

## HISTORY

### BRITAIN AND ISRAEL

Classified or secret Whitehall files and diplomatic documents, recently brought to light, throw a disturbing light on Britain's past conduct with regard to Israel and the Arabs. Not only did the British Government condone British army atrocities against the Arabs of Palestine in 1938, but also took active steps to block peace negotiations between various Arab states and Israel at a time when such states wished to make peace with Israel.

It must be said that Britain's handling of the Mandate for Palestine, which she had received from the League of Nations in 1922, especially in the decade before 1948, is a cause for national shame. Not only did Britain sever 77% of Palestine from the express terms of the Mandate in 1922 and place it under totally Arab control, but actually sought to prevent Jewish immigration into Jewish (Western) Palestine during the time of Nazi Germany's wholesale destruction of the Jews of Europe. Thus, although given the responsibility by God of assisting in the creation of a Jewish homeland, Britain actively opposed the Jewish return to Palestine.

Britain's actions stand in strange contrast to the words of Winston Churchill in February 1920:

"If, as may well happen, there should be created in our own lifetime by the banks of the Jordan a Jewish State under the protection of the British Crown which might comprise three or four millions of Jews, an event will have occurred in the history of the world which would from every point of view be beneficial, and would be especially in harmony with the true interests of the British Empire."

God has clearly stated in the Bible concerning the Jewish people:

***"I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse".*** (Genesis 12:3)

***"For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you will perish; those nations shall be utterly wasted".*** (Isaiah 60:12)

On the 3rd September there was widespread recollection of the outbreak of World War 2 when Britain declared war on Nazi Germany, with remembrance of the amazing victory of the British airforce in the Battle of Britain, the horrors of the Holocaust and of the fearsome destruction inflicted on Germany. In the light of this the following evidence of Britain's conduct over the past 50 years with regard to Israel and her people should be carefully weighed by all political and church leaders, and journalists seeking to pronounce on Israel at this present time.

Much hypocrisy and self-interest has marked, and still does mark, British foreign policy in the Middle East, and those who are concerned for Britain should pray and speak out for integrity and fairness.

#### BRITISH ATROCITIES IN PALESTINE DISCLOSED

Atrocities committed by the British Security Forces in Palestine, and the government's failure to halt them, are detailed in a batch of secret 1938 Whitehall files which were declassified at the beginning of 1989. The government papers would normally have been made public at the end of 1968, under Britain's "30 years rule." But, presumably because of their sensitive nature, they were held back an additional 20 years and quietly released in January 1989.

Unearthed by the Independent newspaper, the papers detail massive British reprisals against the Arab

residents of Jenin for the assassination of a British official; the use by British forces of Arab-driven "minesweeping taxis" to precede troop convoys in areas where land mines had been planted; the refusal by the British authorities in Palestine to abandon the practice of blowing up civilians' homes; and a report of an Arab prisoner being shot by policemen while handcuffed in Jaffa.

The papers also show the government's reluctance to "protest squeamishly" to the commanding officers in Palestine about the excesses, and indicate that a cabinet minister sought to keep details of the atrocities from the House of Commons.

The Jenin reprisal episode dates from the summer of 1938, when a British district commissioner in the town was assassinated. The alleged murderer was apprehended, placed in custody and later shot while trying to escape, according to the government documents. Despite his death, the military authorities decided that further punishment was merited and that "a large portion of the town should be blown up."

Accordingly, on August 25 a heavily armed convoy carrying 4 tons of gelignite made its way from Haifa to Jenin to carry out the demolition. "Actual demolition operations were commenced at 16.15 hours," the papers record. The government cables concerning this mission also contain the first references to the Arab-driven "minesweeping taxis", used "to reduce (British) land mine casualties."

When details of this stratagem were received in London, it was initially deplored as "revolting" by a low-level government official. But higher-ranking officials decided to condone it, with Colonial Office deputy under-secretary Sir John Shuckburgh noting that in Palestine, the British were dealing "not with a chivalrous opponent playing the game according to the rules, but with gangsters and murderers."

Another senior official, Lord Dufferin, supported this view, and wrote that, much as he disliked the implications of the "minesweeping taxis . . . I do not feel that we have the right to interfere. British lives are being lost and I don't think that we, from the security of Whitehall, can protest squeamishly about measures taken by the men in the frontline."

Colonial Secretary Malcolm MacDonald repeatedly expressed concern over military atrocities in Palestine, the files reveal, protesting during one 1938 cabinet meeting over "action taken against civilians, as for example, blowing up houses." But the authorities in Palestine refused to abandon the practice, claiming that it was "an essential part of our military action."

MacDonald also accused one cabinet colleague of deliberately omitting any reference to the activities of the Palestine Police Force when claiming to the House of Commons that there was no evidence of troops committing atrocities in Palestine. MacDonald cited the report of the shooting of a handcuffed prisoner by police in Jaffa. This report, he said, "seemed to rest on good evidence." (The Jerusalem Post 22 January 1989)

## **BRITAIN BLOCKED PEACE BETWEEN ARAB STATES AND ISRAEL**

Secret diplomatic documents show several Arab states were willing to conclude peace agreements with Israel 40 years ago, but were partly dissuaded from doing so by Britain, then the pre-eminent Western power in the Middle East. The classified British documents, each bearing the stamps Secret, Top Secret, Restricted and Confidential, show that Britain, which had military treaties with several Arab states, worked incessantly to prevent the establishment of peaceful relations between the new state of Israel and its Arab neighbours, especially Transjordan (now Jordan). British diplomats were apparently afraid that an Arab-Israeli peace might lead the Arabs to be less pro-Western, and they therefore urged Arab leaders not to make peace. King Abdullah (grandfather of Jordan's present King Hussein) was anxious to come to agreement with Israel, but was restrained by Britain.

The disclosures were made in highly secret minutes of a gathering of British Foreign Office representatives and ambassadors to the Middle East held on July 21 1949, at the time the first Arab-Israeli war ended. Sir Alec Kirkbride, the British Minister to Transjordan, whose comments were summarised in the minutes of the 1949 gathering, noted that many key members of the Transjordanian Government shared Abdullah's peaceful intentions toward Israel, but they probably could be persuaded to change their minds.

Sir Ronald Campbell, Britain's ambassador to Egypt, told the assembled diplomats that the Egyptians had no intention of renewing the quarrel (with Israel) and would probably agree to a modus vivendi (a compromise arrangement), although they were not yet prepared to accept a formal agreement. Egypt might be willing later to join other Arab states in making agreements with Israel. Sir John Troutbeck, then head of Britain's Middle East office, said certain Arab Governments wished to conclude peace with Israel but were afraid of doing so independently. He added that Britain was in a position to control the Arab Governments but not Israel, although he gave a warning that an Arab- Israeli peace might lead to the formation of a neutral block opposing British interests in the Middle East.

The minutes of the 1949 meeting were among several documents that apparently slipped through the net of official secrecy surrounding British diplomacy. From these documents, it appears that even the Arab regimes in Syria and Iraq have been willing - according to British estimates - to reach some kind of settlement with Israel even as early as 1949, but British policy makers played on the Arab-Israeli rivalry to advance British military and economic interests from Suez to the Gulf.

In another passage from the minutes, Britain's Minister to Syria is reported to have said that Marshal (Husni) Zaim (then military ruler of Syria) wished to reach a settlement but he doubted he (Zaim) would get Cabinet support. Zaim would probably follow Egypt.

The British Minister in Beirut said Lebanon would no doubt follow the other Arab states and was unlikely to conclude any agreement independently.

Britain's fear that Israel might form a neutral block with the Arab states also came to light in a nine-page memorandum - marked Secret, and dated August 25 1949 - to the British Cabinet from Mr Ernest Bevin, then Foreign Secretary. In paragraph 20 of the memorandum, Mr Bevin remarked that Britain did not oppose peaceful relations and trade between Israel and the Arab countries as long as Israel did not get to the point of dominating them (the Arabs) economically and so politically, and thus perhaps imposing its own views of neutrality on the Arab world.

The Arab League, according to several Cabinet documents and diplomatic correspondence, was used by Britain to further its own interests, while limiting the influence of the Soviet Union, France, the United States and Israel. (*The Times* January 1983)

## **BRITAIN AND THE HOLOCAUST**

Where there is an awareness of the Holocaust, in which some six million Jews died by starvation, shooting or in gas ovens, there is a general revulsion that this should ever have taken place. It must be remembered at the same time however that Britain shared in the indifference, ignorance and inaction of the allies with regard to Hitler's "final solution" which gave Hitler freedom to pursue his demonic plan to totally destroy the Jews of Europe unhindered.

Although supplied with information about the decimation of Jewish communities in the gas ovens of Europe, the allies turned a blind and unbelieving eye. Thus, British Foreign Office minutes referring to such information received from Occupied Europe read:

"Why should the Jews be spared distress and humiliation when they have earned it?".

"In my opinion, a disproportionate amount of the time of the Office is wasted on dealing with these wailing Jews", and again, "What is distressing is the apparent readiness of the new Colonial Secretary to take this Jewish Agency "sob-stuff" at its face value." (Quoted in *The Listener* 16 September 1982)

## **CONCLUSION**

God has been gracious to Britain and given her great privileges and responsibilities, especially with regard to Israel. He wants to bless Britain, and for her to be an example of integrity and in turn a means of blessing to the world. The need of the hour is for repentance on behalf of both Church and nation. God's condescension and mercy made Britain great once, and will do so again if we turn to Him.

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