

Terrorism and the origins of Israel—Part 1

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21 June 2003

The following is the first of a two-part series. The concluding part will be published June 23.

Last month the National Archives, formerly known as the Public Record Office, released MI5 Security Service files showing that Zionist terror groups planned to set up cells in London and assassinate the post-war Labour government's British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin.

“Present Trends in Palestine”, an MI5 briefing paper written in August 1946, reported on the activities of the Stern Gang. This was the terrorist group that had assassinated Lord Moyne, the British military governor in Egypt in 1944.

“In recent months it has been reported that they [the Stern Gang] have been training selected members for the purpose of proceeding overseas and assassinating a prominent British personality—special reference having been made several times to Mr. Bevin in this connection,” the paper noted.

One of the leading lights of the Stern Group, which had by this time renamed itself Lehi, was Yitzhak Shamir who became prime minister in 1983 and whose tenure in the highest office in Israel was second only to Ben Gurion.

Another paper, “Threatened Jewish Activity in the United Kingdom, Palestine and Elsewhere”, prepared for the Prime Minister Clement Attlee, focused on the activities of the Irgun.

It noted that the Irgun, led by Menachem Begin—later to become prime minister of Israel in 1977—who had a £2,000 price on his head, “was responsible in the past for the liquidation of members of the police and the military whose activities have been judged especially worthy of Jewish resentment in Palestine.”

The paper was written in the aftermath of a terrorist bombing by the Irgun that had in the previous month blown up the British headquarters in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, killing 91 people—Britons, Arabs and Jews—and injured many more.

It said, “Our Jerusalem representative has since received information that the Irgun and Stern Group have decided to send 5 ‘cells’ to London to work along IRA [Irish Republican Army] lines. To use their own words, the terrorists intend ‘to beat the dog in his own kennel’. If the 18 Sternists are executed [for their part in the King David bombing] the Irgun have agreed to co-operate with the Stern Group.”

The intelligence forces believed that if the executions were carried out, there would be at least 100 retaliatory terrorist outrages and “indiscriminate shooting of British officers and soldiers on the streets of Palestine must be expected”. The files showed that the sentences were in fact reduced to life imprisonment.

A briefing note prepared for a meeting between the prime

minister and the head of MI5, Peter Sillitoe, also listed precautionary measures to be taken to combat terrorism. Police would monitor Jewish groups in Britain and spy on “Jews known to have expressed sympathy with terrorist activity in Palestine, and who might be a point of contact for any terrorist arriving in this country. All applications for UK visas in the Middle East are scrutinised by local security authorities. Immigration officers at UK ports report to Home Office, Special Branch and MI5 the particulars of all Jews, including seamen, arriving from the Middle East.”

The fact that MI5 claimed it was keeping a close watch “through its own sources” on UK Zionist groups with sympathy for the terrorists suggests that they had informers working for them inside. Given the British propensity to use such groups for its own purposes to divide and rule, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that MI5 had agents provocateurs working within them.

While it has long been known that these Zionist groups carried out or planned to carry out assassinations, bombings and sabotage against British targets, these papers—released so long after the normal 30-year rule—are important for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the papers provide a timely reminder that the Zionists of all political colours used terrorist methods to achieve statehood—something that present-day Zionists seem to have forgotten when they talk about refusing to negotiate with the Palestinians whom they routinely refer to as “terrorists”.

It is not simply that Ariel Sharon and company are a bunch of hypocrites or political amnesiacs about the past. More importantly, the Irgun, led by Menahem Begin, the Stern Group and Lehi, its successor, went on to form the Herut party, forerunner of the Likud party, and the ultra right-wing Moledet party, which form the main coalition partners of the Sharon’s government. The gang of former generals, ultra-nationalists and religious bigots that run Israel today are the political heirs of terrorists who furthermore had close connections with the fascists. In this, they mirrored some of the Arab nationalists in Palestine, Egypt and Iraq who allied themselves with Germany in order to rid themselves of British imperialism. These alliances led to a virtual civil war between the various wings of the Zionist movement during World War II.

The various Zionist terrorist groups emerged out of the far right wing of the Revisionist Zionist movement, an ultra-nationalist Zionist group. While all the Zionist groups sought to stifle the rising tide of class struggle in Palestine in the name of national unity, the Revisionists openly stated at the very beginning of the Palestinian-Zionist conflict, in opposition to the mainstream political Zionist movement, that the establishment of a Zionist state in Palestine was impossible without violence and the forcible

transfer of the indigenous population. The Zionist state could only be established “in blood and fire”. They opposed the division of Palestine in 1922 whereby Britain had ceded what is now Jordan to its client, the Hashemite emir Abdullah, as a reward for his support during World War I. While the Labour Zionists orientated towards the Western democracies, the Revisionists’ political ideology had more in common with the fascist dictators of Europe.

By the late 1930s, the British, who ruled Palestine under a League of Nations mandate, began to reverse their previous and somewhat vague support for the establishment for “a homeland for the Jews” in Palestine. Menachem Begin, a leading member of the Betar, a far right Revisionist group, regarded military action against the British as both inevitable and necessary to secure a Jewish state in Palestine and the East Bank of the Jordan.

As the situation in Eastern Europe grew ever more desperate for the Jews, and the British sought to limit Jewish immigration to Palestine in an effort to gain support from the Arabs in the coming war against Germany, Betar joined forces with the Irgun—the National Military Organisation, the Revisionists’ military wing. With no prospect of a Jewish state in sight, they argued that armed struggle against the British was the only way forward.

In 1939, when war broke out between Britain and Germany, Avraham Stern, one of the leaders of the Irgun, who had studied in Italy and was an admirer of Mussolini, rejected any support for the British against Germany. He argued that the British were the main enemy. There was no difference between the Nazi-fascist states and the Western democracies, between communists and social democrats, between Hitler and Chamberlain, or between Dachau and Buchenwald and closing Palestine off to the Jews. When he failed to persuade the majority of the Irgun to support him, he broke with the Revisionist movement and his faction became known as the Stern Group.

While both the mainstream Zionists and the Revisionists supported the British against Germany and joined the British armed forces, the Stern Group opposed conscription of the Jews and went on to carry out armed robberies, murders, and terrorist attacks against both the British and the Arabs. It waged a campaign of terror aimed at driving out the British and establishing a Jewish state on the entire land of biblical Palestine, including Transjordan. With the Jews a minority in Palestine, such a state would necessarily mean expelling the Arab population to ensure its Jewish character.

In his support for the enemy of the British, Stern turned a blind eye to the anti-Semitism of the Nazis. The Stern Group’s policies and actions were opposed and condemned by the overwhelming majority of Jews in Palestine.

In return for help from first the Italians and later the Germans in driving the British out of Palestine, Stern promised that the new Jewish state would become a German client state while Jerusalem, with the exception of the Jewish holy places, would become a province of the Vatican. In other words, the establishment of a Jewish state took precedence over the safety of European Jewry. His group had meetings with the Nazi regime’s representatives and tried to recruit 40,000 Jews from occupied Europe to invade Palestine and defeat the British. But the Germans had no more wish to alienate the Arabs and lose the chance of gaining access to

the region’s oil resources than the British and dismissed the offer.

The British shot and killed Stern in February 1942 and imprisoned his immediate coterie, including Yitzhak Shamir, the future prime minister.

As the war drew to a close, Stern’s followers, including Shamir on his release from jail, regrouped as the Lehi with similar aims, including Stern’s “Eighteen Principles of National Renewal” that proclaimed a Jewish state from the Nile to the Euphrates. They adopted the methods of the IRA in its struggles against the British. Shamir even used Michael as his *nom de guerre*, after Michael Collins. The now embarrassing Nazi-fascist affiliation was dropped in favour of Britain’s latest enemy, the Soviet Union, although some advocated an alliance with the Arab national liberation movements that opposed the stooge regimes imposed by British imperialism.

Lehi denounced the Labour Zionists and the mainstream Revisionist movement for relying upon negotiations with the British. As far as Lehi was concerned, the British were the Gestapo and the Labour Zionists were akin to Vichy Europe, and Lehi were the resistance. Asked if it was possible to achieve national liberation through terrorism, Lehi’s response was, “The answer is no! If the question is, are terrorist activities useful for the progress of revolution and liberation, the answer is yes.”

Lehi’s most notorious action was the assassination of Lord Moyne, the British military commander in Egypt in 1944.

According to Shindler, a fellow in Israeli Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and author of *The Land Beyond Promise: Israel, Likud and the Zionist Dream*, Lehi copied the methods of the IRA. Between September 1942 and July 1946, when Shamir was arrested and exiled to Eritrea, there were seven assassination attempts on the life of the British High Commissioner in Palestine and several more were planned, including Ernest Bevin, the British foreign secretary and members of British intelligence forces. It was Shamir who planned the assassination of Lord Moyne. Lehi also carried out 14 assassination attempts against Jews who worked or were believed to work for British intelligence. It was not averse to killing its own members if the need arose.

While Lehi was by far the smallest of the Zionist terrorist groups, the Stern/Lehi group carried out 71 percent of all political assassinations between 1940 and 1948. Nearly half of these were against fellow Jews.

Even after the establishment of the Zionist state, Lehi continued its murderous activities. Hazit Ha’Moledet, the Fatherland Front, a Lehi splinter group that later formed the Moledet party, carried out the assassination of Count Folke Bernadotte, a UN envoy seeking to arrange a peace agreement between Israel and the Arabs.

To be continued



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