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Early Zionist-Kurdish Contacts and the Pursuit of Cooperation: the Antecedents of an Alliance, 1931-1951

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Scott Abramson

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This study traces the progress of the contacts between Zionists/Israelis and Kurds—two non-Arab regional minorities intent on self-government and encircled by opponents—in their earliest stage of development. From the early 1930s to the early 1950s, the Political Department of the Jewish Agency (later, the Israeli Foreign Ministry) and several eminent Kurdish leaders maintained contact with a view to cooperation. The strategic calculus behind a Zionist/Israeli-Kurdish partnership was the same that directed Zionist/Israeli relations with all regional minorities: If demographic differences from the region's Sunni Arab majority had made

them outliers and political differences with them had made them outcasts, the Zionists/Israelis and the Kurds, together with their common circumstance as minorities, had a common enemy (Arab nationalists) against whom they could make common cause. But in the period under consideration in this work, contact did not lead to cooperation, and none of the feelers, overtures, appeals for support, and proposals for cooperation that passed between the two sides throughout these two decades were crowned with success. For the failure of this pursuit, this study finds the Zionists, despite their openness to the Kurds, principally responsible, and identifies several reasons they chose not to give effect to Kurdish proposals: the distance and inaccessibility of the remote and landlocked Kurds; Zionist concern for Turkish, Iranian, and American sensitivities; doubts on the part of certain Jewish Agency personnel about the promise of such a relationship; and Zionist preoccupation and limited resources. Despite these inauspicious beginnings, what was then unknowable to those participating in real time is now undeniable to those observing in retrospect: namely, that the early relations between Kurds and Zionists were to be the foundation of their later partnership, the antecedents to their eventual alliance.

The dissertation of Scott Abramson is approved.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Jewish State and the "Second Israel"

Amid the international outcry in September 2017 against the Kurdish Regional Government's (KRG) referendum on seceding from Iraq, there was but one voice that could be heard speaking in favor of the initiative and its pro-independence result. The quarter from which this lone voice issued, as many headlines announced, was Israel. True though it was that a few other countries—Canada and the Czech Republic, for example—could be said to have backed Kurdish independence tacitly, keeping quiet amid the world's advocacy of Iraq's "territorial integrity." But if their support was silent, Israel's was strident.

The singularity of Israeli support did not escape the attention of the KRG's electorate. Photographs widely publicized in the regional and Western press showed Iraqi Kurds of every description waving Israelis flags in gratitude, a scene that left one to wonder whether this was the only time since 1948 in the Middle East outside the Jewish state in which Israeli flags could be seen waved overhead in support rather than trampled underfoot in contempt.

At the bar of regional public opinion, the Iraqi Kurds had long stood accused of being a "second Israel," so, to many observers in the Middle East, this vexillary display was enough to solidify an accusation into a conviction. So, too, did it dramatize just how far the Iraqi Kurds' ambitions had diverged from the line on Kurdish independence taken by the KRG's neighbors. For all their disagreements, regional governments had discovered a rare patch of common ground in opposing the KRG's secession."You should know that the waving of Israeli flags there will not save you," thundered Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan.[1] Iranian Supreme Leader

[1] "Barzani's Decision to Hold Referendum 'Betrayal to Turkey,' Erdoğan Says," *Hürriyet Daily News*, September 26, 2017

Ayatollah Khamenei, for his part, alleged an international conspiracy headed by the United States (never mind that Washington opposed the referendum) that sought "to create a 'new Israel' in the region.'"[2] The state-run Arabic-language Iranian television channel *Al-Kawthar TV* seconded Khamenei's description of Kurdistan as a "new Israel" but extended the analogy to KRG president Massoud Barzani, whom it denounced as "Ben-Gurion Barzani."[3] Former Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki was more minatory than analogical, vowing, "We will not allow the creation of a second Israel in northern Iraq."[4] As if to press this home, the Iraqi parliament reinstated a defunct law banning any public display of the Israeli flag.[5]

Tagging the Kurds of Iraq with the label "second Israel" was hardly novel in the region's political discourse. Ever since 1962, when it was first attached to the Kurds of the Syrian Jazira by Damascus's then Foreign Minister Assad Mahassen, the epithet has been deployed regularly by regional leaders ill-disposed to Israel and the Kurds alike.[6] Two days before the Six-Day War, for example, Iraqi Brigadier General Mahmoud Arim addressed a speech to the Syrian public in

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(http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/barzanis-decision-to-hold-referendum-betrayal-to-turkey-erdogan-says-118415).

[2] "The Zionist Regime Seeks to Establish a 'New Israel' in Region," *Khamenei.ir*, October 4, 2017 (http://english.khamenei.ir/news/5196/The-Zionist-regime-seeks-to-establish-a-new-Israel-in-region).

[3] "Ben-Ghurion al-Barzani...Isra'il Jadida!" *al-Kawthar TV*, September 26, 2017 (http://www.alkawthartv.com/news/95646).

[4] Patrick Cockburn, "Iraqi Kurdish Referendum: Why International Powers Fear Independence Vote Could Derail Fight Against Isis," *The Independent,* September 19, 2017 (https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraqi-kurdish-independence-referendum-preview-isis-krg-vote-a7955936.html)

[5] Tamer El-Ghobashy and Mustafa Salim, "Iraq's Parliament Reinstates Ban on Israeli Flag," *The Washington Post*, November 1, 2017 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/11/01/iraqs-parliament-reinstates-ban-on-israeli-flag/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.80790532a679)

[6] Avi Shektar, Member of the Research Department of the Foreign Ministry, to Mordechai Gazit, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, "Arab Responses to the Kurdish Question, " November 12, 1962, ISA 6529/1

which he spoke of the impending war as an opportunity to repay Damascus for its participation in a joint Iraqi-Syrian military campaign against the Iraqi Kurds in 1963: “You [Syrians] came to us to finish off the Second Israel [the Kurds of Iraq], and now we have come to discharge the debt and finish off the first Israel.”[7] Taking a leaf from the same book, the Iraqi defense minister in 1965 and 1966, Abd al-'Aziz al-'Uqaili, denounced a stillborn proposal for Kurdish autonomy in Iraq as “a new Balfour Declaration.”[8]

Though intended as opprobrious, these and other epithets have quite often been accepted with high relish by their Kurdish targets. Accordingly, just as chants of “We are the Second Israel” sounded at a polling station in Arbil (Iraqi Kurdistan’s capital) on the day of the referendum in 2017,[9] so some of the twentieth century’s leading Kurdish personalities happily claimed for the Kurds the title of “Second Israel,” figures including Kamuran Ali Badr Khan, Ibrahim Ahmad, and—most iconic of all post-Ottoman Kurdish figures—Mulla Mustafa Barzani.

From this “Kurdistan-is-a-Second-Israel” discourse in the Middle East in 2017 it was clear that the comparison was not inspired solely by a recognition of a contemporary affinity of circumstance and sentiment between Israelis and Kurds, two regional minorities whose political programs had alienated them from their neighbors while endearing them to one another. History

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[7] Massoud Barzani, *al-Bārazānī wa-al-ḥarakah al-taḥarrurīyah al-Kurdīyah* (Beirut: Kāwā lil-Thaqāfah al-Kurdīya, 1997), 193.

[8] Eric Rouleau, "Le poids du Kurdistan irakien," *Le Monde,* October 12, 1968.

[9] David Patrikarakos, “In Kurdistan's Erbil, the Polling Station Head Shouted Out: 'We are the Second Israel,” *Haaretz*, September 28, 2017, https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/.premium-in-erbil-the-polling-station-head-shouted-out-we-are-the-second-israel-1.5453872; Bob Mason, Analysis: How Kurdistan’s Independence Can Spark The Middle East,” *Jerusalem Post*, October 8, 2017, https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Analysis-How-Kurdistans-Independence-Can-Spark-the-Middle-East-506929

also explained the comparison. While history in the Middle East is often an elastic affair—stretched, compressed, or otherwise manipulated in the service of polemic—in this case, such distortion was unnecessary; history supplied a genuine precedent for Israeli-Kurdish partnership, for it is a matter of record that Israel and the Kurds of Iraq had maintained a nearly 12-year alliance in the 1960s and 1970s. Knowledge of this history being widespread in the region, the renewal of the "second Israel" accusation in 2017 owed perhaps as much to history as to the exhibitions of Israeli-Kurdish friendship related to the referendum. Regional opponents of Jewish and Kurdish statehood well understood that Kurdish independence could not just open the possibility of Israeli-Kurdish relations, but that such relations would be more a resurrection than a birth of this dreaded association.

For their part, Israeli officials did not fail to refresh the regional recollection of the historical Israeli-Kurdish relationship either. Not long after the referendum, at a memorial ceremony for Rehavaam Ze'evi, the slain Israeli general and parliamentarian, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke of the longevity of Kurdish-Israeli friendship. Mentioning the very cordial reception Ze'evi had found among Israel's Kurdish allies on his visits to northern Iraq in the 1960s, Netanyahu remarked, "He came face to face with warm expressions of support for Israel which continue to this day."[10]

The alliance Netanyahu mentioned had indeed loomed as the distant backdrop against which many in the region, whether favorably or adversely, viewed the scenes of Israeli-Kurdish friendship in September 2017. This decade-plus Israeli-Kurdish alliance in the 1960s and 1970s—"the longest and most fascinating" of all of Israel's relations with minorities, in the

[10] "Netanyahu: World Should Take Care of Kurds' Future," *AFP*, October 24, 2017, https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/24102017

language of former Mossad director Shabtai Shavit—was both an application of the immemorial principle that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" and a by-product of the Iraqi Kurds' fourteen-year rebellion (1961-1975) against Baghdad.[11] The common enemy against whom the two peoples had made common cause was the Iraqi government, which opposed by force the self-government the Kurds still sought and that the Israelis had already achieved.

The Israeli-Kurdish entente did much to promote the interests of both parties. The Israelis furnished weaponry and training to the Kurdish insurgents and lent their much-needed assistance in other domains, including agriculture, health care, radio broadcasting, education, public relations, and diplomacy. The Kurds, in turn, not only diverted Baghdad's energies from strengthening the Arab front against Israel, they also supplied Israelis with valuable intelligence and helped smuggle out of Iraq the last holdouts in the country's hugely depopulated Jewish community. So plentiful were the fruits of this alliance for the Israelis that Meir Amit, another former Mossad director, would later reflect, "The benefit we derived was enormous."[12] For the Kurds, the gains were considerable but, on the whole, fleeting, extinguished in 1975 along with the Kurdish revolt itself.

2.1 Synopsis

If the Israeli-Kurdish alliance of the 1960s and 1970s was the backdrop against which the scenes of Kurdish-Israeli amity in 2017 were enacted, the decades of Zionist/Israeli-Kurdish contacts before the alliance had raised the curtains on the performance. And it is these antecedents to the alliance that provide the substance of this study. This work traces the progress

[11] Shabtai and Yael Shavit, *Yoman ve-mikhtavim: shlichut be-Kurdistan, mertz-yuni 1973* (Tel Aviv: Tefer, 2013), 8.

[12] Meir Amit, "Introduction" in *ha-'Imut ha-'Iraḳi-Yiśre'eli: 1948-2000*, ed. Shaul Shai (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 2002), 110.

of the contacts between Zionists/Israelis and Kurds—two non-Arab regional minorities intent on self-government and encircled by enemies—in their earliest stage of development. Beginning with contacts in 1931 between the Iraqi Kurds and a young Zionist emissary, Reuven Shiloah (the future—and first—director of the Mossad), and ending with a Kurdish appeal in 1951 for Israeli support for a proposed revolt against Baghdad, these two events bracket two decades of contacts between the Political Department of the Jewish Agency (and its successor, the Israeli Foreign Ministry) and Kurdish leaders.The strategic calculus that lay behind Zionist-Kurdish dialogue was based on the proposition that the natural result of the enmity of their common enemy (Arab nationalists) was friendship. And the natural corollary of this friendship, in turn, was cooperation.

Yet while friendship between the Jewish Agency and certain Kurdish leaders led to frequent contact between the two sides, it did not lead to cooperation. Accordingly, an inquiry into the feelers, ineffectual overtures, unfulfilled appeals for support, and dud proposals that passed between the Zionist/Israelis and the Kurds in the decades before their official alliance is mostly a study in failure. But if success were the only arbiter of whether negotiations or bids for cooperation merit investigation, the scholarship on the diplomacy between the Jewish Agency/Israel and the states and peoples of the Middle East would occupy a few bookshelves rather than fill whole libraries. Neil Caplan's first two volumes in his four-volume *Futile Diplomacy* series and Itamar Rabinovich's *The Road Not Taken: Early Arab-Israeli Negotiations*, in particular, stand as testaments to the high dignity of historiography concerned with the early and anticlimactic pursuit of cooperation or peace between the Zionists/Israelis and others in the region. As regards Zionists and regional minorities in particular, Laura Zittrain Eisenberg's *My*

Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900-1948 remains the *locus classicus* for the history of the many and abortive attempts at an entente between the Jewish Agency and the Maronites before Israeli statehood.

There being no comprehensive study of the prestate contacts between the Zionists and the Kurds, this relationship has not only eluded scholarly investigation, it seems also to have eluded some scholarly awareness too. Several otherwise worthy studies of the Israeli-Kurdish alliance in the 1960s and 1970s date the origins of this relationship to the late 1950s or early 1960s instead of to the early 1940s, when a representative of the Jewish Agency took up a friendship in Beirut with one of the twentieth century's outstanding Kurdish cultural and political figures, Kamuran Badr Khan. Not only would Badr Khan—"a true asset for the state of Israel," as Reuven Shiloah described him—singlehandedly make possible Israel's alliance with the Iraqi Kurds in the 1960s and 1970s, he would serve as one of Israel's most trusted and valuable intelligence sources and intermediaries with regional leaders for almost forty years. The earliest phase of Badr Khan's relations with the Jewish Agency and his many attempts to effect Zionist-Kurdish cooperation are the antecedents to the later alliance. These antecedents are the focus of this inquiry.

1.3 Main contentions

Besides excavating this unearthed history and exposing the deep roots of Zionist-Kurdish relations, the present study advances a conclusion that, considering the Zionists' regional isolation and their eagerness for relations with all friendly elements, might otherwise seem improbable: It was the Political Department of the Jewish Agency (and the Israeli Foreign Ministry thereafter), not such Kurdish leaders as Badr Khan with whom it maintained contact,

that declined to act on any of the many proposals that passed between the two sides during the years under consideration.

For this refusal of Kurdish overtures, as will be seen in the ensuing chapters, the reasons were several. First, there prevailed a skepticism in the Political Department of the Jewish Agency—particularly on the part of its director, Moshe Sharett, and the head of its Arab Affairs division, Eliyahu Sasson—that the investment of the Jewish Agency's scant resources in such a partnership would be rewarded by gains sufficient to justify their expenditure. Doubts about the feasibility of the Kurds' often ambitious proposals and the distaste of Moshe Sharett for any kind of minority adventurism and of Eliyahu Sasson for any major deviation from a focus on state diplomacy were often enough to defeat the Kurds' proposals. Even more than Sharett, though unlike some of his colleagues in the Political Department, Sasson tended toward skepticism of minority relations in general, believing as he did that the region's Sunni Arab majority might yet be won over to Zionism. But if Sasson was only slightly dubious about partnerships with such regional minorities as the Maronites and Druze, whose proximity and accessibility commended them to the Zionists, he was even more skeptical of the promise of an entente with the far-flung and landlocked Kurds. Thus unconvinced, Sasson reserved and often exercised his veto power over proposals supported by others in the department more persuaded of the promise of relations with the Kurds.

In the 1940s, the Political Department discovered another reason for caution toward Kurdish overtures—namely, the sensitivities of other actors, regional and Western, about the empowerment of the Kurds. Then as now, the Middle East's two non-Arab states, Turkey and Iran, worried that any advance in the pursuit of Kurdish self-determination anywhere in the

region could not but spell a reverse for Turkish and Iranian stability. Accordingly, Kurds strengthened by a partnership with the Zionists threatened to inflame Turkey and Iran's restive Kurdish communities and deny Israel the goodwill of Ankara and Tehran it coveted. Still more important to the Zionists and Israel was the support of the Americans, who suspected the Kurds of partisanship for the Soviet Union. Apprehensive of any measure that might give the Americans another reason to oppose Jewish statehood in 1947 and recognition of Israel in 1948, the Jewish Agency was loath to cooperate with an element that Washington looked upon as rotten with Communist associations or sympathies. Toward Washington's British ally, the Jewish Agency need not have proceeded so gingerly, as British-Zionist relations had already been envenomed by Britain's closure of Palestine to Jewish refugees, but there remained a major concern that discouraged a partnership with the Kurds. Specifically, the Jewish Agency feared that by conspiring with the Iraqi Kurds against London's Iraqi ally, the British might be provoked into taking military action against Zionist forces. British threats during the First Arab-Israeli War were no mere bluster, after all, and the Zionists had good reason to suppose that the British, who were already assisting Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq in the war, might enter the hostilities itself if provoked.

The foregoing reasons for the failure of the Zionists and the Kurds to cooperate—despite common isolation, Zionist openness, and Kurdish eagerness—will find elaboration in the ensuing chapters. In brief, the ambition of the present work not only to chart the history of the contacts between the Zionists/Israelis and the Kurds, between 1931 and 1951, but also to inquire into the reasons that a bilateral partnership was pursued but not accomplished until the 1960s. In 1959, on the eve of this alliance, one eminent Israeli intellectual, Baruch Uziel, was lamenting the Jewish

Agency's unresponsive posture years before to the overtures of the Kurds. "Long before the establishment of the state," Uziel wrote, "the Kurdish freedom movement sought a close relationship with the Zionist organization but was rejected by it."[13] Appropriately enough, the name of the pamphlet in which this lament appeared was the "Periphery Doctrine," and its author, Baruch Uziel, the first Zionist both to use the term and to give written expression, in 1948, to the strategic framework within which the Israeli-Kurdish alliance was to be accomplished.[14] Little could Uziel know in 1959 that the Jewish Agency's inaction he was deploring would, in retrospect, become the prehistory of the Kurdish-Israeli alliance just a few years ahead.

[13] Baruch Uziel, *Berit ha-periferyah: hatsa'ah li-mediniyut Yiśre'elit* (Tel Aviv: Hamerkaz, 1959), 23.

[14] Jean-Loup Samaan, "Contourner des frontières hostiles: Israël et la naissance de la doctrine de la périphérie," in *Survivre à la globalisation: Les stratégies incertaines des petits États*, ed. Mourad Chabbi (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2018). 81.

CHAPTER TWO: ZIONISM, MINORITIES, AND THE KURDS

The present chapter proposes to examine both the process by which isolation became the lot of the Zionists in Palestine and the emergence of one of their prescriptions for relieving this isolation: pursuing relations and, possibly, cooperation with the Middle East's minority communities. This chapter also profiles the Kurds in their own right before casting them in the light of their potential as friends or partners of the Zionists. Lastly, the main personnel in the Political Department of the Jewish Agency (in effect, prestate Israel's foreign ministry) who were to be involved with the Kurds throughout the 1930s and 1940s are introduced and their positions on relations with the Kurds touched on.

2.1 Zionism and the minorities of the Middle East

Zionism's narrowing circle of regional partners

The Arab world's acquiescence in—still less acceptance of—Zionist aims in Palestine was, for reasons of regional demography alone, an unlikely prospect from the beginning. After all, Zionism, with no small measure of chutzpah, aspired to a non-Arab, non-Muslim state in a largely Arab and overwhelmingly Muslim region. So was it all but foreordained that in Palestine itself, sovereignty over the land, whether partly or wholly, would have to be contested between a Jewish minority and a mostly Muslim Arab majority attached to the regional majority by the bonds of ethnicity, religion, and culture. And since it is an axiom that where there is similarity

there follows empathy, regional solidarity with the Palestinian Arabs could not but ensure the enlargement of a local conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine into a regional conflict between the Jewish state and the entire Arab world. Zionism, then, flowed in the Middle East like a crosscurrent, defying the tide of regional opinion.

Yet far from resignedly accepting the conclusion that they may not be welcome, Zionists sought an accommodation with the Sunni Arab majority, first in Palestine, and then in the region—but without effect. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Zionist hopes of an understanding with the Palestinian Arabs pivoted on what has often been termed an "exchange-of-services," a formula founded on the proposition that, whatever their initial anxieties about Zionism, Palestinian Arabs would come around to accepting Jewish statehood because the material rewards it would ensure them were too great to be sacrificed to anti-Zionist principle.[15] Yet Palestinian notables who were prepared to make terms with Zionism's central objective, even in its most diluted form of a binational state, were scarcely to be found.[16] Typical of their sentiment was the proud response of Palestinian Arab notable Musa al-Alami to David Ben-Gurion's assurance that the Arabs would share in the fruits of Zionism's harvest in Palestine. "I would rather that there be a barren waste here for another hundred years, another thousand years," replied Alami, "till we [Palestine's Arabs] can make it flourish and redeem it."[17] The "exchange-of-services" formula was at last retired for good by the British Peel Commission of

[15] Neil Caplan and Laura Zittrain Eisenberg, *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace, Second Edition: Patterns, Problems, Possibilities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 9.

[16] Benny Morris, *One State, Two States: Resolving the Israel/Palestine Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 51-52.

[17] Abdel Wahab El-Messiri, *The Land of Promise: A Critique of Political Zionism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: North American Books, 1977), 125.

1937, the Zionist despair of an eventual accommodation with local Arab leaders only deepening thereafter.[18]

More numerous were non-Palestinian Arab leaders hospitable to a compromise with Zionism. For them, Palestine may have been kindred Arab territory and the seat of al-Quds, but one thing it was not, in the language of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, was "a single word: homeland."[19] As far as their positions toward Jewish nationalism were concerned, the contrast between the fixity of Palestinian Arab leaders and the flexibility of regional Arab leaders had already revealed itself in the earliest years of the British Mandate of Palestine, when meetings between Zionist officials and non-Palestinian leaders of the movement for "Greater Syria" were of regular occurrence.[20] That such Sunni Arab potentates as Emir Faisal (Iraq's first king), Emir Abdullah (Faisal's elder brother and Transjordan's first king), Riad al-Solh (Lebanon's first prime minister), and Jamil Mardam (Arab nationalist leader and later Syrian prime minister) seemed more flexible on the Palestine question at one time or another was no misperception. As third parties and, as such, unwitting actors in an object lesson in the economic concept of "moral hazard," they were much less invested in the fate of Palestine and much less affected by concessions than were its own native sons, even if some of these leaders (King Abdullah, for example) still had their own designs on the country.

The Zionist establishment thus nourished the hope throughout the era of the British Mandate that a cooperative regional Arab leader could be enlisted to soften Palestinian Arab

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[18] Gudrun Kramer, *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 279.

[19] Mahmoud Darwish, "Ana Min Hunak" in *Diwan* (Beirut: Dar al-Awda, 1994) II. 327.

[20] Yosef Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs, 1882-1948: A Study of Ideology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 85.

opposition to Zionism.[21] But as the years of the British Mandate advanced and the violence in Palestine in 1929 and 1936-1939 transformed the Palestine question into a pan-Arab cause célèbre, the liabilities of association with Zionists became prohibitive and Sunni Arab leaders open to compromise with Zionism vanished from the scene.[22] Meanwhile, the rise of post-Ottoman, though pre-Nasserist, Arab nationalism only ensured that theirs would be a disappearance not temporary.

Minorities *faute de mieux*

And so it was that, for the Zionists, the circle of potential partners in the region had narrowed to so tight a radius as to admit minorities alone. The leaders of the Palestinian Arab majority had never shown themselves as receptive to an accommodation with Zionism, and the leaders of the regional Arab majority who may have once been open to such a compromise were open no longer. Fear of defying popular opinion or a genuine change of heart had hardened their position with the result that, in the search for regional partners, there remained only minorities.

Yet it was not as if the Zionists had suddenly awakened to the potential of relations with regional minorities only after the Palestinian and regional Arab alternatives had been foreclosed as partners. On the contrary, Zionist interest in ties with the Middle East's minorities had a long pedigree. Nor was it only the affinity of circumstance between the Jews of Palestine and regional minorities, both being outliers in the Sunni Arab Middle East, that had engaged Zionist attention. No less obvious to Zionist officialdom as the ethnic and religious differences that distinguished the minorities from the region's Sunni Arab majority was their different attitude toward Zionism.

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[21] Laura Zittrain Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900-1948* (Detriot: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 20.

[22] A notable exception was Transjordan's Emir Abdullah.

With the exception of Arab Christians of the Greek Orthodox communion whose hostility to Zionism often differed little from that of Sunni Arabs , Zionist officialdom appreciated that the posture of regional minorities toward Jewish nationalism was variously one of neutrality, indifference, or sympathy.

While “thinking with the blood,” in the evocative phrase of D.H. Lawrence, caused peoplehood and politics to converge among Palestinian and other Arabs (as often among Zionists and the Jewish Diaspora too), regional minorities—who did not share the ethnic identity, culture, religion, and language that united the Middle East’s Sunni Arab majority with their Palestinian kinsmen—were consequently aloof from the cause of the Palestinian Arabs. When this demographic difference between regional minorities and the Middle East’s Sunni Arab majority was widened by a political difference—such as the Maronites’ Greater Lebanon, Kurdish separatist initiatives, or the minority statelets of Mandatory Syria—the minorities were pushed yet further away from the regional majority and closer to Palestine’s Zionist minority. The result, for them and for the Zionists alike, was the same: If differences from the region’s Sunni Arab majority had made these minorities outliers, political differences had made them outcasts.

By the early 1930s, amid galloping regional hostility to Zionism, the Zionists already had good reason to suppose that minorities diverged from Sunni Arabs in their sentiments toward Jewish nationalism. The Maronites of Lebanon, who had accomplished their dream of Greater Lebanon in 1920 over the objections of the regional majority, had already given not a few proofs of a friendly orientation toward Zionism. The first official executive Zionist body in Palestine and the precursor of the Jewish Agency, the Zionist Commission, had even concluded an

(abortive) agreement in 1920 with Maronite activists from Lebanon.[23] The Druze of Palestine likewise exhibited an accommodating attitude toward Zionism. Not long after the riots in Palestine in 1929, the country's Druze notables addressed a letter to the British High Commissioner pledging themselves to neutrality in the escalating conflict between Palestine's Arabs and Jews.[24] In the 1930s, there followed similar divergences from regional sentiment toward Zionism among the Druze of Lebanon and Syria.[25] As the interwar years wore on, such signs of an attitudinal difference between the regional majority and minorities toward Zionism only proliferated. It remained for the Jewish Agency, which was ever watchful for such signs, to convert sympathy into a relationship or, perhaps, a partnership.

2.2 The Kurds in the light of Zionist interest

Though many times more numerous than the region's Maronites and Druze combined, the Kurds of the Middle East, being more remote from Palestine, were also more remote from Zionist thought. Still, for the Zionists, the communal profile of the Kurdish people contained much to recommend them as an ally and to remind them of themselves. Before proceeding to a discourse on the Kurds in the light of Zionist interest, it is well to sketch a portrait of this, the Middle East's largest, minority on its own terms.

The Kurds in Broad Outline

[23] *Ibid.,* 56.

[24] Kais Firro, *The Druzes in the Jewish State: A Brief History* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 23.

[25] Kramer, *A History of Palestine*, 287.

In a letter to British and American diplomats and missionaries in Iran in 1880, Sheikh Ubaydallah, leader of the first Kurdish nationalist revolt,[26] described his people thus: "The Kurds are a people apart."[27] An ancient nation indigenous to the region, the Kurds of the Middle East are indeed distinct from the other peoples of the region, of whom they number the fourth largest, after the Arabs, Turks, and Iranians. In common with Arabs and Turks, they mostly profess Sunni Islam,[28] and in common with the Iranians, they speak an Indo-European tongue closely related to Persian and to other cognate languages of the Iranian Plateau. Yet unlike Arabs, Turks, and Iranians, the Kurds are a nation without a state. Indeed, they are the largest such in the world without a state, and this has not been for lack of trying.

Since Sheikh Ubaydallah proclaimed, in the same letter, "We want our affairs in our own hands," there have been Kurdish nationalist bids for self-determination. But the best strivings of the Kurds have not been rewarded by the achievement of Kurdish self-rule, for the Kurds have always found themselves arrayed against forces larger and mightier than they. To statehood, the Kurds plead their title in the Kurdish homeland ("Greater Kurdistan"), a mountainous crescent of territory that, if overlaid on political map of the modern Middle East, would trespass on the sovereignty of the four countries in the Middle East it extends partly over: Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. For these countries, opposition to Kurdish self-rule has supplied a rare point of

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[26] David Gaunt, "The Culture of Inter-Religious Violence in Anatolian Borderlands in the Late Ottoman Emprire" in *Gewaltsgemeinschaften: Von der Spätantike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Winifried Speitkamp (Göttingen: V & R, 2013), 254.

[27] Sheikh Obeidullah to Dr. Cochran, October 5, 1880, *Index to the Executive Documents of the House of Representatives for the First Session of the Forty-Seventh Congress,* 1881-82, Vol 22 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882), 15-16.

[28] The Yazidis of Iraq and the Yarsan throughout Greater Kurdistan are two small ethnoreligious groups that most Kurds claim as kinsmen. Alevi and Shia Kurds also live in significant numbers in Turkey and Iran, respectively.

consensus in a Middle East in which division is endemic, and as early as the 1930s regional governments have cooperated to stymie *Kurdayeti* (Kurdish nationalism).

The division of the Kurds into four separate polities in the modern Middle East has scarcely been the only division in the Kurdish national condition. Division had indeed been a theme in Kurdish experience, so much so that if the Kurds are, as Sheikh Ubaydallah declared, "a people apart," they could also be said to be a people "in parts," riven as they are by divisions of dialect, region, religion, tribe, and—in recent decades—political party and ideology. To these natural divisions the Kurds themselves have often added internecine ones, which their four host countries have seldom passed up opportunities to exploit. This tendency to assist, by means of infighting, their overlords with the "divide" half of dividing and ruling them has given another dimension of pathos to Kurdish experience, making it a "sorrowful history of the mountain"—in the words of Sherko Bekas, one of the twentieth's century foremost Kurdish poets.[29] Nor is this double obstacle to Kurdish self-rule of geopolitical division and internal division a strictly twentieth-century phenomenon. Allegorizing Kurdish separation and infighting centuries ago, Ahmad Khani's *Mem u-Zin* (1695), the first and most celebrated epic poem in the Kurdish literary canon, laments, "If only there were unity among us, and we would obey one another, then all of the Ottomans [Turks] and Arabs and Iranians would become our servants, we would reach perfection in religion and politics."[30]

Zionism and the prospect of relations with the Kurds

[29] Sherko Bekas, *Butterfly Valley* (Todmorden: Arc Publications, 2018), 35.

[30] Martin van Bruinessen, "Ehmedi Xani's Mem u Zin and Its Role in the Emergence of Kurdish National Awareness," *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. Abbas Vali (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2003), 44.

At the beginning of the 1930s, when the potential of relations with the Kurds first suggested itself to Zionist officials, the Kurds were still, just as they had been in *Mem-u Zin*, under the rule of their Turkish, Arab, and Iranian "enemies." To the Zionists, however, the stateless Kurds' struggle against the Turks and Iranians was a misfortune, these being the region's two most numerous and influential non-Arab peoples whose goodwill the Zionists had good grounds to seek. But the Kurds' struggle against the Arabs, under whose rule the Kurds lived discontentedly in Syria and Iraq, was more than adequate compensation, for it meant that, together with their common circumstance as minorities, the Zionists and Kurds had a common enemy against whom they might make common cause.

While the Zionists' courtship of Turkey from the late 1930s and of Iran from the late 1940s meant that Ankara's and Tehran's sensitivities about the Kurds had to be respected, they understood even in the early 1930s that, as regards the Kurds, similar caution need not have been exercised toward Damascus and Baghdad, whose identification with the Palestinian Arabs had made Syrian and, more especially, Iraqi friendship ever more elusive and improbable. Meanwhile, signs of Kurdish-Arab enmity in Iraq and Syria deepened the Zionists impression that their Arab enemy's Kurdish enemy could be a friend. As Iraq was poised to gain its independence and admission to the League of Nations, Sheikh Mahmoud Barzinji, the preeminent Kurdish rebel leader in Iraqi Kurdistan, addressed an appeal to the organization in 1931 in which he presumed to speak "in the name of all tribes of Southern Kurdistan [Iraqi Kurdistan]."[31] Denouncing "Arab oppressors,"[32] Barzinji averred, "We cannot possibly continue

[31] "Cannot Live Under Arab Government," *Palestine Bulletin*, January, 23, 1931, 1.

[32] Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq, 1914-1932* (London: Ithaca Press for the Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford, 1976),

to live under the existing conditions of Arab government" and that the "Kurds are prepared to defend themselves, as well as the other oppressed minorities of Iraq, against further maltreatment."[33]

The Zionists were likewise attentive to the stirrings of the Kurdish autonomy movement in the northeastern corner of Syria beyond the Euphrates, in the region Arab geographers called "the Jazira" (the island), lying as it does between Mesopotamia's two iconic rivers, and Syrian leaders would later sometimes call a "Second Israel."[34] Whereas for most of French mandatory rule, Syria's Sunni Arab heartland was ruled from Damascus as a single unit, much of the country's rural and minority-populated periphery had been cantonized, divided into such self-governing entities as Jabal Druze (1922-1936, 1939-1942), the Alawite State (1920-1936, 1939-1942), and the autonomous Kurdish and Christian district of the Jazira (1920-1936, 1939-1942).[35] In 1932, the same year neighboring Iraq achieved independence and its Kurds mounted a fresh rebellion, Kurds and Arabs clashed in the Syrian Jazira. The Palestinian Arabic newspaper, *al-Jamia al-Arabiya*, reported that the Kurds, backed by the region's Christians (with whom the Kurds would later launch an autonomy movement there) purged the Jazira's administration of Arab staff.[36] The cumulative effect of these and other Kurdish-Arab enmities was the Jewish Agency's recognition that the Kurds, whose national distinction from the Arabs

[33] "Cannot Live Under Arab Government," *Palestine Bulletin*, January, 23, 1931, 1.

[34] The branding of Jaziran Kurds as "the Second Israel" began in the early 1960s, amid Damascus's denaturalization of more than 120,000 of this community and the circulation of a notorious anti-Kurdish pamphlet by Baathist official Muhammad Talib Hilal. At once a polemic against Kurds and a blueprint for the Arabization of the Jazira, Hilal's pamphlet is rife with comparisons between Israel and the Jaziran Kurds.

[35] There is some variation of opinion on the inception dates of these three administrations.

[36] "Kurdish-Armenian Homeland in Syria," *Al-Jamia al-Islamiyya*, August 19, 1932، 1 (Arabic).

had already advertised their potential as partners, would, at the very least, be open to relations with the Zionists.

Recognition of a common enemy was often accompanied by a recognition of common characteristics, a tendency that also prevailed in the Zionist conception of Maronites. That one should have had no little difficulty in identifying common attributes of Zionists and Kurds did not prevent certain Zionists, whether journalists or Jewish Agency officials, from trying to find them. In the early 1930s, the Kurds were a nation of peasants and pastoralists, overwhelmingly rural and illiterate, long fabled for their ferocity in battle. In contrast, the Zionists, despite their best efforts to rusticize Jewry, possessed none of these characteristics. Cosmopolitan, urban, intellectual, and, at the time, unpracticed in combat, they could not look upon the Kurds as they did the sophisticated Maronites of Lebanon, who resembled them more closely. Nor could the Zionists, as they and many of their Maronite and Assyrian contacts often did, invoke a biblical relationship as an ancestral precedent for a renewed association. In their frequent meetings, the Zionists and Maronites would often mention the alliance between David (and Solomon after him) and the Phoenician king Hiram of Tyre while the Zionists and Assyrians would reminiscence about Jonah's divinely ordained mission to Nineveh and the city's salvation. Although the Kurds claim descent from the biblical Assyrians' rival, the Medes, and although the misnamed Persian emperor "Darius the Mede" figures in Jewish scripture as a benefactor of the Second Temple, history does not record any invocation of an ancient "Median-Jewish" link in the Zionists' conceptions of Kurds or in their discussions with them. Yet their resemblances to the Kurds, few though they were, the Zionists often stressed, and the most important of these was that both were regional minorities striving for self-determination in a Sunni Arab Middle East opposed to their

political ambitions (Zionism and Kurdayeti). And while they may not have had a similar national profile, Zionists familiar with the Kurds almost always spoke with admiration of them, whose hardihood, resilience, and rusticity inclined them to see in the Kurds something of the fierce, robust agriculturalists they wanted the "new Jew" to resemble.

Zionists also appreciated that, though the Jewish experience in pastoral Kurdistan was no idyll, the twentieth-century intensification in the Middle East of ill-feeling toward Jews found no parallel in Kurdistan. Amid mounting anti-Jewish sentiment in "Arab Iraq" (Iraq south of Kurdistan) in 1931, Reuven Shiloah, institutional Zionism's first representative to open contacts with the Kurds, observed this contrast while visiting Kurdistan. "The Kurds are friends of the Jews," Shiloah concluded in a report.[37] The singularity of this circumstance in the twentieth-century Islamic world and the affection of Kurdistani Jews in Israel for their former neighbors were such that that they became "excellent ambassadors " who lobbied the Israeli government on their behalf, as Kurdish intellectual Jasim Abdullah Rikandi described them.[38] Although elaboration of this consideration in later Israeli policymaking trespasses beyond beyond the chronological bounds of this study, it suffices only to mention that past Kurdish friendship with Jews—and even the idea of repaying Kurdish benevolence—was often broached in Israeli discourse on the Kurds.

Whatever the Jewish Agency's interest in the Kurds, relations with them offered certain obstacles. Of these, geography was the most obvious. In the first place, the whole of Greater Kurdistan is landlocked, its population therefore difficult of access, and only by stealth or with

[37] Reuven Shiloah, Central Zionist Archives (CZA), S25/22631-1.

[38] Jasim Abdullah Rikandi, "The Surprising Historical Ties between Israel and the Kurds: Part One," *Ahewar*, August 19, 2014 (in Arabic). http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=429050&r=0

the approval of a friendly government could they be reached. Consequently, the landlocked geography of Syrian and Iraqi Kurdistan, to say nothing of the rest of Greater Kurdistan, condemned Israel to be at the mercy of the Iranians and Turks, without whose agreement access to these Kurdish populations was impossible. (Syrian and Iraqi approval was, of course, inconceivable). Two examples from recent decades serve to illustrate this Israeli dependence. In March 1975, when the Shah of Iran suddenly ended his many years of support for Iraqi Kurdish insurgents rebelling against Baghdad, abandoning his former allies to the vengeance of Saddam Hussein, Iran also demanded and enforced the end of Israeli support. In the face of the abrupt Iranian withdrawal of support for the Kurds, Ephraim Halevy, later director of the Mossad, lamented, "The Iranians have ceased all aid to the Kurds and are even preventing us from [assisting them]."[39] And when, in 1991, the Israelis sought to send relief to the Iraqi Kurds who had crossed into Turkey to escape more of Saddam Hussein's brutalities, Ankara, like Tehran before it, refused to allow the Israelis, despite their pleas, to minister to the welfare of the anguished Kurds.[40] Syria and Iraq being off-limits, it therefore fell to these two-Arab countries, Iran and Turkey, the only two regional countries until 1979 with which Israel had semi-official relations, to allow or to refuse the Zionists overland passage to the Kurds in Iraq or Syria.

But Turkish and Iranian assent was of little prospect, even in the earliest years of the new Turkish and Iranian states, before the Kurdish question in these countries had assumed its later gravity. Turkey had extinguished a Kurdish rebellion just two years after Ataturk had founded the Turkish Republic in 1923, while Iran under Reza Khan, who had suppressed Iranian Kurdish

[39] Memorandum from Ephraim Halevy to David Turgeman, Israeli ambassador to the United States,Washington, March 1975, ISA 6710/8.

[40] Letter from Dr. David Orenstein, Chairman of the Israeli Association of State Employee Physicians, to Dr. Selim Olcer, President of the Turkish Medical Association, April 28, 1991, ISA 23285/12/Gal.

uprisings as a general before founding the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, was intolerant of any expression of nationalism not Iranian. Nor did the Zionists, for their part, desire to make the Turkish and Iranian goodwill they sought harder to obtain. Ataturk had already done the Zionists a service in 1931 by pointedly declining to send a delegate to Hajj Amin al-Husseini's pan-Islamic Congress in Jerusalem, which the secularizing Turkish leader opposed. Although several years remained until the Jewish Agency would begin to ingratiate itself with Turkey and Iran, the Jewish Agency still valued the friendship of the two non-Arab states above relations with the Kurds. And even though the Jewish Agency would not pursue relations with Turkish or Iranian Kurds lest it alienate the two countries, it still seems to have understood Ankara's and Tehran's conviction that to empower the Kurds of any state (even of Syria or Iraq) would be to embolden the Kurds of every state. The Jewish Agency would nevertheless establish relations with Syrian and Iraqi Kurds undeterred by but careful of Iranian and Turkish sensitivity.

Together with inaccessibility, distance was a companion obstacle to relations with the Kurds. Whereas proximity, among other considerations, recommended relations with the Maronites of Lebanon and the Druze of the same and of Syria, distance alone discouraged relations with the Kurds. More than four hundred miles intervened between Palestine and the nearest Kurdish communities in the region, those of Syria, the only country of those contiguous to Palestine that hosted a Kurdish population of any size or significance. But whereas the Druze of Syria were concentrated near the Palestinian border, all three of Syria's main centers of Kurdish habitation lie along the country's northern extremity. It was the remotest of these three, the Kurds of the Syrian Jazira–on the other side of the forbidding Syrian desert, the *Badia*—who

were both the most active Kurdish nationalists and, from the Zionist perspective, the most promising concentration of Syrian Kurds.

Finally, a word of explanation is in order for exactly what is meant by “Kurds” in relation to the Zionists. The Kurds with whom the Zionists would establish relations and consider cooperation fell under two rubrics: senior Kurdish figures in Arab governments and Kurdish separatists disaffected with Damascus and Baghdad. Both of these Kurdish elements were hostile to Arab nationalism, sympathetic to Zionism, and ambitious of cooperation with the Jewish Agency. As regards high Kurdish officials in Arab governments, these were generally not alienated from their roots, nor indifferent to Kurdish nationalism, despite their appointments in Arab governments. They tended rather to be sympathizers with or even espousers of Kurdish nationalism. Naturally, their service as high officials in the governments of Baghdad and Damascus demanded the public suppression of their pro-Kurdish enthusiasms, but when it came to their opposition to Arab nationalism, they were more vocal than reticent. Yet for all their efforts to avoid charges not just of Kurdish nationalism but even of Kurdish particularism, these leaders, either because they opposed Arab nationalism or simply because they were Kurdish, were suspected of Kurdish separatism just the same. This element often cooperated, albeit usually behind the scenes, with the other class of Kurds with whom the Zionists were in contact: the Kurdish separatists. These were Kurdish nationalist leaders who agitated for Kurdish self-government, in the form either of autonomy or independence. In the two Arab states hostile to Zionism, self-government meant autonomy for the Syrian Jazira and autonomy or sovereignty in northern Iraq.

2.3 The Political Department of the Jewish Agency and Zionist diplomacy

Whereas the Mossad was the chief steward of Israel's alliance with the Kurds in the 1960s and 1970s, during the era of the British Mandate, it was the Political Department (the predecessor of the Israeli Foreign Ministry) of the Jewish Agency that was the instrument for contacts with the Kurds and other regional minorities. Until 1931, when Chaim Arlosoroff took up his ill-fated appointment as head of the Political Department, Zionist diplomacy in the region had been negligible. Arlosoroff's two predecessors in the 1920s, the British Jews David Eder and Frederick Kisch, had called on Transjordan's King Abdullah, had ocassionally met with the leaders of the "Greater Syria" movement, and had maintained relations with Palestinian Arabs, but neither's diplomatic horizons extended to include the far-flung Kurds, who escape mention altogether in Eder's[41] and Kisch's[42] memoirs. When Chaim Arlosoroff succeeded to the directorship of the Political Department in 1931, he brought to the Jewish Agency a keener appreciation of the region than his predecessors and a more expansive diplomatic vision. The same, only more so, could be said of the man Arlosoroff appointed secretary of the Political Department and head of its Arab Affairs Branch, Moshe Sharett (Shertok), who was to become Israel's second prime minister. It was under Arlosoroff and his deputy Sharett that contacts with minorities, the Kurds among them, first became an aspiration, though still a very vague one, of the Jewish Agency's diplomacy.

For his part, Arlosoroff was less concerned with minorities *per se* than with any element in the region conspicuous for a friendly posture, though he could not but have recognized that minorities figured disproportionately in this category. Yet even if Arlosoroff had matured the

[41] David Eder, *Memoirs of a Modern Pioneer*, ed. J.B. Hobman (London: Gollancz, 1945).

[42] Frederick Kisch, *Palestine Diary* (London: Gollancz, 1938).

still-embryonic idea of minority relations into a guiding principle of the diplomacy he directed, the Jewish Agency's capabilities would still have been restricted. Foremost among the obstacles to the Political Department's diplomatic endeavor was its pinched operational budget. When Arlosoroff assumed his appointment in 1931, the Political Department was in such financial straits, thanks to a recent retrenchment of its budget, that all but one of its personnel had to be relieved of their employment.[43] Reduced to recruiting new staff from among students, the Political Department enlisted two young Arabists from the Hebrew University, Reuven Shiloah (Zaslani) and Eliahu Elath (Epstein).[44] They were joined by another new hire, Eliyahu Sasson, an author and lecturer on Middle Eastern affairs and a Damascene Jew of the venerable Sasson family of Baghdad (the "Rothschilds of the East"). For the rest of the British Mandate, it was the voices of these three Jewish Agency personnel—Reuven Shiloah, Eliahu Elath, and Eliyahu Sasson—that would be heard most frequently sounding off on Kurdish matters. In the 1940s, theirs would be joined by the loudest voice of all, that of Morris Fisher, who would enter the service of the Political Department a few years later and become the most vocal advocate of Zionist relations with the Kurds.

These voices were often more dissonant than harmonious in their discussions of the Kurds. On the wisdom or otherwise of a Zionist investment in relations with the Kurds, Fisher and Sasson would polarize, with the former pleading for and the latter against. Fisher, for his part, never ceased to press for relations with regional minorities (e.g., Maronites, Assyrians, Druze, and most especially Kurds) while Sasson tended toward skepticism of minority relations

[43] Yaron Ran, "Moshe Shertok and the Arab Problem: First Steps, 1931-1933" *Israel Studies* 20, no. 3 (Fall 2015), 43.

[44] Moshe Yegar, *Toldot ha-maḥlaḳah ha-medinit shel ha-Sokhnut ha-Yehudit* (Jerusalem: Sifriyah Tziyonut, 2011), 159.

in general, preferring instead to direct the Jewish Agency's labors toward cultivating Sunni Arab leaders and elements he thought could be won over yet. If Sasson's view that seeking partnerships with Maronites or Druze, partnerships he did not oppose so much as question, were a distraction from the more promising objective of an accommodation with the Sunni Arab majority, his view of an entente with the remote and inaccessible Kurds was yet more dubious. When he found himself at variance with Fisher over some or other proposal for relations with the Kurds, Sasson, head of the Political Department's Arab Affairs Division from 1933 until the establishment of Israel, always prevailed. It did not help Zionist diplomacy that Sasson and Fisher's disagreement over a partnership with the Kurds was also embittered by a personal distaste for one another, one that especially soured in the latter half of the 1940s.

The Political Department never adopted a "Kurdish policy"—or, for that matter, a Maronite or Druze policy, its diplomacy with these minorities driven by its interest in relations with all receptive actors in the region. Zionist diplomacy with the Kurds was always an exercise in ad-hocery and, therefore, exploratory and haphazard. But insofar as one can speak of a "Kurdish file," the foregoing personnel in the Political Department of the Jewish Agency were those on whose desks it could most often be found.

CHAPTER THREE: EARLY CONTACTS

The present chapter surveys the contacts between the Jewish Agency and Iraqi Kurds from Reuven Shiloah's mission in Iraqi Kurdistan in the early 1930s to the advent of three Zionist emissaries in Iraq in the early 1940s. The conflict between between early Arab nationalism and Jewish and Kurdish nationalisms—as well as the contrast between Arab and Kurdish sentiment toward Iraqi Jewry and Zionism—are recurring themes in this narrative. Projected against this backdrop, this chapter shows that official Iraqi hostility to Zionism was suspended by the temporary influence of two Kurdish leaders—Bakr Sidqi and Daud al-Haydari—over Iraqi affairs. It was only during these brief intervals of Kurdish sway that the Jewish Agency and Iraq could even consider an accommodation and, more ambitiously, cooperation. The fall of these Kurdish personalities from the heights of their influence and Iraq's subsequent relapse into state-sponsored anti-Zionism ended any hope of an understanding between Iraq and Zionism.

3.1 Reuven Shiloah's assignment in Iraq

The earliest attested interactions between Zionist officials and that community of Kurds with which the Israelis would later be allied even preceded the establishment of Israel and Iraq. In 1931, when Iraq was the British Mandate of Iraq and Israel the British Mandate of Palestine, the Political Department of the Jewish Agency dispatched a 21-year-old university student to Iraq in the guise of a Hebrew teacher and journalist. There to make a reconnaissance and to initiate contacts with all receptive, this young student on the maiden assignment of his career was no less than future spymaster Reuven Shiloah, the first director and co-founder of the Mossad

and the architect in the late 1950s of Israel's Periphery doctrine, the conceptual framework within which Israel envisaged minority alliances. In Baghdad, Shiloah was quickly unmasked by the authorities and sent home to Palestine, only to return to Iraq not long after on another, though still mysterious, mission.[45]

Although Shiloah had discharged the better part of his mission in "Arab Iraq," it was his visit to the country's Kurdish north, where he opened contacts with Kurdish nationalist leaders,[46] that seems to have left the deepest impression on him. The authors Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, who have jointly written several books on Israeli intelligence, maintain that the young spy's encounter with the Kurds of northern Iraq may have planted in Shiloah's mind the seed that would eventually flower into full bloom in the Periphery Doctrine:

> "The most memorable lessons Shiloah learned came while trekking in the mountains of Kurdistan in northern Iraq, where he forged contacts with stateless, non-Arab mountain dwellers….He never forgot the Kurds, and as he developed his personal vision of the future Israeli espionage community he focused on the need for clandestine alliances with all the non-Arab minorities of the Middle East. The Jews, he felt, could have friends dotted around the periphery of the Arab world. Shiloah's 'peripheral philosophy' became a lasting tenet of Israeli intelligence."[47]

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[45] Haggai Eshed, *Reuven Shiloah: The Man Behind the Mossad: Secret Diplomacy in the Creation of Israel* (Frank Cass: New York, 1997), 323.

[46] Tom Segev, *1949: ha-Yiśre'elim ha-rishonim* (Domino Press: Jerusalem, 1984), 34.

[47] Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, *Every Spy a Prince: the Complete History of Israel's Intelligence Community* (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1990), 21.

Indeed, it would be no wild conjecture to suppose that it was in Iraqi Kurdistan, during Shiloah's visits there in the early 1930s, that there dawned the idea that would later become known under the name "Periphery Doctrine." Exactly what it was there, amid the mountains of Kurdistan, that stirred Shiloah so profoundly the documentary record does not specify, but Shiloah's correspondence from Iraq does admit of some reasonable inference. The strong impression the Kurds made on him appears to have gathered much of its force from the divergent attitudes he observed of Iraqi Kurds and Arabs toward both the Palestine question and Jews in general. When Shiloah arrived there in 1931, Iraq had already begun to assume its distinction as the Arab country in which the flame of anti-Zionism burned most hotly.[48]

It was the currency of this anti-Zionism that destined Baghdad to be the scene of the world's first mass demonstration against Zionism outside Palestine itself.[49] The occasion of this 10,000-strong violent protest was the February 1928 visit of the British Jewish peer and avowed friend of Zionism Alfred Mond (Lord Melchett).[50] Although in these demonstrations, a distinction between Jews and Zionists seems to have been observed, in the larger and more pivotal August 1929 demonstrations, staged in response to the Arab riots in Palestine, conflation prevailed over distinction. So, whereas "Down with Zionism" and "Down with the Balfour Declaration" sounded among the cries of the protestors in 1928, the sloganeering of the 1929 protests turned out "Death to the Jews."[51] In Iraqi-Jewish experience, the cause of the 1929

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[48] Michael Doran, *Pan-Arabism Before Nasser: Egyptian Power Politics and the Palestine Question* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 142.

[49] Georges Bensoussan, *Jews in Arab Countries: The Great Uprooting* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN, 2019), 273.

[50] *Doar Ha-Yom*, February 14, 1928, 1.

[51] *Ibid.*

protests, the August 23-29 Arab riots in Palestine, proved to be the knot that tied together the vicissitudes of the conflict in Palestine with the fortunes of the Jews in Iraq.[52] Happenings of consequence in Palestine would thereafter bear directly on the lot of Iraqi Jewry—much to their harm.

Yet in Iraqi Kurdistan, any impact the 1929 Palestine revolts and the anti-Zionist and sometimes anti-Semitic agitation in Baghdad was scarcely to be observed. This was not merely because insular, underdeveloped Iraqi Kurdistan was a world away from Baghdad, a cosmopolitan city vibrating with political and journalistic activity; the imperturbation of Kurdistan was also because the Kurds, as separatist-minded non-Arabs, did not see the Palestinian Arab cause as their own. Shiloah, for his part, keenly registered this Kurdish detachment.

The often harmonious relations between the Jews and Kurds of Iraqi Kurdistan, as against the mounting anti-Semitism he had observed in Baghdad, also passed under Shiloah's notice. From the same year Shiloah arrived in Iraq, the Central Zionist Archives preserves a British report that found, "Kurdish sentiment is strongly opposed to any kind of molestation of the Jews."[53] Although the British, in their descriptions of Jewish life in the Middle East and elsewhere, tended to flatter the wellbeing of their Jewish subjects, the better to avoid issuing Jews "asylum" visas for Palestine, this observation is largely consistent with the historical record. Of the temperature of the relations between the Jews and their Kurdish neighbors during this period, Haya Gavish, an Israeli historian of the Jews of Iraqi Kurdistan, writes, "In contrast

[52] Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2012), 103.

[53] W.C.F. Wilson, administrative inspector of the Mosul Liwa, Untitled report on the Jews of Iraqi Kurdistan, July 7, 1931, CZA/9822-3

to the situation prevailing in [Arab] Iraq, and especially in Baghdad, relations with the Kurds were very good."[54] Shiloah himself testifies to this amity in one of his dispatches from Iraqi Kurdistan. On a visit in 1932 to the city of Arbil, the head of whose Jewish community was a devoted Zionist, Shiloah observed, "The Kurds are friends of the Jews, [and] not the Ishmaelites [Arabs]."[55]

Shiloah was also struck by the Kurds' disaffection with the Iraqi state and their checkered relationship with its Arab majority. For all the Kurds' divisions, the one consensus position that united Kurdish opinion in Iraq was that Baghdad's relationship with its Kurdish citizens was unsatisfactory. It was the remedies on which the Kurds differed. Some sought autonomy, others sovereignty, and still others an undivided Iraqi that stipulated and upheld constitutional recognition of Kurdish rights. But whatever their ambition, they all had cause for grievance with Baghdad. The chronic Kurdish uprisings against the central government were the most obvious expression that, in Iraqi Kurdistan, there seethed much discontent.

In the year of Shiloah's arrival in Iraq, 1931, the popular Iraqi Kurdish leader Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji had mounted yet another of his many revolts since 1919. In the name of Iraq's Kurds, Barzinji avowed his resistance to subjugation by "Arab oppressors" in Baghdad.[56] Barzinji's uprising was swiftly put down by the British, on the eve of their departure from Iraq, disappointing his pretensions to being the king of an independent and united Kurdistan.

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[54] Haya Gavish, *Hayinu Ziyonim: Ḳehilat zakho be-Kurdistan sipur* (Jerusalem: Makhon Ben Zvi, 2004), 32.

[55] Reuven Zaslani (Shiloah), "Correspondence with Iraqi Jewry and Records," 1932, CZA, S25/22631-1 (Hebrew)

[56] Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq, 1914-1932*,

No sooner had Barzinji's revolt been quashed than two other Kurdish leaders, the brothers Sheikh Ahmad Barzani and Mulla Mustafa Barzani, had risen up against Iraqi rule. The Barzanis' friendship with the Jews of their domain was legendary, just as Mulla Mustafa Barzani's friendship with the Israelis (who, in 1966, made him an honorary general in the IDF), was fated to be.[57] One example from the eve of the Barzani rebellion typifies Mulla Mustafa's solicitude for the Jews of his acquaintance. As he and his brother were readying to launch their rebellion in 1931, Mulla Mustafa, anticipating that the Jews in the district of Mergasor would be unable to leave the area to obtain kosher meat in the event of a siege, sent for a kosher butcher to provision them at his own expense.[58]

Shiloah's visit to Iraq coincided with the last of more than a decade of revolts by Barzinji and the first of several decades of revolts by the Barzanis. His observations of the Kurds, in all their recalcitrance, had even left him to speculate that nature had invested the Kurds with a particular instinct for insurrection. In a letter from Iraq to Gershon Agron—for whose newspaper, *The Palestine Bulletin* (the earliest incarnation of the Jerusalem Post), Shiloah was posing in Iraq as a journalist—he wrote, "There seems to be something in the nature of the Kurds that makes them inclined toward such movements."[59] It most probably also struck him that the cojunction of the Kurdish disaffection with Iraq and the Kurdish inclination to rebellion could be exploited to the detriment of the anti-Zionist government in Baghdad.

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[57] Meir Amit, *Rosh be-rosh: mabaṭ ishi 'al eru'im gedolim u-farashiyot 'alumot* (Or Yehuda: Hed Artzi, 1999), 159.

[58] Mordechai Zaken, "The Jewish Communities in Kurdistan within the Tribal Kurdish Society," in *Routledge Handbook on the Kurds*, ed. Michael Gunter (New York: Routledge, 2019), 191.

[59] Reuven Zaslani (Shiloah) to Gershon Agronsky (Agron), June 7, 1934, Israel State Archives (ISA), 4373/3. Shiloah was referring to Iraqi Kurdish support for leaders who united in their person the different characters of a spiritual, national, and military leader.

But the Kurdish connection in which Shiloah had discovered such promise was not exploited on his return to Palestine, as the Jewish Agency's attention soon disengaged from Iraq and its Kurds. Shiloah protested the Jewish Agency's inattention,[60] but to no avail, and from 1935 to 1942, there does appear to have been any further visits to Iraqi Kurdistan by any other Jewish Agency personnel. Although all Zionist endeavor was officially outlawed in Iraq in 1935, [61] the Political Department, without much difficulty, could have circumvented the ban and fielded emissaries in Kurdistan and elsewhere in Iraq, as the Jewish Agency was accustomed to operating discreetly in dangerous and inhospitable places.

But the Political Department, under its new head, Moshe Sharett (Shertok), saw fit not to. Sharett was more interested in diplomacy in neighboring Lebanon and Syria than in faraway Iraq. A further reason for the Political Department's neglect of Iraq from 1935 to 1942 is posited by Mordechai Bibi, a Baghdad-born Jew who worked in Iraq in the 1940s on behalf of Mossad LeAliyah Bet, the arm of the Haganah (Jewish Palestine's main prestate paramilitary force) that organized illegal immigration to Palestine. Bibi offers that Sharett feared the possible exposure of Jewish Agency activity in Iraq could further prejudice Iraqi public opinion against Zionism, as the Iraqis would resent Zionist interference in Iraq's internal affairs.[62]

Sharett had succeeded to the directorship of the Political Department in 1933, after his predecessor, Haim Arlosoroff, was assassinated in revenge for his diplomacy with Nazi

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[60] Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, "Address to the Executive Committee of the Histadrut, Tel Aviv," January 2, 1935, in *Yitzhak Ben-Zvi: ha-naśi ha-sheni: mivḥar te'udot mi-pirḳe ḥayaṿ*, eds. Yemima Rosenthal and Haggai Tsoref (Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 1998), 217.

[61] Yaron Ran, "Moshe Shertok and the Arab Problem: First Steps, 1931-1933" Israel Studies 20, no. 3 (Fall 2015), 43.

[62] Mordechai Bibi, "ha-Mahteret he-Halutzim be-`Iraq" in *Pe`amim* 8 (1981), 93.

Germany, whose Jewish community he had tried to help emigrate. On taking up his appointment, Sharett promoted Eliyahu Sasson to the position he vacated, that of head of the Jewish Agency's Arab Affairs division. Both would retain their positions in the Political Department down to its transformation into the Israeli Foreign Ministry in 1948. Both were also interested in contacts with the Kurds, but reservedly so, and of all the personnel in the Political Department who could be said to have worked on the "Kurdish file," Sharett and Sasson, also the most senior, were the most skeptical of the prospects of a Kurdish-Zionist partnership's success.

Despite the Jewish Agency's neglect of Iraq and its Kurds that began in 1935, not long after Shiloah's return to Palestine, and ended in 1942, there was one brief interlude of renewed attention during this lull. The revival came in 1936, when a Kurdish general in Baghdad carried out the first coup d'etat in the Arab world. Soon senior Political Department personnel would be back in Iraq, having been invited there, this time, by another Iraqi Kurd, a civilian politician linked to the new regime.

2.2. The Bakr Sidqi regime, Daud al-Haydari, and Zionism

If Iraq in 1934 was, as the Hebrew daily *HaYarden* proclaimed, "the center of pan-Arab policy,"[63] in 1935, under the Arab nationalist government of prime minister Yasin al-Hashimi, the same declaration could still be made, only much more emphatically. As far as Arab nationalism and its allied enthusiasm, anti-Zionism, were concerned, in al-Hashimi's Iraq, government policy and popular sentiment converged, and to the satisfaction of the public, Al-Hashimi had made anti-Zionism and support for the Palestinian Arabs central to his administration.

[63] *HaYarden*, October 31, 1934, 4.

When the Palestinian Arabs rose up against British mandatory rule and the Yishuv (the prestate Jewish community in Palestine) in April 1936, al-Hashimi's support turned from rhetorical and diplomatic to military and material. Amid campaigns by the visiting Palestinian Arab leader Hajj Amin al-Husseini to marshal Iraqi backing for the insurgency,[64] by the Iraqi press to agitate in support of the Arab rebels, and by the Baghdad-based Committee for the Defense of Palestine to raise contributions, al-Hashimi's government adopted several measures to assist the Palestinian Arab uprising.

With al-Hashimi's imprimatur, the Iraqi army chief of staff established a clandestine installation at which senior Iraqi officers trained Iraqi volunteers and Palestinian exiles to fight alongside the Arab rebels in Palestine.[65] The most senior Iraqi commander who led this several-hundred strong soldiery in Palestine was the Lebanese-born, Iraqi-based officer Fawzi al-Qawukji,[66] who was to return to Palestine with a far larger volunteer force, the Arab Liberation Army, in the first half of 1948. Besides the dispatch of Iraqi fighters, an additional testament to al-Hashimi's zeal for the cause of the Palestinian Arabs was his administration's provision of more weaponry to the rebel effort in Palestine than any other Arab government.[67]

Meanwhile, the lot of Iraq's Jews south of Kurdistan darkened under al-Hashimi. As had been the case ever since 1929, whenever major disturbances struck in Palestine, they bore adversely on the welfare of Iraqi Jewry. With the outbreak of the Arab Revolt in Palestine in

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[64] Laila Parsons, *The Commander: Fawzi al-Qawuqji and the Fight for Arab Independence, 1914-1948* (New York: Hill and Wan, 2016), 114.

[65] Abdul Rahman al-Tamimi, *Mawqif al-'Irāq al-rasmī wa-al-sha'bī min al-muwājahāt al-'Arabīyah al-Isrā'īlīyah, 1947-1979* (Dār al-Mu'tazz lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī': Amman, 2017), 27.
[66] Parsons, *The Commander*, 114.

[67] Michael Eppel, *The Palestine Conflict in the History of Modern Iraq: The Dynamics of Involvement, 1928-1948* (Frank Cass: London, 1994), 41.

April 1936, anti-Jewish harassment, incitement, extortion, and violence—sometimes abetted by al-Hashimi's administration—became their regular misfortunes. One especially bitter occasion of anti-Jewish agitation was "Palestine Day" in September 1936, which the government proclaimed and the population solemnized.[68]

A month later, on October 29, 1936, a welcome change for Iraqi Jews and the Jewish Agency alike arrived in the person of Bakr Sidqi al-Askari, a Kurdish general in the Iraqi army. Backed by Kurdish troops,[69] Sidqi carried out the first coup d'etat in the Arab world and the first of seven to convulse Baghdad between 1936 and 1941. Though the author of the coup, Sidqi refused any portfolio in the government, preferring instead to invest himself as chief of staff of the Iraqi army and exercise his influence behind the scenes, as an *eminence grise*.

The government the Kurdish Sidqi brought to power was led by Hikmat Suleiman, a member of another Iraqi minority, the Turkomans. By these and other of Iraq's many minorities, the Sidqi-Suleiman regime was as much embraced as it was spurned by Iraqi Arab nationalists. While hopeful Iraqi Kurds expected that, one of their number having seized power, their demands would at last be given due regard,[70] Iraqi Jews rejoiced over Sidqi's ouster of the Hashimi government and the appointment of Hikmat Suleiman, who was known for his sympathy for Jews, to power.[71] Sidqi's coup itself had even by assisted, albeit modestly, by an Iraqi Jew and a fellow member of the Iraqi Armed Forces. Naji Ibrahim, the only Jew ever to

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[68] Yitzhak Bezalel, *Levadam be-mivtsar ha-ḳets: kakh ne'elmah Yahadut 'Iraḳ* (Tel Aviv: Maariv, 1976), 21.

[69] "How the Iraqi Government Was Overthrown," *Davar*, November 5, 1936, 8 (Hebrew).

[70] Muḥammad Suhayl Ṭaqqūsh, *Tārīkh al-Akrād, 637-2015* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 2015), 48.

[71] Mordechai Bibi, *ha-Maḥteret ha-Tsiyonit-ḥalutsit be-'Iraḳ: meḥḳar ti'udi* (Jerusalem: Makhon Ben-Zvi, 1987), 23.

serve as a pilot in the Iraqi air force, strafed Baghdad on the morning of the coup and rained down leaflets heralding the change of government.[72]

Kurds and Jews were hardly alone among Iraq's minorities in their ardor for the new regime. Less than a fortnight after the coup, a British squadron commander who sounded out local sentiment in Mosul reported that "the educated and vocal elements among the various minorities in Mosul are extremely gratified at the formation of the new government, which they claim to be a 'non-Arab' government and one which will give justice and fairplay to minorities." [73] Even the Assyrians and the Yazidis in this, Iraq's second most populous, city shared the enthusiasm of Iraq's other minorities for Iraq's new "non-Arab" government.[74] This support, it is worthy of observation, stood as a matter of some curiosity inasmuch as it was Sidqi himself who personally commanded both the notorious Simele Massacre of Iraqi Assyrians in 1933 (a coda to the Seyfo–the Assyrian Genocide—two decades before) and the brutal suppression of a Yazidi revolt in 1935.

From the standpoint of the Jewish Agency, the first few months of the minoritarian Sidqi-Suleiman regime gave much promise of Baghdad's reorientation toward Zionism. Not only was Hikmat Suleiman known for his sympathy for Jews,[75] but among his government's first acts was an "official visit of reassurance to the leading Jews in Baghdad."[76] And whereas attacks

[72] Nissim Kazzaz, *ha-Yehudim be-'Iraḳ ba-meʾah ha-'eśrim* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi), 89-90.

[73] F.L.B. Mebbert, "Report by squadron leader F.L.B. Mebbert after his visit to Mosul from 7th to 9th November, 1936," November, 9, 1936 AIR 23/671.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] Bibi, *ha-Maḥteret ha-Tsiyonit-ḥalutsit be-'Iraḳ*, 23.

[76] F.L.B. Mebbert, "Report by squadron leader F.L.B. Mebbert after his visit to Mosul from 7th to 9th November, 1936," November, 9, 1936 AIR 23/671.

against Jews were routine in the era of al-Hashimi, whose government often connived at the anti-Jewish violence, for nearly the whole of Sidqi's 10-month regime, there were no attacks on Iraqi Jews.[77] The contrast between al-Hashimi's Arab nationalist regime and the Sidqi-Suleiman successor government also extended to Zionism. As we have seen, anti-Zionism was one of the chief enthusiasms of al-Hashemi's government, and the policies it maintained reflected this commitment. In contrast, the Sidqi regime, as Moshe Sharett observed, "has a different character" and is "based on anti-pan-Arab elements."[78] Sharett added that the new Iraqi government, unlike its predecessor, would not have intervened in Palestine on behalf of the Arab insurgents as al-Hashemi's did.[79] The historiographical consensus likewise accepts that, as regards Zionism, the governmental difference between the al-Hashimi and Sidqi regimes was that of an about-face. To take two illustrative examples, Israeli historian Michael Eppel writes that the Sidqi regime "adopted a sympathetic approach to the Zionist movement"[80] while Iraqi historian Hussein 'Obeid 'Issa writes that the era of "Bakr Sidqi was a Zionist spring, open to ambitious Zionist ideas."[81]

The Sidqi-Suleiman regime's indifference to the affairs of the Arab world and its suspicion of the Arab nationalist circles that had been close to the *ancien regime* and consecrated

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[77] Hayyim Cohen, *ha-Pe'ilut ha-Tsiyonit be-'Iraḳ* (Jerusalem: ha-Sifriyah ha-Tsiyonit, 1969), 157.

[78] Moshe Sharett, "Remarks to the Jewish Agency Executive," *Moshe Sharett and His Legacy*, January 31, 1937, Jerusalem, http://www.sharett.org.il/cgi-webaxy/sal/sal.pl?lang=he&ID=880900_sharett_new&act=show&dbid=bookfiles&dataid=1227 (Hebrew)

[79] *Ibid.*

[80] Michael Eppel, "The Transformation of the Arab-Jewish Conflict from a Local into a Regional Conflict: The Background of the Growth of Syrian and Iraqi Involvement in Palestine, 1936-1939," in *Iyunim Be-Tkumat Israel* 7 (1997), 62 (Hebrew).

[81] Hassan "Obeid 'Issa, "Ezra, Nehemiah, and a Discussion of Jewish Rights in Iraq," *al-Mustaqbal* 27, no. 30 (September 2004), 57 (Arabic).

to the cause of the Palestinian Arabs (e.g., the Muthanna Club and the Committee for the Defense of Palestine) prompted the new government to reverse some of the initiatives begun by al-Hashemi. Support for these groups was accordingly withdrawn and Qawukji, the "hero of the Palestine revolt," was banished to Kirkuk on his return from the front.[82] Commenting on this policy reversal, the late Iraqi historian Fadil Barak, the author of the most detailed, if often polemical, Arabic account of Mulla Mustafa Barzani's relations with Israel decades later, writes, "It is no surprise that we find the Zionists in Iraq expressing sympathy with the coup of Bakr Sidqi (October 29, 1936) since the coup government turned away from the Palestinian cause."[83]

While Arab nationalists in Iraq and elsewhere in the region saw Bakr Sidqi as a Kurd devoted to the cause of Kurdayeti,[84] and while the Kurds themselves bemoaned the dearth of Kurdish ministers in the new government,[85] the Jewish Agency still had little cause for grievance. On the contrary, the opening months of the Sidqi era encouraged the Political Department to the view that Iraq—"a state of minorities," according to future Mossad chief Zvi Zamir,[86] who was to visit Iraqi Kurdistan in the seventies to direct the Israeli-Kurdish alliance—was far from lost to its Arab nationalists as long as its minorities, and none more than the Kurds, had a say.

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[82] "Qawukji Expelled from Baghdad," *Davar*, January 26, 1937, 8 (Hebrew).

[83] Fadil Barak, *al-Madāris al-Yahūdīyah wa-al-Īrānīyah fī al-'Irāq: dirāsah muqāranah* (Baghdad: 1984),

[84] Umar Muhammad Muhammad Karim, *al-Qaḍīyah al-Kurdīyah fī siyāsat al-ḥukūmāt al-'Irāqīyah, 1932-1945* (Suleimaniyah: KRG Ministry of Culture, 2009), 131; Reeva Spector Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars: The Militarist Origins of Tyranny* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2004), 125.

[85] Air liaison officer, Suleimaniyah, to air staff intelligence, Hinaidi, "Section I. Iraq. Home politics, Kurdish nationalism," November 9, 1936, AIR 23/671.

[86] Zvi Zamir, *Be-enayim pkuhot : rosh ha-mosad martia': ha-im yIsrael makshiva?* (Zmora Bitan: Tel Aviv, 2011), 83.

Daud al-Haydari

If the Sidqi-Suleiman government's early policies had excited the Jewish Agency's hopes that this new Iraqi regime, under the command of a Kurdish general, was amenable to Zionism, then its contacts with another Kurd connected to the new government, Daud al-Haydari, gave stronger grounds yet for optimism. In early 1937, al-Haydari, who was an associate of Hikmat Suleiman's but not a member of his government, launched a relationship with the Jewish Agency that would endure for almost a decade. A native of the Kurdish city of Arbil, al-Haydari belonged to one of Iraq's illustrious Kurdish families. His father was the last Ottoman Sheikh al-Islam[87] (the highest Islamic official in the Ottoman Empire) and his nephew is Buland al-Haydari, Iraq's most celebrated contemporary Kurdish poet in the Arabic language. Daud al-Haydari, for his part, had previously served as a deputy in the Iraqi parliament and as a minister in the Iraqi government. To his many interlocutors in the Jewish Agency, he never ceased to express his profound sympathy for the Zionist enterprise, and he several times proposed cooperation between the Jewish Agency and the Iraqi government, for which he became foreign minister in 1942.

The first of al-Haydari's many meetings with Jewish Agency representatives over the years took place in January 1937, amid clashes between Arab and Kurdish officers in the Baghdad Military Club and the deliberations of the British Peel Commission.[88] Just days after Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization, had assented to the partition of

[87] "Daud Pasha al-Haydari in Jerusalem," *al-Jamia al-Islamiyya*, October 2, 1934, 5 (Arabic).

[88] Air liaison officer, Mosul, to air staff intelligence, Hinaidi, Untitled report, June 15, 1937, AIR23/ 671

Palestine in an in-camera meeting with one of the Peel Commission's members,[89] he, Moshe Sharett, and an Iraqi Zionist then in Cairo, called on al-Haydari in Egypt.[90] Of this meeting Weizmann makes no mention in any of his writings that month,[91] but Sharett, who met with al-Haydari without Weizmann a few days after their first meeting, reported the minutes in a speech to the Jewish Agency Executive (the highest decision-making body in the Jewish Agency) on January 31, 1937. Sharett described al-Haydari as "a Kurdish statesman from Iraq, very close to the present government," who entertains "no enthusiasm for pan-Arabism nor resentment toward Jews."[92] Haydari made plain his hospitality to the Zionist program and his desire for cooperation between its exponents and Iraq, but the modalities of this cooperation were left undefined by the two sides. More concrete were the short-term purposes with which the Jewish Agency and al-Haydari courted one another's assistance. Al-Haydari sought to use the good offices of the Jewish Agency to effect a rapproachment between the Sidqi-Suleiman government while the Jewish Agency wanted to enlist al-Haydari as a pro-Zionist witness before the Peel Commission.[93]

After another meeting in Egypt with al-Haydari, from which Weizmann was absent, Sharett decided to send to Iraq, at the invitation of al-Haydari, the Political Department's two

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[89] Izthak Galnoor, *The Partition of Palestine: Decision Crossroads in the Zionist Movement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 50.

[90] Moshe Sharett, "Remarks to the Jewish Agency Executive," January 31, 1937, Jerusalem, http://www.sharett.org.il/cgi-webaxy/sal/sal.pl?lang=he&ID=880900_sharett_new&act=show&dbid=bookfiles&dataid=1227

[91] My special thanks are owed to Lior Hecht-Yacoby of Yad Chaim Weizmann, who made available to me by e-mail all of Weizmann's writings from January 1937.

[92] *Ibid*.

[93] *Ibid.*

main officials concerned with relations with neighboring states and regional minorities, Eliahu Elath and Eliyahu Sasson.[94] Elath, who was later to refer to al-Haydari as "my close friend,"[95] and Sasson reached Iraq at the beginning of February 1937, their mandate, as Elath described it, "to inquire into the nature of the new regime and to clarify its position on the Palestine question." [96] The responsibilities of the two Political Department envoys were divided such that it fell to Elath to meet with high government officials while meetings with intellectuals, journalists, and parliamentarians were the business of Sasson.[97]

Elath and Sasson found a most warm reception during their nine-day visit (February 3-11, 1937). Elath called on Prime Minister Suleiman and several ministers in his government, observing "encouraging signs for our continued contact with Prime Minister Hikmat Suleiman and his colleagues."[98] For his part, Sasson, counts in his memoirs 28 Iraqi personalities with whom he met during his visit.[99] Far from concealing his Jewish identity and his Zionism, Sasson emphasized it in these meetings, something he says proved an endearment more than a liability. [100] The conclusion that followed from Elath's and Sasson's discussions with these Iraqi grandees

[94] Moshe Sharett, "Remarks to the Jewish Agency Executive," January 31, 1937, Jerusalem, http://www.sharett.org.il/cgi-webaxy/sal/sal.pl?lang=he&ID=880900_sharett_new&act=show&dbid=bookfiles&dataid=1227

[95] Eliahu Elath, *Zionism at the UN: A Diary of the First Days* (Jewish Publication Society of America: Philadelphia, 1976), 24.

[96] Eliahu Elath, *Shivat Tsiyon ṿa-'Arav: pirḳe 'iyun u-ma'aśeh* (Devir: Tel Aviv, 1974), 321.

[97] Ian Black, *Zionism and the Arabs, 1936-1939* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2015),

[98] *Ibid.*, 321.

[99] Eliyahu Sasson, *Ba-derekh el ha-shalom: agrot ṿe-shiḥot* (Am Oved: Tel Aviv, 1978), 55.

[100] *Ibid.*

was that the new regime in Baghdad, upheld by the Kurdish strongman Sidqi and headed by the Turkoman premier Suleiman, was indeed amenable to the Zionist project.

Yet what it was that appealed to the Jewish Agency about the Sidqi regime—its minoritarian character and its openness to Zionism—was what alienated Arab nationalists, and the vulnerability of the Sidqi regime was obvious to Sharett early on. In Iraq as elsewhere in the Middle East, Arab nationalists looked upon Bakr Sidqi as a Kurdish nationalist whose first care was the gratification of Kurdish political ambitions. [101] Among the most strident voices against him belonged to Sa'ib Shawkat, an apostle of Arab nationalism and Iraq's preeminent doctor, who charged that "Sidqi pretended to care about the interests of the Arabs, but really cared only for the Kurds."[102] A polemic against Sidqi to similar effect appeared in the long-running Damascene newspaper *Alef-Ba*, decrying "Kurdish hostility to Arabs."[103] The Hebrew daily *Davar* quoted an Arabic newspaper that claimed that Sidqi was "a member of a Kurdish terrorist group whose goal is to cleanse Iraq of Arabs."[104]

The extent to which Sidqi was a Kurdish particularist remains an article of controversy in Iraqi historiography. Yet the accusations against him of a blind allegiance to the Kurds and an allied animus against Arabs may be readily dismissed as extravagant exaggerations. The cardinal foreign policy achievement of the Sidqi-Suleiman regime, after all, was the Saadabad Pact of 1937, a non-aggression pact between Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan that called for, if

[101] Simon, 125.

[102] Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2009), 137.

[103] Karim, *al-Qaḍīyah al-Kurdīyah*, 131.

[104] Aviva Torovsky, "The Syrian Response to the Coup in Iraq," *Davar*, November 25, 1936, 2 (Hebrew)

obliquely, coordination in containing Kurdish cross-border Kurdish infiltration and subversion. This is not to suggest, however, that Sidqi was indifferent, much less hostile, to Kurdish nationalism. He had even told some of his interlocutors, not least Fritz Grobba, the German orientalist and Nazi ambassador to Iraq, that he longed for Kurdish statehood.[105]

If the Sidqi-Suleiman government was sensitive, amid mounting popular discontent, to the accusation that theirs was a regime beholden to minorities, it was especially disquieted by the accusation of neglect of the Palestine cause. This unease sprang not so much from any personal affront as from apprehensions of their regime's survival. The Sidqi-Suleiman government appreciated that so dear to the Iraqi populace was the cause of the Palestinian Arabs that a perception of indifference to it, accurate though it would be in this case, could spell the regime's downfall. By this time, popular Iraqi commitment to the Palestinian Arab cause, as Iraq historian Charles Tripp observes, was such that "the cause of Palestine had come to the forefront of Iraqi public life" and "politicians ignored [it] at their peril."[106] Thus, in late March 1937, halfway through its ten-month incumbency, the Sidqi-Suleiman regime began to espouse a less sympathetic line on the Palestine question.[107]

As we have seen, the Sidqi-Suleiman regime had hitherto shown itself amenable to compromise and even cooperation with Zionism. Among other overtures that reflected this approach, Suleiman had even proposed to a British envoy in February 1937 the establishment of

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[105] Hamid Mahmud Isa, *al-Qaḍīyah al-Kurdīyah fī al-'Irāq : min al-iḥtilāl al-Barīṭānī ilá al-ghazw al-Amrīkī, 1914-2004* (Maktabat Madbuli: Cairo, 2005), 248.

[106] Charles Tripp "Iraq and the 1948 War: Mirror of Iraq's Disorder," in *The War for Palestine Rewriting the History of 1948,* ed. Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 128.

[107] Michael Eppel, "The Hikmat Sulayman-Bakr Sidqi Government in Iraq, 1936-37 and the Palestine Question," in *Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 1 (January 1988), 35.

a loose federation embracing Palestine and the two kindred Hashemite states, Jordan and Iraq, to which Jewish immigration would be unlimited.[108] The boldness of this proposal is difficult to overstate, as the central grievance of the Palestinian Arabs since 1909 had been Jewish immigration, ending it their principal preoccupation.[109] But from March 1937, the public pressures mounting, the Sidqi-Suleiman regime began to retreat from its earlier conciliatory stance.[110]

The Iraqi government's unsupportive response to the publication of the Peel Commission's recommendations in July 1937 dramatized Sidqi and Suleiman's reversal. The Peel Commission had been empaneled in November 1936 for the purpose of cooling Palestinian Arab discontent, which had blazed into an insurrectionary conflagration in April of that year. While the commissioners conducted their inquest, the Palestinian Arab rebels laid down their arms. But far from extinguishing the hostility of the Palestinian Arabs, the publication of the report in July 1937 rekindled it. By summer's end, the Palestinian Arabs had relapsed into rebellion, one that far exceeded the first phase in its intensity.

It was the Peel Commission that introduced the principle of partition into what decades later would be called "the peace process." In this, the inaugural proposal for partition, about 15% of Mandatory Palestine was to be earmarked for a Jewish state while nearly all of the remaining land would be annexed to Transjordan by way of a federation—"nearly" because the British had arrogated to themselves the main centers of Christian interest in Palestine. Nazareth, the shore of

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[108] *Ibid.*

[109] Neville Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism Before World War I* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 77.

[110] Michael Eppel, "The Hikmat Sulayman-Bakir Sidqi Government in Iraq," 305.

the Sea of Galilee, and a land corridor from Bethlehem, through Jerusalem, opening onto the sea at Jaffa would all devolve to the Crown.[111] With the backing of the delegates at the Twentieth Zionist Congress, the Jewish Agency, not without reluctance, assented to the Peel Plan as a basis for negotiation and, tacitly, to the principle of partition it introduced. The Palestinian Arabs, reflecting popular sentiment in the Arab world, rejected it summarily.

The Sidqi-Suleiman government's earlier recognition that, at the very least, an affectation of support for the Palestinian Arabs was an imperative of their regime's survival, was refreshed by popular Iraqi outrage that greeted the publication of the Peel Commission. Suleiman confided to a British envoy that "no Iraqi government would be able to remain in power without giving some degree of satisfaction to the public hatred of the proposals for the partition of Palestine."[112] The Sidqi-Suleiman government duly raised a clamor against the Peel Plan, denouncing it as high treason against the Arab cause.[113] Had the Iraqi government done otherwise, it might have found some cover in the circumstance that the Peel Commission won acceptance from some governments and influential elements in the region. Among these was Transjordan, whose sovereign, King Abdullah, was both the kin of the Iraqi monarchy and a frequent interlocutor of Jewish Agency officials. Abdullah accepted the Peel Plan, promising as it did to enlarge his kingdom by almost a fifth. The Palestinian Arab Nashishibi clan—the traditional rival of the clan

[111] *Palestine Royal Commission* Report *Presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the United Kingdom Parliament by Command of His Majesty* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office 1937), 381, 382.

[112] Dawisha, *Iraq,* 137.

[113] Michael Eppel, "The Hikmat Sulayman-Bakr Sidqi Government in Iraq, 1936-37 and the Palestine Question," 36.

of the preeminent Palestinian Arab leader, Hajj Amin al-Husseini (aka "the Mufti," in reference to his title as an expositor of Islamic law) —also gave its assent to the Peel Plan.

Nor did the Lebanese government reject it. The Maronites of Lebanon, another regional minority with Zionist sympathies and ties, were the Yishuv's closest ally in the region, and Lebanon's then president was the Maronite Zionist Emile Edde, an ardent if self-protectively discreet friend of the Zionist program.[114] When, just days before the Peel Commission's report passed into publication, Edde met Chaim Weizmann and Eliahu Elath in Paris, the latter being the Jewish Agency's most active cultivator of Zionist-Maronite relations, he warmly congratulated Weizmann on the report's provision for a Jewish state.[115] Yet Edde well understood that his support could not turn from private to public, the more so because he had outraged Lebanese Muslim opinion by sending a Lebanese delegation to Tel Aviv's Levant Fair the year before, so his government neither supported nor rejected the Peel Report.[116] As for the Kurdish Sidqi and the Turkoman Suleiman, they, like Edde, may have supported the Peel Plan in their private sentiments–indeed, the Iraqi ambassador to Britain confided as much to an official in the Foreign Office—but Iraq was not Lebanon.[117] Iraqi Arabs had already shown themselves the most febrile enemies of Zionism in the region, the Palestinian Arabs besides. The neutral line of the Lebanese government, which had much inflamed Lebanese Muslims against Edde, simply would not do in Iraq.

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[114] Kirsten Schulze, *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), 20.
[115]Elath, *Shivat Tsiyon ṿa-'Arav*, 311.

[116] Raghid el-Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism: National Identity and State Formation* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 82.

[117] Michael Eppel, "The Hikmat Sulayman-Bakr Sidqi Government in Iraq, 1936-37 and the Palestine Question," 37.

Such was the Sidqi regime's dread of finding itself athwart Iraqi public opinion and, thus, out of power that it disguised its private approval of the Peel Commission with public condemnation. Yet despite this and all its other efforts since late March 1937 to appear more zealous for Arab causes—and for the cause of the Palestinian Arabs above all others—the Sidqi-Suleiman government could not escape accusations of disloyalty and even of minority separatism. Thus, in August 1937, the Sidqi-Suleiman government was overthrown in a coup and Bakr Sidqi executed. "Bakr Sidqi was brought down by the pan-Arab nationalists," writes Reeva Simon in an epitaphic summation of Sidqi's end.[118] Not for nothing was this, an Iraqi government installed and upheld by a Kurd and administered by a Turkoman, different in its approach to the Palestine question from all other Iraqi governments, before or since.[119] "Bakr Sidqi's regime was an aberration," writes Malik Mufti; "Iraq, with a 75 percent Arab population, could hardly be transformed into a Kurdish or Turkish state."[120]

The fall of the Sidqi-Suleiman government came as no surprise to the Political Department. As noted, Moshe Sharett had recognized the vulnerability of the regime early on. Yet Elath writes in his memoirs that, despite the Sidqi regime's retreat from its earlier line toward Zionism, he had not relinquished the hope of an "understanding" with Iraq under Sidqi and Suleiman. "The revolutionary regime came to an end before we were able" to pursue one, he writes.[121] Elath's hopes of such a modus vivendi with Sidqi and Suleiman's Iraq were more

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[118] Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*, 124

[119] Eppel, *The Palestine Conflict in the History of Modern Iraq,* 53.

[120] Malik Mufti, *Sovereign Creations: Pan-Arabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) 34.

[121] Elath, *Shivat Tsiyon ṿa-'Arav*, 321.

sanguine than could be reconciled with the about-face of the Sidqi regime halfway through its ten months of governance. Sidqi and Suleiman had come to understand that to defy Arab nationalist sentiment in Iraq by making terms with Zionism was to risk the overthrow of their regime. Hence their repudiation of the "cooperation" with the Jewish Agency that Haydari, an Iraqi Kurd like Sidqi, had sought. For his part, Haydari was not dissuaded from his pursuit of cooperation with the Jewish Agency, cooperation, as will be seen, he sought anew in 1941. For the whole of the ensuing decade, he remained in regular contact with the Jewish Agency, even while briefly serving as Iraq's foreign minister in 1942 and as its ambassador to Tehran and to Britain subsequently.

The authors of the coup that overthrew Sidqi and Suleiman were seven military officers known in Iraqi historiography as "the seven" or "the circle of seven." Of these, four were colonels who comprised a clique known as the "Golden Square." It was this quadrumvirate that convened in the Mufti's residence in Baghdad in February 1941 to plot the coup that installed the regime of Rashid Ali Kilani,[122] whom the Mufti had persuaded to become prime minister and whose regime the Nazis supported.[123] As for the house in which the coup that overthrew Sidqi was worked out, it belonged to one of the trio of officers not in the Golden Square, Abdul Aziz Yamulki.[124] Ironically, Yamulki stood apart from the six others in the "circle of seven" in that he was not a Sunni Arab nationalist but rather a Kurd. More ironic yet, Abdul Aziz Yamulki, in whose house the coup was hatched to topple the regime of the Bakr Sidqi, a fellow Kurd who

[122] Wamīḍ Jamāl ʻUmar Naẓmī, Ghānim Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, and Shafīq ʻAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Taṭawwur al-siyāsī al-muʻāṣir fī al-ʻIrāq* (Baghdad: University of Baghdad Press, 1980), 14.

[123] Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 92.

[124] Karim, *al-Qaḍīyah al-Kurdīyah*, *1932-1945*, 136.

had installed the only regime in Iraqi history friendly to Zionism,[125] would himself seek Israel's cooperation years later.[126] As will be seen in the progress of this work, Yamulki was to solicit Israeli backing for a Kurdish rebellion he intended against Baghdad in 1951.[127] As for the regime Yamulki helped to install in 1937, it proved no more durable than the regime he helped topple. It, too, was overthrown, just as five subsequent Iraqi governments would be, until both the British and stability returned to Iraq in 1941.

3.3 Iraq after Bakr Sidqi: Zionism, Palestinian Arab exiles, and the Kurds

History does not record much meaningful contact between Jewish Agency officials and the Kurds in the late 1930s. With the exception of the ten-month interval of the Sidqi's regime and the corresponding subsidence of Iraqi hostility to Zionism, Iraq, whose Kurds were of most interest to the Zionist officialdom, was almost completely free of Jewish Agency activity from 1935, shortly after Reuven Shiloah's visit, to 1942, after the the British ousted the Nazi-aligned regime of Rashid Ali Kilani and reoccupied the country. At the official level, all Zionist endeavor had been outlawed in Iraq since 1935, when the last two Zionist teachers from Palestine were deported.[128] The various regimes that had taken power in coups since then had enforced bans on *halukka* (charity raised in the Diaspora and remitted to Eretz Israel to sustain Jewish communities there) and shekel donations to the Jewish National Fund for the purchase of tracts

[125] Eppel, "The Transformation of the Arab-Jewish Conflict from a Local into a Regional Conflict," 62 (Hebrew).

[126] "Summary of the Letter by Mr. Abraham Zevideh to the Foreign Ministry," November 1951, ISA 17108/35/Gal.

[127] *Ibid.*

[128] Bibi, *ha-Maḥteret ha-Tsiyonit-ḥalutsit be-'Iraḳ*, 14.

in Palestine.[129] Zionist literature was treated as contraband and confiscated and Iraqi Jews who dared to visit Palestine were obliged to pledge 50 dinars as a surety for their return (in addition to the 60 pounds required by the British consuls for visas to Palestine).[130]

Meanwhile, two foreign elements in Iraq had made the country yet more inhospitable to Zionism: Nazi diplomats and Palestinian Arab exiles. The German Orientalist and ambassador to Baghdad, Fritz Grobba (known as “the German Lawrence of Arabia”), was evangelizing determinedly in the service of Nazism, making many apostles among Iraqi Arab nationalists. His task was assisted by the outbreak of the Second World War, when local sympathy for Germany found ever more currency, as "most Iraqis, and other Arabs,” writes Emory Bogle, “believed that the Germans would win and that an Axis victory would sever the Arab world from European imperialist and Zionist influence."[131]

Concurrent with the rise of German influence in Iraq, the Iraqi government extended its hospitality to hundreds of Palestinian Arab activists fleeing the British suppression of the Arab revolt in Palestine. Many of these found employment with the Iraqi Ministry of Education, under whose auspices they diffused anti-Zionism in their work as administrators and instructors.[132] Palestinian Arab teachers had, in fact, been sought out by the Iraqi minister of education, Sati' al-Husri, one of the twentieth century’s most influential theoreticians of Arab nationalism. So great was their impact on Iraqi education that these Palestinian (and Syrian) instructors, as Kanan

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[129] Herzl Yonah, *Ḳehilat Yehude Arbil : sipurah shel ha-ḳehilah ha-Yehudit ṿeha-maḥteret ha-Tsiyonit ḥalutsit be-Arbil -'Iraḳ ba-me'ah ha-20* (Amutat moreshet Yehude Arbil, 2008), 174.

[130] *Ibid.*

[131] Emory C. Bogle, *The Modern Middle East: From Imperialism to Freedom, 1800-1958* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1996), 310.

[132] Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1997), 95.

Makiya puts it, “fundamentally shaped the Iraqi education system for a whole historical period.”[133]

Iraqi Jews and the Jewish Agency were not the only ones disquieted by the influence of Palestinian Arab activists on Iraqi education. Kurdish students in Iraq protested that “the teachers from Palestine harbored anti-Kurdish opinions and hurt the feelings of their Kurdish students.”[134] Iraqi social democrats charged that the “exiles denigrated Iraqi Kurds”[135] while an Egyptian critic of al-Husri’s curriculum charged, “This Husrism which we have seen in Iraq weakens the Iraqi entity itself since it looks upon the Kurds with some hatred….”[136]

The most influential Palestinian exile to find refuge in Iraq was also the most influential Palestinian Arab of his age, Hajj Amin al-Husseini. After fleeing Palestine in 1937 and staying two years in Zouk in the French Mandate of Lebanon, the Mufti arrived in Iraq in October 1939 to a hero’s welcome. “The Mufti,” in the estimation of a sympathetic biographer, “was regarded by the Iraqi public as the leading Arab nationalist,”[137] and the Iraqi government, appreciating his celebrity, accommodated him and his entourage of Palestinian Arab exiles with handsome

[133] Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 171.

[134] Orit Bashkin, “Iraqi Shadows, Iraqi Lights: Anti-Fascist and Anti-Nazi Voices in Monarchic Iraq, 1932-1941” in *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion*, ed. Israel Gershoni (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 164.

[135] Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2012), 105.

[136] Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*, 31.

[137] Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, 89.

stipends.[138] The Mufti was to remain in Iraq until May 1941, after the British toppled the short-lived Nazi-aligned regime of Rashid Ali al-Kilani and occupied Iraq anew.

The lull in its Iraqi activity notwithstanding, the Jewish Agency remained abreast of Kurdish affairs in the late 1930s.[139] Nor was the Jewish Agency exclusively concerned with the Kurds of Iraq. It also followed with interest happenings in the Syrian Jazira, the overwhelmingly Kurdish and Christian region in Syria's northeastern corner, east of the Euphrates. The Jazira engaged the interest of the Jewish Agency both because it was a region where Kurds and Christians (Armenians, Jacobites, Chaldeans, and Assyrians) predominated and because the Kurds and Christians there had launched a movement in 1937 to press for the restoration of its autonomy, it having been abolished the previous year over the objections of its population.

Yet as far as Syrian minorities were concerned, however, the Jewish Agency was far more interested in the Druze. Not only had the Jewish Agency already been in contact for years with the Syrian Druze, with whose kinsmen in Palestine many Zionist officials had cooperative relations, but Jabal ad-Druze (Syrian Druze's largest concentration), unlike the exceedingly remote Jazira, lay near the border of Mandatory Palestine.

The Kurds of Turkey, too, commanded the interest of certain Zionist officials, but the Jewish Agency set a much higher value on relations with Turkey itself. The Kurdish question in Turkey had arisen in the 1920s, and the Zionists were far from blind to Turkish sensitivity toward a minority element Ankara regarded as subversive. Nevertheless, in June 1940, the Political Department sent Eliahu Elath to Turkey to inquire into the situation of the Kurds, among other

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[138] Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, *Mudhakkirāt al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Amīn al-Ḥusaynī,* ed. 'Abd al-Karīm 'Umar (Damascus: al-Ahali, 1999), 89.

[139] Shlomo Nakdimon, *Tikvah she-karsah: ha-kesher ha-Yisreʾeli-Kurdi, 1963-1975* (Tel Aviv: Miskal-Yedioth Ahronoth, 1996), 26.

tasks assigned him.[140] As regards Turkey's Kurds, Elath's mission does not appear to have been more than a simple reconnaissance. Talks with Kurdish personalities would have risked injury to the Jewish Agency's improving relations with Turkey, relations that had been warming since Chaim Weizmann's visit to the country in 1938.[141]

The Return of Daud al-Haydari

A few years after Daud al-Haydari's overture to the Jewish Agency and the promising if anti-climatic visits of Elath and Epstein that followed, al-Haydari was back in contact with the Jewish Agency, again urging cooperation between Iraq and Zionism. The impetus for the renewed contact was the coup on April 1, 1941 that installed the government of Rashid Ali al-Kilani. Nazi Germany's support for the new regime and the Mufti's influence on it had made Rashid Ali's Iraq anathema to the Zionists. So close to Rashid Ali's regime was the Mufti that coup itself was plotted in the Mufti's residence in Baghdad.[142] What is more, it was only at the Mufti's instigation that the initially reluctant Rashid Ali acquiesced to becoming prime minister in the first place.[143] Rashid Ali, for his part, was an ardent pan-Arab nationalist and supporter of the cause of the Arabs of Palestine–"Iraq's connection to Palestine is a bond of blood, religion, and culture,"[144] he proclaimed—and the government he led enjoyed not a little popular support

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[140] Yoav Gelber, *Shorshe ha-ḥavatselet : ha-modi'in ba-yishuv, 1918-1947* (Tel Aviv: Israeli Ministry of Defense, 1992), 466.

[141] Howard A. Patten, "The Genesis of Turkish Views on Partition and Conciliation," *Israel Affairs* 14, no. 3, 543.

[142] Wamīḍ Jamāl 'Umar Naẓmī, Ghānim Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, and Shafīq 'Abd al-Razzāq *al-Taṭawwur al-siyāsī al-mu'āṣir fī al-'Irāq* (Baghdad: University of Baghdad Press, 1980), 14.

[143] Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, *Mudhakkirāt*, 92.

[144] Abdul Rahman al-Tamimi, *Mawqif al-'Irāq,* 29.

on this account.[145] Such was the salience of the Palestine question in Iraqi political life that in the reckonings of two Iraqi prime ministers, Tawfiq al-Suwaidi[146] and Nuri al-Said, who served both before and after Rashid Ali, the Palestine question was to blame, at least partly, for the coup that brought the Mufti-aligned regime to power[147]

Al-Haydari was among a group of five pro-British Iraqi leaders—the others being the regent Abd al-Ilah and former prime ministers Nuri al-Said, Ali Jawdat al-Ayoubi, and Jamil al-Midfai—who escaped to the safety of the British Mandate of Palestine at the outset of the coup.[148] The reception the Iraqi exiles found in Palestine differed among the country's Arabs, Jews, and British administrators. Naturally, the Arabs of Palestine spurned the Iraqi guests, the latter forming the vanguard of the opposition to the new government in Baghdad. Rashid Ali, after all, had long been a champion of the cause of the Palestinian Arabs and assumed his appointment as prime minister at the request of preeminent Palestinian leader, Hajj Amin al-Husseini. For their part, he British, to be sure, supported the exiles, to whom they had given sanctuary, but according to Sasson, they refrained from any clear protestations of support. This British reticence, Sasson concludes, sprang both from initial British hopes of compromise with Rashid Ali and from fears of alienating popular Arab opinion.[149]

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[145] Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London ; I.B. Tauris, 2001), 21.

[146] Tawfiq al-Suwaidi, *Mudhakkirātī : niṣf qarn min tārīkh al-'Irāq wa-al-qaḍīyah al-'Arabīyah* (Beirut : al-Mu'ssah al-'Arabīyah lil-darāsāt wa al-Nashr, 2010), 298.

[147] Sasson, *Ba-derekh el ha-shalom*, 217.

[148] *Ibid.,* 209.

[149] *Ibid.*

The Jewish Agency, represented by Sasson, was much warmer. After all, al-Haydari was the Political Department's old Kurdish friend and the regime he fled, its existence inspired by the Mufti and protected by Nazi Germany, was an abomination to the Yishuv. Sasson even paid calls on the Iraqi exiles at the Camp David Hotel, where they lodged, every day of their stay in Palestine.[150] Of the five Iraqi exiles, al-Haydari was both the only Kurd and the only one who could justly be described as a Zionist.[151] So, too, was he the sole Iraqi to use the occasion of his exile in Jerusalem to propose cooperation with the Jewish Agency, just as he had done in January 1937, when Bakr Sidqi was in power. At al-Haydari's request, Sasson arranged a meeting for him with Moshe Sharett, whom al-Haydari had met with previously and would meet with subsequently.[152] The two-hour conversation between Sharett and al-Haydari, for which Sasson and Reuven Shiloah were also present, took place on April 21, 1941, just as British forces had come aground at Basra for the purpose of toppling Rashid Ali's regime.[153] Al-Haydari, who presented himself as the envoy of the exiles, opened the conversation with a denunciation of the Mufti, Rashid Ali, and the Nazis and their Iraqi supporters.[154] He then proceeded to his main purpose, recruiting the help of the Jewish Agency in the propaganda war between Rashid Ali and

[150] *Ibid.*

[151] Bibi, *ha-Maḥteret ha-Tsiyonit-ḥalutsit be-'Iraḳ*, 124-125.

[152] Sasson, *Ba-derekh el ha-shalom*, 209

[153] *Ibid*., 210.

[154] *Ibid.*

the pro-British opposition.[155] Specifically, al-Haydari sought the Jewish Agency's help to enlighten British and American public on the Nazi connections of Rashid Ali's regime.[156]

To al-Haydari's proposal Sharett was receptive, but he entertained no illusions that the Jewish Agency's assistance could convert the Iraqi enemy into an ally, not least because Nuri al-Said, the previous Iraqi prime minister and the single most influential Iraqi political figure in the last two decades of the monarchy, was an anti-Zionist of long standing. "We are quite ready," responded Sharett to al-Haydari's proposal, and though Sharett said the Zionists still entertained hopes of an eventual agreement with Iraq, failing that, they were prepared to close ranks with the Iraqi exiles "in those areas in which we have a common interest…[and]...stand together…[in their]...common war against Nazism."[157] Sharett then requested from al-Haydari an aide-memoire and the specific news items he desired the Jewish Agency to circulate, materials on which Al-Haydari said he would set to work straightaway.[158]

Meanwhile, al-Haydari's distinction as the only Kurd among the exiles was pressed home in an interview he gave to Reuters widely excerpted in Palestine's Hebrew and Arabic newspapers. In the interview, which took place about a month after his meeting with Sharett, during which interval al-Haydari met with Sasson daily, al-Haydari presents himself more as a representative of the Iraqi Kurds than of Iraq itself. The Hebrew daily *HaBoker* describes

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[155] *Ibid*., 211.

[156] *Ibid*.

[157] Moshe Sharett, "In the Arab Arena," speech to the Jewish Agency's Committee for the Study of the Arab Problem, December 3, 1941 (Hebrew). http://www.sharett.org.il/cgi-webaxy/sal/sal.pl?lang=he&ID=880900_sharett_new&act=show&dbid=bookfiles&dataid=3177

[158] *Ibid.*

al-Haydari as “an important Kurdish leader from northern Iraq” and quotes him hailing the Kurds as Iraq’s saviors who stood to redeem the country from Rashid Ali’s regime: “The Kurds will rise up against those who violated the constitution of their country and try to save Iraq from the destructive actions of a small gang that has temporarily occupied Iraq.”[159] *Falastin*, one of Mandatory Palestine’s leading leading Arabic dailies, quotes al-Haydari defending Kurdish loyalty to Iraq, saying, “The Kurds joined the Arabs in establishing the Iraqi Kingdom.”[160]

The second step on the path to Jewish Agency-Iraqi cooperation was never taken, as the aide-memoire and the press items Sharett had requested and al-Haydari had promised were never delivered.[161] Nor need these have been after the proposed Jewish Agency-assisted Iraqi propaganda campaign against Rashid Ali’s regime was emptied of its utility when the British defeated and overthrew Rashid Ali’s regime. Al-Haydari certainly knew that the British sword was mightier than the Zionist pen, but when he appealed to Moshe Sharett for the Jewish Agency’s assistance, he and the other Iraqi exiles doubted that the British sword would be unsheathed. When, to al-Haydari’s pleasant surprise, it was, polemics against Rashid Ali and the Mufti in the Western press had become needless. In remarks to the Jewish Agency’s Committee for the Study of the Arab Problem a few months after the British ouster of Rashid Ali’s regime and the repatriation of the exiles, Sharett remarked that al-Haydari and the exiles “needed the

[159] *HaBoker*, May 21, 1941, 2.

[160] “Daud Pasha al-Haydari, His grave statement on the situation in Iraq,” *Falastin*, May 21, 1941, 4 (Arabic).

[161] Moshe Sharett, “In the Arab Arena,” speech to the Jewish Agency’s Committee for the Study of the Arab Problem, December 3, 1941 (Hebrew). http://www.sharett.org.il/cgi-webaxy/sal/sal.pl?lang=he&ID=880900_sharett_new&act=show&dbid=bookfiles&dataid=3177

Jews no longer."[162] Sharett added that cooperation with sympathetic Iraqis, "far from a political agreement" though it was, was still desirable.[163]

And a sympathetic Iraqi Kurd al-Haydari certainly remained. On his return to Iraq from Palestine, al-Haydari assumed a number of senior appointments in the Iraqi government and diplomatic corps while remaining in contact with the Jewish Agency throughout. After brief consecutive stints as Iraq's foreign and justice ministers, he was appointed Iraq's ambassador to Iran in 1943, in which year the Jewish Agency opened an office in Tehran. In his memoirs, Elath tells of a soiree in the Iranian capital at which al-Haydairi once again avowed his support for Zionism. "My wife and I," recalls Elath, "were the guests of honor at a meal to which prominent Iraqi Jews who had settled in Iran were invited. In his after-dinner speech al-Haidari praised our work in Palestine and criticized his wealthy Jewish guests who did not contribute toward the upbuilding of the Jewish national home in Palestine!"[164] Al-Haydari was similarly bold and incautious when speaking to his Zionist interlocutors about Iraqi state secrets. While serving as Iraqi ambassador to London in 1944, he confided to Moshe Sharett that Nuri al-Said, the influential Iraqi prime minister, was ambitious of extending Iraqi influence to Syria by transforming that republic into a monarchy over which a Hashemite king would reign.[165]

It is curious that al-Haydari, who was already suspect in the eyes of Arab nationalists because he was a Kurdish supporter of the British and an opponent of Arab nationalism, did not take care to disguise his associations with the Zionists. On the contrary, he seemed positively

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[162] *Ibid.*

[163] *Ibid.*

[164] Elath, *Zionism at the UN*, 124-125.

[165] Yehoshua Porath, *In Search of Arab Unity, 1930-1945* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 53.

reckless of the risks of his deviations. Nor did he seem troubled by his reputation as a friend of the Jews of Baghdad, who, when in a plight, would invoke his assistance and, as Elath observes, "were never disappointed."[166] Perhaps his boldest expression of his friendship with them came when suspicion of Iraqi Jewry as a "fifth column," as the Mufti described them, had attained its highest pitch.[167] On the eve of Iraq's entry into the First Arab-Israeli war, al-Haydari lobbied to get Meir Basri, an Iraqi Jewish intellectual and man of affairs, appointed finance minister.[168] It was not only the timing but also the recipient of this proposal that made it an intrepid initiative. That al-Haydari floated his suggestion to Iraqi prime minister, Salih Jabr, made this an especially tone-deaf proposal since Jabr had just months earlier vowed that, in the event of war between the Jewish and Arab states, "severe measures should be taken against all Jews in Arab lands."[169] It was a response far from surprising when al-Jabr refused al-Haydari's suggestion; nor was it unexpected that, on account of these and other of his heterodoxies, a British official recorded in 1951 that al-Haydari was "widely distrusted."[170]

[166] Eliahu Elath, *Zionism at the UN*, 124.

[167] al-Husseini, *Mudhakkirāt*, 69.

[168] Shmuel Moreh, *Baghdād ḥabībatī: Yahūd al-'Irāq, dhikrayāt wa-shujūn* (Haifa: Maktabat Kull Shay', 2012), 397.

[169] Douglas Busk, official at the British embassy in Baghdad, to the British Foreign Office, September 12, 1947, FO 371/61529.

[170] *Records of Iraq, 1914-1966: 1958-1960*, eds. Alan de L. Rush and Jane Priestland (London: Archive Editions, 2001), 17.

Iraqi Kurds and the Plight of Iraqi Jewry during and after Rashid Ali

Although al-Haydari's bid for cooperation between the Jewish Agency and the Iraqi exiles was never carried into operation, Iraqi Kurdish actions during the regime of Rashid Ali served the interests both of the Jewish Agency and the welfare of Iraqi Jewry. The Kurds of Iraq had refused their support to the pan-Arabist regime of Rashid Ali,[171] even though Hitler had apparently pledged Nazi assistance for the establishment of a Kurdish state as an inducement.[172] Mahmoud Barzinji, the old rebel leader, had even launched a rebellion against Rashid Ali's regime in the hope that the British would acquiesce in what they had resisted earlier: a Kurdish state with him at its head.[173] Meanwhile, the Kurds of Iraq, in several instances, saved Iraqi Jews from the predations of the mob, the army, and the police. The aghas of the tribes of Doski and Barzani, with whose members Israel was to work closely in the 1960s and 1970s, protected Jews from outsiders who intended them harm. The aghas of the two villages around Zakho and the hamlet of Yekmala also secured their Jews from ill while Mulla Effendi,[174] the venerable Kurdish Islamic cleric who gave refuge to six-year old King Faisal II,[175] rescued the Jews of Arbil from a mob of 200 pro-Nazi youths.[176]

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[171] Faniel Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1929-1941* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 138.

[172] Hamid Mahmud Isa, *al-Qaḍīyah al-Kurdīyah*, 248.

[173] *Ibid.,* 239.

[174] Herzl Yonah, *Ḳehilat Yehude Arbil*, 179.

[175] Ṭāriq Ibrāhīm Sharīf, *Sīrat ḥayāt al-Malik Fayṣal al-Thānī, 1935-1958 : ākhir mulūk al-ʻIrāq* (Amman: Dar Ghaida'a, 2011), 18-19.

[176] Herzl Yonah, *Ḳehilat Yehude Arbil*, 179.

Meanwhile, the "30 Days War" between Britain and Iraq had begun. In May 1941, as the Royal Airforce and the Luftwaffe contended in dogfights over Baghdad, Iraqi Jews on the ground, communicating by means of wireless devices with the British bombers overhead, identified targets for the RAF pilots.[177] A handful of Palestinian Jews assisted the British, who authorized a commando operation in Iraq to be executed by the Irgun, the militant Zionist group that, ironically, would lead the Yishuv's insurgency against the British from 1944 to 1947. The four-man Irgun cell headed by David Raziel—the commander-in-chief of the organization and, as such, Menachem Begin's predecessor—was charged with destroying Iraq's oil refineries, just as the Israelis and Kurds would do, jointly, from 1969 to 1971.[178] In exchange for their cooperation, the Irgun extracted a significant concession from the British: permission to assassinate the Mufti.[179] In the event, the sabotage operation was called off and replaced with a reconnaissance patrol in Fallujah, which ended with Raziel's death at the hands of a German bomber overhead.[180] Nevertheless, the British clinched their defeat of Rashid Ali and his partisans, bringing their two-month rule to a decisive end.

The ever-elusive Mufti, for his part, stole across the border into Iran, staying there briefly before proceeding Germany, where he remained for the rest of the war. In his memoirs, the Mufti not only fingers Iraqi Jewry as the culprit in the fall of Rashid Ali's regime, but in an obvious if oblique reference to the Kurds, he writes that Iraq's "Jewish fifth column" was abetted by

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[177] Bibi, *ha-Maḥteret ha-Tsiyonit,* 98.

[178] Adrian O'Sullivan, *The Baghdad Set: Iraq Through the Eyes of British Intelligence, 1941-45* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 55.

[179] *Ibid.*

[180] *Ibid.*

"several other non-Arab elements."[181] Any doubts that the latter is an allusion to the Kurds are dispelled by the subject of the next passage, in which the Mufti implicates British intelligence and Cecil Edmonds, a British Orientalist and advisor to Iraq's interior ministry, for "inciting the Kurdish national movement in Iraq and sowing discord" between Kurds and Arabs.[182]

While the Mufti himself evaded capture, a different fate awaited his famous nephew, Abdul Qadir al-Husseini, best known as the commander of the largest native Palestinian Arab force in the 1948 war, the Holy War Army (*Jaysh al-Jihad al-Muqaddas*). After the "30 Days War," in which he commanded a unit of Palestinian volunteers against the British at Abu Ghraib, Abdul Qadir al-Husseini was apprehended and sent to Zakho (called "Jerusalem of Kurdistan" for its large Jewish community), there to remain under house arrest.[183] The local response to Abdul Qadir al-Husseini's exile in Zakho further attests to the attitudinal difference between Iraq's Arabs and Kurds to the regime of Rashid Ali. There is no indication that the detention of so eminent a Palestinian Arab nationalist elicited either the sympathy of Zakho's Muslims (who sought neither to free him nor to infiltrate him across the Turkish border, just miles away) or the terror of Zakho's Jews (who never even mention his detention in their oral histories).

Although the British, with modest Zionist help, ousted Rashid Ali's Nazi-aligned regime just two months after it had seized power, the relief of Iraqi Jewry was quickly converted into agony. Not 24 hours after Rashid Ali had been ousted and the *ancien regime* reinstated, a pogrom struck Iraq's largest Jewish community. For two days (June 1 and 2, 1948), the pogromists

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[181] Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, *Mudhakkirāt*, 70.

[182] *Ibid.*

[183] Aref al-Aref, *al-Nakbah: Nakbat Bayt al-Maqdis wa-al-firdaws al-mafqūd* (Beirut: Dar al-Huda, 1989), 166.

avenged the fall of Rashid Ali's beloved regime on the Jews of Baghdad, looting homes, raping women, abducting children, ransacking shops—killing 179 Jews in total.[184] So destructive was the mayhem unleashed on the Jews of Baghdad that Mordechai Bibi estimates that forty percent of the Jewish community in Baghdad was affected by the pogrom in some way. [185] Although the Farhud (or "violent dispossession") was perpetrated by local Arabs, it occurred *after* the British had overthrown Rashid Ali's regime and secured the country. While the Farhud was underway, the British had proclaimed—but refused to enforce—a curfew, inaction that suggested complicity.[186] This judgment figures in a report written two years later by Enzo Sereni, who came to Iraq in 1942 as one of the first three Zionist emissaries sent there, that reads, "In 1941, while the riots were raging and the English [sic] were two kilometers from Baghdad, if any signal had been given, the riots could have been stopped…."[187]

It was not the British, but rather a company of Kurds in the Iraqi army that came from the north to suppress this "Iraqi Kristallnacht," as many of its survivors have called it.[188] The Kurdish soldiers, whose company rejected the Rashid Ali regime,[189] descended on Baghdad's Jewish districts (e.g., the Shorja souk, Rashid Street) and, according to Martin Gilbert, "acted

[184] Haggai Ehrlich, *ha-Mizraḥ ha-Tikhon ben milḥamot-ha-'olam* (Ramat Aviv: Open University, 2002), 104.

[185] Bibi, *ha-Maḥteret ha-Tsiyonit*, 94.

[186] Elie Kedourie, *Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies* (London: Cass, 1974), 298.

[187] Enzo Sereni, "On the Diaspora in Iraq," April 4, 1943 reprinted in Bibi, *ha-Maḥteret ha-Tsiyonit-ḥalutsit be-'Iraḳ*, 195 (Hebrew)

[188] Shmuel Moreh and Zvi Yehuda, *Śin'at Yehudim wpra'ott b'Iraq: kovets meḥkarim wt'audot* (Or-Yehuda: Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, 1992), 105.

[189] Ibid.

with unrestrained zeal, shooting the rioters without mercy and dispersing the mobs."[190] The Kurds also apprehended some of the pogromists and stationed themselves outside Jewish homes to deter further mischief.[191] Even before the Kurdish soldiers had put an end to the pogrom, some individual Kurdish civilians, presumably at the risk of their lives, had dared to rescue Jews in Baghdad. For example, a Kurdish family hid Mana Dinah, a Jewish woman whose misfortune it was to give birth during the Farhud, in their home in Baghdad and turned away the mob when it rapped at her door, demanding to know if Jews were inside.[192] When a Kurdish guard refused entry to the rabble assembled outside a Jewish home in Karrada, he was killed, his corpse trampled.[193]

The horrors of the Farhud had introduced a new social climate for the Jews of Iraq. Amid the incitement of the 1930s, the 2,500-year-old community lived in panic as the atmosphere thickened and the storm clouds gathered, threatening to rain down their torrents on them. The Farhud was the downpour, and insecurity and dread its aftereffects. Ten years after the pogrom, the Iraqi Jewish community, in Kurdistan and in Arab Iraq, had been reduced to a ghost of a once robust body. (Add two quotations here)

Naturally, Britain's overthrow in May 1941 of an Iraqi regime supported by the Mufti and the Nazis was welcomed by the Jewish Agency—as also Britain's ouster of France's Vichy-aligned mandatory governments in Lebanon and Syria in June and July 1941. Yet the

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[190] Martin Gilbert, *In Ishmael's House: a History of Jews in Muslim Lands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 193.

[191] Saul Silas Fathi, *Full Circle: Escape from Baghdad and the Return* (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2005), 40.

[192] Mane Dina (Shohat), "Testimony from Iraq," *The Forgotten Million: Jews Uprooted from Arab Countries*, http://www.forgotten-million.co.il/eduyot/iraq/mane_dina.html (Hebrew)

[193] Violette Shamash, *Memories of Eden: a Journey Through Jewish Baghdad* (Surrey: Forum Books, 2008), 208.

various pro-British governments that ruled Iraq until the monarchy was overthrown in July 1958 were still hostile to Zionism. The pro-British Nuri al-Said, an inveterate opponent of Zionism, was the single most influential politician in Iraq from 1941 to 1958, during which era he was prime minister most of the time. Nor were these governments well-disposed to the political aspirations of Iraqi Kurds.

The catastrophe of the Farhud—as well as the vulnerability of Iraqi Jewry it exposed and the desire to emigrate it introduced—combined with the stability of Iraq's British-oriented order renewed the Jewish Agency's interest in Iraq. It will be recalled that between 1935 and 1941, the Jewish Agency's activities in Iraq were minimal. The first half of Bakr Sidqi's 10-month regime, before it retreated from its earlier openness to cooperation with Zionism, was the exception. This neglect gave way to interest in 1941, and from 1942 onwards, with the British back in Iraq, the Jewish Agency and even firms from the Yishuv were active in the country.

Yet it was Iraq's Jews, not its ethnic Kurds, who provided the focus of the Jewish Agency's Iraqi endeavor. This was part of a general shift in the Zionist movement's attention to the Jews of the Middle East, whom it had long neglected.[194] Thus, in early 1942, Shaul Avigur—the head of the Mossad LeAliyah Bet, the underground organization that organized the illegal immigration of Jews to Palestine—arrived in Baghdad to make a reconnaisance.[195] On his return to Palestine, Avigur posted three emissaries to Iraq: Shmaryahu Guttman, Ezra Kedourie, and Enzo Sereni. Though their mission was ill-defined, the emissaries had been sent to minister to Iraqi Jewry, facilitating their (illegal) immigration to Palestine, organizing Jewish self-defense,

[194] Haya Gavish, *Unwitting Zionists: the Jewish Community of Zakho in Iraqi Kurdistan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 239.

[195] Bibi, *ha-Maḥteret ha-Tsiyonit-ḥalutsit be-'Iraḳ*, 95.

and establishing a Zionist underground in a country where earlier Zionist endeavor had been stamped out. Of these and the many other Zionist emissaries active in Iraq until the late 1940s, the first to visit Iraqi Kurdistan was by Shmaryahu Guttman. As the emissary tasked to deal with matters of emigration, Guttman was in contact with Kurdish smugglers who, for a sometimes considerable sum, would help Jews infiltrate neighboring countries. Nevertheless, Guttman and the other emissaries, who both accompanied and followed him, did not give much attention to fostering relations with the Kurds of the northern Iraq. Nor did they even attend to the Jews of Kurdistan until the middle of the 1940s. The emissaries gave priority to Baghdad, where they preferred to work anyway, and they delayed formal Zionist activity in Kurdistan until 1946.[196] (Briefly mention the roles of Avigur and Guttman in Kurdistan in the 1960s)

The Kurds were not completely ignored though. The emissaries and hundreds of Palestinian Jews working in Iraq for Solel Boneh, the Zionist construction firm the British had contracted to build infranstructure in Iraq, occasionally filed reports in which Kurdish affairs figure. In 1944, a former Solel Boneh employee,[197] Aryeh Eshel, became the Political Department's first permanent representative in Iraq.[198] Eshel worked with Mossad LeAliyah Bet, but as a Political Department representative, he mostly concerned himself with general Iraqi affairs and intelligence matters.[199] One of his preoccupations, however, was the Kurds, who in 1943, had renewed their insurgency against Baghdad under the command of Mulla Mustafa

[196] Bashkin, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 82-83.

[197] Hayim Saadon, *Ba-maḥteret me-artsot ha-Islam: parashiyot ha'palah ṿa-haganah* (Jerusalem: Mechon Ben-Zvi, 1997), 89.

[198] Gelber, *Shorshe ha-ḥavatselet*, 643.

[199] *Ibid.*

Barzani, the foremost Kurdish leader of the twentieth century and, years later, a close Israeli ally.[200]

Meir Batz, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, and a Revolt against Baghdad in 1942?

As regards the later alliance between Barzani and Israel, some have posited a much earlier inception of this entente than may be reconciled with the historical record. In several Hebrew publications and on not a few Hebrew websites, there appears the claim that in 1942 Meir Batz—then a commander in the Palmach (the elite strike force in the Jewish prestate paramilitary organization) and later a celebrated civil engineer responsible for developing the Negev—was sent to Iraq to organize a revolt against Baghdad with Barzani.[201] It would seem this claim, which reads as follows, finds its origins in a biography of Batz on the Palmach's official website: "In 1942, [Batz] met with Barzani, the leader of the Kurds, in order to plan and organize a Kurdish revolt in response to the rebellion of Rashid Ali [al-Kilani] in Iraq."[202]

Although this biographical profile was written on the authority of no less an intimate of Meir Batz than his own son, Uri (Israel's famous weatherman),[203] the claim of collaboration between Meir Batz and Barzani in 1942 does not survive historical corroboration and must, therefore, be dismissed as mistaken. In the first place, in 1942, Mulla Mustafa Barzani was inaccessible, languishing as he then was under house arrest, to which he had been remanded years earlier for his last rebellion, in Suleimaniyah. Moreover, throughout Kurdistan, security

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[200] *Ibid.*

[201] See Dan Gazit, "Prophet of the Negev," *232*, no. 133 (January 2015), 24 (Hebrew); Hanina Porat "Meir Batz: Mr. Negev," *News1*, December 19, 2016, https://www.news1.co.il/Archive/0024-D-116728-00.html (Hebrew)

[202] "Colonel Batz (Rabinowitz), Meir," *Palmach* (official site), http://palmach.org.il/memorial/fighterpage/?itemId=85476 (Hebrew)

[203] *Ibid.*

was tight and government surveillance routine. In 1938, Baghdad had begun to field many police in Kurdistan,[204] and after the fall of Rashid Ali's regime and their return to Iraq in 1941, the British had posted advisers to Kurdistan.[205] A visitor to the quarters to which Barzani was confined in 1942, quarters actively surveilled, would have been most unlikely to escape the vigilance of Iraqi or British personnel stationed there. Even the visit of a Zionist official to Kurdistan in 1942, to places monitored less than Barzani's carceral home, did not pass undetected. In 1942, Enzo Sereni (one of the three Zionist emissaries then in Iraq) visited Kurdistan, which he described as a "warzone," with Moniya Meridor, who was also active in Mossad Aliyah Bet.[206] After Sereni and Meridor, who went incognito, returned to Baghdad from Kurdistan, word reached them that British intelligence personnel in Iraq had received a report alerting them to the presence of the two Zionist visitors.[207] If Sereni and Meridor had not escaped detection visiting Kurdistan incognito, it follows *a fortiori* that Batz could scarcely have managed a visit to the surveilled home of Kurdistan's best-known rebel leader, then under detention. Yet another reason for incredulity at the claim of Batz-Barzani cooperation is *argumentum ex silentio*, for neither in any of the reports filed by the three Zionist emissaries in Iraq 1942—Shmaryahu Guttman, Ezra Kedourie, Enzo Sereni—nor in Meridor's reports, nor in

[204] Ṣiddīq 'Uthmān Miḥū, *al-'Āmil al-khārijī wa-dawruhu fī ikhmād al-intifāḍāt al-Kūrdīyah: dawr Barīṭāniyā fī ikhmād intifāḍatay Bārzān al-ūlá wa-al-thāniyah, 1931-1945 namūdhajan* (Arbil: Ministry of Culture and Youth, 2010), 150.

[205] Stefanie K. Wichhart, "A 'New Deal' for the Kurds: Britain's Kurdish Policy in Iraq, 1941–45" in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (December 2011), 821.

[206] Enzo Sereni, "Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Histadrut concerning Aliyah Bet" July 2, 1942, reprinted in *Bibi, ha-Maḥteret ha-Tsiyonit-ḥalutsit be-'Iraḳ*, 86 (Hebrew).

[207] Moniya Meridor, *Sheliḥut 'alumah: pirke mivtsa'im meyuḥadim be-ma'arkhot ha-Haganah* (Tel Aviv: Maarachot, 1957), 86.

any document turned up by this author in the Palmach Archives, is mention made of Meir Batz's even being in Iraq in 1942.

The Jewish Agency and Regional Minorities during the Second World War

The Kurds remained marginal to Jewish Agency diplomacy throughout the Second World War. As far as regional minorities were concerned, the Jewish Agency's diplomatic endeavor was chiefly focused on the Maronites of Lebanon, and as far regional states were concerned, Lebanon and Syria claimed priority. So this remained even after wartime political developments in these two countries brought reverses for Zionist diplomacy with Lebanese and Syrian minorities. In 1942, the independent states of Jabal Druze, the State of the Alawites, and the autonomous Kurdish-Christian zone in the Syrian Jazira were all dissolved into a newly enlarged Syria, controlled by a government in Damascus in which Sunni Arabs exercised preponderant influence. Now that these three regions were brought under the sway of Damascus, a political subordination that the majorities in each region had opposed,[208] the Jewish Agency's prospects for partnerships with them narrowed considerably. This was a major reverse for Zionist aspirations to partnerships with Syrian minorities. Sasson had visited the Alawites in 1941, and the Jewish Agency was aware that not a few of their number had shown sympathy for Zionism. The Jewish Agency had also maintained contacts with Syrian Druze, not least with the preeminent Syrian leader, Sultan al-Atrash, for years, and these associations continued throughout the Second World War.[209] The isolated, landlocked Syrian Jazira, with its Kurdish-Christian movement for autonomy, was of less consequence to the Jewish Agency, but it

[208] Fouad Ajami, *The Syrian Rebellion* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2012), 20.

[209] Moshe Yegar, *Toldot ha-maḥlaḳah ha-medinit*, 308.

still commanded the interest of Zionist officialdom. Even so, its absorption into Syria much encumbered the possibility of Zionist links with Jaziran Kurds and Christians

In neighboring Lebanon, political developments during the war were no less unhappy for the Jewish Agency. The year that followed the annexation of Syria's three peripheral minority regions to Damascus, 1943, brought three specific reverses for the Jewish Agency: first, the defeat of the Zionist-aligned Maronite nationalist National Bloc in Lebanese elections; second, Lebanon's National Pact, a covenant between the Maronite president and Sunni prime minister that, in addition to laying down the sectarian distribution of political and administrative posts, recognizes Lebanon's identity as a country with an "Arab Face" (*wajh arabi*) and, as such, recommends its integration into the Arab world; and, third, the discrediting of the Jewish Agency's closest Maronite friend in Lebanon politics, Emile Edde, after he served for ten days as Lebanon's French-appointed president at the height of the Lebanon's bid for independence from France. The Zionists' closest friends in Lebanon were the Maronite nationalists who saw Lebanon's vocation as country detached from the Arab world, not aligned with it, but these three setbacks conspired to disarm the pro-Zionist Maronites of much of the clout they had formerly enjoyed.

The relegation of these Maronites notwithstanding, the Jewish Agency had not yet despaired of cooperation with them, and the Maronites remained the regional minority with which the Jewish Agency was most ambitious of a relationship and Lebanon and Syria remained the foremost theater of Zionist diplomacy. Such was the Jewish Agency's continued attention to

Lebanon and Syria, even after the recent setbacks, that Sasson even complained in 1944 that his colleagues were focusing on Syria and Lebanon to the neglect of other countries in the region.[210]

Still, the Jewish Agency's regional footprint during the Second World War did expand to include additional countries, and specifically two countries with large Kurdish populations. In 1943, the Jewish Agency opened offices in Tehran and Ankara. Turkish and Iranian Kurds, however, were of little interest to it. The Jewish Agency's first care was the welfare of the European Jewish refugees who had trickled in to the two countries in the course of the war. Fostering relations with the Turkish government, a particular ambition of Chaim Weizmann's, was one of the Jewish Agency's aims besides.[211] The Jewish Agency's inattention to the Kurds of Iran and Turkey was, as we have seen, rooted in its appreciation that relations with Turkey and Iran and relations with Turkish and Iranian Kurds were mutually exclusive. That Turkey and Iran were both non-Arab states and two of the region's two rising powers made the Jewish Agency's choice in favor of relations with Ankara and Tehran an especially easy one. It happened

Despite the insignificant Kurdish communities in Lebanon and the remoteness of the Jazira, and despite the preoccupation with the Maronites, it was in Lebanon where the Jewish Agency and the Kurds made their most fruitful and enduring relationship.

[210] *Ibid.*, 306.

[211] *Ibid.* 316.

CHAPTER FOUR: KAMURAN BADR KHAN AND MORRIS FISHER

This chapter introduces the two most ardent enthusiasts of Zionist/Israeli-Kurdish cooperation from the early 1940s, when their friendship was kindled, to the fulfillment of this ambition in the 1960s. When they met in wartime Beirut, the celebrated Kurdish scholar and activist, Kamuran Ali Badr Khan, and a Belgian Jewish Agency official, Morris Fisher, discovered in one another a partner with the same conception of a Middle East of minority cooperation and even ascendancy. Thanks to Fisher, Badr Khan became the Jewish Agency and Israel's principal Kurdish interlocutor for almost four decades. From the mid-1940s onward, he was the Jewish Agency's and Israel's conduit for almost every proposal transmitted to them involving the Kurds. For Israel, he was also the gatekeeper to Iraqi Kurdistan, as it was Badr Khan's intermediation that enabled the alliance between Israel and Mulla Mustafa Barzani in the 1960s and 1970s. But if the 1960s afforded fertile ground for Badr Khan's efforts to effect cooperation between their two peoples, the 1940s offered only barren soil. Their many and unproductive efforts to this end in the 1940s will be explored in the ensuing pages.

1.1. The two prime movers of Zionist-Kurdish relations

The lowly beginnings of Israel's early relations with regional minorities foretell nothing of the complexity and strategic weight their later alliances would assume. Consider the modest genesis of Israel's partnerships with the mostly Maronite South Lebanon Army (1978-2000), the South Sudanese rebels (1969-1971), and the Iraqi Kurds (1963-1975). Israel's decadeslong stewardship of the South Lebanon Army, the mostly Maronite force that guarded Israel's South

Lebanese "security zone" until it was dissolved in 2000, traces its origins to a single note. The note, an Arabic appeal for help from the Maronite village of Qlayaa in southern Lebanon, had been attached to a rock lobbed over the border fence and discovered by an Israeli patrol one day in March 1976.[212] The Maronites' request to rendezvous along the border fence that night was duly fulfilled by the Israelis, and the Israeli-Maronite relationship that would give rise to the South Lebanon Army had begun. A note also launched Israel's relations with another minority in an Arab country, the largely Christian non-Arab rebels of South Sudan. After the Six-Day War, the commander and founder of the South Sudanese rebels addressed a letter to Israeli prime minister Levi Eshkol extolling Israel's victory in the Six-Day War and offering his soldiery's assistance to tie down the Sudanese army in exchange for Israeli support.[213] There followed a three-year relationship, between 1969-1971, that served the interests of both parties.[214]

A Kurdish Zionist and a Zionist Kurdophile

Israel's entente with the Kurds of Iraq—"the longest and most fascinating" of all of Israel's relations with minorities, as Mossad director Shabtai Shavit described it-–emerged from similarly simple circumstances.[215] It was not a note but a deep and abiding personal friendship begun in Beirut the early 1940s between a Kurdish noble, Kamuran Badr Khan (b. 1895), and a Belgian Jew, Morris Fisher (b. 1903), that would lead to the Israeli-Kurdish alliance twenty years later.

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[212] Yair Ravid-Ravitz, *Ḥalon la-ḥatser ha-aḥorit : toldot ḳishre Yiśra'el 'im Levanon, 'uvdot ṿe-ashlayot* (Yehud: Ofir Bekurim, 2012), 65.

[213] Danna Harman, "Leaving Bitterness Behind," *Haaretz*, January 28, 2011 https://www.haaretz.com/1.5114385

[214] See the memoirs of the Mossad operative who directed this relationship: David Ben-Uziel, *Bi-sheliḥut ha-Mosad li-Derom Sudan 1969-1971 : yoman mivtsa'* (Herzliya: Ṭeva' ha-devarim, 2015).

[215] Shavit, *Yoman ve-mikhtavim*, 8.

The early 1940s found these two prime movers of Kurdish-Israeli relations, Badr Khan and Fisher, in the same city, Beirut, working for the same employer, the Free French. In the service of France's government-in-exile, Badr Khan was giving two thirty-minute Kurdish-language broadcasts each week on France's *Radio Levant*[216] while Fisher was working as an intelligence officer for the Deuxième Bureau (the French intelligence service). Introduced by an Armenian leader of their common acquaintance, they took to each other and fell into fast friendship, which continued until Fisher's death in 1965. [217]

Even longer was the relationship between Fisher's employer—the Jewish Agency and the state of Israel thereafter—and Badr Khan, a relationship that spanned almost four decades, from the early 1940s until Badr Khan's death in 1978. "He has been working with us," recalled his longtime friend Walter Eytan, Israeli ambassador to France, in 1970 to Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli ambassador to the United States, "since...before the establishment of the state."[218] Described by Reuven Shiloah as "a true asset for the state of Israel"[219] and as "still indispensable" in a confidential Foreign Ministry memo from June 1966,[220] "Purim" (Badr Khan's codename in Israeli correspondence) was universally beloved by his Zionist and Israeli interlocutors, if not always universally valued by them. It was thanks to his good offices that the alliance he had

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[216] Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 23.

[217] Nakdimon, *Tikvah she-karsah*, 21.

[218] Walter Eytan, Israeli ambassador to France, to Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli ambassador to the United States, "Badr Khan," September 22, 1970, ISA 1507/16.

[219] Yehudah Ben-David, *Shishah yedidim ṿe-aḥad she-bagad: pegishot 'im anashim meyuḥadim* (Kibbutz Dalia: Kibbutz Dalia Publishing, 1999), 76.

[220] Mordechai Gazit to Walter Eytan, "Purim," June 5, 1966, ISA 1507-16 (Hebrew)

labored, for twenty years, to forge between the Zionists/Israelis and the Kurds was at last carried into operation in the early 1960s.

Twenty years earlier, in the early 1940s, Fisher and Badr Khan may have made their own modest contributions to the French war effort while in the employ of the Free French in Beirut, but it was serving Zionism and Kurdish nationalism, rather than the French cause per se, that supplied the chief motive of their employment. Fisher's commitment to Zionism was what had brought him to Beirut in the first place. After settling in Palestine in 1930 and founding the farming village of Kfar Yona (named after his father),[221] he joined the Mossad Le'Aliyah Bet, the underground organization that oversaw the illegal immigration of Jews to British-controlled Palestine.[222] Fisher subsequently joined the Political Department and, in 1941, requested and received David Ben-Gurion's permission to join the Free French and serve as the contact man between the Jewish Agency and De Gaulle's movement.[223] On the eve of the establishment of Israeli statehood, Fisher settled in Paris, where he functioned, first, as a the head Jewish Agency's of the Jewish Agency's mission in the city, and after the establishment of the state, as Israel's first ambassador to France, the first of several ambassadorships he held until his death in 1965.

As illustrious as was Morris Fisher's distinguished career of diplomatic service, his lifelong Kurdish friend became a far more celebrated figure in his people's history than Morris Fisher proved in his. An urbane scholar who never failed to impress his Jewish contacts with his

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[221] "Kfar Yona: City Quality, Village Comfort," *Kfar Yona*, https://kfar-yona.muni.il/אודות-הישוב/ (Hebrew)

[222] Meir Zamir, "Morris Fisher, the Kurdish Connection, and the Iraqi Threat" in *Mabat Malam* 80 (February 2018), 42 (Hebrew)

[223] *Ibid.*

sincerity and erudition, Kamuran Badr Khan was a scion of a storied Ottoman-era Kurdish dynasty that had ruled its own semi-autonomous principality, the Emirate of Bohtan, at the triple frontier between Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. The celebrity of the Badr Khan clan long survived the Ottoman destruction of their emirate in 1847, culture succeeding princely administration as the theater of their endeavor. The Badr Khans' founding, in 1898, of the first Kurdish-language newspaper, *Kurdistan,*[224] and, in 1908, of the first public Kurdish nationalist organization only crowned the clan's name with more glory.[225]

The next generation of Badr Khans, of whom Kamuran and his two brothers—Sureya and Jeladat—were representatives, proved itself eminently worthy of the illustrious name it had inherited. That the Kurdish alphabet is alternatively called "the Bedirxan Alphabet," devised as it was by Kamuran's brother, Jeladat, is but one token of the Badr Khan brothers' impact on Kurdish culture. Indeed it would be no exaggeration to say that, such was the amplitude of the three brothers' literary labors and such the variety of their contributions to Kurdish culture in the first half of the twentieth century, they shone as the brightest luminaries in the Kurdish intellectual firmament, and not just in Syria and Lebanon, where they were based, but in the entire region.

Kamuran Badr Khan, in particular, almost single-handedly made Beirut, the city where he befriended Fisher, into a center of Kurdish culture during his residence there, despite Lebanon's small and recently established Kurdish presence. In Beirut he also addressed himself to diplomacy for a Kurdish state as-yet unborn, and no sooner had he and Fisher commenced their

[224] Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East* (Lexington: Lanham, MD, 2010), 110.

[225] Harriet Allsopp, *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris: London, 2015), 51

friendship in the Lebanese capital than they sought to make a personal relationship political. Fisher introduced Badr Khan to the personnel in the Political Department, who, when visiting Beirut, would usually call on him. When Fisher departed Beirut in 1946, the relationship he had fostered between the Political Department and Badr Khan continued, and Badr Khan soon became one of its salaried clients. Regarding the question of money, Badr Khan may have been a nominal prince, his grandfather the last dynast in the clan's ancestral principality, but his means were far from regal. He was "a prince with neither a palace nor a kingdom," as Yehuda Ben-David, one of his main Israeli interlocutors in the 1950s, described him.[226] So pinched were his finances that when he was registered on the Jewish Agency's payroll on the eve of Israeli statehood, the Jewish Agency's financial contributions made up most of his budget.[227] Although the state of Israel for many years kept up these stipendiary payments, which the Jewish Agency had begun, Badr Khan was no mercenary. Unlike many of the local and foreign Arab clients and agents the Jewish Agency initially and the state of Israel subsequently paid to barter political principle for personal gain, Badr Khan was an ardent Zionist, who read and admired Herzl and saw in the Jewish nationalist movement a model for emulation.[228]

Israel's investment in Badr Khan—"true asset for the state of Israel" that he was—would bring considerable returns. Recompense came not just by way of the many services he did the Jewish state for almost forty years, but literally—in the very same "medium of exchange" in which he had originally been paid: The childless Kurdish prince was so fond of the Jewish state

[226] Yehudah Ben-David, *Shishah yedidim ṿe-aḥad she-bagad: pegishot 'im anashim meyuḥadim* Ben-David, 76.

[227] Nakdimon*, Tikvah she-karsah, 21.*

[228] Elath, *Shivat Tsiyon ṿa-'Arav*, 231.

that he even made provision in his will for the Israeli government to fall heir, on his death, to his entire estate.[229] This union of sentimental attachment and political expediency that informed Badr Khan's interest in Israel likewise surfaced in his relationship with Morris Fisher. Between these two prime movers of Zionist/Israeli-Kurdish relations there had evolved a dynamic that would more properly be described as an intimate bond than a mere political association in the service of their two peoples. An artifact of this friendship was on display in Badr Khan's modest quarters in Paris, where, as an Israeli journalist reported in 1970, five years after Fisher's death, one could see a photo of Fisher on the wall.[230] A few years before Badr Khan himself died, Eliahu Elath wrote, "Until this day, the Emir Kamuran Ali Badr Khan mentions Morris Fisher as one of the most loyal friends the Kurdish people—and he himself—ever had."[231]

2.1. Zionist and Kurdish delegations at the UN's Founding Conference

Throughout the Second World War, Badr Khan and Fisher quite often met with one another in Beirut, during their service to the Free French. Fisher also met with leaders from other minority communities (Maronites, Assyrians, and Druze), but Badr Khan seems to have been his favorite and most frequent interlocutor. At least some of their amity was probably attributable to the complete symmetry of their views of the Middle East. Badr Khan and Fisher's shared political ideal for the region was of a Middle East of minorities empowered both by self-government and by cooperation with one another. Whereas such a political vision struck the

[229] Walter Eytan, Israeli ambassador to France, to Shmuel Winograd, Israeli administrator general, "Mr. Badr Khan: life estate for the welfare of the country," May 8, 1967, ISA 1507/16. Whether this provision was amended in the ensuing twelve years of Badr Khan's life I have not been able to establish.

[230] "No Kurdish Leader Will Participate in a War Against the Jews," *Maariv*, March 17, 1970, 2 (Hebrew)

[231] Elath, *Shivat Tsiyon ṿa-'Arav*, 232.

likes of Sharett and Sasson as chimerical (even if desirable as an abstraction), it appeared to Badr Khan and Fisher as eminently practicable.

In Beirut, as the Second World War drew toward its end, Badr Khan and Fisher continued their frequent discussions about more serious cooperation between Zionism and the Kurdish national movement, but the Political Department's attention and priorities were decidedly elsewhere. Once the Second World War ended, the Political Department addressed itself to the central objective it would pursue until the United Nations' adoption of the resolution in November 1947 calling for Jewish and Arab states in Palestine: reaching a compromise based on partition with Transjordan's Emir Abdullah.[232] Although the United Nations (UN), to the satisfaction of the Zionists, would endorse partition in November 1947, the Jewish Agency's (and the Kurdish national movement's) debut at this new international organization was far from auspicious.

In San Francisco in April 1945, there convened a historic conference, its purpose to draw up and adopt a charter on the basis of which a new international organization would be established, the United Nations (UN). The "founding conference" of the UN, as it is commonly described, drew official delegations from 50 states and unofficial delegations of stateless peoples ambitious of self-determination. In attendance were three such missions from the Middle East on behalf of regional minorities: the Zionist Jews, the Kurds, and the Assyrians. As the veritable government of the Jewish community of Palestine, the Jewish Agency represented the Zionists, its delegation consisting of Eliahu Elath, Reuven Shiloah, and Gershon Agron, the Ukrainian-born American Jew who founded the *Palestine Post* (renamed the Jerusalem Post in

[232] Yoav Gelber, *Jewish-Transjordanian Relations, 1921-48* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 2.

1950). Shiloah, it will be recalled, corresponded copiously with Agron while in Kurdistan in the early 1930s and, while in Iraq, posed as a journalist for the newspaper the latter edited, *The Palestine Bulletin* (the predecessor of the *Palestine Post*). The Kurdish mission, which was manned, in part, by Kurdish Americans, was sent by Badr Khan and acted under his precise instructions.[233]

Broadly, the central purpose of the Zionist, Kurdish, and Assyrian delegations was the same: to introduce a discussion of their cause into the conference proceedings. With this objective in view, each submitted a memorandum to the conference (the Zionists' written by Weizmann and the Kurds' by Badr Khan) and lobbied on the sidelines. As it turned out, though, it was to the sidelines that the three minority delegations were consigned for the entire convention, as the conference passed with no discussion of their aspirations. They were frozen out of the proceedings entirely. Seats had been reserved for the five Arab states who sent delegations, but the Zionists, Kurds, and Assyrians, as representatives of stateless peoples, could participate only as observers.

Their exclusion in San Francisco highlighted the Zionists and the Kurds' common isolation. The Jewish Agency's mission lamented this exclusion, with Agron bemoaning its "lack of authority"[234] and Elath complaining that he "felt more isolated than in the Syrian desert."[235] The Kurds fared even worse, their delegation leaving even before the end of the conference.[236] Of

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[233] Eliahu Elath, *Zionism at the UN*, 244.

[234] Menachaem Kaufman, *An Ambiguous Partnership: Non-Zionists and Zionists in America, 1939-1948* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), 190.

[235] *The Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the United States Congress* 96, no. 15 Washington, D.C.: (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950),

[236] Elath, *Shivat Tsiyon ṿa-'Arav,* 233.

course, the Kurds scarcely did their cause a service by submitting to the conference a map showing Greater Kurdistan superimposed on parts of each of the countries it overspreads, countries all represented at the conference.[237] The Kurdish delegation's demands were even derided as "ridiculous" in *Foreign Affairs* the following year."[238] The Zionist and Kurdish delegations embraced the opportunity of their common attendance to confer with each other. The meeting was very cordial, to be sure, but not productive of any subsequent gain. The affection of Badr Khan's delegation, however, was offset by the suspicion of the Turkish delegation. It is more than probable that the Jewish Agency, being desirous of Turkish goodwill, found itself under the necessity of ensuring discretion to its contacts with Badr Khan's representatives. Anakara looked upon the Badr Khan clan, with its history of opposition to the homogenizing Turkish nationalist policies, as dangerous subversives. In 1923, the year in which the Turkish Republic was founded, Badr Khan had even been sentenced to death in absentia by the Turkish government.[239] Not unexpectedly, then, the Turkish delegation kept its unofficial Kurdish counterpart at the conference under close scrutiny.[240]

Another Kurd with whom Elath met in San Francisco—in meetings with whom discretion would also have been essential—was Daud al-Haydari's brother-in-law, Nasrat al-Farsy.[241] A

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[237] Jamal Jalal Abdulla, *The Kurds: A Nation on the Way to Statehood* (Bloomington: Author House, 2012), xix.

[238] William Linn Westermann, "Kurdish Independence and Russian Expansion," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1946, 11

[239] Hakan Ozoglu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany: State University of New York, 2004), 101.

[240] Chikara Hashimoto and Egemen B. Bezci, "Do the Kurds Have 'No Friends But the Mountains'? Turkey's Secret War against Communists, Soviets and the Kurds," *Middle Eastern Studies* 52, no. 4 (2016), 645.

[241] Elath, *Zionism at the UN*, 124.

onetime Iraqi foreign minister and interior minister, al-Farsy, like his brother-in-law, sympathized with Zionism and had intervened on behalf of Baghdadi Jewry in times of crisis.[242] Also like al-Haydari, who had called on President Truman at the White House just weeks before, al-Farsy was constrained to accept his government's line on Zionism, however much he may have rejected it in his private sentiments.[243] He accordingly had nothing to offer the Zionists apart from a few candid remarks about Saudi Arabia.[244]

For the Zionists, Kurds, and Assyrians, the three peoples from the region who sent delegations to the San Francisco Conference, their representations to the official delegates proved unavailing, as no discussion of Zionist, Kurdish, or Assyrian rights made it onto the conference's agenda. But alone among the three, the Zionists would soon see their fortunes change for the better at the UN, the organization the San Francisco Conference had founded. On November 29, 1947, UN Resolution 181, endorsing the establishment of a Jewish state, carried in the General Assembly by the requisite two-thirds majority. No sooner had the Zionists won international endorsement for their movement in the new international organization—and well before the state of Israel was admitted to the UN as an official member state in March 1949—than they set about marshaling support for the Kurds at the UN.

Although Herzl had written that once Zionism had, through its fulfillment, solved the Jewish Question, the representatives of the Jewish state ought to take up the cause of the world's scattered and oppressed blacks,[245] it turned out, however, that the Kurds were the first people on

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[242] *Ibid.*

[243] *Ibid.*

[244] *Ibid., 125.*

[245] Theodor Herzl, *Old New Land/Altneuland* (Berlin: Hoffenberg, 2018), 107.

whose behalf the Zionists/Israelis exerted themselves after their own aspiration for self-determination had been crowned with success. Thus, of the fifteen appeals the Kurds addressed to the UN between 1945—beginning with Badr Khan's memorandum submitted at the San Francisco Conference—and 1950,[246] the most extensive was a 50-odd page pamphlet prepared with the assistance of the Israeli Foreign Ministry.[247] Titled *Memorandum sur la situation des Kurdes et leurs revendications* ("Memorandum on the Situation of the Kurds and Their Claims") and written principally by Kamuran Badr Khan, the pamphlet hardly shows any Israeli fingerprints, apart from a quotation from Eliahu Elath extolling the Kurds of the Syrian Jazira.[248] But the date chosen on which Sheriff Pasha, the Kurdish leader who had also represented his people at the fateful Paris Peace Conference in 1919, submitted the memorandum to UN Secretary General Trygve Lie gave more of a hint of Israeli involvement, or at least, inspiration. Apparently, with a view to a symbolic linkage of Zionism and Kurdish nationalism, the memorandum was presented to Secretary Lie on November 29, 1948, exactly a year after the UN's institutional endorsement of Jewish statehood.[249] Here, then, was a Kurdish delegation petitioning the UN with a document the Israeli Foreign Ministry had helped with on the one-year anniversary of Jewish statehood's official acceptance by an international consensus.

Israeli assistance to the Kurds at the UN in the late 1940s inaugurated decades of similar Israeli lobbying on the Kurds' behalf at the UN, though also without success. When Badr Khan visited New York in 1962 with a view to pressing the Kurdish question on the attention of the

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[246] *The New Statesman and Nation*, Volume 39, April 22, 1950, 452.

[247] Meir Zamir, "Morris Fisher, the Kurdish Connection, and the Iraqi Threat," 44.

[248] *Mémorandum sur la situation des Kurdes et leurs revendications* (Paris: 1948), 5.

[249] Meir Zamir, "Morris Fisher, the Kurdish Connection, and the Iraqi Threat," 44.

UN, the Israelis tried to open doors for him there, but without meaningful results.[250] Similarly, in 1968, when Badr Khan and two other Kurdish intellectuals who visited Israel—Mahmoud Othman and Ismet Sheriff Vanli–Israel's good offices could not overcome the opposition of UN Secretary General U Thant, who declined to receive them.[251] Although it was not until 1991, years after Israel's alliance with them, that the Kurds were so much as mentioned in a UN resolution,[252] Israeli efforts on the Kurds behalf in lobbying and public relations found more success outside the UN. The Kurdish-American Relief Society, founded by Badr Khan in 1971, [253] was, for all practical purposes, an Israeli initiative, the Israelis having funded it and recruited American dignitaries for its board.[254]

The Jewish Agency and the Mahabad Republic

In northwestern Iran, not many months after the San Francisco Conference, there arose the only sovereign Kurdish polity in history. In January 1946, with the support of the Soviet Union, whose troops had been deployed in Iran since late 1941, the Iranian-Kurdish leader Qazi Mohammad proclaimed the establishment of a Kurdish state, the so-called "Republic of Kurdistan," centered on the Iranian-Kurdish city of Mahabad. Although it endured for just eleven

[250] See ISA (unnamed file) Hetz 6529/1.

[251] *Kurdish Facts,* ed. Silvio van Rooy, (April 1968), 12.

[252] Michael Gunter, *Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). 16.

[253] "Kurdish-Aid Group Formed in the U.S.," *The New York Times*, January 17, 1971, 12.

[254] Walter Eytan, Israeli ambassador to France, to Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli ambassador to the United States, "Badr Khan," September 22, 1970, ISA 1507/16.

months and embraced but a fraction of Iranian Kurdistan—to say nothing of Greater Kurdistan—the Mahabad Republic resounds in the annals of the Kurds as a worthy fulfillment of their strivings for self-determination. What invested this momentary experiment in Kurdish statehood with a special dignity was its association with the Mulla Mustafa Barzani, whom Qazi Mohammed appointed general of the Mahabad Republic's modest army.

But the Mahabad Republic's Soviet-supported foundation was precarious. When the Soviets withdrew from Iran under American threats and Iranian inducements, the Kurds, now orphaned of their powerful patron, were exposed to the retribution of a government they resisted, a pattern that would repeat itself once in each of the twentieth century's last three decades. The Mahabad Republic's fate was sealed in December 1946, when Iranian forces ravened into Mahabad, hanged Qazi Mohammed, and restored the breakaway territory to the Peacock Throne. Mulla Mustafa fled Iranian vengeance in time, setting out on his own Mao-style "Long March" and trekking with 500 of his partisans into the USSR, where he sheltered until 1959, when he returned to northern Iraq after the fall of its monarchy.

By the Zionists, the Mahabad experiment was looked upon more with disquiet than with excitement. It was Soviet support for the Mahabad Republic, in particular, that gave Zionist officialdom some unease. A long-term consequence of this Soviet patronage that encumbered the Kurds' bid for a partnership with Israel was the perception, on the part of Israeli officials who were few but senior, that many Kurds—and none more than Barzani himself—inclined to Communism. Eliyahu Sasson was one such. Even a few years after the fall of the Mahabad Republic, Sasson apparently still believed that the Kurds—and those of Iraq, not of Iran—were partisans of the USSR. Ben-Gurion notes in a diary entry from December 1948 that, on Sasson's

authority, “the Kurds are supporters of the Soviets.”[255] The tenacity of this view in some quarters in the Israeli Foreign Ministry was such that on the eve of the Israeli-Kurdish alliance, Abba Eban, Israel’s ambassador to Washington, wrote in a telegram to Walter Eytan, Badr Khan’s close friend and the head of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, that Barzani’s alleged ardor for communism had indeed made the Kurdish leader worthy of the moniker “Red Mulla” attached to his name in the Western Press.[256] Yet Eban’s telegram was based on inquiries made the CIA, which, in this and in not a few other cases, suspected Communist allegiances when there were none. Israeli officials more closely involved with the “Kurdish file” appreciated that Mulla Mustafa’s past support from the Soviet Union was tactical and opportunistic on both sides, and that the “Red Mulla” was neither “red” nor a “mullah.” By 1963, by which time the Israelis were supporting Barzani with aid, Israeli diplomats at embassies throughout the world were under strict instructions to tell their interlocutors that Mulla Mustafa Barzani was no communist.[257]

4.3 Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry

Whatever their misgivings about the Mahabad Republic, some officials in the Jewish Agency, and none more than Morris Fisher, remained alive to the benefits that a partnership with the Kurds could still bestow. In early January 1946, just days before the Mahabad Republic was founded, there came the first opportunity for the Jewish Agency to enlist Badr-Khan in the service of the Zionist cause. Then it was that the 12-member Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry was appointed in 1946 “to study,” as the American commissioner Bartley Crum

[255] David Ben-Gurion, *Yoman HaMilhemah* vol. 3 (Tel Aviv: Israeli Ministry of Defense, 1982), 913.

[256] Nakdimon, *Tikvah she-karsah*, 54.

[257] Shaul Bar-Haim, director of Middle East bureau, to Israeli embassies throughout the West, “Kurds,” June 26, 1966, ISA Hetz 6554/2.

described it, “the position of Jews in European countries where they had been victims of Nazi and Fascist persecution, and to determine what practical measures could be taken to enable Jews, who so wished, to continue to live in Europe free from persecution; and to determine how many wished, or would be impelled, to migrate to Palestine and to other non-European countries.”[258]

For their part, the Zionists endeavored to recruit witnesses to give supportive testimony before the commission, the better to sway its recommendations toward an endorsement of Jewish immigration to Palestine. Friends of Zionism around the world, most notably Albert Einstein, thus appeared before the commission to urge the cause of Jewish nationalism. When the commissioners posted to the Middle East on a fact-finding tour, the Jewish Agency tasked Morris Fisher, still in the employ of the Free French in Beirut, with enlisting minority leaders of standing to give pro-Zionist testimonies before the commission.[259] The Jewish Agency’s purpose, in producing such witnesses, was to demonstrate that the diverse peoples of the Middle East, far from sharing the opposition to Zionism of Arab Muslims, did not speak with one antagonistic voice in the matter of Zionism. On the contrary, such minorities as Maronites, Assyrians, and Kurds, the Jewish Agency sought to prove, were favorably disposed to the Zionist project.

In early 1946, the Political Department dispatched Yehuda Hellman to Beirut to assist Fisher in recruiting and priming pro-Zionist minority witnesses.[260] Although Fisher and the Jewish Agency’s longstanding minority contacts in Lebanon proved most receptive, they appreciated the perils that could ensue from their open identification with Zionism, and they

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[258] Bartley Crum, *Behind the Silken Curtain: a Personal Account of Anglo-American Diplomacy in Palestine and the Middle East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), 11.

[259] Gelber, *Shorshe ha-ḥavatselet*, 628.

[260] *Ibid.*

stipulated that their testimonies to the commission be taken in camera or with anonymity. Thus, in March 1946, two months before the Maronite Church and the Jewish Agency concluded an ultimately abortive treaty of cooperation, three high clerics in the Maronite Church (including the patriarch, Antoine Arida, himself and the archeparch of Beirut, Ignace Mubarak) met with American commissioner James G. McDonald and extolled Zionism.[261] On the same day as the meeting, Archeparch Mubarak, the most intrepid of the Maronite leaders sympathetic to Zionism, gave an interview to the Palestine Post in which he avowed the support for Zionism he and his fellow Maronites had expressed to McDonald privately.[262] Another high cleric of another Christian regional minority, the Assyrians, likewise offered his endorsement of Zionism to the commission. In a signed memorandum submitted to Joseph C. Hutcheson, the American co-chairman of the commission, the Assyrian leader, who subscribed his name but requested its suppression, entreated the commissioners to recommend the establishment of a Jewish state, the mere existence of which, he says, would give moral support to the Assyrians.[263] To this appeal he added his own affirmation that the Assyrians desire to live as a protected minority in a Kurdish state, this being the political arrangement promised both the Kurds and the Assyrians in Article 62 of the Treaty of Sevres.[264]

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[261] Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy,* 135-136

[262] Gerold Frank, "Beirut Archbishop Refutes Moslem Claim," *Palestine Post*, March 21, 1946, 1.
[263] "Assyrians in Favor of the Establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine," *HaMashkif*, March 22, 1946, 1 (Hebrew).

[264]Concluded by a victorious Britain and France, et al, and a vanquished Ottoman Empire, the Treaty of Sevres of 1920 parceled out postwar Ottoman domains to the European powers (Britain, France, Italy) and states (Greece) and to regional peoples (Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians). It was as much abhorred by Turkish nationalists as celebrated by the Kurds and other minorities. While to the Turks, it was a diktat intended to reduce Turkish sovereignty to the Turkish heartland of Anatolia (a mere fraction of the soon-to-be-established Republic of Turkey), to the Kurds, Armenians, and, to a lesser extent, the Assyrians, it was a charter for self-rule in what is today Eastern Turkey. When Turkish nationalists under Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) mounted a military challenge to the Treaty of Sevres, which the European powers had not the will to enforce, the two sides signed a new and superseding accord, the Treaty of

As for the Kurds and the Anglo-American Commission, Badr-Khan, with alacrity, answered the Jewish Agency's request to testify, adding that, after his appearance before the commission, he would come to Jerusalem to formulate "an agreed plan of action between the Kurdish national movement and the Jewish Agency."[265] Badr-Khan's bid for a semi-official or formal entente with the Jewish Agency was not new. He had long aspired to a partnership with the Jewish Agency that rose above simple meetings with his friend Morris Fisher and other Jewish Agency personnel in Beirut. Fisher shared Badr-Khan's anxiety for an agreement or, failing that, for more serious cooperation between Kurdish nationalists and the Jewish Agency, but not many others did. By the time Badr Khan was called on to testify, to which he had readily agreed, he had grown frustrated with the Jewish Agency's inaction,[266] a feeling that would renew itself often until the Kurdish-Israeli alliance was at last accomplished in the early 1960s.

Despite Badr-Khan's promise to the Jewish Agency and his personal disposition to testify, he reversed himself after being menaced by Lebanese detectives who surrounded his home in Beirut before he was due to appear.[267] Such intimidation as inspired this about-face was known to the commissioners and even expressed in the testimony of the pro-Zionist Assyrian leader, who entreated them to "take into account the fact that every man giving faithful testimony before your commission exposes himself to danger and retribution."[268] Nor was the fear that

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Lausanne of 1923, that did not so much as mention Kurds, Armenians, and Assyrians, much less provide for their self-rule.

[265] Gelber, *Shorshe ha-ḥavatselet*, 628.

[266] Nakdimon, *Tikvah she-karsah*, 30.

[267] *Ibid.,* 29-30.

[268] "Assyrians in Favor of the Establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine," *HaMashkif*, March 22, 1946, 1 (Hebrew).

occasioned Badr Khan's reversal misplaced. After word leaked of Hellman's preparatory meetings with the Maronite witnesses-to-be, Hellman was himself arrested by the Lebanese police in Beirut and freed not long after, presumably following the intervention of well-placed Maronite friends of the Jewish Agency.[269] Although no longer willing testify, Badr-Khan nevertheless agreed to address a letter to the commissioners in support of Zionism, but though the communication was indeed sent, the tepidity of Badr-Khan's support for the Jewish position fell short of Hellman's expectations.[270]

Badr-Khan came through for the Jewish Agency in another respect. Though he himself was intimidated into reneging on his pledge to testify, an eminent Kurd in his network and one who, unlike Badr Khan, held political office, did give pro-Zionist testimony to the Anglo-American Commission. Former Syrian prime minister Husni al-Barazi, the only official in Arab government to give pro-Zionist testimony to the commission, was an ornament of a leading Kurdish landowning family from Hama. The Badr Khans' ties with the Barazis reached back into Ottoman times, and Kamuran and Husni had been associates at least since being classmates at Istanbul's Dar al-Funun on the eve of the First World War.[271] In the 1930s, Husni al-Barazi had financed *Hawar*, the influential journal of the Badr-Khans through which Jeladat, its editor and Kamuran's brother, propagated the Latinized Kurdish script he devised.[272]

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[269] Gelber, *Shorshe ha-ḥavatselet*, 628.

[270] Nakdimon, *Tikvah she-karsah*, 30.

[271] Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2018), 384.

[272] *Ibid., 385*

Thanks to Badr Khan, Barazi had been in contact with the Jewish Agency even before he testified.[273] Barazi had done the Jewish Agency an earlier service in 1946, using his good offices to renew contact between the Jewish agency, in the person of Dov (Bernard) Yosef, and Transjordan's King Abdullah.[274] In his testimony in Jerusalem before the Anglo-American Commission, al-Barazi urged the establishment of a Jewish state in the areas of Palestine where Jews predominated.[275] Although he had chosen to appear before the commission in camera, the support for Zionism that al-Barazi was to express in his testimony to the Anglo-American Commission was a continuation of, rather than a departure from, a position he had earlier espoused. He had spoken openly of the need for an accommodation between the Arabs and the Jews of Palestine, and he had facilitated the entry into Palestine, by way of Syria, of Jewish refugees from Poland (or so he claimed).[276] In another of his services to the Jewish Agency, he pressed Emir Abdullah to avow to the public his openness to an agreement that he whispered to his Zionist interlocutors.[277] He also distinguished himself as the only Syrian politician to defend both Lebanese independence (as opposed to Lebanon's absorption into Syria)[278] and, later on, the UN Partition Plan that provided for Jewish statehood.[279] It was this public defiance of Arab

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[273] Yaron Ran, *Šôrešê hā-ôpṣyā hay-yardēnît* (Tel Aviv: Citrin, 1991), 143.

[274] *Ibid.,* 141-142.

[275] See Podet, Allen H. "Husni al-Barazi on Arab Nationalism in Palestine." in *Zionism and Arabism in Palestine and Israel*, eds. Elie Kedourie and Sylvia G. Haim, (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 175-179.

[276] Yaron Ran, *Šôrešê hā-ôpṣyā hay-yardēnît,* 143.

[277] *Ibid.*

[278] Emir Farid Chehab, *A Face in the Crowd: A Selection from Emir Farid Chehab's Private Archives*, eds. Youmna Asseily and Ahmad Asfahani (London: Stacey International, 2007), 185.

[279] Sami Moubayed, *Syria and the USA: Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 123.

nationalists that marked al-Barazi out as their *bete-noire*. Typical was the view of Akram al-Hawrani, one of the twentieth century's foremost Arab nationalist personalities and al-Barazi's most bitter antagonist, in whose memoirs al-Barazi figures as "an enemy of the people...considered the number one enemy of independence."[280]

Although the brainchild of anti-Zionist British foreign minister Ernest Bevin, the Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry, appointed to canvass the problem of Jewish immigration, issued a report the central recommendation of which the British and the Arabs condemned, President Truman endorsed, and the Zionists welcomed: the entry of 100,000 Jewish displaced persons into Palestine without delay. The commission did not call for the establishment of a Jewish state, as the Kurdish, Maronite, and Assyrian witnesses had urged, as doing so would have exceeded its mandate. Still, its recommendation of the admission Jews who would have expanded Mandatory Palestine's Jewish population by a sixth, a recommendation the British government spurned, was hailed as a victory by the Zionists. The Arab reaction was quite otherwise. So outraged was Arab sentiment by the Anglo-American Commission's recommendations that its report occasioned the bombing of the American legation in Beirut in August 1946, the first ever attack against an American diplomatic post in the Middle East.[281]

Al-Barazi's testimony before the Anglo-American Commission brought the first tangible benefit to accrue from the Jewish Agency's contacts with the Kurds in general and with Badr Khan in particular. It was to be the first of many such. For his part, al-Barazi would resurface two years later at the center of a plan for a Kurdish-led government in Syria aligned with Israel, and

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[280] Akram al-Hawrani, *Mudhakkirāt* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1999), 933,

[281] Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations: 1820-2001* (PublicAffairs: New York, 2010), 190-191.

Badr Khan would again be the point of contact between the Kurds and the Jews. Nor would Badr Khan ever again be daunted into retreating from cooperation with the Zionists. After lobbying unsuccessfully for the independence of the Syrian Jazira, Badr left Lebanon, where he had been intimidated into his about-face, for the safety of Paris, making his residence in the French capital, there to remain for the rest of his life.

Differences of opinion in the Political Department

The Jewish Agency's effort, undertaken chiefly by Fisher and Hellman, to produce pro-Zionist witnesses for the Anglo-American Commission exposed divisions in the Political Department over the expediency or otherwise of relations with the Kurds. On one side stood Morris Fisher, who, ever since discovering a zeal for Zionist-Kurdish relations, never ceased to press for such an arrangement. Though not as ardent as Fisher, there were other senior officials in the Jewish Agency who also appreciated the potential of a Zionist-Kurdish entente, but in the late 1940s, their attention was disengaged from relations with minorities. One such official was Eliahu Elath, who in the 1930s and 1940s was the foremost advocate in the Jewish Agency for a Zionist-Maronite alliance. He, too, was hospitable to proposals for partnerships with the Kurds, even if the pursuit of ties with Maronites was dearer to him. But after the San Francisco Conference in 1945, Elath remained in the United States, where he served as the Jewish Agency's representative in Washington and, after Israeli statehood was proclaimed, as Israel's first ambassador to the United States.

Another of the Jewish Agency officials, besides Elath, sent to the San Francisco Conference and impressed with the promise of Zionist-Kurdish relations was Reuven Shiloah. Shiloah's interest in the Kurds does not appear to have flagged since the visit to Iraqi Kurdistan

in the early 1930s that had exerted so great an impact on him. On the contrary, on his return to Palestine in the early 1930s, he called on the Jewish Agency to follow up on his work in Iraq, only to watch in frustration as this recommendation was ignored. In his files in the Central Zionist archives there sits an unsigned, undated report on the Kurds (most probably from 1943 or 1944) in which the following is written: "That there is no immediate prospect of establishing an independent Kurdistan is no reason to neglect the Kurdish problem, nor to [judge it] unworthy of interest."[282] In the same spirit of openness to the Kurds, Shiloah, like Elath, met with Badr-Khan's representatives at the San Francisco Conference and appreciated the potential of Badr Khan as a contact. But also like Elath, following the San Francisco Conference, he was preoccupied with other matters and often away from the region.

If Morris Fisher was an unreserved advocate of a Kurdish-Zionist entente, Eliyahu Sasson was his skeptical rival. Sasson's doubts about the value of an alliance with the Kurds extended to partnerships with minorities, (notably Maronites and Druze) in general. For the whole of his fifteen-year tenure (1933-1948) as head of the Jewish Agency's Arab bureau, Sasson was unconvinced that minority alliances gave more promise than relations with neighboring Arab states. To be sure, Sasson was not averse to relations with minorities, but as an optimist about Zionism's ultimate acceptance by the region's Sunni Arab majority long after his colleagues despaired of such an eventuality, Sasson felt that the Jewish Agency's efforts would be better employed with a view to the development of relations with neighboring states. Only in the early 1950s did Sasson join the consensus and resign his hopes of a modus vivendi with the regional

[282] Untitled, undated report on the Kurds, CZA S25-22592-66

majority.[283] Sasson's principal, Moshe Sharett, was not as sanguine about the prospects for an understanding with the Arabs, but in the matter of an alliance with minorities in general and with the Kurds in particular he inclined much more heavily toward Sasson than Fisher.

Against the backdrop of the Political Department's inertia, Fisher and Badr-Khan commiserated about institutional Zionism's failure to enlarge their friendship into a partnership between their two peoples. Hellman wrote that Fisher, who "goes about with bitterness," was "as full as a pomegranate of personal complaints" about Political Department personnel.[284] Hellman was struck by the impression that Fisher's conversations with Badr-Khan reflected "only his [Fisher's] his good will, not the opinion of the Political Department."[285] Hellman further reported that Badr-Khan complained that Elath and other officials from the Political Department "always promised him 'cooperation,' but their promises never went beyond words."[286] Fisher and Badr Khan's frustration with Zionist inaction in answering Kurdish overtures would be refreshed at intervals in the 1950s, after the Political Department had been replaced by the Israeli Foreign Ministry. A later communication from Fisher illustrates his long-simmering resentment. In a bitter memorandum addressed to then Foreign Minister Golda Meir, among others, in 1958, Fisher writes, "I have the unpleasant duty of expressing yet again, as I have for many years, my regret over the neglect, on our part, of the Kurdish connection."[287]

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[283] Zvi Ben-Eliezer, "Policies of the Periphery of Israel: the Development of Israeli-Turkish Relations," March 24, 1990, ISA 4687/17-P (Hebrew)

[284] Gelber, *Shorshe ha-ḥavatselet,* 628.
[285] *Ibid.*

[286] *Ibid*.

[287] Memorandum from Morris Fisher to Golda Meir, Reuven Shiloah, et al., July 30, 1958, ISA 3749-11-3 (Hebrew)

In May 1946, Morris Fisher left Beirut after his almost five-year stint there as an intelligence official in the service of both the Free French and the Jewish Agency. Badr Khan, in turn, left Beirut a few months later. Although Badr Khan kept in contact with the Jewish Agency after Fisher's departure,[288] Zionist-Kurdish contacts in pursuit of cooperation might have come to an abrupt end had circumstances so ordered themselves as to place these two most dogged advocates of Kurdish-Zionist cooperation in the same city once again. In 1947, Morris Fisher made his home in Paris, having been sent by the Jewish Agency to serve as its representative in France. Not long after Fisher's arrival in the French capital, Badr Khan also established himself in Paris, there to take up the chair of Kurdish Language and Civilization at the École Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes (better known by its later name, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, INALCO).[289] If Badr-Khan had already achieved eminence before his move to Paris, it was after his move there that he would gain the dual distinction of the Kurds' foremost diplomat and scholar in the West.[290] Naturally, it was in this first capacity—that of being, as *The Washington Post* later described him, "a one-man traveling embassy for a country which would like to be born"—that his relations with Israel were most salient.[291] But neither were his relations with Israelis irrelevant to his function as a scholar. With the partial support of Israel,[292] Badr-Khan founded in 1948 the Kurdish Institute in Paris,[293] at which some of his

[288] Meir Zamir, "Morris Fisher, the Kurdish Connection, and the Iraqi Threat," 44.

[289] Joyce Blau. "Mémoires de l'émir Kamuran Bedir-Khan." Etudes kurdes, no. 1 (February 2000), 25.

[290] Clémence Scalbert-Yücel and Marie Le Ray, "Knowledge, ideology and power. Deconstructing Kurdish Studies," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 5 (2006), https://journals.openedition.org/ejts/777

[291] "One-Man 'Traveling Embassy' Here Seeks Aid for 120,000 Kurds of Iraq," *The Washington Post*, October 11, 1962, A24.

[292] Untitled summary of Israeli-assisted pro-Kurdish endeavor ISA in 1948 and 1949, ISA Hetz 2565/1.

students—most notably, the great Ismet Sheriff Vanly, who, at Mulla Mustafa Barzani's request, visited Israel in 1964 to deepen Kurdish-Israeli relations—joined him in fostering the Israeli-Kurdish alliance.[294]

[293] *Ibid.*

[294] See Ayoub Barzani, *Al-Haraka al-Taharruriya al-Kurdiya aa Sira'a Quwa al-Aqlimiya wa al-Dawliya, 1958-1975* (Geneva: Réalités-Orient, 2017).

CHAPTER FIVE: ZIONIST-KURDISH RELATIONS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

This chapter considers the influence of different countries on the Jewish Agency's receptivity or resistance to cooperation with the Kurds. In 1947 and 1948, when the Zionist struggle for statehood entered its most critical phase, signs of Kurdish sympathy for, and bids for cooperation with, Zionism proliferated. For Zionist officialdom, supporting or cooperating with Kurds had to be considered in the light of its potential to conduce to or militate against Zionism's existential purpose: the establishment of a Jewish state. This chapter accordingly surveys the positions of various actors, regional and international, toward Zionist-Kurdish cooperation, and the Jewish Agency's responses. If these actors did not have explicit positions toward Zionist-Kurdish cooperation—unlike Britain (which opposed it) and France (which supported it)—their postions were still deducible from their strategic interests. That all of these actors except France would have looked with disfavor on Zionist-Kurdish cooperation supplied still another reason that the Jewish Agency resisted such a partnership.

5.1 Zionist-Kurdish relations and Iranian, Turkish, and American apprehensions

But for the coincidence of Fisher's and Badr-Khan's contemporaneous appointments in Paris, Zionist-Kurdish contacts may have fallen victim to geography and come to an end, had not the friendship between these two most ardent advocates of Zionist-Kurdish cooperation been sustained by the frequent face-to-face meetings that proximity allowed. In the roughly one-year interval between Fisher's and Badr-Khan's respective departures from Beirut and their reunion in Paris, contacts between Badr-Khan and the Jewish Agency continued but slackened.[295] But the

[295] Meir Zamir, "Morris Fisher, the Kurdish Connection, and the Iraqi Threat," 44.

rejuvenation of Zionist-Kurdish relations enabled by Fisher's and Badr Khan's residence, once again, in the same city still did not mean that Zionist-Kurdish relations prospered on the eve of the First Arab-Israeli War. Rather, during this period, pressures both recommending and discouraging cooperation wrought a kind of equilibrium in which contacts were maintained but cooperation not achieved.

Throughout 1947, Zionist attention fastened on Lake Success, New York, the seat of the United Nations, on which organization Britain had announced in February it would offload responsibility for settling the Palesine question. Fresh impetus was given to the Jewish Agency's international diplomacy in May 1947, when the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was appointed to inquire into the Palestine problem and recommend a solution. Before the UN endorsed partition as the most desirable solution to the Palestine question, the Jewish Agency Executive had already accepted partition in its internal deliberations in August 1946, and the Twenty-Second Zionist Congress, in December 1946, had called for the immediate establishment of a Jewish state.[296] The most pressing business for Jewish Agency diplomacy, and more especially after UNSCOP drew up its report, was to recruit support for Jewish statehood from the individual UN member states that would soon vote on the recommendation of partition and Jewish statehood. Pursuing this ambition in the Middle East, whose Sunni Arab majority was inexorably opposed to Jewish statehood, was recognized as a fool's errand, so instead the Jewish Agency channeled its regional diplomatic efforts toward compromise with the one Sunni Arab head of state who had earlier shown himself amenable to an accommodation: Transjordan's Emir Abdullah. Thus, between the end of the Second World War and the UN's adoption of the

[296] Ruth Gavison, *The Two-State Solution: The UN Partition Resolution of Mandatory Palestine,* 13.

partition resolution, the Political Department's central ambition was reaching an understanding with Emir Abdullah based on partition.[297] To the achievement of this compromise, the head of the Political Department, Moshe Sharett, and the head of its Arab division, Eliyahu Sasson, applied themselves doggedly. The Political Department was assisted with this to no little extent by Badr Khan's friend, Husni al-Barazi, who served as an intermediary between the Political Department and Abdullah.[298] Amid this preoccupation with reaching a compromise with Abdullah, to say nothing of the other diplomatic efforts that claimed its attention, the Political Department found little time for the Kurds. Unaffected by Zionist disregard, Kurdish signs of sympathy or appeals for cooperation nevertheless continued throughout.

Iran and Turkey

Preoccupation with diplomatic goals of greater consequence was not the only factor at the time to relegate relations with the faraway Kurds to the margins of Zionist diplomacy. Turkish and Iranian sensitivities were another. In the often zero-sum dialectic that regulates international relations, friendship with one party can automatically spell enmity with another. So it was in this case regarding Israel's dichotomous relations with the Kurds and with Iran and Turkey, two countries in the region that host considerable Kurdish communities. Along with Pakistan, Turkey and Iran were the only three non-Arab UN member states in 1947 with Muslim majorities. Yet whereas the Jewish Agency had, from the first, accepted the inevitability of Pakistan's UN vote against Jewish statehood, it had not done so with Turkey or Iran. Zionist-Kurdish relations, much less cooperation, threatened to remove any reservations the two countries might have entertained about voting against Jewish statehood. The delicacy of the Kurdish question in Iran and Turkey,

[297] Gelber, *Jewish-Transjordanian Relations*, 1921-48, 2.

[298] Yaron Ran, *Šôrešê hā-ôpṣyā hay-yardēnît*, 143.

the Jewish Agency well understood, was such that Zionist cooperation with the Kurds of a third country might well clinch Tehran's or Ankara's expected "no" votes. In the end, Iran and Turkey both voted against partition, though Iran voted in favor of the UN's minority report, which all the Arab states still rejected. Iran and Turkey also recognized Israel de facto within two years of its establishment.

The United States

Nor was it only non-Arab states in the region that the Jewish Agency could ill afford to offend by cooperating with the Kurds. The Jewish Agency also worried about an adverse response from the United States to any kind of Zionist-Kurdish cooperation. American unease about the Kurds had already been excited by the Kurd's Mahabad Republic, a Soviet client state. Indeed, the Soviet-American dispute over the short-lived Kurdish state was one of the first clashes of the Cold War, and as far as the Americans were concerned, the Kurds (and not just of Iran) had arrayed themselves on the wrong side. CIA documents from the period also express American disquiet about Mulla Mustafa Barzani's flight to the Soviet Union with his partisans, the overrepresentation of Kurds in the Iraqi Communist Party, the Syrian Communist Party's leadership by Khalid Bakdash (a Damascene Kurd), and Soviet penetration of the Syrian Jazira.

American suspicions of Kurdish communism had even fallen on Kamuran Badr Khan, an avowed enemy of the ideology. Amid mounting American anxieties about the Soviet threat to Turkey, the CIA, crediting information from a spurious source, reported in 1946 that Soviet-backed Kurds affiliated with Badr Khan were poised to stage a revolution in eastern Turkey.[299] The Kurdish area of Turkey's southeast, in this scenario, was to be the staging ground

[299] "Conditions among the Kurds," CIA Intelligence Report. October 28, 1946.

for a larger communist takeover of the country, rather as Manchuria was destined to be for the Chinese communists in 1948 or the Sierra Maestra for the Cuban revolutionaries in the late 1950s. “Dr. Kamiran Badr Khan of Beirut will soon become the ‘Prince of the Kurds,’” the CIA imagined.[300] Wholly delusional though it was, this report attests to the depth of American suspicions of a supposed Kurdish instinct for communism, if even as well-known an anti-communist as Badr Khan could inspire such Bircher-esque paranoia.

If the Americans were alarmed by whom they perceived as the Kurds’ friends (the Soviets), they were similarly disquieted by whom they recognized as the Kurds’ enemies (the Kurds’ host countries). Of the four countries in the region coextensive with Kurdistan—Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria–it was only Syria that in 1947 had yet to throw in with the Americans in the Cold War. The US nevertheless remained hopeful of an American-aligned Syria, particularly because Washington sought Syrian approval for a plan to route a pipeline through Syrian territory that would convey Aramco oil from Eastern Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean. [301]Oil also informed the high value the US set on oil-rich Iraq’s alignment with the US. It was essential for Europe’s regeneration, as envisaged by the Marshall Plan, and the US was glad of the close relationship between the Iraqi and British governments. As for American relations with Iran and Turkey, the US and Iran closed ranks to force Soviet troops out of northwestern Iran and to dissolve the Azerbaijani and Kurdish client states, and the US issued the Truman Doctrine to uphold Turkish sovereignty against Soviet designs on the Dardanelles and swathes of eastern Turkey. In other words, on the eve of Jewish statehood, Washington’s Cold War alliance with the Shah’s Iran and Turkey had already taken form.

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[300] *Ibid.*

[301] Rathmell, *Secret War in the Middle East: the Covert Struggle for Syria, 1949-1961*, 18.

American support for Jewish statehood was a desideratum without which Zionist diplomacy at the UN was unlikely to be crowned with success. The consensus of the Zionist establishment since 1942 had been that it was American—and no longer British—auspices that gave the most promise of Zionism's fulfillment. As Zionist officials valued American friendship above that of any other country, any demarche that could endanger that friendship was studiously to be avoided. Collaboration with the communist Kurds, for such was their nature in American eyes, was liable to arm the State Department, the Pentagon, and the CIA—all of which opposed Jewish statehood—with yet more ammunition to deploy in their arguments against partition. Insecurity about American backing lingered even after Washington's support for Jewish statehood in the partition resolution (Resolution 181) at the UN in November 1947. Washington supported Jewish statehood on paper in November 1947, but whether Washington would support Jewish statehood on the ground in May 1948 was an open question. In the six months that elapsed between the adoption of the partition resolution and the declaration of Israeli statehood, the Americans were hesitating between support for Jewish statehood and UN trusteeship. The Jewish Agency, meanwhile, observed this American vacillation with alarm. Abba Eban, Israel's first ambassador to the United Nations, wrote that of the many countries' positions toward Jewish statehood at the UN, "it was the American attitude that was giving us most concern."[302]

5.2 France and Zionist-Kurdish relations

Brief excursus on France and the minorities of the Middle East

As we have seen, Zionist-Kurdish cooperation on the eve of Israel's declaration of statehood would have been a liability in the Jewish Agency's relations with the Turks, Iranians,

[302] Abba Eban, *Personal Witness: Israel through My Eyes* (London: Putnam, 1993), 102.

and Americans. However, on the "credit" side of a ledger tabulating the assets and liabilities of Zionist-Kurdish cooperation at the time, French support could have been entered, for the French expressly encouraged the Zionists to cooperate with the Kurds.[303] Of the two Western powers that dominated the interwar Middle East, it was the British, to be sure, who had originally sponsored Zionism by administering Palestine pursuant to the League of Nations Mandate that incorporated the Balfour Declaration. Yet it was the French, not the British, whose vision of the Middle East as a whole aligned with that of the Zionists. France had always been far more sympathetic than the British to self-government for minorities and even to minoritarian domination in the Middle East.

Much the oldest and strongest of France's ties to regional minorities was its bond since the Crusades with the Maronites of Lebanon, the Levantine community with whom the Zionists enjoyed especially close relations. France had exercised its influence to create for the Maronites, whom it looked upon with affection as "*les Français du Levant*," an autonomous Lebanese principality detached from the Ottoman Empire in 1861. In 1920, at the prompting of the Maronites and over the objections of the Levant's Sunni Arabs, the French enlarged this Lebanese mini-state—Petit Liban, as it is sometimes called—into the modern Lebanese state as we know it, Grand Liban. Modern Lebanon, in other words, was a French-sponsored Maronite initiative opposed by the regional majority, just as the British Mandate of Palestine, based as it was on the League of Nations-approved Balfour Declaration, was a British-sponsored Zionist initiative opposed by the regional majority.

[303] Meir Zamir, "Morris Fisher, the Kurdish Connection, and the Iraqi Threat," 44.

French patronage was extended to other regional minorities too. Both to exert classic imperialist *divide et impera* and to spare minorities what they perceived as Arab Muslim subjugation, the French sought to establish systems—legal in the case of the Berbers of North Africa and political/administrative in the case of Lebanon's Maronites and Syria's Druze, Alawites, and Jaziran Kurds and Christians—that expressed the distinctive identity of these ethnic and religious minorities. To the indignation of Arab nationalists, the French promulgated a separate tribalistic legal code, distinct from Islamic Sharia, for the Berbers in the French Protectorate of Morocco. Likewise incensing Arab nationalists, the French raised a local loyalist army in Syria, Troupes spéciales du Levant, recruited mostly from among Syrian minorities, and they established, on lands that would later be annexed to Syria, Druze and Alawite states and a Christian-Kurdish autonomous entity in the Jazira. Although the territory of modern Syria—much less the Levant— had never been united as an integral whole, nor ruled as a single polity, nor called "Syria," Arab nationalists pressed for the unification of the minority districts under the control of Damascus and, accordingly, bemoaned this "division" as *tamziq* ("rending") or *tajzi'a (*"fragmentation").[304]

France's empowerment of regional minorities was welcomed by those in the region who most feared Sunni Arab ascendancy in the Middle East—that is, by the Zionists and the regional minorities themselves. Each of these, however, had its own reasons for being well-disposed to this policy. Well aware that their history of colonialism in North Africa had made them suspect in Arab eyes, the French embarked on their custodianship of Syria and Lebanon after the First World War in the—indeed, accurate—expectation that the Sunni Arab majority could not but be

[304] Benjamin Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 11.

averse to its presence and its administration. The French similarly understood, by way of contrast, that regional minorities—and none more than their Maronite clients—would be more hospitable to a system that would at once allow the projection of French power in the region and serve the self-determination of friendly minorities.

Unlike the French, the optimistic Zionists had not presumed Sunni Arab hostility from the beginning. It was not until the 1930s that much, but by no means all, of Zionist officialdom awakened to the near unanimity of Sunni Arab opposition to Zionism. This dawning realization encouraged the Zionist search for partners among the region's minorities, who unaffiliated with the Palestinian Arabs by religion or ethnicity or both, were not likely to see the Arab cause as their own. That minorities did indeed prove more amenable to an understanding or even a partnership with Zionists meant that the empowerment of minorities—particularly at the expense of Sunni Arab hegemony—would be a service to Zionist interests. For their part, the regional minorities themselves, internally divided though they were, favored self-government guaranteed by the French.[305]

To the dismay of this trio (the French, the Zionists, and the regional minorities), the Second World War brought the eclipse of French power in the Middle East. After the fall of France in May 1940, the French regime in Syria and Lebanon was taken over by the by the Collaborationist regime of Vichy. Once the British, with Free French and Zionist assistance, ousted this Nazi-linked regime from Syria and Lebanon in June 1941, the British emerged as the single unchallenged hegemon in the region. Britain's rivalrous French ally (represented by the Free French under Charles de Gaulle), had now been degraded in the region from an equal to a

[305] Ajami, *The Syrian Rebellion*, 20.

junior partner. This demotion they did not accept willingly. But since it was Britain that had dislodged Vichy from the Levant in 1941, delivering Syria and Lebanon to the Free French, de Gaulle and his government-in-exile could not but yield.

Concerning Franco-British relations in the Levant, the 1940s may be evenly divided into two distinct phases. The first half of the decade saw France's relinquishment of its Levantine mandates under British duress while the second half brought a French campaign to recover its influence in the Levant and to avenge British duress. The first half of the 1940s found the British, with only the most grudging French acquiescence, presiding over the decolonization of French domains in the Levant (i.e., Lebanon and Syria). Such was the tension between the two nominal allies in this period that on two occasions Britain even threatened to enforce its demands of the French with military action. In November 1943, after the Lebanese Chamber of Deputies erased from the Lebanese constitution all the prerogatives reserved to the French mandatory authorities, the British, threatening the use of force, compelled a reluctant France to accept this act of protest and grant Lebanon independence. Then, in 1945, after the French, refusing to disband their *Troupes Speciales* (their mostly minority-manned Syrian forces), bombed Damascus, the British threatened to exact French submission by force. Far from bluffing, the British, with American endorsement, deployed tanks from Transjordan to Damascus. Only then did the French relent and concede true independence to Syria, just as they had to Lebanon in 1943, also under British duress.

Franco-Zionist Cooperation Following the Second World War

For the French and also for the Zionists and regional minorities, Britain's new primacy at France's expense was an unhappy development. In 1942, not long after compelling a public

(though unfulfilled) French assurance of Lebanon and Syria's imminent independence, Britain succeeded in pressing France in 1942 to create a unitary Syria by abolishing the independence of the Druze and Alawite states and the autonomy of the Jazira. Contrary to the wishes of the majority in them, each of the three territories were annexed to a new Syria ruled from Damascus and populated by a Sunni Arab majority.[306] Britain thereupon compelled French fulfillment of its earlier assurance, and Lebanon duly became independent in November 1943 and Syria in April 1946. It was not only or chiefly the Syrian Druze, Alawite, and Kurdish majorities who bemoaned the departure of France. For the same reason—fear of Arab nationalist domination of Syria—the Zionists in Palestine and the Maronites in Lebanon had opposed Syrian independence too.[307] The French, after all, were a like-minded counterpoise to the Arab nationalists and their influence in the Levant gave no little reassurance to anxious minorities.

Of yet greater concern to the Zionists and regional minorities was Britain's simultaneous courtship of moderate Arab nationalists. British policy in the 1940s, concludes Elie Kedourie, "assumed that the triumph of pan-Arabism was inevitable and, seeking an alliance with the inevitable, it hoped to reap the benefits of such a mighty connection." It was with such an objective in view that Britain, in the person of Antony Eden, promulgated a proposal for the inter-Arab body formed in 1945 under the name of the "Arab League." To be sure, Britain did not favor the collapse of the prevailing political order into one unitary Arab state; rather, it preferred governments, in the existing states, led by moderate Arab nationalists beholden to London and amenable to treaties that formalized British suzerainty. Among the moderate Sunni

[306] Ajami, *The Syrian Rebellion*, 20.

[307] Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 45.

Arab nationalists in the 1940s who fit this profile were Jordan's King Abdullah and such prime ministers as Egypt's Mustafa al-Nahhas, Lebanon's Riad al-Solh, Syria's Jamil Mardam, and Iraq's Nuri al-Said.

The common opposition of the French and the Zionists to British policy and its Arab beneficiaries in the 1940s induced the two to make common cause. Such cooperation was the obvious corollary of the opposition of Britain's Arab friends to the Zionists and the French. Commenting on the regional opposition that suggested a partnership to the French and the Zionists , the British ambassador to Cairo observed of the Arab states, "At present it may be said that the only aims on which all these States are united are those of getting rid of the French from Syria and of preventing the Zionist domination of Palestine."

While France was longing to avenge the British-engineered independence of Lebanon and Syria, the loss of which France still had not accepted, the Zionists were resisting Britain's enforcement of the White Paper, which foreclosed Palestine as a Jewish destination after the Second World War. If it was the Palestinian Arabs who revolted against the British in the 1930s, in the 1940s it was the Zionists' turn. But only in the latter case[308] did the French support the insurgents, albeit modestly, with funds and arms.[309] The Zionists drew additional strength from internal cooperation that factiousness had long precluded. After years of enmity, the three main paramilitary forces in the Yishuv—Lehi, the Irgun, and the Haganah–suspended their differences

[308] One might argue that the French had also abetted the insurgents in the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939 by not preventing the cross-border infiltration of rebels from French Lebanon and Syria into British Palestine. French connivance during the Arab Revolt in Palestine could be interpreted as revenge for Britain's hospitality in Jordan to anti-French Syrian insurgents during the Syrian Revolt for 1925-1927.

[309] James Barr, *A Line in the Sand : the Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East, 1914-1948* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), IX, 295-297

and formed the Hebrew Resistance Movement, in whose name they commenced a ten-month revolt against Britain in October 1945.

Meanwhile, the French and Zionists took measures—sometimes coordinated, sometimes independent—against their other common foe, the Arab nationalists Britain supported. After the Zionists concluded an ultimately abortive treaty of cooperation with the Maronite Church in May 1946, the French supported the separatist rebellion of the mercurial Syrian Alawite leader, Suleiman Murshid.[310] Despite this French backing, the Alawite uprising was put down and the Alawite region's absorption into Syria ratified by force.

The French interest in regional minorities, the Kurds among them, in the second half of 1945, only deepened after the loss of Syria.[311] France had still not reconciled itself to the sudden evaporation of its power in the region. It had also not forgiven the British their sponsorship of its downfall in the Levant. The French consequently prosecuted a regional policy animated by desperation and vengeance. They resolved to salvage their influence and, thus, to avenge Britain's decolonization by cooperating with the regional elements opposed to the new political order in the Middle East that the British had forged at its expense. But the French were apprehensive of provoking the British and alienating the Americans, the latter having supported Britain's decolonization of French holdings in the Levant. For France, sensitivity to American wishes was of the first importance since, beginning in 1947, it sought an alliance with the United

[310] Dzmitry Seuruk, *Die Muršidiyya Entstehung und innere Entwicklung einer religiösen Sondergemeinschaft in Syrien von den 1920er Jahre bis heute* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2013), 92

[311] Meir Zamir, "Morris Fisher, the Kurdish Connection, and the Iraqi Threat," 45.

States independent of Britain.[312] Deputizing a third party, however, offered a way out. And so it was to the Jewish Agency—-whose influence, interest in minorities, and and anti-British posture could be exploited in the service of their shared objectives—that the French now turned.

France, the Zionists, and the Kurds

A few months before his departure from the city in 1946, Morris Fisher met in Beirut with Paul Beynet, the French delegate-general in the Levant (i.e., the highest French representative in the region) and brokered an understanding between the French and the Jewish Agency. The arrangement they worked out called for collaborating in the United States in order to undertake diplomacy and disseminate propaganda stressing the precarious position of minorities in the Levant.[313] Not unexpectedly, the Maronites, the regional minority dearest to the French and closest to the Zionists, claimed the focus of this effort. But far from centering exclusively on the Maronites, Franco-Zionist endeavor on behalf of regional minorities ranged beyond the Maronites and beyond merely diplomacy and propaganda in the United States in support of minorities.

Given Fisher's ardent and absorbing interest in cooperation with the Kurds it could not have been otherwise than that they would figure among the regional minorities the French and Zionists agreed to support. Paul Beynet may not have been a Kurdophile like Fisher, but he too was struck by the promise of support for the Kurds. After Syrian independence was upheld by British threats in mid-1945, Beynet instructed his staff to inquire into various means of

[312] Irwin M. Wall, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945-1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 131.

[313] *Ibid.*

supporting the Kurds.[314] But just as the French, before the war, had taken care to moderate their support for the Jaziran Kurds lest they alienate Turkey, so, after the war, France sought to aid the Kurds without provoking the British and antagonizing the Americans.[315] The French well remembered their brinksmanship with the British in November 1943 and May 1945, when the British threatened, and nearly employed, the use of force against them. Besides, while the whole thrust of French policy in the latter half of the 1940s was consciously anti-British, in the final analysis, France and Britain, though rivals, were still allies. Discretion, then, was an imperative of this policy, so France conceived a clever circumvention of this hazard: to have the Jewish Agency support the Kurds.

If Fisher had already been pleased with this development of Franco-Zionist cooperation, he was postively delighted by France's interest in the Kurds. The explicit prompting of France, Fisher thought, may at last move the dithering Political Department to consent to an article of policy he had urged almost since the beginning of the decade.

But Fisher's hopes proved misplaced. As before, his advocacy in support of a deeper relationship with the Kurds snagged on the opposition of his colleague and rival, Eliyahu Sasson. Sasson, as noted, was far more ambitious of a relationship with King Abdullah of Jordan, whom he was then cultivating, than with the Kurds. Sasson, it will further be recalled, was also a general skeptic of minority alliances and resisted the investment of significant resources in their pursuit. Sasson's veto, moreover, he being head of the Arab division of the Political Department, was often decisive.

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[314] *Ibid.*

[315] Meir Zamir, "Morris Fisher, the Kurdish Connection, and the Iraqi Threat," 44.

Sasson was not the only barrier to the progress of Fisher's bid for Jewish Agency support for the Kurds. The Jewish Agency itself was not free of the dread of provoking the British and antagonizing the Americans that lay behind France's preference for vicarious rather than direct support for the Kurds. The Jewish Agency need not have worried overmuch about embittering its relations with Britain since the Yishuv—with Jewish Agency support from October 1945 to July 1946—was already in open rebellion against the British. Still, Zionist support for Kurds against Britain's tributary government in Baghdad, with which London sought a treaty, might provoke the British into an even more severe posture. The British, for their part, scarcely needed greater cause for discontent with the rebellious Zionists. In the early days of the uprising, they had even weighed dismantling the Jewish Agency by force.[316] Nevertheless, if alienating (without provoking) the already alienated British was a contingency the Zionists could accept, alienating the goodwill of the Americans, goodwill the Jewish Agency had courted determinedly, was a different and unacceptable proposition. An open entente with Soviet-aligned Kurds, or so the Americans understood them, against the Americans' principal ally would not have endeared the Jewish Agency to Washington's already unfriendly foreign policy establishment.

Zionist Support for the Kurds

In the end, to the disappointment of Fisher, the French, and Badr Khan and other Kurds, the Political Department refrained from either a partnership with, or substantial support for, the Kurds. Some modest support, however, was given. French prompting and the threat of war moved the Political Department, under the direction of Eliyahu Sasson, to give more serious regard to the Kurds and their affairs. Sasson accordingly commissioned a brief if compendious

[316] Motti Golani, *Palestine Between Politics and Terror, 1945-1947* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2013), 58.

English-language profile of the Kurdish people. The Jewish Agency also managed some concrete support for the Kurds. Despite its preoccupation with UNSCOP and the specter of war, its pinched resources, and its apprehensions of British punishment and American alienation, the Jewish Agency and, after statehood, the Israeli Foreign Ministry, assisted the Kurds by means of lobbying, diplomacy, and even academic endeavor. The reunion of Fisher and Badr Khan in Paris accelerated the tempo of Israeli activity in support of the Kurds, and there followed a number of pro-Kurdish Israeli demarches, among which were these: lobbying the UN on the Kurds behalf, assisting Badr-Khan with his pamphlet *Memorandum sur la situation des Kurdes et leurs revendications* (presented to the secretary general, as noted, on the one-year anniversary of adoption of the partition resolution), and propagandizing in the Western press in support of the Kurds.[317]

It is also more than probable that the academic center Badr Khan founded in Paris in 1948, the Centre d'Etudes Kurdes, was funded by Israeli subsidies and/or by donations raised by Morris Fisher from European Jews of substance. For this, three reasons suggest themselves: First, Badr Khan's want of fortune at this time was such that, when he was registered on Israel's payroll the following year, Israeli outlays made up the bulk of his budget.[318] "Bedir Khan set up a Kurdish study center," notes Jonathan Randal, "but was so poor that he could often not afford to print his publications and had to make do with a mimeograph machine."[319] Second, for reasons that remain to be determined, Badr-Khan drew no salary from INALCO, nor received any

[317] Untitled summary of Israeli-assisted pro-Kurdish endeavor ISA in 1948 and 1949, ISA Hetz 2565/1.

[318] Nakdimon, *Tikvah she-karsah*, 28.

[319] Jonathan C Randal, *Kurdistan: After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?*, 188.

remuneration from it, for the whole of his 22-year professorial appointment there (1948-1970).[320] Nor did Badr Khan, in some kind of romantic gesture, refuse compensation, opting instead to teach Kurdish studies simply *pro bono patriae*. A salary, it would seem, he was never even offered.[321] Third, not only was Badr Khan already being paid by the Israeli government in 1948, but after Fisher's death in 1965, it emerged that Fisher had for years supplemented the money Badr Khan received from the Mossad with annual donations of ten-thousand dollars, money he had evidently raised for Badr Khan independently.[322] In any case, however these endeavors were financed, it was in Paris where Badr Khan would emerge as the foremost Kurdish activist and academic in the West.[323]

[320] Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History*, 373.

[321] *Ibid.*

[322] Shaul Bar-Haim, director of Israel's Middle East bureau, to Walter Eytan, Israel's ambassador to France, "Purim," February 27, 1966, ISA 1507-16-3

[323] Scalbert-Yücel and Le Ray, "Knowledge, ideology and power." Although the authors pronounce Badr Khan "the main Kurdish political and academic figure in Europe," this claim holds as to the whole of the Western world.

Document from the Israel State Archives enumerating specific areas of endeavor in which the Kurdish national movement received Israeli assistance in 1948 and 1949 (ISA Hetz 2565-1)

The year 1948 showed the following activities in favour of the Kurdish cause:-

1. The presentation of a Memorandum to the United Nations Organisation by the Kurdish Delegation.

2. The publication of many articles in France, England and Switzerland.

3. The teaching of the Kurdish language in the National School of Oriental languages in Paris.

4. The creation of a Centre of Kurdish Studies.

5. The publication of a Bulletin in French and English.

6. The publication of different pamphlets in the Kurdish language and their distribution in Kurdish territories.

7. The organisation of Kurdish Youth Circles inside and outside Kurdistan.

8. Contacts with different political and scientific personalities throughout the world.

In 1949 these activities were further developed.

1. Emir Bedir-Khan went to London and to Washington to awaken the support of the English and the American Governments. The same contact was made with the French Government; These contacts are developing in a very favourable manner. It seems possible that in the near future one of these Governments will be able to bring the Kurdish question before the Assembly of the United Nations Organisation.

2. The publication of articles in favour of the Kurds took a further development and it has been possible to publish several articles even in Canada, the United States, in the Far East, in North Africa & in Italy. One can cite among other channels, the "Daily Mail", the "New York Herald Tribune", the "New York Times" and the "Central Asian Journal".

5.3 Kurdish appeals and Zionist and Israeli responses

Kurdish Signs of Sympathy and Appeals for Cooperation

In 1947, as the Zionists labored on behalf of the Kurds in the areas of public relations and diplomacy, there came no shortage of signs from Iraqi Kurdistan that some Kurdish elements were ambitious of cooperation with the Zionists. One such sign arrived courtesy of Archie Roosevelt, the American military attache in Baghdad and an Arabist. Roosevelt shared neither the Zionism of his presidential grandfather, Theodore,[324] nor the misperception of the American foreign policy establishment that most Kurds were either in sympathy or in league with the Soviets. His latter heterodoxy was a conclusion drawn from first-hand observation, for Roosevelt, notwithstanding his zealous anti-Communism, was one of only four Americans to visit the Mahabad Republic during its yearlong existence.[325] While there he gathered many sound impressions about the Kurds that he, in turn, reported to his colleagues and offered to the public.

Far from seeing the Kurds as stooge partisans of the Soviets, he quickly apprehended that the Kurdish-Soviet entente that brought about the Mahabad Republic was a partnership of convenience born of nationalist opportunism, not of communist allegiance. After two audiences with Qazi Mohammad, the president of the Mahabad Republic, he concluded that the Kurdish leader's "movement was nationalist, not communist."[326] While Mohammed did rail against the British, as any Soviet apparatchik might have, his grievances were specific to Britain's relations with the Kurds rather than the usual Soviet banalities about British capitalism and imperialism.

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[324] Theodore Roosevelt, *Letters*, ed. Elting E. Morison, Volume 8, 1372

[325] Archie Roosevelt, Jr., "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad." *Middle East Journal* 1, no. 3 (1947): 247.

[326] Archie Roosevelt, Jr., *For Lust of Knowing: Memoirs of an Intelligence Officer* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 282.

That Mohammad's preoccupations were much more Kurdish than Communisit showed itself in his commentary on France too. Of that other major European power on the side of the Iron Curtain opposite the Soviets, he "expressed a positive view," noting that it was "the French who had 'helped the Kurds' in Syria."[327]

Unhappily for Badr Khan, Fisher, and those in the Jewish Agency and in Israel thereafter such conclusions as Roosevelt circulated—"fear and even hatred of the Soviets among the Kurds is strong"[328]—did not find currency in the American foreign policy establishment. There consequently remained "the feeling in certain quarters in Washington," as observes former American intelligence officer Stephen Pelletiere, that "all Kurds were communists."[329] Zionist/Israeli support for the Kurds, then, most especially in late 1947 and early 1948, had to be considered in the light of forseeable American objections.

When it came to Zionism, as against the Kurds' suspected Communism, Roosevelt's views were much more consistent with those then reigning in the American foreign policy establishment. Yet his opposition to Zionism was far less vehement than that espoused by his more influential cousin, Kim "Kermit" Roosevelt. And it may have been this milder posture that moved him to report—apparently to the Jewish Agency or to emissaries of Mossad LeAliyah Bet—that Kurdish leaders in Baghdad told him when he served in the city in 1947 as the military attache to the American legation that "they sympathized with Zionism and with the Jews in the

[327] *Ibid.,* 278.

[328] Archie Roosevelt, Jr., "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad," 263.

[329] Stephen Pelletiere, *Oil and the Kurdish Question: How Democracies Go to War in the Era of Late Capitalism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), 18.

war in Palestine."[330] Roosevelt was not the only American military attache in the region to report on Zionist-Kurdish connections. Just a little while earlier, Roosevelt's counterpart in Beirut reported that Kurds in the Syrian Jazira "admitted having received arms and ammunition from...the Zionists."[331] However, whereas Roosevelt's reports of Kurdish expressions of sympathy for Zionism were consistent with reports filed by the Jewish Agency, the claim of Zionist arming of the Kurds of the Jazira is rather to be dismissed as baseless hearsay.

Other signs of the Kurds' sympathy for Jews or Zionism or their desire for Kurdish-Zionist cooperation were much in evidence at the time, as the Political Department was well aware. In his memoirs, the celebrated Canadian Jewish author Naim Kattan touches on the logic that informed these Kurdish sympathies in the 1940s, when he was a teenager in Baghdad. Of his teacher, he writes, he "was a Kurd who made no secret of his deep sympathy for us. As the Jews were not, like the Arabs, conducting a masked war against the Kurds, he presumed on our friendship and understanding."[332] Around the same time Kattan was taking tuition from a pro-Zionist Kurdish instructor, another Jew from Arab Iraq destined for literary celebrity, the Israeli poet Zakkai Aharon, was being feted by the headman of a Kurdish village in the north simply because he was Jewish. Having been enlisted by Mossad LeAliyah Bet in 1947 to register Iraqi Jews for immigration, Aharon made a tour of Dohuk that brought him to the outlying village of Brifka, whose agha, Sheikh Jalal al-Din Brifkani, he called on. "When he learned that I

[330] Nakdimon, *Tikvah she-karsah*, 28-29.

[331] Secret telegram from British mission in Aleppo to that in Beirut, October 25, 1946, FO195/2596

[332] Naim Kattan, *Farewell Babylon: Coming of Age in Jewish Baghdad* (London: Souvenir, 2009), 49.

was a Jew," recalled Aharon, "he gave a huge feast and told me that his ancestors had good relations with Jews and greatly respected them."[333]

With these Kurdish expressions of goodwill toward Jews or sympathy with Zionism, there also came Kurdish appeals for cooperation. Not long after Fisher and Badr-Khan's reunion in Paris in late 1947, a report from the Jewish Agency concerning the Kurds reached Fisher, the organization's representative in Paris.[334] The report relates that the Shemdin Agha, the preeminent clan in Zakho in the extreme north of Iraqi Kurdistan, had been entreating the Jewish Agency's support against the Arabs, their "common enemy," and offered to assist Zionist emissaries in Baghdad in case of need.[335] Shemdin Agha had already proven its credibility to the Jewish Agency on several counts—its assistance in the past smuggling Jews to Qamishli, its benevolent treatment of the Jews of Zakho (the "Jerusalem of Kurdistan" as local Jews called it), and its recent hospitality to Zionist emissaries for Mossad LeAliyah Bet. As if to press home the desire of some Iraqi Kurds for, at the very least, relations with Zionist officialdom, another appeal from this community soon followed. Two months after Fisher received the report of Shemdin Agha's appeals for assistance, Shmuel (Sami) Moriah, a Basrawi Jew active in Mossad LeAliyah Bet in Iraq, arrived in Palestine with a message from the country's Kurds.

Yet for all this persistence on the part of the Kurds, the Jewish Agency did not avail itself of the Iraqi Kurds' avidity for a partnership. To be sure, the Jewish Agency's attention and resources were then engaged by the First Arab-Israeli War, which had broken out at the end of November 1947. But even when modest action might have been taken with an eye to deeper

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[333] "Conversation with Poet Zakkai Aharon," [and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi] November 16, 1956, ISA 1917/11-P

[334] Letter to Morris Fisher 1947, CZA S25 6636-52

[335] *Ibid.*

relations with the Kurds, the Jewish Agency elected not to. The Kurds were such a low priority that when Shmuel Moriah returned to Iraq a few months after he had come to Palestine with a message from Iraqi Kurds, his principal mission was to reconnoiter the Iraqi military.[336] Inquiring into relations with the Kurds was an ancillary task.

The secondary significance to which the Kurds were relegated in Moriah's mission had withstood a recent effort by a Jewish Agency official never before involved with the Kurds. Having recently served as one of the Jewish Agency's three liaison officers to the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, David Horowitz met in January 1948 with Ezra Danin, the head of SHAI (the intelligence arm of the pre-state military, the Haganah), and urged an "understanding" (*havanah*) with the Kurds.[337] In the Kurds, the Jewish state "would find a sympathetic ear and a helping hand," Horowitz offered.[338] Although Danin relayed Horowitz's recommendation to Sasson, he, rather like Sasson, was not convinced of the wisdom of any significant investment in relations with the Kurds. It is of interest that Danin's hesitations about an entente with the Kurds would revive in the 1960s, when he stood alone as virtually the sole Israeli figure involved in the Israeli-Kurdish alliance of that and the following decade to entertain doubts about the alliance.[339]

Just as the addition of Horowitz's voice to the small chorus, led by Fisher, in favor of relations with the Kurds had failed to overcome the opposition and inaction of the Jewish Agency, so a dramatic display of Kurdish opposition to participating in the war against Zionism

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[336] Zamir, "Morris Fisher, the Kurdish Connection, and the Iraqi Threat," 70.

[337] Ezra Danin to Eliyahu Sasson, January 4, 1948, CZA S25/4050

[338] *Ibid.*

[339] See Ezra Danin, *Ṣiyyônî be-ḵol tenây* (Jerusalem: Qiddum, 1987), 544-548.

also proved unavailing. On January 5, 1948, the day after Danin had written Sasson to report Horowitz's call for relations with the Kurds, the Hebrew daily *Davar* ran a news item that told of a recent assembly of Kurds, convened "in a village close to the border between Syria and Iraq," that produced a statement in opposition to the war then underway in Palestine.[340] Although the Arab states would not enter the war until the morrow of Israel's declaration of independence in May 1948, the Arab League had agreed the previous year to raise and deploy a volunteer force—the "Arab Liberation Army—to assist the local Arabs in Palestine. Having spearheaded the effort, Syria was preparing to field the first contingents of volunteers in Palestine when the Kurds of the Jazira (the Syrian and Iraqi parts alike, apparently) made this show of opposition. The statement published by the assembly recalled Arab oppression of the Kurds and dismissed the war in Palestine as irrelevant to the their national aspirations. The statement was distributed to regional newspapers that, in turn, refused to publish it because, as *Davar* relates, it belied the Arab press's earlier claim that "the Kurds had gone to Palestine as volunteers to fight side by side with their Arab brothers."[341] A later confidential report by British Foreign Office Research Division confirmed the resistance of the Jaziran Kurds to participating in the Arab fight in Palestine, recounting that "an attempt by the Syrian Government to obtain Kurdish volunteers to fight in Palestine at end of 1947 was not favourably received by the Kurdish leaders."[342]

Whether this refusal owed to a want of Kurdish commitment to the Palestine question or to possible lobbying by Kamuran Badr Khan remains to be established beyond doubt. The weight

[340] "Kurds Will Not Participate in War in Palestine," *Davar*, January 5, 1948.

[341] *Ibid.*

[342] Confidential report, "The Kurdish Problem, 1946–1950," Foreign Office Research Department, FO248/1523.

of the available evidence, however, seems to tilt the scale of probability toward the former. Badr Khan had indeed commanded many levers of influence with Syrian Kurds, but intensive lobbying on his part would have been pushing against an open door, as many Syrian Kurds scarcely needed to be convinced not to do the bidding of a central government from which the greater part of them were anyhow alienated. Nowhere was this truer than in the Syrian Jazira, where the Syrian Kurds' largest community and strongest secessionist tendency had found place.

The formerly autonomous Jazira, it will be recalled, had been annexed to Syria in 1942 over the objections of its Kurdish and Christian majority, many of whom had still not resigned themselves to their subjection to Damascus. The Badr Khans were foremost among them. In 1946, while Kamuran Badr Khan was petitioning the Syrian government for autonomy for the Jazira the same government drove his brother, Jeladat, out of the Syrian Chamber of Deputies, in which he had served as a representative for the Jazira. Presumably, it was the Jazira Kurds' disaffection with Damascus and their corollary ripeness for friendship with the Zionists that had led one American observer, in particular, into error: The attache at the American legation in Beirut had falsely reported the year before that the Jazira Kurds had "admitted having received arms and ammunition from...the Zionists."[343]

Zionist-Kurdish Cooperation as a threat

If fear of alienating the Americans and provoking the British were anxieties that, along with a paucity of resources and internal opposition in the Jewish Agency, hindered the Zionists from seizing on the sympathies and initiatives of the Kurds, then the Jewish Agency momentarily

[343] Foreign Office Report, "The Syrian Kurds," June 3, 1946, FO195/2596.

deviated from the middle course it had been steering between its low-level support for Badr Khan and its studied aloofness from the Kurds in general.

In February 1948, amid ongoing British efforts in favor of the Arabs states and to the detriment of Zionist ambitions, Reuven Shiloah arrived in London on a mission in which the Kurds were unwittingly to play a role. David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, had sent Shiloah to issue a "double threat": If the British did not desist from their pro-Arab campaign against Jewish statehood, the Jewish Agency would both support a Kurdish revolt in Iraq and cooperate with the Soviet Union.[344] Conveyed to MI-6 (the British foreign intelligence service) in a meeting on February 16, 1948, Shiloah's threat was not taken lightly.[345] Acting on it would destabilize Britain's Iraqi client and, by means of Zionist-Soviet cooperation, would promote the USSR's influence in the region at Britain's expense.

Recent happenings in the region gave yet more gravity to Shiloah's threat. Just a few weeks previously the British had concluded a treaty of friendship with the Iraqi government. But when the Anglo-Iraqi treaty was announced publicly, it provoked an uprising in Baghdad that Iraqis came to call *al-Wathba* ("the leap"). Faced with this backlash, the Iraqi government reluctantly repudiated the treaty. [346] It did not escape Shiloah's interlocutors in British intelligence that the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) figured prominently in leading the uprising. Nor had British intelligence forgotten that the KDP's leader, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, was sheltering in the Soviet Union and that the ICP—like the

[344] Meir Zamir, "Intelligence and decolonization in the Middle East: A Century Since the Sykes-Picot Agreement," in *Jaamaa* 3 (2017): 179 (Hebrew).

[345] Meir Zamir, "Morris Fisher, the Kurdish Connection, and the Iraqi Threat," 45.

[346] Doran, *Pan-Arabism before Nasser,* 142.

Syrian Communist Party under the leadership of the Damascene Kurd Khalid Bakdash—had supported the UN Partition Plan out of fealty to the Soviets.[347]

Yet for all the concern it excited, Shiloah's threat was a mere bluff. While the years 1944-1949 (and more especially 1947-1949) spanned an interval of Soviet sympathy for Zionism and were, thus, an aberration in the USSR's lifetime of hostility to Jewish nationalism, there was never any real prospect of a Jewish state-to-be's becoming a Soviet ally. This, though, was precisely one of the fears of American officialdom, in its opposition to Jewish statehood.[348] The CIA even saw Soviet support for partition in 1947 and for the Mahabad Republic the previous years as springing from the same conception of a Middle East in which regional minorities empowered at the expense of Western interests.[349] Writing on the eve of Israel's declaration of statehood, the CIA reported, "

"USSR is accelerating its activities among the Kurds….Current Soviet promises that the USSR will aid separatist movements among Middle East minorities after 'settlement' of the Palestine problem are thoroughly consistent with Soviet support of partition. The formation of an independent Zionist state would provide a logical basis for separatist demands by the Kurds, the Azerbaijani [sic], and the Armenians of eastern Turkey."[350]

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[347] Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 599.

[348] Steven Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 26.

[349] "Trends in brief," CIA Report, Book IV, Weekly Summary Complete- January 9, 1948 (#80) through May 14, 1948, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-01617A001900010001-9.pdf

[350] *Ibid.*

Since American support for Jewish statehood, which was far from certain at the time, was the highest aspiration of Zionist diplomacy, the Jewish Agency well understood that such cooperation as Shiloah threatened was impracticable because it would alienate the Americans. For the same reason, the Jewish Agency would have been unwilling to support an Iraqi Kurdish rebellion against Baghdad. In American eyes, this would have appeared as Zionist support for Soviet stooges (the Iraqi Kurds) against the semi-protectorate (Iraq) of America's foremost ally (Britain). True, the Palestine question itself was a low priority for the Truman administration, but containment of the Soviets—in the Middle East and elsewhere—was of the first importance.[351] George Kennan's new doctrine had also taken on a fresh urgency in the same month Shiloah made his threat, for February 1948 was "Victorious February" for the Communists who took control of Czechoslovakia in a putsch. It did not assuage American concerns when this new Czechoslovak communist government began funneling Soviet-supplied arms to the Haganah two months later.

For his part, Shiloah knew that the Kurds of Iraq were not the Soviet Trojan horse they were thought to be by the British and, to a greater extent, the Americans. But, as noted, Sasson seems to have looked upon the Iraqi Kurds not dissimilarly from the two Western powers.[352] Bluff though it was, Shiloah's threat also posed a grave risk for the Jewish Agency. At a time when the United States was considering a retreat from its support of partition in favor of international trusteeship of Palestine instead, the Jewish Agency would scarcely have endeared itself to Washington by threatening to undermine Britain's semi-protectorate, Iraq, while

[351] Steven Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 16.

[352] Ben-Gurion, *Yoman HaMilhemah*, 913.

undergirding the United States' chief rival, the USSR. The State Department, Pentagon, CIA, and the American deputation to the UN were all already averse to Zionism, mostly for reasons concerning the Cold War, and the critical months of early 1948, when American support was needed most, was an ill moment to antagonize Washington with any measure congenial to Soviet interests.

Nor did the Jewish Agency wish to alienate Washington's ally Turkey, which it had also courted, with talk of cooperation with the foreign power Turkey most dreaded, the Soviet Union, and the internal element it most suspected, the Kurds. Turkish apprehensions were impressed on Eliahu Elath, now the head of the Jewish Agency's office in Washington, just days after Shiloah's meeting with British intelligence officials on February 16. In conversation with Turkey's delegate to the UN, Selim Sarper, Elath heard his Turkish interlocutor reiterate his anxieties about Soviet subversion in the region and its potential to embolden the Kurds to revolt.[353]

Still, for all the hazards it posed and implications it carried, Shiloah's double threat wrought no change, either in British or in Zionist behavior, as the British were undeterred and the Zionists unwilling. The British, as noted, had taken the threat seriously, but they nevertheless persisted in the policies the Jewish Agency had opposed, presumably recognizing the vacuity of Shiloah's threat.[354] If Britain's concluding a treaty with Transjordan the next month was one sign that the British were ultimately unmoved by the threat, then Shmuel Moriah's mission to Iraq around the same—a mission to which the Kurds, as noted, were peripheral–was a sign that the

[353] Eliyahu Epstein to the Jewish Agency Executive, "Conversation Held on February 25th with Mr. Selim Sarper, Chief Turkish Delegate to the U.N., Lake Success," March 1, 1948, IDF archive, Z 6/4/5

[354] Zamir, 45.

Jewish Agency was unserious about it too. To this episode, there followed, after an interval of several months, a coda. As will be seen in the next chapter, Israel later renewed Shiloah's threat of Soviet-supported Kurdish subversion in Iraq. But this time, it was through inflammatory disinformation broadcast by *Kol Israel* to Iraqi Kurds, not a direct threat in the company of British intelligence officials.

CHAPTER SIX: THE FIRST ARAB-ISRAELI WAR

This chapter looks at the salience, vis-a-vis Israel, of Syrian and Iraqi Kurds during the First-Arab Israeli War. While these hostilities were underway, Badr Khan floated two ambitious proposals to Israel providing for cooperation with Syrian Kurdish personalities. Although considered but rejected, the first proposal contemplated the overthrow of the Syrian and Lebanese governments while the second called for Israeli support for a coup by Syrian Kurdish colonel Husni al-Za'im. In the result, Za'im carried out the coup anyway, without Israeli assistance, and, once in power, made an overture to Israel for peace with Syria. It, too, was rebuffed. On the Iraqi front, Israel renewed Shiloah's threat of Israeli cooperation with the Kurds and the Soviets, but in a different form. This time Israel tried to incite Iraqi Kurds to revolt by means of false propaganda. By broadcasting radio bulletins falsely reporting the establishment of a Soviet-supported Kurdish government in Soviet Armenia, very close to the northeast extension of Greater Kurdistan, the Israelis hoped to force the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from the West Bank. But this, like the proposals for cooperation during and after the war, came to naught.

6.1 Badr Khan's proposals and wartime Syria

On May 14, 1948, on which day Britain ended its long and thankless administration of Palestine and recalled its forces from the country, the Jewish Agency Executive proclaimed Jewish statehood under the name Israel. For many Kurds in the region, the establishment of Israel, according to the Kurdish scholar Jasim Abdul Rikani, "inspired admiration and a desire to emulate the success of the Jews in the[ir] new state."[355] If there were Kurds who saw a connection between their political destiny and Israel's, there were Arabs who saw likewise. As

[355] Rikandi, "The Surprising Historical Ties between Israel and the Kurds," http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=429050&r=0

Ahmet Serdar Akturk writes, “The foundation of Israel in 1948 influenced both national politics and the perception of the Kurds in Syria as well as in other Arab countries…[and] made non-Arab minorities suspicious in the eyes of the Arab nationalists.” The view is seconded by Kurdish scholar Ayoub Barzani, an illustrious ornament of the Barzani family and a protege of Badr-Khan’s leading academic disciple Ismet Cheriff Vanly (the Syrian Kurdish scholar sent to Israel in 1964 by Mulla Mustafa Barzani). Discoursing on the Kurds and Israel’s birth, Barzani writes, “The Arab states showed their hostility to Israel and...to the rights of the Kurdish people in their homeland, and they were not slow to describe the Kurdish movements as aiming to create a ‘Second Israel.’”[356]

Naturally, Badr Khan numbered among those Kurds who saw the newly established state of Israel as a lodestar. His choice of November 29, 1948—the one-year anniversary of the UN’s adoption of the partition resolution—as the date on which to submit his famous memorandum to the UN was but one of many indications of this. To him, Israel’s establishment was a major victory in a decade in which the fortunes of regional minorities had foundered, for in his conception, the victory of one minority in the region was a victory for all. Of the implications of Israeli statehood for stateless peoples the world over, Elath explains Badr Khan’s view in his memoirs:

> “Israel is in his eyes the greatest movement in the history of nations wishing to live in dignity and with national security….It also serves as a source of inspiration, a beacon for

[356] Barzani, *Al-Haraka al-Taharruriya al-Kurdiya,* 37.

all nations whose destination is as yet unreached, to achieve their national aspirations. He said the establishment of Israel had contributed not only to the Jewish people but also to all peoples enslaved in the world [who achieve their freedom by] historical right."[357]

Well before the Jewish Agency in the 1930s had begun in earnest to seek relations with regional minorities, Badr Khan had already labored to make common cause with other small peoples in the Middle East. The Armenians, in particular, engaged his interest because they, like the Kurds, opposed Turkey and claimed part of its territory. On his arrival in Lebanon in 1927, having been driven out of Turkey, Badr Khan and his brother founded the Khoybun movement, one of whose objectives was to ally with the Armenian Dashnak party.[358] In 1942, just as his relationship with Fisher in Beirut was beginning, Badr Khan applied himself to forging ties with another regional minority who, like the Armenians, had been uprooted from Turkey during the First World War, the Assyrians.[359]

In Fisher, Badr Khan found a fellow champion of minority partnerships, and it was this shared conception that was one of the sinews of their lifelong friendship. But, as we have seen, Fisher's espousal of minority partnerships had not met with unanimous acceptance in the Political Department. During the First Arab-Israeli War, Badr Khan, again with Fisher's support, would press Israel to use its best endeavors to establish a new order in the Levant based on his vision of minority ascendancy.

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[357] Elath, *Shivat Tsiyon ṿa-'Arav,* 233.

[358] Westermann, "Kurdish Independence and Russian Expansion," 11.

[359] *Ibid.*

Not long after the entry of the surrounding Arab states into Palestine on May 15, 1948, Paris, where Fisher and Badr Khan had made their homes the previous year, became a nest in which Israeli plans for diplomacy and espionage in Arab countries were hatched. In early July 1948, Eliyahu Sasson arrived in the city to explore strategies for ending or, failing that, disrupting the war efforts of the combatant Arab states.[360] It was with this objective in view, that Sasson, whose previous opposition to Badr Khan's diplomacy had been slightly relaxed by the war, turned to Israel's principal Kurdish contact.

On July 25, 1948, Badr Khan, under instructions from Sasson, set out from Paris on a tour of the Middle East, his mission to report on happenings in Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt and to renew suspended contacts with compromise-minded Arab personalities like Transjordan's King Abdullah.[361] With both aims, Badr Khan was assisted by his old associate, the Kurdish former Syrian prime minister Husni al-Barazi, who himself had a history of service to the Jewish Agency. After distinguishing himself as the most senior politician from an Arab country to give pro-Zionist testimony to the Anglo-American Commission, Barazi undertook missions for the Haganah's intelligence service, Shai,[362] and served as a kind of courier for messages between King Abdullah and the Jewish Agency.[363] During the First Arab-Israeli War, the *Voice of Israel*'s Arabic-language broadcasts found use for him too, transmitting to the Syrian public "his

[360] Shmuel Cohen-Shani, "Peace without Illusions: Secret Israeli Diplomacy and Contacts for Peace with the Arab States, 1948-1958," *Mediniyut milḥamah, mediniyut shalom : sugyot be-toldot ha-biṭaḥon shel ha-yishuv ha-Yehudi u-medinat Yiśraʾel* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1999), 204.

[361] Shmuel Cohen-Shani, *Mivtsa' Paris: modi'in ṿe-diplomaṭyah ḥasha'it be-reshit ha-medinah* (Tel-Aviv: Ramot, 1994), 78.

[362] Meir Zamir, "Israel's Secret War to Secure Syrian Independence," *Haaretz*, June 13, 2018, https://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/.premium-MAGAZINE-1.6174439 (Hebrew)

[363] Nakdimon, *Tikvah she-karsah*, 33.

successive statements calling for an understanding [with Israel] and denouncing the Arab 'facism' that persecutes the Jews."[364] Through Barazi's intermediation, Badr Khan reopened the Jewish Agency's channel to King Abdullah, closed since the outbreak of the war, and met with the king, reporting to the Jewish Agency both Abdullah's terms and, unbeknownst to the king, Abdullah's military policy and weapons acquisitions.[365]

Also with Barazi's input, Badr Khan made a policy recommendation to the Middle East Department that answered, albeit grandiosely, Sasson's interest in disrupting or discontinuing the involvement of the surrounding Arab states in the war and fostering conditions for peace between Israel and its neighbors.[366] Badr Khan pressed Israel to overthrow the governments of Syria and Lebanon in collaboration with a cabal of Kurdish, Circassian, and Druze officers in the former and their Maronite and Druze counterparts in the latter.[367] As Badr Khan saw it, after Israel's creation, this would be another advance on the path to a new minoritarian regional order. Closer to home for him, Badr Khan also thought this new Levantine dispensation, like the recently established state of Israel, would embolden the Kurds to rise up and assert their rights.[368]

For all the overweening ambition of Badr Khan's proposal, there were reasons for Israel to give it serious regard. Nor was this merely because, if implemented, the proposal would install in power regimes friendly to Israel. Rather it was because, around the time Badr Khan floated

[364] Hawrani, *Mudhakkirāt*, 933.

[365] Nakdimon, *Tikvah she-karsah*, 30-31.

[366] Cohen-Shani, "Peace without Illusions," 205.

[367] Randall, *Kurdistan: After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?*, 187.

[368] *Ibid.*

this proposal, in the summer of 1948, there appeared not a few signs that the minority communities whose participation was necessary might be favorable to the initiative.

The Maronites of Lebanon, for their part, had overwhelmingly opposed Lebanese participation in the war against Israel. Fouad Shihab, the Maronite chief of staff and, later, Lebanon's third post-independence president, refused to commit troops to the war against Israel, [369] and, in consequence, Lebanon's participation in the war was limited to a single and minor engagement.[370]But even this was qualified, for it was claimed that no Maronite soldiers crossed the Israeli frontier to fight.[371] And as far the Maronites who lived north of this frontier were concerned, many wanted to fight, not against Israel, but for it. Throughout the war South Lebanese Maronites addressed appeals to the Israeli government pleading to enlist in the IDF. "With Israel we fight and with Israel we live or die," proclaimed a later petition from South Lebanese Maronites to the Israeli government.[372] Ever aware of Maronite sympathy, Ben-Gurion had even considere forming a Maronite battalion to serve in the IDF, though his interest in such an initiative flamed out as the war progressed.[373] The sum of all of these indications of Maronite sympathy for Israeli—to say nothing of the many concurrent signs of Maronite discontent with

[369] Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 233-234.

[370] Oren Barak, *Lebanese Army, The: A National Institution in a Divided Society* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 2009), 45.

[371] Matthew Hughes, "Lebanon's Armed Forces and the Arab-Israeli War, 1948-1949," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 2 (Winter 2005), 28.

[372] Reuven Ehrlich, *Bi-sevakh ha-Levanon: midiniyutan shel ha-tenu'ah ha-Tsiyonit ṿe-shel Medinat Yiśra'el kelape Levanon, 1918-1958* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 2000), 250.

[373] *Ibid.*, 249.

independent Lebanon's "Arabist"orientation—was that a search for Maronite conspirators to activate Badr Khan's plan would not have been difficult.

Another regional minority envisioned as conspirators in Badr Khan's plan was the Druze. It is of interest that, Sasson, to whom Badr Khan reported, heard talk ten years earlier also about a Druze-Maronite takeover of Lebanon. In a meeting with Sasson in 1938, Lebanese Druze leader Sheikh Hussein Hamada hinted at the future possibility of "a plan that would help the Jews take control of Palestine and the Maronites and Druze take control of Lebanon."[374]

In 1948, however, most of Israel's senior Druze contacts outside of Palestine were not in Lebanon but rather in Syria, home of the Middle East's largest Druze community. But Badr Khan's plan also envisioned a no less critical role for Syria's Druze in taking power in their state. The Syrian Druze were also more ripe for partnership with Israel because they, in their majority, rejected the submission to Damascus that had been their lot since 1942. Most Syrian Druze would have preferred autonomy or even annexation to Emir Abdullah's Transjordan over the status quo. The region's preeminent Druze leader of the era, Syria's Sultan al-Atrash, had sent word to the Zionist establishment that he would remain neutral in the hostilities, and he threatened to obstruct the transit of Syrian military vehicles en route to Palestine if Damascus, continued its centralizing policy in his domain, the Middle East's largest Druze stronghold, Jabal Druze. And all this is to say nothing of the alignment of Palestine Druze with Israel in the course of the 1948 war, the culmination of which was the formation in August 1948 of the largely Druze "Minorities Unit" in the IDF.

[374] Sasson, *Ba-derekh el ha-shalom*, 124.

To Badr-Khan's proposal, the Syrian Druze were in fact central. Under this vague and sanguine scheme, Israel would attack Syria near the Israeli-Syrian border, itself not far from Syria's Jabal Druze. Syrian president Shukri al-Quwatli would then deploy the bulk of its forces to the south, whereupon Husni al-Barazi would ride into Damascus, from which Syrian forces had been withdrawn, on the tanks of an unspecified minority battalion, proclaiming himself president of a new minoritarian regime thereafter. In contrast to the Syrian part of Badr Khan's proposal, the particulars of the plan for a Maronite-Druze takeover in Beirut are left undefined. David Ben-Gurion, however, seems to have filled in the contours of such a proposal with details of his own. Around the same time of Badr Khan's proposal, he confided to his diary on.. That "The weak link in the Arab coalition is Lebanon. The Muslim rule is artificial and easy to undermine. A Christian state must be established whose southern border will be the Litani. We will sign a treaty with it."

In what had, by this stage, emerged as a pattern, Fisher supported Badr Khan's proposal while Sasson rejected it, the latter unconvinced by its prospects for success. In the handful of studies in which it is dealt with, this proposal is often instanced as a precursor for two subsequent episodes involving "regime change" in Lebanon on the same general lines as Badr Khan's scheme: Ben-Gurion's suggestion to Moshe Sharett in February 1954 that Israel help install a Maronite regime in Lebanon and Begin and Sharon's attempt in September 1982 to seat a Maronite president of their choosing in Baabda Palace (Lebanon's presidential residence). To these may be added Ben-Gurion's setting regime change in Lebanon as an objective of the 1956 Suez Crisis and Yigal Allon's suggestion during the Six-Day War to establish (or, rather, reestablish) a Druze state in Jabal Druze in Southern Syria. There was also a distant echo of Badr

Khan's grandiose proposal in a suggestion Mulla Mustafa Barzani floated to the Israelis in 1974. Barzani proposed that the Israelis and the Iraqi Kurds topple the Middle East's two Baathist regimes; the Israelis would overthrow Hafez al-Assad in Damascus while the Kurds would oust Saddam Hussein (and Hassan al-Bakr) in Baghdad.[375]

Badr Khan's first proposal may have been rejected by Sasson, but he presented a second one—one less ambitious—that he hoped would not also be defeated by Sasson's skepticism. Whereas in the first scheme Husni al-Barazi was the protagonist, it was not him, but his cousin, Muhsin, who was to assume a central role in the second proposal. Despite being a Kurdish nationalist, Muhsin al-Barazi cut the figure of an ordinary high Syrian official with no special sympathy for the Kurds. He had been the minister of education in a past government, but in 1948, he was serving as an advisor to Shukri al-Quwatli, Syria's president. Under the scheme, which Badr Khan proposed to Sasson and Fisher in Paris in August 1948, the Syrian Kurdish colonel Husni al-Za'im was to oust the regime of Shukri al-Quwatli and assume the presidency himself, while Muhsin al-Barazi would be his prime minister.

Fisher was agog about the proposal. He even asked Emile Najjar, an Egyptian Jew and Israel's press attache in Paris, to relay the details of the proposal to Shiloah on Najjar's upcoming trip to Israel. Sasson, was disinclined, but he did not reject it out of hand. The proposal came to the attention of Sharett and Ben-Gurion, whom he seems to have lobbied against it, and, with their backing, he again rebuffed Badr Khan. Za'im, for his part may have been disappointed by Israel's rejection, but he was not dissuaded from his purpose. In April 1949, Husni al-Zaim, a Kurdish commander, became the author of the first coup in Syrian history, just as another

[375] Tsuri Sagui and Shaul Weber, *Milḥamotai le-tsad ha-Kurdim be-'Iraḳ ṿe-sipurim aḥerim* (Petah Tikva: Steimatsky, 2017) digital edition, 477.

Kurdish commander, Bakr Sidqi, had been the author of the first coup in Iraqi—and indeed, modern Arab—history. Za'im duly installed himself as president and Muhsin al-Barazi as his prime minister.

The parallels between Sidqi's and Za'im's regimes did not end there. Arab nationalists saw Sidqi and Za'im in much the same light, believing as they did that the two Kurdish officers were Kurdish chauvinists whose foremost ambition was to establish a Kurdish state in the countries they led. The Muslim Brotherhood, for example, explicitly accused Za'im of intriguing to establish a Kurdish state.[376] That Za'im's inner circle was made up of many Kurds and Kurdish nationalists could only have given verisimilitude to such accusations. Not only was Za'im's prime minister a Kurd with a history of support for Kurdish nationalist endeavor, but another of Badr Khan's confederates, Nuri Ibish, was also a minister in the Za'im government. Ibish was none other than the leader of the Syrian branch of Khoybun, the Kurdish nationalist organization Badr Khan had founded in Beirut.[377] In addition to serving in Za'im's government, Kurds also guarded it, for just as the Assad clan decades later would detail an Alawite praetorian to uphold its rule, so Za'im relied on a bodyguard composed exclusively of Kurds and Circassians.[378]

Still another parallel between the Sidqi and Za'im regimes was their early overtures to Zionists. Although his bid for Israeli support for the coup he eventually carried out was rejected,

[376] Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 45.

[377] *Ibid.*

[378] *Ibid.*

Za'im—who was "devoid of anti-Israel ideology,"[379] as Moshe Ma'oz describes him—sent word to Israel that he desired to conclude a peace treaty with it. The details of Israel's deliberations on Za'im's offer need not detain us here, as they are elaborated at length in several other works. It suffices here only to mention the terms of Za'im offer and Israel's response. In exchange for a full peace treaty with Damascus (with normalization to follow) and the settlement of 300,000 of the war's Palestinian Arab refugees in the Syrian Jazira, Za'im asked for part of the Sea of Galilee. For David Ben-Gurion, such a claim was a non-starter, and he rejected Za'im's overtures without hesitation.

Sasson and Sharett, however, were receptive. As we have seen, Sasson had all along been much more interested in agreements with Arab states than in cooperation with minorities. True, Za'im and Barazi were Kurds, and Kurdish solidarity was the mainstay of his regime,[380] but what was far more consequential in Sasson's eyes was that Za'im, in floating his peace proposal, spoke as the Syrian president in the name of an Arab state, not as a Kurdish leader with only Kurds behind him. It hardly mattered that the Syrian masses were not behind him; as the CIA observed, "...by deciding to deal with Israel he has discarded one obvious means of whipping up popular support." Za'im was still, popular or not, the Syrian head of state. In any case, Sasson's efforts to prevail on Ben-Gurion to reconsider his rejection were defeated by Ben-Gurion's inexorable opposition.[381]

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[379] Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking: From War to Peacemaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 24.

[380] Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 45-46.

[381] Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel*, 23.

One last parallel between the Sidqi and Za'im regime's concerns the end of the two Kurdish commanders' rule. Both Sidqi and Za'im ruled for less than a year before being overthrown in military coups and executed. Both also presided over the only regimes in their countries' histories that sought relations with Zionism. It was this lack of hostility to Zionism, moreover, that contributed both to alienating their populations and provoking their overthrow.[382]

6.2 Iraqi participation in the 1948 war and Israeli hope of a Kurdish uprising

While the Jewish Agency in 1947 had failed to provide the support to the Iraqi Kurds that they had requested and that Baghdad and its British overlord had feared, the Haganah nevertheless assumed that the Iraqi Kurds would assist the newborn Jewish state, albeit indirectly and unintentionally, in the event of a pan-Arab war against Israel. In the Haganah's calculus, the specter of a renewal of a Kurdish insurgency in Iraq was such that, in a pan-Arab war against the Jewish state, Iraq would participate either minimally or not at all. Moshe Sneh, commander of the Haganah, accordingly told the *Washington Post* in 1947 that "Iraq is engaged in a more or less permanent war with the Kurds, and the government obtained the upper hand only with the aid of British forces."[383] On the same general lines, *The New York Times* reported in December 1947, on the authority of "Jewish defense experts," that "Iraq could not spare any considerable forces for fear of revolt by the Kurds in northern Iraq."[384]

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[382] Ahmet Serdar Akturk contends that the suspicion that led to the purge of many Kurds from the Syrian armed forces in the late 1950s began years earlier, with an anti-Kurdish backlash to the rule of Za'im and Barazi. See Ahmet Serdar Akturk, *Imagining Kurdish Identity in Mandatory Syria: Finding a Nation in Exile,* Ph.D. diss.,(University of Arkansas, Fayetteville), 245.

[383] "Jewish leader scoffs at fears of Holy War," *Washington Post*, March 23, 1947, B2.

[384] Sam Pope Brewer, "Arabs and Jews Arming For a Palestine Test," *The New York Times*, December 14, 1947, E5.

Yet to the embarrassment of the received opinion of the Zionist high command,[385] Iraq not only joined the pan-Arab war the day after Israeli statehood was proclaimed, it fielded the largest of all Arab armies in Palestine,[386] its troops "among the most dangerous of all," in the appraisal of the eminent Israeli military historian Martin Van Creveld.[387] Baghdad's entry into this, the First Arab-Israeli War, in May 1948 set the pattern for Iraqi bellicosity that would enable Iraq, a half-century hence, to claim a hostility to Israel surpassing, in its intensity and longevity, that of all other nations, Libya and Iran not excluded.[388] It was answering this truculence that would be Israel's main motive in allying with the Iraqi Kurdish rebels in the 1960s and 1970s.

As we have seen, Iraq's early zeal in the fight against Zionism had been observable in the first half of the 1930s, but the first Arab-Israeli war brought further proofs of Iraq's crowning animus against Zionism. Apart from its dispatch of the largest Arab force to Palestine, Iraq was only the only major Arab combatant that did not share a border with Israel. Yet so profound was its concern with Palestine that the Iraqi government, which was seized by fear of domestic disorder throughout 1948, dared to send most of its army to Palestine.[389]

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[385] Yehoshua Bar-Arieh, *Milhemet HaAtzmaut* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1983), 46.

[386] Kenneth Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 150.

[387] Martin van Creveld, *Defending Israel: A Controversial Plan Toward Peace* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2014), 90.

[388] Unlike Jordan and Lebanon, two states that border Israel, Iraq participated in all three major Arab-Israeli wars: the First Arab-Israeli War, the Six-Day War, and the Yom Kippur/Ramadan War. What is more, Iraq, having been the only combatant in the First Arab-Israeli War not to conclude an armistice agreement with Israel, would retain its position in the rejectionist vanguard ever after, distinguishing itself from all of Israel's immediate neighbors in its persistent rejection of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. These two measures—promulgated in 1967 and 1973, respectively—were, like the armistice talks of 1949, UN efforts to end multi-state Arab-Israeli wars with a view to non-belligerency or peace.

[389] Doran, *Pan-Arabism before Nasser*, 142.

Baghdad's actions during and at the end of the war further distinguished Iraq as the most intransigent of all the Arab combatants. Bowing to popular sentiment in Iraq, Prime Minister Muzahim al-Pachachi had defied both the Arab League and the UN and rejected the second truce in the war,[390] which unlike the first, the UN Security Council ordered, threatening sanction for non-compliance.[391] Also in response to its public opinion, Baghdad emerged as the sole Arab combatant that disdained to sign an armistice agreement with Israel after the war. Prime Minister Nuri al-Said, the preeminent Iraqi leader from 1941 until the fall of the monarchy in 1958, explained that he could not expect to escape assassination if he followed the example of Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria and concluded an armistice agreement with Israel.[392] Such a fate as Said feared, however, would eventually befall him in 1958.

Iraqi Participation in the War

After shutting off the Kirkuk-to-Haifa oil pipeline and suffering some early reverses at the hands of the Haganah in the Beit She'an Valley in mid-May 1948, the Iraqi expeditionary force had contrived by month's end to install itself in the northern West Bank. Firmly in position, the entrenched and rapidly reinforced Iraqis repulsed a Jewish offensive to dislodge them and, in July, took seven West Bank villages north of Jenin. Thereafter, from July 1948 until April 1949, Baghdad's participation in the war amounted to a *sitzkrieg*, with Iraqi troops merely holding the line in the northern West Bank and skirmishing with IDF at intervals. Despite the relative quiet in their sector of the country, the entrenched Iraqis not only tied down the IDF and secured the right

[390] Henry Mack to Hector McNeil, "Iraq: Annual Review for 1949," January 17, 1950, FO 371/82403.

[391] Muhammad Khalil, *The Arab States and the Arab League: a Documentary Record* (Beirut: Khayats, 1962), 576.

[392] Yegar, *Toldot ha-maḥlaḳah ha-medinit*, 145-146.

flank of Jordan's Arab Legion, but more menacingly from the Israeli perspective, they commanded a strategic chokepoint overlooking Israel's narrow coastal plain. From their perch in the West Bank, the Iraqis could alight, advance toward Haifa, and bisect the coastal plain, effectively slicing the country in half. As such a move threatened to be fatal to the infant country, many in the Israeli military brass had come to see uprooting the Iraqis as a strategic imperative. If they could manage the eviction of the Iraqis, the Israeli generals thought, it would remove the specter of a westward thrust by the Iraqi army while enabling Israel to broaden its narrow waist and obtain a greater measure of strategic depth in the postwar regional order.

As the war advanced, the ambition and the anxiety of the Israeli generals swelled correspondingly. Many now called not just for ousting the Iraqis, but also for driving out the Jordanians, the other Arab force in the West Bank, and seizing the West Bank altogether. Even amid the armistice negotiations with Jordan the following year—Iraq having rejected any contact, much less armistice talks, with the Jewish state—many Israeli commanders had not reconciled themselves to the loss of the West Bank that a bilateral agreement would codify. As late as the eve of the armistice agreement with Jordan, the Iraqi forces still in their positions, Israeli general Yigal Allon appealed to prime minister David Ben-Gurion to authorize the conquest of the West Bank. Such an initiative, claimed Allon, reflected the position of "most of the army's senior staff."[393] The Iraqis, for their part, justly feared that, whatever the outcome of the armistice negotiations with Jordan, the withdrawal from their positions would invite an immediate Israeli, rather than a Jordanian, occupation of the territory.[394]

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[393] Benny Morris, *1948: The First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 386.

[394] Elad Ben-Dror, *Ralph Bunche and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN, 1947-1949* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 202.

Meanwhile, fears far graver than Israeli occupation of a remote formerly Iraqi-held foreign territory preyed on the Iraqi government. Much more disquieting was the prospect of upheaval in Iraq itself. Baghdad had fielded almost its entire army in Palestine, leaving the homeland almost destitute of defense amid the very real threat that subversive elements in the country—Communists, militant anti-British Arab nationalists, or, most particularly, the Kurds—might seize on the army's entanglement abroad and either rise in revolt or attempt a coup. After all, these were the very same elements that had threatened Iraq's stability just months earlier. In January 1948, after the pro-British anti-Soviet Iraqi government's announcement that it had just concluded a treaty of friendship with British, a mass uprising—known in Iraqi history as *al-Wathba* ("the leap")—seized Baghdad. Chief among the leaders of the dislocation in the Iraqi capital were two political parties with Soviet ties: the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP)—whose leader, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, was then sheltering in the Soviet Union—and the pro-Kurdish Iraqi Communist Party (ICP)—which like the Syrian Communist Party under the leadership of the Damascene Kurd Khalid Bakdash,[395] had supported the UN Partition Plan out of loyalty to the USSR.[396]

The Iraqi government was hardly the only actor to register the risk of a military deployment abroad amid the double threat of Kurdish and Soviet subversion at home. Western officials appreciated Baghdad's vulnerability too. The CIA, for one, commented on Iraq's predicament in a report from August 1948:

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[395] The United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The Strategy and Tactics of World Communism* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 18.

[396] Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 599.

> The perennial Kurdish problem is also capable of obtaining serious proportions, particularly since most of the Iraqi Army's Second Division, which normally patrols the Kurdish tribal areas, is still in Palestine and thus unavailable for police duty. The Kurds are unusually restive….Reports that Kurdish tribesmen have recently clashed with government forces in neighboring sections of Iran will not ease the minds of Iraq's political leaders.[397]

Echoing the CIA, the British Foreign Office reported in late July 1948 that "the situation there will only become dangerous if as a result of events in Palestine effective government breaks down in Baghdad or if the Russians make a serious effort to stir up trouble. We have probably most to fear from serious disorder in Baghdad, which would certainly be followed by disorders in...Kurdish tribal areas. The armed forces available to deal with any such trouble have been seriously depleted by the despatch of five battalions with supporting units to Palestine….[398]

The Israelis well understood Iraq's obvious vulnerabilities too. Yet if the British and Americans saw a threat in pro-Western Iraq's precarious position, the Israelis saw in it an opportunity. To manipulate Iraqi insecurities to best advantage, the Israelis thought to try their fortune at making the possibility of a revolt seem a certainty or, better yet, become a reality. In either event, the Iraqis would find themselves under the necessity of recalling their expeditionary force from Palestine, where it had been fixed in the northern West Bank since May 1948. The

[397] CIA Near East/Africa Branch Intelligence Summary 3 no. 30, August 3, 1948.

[398]Confidential dispatch from John Richmond of the British embassy in Baghdad to Bernard Burrows of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, July 28, 1948, FO 371/68472.

Iraqis, as noted, had no sooner secured this foothold in May 1948 than the IDF tried and failed to displace them—and that thanks, in no small degree, to the reinforcements Baghdad had sent. But now, the year drawing toward a close and the Iraqis still dug in, the Israelis would take a different tack in the hope of accomplishing the ambition that had earlier eluded them. And the timing was most opportune. Having successfully executed Operation Yoav in the Negev and Operation Hiram in the Upper Galilee, the IDF, its hands now free in the northern and southern sectors of the country, could now address itself to the liberation of the Iraqi-held "triangle" in Samaria. This, as Ben-Gurion recorded in his diary on October 30, just as Operation Hiram was winding up, should be the IDF's next order of business.[399]

It was at this time and in this light that the potential of the Iraqi Kurds appeared anew to the Israelis. While the embattled Israelis had not the resources, to say nothing of the logistical access, to meet the Iraqi Kurds' request for material help the year before, spreading disinformation to incite disturbances in Iraq suggested itself as a promising alternative. Economy alone recommended such an initiative, demanding as it did the fewest resources and the least expense, effort, and risk.

The Israeli effort that followed was, in some measure, a sequel to the threat made by Reuven Shiloah in February 1948 to cooperate with the Soviets and to support a Kurdish uprising in Iraq. This time, the Israelis formed the scheme of inciting Iraqi Kurds, by means of false radio bulletins, to rebellion. To this end, in early November 1948, two Israeli radio stations, *Kol Yisrael* and *Kol Yerushalayim*, broadcast the sham announcement that the Soviets had helped the Kurds set up a government in Yerevan, Armenia, of a Kurdish state-to-be. As the seat of this Kurdish

[399] Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies: Israel and Transjordan in the War of 1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 120.

state, the broadcasts claimed, Yerevan would serve as "the centre of the planned revolution to bring about the creation of a new Kurdish state as a Soviet Republic reaching from northwestern Iran, to eastern Turkey and northern Iraq."[400] If the Kurds were, as Eliahu Elath later wrote, "the most dangerous and explosive material for any authority, especially in times of rage and fury,"[401] it was Israel's hope that the false bulletin would be the detonator.

The poverty of Iraqi Kurdistan and other such circumstances as might have been thought adequate to intercept the Israeli disinformation from its intended Kurdish audience hardly proved obstacles at all. Although *Kol Israel's* subversive broadcast aired in Arabic—rather than in either of the region's two main Kurdish dialects, Kurmanji and Sorani—Arabic, Iraq's official language, was widely understood in the Kurdish north.[402] Nor had Kurdistan's poverty restricted ownership of radio sets and, consequently, listenership of radio broadcasts to a circle too narrow for the bulletin to be productive of its desired effect. On the contrary, the Kurds of Iraq were surprisingly "radio-conscious," as the British Foreign Office observed in 1950.[403] Not long before this—and just a few months after the subversive Israeli broadcast—another Foreign Office official had reported that a "high proportion of Kurds have access to radio sets."[404] "Every village," he wrote, "has one cafe radio, often with a loudspeaker attached to it, to which a considerable proportion of the population listens."[405]

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[400] "Kurds Plot Revolt," *The Palestine Post,* November 05, 1948, 1.

[401] Elath, *Shivat Tsiyon ṿa-'Arav*, 173.

[402] Adam Watson, International Research Department, to Bernard Burrows, head of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, "Towards a Kurdish Republic," November 1948, FO 371/68438.

[403] Untitled confidential dispatch from the British embassy in Baghdad to Geoffrey Warren Furlonge, Foreign Office, November 8, 1950, FO195/2560.

[404] *Ibid*.

[405] *Ibid.*

As for whether these radios might actually be tuned in to *Kol Israel*, the Iraqi authorities, ironically, had ensured the station a larger audience by two recent obscurantist follies. First, they imposed a ban on listening to the station, a ban easily violated without detection. Now, it being an axiom that to ban select knowledge is to stimulate interest in that very knowledge, the Iraqi authorities had most probably given *Kol Israel* a mystique and the Iraqi people a curiosity about the station that neither had hitherto had. Second, whereas the Iraqi national radio station throughout the war flattered the Arabs' performance by the exaggeration of their successes and the extenuation of their failures, *Kol Israel's* broadcasts decidedly did not.[406] Accordingly, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that some Iraqis, especially in a year in which their government's pro-British position had degraded Baghdad's domestic credibility to a new low, might even have made a dialectical turn from the Iraqi national station and its "thesis" to *Kol Israel* and the "antithesis" it presented or the "synthesis" it enabled. This is not to suggest that the Iraqis saw *Kol Israel* ("the voice of Israel") as "the voice of truth"—as Mulla Mustafa Barzani later described it to Chaim Levakov—Israel's liaison to him in the 1960s.[407] Yehuda Teggar, the Iraqi-born Mossad agent and scholar imprisoned in Baghdad from 1951 to 1960, opined that Kol Israel's listenership in Iraq was "very broad," commanding the largest radio audience in the country after the Iraqi and Egyptian national stations.[408]

In regional wars, the efficacy of radio as a weapon and disinformation its ammunition was scarcely to be doubted. This was neither the first time disinformation had been used in the

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[406] David Kazzaz, *Mother of the Pound: Memoirs on the Life and History of the Iraqi Jews* (Sepher-Hermon Press for Sephardic House: Brooklyn, 1999), 303.

[407] Chaim Levakov, *Msaper* (Yavneel: Yavneel Archive, 2004), 42.

[408] Gavriel Shtrasman, *Ba-ḥazarah min ha-gardom* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 1992), 305.

Zionist-Arab conflict nor the last time the medium on which it was broadcast, the radio, would be used in regional wars. The Jewish Agency had already employed radio disinformation as an effective expedient for undermining the Palestinian Arab insurrection of 1936-1939.[409] Even earlier in the First Arab-Israel War, Israeli intelligence and the IDF, most notably under the command of Yigal Allon, had caused mass flight of Arab from the Upper Galilee and the Hula Valley in a "whispering campaign."[410] By means of fliers and oral rumor-mongering in Arab villages, Israel had sown fear of atrocities or of an IDF juggernaut surging inexorably through villages, disinformation that had caused widespread panic and, in consequence, the flight of thousands of Arab villagers.[411] As for radio itself, it "was to become a key weapon in the Arab nationalist armoury," as Keith Somerville, an expert in radio and warfare, put it.[412]

A bogus stew though it was, the Israeli radio bulletin was made of plausible ingredients, that, in their their integrity, might well overcome the incredulity of more skeptical listeners. In the first place, Yerevan and its Caucasian environs was the nearest approach to a Kurdish center in the USSR, and Mulla Mustafa Barzani, the Iraqi Kurdish leader of widest reputation and strongest appeal, had indeed established himself there. What is more, western Armenia, where there lived a modest community of Kurds, was regarded by Kurdish nationalists as the northern extremity of Greater Kurdistan. This and the territory's contiguity to Turkish and Iranian Kurdistan would only have strengthened the stimulus to rebellion, for the removal of Kurdish

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[409] See Mahmoud Muhareb, "The Zionist Disinformation Campaign in Syria and Lebanon during the Paletinian Revolt, 1936-1939" in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2013).

[410] Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 250-251.

[411] *Ibid.*

[412] Keith Somerville, *Radio Propaganda and the Broadcasting of Hatred: Historical Development and Definitions* (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 61.

lands from Turkish, Iranian, and Iraqi yoke held out the promise both of unifying the divisions of Greater Kurdistan and, thereafter, of securing Soviet support for their annexation to the Yerevan-based Kurdish state. In Kurdish eyes, Soviet support was rather to be counted on than merely hoped for, as the USSR had already shown itself a friend of Kurdish nationalism—the Soviets having sponsored the evanescent Kurdish state, the Mahabad Republic, in Iran in 1946. The Kurds further recognized that supporting Kurdish expansionism appealed to Soviet interests because the Kurdish lands absorbed by the new state in Yerevan would enlarge the USSR's dominions at the expense of the three pro-Western states on its southern border: Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.

Little, then, did the British, for all their savviness, think the broadcast pure invention. On the contrary, so much were they shaken by it that the Foreign Office sent bulletins to its chanceries throughout the Middle East.[413] Even as practiced a surveyor of the Soviet scene as Adam Watson of the International Research Department, the legendary clandestine branch of the Foreign Office assigned to circulating anti-Communist propaganda, took alarm. Watson addressed a request for clarification to Bernard Burrows, head of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, writing, "This can be quite serious if true. Could your dept. let us have what they know, or else perhaps institute some sort of inquiry?"[414] A month later the Foreign Office answered that it was still unable to ascertain the truth or otherwise of the Israeli bulletin.[415] For

[413] Untitled memorandum from the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office to the chanceries of the British Embassies in Baghdad, Damascus, Ankara, and Tehran, November 15, 1948, FO 371/68438.

[414] Adam Watson, International Research Department, to Bernard Burrows, head of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, "Towards a Kurdish Republic," November 1948, FO 371/68438.

[415] Confidential dispatch from the chancery of the British embassy in Ankara to the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, December 6, 1948, FO 371/68438.

his part, the press counselor at the British embassy in Ankara to the Foreign Office, who had "been interested in the Kurdish question for many years," offered that while he suspected Israeli subterfuge, the report of a Soviet-sponsored Kurdish government in Yerevan "may be true."[416] Together with this self-contradictory statement, the press counselor gave what was likely the earliest commentary by an outside observer—one neither Israeli nor Kurdish—on the Israeli interest in friendship with the Kurds, remarking,"I have long suspected that the day would come when the Zionists would start playing up the Kurdish question as a stick to beat the Syrians and Iraqis with."[417]As if to vindicate this statement, the IDF's official weekly, *Bamahane*, editorialized days later, "We know that Arab "unity" in the Middle East is an artificial unity created on the backs of all manner of national and religious minorities (Christians, Kurds, Druze, Circassians, among others) who, together, constitute a force of great heft."[418] Nor was *Bamahane* the only Hebrew publication at the time to write of regional minorities in such tones. A week after the false bulletin aired, the Hebrew daily *Hed HaMizrach* opined,"We are confident that a friendly alliance and ties between us and the Kurds in Iraq may serve as an important restraining factor in order to put an end to the adventures of the Iraqi governments. A million Kurds in Iraq have the power to destabilize and dissolve the Iraqi state."[419]

Yet, as it turned out, the contingency that had excited both Israeli hopes and Iraqi anxieties never came to pass, the false Israeli bulletins having failed to provoke a Kurdish

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[416] *Ibid.*

[417] *Ibid.*

[418] Quoted in Avraham Metzer, "Who Are Our Natural Allies in the Middle East," *Kol HaAm*, December 15, 1948, 2 (Hebrew).

[419] David Sitton "Israel and the Minorities of the Middle East," *Hed HaMizrach*, November 12, 1948, 3 (Hebrew).

rebellion. Nor did any major disturbances upset Iraq's tranquility when the bulk of its army was on campaign in Palestine in 1948 and 1949. There followed further disappointments for Israel. Precisely as the Israeli general staff had feared, the wartime position of the Iraqi army in the northern West Bank had decided the postwar tenuity of the Jewish state.[420] The Israeli-Jordanian armistice Agreement delimited a West Bank border that, thanks to the fixity of the Iraqi army during the war, was alarmingly narrow near Kfar Yona (fortuitously, a village founded by Morris Fisher and named after his father),[421] making this stretch of the country especially difficult of defense.[422]

Only after the war did the Iraqis withdraw, ceding their position in Samaria to Transjordanian troops, as stipulated by the Israeli-Transjordanian Armistice Agreement.[423] Yet Iraqi apprehensions of Kurdish subversion persisted. Even in the evacuation of Iraqi troops from Palestine this fear was manifest. On the authority of one of its informants, the CIA reported that the first troops recalled to Iraq were "all Arabs and have been stationed in northern Iraq. The Kurdish troops will be among the last withdrawn from Palestine, and they are to be stationed in southern Iraq."[424]The British also noted that well into 1949 "rumours of the impending return of Mulla Mustafa al Barzani, this time assisted by Russian money and arms, were circulating," but

[420] Pesach Malovany, *Wars of Modern Babylon: A History of the Iraqi Army from 1921 to 2003* (University Press of Kentucky: Lexington, KY), xv.

[421] "Kfar Yona: City Quality, Village Comfort," *Kfar Yona*, https://kfar-yona.muni.il/אודות-הישוב/ (Hebrew)
[422] Malovany, *Wars of Modern Babylon*, xv.

[423] *Israel-Jordan Armistice Agreement,* April 3, 1949, https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook1/pages/israel-jordan%20armistice%20agreement.aspx

[424] CIA Information Report, "Withdrawal of Iraqi Troops from Palestine," March 22, 1949.

by June 1949, "the Iraqi army was out of Palestine and the Mulla Mustafa scare was over."[425] Israel would have to wait until the Six-Day War— in which the Iraqi army had, incidentally, played a small part–to rectify the borders that the Iraq army had demarcated in 1948.

6.3 Abdul Aziz Yamulki's appeal for Israeli support

Another opportunity for an Iraqi Kurdish revolt passed under Israel's notice not long after the subversive radio broadcasts had failed of their effect. But on this occasion, with the Iraqi military no longer engaged against Israel, the benefits a revolt could secure for Israel were far less considerable. After the First Arab-Israeli War, the condition of Iraqi Jewry, the most ancient of all the Jewish Diaspora's communities, had grown ever more precarious. While the lot of the Jews in Iraq's Kurdish north was a good deal better than that of the more numerous Jewish community in "Arab Iraq," but when the Kurds were not in revolt, Baghdad's writ—and, consequently, the reach of its anti-Jewish persecution—extended even to the remotest recesses of Kurdistan. And so it was that not many months after the First Arab-Israeli War, this 2,500-year-old Jewish community, downtrodden by their government and suspected by their neighbors, had come to despair of a secure future in Iraq and at last resolved to immigrate to Israel. Among the 120,000 refugees who removed themselves to Israel in 1950 and 1951, nearly the whole of Iraq's Jewish community, was one Abraham Zevideh. Zevideh had come to his new country in August 1951 not just to set up home, but also to deliver a message to the government: the Kurds of Iraq were poised to revolt, and they wanted Israeli support.[426] This, at any rate, was

[425] Henry Mack to Hector McNeil, "Iraq: Annual Review for 1949," January 17, 1950, FO 371/82403.

[426] "Summary of the Letter by Mr. Abraham Zevideh to the Foreign Ministry," November 1951, ISA 17108/35/Gal.

what the author of the message, a retired but formerly influential Iraqi colonel of Kurdish background, had tasked Zevideh with relaying.

This Kurdish colonel was none other than Abdul Azizi Yamulki, the only Kurd among the gravediggers of Bakr Sidqi's regime in 1937. It will be recalled that Yamulki and six other Iraqi officers—a cabal inscribed in the annals of Iraqi coupmaking as "the Seven"—assassinated Kurdish caudillo Bakr Sidqi and brought down the government he had propped up. Almost 15 years after toppling the regime of a fellow Kurd, the only regime in Iraqi history friendly to Zionism, Yamulki was now courting Israeli support for another act of subversion against Baghdad. The son of a Kurdish separatist close to Mahmoud Barzinji (the attempted "King of Kurdistan") and a seasoned veteran both of the Ottoman and Iraqi armies, Yamulki, a year after ousting Bakr Sidqi, was back in Baghdad's corridors of power changing the composition of another government, this time to force the resignation of Iraqi prime minister, Jamil al-Midfai.[427] Such was Yamulki's long record of subversive mischief that he was later sent into diplomatic exile in Afghanistan, where he was posted as chargé d'affaires to the Iraqi embassy in Kabul. When he made his bid in 1951 for Israeli support for the Kurdish uprising, he had been several years back in Iraq, living as a pensioner in Baghdad.

The Israel State Archives preserves Yamulki's proposal in a formerly confidential summary that passed between the Foreign Ministry and the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Arab Affairs in 1951.[428] Of Israel, Yamulki apparently asked very little, his main request a vague appeal for support merely "moral" and diplomatic, not military or financial. The framing of the

[427] Ibrahim Al-Marashi and Sammy Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces: An Analytical History* (Routledge: Oxon, 2008), 57.

[428] "Summary of the Letter by Mr. Abraham Zevideh to the Foreign Ministry," November 1951, ISA 17108/35/Gal.

proposal also shows Yamulki as rather more adept than Badr Khan in “marketing pitches” to the Israelis. Throughout his almost forty-year relationship with the Jewish Agency and the state of Israel, Badr Khan never seemed to grasp the dilemma that confronted his Jewish interlocutors when they weighed the possibility of relations with the Kurds against the probability of Turkish or Iranian displeasure. For example, just months before Yamulki’s proposal reached the Israeli government, Badr Khan had importuned to Moshe Sharett, Israel’s foreign minister, to intercede with the Shah of Iran on behalf of Iranian Kurds. Badr Khan had made his appeal, moreover, right after Israel had secured de facto Iranian recognition of Jewish statehood, a diplomatic victory accomplished by means of vigorous lobbying and, reportedly, a $400,000 bribe. Neither then nor years later did Badr Khan appreciate that Israeli meddling in Iran’s internal affairs, to say nothing of prodding one of Iran’s sorest political spots—minority discontent—would have been a grave affront to a country that Israel had taken pains not to offend.

Yamluki, in contrast, took care to stress, in a shrewd bid to forestall potential Israeli objections, that the revolt would involve only the Kurds of Iraq, not those of Turkey and Iran. The delicacy both of Tehran and Ankara’s “Kurdish problem” and of Israel’s relations with these two countries, the only two Muslim countries that had recognized the Jewish state, was obvious to him. Yamulki’s assurance was designed to appease the one particular anxiety that would haunt the Israelis in all their subsequent dealings with the Kurds: namely, the zero-sum risk that the corollary of an overture to the Kurds was an injury to Israeli-Iranian or Israeli-Turkish relations. On the eve of Israel’s alliance with the Kurds a little more than ten years later, David Ben-Gurion would give pithy expression to the balancing act that Israel had to perform in its relations with

the Kurds. While advocating the Israeli-Kurdish alliance, he counseled the Mossad to proceed "without stepping on Iranian or Turkish toes."[429]

Besides preempting the objections of the Israelis, Yamulki's proposal promised them several rewards, not least an intelligence windfall. Zevideh reported that, though retired, Yamulki boasted access to "excellent" intelligence, as he was both "in constant contact" with Iraqi intelligence officers and a friend of Shaker al-Wadi, the incumbent Iraqi defense minister, and of "most of the officers of the Iraqi general staff and the commanders of different brigades."[430] Whatever the truth of this, Zevideh's report was also overly optimistic about the prospects of the revolt's success, which he described as "assured." In another instance of overselling, the accounting of the quantity and grade of the weapons in the Kurdish rebels' armory is lavishly exaggerated, whether intentionally or mistakenly.

Yamulki's proposal did indeed stir Israeli interest. In a memorandum accompanying a summary of the proposal, Yehoshua Palmon, the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Arab Affairs, recommended that "maximal efforts ought to be made for the success of this plan."[431] To discuss the modalities of Israeli support, Yamulki proposed a meeting with an Israeli representative to be held at the Parisian home of his sister, a local doctor. Whether such a discussion took place the documentary record does not say, but if any further action was taken in the French capital, it would have been pursued by the two original dynamos behind Israeli-Kurdish cooperation, Badr Khan and Morris Fisher. In the result, Yamulki never did launch the revolt he intended, and this

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[429] Roham Alvandi, *The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 72.

[430] *Ibid.*

[431] Yehoshua Palmon, Israeli Advisor to the Prime Minister on Arab Affairs, to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, "Letter of November 15, 1951," November 21, 1951, ISA 17108/35/Gal.

revolt, like the one the Israelis had hoped to provoke in 1948, never passed from the minds of its dreamers into the hands of its intended fighters. And since the revolt was the fulcrum on which Israel's relationship with Yamulki pivoted, Yamulki's proposal lost its raison d'etre and the whole affair expired quietly.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In April 1963, Dr. Kamuran Badr Khan visited Israel, where Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Meir received him as an honored guest, showing him the special attention worthy of a visiting foreign minister from a friendly country.[432] Three months later, Iraqi Kurdish rebels, engaged against Baghdad since 1961, took receipt of the first of many consignments to come of Israeli munitions.[433] A milestone in Israeli-Kurdish relations though this was, Morris Fisher, for one, was still unimpressed. With no little displeasure, he observed that though Israel had indeed begun sending arms to Kurdistan, it had yet to send Israelis there. Subsequent shipments of weaponry would not mollify him either, and the end of November 1964 found him complaining,[434] just as he had for most of his career, of Zionist/Israeli neglect of the "Kurdish connection."[435]

Yet not many weeks later, the relationship Fisher had cultivated for more than twenty years would ripen into something like a formal alliance. It was then that there came another breakthrough in Israeli-Kurdish relations, when the first of many Israeli trainers and advisers arrived in Iraqi Kurdistan to set up camp and establish a Mossad station. An Israeli field hospital, staffed by Israeli doctors and nurses who tended Kurdish patients, was soon to follow. These two installations—the Mossad station and the field hospital, a union of the strategic and the sentimental that ever characterized Israel's conception of the Kurds—would remain in Iraqi

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[432] Eliezer Tsafrir, *Ana Kurdi: 75 shanot Mula Mutsṭafah ṿe-'od 4000: roman milḥamah u-miluṭ be-Kurdisṭan* (Or Yehudah: Hed Arzi, 1999), 85. Tsafrir was the head of the last Mossad station in Iraqi Kurdistan (1974-1975).

[433] Meir Ezri, *Mi va-khem mi-kol 'amo* (Or Yehudah: Hed Arzi, 2001), 252.

[434] Nakdimon, *Tikvah she-karsah*, 94.

[435] Memorandum from Morris Fisher to Golda Meir, Reuven Shiloah, et al., July 30, 1958, ISA 3749-11-3 (Hebrew)

Kurdistan until they were dismantled, perforce, in 1975.[436] For his part, Morris Fisher, the Belgian Jew who had exerted himself more than any other Israeli to lay the foundation of this alliance, died in August 1965, just as the ambition that had spanned nearly his whole career in the service of Zionism, was at last being carried into operation. As if to dramatize the concurrence of his life's end and his dream's beginning, it, too, was in August 1965 that Israeli paratroopers launched a training course for their Kurdish "cadets," a course that would turn out many battle-ready Kurdish rebels. [437]

After he was bereaved of Fisher, his good friend of twenty-plus years, Kamuran Badr Khan, the other half of the original Kurdish-Zionist connection, kept in close contact with his Israeli interlocutors, carrying on with the work that made the Israelis see him as "indispensable" and a "true asset." From his base in Paris, he agitated in support of the Kurdish rebellion while undertaking the scholarship and activism that entitled him to preeminence among Kurdish academics and quasi-diplomats in the West. Mulla Mustafa Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish rebellion whom the Israelis had made an honorary general in the Israel Defense Forces, reportedly even offered Badr Khan the position of vice-president of Iraq in 1970, when Barzani and Baghdad struck a compromise, abortive though it proved, that reserved this position for a Kurd.[438] When Badr Khan died 13 years after Fisher, in 1978, the Israeli-Kurdish alliance had been three years over, having been brought to an abrupt end by the Shah of Iran, the only person who could allow or refuse Israeli access to the landlocked Iraqi Kurds. Despite this unhappy

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[436] Eliezer Tsafrir, "Rediscovering the Kurds," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 9, no. 3 (2015), 454.

[437] Samuel Segev, *Meshulash ha-Irani* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Ma'ariv, 1981), 215.

[438] Salim Meriç, "Beyaz Kürtlerin gizli iktidarı," *Odatv,* July 15, 2012, https://odatv.com/beyaz-kurtlerin-gizli-iktidari-1507121200.html (Turkish)

terminus, Badr Khan had nevertheless lived to witness the entire history unfold of the alliance that he and Fisher had labored so devotedly to bring about.

As we have seen, this alliance was long in coming, and the path along which the early contacts between Zionists/Israelis and Kurds proceeded was far from straight. Nor was the advance along this path steady. In the preceding three decades, contacts between the two peoples were so many unrequited overtures, dud proposals for cooperation, and stillborn bids for an alliance. Irregular in occurrence and anticlimactic in outcome, these contacts mostly led to dead ends. Nevertheless, between the Israeli-Kurdish alliance and its decades of antecedents, there ran a single connecting path, and after two decades of friendship, failure, and frustration, Fisher and Badr Khan had at last succeeded in accomplishing an alliance between their two peoples.

As we have also seen, the path Fisher and Badr Khan followed these many years had been crowded with obstacles preventing Israeli-Kurdish cooperation. Yet by the time the Israelis and Iraqi Kurds at last commenced their partnership in the 1960s, these obstacles had been cleared, one by one. Both to look back at the path along which these obstacles lay and to look forward, albeit glancingly, at their removal, it is worthwhile here to take a retrospective gaze at the history we have already seen and a prospective glimpse at what we have not.

To begin with, one major obstacle to Zionist-Kurdish cooperation had been the doubt, of which Eliyahu Sasson was the main exponent in this narrative, that Zionist diplomacy with the Kurds held enough promise to justify its pursuit. To the likes of Sasson, the Kurds did not especially commend themselves to the Zionists as partners, as they were remote, inaccessible, and stateless, subject to the rule of unfriendly host governments; by Sasson, it was thought that, with the regional majority, compromise was still possible, and among regional minorities, the

Maronites and Druze were preferable. But the isolation and ostracism that became Israel's lot in its early years of statehood disabused Sasson--who had been somewhat hopeful of Israel's ultimate acceptance in the region--of his optimism. Sasson had come to despair of diplomacy with the Arab states in the early 1950s, after the assassination of Jordan's Emir Abdullah, the Arab head of state he had cultivated for years and had sought an accommodation with.[439] As the decade advanced and as Arab nationalism flowered into full bloom, regional anti-Zionism became so potent a force as to convert any expectation of an agreement with an Arab state, in the existing regional order, from a hope into a chimera.

Meanwhile, just before Arab nationalism rose to the summit of its success in 1958—the pan-Arab *annus mirabilus* in which Egypt and Syria disappeared into the United Arab Republic, the Baghdad Pact-bound Iraqi monarchy fell, and the pro-Western governments of Lebanon and Jordan tottered—the idea of forming Zionist partnerships with non-Arab and/or non-Muslim elements in the Middle East became official Israeli policy. A once vague principle of Jewish Agency diplomacy was now an articulate doctrine of Israeli foreign policy. To Reuven Shiloah the first credit for this was due. Shiloah's career in espionage had begun in the early 1930s, when the Jewish Agency sent him, then in his early twenties, to Iraq, where he opened contacts with the Kurds. Just before his death in 1959 cut short his career, Shiloah, who had been the first director of the Mossad, had succeeded in raising an idea, an idea that likely first struck him while in Iraqi Kurdistan, to the level of official policy.

Before this idea became a "doctrine," it had inspired Zionist diplomacy with regional minorities since the early 1930s. Nor was Shiloah the only one linked to the Jewish Agency who

[439] Zvi Ben-Eliezer, "Policies of the Periphery of Israel: the Development of Israeli-Turkish Relations," March 24, 1990, ISA 4687/17-P (Hebrew)

supported it, never mind if he was among its most persistent proponents. Badr Khan and Fisher's advocacy of an "alliance of minorities" was conceived in the same spirit as this, one of the twin tenets of Israel's Periphery Doctrine (the other being the policy of collaborating with the non-Arab anti-Nasserist states on the region's "periphery"--i.e., Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia). In the appraisal of Ayoub Barzani, both Badr Khan's and Mulla Mustafa Barzani's initiatives in the service of closer relations with Israel were "wholly consistent with the 'Periphery Alliance' formulated by Ben-Gurion and a number of his advisors [i.e., Shiloah]."[440]

In constrast to these champions of Zionist-Kurdish relations, throughout the era of the British Mandate of Palestine, some in the Political Department, Eliyahu Sasson, most particularly, had reservations about such a strategy. After Israeli statehood, however, things changed. No longer was it tenable to claim that Israel would do better to direct its diplomatic efforts toward peace with Arab governments in preference to cooperation with regional minorities. To be sure, doubts may have remained about the viability of such partnerships, but it could not any longer be maintained that the pursuit of cooperation with regional minorities was a diversion from diplomacy with receptive Arab governments.

For this, the reason was plain enough: There were no receptive Arab governments. Having tried without success to accomplish Israel's destruction in the war of 1948, the Arab world had applied itself to isolating Israel, erecting around it a wall of isolation built with such tools as boycotts, blockades, and diplomatic pressure. Yet far from being impregnable, this was a wall of many cracks. And it was one of these cracks in particular--the discontent of many of the

[440] Barzani, *Al-Haraka al-Taharruriya al-Kurdiya*, 48.

Arab world's ethnic and religious minorities--that gave the Arabs alarm and the Israelis an opening.

If Fisher's advocacy of relations with such minorities as the Kurds was regularly defeated by Sasson's reluctance or opposition in the 1940s, the promulgation of the Periphery Doctrine in the next decade brought a belated victory for him, Israel's most energetic advocate of relations with the Kurds. The sense of regional isolation that had closed in on Israel had so deepened that when the Israeli-Kurdish alliance was at last formed in the 1960s (in line with the Periphery Doctrine), there remained almost no opposition whatsoever in Israeli officialdom, whether in the Foreign Ministry, the Mossad, or Aman (Israel's military intelligence organization).

Concerns that cooperation with the Kurds could alienate the goodwill of Iran and Turkey had also relaxed by the time of the Israeli-Kurdish alliance in the 1960s. Turkey, for its part, was scarcely less averse to Israeli relations with the Kurds, fearing as it did any aggrandizement of Kurdish power in the region, but the Iranian position differed slightly in the 1960s. Although it shared Turkey's opposition to Israeli-Kurdish relations—and for the same reason—Iran was prepared to suspend its opposition for an interval when expediency recommended it. The fall of the Iraqi monarchy brought such an occasion. Until 1958, when the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown, Iran had enjoyed amicable relations with its two neighbors, Turkey and Iran, that hosted large Kurdish communities, arrayed as they all were on the American side of the Cold War ramparts. Relations between Iran and Iraq's new republican regime, however, were quite otherwise. In parallel with this deterioration of Iraqi-Iranian relations, Egypt severed relations with Iran and disagreements over Kurdish rights parted the new Iraqi regime and Mulla Mustafa Barzani, whom Baghdad had welcomed back from exile after the overthrow of the monarchy. In

1961, Barzani, impatient of a compromise with Baghdad, launched a rebellion. The Shah, meanwhile, found it expedient to exploit the Kurds as a lever against Iraq and, despite his suspicion of the Kurds in general and his distaste for Barzani in particular, became a patron of the 14-year Kurdish rebellion against Baghdad.

As for the Turkish view of Israeli involvement with the Iraqi Kurds, Ankara may not have liked Israeli support for a Kurdish rebellion perilously close to its southern border, but ironically, Turkish apprehensions on this score served Israeli interests. Far from driving Turkey away from Israel, anxiety over Israel's relations with the Iraqi Kurds drew Ankara closer to Israel, the better for Turkey to observe Israeli-Kurdish ties up close.[441]

As with Iran and Turkey, the obstacle posed by American opposition to Zionist cooperation with the Kurds, whom Washington had long suspected of Soviet partisanship, had also become surmountable. Such was the fragility of American support for the partition of Palestine in 1947 and for the recognition of Israeli statehood in 1948 that the Jewish Agency then looked with disfavor on any measure that risked American displeasure. It was the misfortune of the Zionists' Kurdish suitors that when Kurdish appeals for cooperation were most numerous--in 1947 and 1948--American support for Zionism was most needed. It hardly need be said that, for the Zionists, the choice between cooperation with a stateless minority and the support of a superpower was no thorny decision or major quandary.

Although the American perception of the Kurds as an element rotten with communist sympathies or allegiances would not change completely until the late 1960s, the Zionist movement, having received American backing at a critical moment in its fortunes (in 1947 and

[441] Turan Yavuz, *Amerika'nın Kürt karti* (Istanbul: Otopsi yayınları, 2003), 43.

1948), did not act as gingerly toward American sensitivities thereafter, once statehood had transformed the Jewish Agency into the Israeli government. In the coming years, the stakes much lower and the prospect of Jewish statehood itself no longer hanging in the balance, Israel would defy the Americans with measures Washington found far more objectionable than cooperation with the Kurds, suspected communists or not. To take just two examples, in 1956, Israel much incensed the Eisenhower administration with its role in the Suez Crisis, and in 1963, it antagonized the Kennedy administration by stonewalling Washington about its fledgling nuclear program. Gone was the special delicacy with which Israeli calibrated its actions in the late 1940s out of fear of American disfavor.

Another reason Zionist reluctance toward cooperation with the Kurds in the 1940s gave way to Israeli acceptance of it in the 1960s was that Washington could no longer claim in the 1960s that the Iraqi Kurds, with whom Israel was then allied, were the Soviet stooges they were believed to be in the late 1940s. After all, for the better part of the Kurdish rebellion against the Iraqi government (1961-1975), it was to Baghdad, not to Iraqi Kurdistan, that the USSR had extended its assistance, even to the point of dispatching Soviet bombers to assist in suppressing the insurgency. True though it was that the Soviets may have made possible the only Kurdish state in history, the short-lived Mahabad Republic in 1946, but less than two decades later, they were working against Kurdish self-rule, as Washington was well aware.

And so, it was only at this point, in the early 1960s, that these earlier obstacles fell away and the geopolitical stars in the region aligned to enable strategic cooperation between Israel and the Kurds of Iraq. Nevertheless, the removal of some of these obstacles to Zionist/Israeli-Kurdish cooperation was to prove fleeting-- and none more than that posed by Iran. To Israeli-Kurdish

relations the change in the Iranian posture from opposition to assent could not but be temporary. Iran's longstanding suspicions of Kurdish separatism and communism were such as to make any deviation from Tehran's anti-Kurdish line a brief and opportunistic swerve, not a long-term change of course.

The Iranians held the only key that could unlock the door for the Israelis to any part of Greater Kurdistan and now that it was momentarily to their interest, they would turn the key, admitting entrance to the Israelis and commencing the formal alliance between the Israelis and the Iraqi Kurds. "The chief difficulty, of course, was complete dependence on the goodwill of the Iranians," Meir Amit, the Mossad director intimately involved in the Israeli-Kurdish alliance, would later write. This difficulty was revealed to the Israelis in all its immutability in March 1975, when Iran suddenly entered into a peace treaty with Baghdad, the Algiers Accord, whereby the Shah was obliged to withdraw his support for the Iraqi Kurdish rebels. At a stroke, the agreement converted the Kurds from an Iranian asset in fighting Iraq to an Iranian liability in keeping peace with Iraq. The Shah thereupon jettisoned the Kurds, permitting Saddam Hussein to punish their rebellion with such brutalities as would make his name a byword for cruelty. As for the relations between the Israelis and the Kurds, the Shah slammed the door to Iraqi Kurdistan to the Israelis and threw away the key. And with that, the Iranian monarch brought Israeli-Kurdish relations to an end that was as abrupt as their decades-long evolution had been gradual.

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