, 1951, which had been supposedly written to the editor by a recent arrival to Israel, one Maurice Spiro.<sup>40</sup> Another article appeared in the March 14 issue of *Pravda*. Israel was described as being "directly and absolutely dependent, economically and politically, on the monopoly capital of the United States and Britain," which was being controlled by the West through its ruling circles of "bourgeois Jewish and Arab leaders" who were determined to involve its enslaved people in a military bloc against the Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup> The new trend in anti-emigration, anti-Zionist, and

38. *JAD* II, no. 39 (309), June 23, 1950, p. 1559.

39. See, for instance, the article "International Life: Transaction in Jerusalem," *New Times*, no. 38 (September 20, 1950), p. 17.

40. Maurice Spiro, "Letter from Haifa," *New Times*, no. 8 (February 21, 1951), p. 31.

41. "The U.S.A. Is Converting Israel into a Base of Imperialist Aggression," *Pravda*, March 14, 1951.

anti-Israel propaganda was, perhaps, best represented by the series of “travel notes” which appeared during the latter half of 1951. One such article, in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, written by Anna Lungo, a Rumanian representative to a conference of “Democratic Women” in Israel, stressed the “oppression and racial discrimination . . . [of] . . . the Jewish bourgeoisie [who] have mastered the Hitlerite methods.” The contrast of the “shameless luxury of a handful of exploiters with the poverty of the masses” was deplored by Israel’s population, which has remained loyal to the increasingly powerful Communist party.<sup>42</sup> The longest and most striking of these articles appeared as a two-part series in consecutive issues (on August 19 and September 5, 1951) of *New Times*. The articles entitled “A Trip to Israel” were written by one P. Khozov, a *New Times* correspondent, upon his return from a “thorough investigation of Israel life.” Khozov detected the “heavy hand” of American penetration even before his arrival, stating that “The airplane in which we flew belongs to the Israel air line *El Al* . . . but we were surprised to see that all members of the crew spoke English. It turns out that Americans are the bosses of Israel’s “national” air line. . . . At their request many Jewish workers were fired a year ago. The technical personnel now consists almost entirely of Americans, and the displaced Jews were added to the already large army of unemployed.” During a drive through a particularly beautiful part of Tel Aviv, he learned that the “villas belong to the aristocracy. All of these Zionist capitalists have divided among themselves the land bought with public money and cheaply constructed these villas.” A drive from Tel Aviv to Haifa along a wide highway “leaves no doubt concerning its strategic character. The war planners at the Pentagon are planning to construct a strategic highway from Cairo to Constantinople.” The articles continue to describe “suffering immigrants,” “discrimination of the Arabs,” and the “suppression of the masses . . . by Zionist agents.” While Khozov was gratified to find that the Communist party and Mapam would continue to remain ever-vigilant against Israel’s transformation into “a weapon for American imperialist policy in the Near East,” his disappointed conclusion about Israel was that “the ruling circles do the will of Washington and London and transform the land into a

42. Anna Lungo, “Travel Notes: In Israel,” *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, July 28, 1951, p. 4.

nest of imperialist intrigues which create a condition of unrest and insecurity . . . in the new country.”<sup>43</sup>

Despite the increasing hostility by the Soviet Union, Israel, continually aware of the large number of Jews still behind the Iron Curtain, made every effort to placate Moscow. For example, on June 6, 1950, the Israeli government held a tree-planting ceremony in honor of the Soviet army on the ninth anniversary of the German invasion of Russia. In dedicating the forest near the village of Ma’ale Hahamisha, Israel’s minister of communications, David Remez, told a group of several hundred dignitaries that it was the government’s hope that the Soviet Union would continue to support Israel as it had during the past. At the end of the dedication a stone monument was erected, with a hammer and sickle, inscribed with the words: “This forest has been planted by the residents of Israel in honour of the Soviet Army—1950.”<sup>44</sup> Several months later, on November 7, 1950, Ben-Gurion, government officials, and the chief of the general staff made a specific point to attend a reception of the Russian legation in Tel Aviv to celebrate the thirty-third anniversary of the Revolution, and a congratulatory cable was sent to Stalin to honor the occasion. Yet, Russia’s recent antagonism over Israel’s acceptance of another United States Export-Import Bank loan of \$35,000,000 (December 27, 1950), and her apparent willingness to participate in the formation of a yet-unproposed Western military alliance, brought a pointed statement from Israel’s foreign minister Sharett in a debate before the Knesset on January 30, 1951. Reiterating Israel’s desire to maintain friendly relations with the Soviet Union, Sharett stressed that the globe was currently divided into an “open world” and a “closed world”—the West and the East. “Much as we want to be friends with Russia,” Sharett stated, “we are not going to deny ourselves the opportunities of drawing upon foreign capital, sources of knowledge, and technical assistance, which only the ‘open world’ provides.”<sup>45</sup>

The year 1951 was to be singularly important in Soviet-Israeli relations as a milestone in Israel’s fading neutrality. Anxious over the probability that any Western military alliance in the Middle East

43. P. Khozov, “A Trip to Israel,” *New Times*, no. 35 (August 29, 1951), pp. 22–25; no. 36, September 5, 1951, pp. 25–29.

44. *JAD* II, no. 40 (310), June 30, 1950, p. 1594. See, also, *Davar*, June 22, 1950.

45. *JAD* III, no. 21 (342), February 9, 1951, p. 821.



would hinge on a rearming of the Arab states, Israel began secret negotiations with the West over her inclusion in the proposed pact early in 1951. The idea of the alliance, as envisioned by the United States and Great Britain, was to close the Middle Eastern security gap against possible aggression by the Soviet Union through the extension of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The military pact had been shelved several times during the first few months of 1951 as a result of Egypt's rejection and the problems arising from American and British collaboration, but as the idea took shape again during the spring months, it was becoming clear to Israel that the West favored a military alliance which, besides the United States, Britain, and France, would only include Turkey, Greece, and the Arab States. The proposal of such a military alliance put Israel in a very delicate position, for according to Walter Eytan:

On the one hand, Israel could not afford to be left out of a scheme which would vastly increase Egypt's military strength. She believed that Egypt would never, in practice, use this strength for the "defense of the area as a whole," but only, as soon as there was enough of it, against herself. . . . But if Israel could not afford to be left out of a scheme which, as she saw it, was going to strengthen Egypt at her expense, she was not eager, on the other hand, to be dragged into a political conflict with the Soviet Union. Even if she joined only a defense organization, the Soviet Union would see her as one of the powers conspiring for aggression.<sup>46</sup>

Israel's decision to move closer to the West was quickly picked up by both camps. On January 9, 1951, the London *Times* carried a lengthy editorial, including an interview with Ben-Gurion, in which Israel's advantages in the West were analyzed. Within days, on January 14, *Pravda* reprinted a report which appeared on the previous day in the Soviet army paper, *Krasnaya Zvezda* (The Red Star), charging Israel with conspiring, through secret negotiations, to enter a military alliance "under American patronage."

On February 19, 1951, General Sir Brian Robertson, commander-in-chief of British Middle East land forces, arrived in Israel for three days of talks.<sup>47</sup> Left-wing demonstrations flared up in the major cities, and

46. Eytan, *The First Ten Years*, p. 133.

47. During his discussion with Ben-Gurion over Israel's ability to resist an attack by the Soviet Union, Robertson was taken to task for suggesting that Israel act as a transit area for British and Arab armies. See Ben-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion: The Armed*

despite the government's denials that military talks were in progress, most of the newspapers agreed with *Al Hamishmar*'s February 20 declaration that "everybody knows why the British C. in C. is making the rounds of the Middle East capitals and on what subjects he is conferring with Israel political and army leaders." On May 13, in a *Pravda* article entitled "Israel as a United States Preserve," M. Marinin wrote that the visit of several Israeli ministers to the United States was the culmination of the transformation of Israel into an American colony, and that the seizure of Israel's economy by American monopolists was progressing at full speed. This theme was quickly picked up by Soviet press reports and radio broadcasts, which continued to play on the mythical threat of an "Anglo-American-Turkey-Israel Axis" in the Middle East.<sup>48</sup>

The Middle East Command plan took formal shape in several drafts, October 14, 24, and November 10, 1951,<sup>49</sup> and although Israel was excluded, Foreign Minister Sharett laid bare Israel's plans to join the Western camp by announcing, on October 27, that the government was willing to consider, on its merits, any defense plan.<sup>50</sup> Protests by the Soviet Union evoked the following response from Ben-Gurion on November 5: "The State of Israel is not for sale and not for rent. Even the United States has not enough money to buy us. No power that talks to us as it talks to puppet governments will get an attentive ear."<sup>51</sup> Israel's new Western position was further clarified when Ben-Gurion, in a comment on an appeal by Mapam to soldiers and officers in the army to refuse to take up arms if ordered to fight the Russians, stated, "I don't think there will be a war with anyone. But, if the nation did decide to go to war, anyone who mutinied would be treated as a traitor."<sup>52</sup> Perhaps Israel's most telling declaration of her decision to

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*Prophet*, pp. 170–71. Robertson's visit was followed, a month later, by a visit from the American assistant secretary of state for Near East and African affairs, George McGhee. *Kol Ha'am* (March 28, 1951) and Radio Moscow (March 28 and 29) were quick to respond.

48. See, for instance, "American Control of the Israel Army," *Izvestia*, May 19, 1951, p. 4; "Ben-Gurion in Washington," *Izvestia*, June 19, 1951, p. 4; "Israel—an American Base," *New Times*, no. 31 (August 1, 1951), p. 21.

49. See the *Department of State Bulletin* XXV, December 31, 1951, pp. 1054–56.

50. *The Times* (London), October 27, 1951.

51. *New York Times*, November 6, 1951.

52. *Ibid.*; *Divrei ha'Knesset*, vol. X (November 4, 1951), p. 284. Israel's left-

move toward the Western camp came in Foreign Minister Sharett's reply before the Knesset to the Soviet Union's warning of November 21 against joining a Middle East Command.<sup>53</sup> With a good deal of nonchalance, Sharett told the Knesset that "if Israel needs these arms and if, in order to acquire them, it will be necessary to enter certain commitments, she will enter into these commitments."<sup>54</sup> In its formal reply to the Soviet note on December 8, however, and after reconsidering the effects of further blunt statements on the fate of the Jewish minority in Russia, the Israeli government went out of its way to assure the Soviet government that, aside from the fact that Israel had not been invited to join the military alliance in question, "Israel has never agreed, and will not agree, to support any aggressive plans aimed against the Soviet Union or any peace-loving countries . . ." and restated its insistence that Russia allow its Jews to emigrate to Israel at the earliest moment.<sup>55</sup> Yet, for all intents and purposes, it was clear that Israel's position of non-commitment in the arena of Cold War politics was dead.

The year of 1952 and the early part of 1953 were crucial milestones in Soviet-Israel relations. Diplomatic relations continued to deteriorate rapidly, and reached their lowest point with the suspension of Soviet representation to Israel in February, 1953. Emigration from Eastern Europe, always a basic factor in Israel's dealings with the Soviet bloc, came to a final halt in mid-1952. The greatest blow to relations, however, resulted from the culmination of Eastern Europe's increasingly

wing declaration to oppose the armed resistance of Soviet forces, while maintaining a patriotic fervor against any other aggressor, stems from a dualism in Comintern policy originating in the prewar United Front era. The double credo of Russia, nationalism and leader-worship, was transferred to the Comintern as the result of the May, 1935, Franco-Soviet Pact and was later defined by the French Communist leader Maurice Thorez as the maintenance of national defense while "defending the Soviet Union in every way." Soviet Union, *Seventh Congress of the Communist International* [July-August, 1935] (Moscow, 1939 [English]), p. 224. See, also, Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1967* (New York, 1968), pp. 227-31, and Franz Borkenau, *World Communism* (Ann Arbor, 1962), pp. 393-95.

53. *Izvestia*, November 21, 1951. The Soviet minister to Egypt had presented a similar warning on September 19, 1951, to the Egyptian undersecretary of foreign affairs. *JAD* III, no. 54 (375), September 28, 1951, p. 2129; IV, no. 9 (384), November 30, 1951, p. 256.

54. *Jerusalem Post*, November 23, 1951.

55. *New York Times*, February 28, 1952; also *JAD* IV, no. 12 (387), December 21, 1951, p. 370; IV, no. 23 (398), March 7, 1952, p. 763.

virulent domestic anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic campaign; the Czech Slansky trial, the resulting fragmentation of Israel's left-wing parties, and Israel's genuine alarm for the physical safety of the Jewish population in Eastern Europe, which was threatened by the fantastic Doctors' Plot in January, 1953.

The immigration question was closely interwoven with the course of Eastern Europe's anti-Zionist campaign. As arrests of Zionist leaders and Jewish writers and public figures in the various satellite nations increased, the emigration of their Jews to Israel came to a temporary standstill. A trickle of emigrants were allowed to leave throughout the years 1949 to 1951 (except from the Soviet Union, which released only five elderly Jews). Only Rumania, with no apparent policy, allowed the haphazard release of large numbers of emigrants totalling 118,000 Jews by the end of 1951. From the approximate release of 40,000 Jews in 1951, the number suddenly dropped to slightly more than 3,400 in 1952, and by the summer, all further emigration from Rumania was closed. The West quickly learned that arrests of Jews within the bloc were reaching unprecedented proportions.

The wave of purges and arrests within the Soviet bloc were far more complex than was visibly apparent. While anti-Semitism was the major facet, the arrests and purges also served the purpose of Sovietization, the process by which the satellite nations were transformed to fit Russia's economic and productive needs. Peasant resistance to collectivization, passive resistance of industrial workers, and native Communist bureaucratic pressure against ideological subservience to Moscow, were all facets of the same purges. In addition, Tito's defection in 1948 had left Stalin with a deep suspicion of native Communist leaders and bureaucrats whose nationalist feelings or popularity (resulting from their partisan activities against the Germans during the war, or their contact with the West as a result of participation in the Spanish civil war, or participation in a government-in-exile during their country's occupation) might cause them to follow Tito's lead. This trend changed in 1951, however, when it became apparent that the purges were to include "Muscovites" as well: faithful party hacks who had spent the war years in Moscow, and who commanded little genuine popularity at home. The purges, intentionally or not, had one other facet. They caused the eventual merging of Russia's dual policy toward Israel and Eastern native Jewish minorities, and at the same time,

brought about Russia's long-sought disentanglement from the United Nations. The Soviet Union's domestic policy now superseded its foreign policy in the Middle East, and Israel was seen in a single light, as an extension of the domestic purges. The Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia was a culmination of all the facets of the East European upheaval.<sup>56</sup>

The public announcement of the trial of Rudolf Slansky, former secretary-general of the Czech Communist party accused of being a Zionist conspirator, burst like a thunderclap on November 22, 1952, in *Pravda* and *Izvestia*.<sup>57</sup> In the first of a series of articles entitled "Trial of Anti-State Conspiratorial Center in Prague," the Soviet press charged that Slansky had admitted, among other things, to "treason," "espionage," "cooperation with Marshal Tito," "subversion of the Czech partisan resistance," "collaboration with Gestapo and Zionist agents," "being a Trotskyite," and "undermining the Czech economy at the direction of American intelligence services." Also in the dock with Slansky were thirteen prominent Czech Communist leaders, most of whom were Jewish. The list included such past dignitaries as the former deputy minister of foreign trade, Eugene Loeb, who admitted to sabotaging the Czech economy through Zionist emigration and property transfer; former deputy minister of finance Otto Fischl, a "Jewish bourgeois nationalist . . . and a Zionist agent"; former minister of foreign affairs Vladimir Clementis, who admitted to high treason

56. It was in this charged atmosphere that several Israelis, most notably Mordechai Oren, on another series of political tours, and Shimon Ornstein, commercial attaché of the Israeli embassy, traveled to and from Prague in mid-1951. Both were arrested in November and "prepared" for their roles as star Zionist witnesses for the prosecution.

57. The trial was initiated as the result of a power struggle between Rudolf Slansky and Klement Gottwald, president of the Czech republic. For an excellent description of the events within the Czech cabinet leading to Slansky's arrest and trial, see Peter Korbel, "The Czechoslovak Cabinet as an Indicator of Political Developments" (August, 1952), and Pavel Korbel and V. Vagassky, "Purges in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia" (October, 1952), *National Committee For A Free Europe*, New York (mimeograph); Jirí Pelikán, ed., *The Czechoslovak Political Trials, 1950-1954; The Suppressed Report of the Dubcek Government's Commission of Inquiry*, 1968 (Stanford, 1971). See, also, Josefa Slánská, *Report on My Husband* (New York, 1969). Moscow's hand in signaling the trial is fairly obvious. Gottwald had just returned from attending the Nineteenth Congress, and was followed soon after, on November 15, by the arrival of the Soviet ambassador, Lavrentiev, in Prague. Lavrentiev was received by Gottwald the next day, and eleven days later Slansky was in prison.

and espionage for the West, and denied ever “having been a genuine Communist”; and former deputy minister of national defense General Bedrich Reicin, who “confessed” to being a former Gestapo agent and a military spy for Tito. The well-coached “confessions” of each defendant were readily volunteered, and each defendant and witness substantiated the state’s charges against one another. The trial lasted one week, from November 20 to 27, 1952.<sup>58</sup>

One of the main purposes of the purge was to adjust Czechoslovakia’s economy to Soviet Russia’s, and to create a scapegoat for Prague’s economic failures.<sup>59</sup> However, it became quickly evident that the Eastern bloc’s reassessment of its relations with Israel was playing an equally important role in the affair. Within days after the completion of the trial, for instance, a Yugoslav editorial entitled “Trials as Political Weapons” stated that “The Slansky and Klementis inquest is the first one in a series to have a foreign policy manoeuvre as one of its obvious aims. It is a move to take advantage of Israel-Arabian antagonisms, to sacrifice “friendship” with Israeli and Western Jewish people (especially American) in order to win the sympathies of the Arabian world and other Moslems. The trial directors apparently think they have done something particularly cunning and profitable for the Soviet foreign policy of expansion (Iran!).”<sup>60</sup> The most dominant theme of the trial, however, was blatant anti-Semitism, as the disastrous economic and social crisis in Czechoslovakia was shifted to an easily accepted scapegoat in East Europe: the Jews.<sup>61</sup> The anti-Semitic na-

58. An extensive review of the indictment and the “confessions” of each defendant constitute the bulk of one defendant’s memoirs; see Eugene Loeb, *Sentenced and Tried: The Stalinist Purges in Czechoslovakia*, trans. from the German by Maurice Michael (London, 1969), pp. 83–248.

59. This view was confirmed by East German planner Fritz Schenk to Richard Lowenthal in *The Observer*, November 9, 16, 1958.

60. “Trials as Political Weapons” (editorial), *Review of International Affairs* (Belgrade) III, no. 23, December, 1952.

61. See especially, Paul Barton [pseud.], *Prague à l’Heure de Moscou: Analyse d’Une Démocratie Populaire* (Paris, 1954); also François Fejtö, “Le Procès de Prague,” *Esprit*, part I (March, 1953), pp. 383–407, and part II (April, 1953), pp. 543–74; F. Fejtö, “La situation des Juifs dans les démocraties populaire,” *Cahiers de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, January–February, 1958. For an analysis of the effort in the trials to equate Jews with Germans (“co Zid, to Nemec”), see “Der Antisemitismus im Slansky-Prozess,” *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, January 3, 1953. An interesting theory that the term “Zionism” as used in the trial was a political label and was in no way meant to represent the actual Zionist movement or

ture of the purge is, perhaps, best seen through the eyes of one of the trial's surviving "star witnesses."<sup>62</sup>

Shimon Ornstein, commercial attaché of the Israeli legation in Prague, was arrested, together with Mordechai Oren, in November, 1951. Since the charges against Slansky and his colleagues were based on their participation in a "Zionist espionage organization" in the pay of the Western powers, it was necessary that the state produce foreign witnesses—preferably Zionists—to confess to the accuracy of the charges. Both were of "suitable" backgrounds: citizens of Israel, early socialist pioneers in the Zionist movement, and both were close friends with many of the leading Communists in Czechoslovakia and, in Oren's case, throughout Eastern Europe. The torture-interrogation of the two men, then simply known as No. 2132 (Oren) and No. 2392 (Ornstein) lasted one solid year before the start of the well-rehearsed Slansky trial. The two never saw each other throughout their imprisonment. The brutal interrogation sessions during that year gradually progressed to brainwashing periods designed to make the witnesses themselves believe in Slansky's participation in a Zionist conspiracy. One session, for instance, was spent translating and retranslating Slansky's name (which according to his long-time acquaintance, Ornstein, was derived from his birthplace, Slany, a short distance from Prague) into the German "Salzmann," and from there into the Hebrew "Malchi" and back. Having thus "established" that Slansky's code name in the Haganah (which, in fact, no longer existed by 1951) was "Malchi," it was now only a question of weaving a plot of traitorous activities around this basic link. After months of repetition and torture, the two witnesses began to believe the story themselves.<sup>63</sup> In other brutal sessions during that year in Prague's notorious Ruzyn prison, Ornstein was interrogated about the activities in the Israeli embassy and on more than one occasion the STB confronted him with its secret files containing the names of every person who had entered the embassy since May, 1948, as well as a great deal of information on the meetings and activities which took place behind their closed

Israel, is advanced by Shlomo Katz, "The Nature of Soviet Anti-Semitism," *Jewish Frontier*, January, 1953, pp. 8–12.

62. See Arnold Krammer, "Prisoners in Prague: Israelis in the Slansky Trial," *Wiener Library Bulletin* (London) XXIII, no. 4, new ser. no. 17 (Winter, 1969), pp. 13–20.

63. Ornstein, 'By Order from Moscow,' p. 197.



doors.<sup>64</sup> The entire grilling procedure, often running into days, was punctuated with bludgeoning and was always aimed toward a single goal: to link the defendants to a mythical Zionist conspiracy.

When the trial began, nearly forty broken prosecution witnesses—Oren and Ornstein among them—filed into the courtroom and recited their lines. Ornstein recalled that after twelve months of intensive interrogation, Slansky was a broken man, “dragging what appeared to be a lifeless body into the courtroom.”<sup>65</sup> He admitted his guilt to every fantastic charge, beginning with his code name “Malchi” and ending with his admission of the validity of the infamous “Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” a well-worn forgery originally concocted by the czarist Okhrana depicting Judaism’s part in a world-wide conspiracy. After all of Slansky’s thirteen colleagues in the dock “confessed” to all charges against them, they threw themselves on the mercy of the People’s Court. The accused not only confessed to their “crimes,” but several asked the court to give them the death sentence. One of them, André Simone (Otto Katz), pleaded: “I have been a writer and a beautiful saying refers to writers as architects of people’s souls. What sort of architect have I been—I who have poisoned the souls? Such an architect of souls belongs on the gallows. The only good service I can still render is to serve as a warning to all those who . . . are in danger of following the same path to hell. The stiffer the penalty, the more effective will the warning be.”<sup>66</sup> At the end of the Prague show trial, all defendants were, not unsurprisingly, found guilty as charged, and Rudolph Slansky, Bedrich Reicin, Otto Fischl, Rudolph Margolis, Vladimir Clementis, Joseph Frank, Bedrich Gemeinder, André Simone (Otto Katz), Ludvig Frejka, Otto Sling, and Karel Svab were immediately hanged. Vavro Hajdu, Artur London, and Evzen Lebl (Eugene Loeb) were sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>67</sup>

64. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

65. Ornstein, ‘Adventure in Prague,’ p. 121.

66. *Práce* (Prague), November 23, 1952. See, also, T. Draper, “The Man Who Wanted to Hang,” *Reporter*, January 6, 1953, pp. 26–30. Not only the defendants but several of their families demanded swift and harsh punishment. See for example the open letters of condemnation from the families of Frejka and London in *Rude Pravo*, November 24, 25, 1952.

67. The text of the chief prosecutor’s speech as well as the court’s verdict may be found in Loeb, *Sentenced and Tried*, pp. 224–48. See, also *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, November 28, 1952, p. 4. The episode had only begun, however, for the two Israeli witnesses, for they were yet to come to trial themselves on similar

In addition to the virulent anti-Semitism present during the entire Slansky affair, the effort to merge destructive acts against Czechoslovakia with Israel's interests was calculated to impress the Arabs. The so-called traitors at the bar, by assisting in the emigration of Jews, by enabling Israel to buy the weapons needed to win its War of Independence, by aiding Jewish displaced persons to reach Palestine, and by conniving to arrange for the transfer of capital, and the organization of a volunteer unit, were alone in damaging the otherwise harmonious relations between Czechoslovakia (and, for that matter, all of the satellite People's Republics) and the Arab world. They, alone, were responsible for the diplomatic and military support which Israel had received throughout the period 1947-48, a fact which the defendants had, themselves, publicly confessed. This facet of the trial was designed to impress upon the Arabs that both they and the Czechoslovak People's Republic, having suffered activities of internal espionage and economic destruction, had the same enemy. The ruthless punishment of these defendants, it was hoped, would clear the slate and allow for the resumption of harmonious relations.

Public and official anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe had increased steadily during the year between Slansky's arrest in November, 1951, and the trial. Within a month after Slansky's isolation and arrest, Premier Antonin Zapotocky made a speech to the executive committee of the Czechoslovak National Front linking Slansky's crimes to Zionist influences, saying: "We shall not tolerate any foreign influence in our affairs, whether from Washington or London, Rome or Jerusalem. . . ." <sup>68</sup> The Czech party's theoretic journal, *Tvorba*, followed quickly with an article which for the first time applied the term "cosmopolite" to Rudolf Slansky:

Cosmopolitanism is the ideology of rightist-socialists and of fifth columnists . . . in progressive movements. It is also the ideology of traitors in the Communist movement, such as bourgeois nationalists

charges. Their show trial took place in August, 1953, and both received life sentences. Shimon Ornstein was suddenly released in mid-1954, although Mordechai Oren was held in Mirov prison until May 12, 1956, when he was unexplainably turned over to the Israeli embassy. In his speech to a welcoming crowd of some 5,000 left-wing Israelis, Oren declared his continued faith in the socialist system. See Walter Z. Laqueur, "The Oren Case: A Fellow-Traveler Comes Home," *Commentary*, August, 1956.

68. *Rude Pravo*, December 19, 1951.

and cosmopolites like Tito, Ranković, Traicho Kostov, . . . Rajk, Sling, . . . Slansky and others. . . .

It is the enemy's aim to hinder the Party's capacity to act and its power of attraction . . . that was the aim of all cosmopolite agents of the class enemy, such as Sling, Slansky, and others. . . .<sup>69</sup>

Other newspapers rapidly picked up the theme. *Lidove Noviny* attacked the "Zionist agents" whose activities "extended far beyond the borders of Israel," and the Slovakian Communist paper, *L'ud*, declared that although Slovak workers, who had tried "to recapture their lost positions" after the war, had been accused of anti-Semitism, it was now clear that they had been expressing sound class instinct. Political analyst Peter Meyer wrote: "In this way, the party press established the identity of 'cosmopolitan' with 'Zionist' and of 'Zionist' with traitor. Being a Jew meant being suspect of these crimes; for the mass of less sophisticated readers, 'Zionist' simply meant Jew. Anti-Semitism, slightly disguised as anti-Zionism, became respectable again."<sup>70</sup> By the time the trial took place in November, 1952, emotions had reached a high peak. On November 24, the central organ of the Czech Communist party, *Rude Pravo*, attacked the "scum and dregs of society . . . the loathsome bunch of traitors . . . led by the Judas Slansky . . . and other Zionist servile flunkies of American imperialism . . . in the service of Zionism and bourgeois Jewish nationalism, . . . the sworn enemies of the people and of Socialism." Anti-Semitism swept Eastern Europe through 1952, extending at least to 1954, and culminated in mass deportations and purges.<sup>71</sup>

Reaction in Israel was swift and, at times, violent. Sporadic demonstrations occurred throughout the year, and on May Day, Haifa crowds trampled the signs and streamers carried by the parading Commu-

69. *Tvorba*, December 13, 1951.

70. Peter Meyer, "The Jewish Purge in the Satellite Countries," *Commentary*, September, 1952.

71. There is little question that the anti-Semitic aspects of the trial were primarily intended for internal purposes. In the report of the trial proceedings, which appeared in the English edition of the Cominform journal, *For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy*, the word "Jewish" was used only once. Despite the attempts to contain the anti-Semitic nature of the purge, the proceedings were nonetheless of considerable embarrassment to Stalinist groups beyond the Eastern bloc. The organ of the British Communist party, *The Daily Worker*, for example, went to great lengths to dismiss the heavy aura of anti-Semitism permeating the Czech trial. See, for instance, *The Daily Worker* (London), December 22, 1952.

nists.<sup>72</sup> Israel's left-wing, Mapam, which had gained considerable strength as the result of Western efforts to superimpose Cold War on the Middle East, and which had grown increasingly close to the Communist party,<sup>73</sup> now found itself forced to choose between Zionism and Socialism. There was no way to reconcile the virulent anti-Semitism and the unexplained arrest of their own representative to the Knesset, Mordechai Oren, with their devotion to the East. Mapam's pleas to the Czech government on Oren's behalf,<sup>74</sup> as well as four separate and strongly worded notes by the Israeli government,<sup>75</sup> brought only silence from Prague. The result was a gradual disintegration of Mapam and a sudden and almost total loss of sympathy for the Israeli Communists.<sup>76</sup> When *Pravda* announced the Slansky trial on November 22, Israeli foreign minister Sharett rose to denounce the "tissue of libels and fabrications regarding activities of its members and emissaries, produced by the fertile imagination of the Czechoslovak Secret Police and Public Prosecution."<sup>77</sup> A rapid exchange of diplomatic notes occurred between Israel and Poland and Czechoslovakia which brought the already strained relations to the breaking

72. *New York Times*, May 1, 1952.

73. Mark Alexander [pseud.], "Israel's Communists and Fellow Travelers," pp. 136-44; Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East*, pp. 115-16.

74. See, for example, *Al Hamishmar*, March 24, 1952.

75. *JAD* IV, no. 39 (414), June 27, 1952, p. 1283.

76. Mark Alexander [pseud.], "Israel's Left Reels to the Shock of 'Prague,'" *Commentary*, April, 1953, pp. 379-89; see, also, Ben Halpern, "Dark Days Ahead for Mapam," *Jewish Frontier*, January, 1953, pp. 13-15; and "Krise bei den Kommunisten in Israel," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, January 8, 1953. In the face of a country outraged at Czechoslovakia's actions, *Kol Ha'am* remained intransigent in its belief that reports of the Prague trial were the results of "the meanest agitation against Czechoslovakia by the propaganda trumpets of American imperialism and the reactionary press" (November 24, 1952). As a result of an inflammatory editorial on January 14, 1953, the Israeli government suspended publication of the Communist party's newspaper for ten days.

77. Israel, Jewish Agency, *Documents Relating to the Prague Trial; Diplomatic Relations Of Israel With Czechoslovakia and Poland; The Moscow Accusations*, p. 10. Israeli officials, with one eye toward Soviet emigration, continued to assert that relations with Russia were excellent. Speaking in Tel Aviv on June 20, 1952, Dr. Shmuel Eliashev, former director of the East European division of the foreign ministry and then minister to Moscow, discussed the various issues on which the two nations were in accord. His major emphasis of harmony revolved around Russia's recent agreement (May 20, 1952) to import some 5,000 tons of oranges and 10,000 tons of other citrus fruit and bananas. *JAD* IV, no. 40 (415), July 4, 1952, pp. 1316-17.

point. On December 2, the Jerusalem offices of the Israeli Communist party were set ablaze by what *Kol Ha'am* declared were "fascist reactionary elements."<sup>78</sup>

Relations deteriorated still further when, on December 6, 1952, the Czech government declared Dr. Arie Kubovy, Israel's minister to Prague, *persona non grata* and demanded his immediate recall. In a note to the Israeli government, Czechoslovakia charged Kubovy with "espionage contacts with Rudolf Slansky and other Jewish Communist leaders who were hanged on 4-12-1952 after being convicted of treason." In addition, the lengthy note accused the Israeli legation in Prague with "systematic intervention in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia" and "emigration irregularities," and asserted that Kubovy, personally, had "ordered the professional spy, Mr. Oren, to carry out concrete acts of espionage."<sup>79</sup> As Kubovy was also Israel's minister to Warsaw, the Polish government quickly echoed Czechoslovakia's charges and on December 9 demanded Kubovy's recall from Poland as well. On February 3, 1953, the Hungarian government followed suit and expelled the Israeli cultural attaché Joseph Walter, on charges of espionage.

On January 13, 1953, a *Tass* news release announced the arrest of nine Soviet physicians, a "gang of beasts in human form" whose "medical disguise" enabled them to cut short the lives of leading Communist figures.<sup>80</sup> The prominent physicians, seven of whom were unmistakably Jewish, included six internists, M. S. Vovsi, V. N. Vinogradov, M. B. Kogan, B. B. Kogan, P. I. Egorov, G. I. Majorov, and J. G. Ettinger; an otolaryngologist, A. I. Feldman; and a neuropathologist, A. M. Grinstein. The "despicable criminals" who "had been hired by a branch of the American espionage service—the Jewish, international, bourgeois-nationalist 'Joint' organization [the American Joint Distribution Committee]"—had allegedly caused the deaths of Andrei Zhdanov (who died in August, 1948) and Alexander Shcherbakov (1945) "by fixing a lethal regimen." They were also charged with plotting to "shatter the health of the Red Army leaders so as to weaken the defensive strength of the country . . . but their arrest spoiled their murderous designs." Professor Vovsi had already "admitted" that

78. *New York Times*, December 3, 1952.

79. The full text of the Czech note, as well as Israel's official rejection of that note on December 7, was released on December 18. See *JAD* VI, no. 11 (440), December 26, 1952, pp. 269–74.

80. TASS News Release, January 13, 1953; *Pravda*, January 13, 1953, pp. 1–4.

he had been given instructions by the United States "to exterminate the leading groups in the Soviet Union."<sup>81</sup>

The same day, the Soviet trade union newspaper, *Trud*, decried:

curses and shame on the base degenerates and murderers! Soviet justice will crush like a poisonous reptile the criminal band which sold itself for dollars and pounds sterling. . . . The conclusion is: In order to liquidate sabotage, it is necessary to put an end to negligence in our ranks. . . . People in the Soviet Union should not even for one moment forget that it is imperative for them to increase their vigilance, to be steadily on the watch and to trace most scrupulously all plots of the warmongers and their agents. . . .<sup>82</sup>

The theme of "vigilance" was instantly picked up and became the central domestic issue for the next two months, until Stalin's unexpected death on March 5, 1953;<sup>83</sup> the surviving doctors were "rehabilitated" on April 4.<sup>84</sup>

Israel had no sooner begun to recover from the charges leveled against it by the Slansky trial in November, when the fantastic Doctors' Plot was announced by the Soviet press. The following day, on January 14, 1953, the Israel Medical Association published an appeal to the physicians of the world, calling for the "denunciation of the trial . . . which concerns not only the nine accused physicians, but also the practitioners of medicine in Russia and the whole world, threatening to incite antisemitic instincts of the masses."<sup>85</sup> A statement

81. *Ibid.* Dr. Vinogradov, 71 years old and one of the most respected figures in Russian medicine, confessed to being a British agent. His four Orders of Lenin and the Red Banner of Labor were immediately revoked. An interesting explanation for the Doctors' Plot—that the affair was provoked by parties anxious to remove any obstacles to get control of Stalin's health and give him a fatal injection—was advanced by Franz Borkenau in a series of articles in the *Rheinischer Merkur* between January and May, 1953.

82. *Trud*, January 13, 1953, p. 1; also *Pravda*, January 13, 1953.

83. See, for example, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, January 15, 1953, p. 1; *Izvestia*, January 15, 1953; p. 1; *Pravda*, January 16, 1953, p. 2; *Pravda*, January 18, 1953, p. 1; *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, January 21, 1953, p. 1.

84. *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, April 4, 1953. *Pravda* announced that the doctors accused of hastening the death of Zhdanov and Shcherbakov had been "arrested by the former U.S.S.R. Ministry of State Security incorrectly, without any lawful basis." On April 6, *Pravda* accused a former minister of state security, Semyon D. Ignatiev, of "political blindness" in connection with the case, declaring that he had been misled by one Ryumin, a deputy minister who was now under arrest. Two of the doctors, Kogan and Ettinger, however, had already died under torture.

85. Israel, Jewish Agency, *Documents Relating to the Prague Trial*, Document 15, pp. 35–36.

by the Jewish Agency executive published on January 15 demanded “the opening of the gates of Russia and of the popular democracies to all Jews wishing to emigrate from there,”<sup>86</sup> and on January 19 Foreign Minister Sharett spoke before the Knesset on the Prague trial and the Doctors’ Plot. He stated that “the denunciation of Zionism and the State of Israel which played so prominent a part in the Prague trial, and the slander against a world-famous Jewish public body [the American Joint Distribution Committee] which accompanies the charge against the physicians in Moscow, both clearly reveal a definite design and clearly show its underlying purpose.” He ended his speech with an emotional warning to Israel’s left-wing parties, declaring that “any attempt by persons and public bodies in Israel to justify or defend campaigns of anti-Jewish instigation which imperil the safety of Jews in any land will be regarded by the Government of Israel as a hostile act against the State of Israel, from which all the necessary consequences will be drawn.”<sup>87</sup> It was not surprising that the act which finally severed diplomatic relations between Russia and Israel was only weeks away.

On February 9, 1953, a homemade bomb exploded in the inner courtyard of the Soviet legation in Tel Aviv, considerably damaging the building, and slightly injuring the minister’s wife, Clavdia Yershov, the legation chauffeur, Ivan Grishin, and the wife of a staff member, Anna Suzayeva. The following morning, Ben-Gurion went before the Knesset to announce “his very deep regret . . . at the abomination” and declared that a “police investigation is . . . proceeding and will be continued with the utmost vigour.”<sup>88</sup> On February 10, a note was presented to the Soviet legation in Tel Aviv promising that “every effort will be made to find the perpetrators of this foul deed, and when found, they will be brought to swift justice,” and that “the dastardly outrage . . . and act of criminal folly stands condemned in the eyes of all . . . citizens.”<sup>89</sup> On the same day, the Knesset endorsed a declaration by the speaker “denouncing this barbaric act.”<sup>90</sup> Despite the charged atmosphere resulting from the Prague trial and the Doctors’ Plot,

86. *Ibid.*, Document 16, pp. 36–37.

87. *Ibid.*, Document 17, pp. 37–39.

88. *Ibid.*, Document 18, p. 39; also the *New York Times*, February 9, 1953.

89. Israel, Jewish Agency, *Documents Relating to the Prague Trial*, Document 19, p. 40.

90. *Ibid.*, Document 20, p. 40.



public opinion instantly rallied against the bombing. A sampling of the press comments of February 10 and 11, 1953, reveals such statements as “irresponsible provocation . . . by terrorists (*Davar*, February 10); “provocateurs . . . who serve foreign interests” (*Al Hamishmar*, February 10); “the public will wish the police rapid and complete success in their search for the culprits . . . and mad men” (*Hador*, February 10); and “. . . foreign agents . . .” (*Haboker*, February 10). Several major papers, however, raised the question of the extreme left wing’s part in the act. The largest independent newspaper, *Ma’ariv* (February 10), for instance, stated that “It would not be difficult to guess who they [the culprits] were, these enemies of Israel who placed the smallest advantage to their Stalinist line above the State.” The following day, a similar charge was expressed by *Hatzofeh* which stated that while there is a “possibility that the bomb attempt was committed by ‘hot-heads’ . . . it is more likely that the perpetrators belong to the camp . . . who wish to destroy the State from within.” The paper went on to theorize the motives involved, and stated that “This bomb is just what was needed by them to create the suitable atmosphere so that they may take courage anew when they are completely isolated following their identification with the anti-Jewish lies. Their appearances in the Knesset, in the press and elsewhere show that they have only waited for such an opportunity to accuse the Government and the people, and who knows whether they have not created this opportunity themselves?”<sup>91</sup> As public opinion rose to condemn the bombing, the increasingly anxious undercurrent of suspense concerning Russia’s reaction remained unspoken. The Soviet note to the Israeli government arrived on February 12 and confirmed Israel’s worst fears.

After reviewing the Israeli government’s actions since the event, the short note solemnly declared, however, that “these apologies are in complete contradiction to the systematic attempts to inflame hatred against the Soviet Union, which were openly made not only by the press of the Government parties, but also by members of the Government of Israel by the Knesset.” The note went on to make particular mention of Sharett’s Knesset speech of January 19 (regarding the

91. *Hatzofeh*, February 11, 1953. According to the historian Robert Payne, “. . . there were some reasons for believing that the bomb had been thrown by a Soviet agent,” presumably to provide the Soviet Union with the opportunity to sever relations with Israel. *The Rise and Fall of Stalin*, p. 673.

Doctors' Plot) "in which he incited openly to acts of hostility against the Soviet Union." With a singular lack of verbiage, the Soviet note closed with the decision to recall "the entire staff of the diplomatic mission in Israel . . . and also feels that it is no longer possible for the Israel diplomatic mission to remain in the Soviet Union and requests the entire staff of the Israel Legation in Moscow to leave without delay."<sup>92</sup> Diplomatic relations had been severed. The Israeli government was astonished. On February 16, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion delivered a lengthy and emotional speech to the Knesset on the government's reaction to the Soviet action, and after detailing the numerous occasions that a Soviet embassy or its personnel had been the object of a terrorist attack, such as in Riga in 1926 and in Warsaw in 1927, without diplomatic retaliation by the Soviet government, he came to the following conclusion:

To our regret we cannot help seeing in the Note that has been delivered to our Minister in Moscow one more step in the campaign of defamatory propaganda against the State of Israel, the Zionist Movement, and World Jewry, which has been proceeding for some time in the Soviet Press, and which has become an official campaign of hostility in the Slansky trial in Prague and in the slanders that were published in Moscow on January 13, 1953 and have continued without interruption since that date.<sup>93</sup>

The Netherlands undertook to represent Israel in the Soviet Union, and Bulgaria to represent the Soviet Union in Israel. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were not renewed until July 20, 1953, resulting from discussions between Michail Bodrov, the Soviet ambassador to Bulgaria, and Gershon Avner, Israel's chargé d'affaires in Budapest and Sofia, followed by a series of notes between Sharett and Molotov.<sup>94</sup> The resumption of diplomatic relations did not close the clash between the two countries, however, and it was clear, even to Israel, which had continued to hope for a Soviet change of heart, that the temporary honeymoon which had begun with Gromyko's first speech in May, 1947, in the United Nations, was long over.

92. Israel, Jewish Agency, *Documents Relating to the Prague Trial*, Document 21, pp. 42-43.

93. *Divrei ha-Knesset*, vol. XIII, p. 719; Israel, Jewish Agency, *Documents Relating to the Prague Trial*, Document 23, pp. 43-48.

94. *Pravda and Izvestia*, July 21, 1953; *Summary of World Broadcasts* I, no. 435, July 20, 1953.

## Summary and Conclusion

BY 1953 the turnabout in the Soviet Union's Middle Eastern policy was nearly complete. The period following Stalin's death, called the "thaw" by Ilya Ehrenburg, saw a general retreat from the entire Middle East area while both the Arabs and the Israelies looked hopefully for a reorientation in Russia's foreign policy. Despite the continuing anti-Semitic campaigns within the Eastern bloc, the Soviet Union maintained moderate relations, especially in trade,<sup>1</sup> with Israel while gradually increasing United Nations support for the Arab world. The only real moment of possible convergence between Russia and Israel took place in late 1953 and early 1954, when Israel, rejected as a potential defensive partner in the West's plans to organize a military alliance in the Middle East and anxious over the potential plan to rearm its Arab neighbors, was desperately looking for security. That such an alliance between the Jewish state and the Soviet Union did not take place was as much a product of Israel's bitter experiences with past Soviet support as of Russia's antagonism over Israel's primary, although futile, efforts to secure any guarantee of her security which the West was willing to offer. It was, perhaps, Egypt's determined opposition to the Western military alliance, especially after mid-1954, which influenced Russia's final decision to support the

1. According to Laqueur, Israeli imports from the USSR were forty times higher in 1954 than they had been in 1950-51; and in June of the same year, the Soviet legation in Tel Aviv and the Israeli legation in Moscow were raised to embassy levels, at which time the Soviets took the opportunity, over vehement Arab protests, to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Laqueur, *The Soviet Union and the Middle East*, p. 204.

Arab world, rather than Israel, as its best candidate in the Middle East conflict—a decision reflected by Nasser's announcement in September, 1955, of massive military aid from Czechoslovakia.

A close examination of the relations between Israel and the Soviet bloc during the period under consideration, 1947 to 1953, indicates two overriding factors. The first is that the Soviet Union, during the postwar period leading to its involvement in the Middle East, saw that area as the entering wedge for ending British influence in the Mediterranean. There was also the additional possibility that a Soviet entrance into the Middle East conflict might bring about a collision between the Western allies. Such a development would weaken the increasingly solid alliance against continued expansion in Eastern Europe and reverse the gradual shift of British to American responsibility for the security of Greece and Turkey. Moscow probably would have been willing to support any movement, regardless of its ideological persuasion, to break the Anglo-American front and to weaken Western unity. Whether or not the Palestine Question was an expected opportunity, however, is a moot question, depending upon the seriousness with which Moscow viewed the variety of pledges and hints of Israeli alliances offered by left-wing Palestinian Zionists.

The second factor which emerges from a detailed study of the period indicates that the Soviet Union was never deeply nor sincerely involved in the conflict between Israel and the Arab world. The Middle East crisis was simply regarded as a problem resulting from Western imperialist designs, which, Russia felt, could be rectified by a British withdrawal from the area. It appears that the Soviet Union did not begin to see the enormous complexities of the issues until a few weeks before Gromyko's first United Nations speech in May, 1947. The Soviet Union had no a priori interest of its own in either the establishment of a Jewish Palestine or in the restoration of an Arab Palestine, but since the British still maintained considerable influence in the Arab world, as opposed to the growing chaos and anti-British terrorism in Palestine, Moscow saw the Zionists as the logical object of its support. Soviet diplomacy could fish very successfully in such troubled waters.

An additional consideration which indicates the Soviet Union's lack of firm engagement in the Middle East struggle is the fact that the weapons and military aid supplied to the desperate Israelis in the face

of six British-supplied Arab armies were not offered directly by the Russian government. The selection of Czechoslovakia as the go-between in supplying arms to the Haganah in 1948, as well as to the Egyptians in 1955, shows Russia's desire to shift responsibility for any possible ideological error on another party. Certainly it would be a misconception to assume that ideological considerations were of any real importance to Moscow's decision to enter into the conflict. Since no influential Communist parties existed on either side of the struggle, and the socialist character of the Zionist movement was, at best, a secondary consideration, there is little doubt that Soviet strategists were motivated by the concept of power politics rather than ideology.

There is certainly no question that the Soviet Union played a major role in creating the State of Israel, perhaps a singularly important role in view of the striking vacillation on the part of the American delegation; but the Soviet decision to support the Jewish position, despite the risk of alienating thirty-five million potential allies in the Arab world, was a complex one. First and foremost, Soviet strategists, supporting Israel as the most potentially successful element to weaken the British position, saw the liquidation of the Palestine Mandate as the first step toward the collapse of British power in the Mediterranean. There were also a variety of secondary motives in the Soviet Union's decision to support the Jewish Agency's position. A logical consideration was the view that any international army sent to defend Palestine against an Arab offensive must necessarily include a contingent from Russia, while further influence could be exerted through the Soviet delegate in the Security Council. One might also speculate that Moscow believed that the new Jewish state might respond more readily to communist anti-imperialist propaganda and Marxist dogma than the conservative Arabs. Moreover, since the Zionists were still searching desperately for a source of diplomatic and military support throughout 1947 and most of 1948, there was a slight chance, despite their numerous declarations of "non-commitment" in the Cold War, that the future leaders of the Jewish state could be influenced to take an eastward orientation in gratitude for the Soviet support. There was also a chance that such gratitude might be deepened by the supply of military weapons which were needed to defend the embryonic Jewish state from the imminent Arab invasion. The longer the conflict continued, the more dependent Israel would become upon the Soviet

Union. As a final, and decidedly secondary, motive, Russia felt it might be able to influence the Jewish state by manipulating the emigration of East European Jews, to include, if necessary, a number of Communist agents to undermine or influence the direction of the Israeli government.

During the several years following 1948, the Soviet Union found itself in an ambiguous position. Having achieved its Middle Eastern objectives of forcing the evacuation of British forces from Palestine and causing the establishment of the State of Israel, Soviet strategists began to note with dismay the poor return on their diplomatic investment. Israel's first national election indicated that only a small fraction of the voters saw Israel's future best served by the leadership of the Communist party, while its need for capital and Western goodwill strengthened its ties with the United States. Israel's efforts to maintain a position of "non-identification" in the Cold War, often extremely difficult in the face of increasingly antagonistic Russian propaganda and tightening East European emigration policies, were not well received by Moscow. In accordance with the Zhdanov Doctrine to which the Soviet Union then subscribed, anyone not exclusively pro-Soviet was ipso facto hostile. Russia's disillusionment with Israel was compounded by the reaction of Moscow's Jewry to the arrival of Gold Meir in September, 1948. Stalin's shocked reaction to Jewish demonstrations in honor of the first Israeli envoy to Russia produced a campaign of immediate retaliation against Russia's Jewry and led to a gradual end to Soviet support for Israel.

While there is little doubt that Stalin's reaction was triggered by the apparent resurgence of Jewish identity in Russia, a variety of other considerations may have played a part in his decision to end support to Israel and initiate the anti-Semitic campaign which raged through the Eastern bloc for years to come. Certainly Stalin's deep-seated suspiciousness, intensely heightened by his outrage at Tito's defection from the Soviet camp a few months before, could not but have caused him to see in the reaction of Moscow's Jewry a growing conspiracy. His immediate solution of a cleansing purge of the party leadership and the initiation of an anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist campaign was designed, no doubt, to eliminate the possibility of any such conspiracy.<sup>2</sup>

2. Stalin may have used the anti-Semitic purges as a tactic to insulate himself against the vulnerability of any future charges of partiality toward the Jews by

A final consideration in Stalin's decision to withdraw aid from Israel, leading to a general Soviet retreat from the Middle East as a whole, may also have been the Soviet Union's disappointment over Israel's unexpected and decisive victory over the combined Arab armies. The Jewish victory reduced, if it did not eliminate, the prospect of a long period of chaos in the Middle East and accompanying tension between Britain and the United States. The Jewish victory also eliminated the possibility of any further Israeli dependence on the Eastern bloc for a continuing supply of military aid. Without this dependence, the Soviet Union believed that it no longer maintained any hope of influencing the political direction of the Jewish state. While there is no way of knowing whether the Soviet Union acted as a result of any single reason or a combination of factors, it was clear that by the end of 1948, the Kremlin had decided that it had placed its support on the wrong entry in the Middle East crisis and it began a general withdrawal from the area in order to reorient its strategy.

If the Soviet Union was becoming disillusioned with the potential advantages of friendship with the new small state, then it could also be stated that Israel, too, was undergoing a process of disillusionment with the Eastern bloc over the critical issue of mass emigration. The very foundation of the Zionist movement rested on the unrestricted "in-gathering" of world Jewry to a national homeland in Palestine, a philosophy which forced the Jewish state to adopt a foreign policy of "non-identification" which it hoped would make possible the eventual mass emigration of the several million Jews in both the Eastern and Western camps. In the meantime, Israeli "non-identification" was almost essential as a means of alleviating the delicate position of Jews abroad, especially in the Soviet bloc. As it became increasingly evident that the satellite governments, in contrast to their earlier enthusiastic support for Israel, intended to restrict their emigration policies to conform with Moscow's virulent anti-Semitic campaign, Israel found itself gradually drawn toward the West. If the Kremlin strategists still held out any hope of swaying the Israeli government through their influence over the Jewish left-wing parties, such as Mapam or the Communist party, Maki, that hope was destroyed by

ambitious political rivals. The Bulgarian, Hungarian, and eventually Czechoslovakian trials which followed were efforts to eliminate the possibility of such charges, and at the same time, bring the satellites under closer Soviet control.



the effects of the openly anti-Semitic Slansky trial of 1952 and the totally fantastic Doctors' Plot of January, 1953. Following these events, Israel's left-wing parties found it extremely difficult to enlist support for a political cause which advocated the frenzied anti-Semitic campaign under way in the Eastern bloc nations. The bomb explosion in the Soviet legation in Tel Aviv following Moscow's disclosure of the Doctors' Plot was quickly utilized by Stalin as an opportunity to sever Russia's diplomatic relations with Israel, and despite the Soviet Union's reconsideration following Stalin's death in March of that year, it was clear that the Eastern bloc's experiment to support the Jews in the Middle Eastern arena was long over.

The Soviet Union's original decision to sanction the creation of Israel at the cost of alienating the more than thirty-five million Arabs is still not fully comprehensible. Soviet strategists, or Stalin alone, may have underestimated the degree of Arab resentment for the West and the amount of national unrest in the Moslem world. Perhaps the policy decision was guided by the standard Marxist-Leninist view of the Arab states as being "reactionary" and "colonially oriented." Despite Lenin's subsequent admonition that the Arab world might well offer a variety of advantages as allies in a struggle against the West, Stalin decided that the limited objectives offered by supporting the Jews still outweighed those offered by the Arab world. The initial decision to support the Jews over the Arabs in 1947 could not have been seriously based on the gamble that either party in the conflict would have been better candidates for Communism, especially in light of the absence of any Soviet force in the area to act as a political lever in a bid for governmental control. It can only be deduced, therefore, that the Kremlin was guided in its initial decision by a dogmatic underestimation of the Arab world's potential strength and anti-Western sentiment in contrast to an overestimation of the limited advantages which support of the Jewish state seemed to offer. One thing is clear: regardless of the Kremlin's motives and considerations in throwing its weight behind the partition plan and thus wittingly denying itself the possibility of winning the gratitude which the Arabs were willing to bestow on any supporter, Soviet Russia's basic impulse was opportunism. The Middle Eastern expert Walter Laqueur has best summarized Russia's intentions in the Arab-Israeli issue by stating

that “Soviet leadership thinks in terms of power politics, not in those of lofty idealism. At the bottom of its Middle Eastern policy, it’s neither pro-Arab, nor pro-Israel; it is pro-Soviet. . . . This is the long and short of it.”<sup>3</sup>

3. Walter Z. Laqueur, “Soviet Policy and Jewish Fate: In Russia and in Israel,” *Commentary*, October, 1956, p. 309.



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--- Josef Korbel, University of Denver.



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