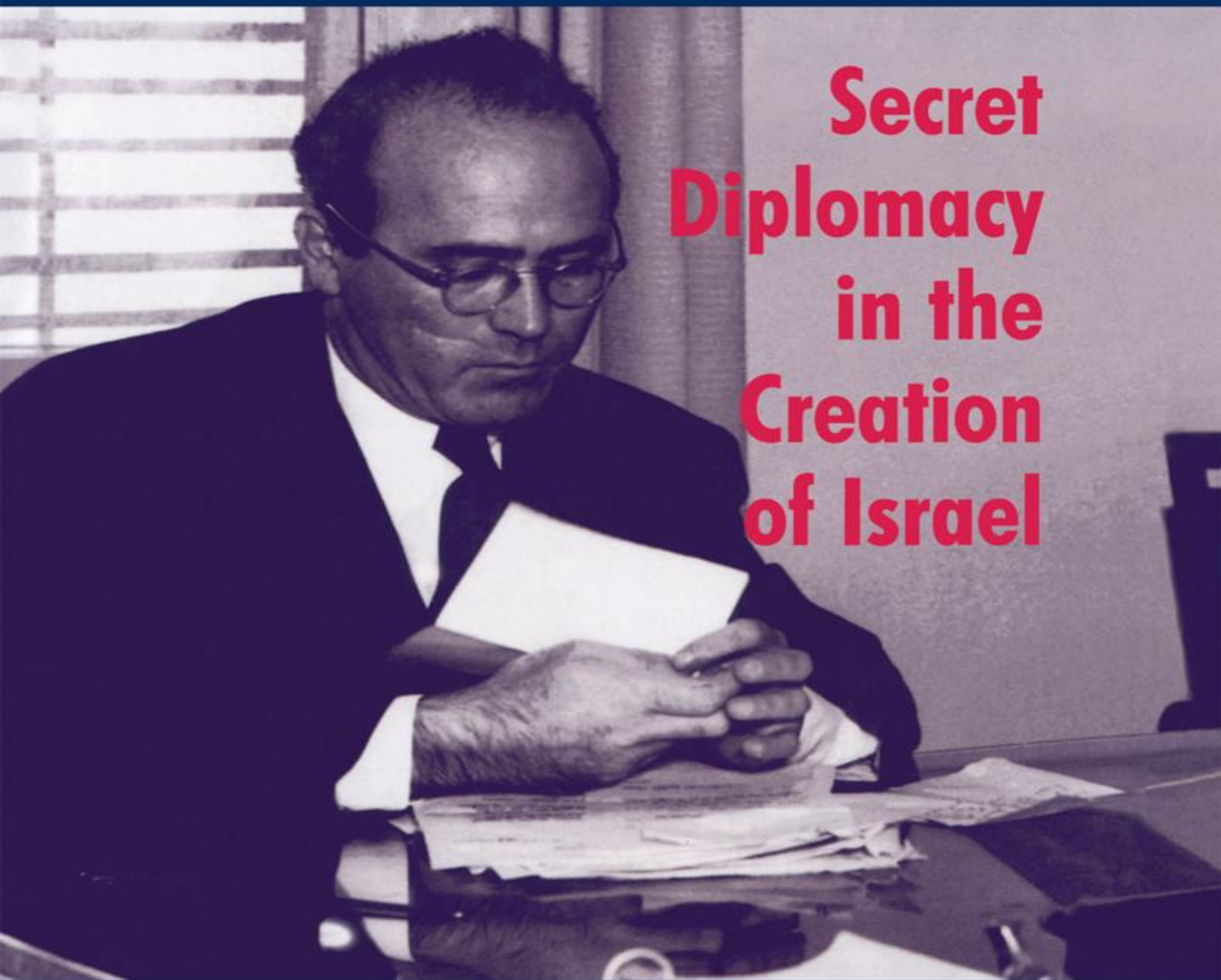


REUVEN SHILOAH

The Man Behind the Mossad



**Secret
Diplomacy
in the
Creation
of Israel**

HAGGAI ESHED

Forewords by

Shimon Peres and Haim Herzog

REUVEN SHILOAH – THE MAN BEHIND THE MOSSAD

Secret Diplomacy in the Creation of Israel

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The Man Behind the Mossad
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To My Mother

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Foreword to the English Edition

The Israeli intelligence service is known throughout the world as 'The Mossad'. Reuven Shiloah was among the founders of the Mossad, an organization that has earned itself international renown over the years. The word *mossad* means 'institution', and one could say of its founder – Reuven Shiloah – that he was an institution unto himself.

He was one of those rare people that are found in some national governments around the world who deal in the most sensitive aspects of statehood without a clearly defined brief. Trying to define a man like Shiloah in conventional administrative terms is an exercise in futility. Untrammelled as the wind, these people are oblivious to hierarchies or regulations, and create a climate of their own that knows no borders, sometimes toppling trees on the way, while at other times bringing restoration and renewal.

Reuven was possessed of a special grace – he knew how to listen and how to make others listen to him. Whatever he heard he absorbed and processed with amazing speed, and what he wanted others to hear he said softly, forcing his interlocutors to focus their entire being on what he was saying.

An embodiment of the saying 'still waters run deep', it is perhaps no coincidence that he chose to be called by the Hebrew name 'Shiloah' the name of a quiet stream that flows near the Old City of Jerusalem, which in Biblical times supplied water through an underground channel to the residents of the city.

And he ran deep indeed. His knowledge of the Arab world, of the Middle East, of events in Washington and the capitals of Europe was unparalleled. Everyone, from all walks of Israeli political life, listened to him, particularly David Ben-Gurion, founder of the State of Israel and its Prime Minister for fifteen years, and Ben-Gurion's rival, Moshe Sharett, who trusted Reuven Shiloah implicitly, never once doubting either his loyalty or his expertise.

Reuven was the main source of classified information for the state, but in contrast to the typical Mossad operative, he was also an endless source of new and strikingly original ideas.

It was he who developed the concept of the 'Periphery' – creating ties between Israel and the countries beyond the immediate circle of hostile neighbors (the Arab countries along Israel's borders – Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and indeed all the Arab countries – refused in his time to recognize the State of Israel and boycotted it), countries like Turkey, Iran, Ethiopia, Sudan and ultimately some African nations as well.

He harnessed his considerable intellectual energies to the implementation of these ideas, bringing about Ben-Gurion's personal involvement in meetings with political leaders from these countries to try to establish the effectiveness of this peripheral alliance. This was a groundbreaking idea, but, as is the case with many innovations, it is not only the groundbreaking that determines their fate, but also the construction on the site. In time it transpired that it was difficult to maintain this process over the long term.

Another idea Reuven Shiloah developed was the possibility of Israel's integration into NATO. We thought that this would deter the Arabs from attacking us, and it is quite possible that

if we had been accepted into the European defense organization we might have been spared three bloody wars. David Ben-Gurion asked Reuven Shiloah and myself to crisscross the NATO nations and discuss this possibility with their leaders, and so we did. Most of the NATO member nations agreed, but membership in the organization required unanimous approval by all members, and the Scandinavian countries at that time were opposed to any expansion of NATO, thus bringing Reuven's initiative to an end.

Reuven Shiloah invested a great deal of time and energy in forging ties between diplomatic and security circles in Israel and the United States, in order to ensure Israel's qualitative edge in the face of the Arabs' overwhelming quantitative superiority. But most important of all, Reuven Shiloah never relented or took no for an answer in his unceasing efforts to open doors to ensure support for Israel, or to exploit even the most minute cracks in the wall of Arab hostility. These efforts were made in the dark, but the openings he created remained as open invitations, waiting for the day when it would be possible to widen them and break through to new diplomatic vistas.

Haggai Eshed – a superb journalist, in fact one of the best and most conscientious publicists Israel has known – attempted in this book to paint a portrait of Reuven Shiloah, to depict his unique personality and extraordinary achievements. As a close personal friend, I know how much thought, talent and emotion Haggai invested in this book.

This book, therefore, is the fruit of a unique combination of the interest and curiosity of an important writer, and the history of a statesman of rare quality.

It is this combination that renders the book a most impressive document with a clear message for the future.

Shimon Peres
Tel Aviv
15 Tevet 5757
25 December 1996

Foreword to the Hebrew Edition

The chronicles of nations are replete with names of great leaders, those men and women who peopled the highest political, diplomatic, military and economic echelons of their country – the policy-makers who stood at the crossroads of vital national issues in times of peace and growth, crisis and war.

Very little, if anything at all, is ever written about the faceless people, those anonymous soldiers who toil behind the scenes in the shadow of their leaders. Yet these unknown men and women very often have a profound and far-reaching influence on the people and the countries they serve. It is they who, far from the limelight, plod through dreary staff work, developing concepts, plans and ideas, working tirelessly to process details, prepare documents, tie up loose ends – in short, do all the complex, unsung groundwork that is necessary for the smooth functioning of government, politics and diplomacy. They are the sword-bearers who make it possible for national leaderships to take action and implement their policies.

One of the most prominent, gifted and highly qualified of these ‘unknown soldiers’ in Israel, who labored in the years immediately preceding the establishment of the State of Israel and the first years of statehood, was Reuven Shiloah. He was a savvy, intelligent and creative man, brimming with ideas, and totally, selflessly dedicated to his work and mission: a man who sought neither glory nor recognition, and always put devotion to duty above the demands of his own personal and family life. His life – everything he had to give – was devoted to the nation and its problems, struggles and needs.

Reuven Shiloah grew up in a religious neighborhood of Jerusalem, and was raised on the wisdom of the Jewish sages, as well as on the fundamentals of Arab culture. In the early 1930s, combining his desire for higher education with a mission of national importance, he went to work with the Jewish community in Iraq. Upon his return, he immediately immersed himself in a variety of political, diplomatic, social and intelligence activities in the service of the ‘state-in-the-making’.

His duties as confidential advisor to David Ben-Gurion, and as liaison between the Jewish Agency and the British Mandate, prepared him for some of his later duties, such as recruiting Jewish volunteers for the British Army in the Second World War, training and sending volunteer paratroopers behind German lines in occupied Europe and preparing for guerrilla warfare in case of a German invasion of Palestine.

When the State of Israel came into being, Shiloah helped lay the foundations for the fledgling Israeli intelligence community, and was the first Chairman of the Committee of Heads of Services. As advisor to Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett, he was a senior member of the Israeli delegation to the UN-brokered Arab-Israeli armistice talks at Rhodes, and headed the Israeli contingent that met with representatives of Jordan at these talks. He also participated in three secret meetings held with King Abdullah of Jordan, meetings which he used to forge unique diplomatic and military ties.

I first came to know Reuven Shiloah during the War of Independence. He was one of the

prime movers behind the creation of Israel's political intelligence services. He was a highly creative man whose influence on Israeli policy-makers of the time was considerable. His tireless capacity for hard work, the extraordinary breadth of his knowledge, his wisdom and profound analytical ability – all these rendered him a priceless asset for the statesmen he served. During his term as Minister in the Israeli Embassy in Washington, he initiated the first contacts with the Americans on sensitive bilateral issues – contacts that were to prove invaluable in later years.

Reuven Shiloah loved the Middle East and the Arab milieu. He was well-versed in Arab culture, as well as in the diplomatic, social and political structures of the region. It was he who conceived the idea of circumventing the wall of Arab enmity surrounding the country by forging strategic ties between Israel and the more important countries on the periphery of the Middle East, such as Iran, Turkey and Ethiopia.

When he died, his heart consumed by the heat of his selfless devotion to his work, he was still a young man in his prime. I was among a group of friends who decided at the time to commemorate his achievements by establishing a research institute that would bear his name: the Shiloah Institute at Tel Aviv University.

It was admirable on the part of my friend Haggai Eshed, a man of unique literary and journalistic talent, to research, collate and put into writing the wonderful story of Reuven Shiloah.

This book promises to be an illuminating historical and educational document, as well as a splendid tribute to this most modest, self-effacing man, to whose great exploits and achievements the State of Israel will be forever in debt.

Haim Herzog
Jerusalem
Shevat 5748
January 1988

Preface to the Hebrew Edition

The need to write a book about the life and work of Reuven Shiloah emerged initially out of the shock of his untimely death. He was a relatively young man – not yet fifty years old – when he died, with a record of over thirty years of feverish, incessant activity in the service of his nation. He was a controversial figure, with as many admirers as critics and detractors, but his sudden death unquestionably left a great void in the lives of those who had worked with him at various stages of his life, particularly Moshe (Shertok) Sharett, David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir. This was the feeling that emerged most clearly out of their eulogies at his funeral. They and others who spoke expressed, directly or circumspectly, their sense of remorse, their feeling that with his sudden passing their chance of giving him his due had been irrevocably taken away. They stressed that in his lifetime he had not been given the opportunity he deserved, that his great potential had not been fully tapped, and that it was somehow their fault that his true promise remained unfulfilled.

All those who knew Reuven Shiloah well were convinced that his fascinating story should be put into writing; that an attempt should be made to somehow decipher the mysteries of the man before they were totally, irrevocably erased from memory. The first attempts were made by his colleagues at the Foreign Ministry, and were, for the most part, unsuccessful. There were simply not enough written records, and the personal recollections – even then – were partial and unsatisfactory. The scattered, piecemeal nature of the written material Shiloah himself left behind made the task of researching his life all but impossible. What is more, much of the material that was available was still too highly classified to be made public, either inside the Foreign Ministry or to the public at large. Drafts were prepared, publishable material was collected and various people were approached to put the material together into a coherent biography. Each attempt was attended by a great deal of initial enthusiasm as extensive plans were drawn up to help meet the challenge – only to peter out again as soon as the first obstacles were encountered. And each time friends and would-be chroniclers retreated from the desire to penetrate the secret of this complex, self-enclosed man, whose tough exterior concealed an inner life, shrouded in necessary and – perhaps – unnecessary secrecy.

A political biography – which is probably the most accurate description of this book – is a difficult task at the best of times. A writer is constantly in danger of losing his objectivity toward the person who, for the duration of the writing, virtually becomes a part of his life, and arouses a growing, unavoidable empathy, despite the writer's professional realization that the success or failure of the writing depends on the ability to remain faithful to the facts, not to gloss over weaknesses or painful failures that might prove to be unpleasant. This book is an attempt to deal not only with the complex and enigmatic personality of Reuven Shiloah, but also with the difficulty of telling his story despite the secrecy surrounding many of the more important details, and the fact that much of the pertinent archival material has only recently been made available for public scrutiny. A few books based on this recently declassified material from the state archives have just begun to appear, and as more documents about this period of Israeli history

become available, many more will undoubtedly be written. Despite all these obstacles, and using existing documentation, it has been possible to paint a fairly comprehensive picture of Shiloah's historical milieu, and to describe his place in the events of his time. It goes without saying that there will remain, perhaps forever, blank spaces in this picture, whose impenetrable secrecy is bound to tantalize the imagination for years to come.

This book moves along three interconnected planes: the story of Reuven Shiloah's activities – his political assessments, initiatives and evaluations; a description of his character and the vagaries of his personal history; and of course, connecting chapters describing the historical background of various periods of the Israeli-Zionist saga – the arena in which he operated. I was greatly helped in this task by books already published on the period in question, but based my work primarily on previously unpublished material that is almost entirely in private hands. Much of the book is based on numerous interviews I conducted with people in Israel and in the United States who worked with Shiloah and were willing to talk about him, and about themselves and the historical events they lived through. A description of the period and its key political decisions will enable the reader to locate Reuven Shiloah in his right place and time and to understand his singular contribution to the formulation of Zionist and Israeli policies, and to the decisions taken by the heads of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel in the first decade of its existence.

I would like to express my thanks first of all to the many scores of people who spared no effort and told the whole unexpurgated truth about the man and his times, each from his or her individual perspective. Our factual memory tends to blur, and we all unconsciously confuse times, events, people and situations. Such is human nature. But memories and impressions after the fact are nevertheless valuable, and provide useful historical testimony, without which it is impossible to reconstruct the prevailing atmosphere of those days. It is in this area that official documents simply lose their effectiveness. It was my great fortune to have been granted access to private archives that were instrumental in creating as true a picture as possible. Without the help of all the people who agreed to be interviewed, this book could not have been written. My thanks, too, to all my friends and acquaintances who briefed and advised me on the specifics of certain issues that the book deals with, particularly to Professor Yoav Gelber and Professor Gavriel Cohen. The assistance given me by friends who knew Reuven Shiloah was invaluable. Chief among them former President Haim Herzog, former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, former Director-General of the Foreign Ministry and top Mossad official for many years, David Kimche, and author Amos Elon – whose professional critique of my work was most instructive. These four graciously agreed to read the manuscript and it was with the help of their incisive comments that certain details in the book were corrected. And finally, it is with great pleasure that I thank my two research assistants – Yaron Ran and later Yael Efrati, who did meticulous work in gathering the available archive materials. I am grateful to them all. The ultimate responsibility for what appears in this book is mine and mine alone.

Haggai Eshed

Introduction: The Man and his Time

Reuven Shiloah was the remarkable product of a distinctive chapter in the history of Israel: a unique period of national regeneration that has vanished, never to return. At no other time in Jewish history could he have achieved what he did or become the man he was. He was *primus inter pares* – first among equals – in a group of ‘operations executives’, men who were neither policy-makers nor decision-makers, but were undoubtedly much more than just ‘senior government officials’ as they would probably be called today. He was a central figure in the momentous transition from the era of the Jewish Agency, the Hagannah¹ and the British Mandate – the period of the ‘state-in-the-making’ – to the era of statehood and a developing administrative and bureaucratic infrastructure. This was a time of difficult and often turbulent growing pains, of innovation, personal initiative and path-finding. It was a period marked by mistakes and mishaps, as well as flights of bold operational imagination. It was in this tumultuous period that the framework of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was created, literally on the battlefield, and the machinery of national government was generated amid the administrative disarray left behind at the end of the British Mandate over Palestine. It was during this time, too, that the foundations were laid for the Jewish state’s civilian and military intelligence services, a period of clandestine arms procurement and secret border crossings, of alliances forged despite the hostility of an Arab world still licking its wounds following its defeat in Israel’s War of Independence – and refusing to accept the consequences.

It was a period shaped not by institutions, but by people. In the absence of a formal administrative structure, every new instrument of government took on the contours of the people who created it, rather than the other way around as is usually the case. Reuven Shiloah was a prime example of this spirit – a man who became an institution in his own time.²

And yet, despite the unique role he played in this crucial era of Israeli history, somehow Shiloah was left behind as the bureaucracy of Israeli statehood developed. Most of his contemporaries and colleagues from this time of transition soon became ambassadors and directors-general of government ministries – at the center of the new establishment – while he remained forever the lone rider, galloping ahead of the rest until, ironically, he found himself languishing on his own in the rear. He was one of a band of like-minded men in the history of nations: fiercely devoted, far-sighted individualists, ranging far to the fore, only to find themselves eventually choking in the dust of those they thought were behind them. He was the first to identify critical ‘blind spots’ in Israel’s political and intelligence activities, and was equally farsighted in preparing the conceptual and operational tools to close these potentially dangerous gaps. However, his colleagues in the Foreign Ministry and in the Mossad – his own brainchild – proved more adept than he at taking advantage of the tools he developed. The new national leaders and up-and-coming bureaucrats had no compunction about exploiting his considerable abilities and innovative ideas, but neglected to keep him a place in their ranks. In

part, of course, this was his own fault: he simply could not find his niche in the new national order. He was not offered any official appointment, and seemed to lack the determination required to take what was his due. These were tragic aspects of his character and destiny. He was, however, possessed of a restless, highly creative mind that spawned ideas and sought solutions to problems at all hours of the day and night, even while reading a book or holding a private conversation. His working life was a non-stop cycle of activity, year in year out, without a pause for either vacations or rest to relieve the tension, a chain of endeavors in the service of the state, which ultimately afforded him no satisfaction whatsoever – neither with his own achievements, with the extent of his colleagues' cooperation nor with political developments in the country.

Reuven Shiloah was an impressive man with considerable personal charisma. His was a troubling, urgent presence, at once annoying and provocative. Neither he nor his views could be easily dismissed by those who worked with him and knew him, and opinions about him were sharply divided between those who thought highly of him and others who made no effort to conceal their dislike for the man. Cloaked in mystery and radiating an aura of power, Shiloah was always deeply immersed in his work, responding to every call, mobilizing others when necessary, and, consequently, not easy to approach or befriend. He was a man who emerged from the shadows surrounding the two pillars of national authority in those days – David Ben-Gurion and Moshe (Shertok) Sharett – who shared, unequally, the power to make decisions on all matters of state, foreign affairs, security and the multitude of other issues facing the Mapai Party³ and the national leadership.

They were the decision-makers and Shiloah was constantly at their side. More than almost anyone else in those circles of the Jewish leadership in Palestine, he understood the complex relationship that bound Sharett and Ben-Gurion, and he knew how to negotiate the hazardous terrain that separated them. Or so, at least, most political insiders at the time tended to believe, adding a great deal of clout to Shiloah's already charismatic status. He became the go-between for many of these two leaders' policy decisions and for much of the classified information they had at their disposal. It was generally believed that if there was anything of importance worth knowing, Shiloah knew about it long before anyone else. His well-known tendency to hold his cards close to his chest caused no little discomfort to people who worked with him, particularly those who did not share the secrets to which he was privy. On the other hand, the aura of mystery surrounding his persona earned him high marks among foreign friends of Israel – British and American, Jew and non-Jew alike. All of them sought his company, treasured his penchant for long conversations deep into the night, admired his comprehensive grasp of the issues at hand and deeply appreciated his proven loyalty to those he counted among his friends. British Intelligence reports from Cairo during World War II described him as 'Shertok's deputy', while American friends of Israel at the time cited him as the man closest to Ben-Gurion. Such was the aura that accompanied him wherever he went.

A small, bespectacled man, Shiloah had gray-blue eyes and a clear, penetrating gaze. In a conversation with Abba Eban,⁴ former President of the State of Israel Haim Weizmann once described the experience of coming under Shiloah's gaze '... as though he were examining you by Xray'. A long diagonal scar on his right cheek, a reminder of shrapnel wounds incurred in a car-bomb explosion at the Jewish Agency building in Jerusalem in 1948, lent his persona a touch of mystery, the shadow of enigma and a hint of covert missions. In fact, the impression was not accurate. As a youth in Jerusalem of the 1920s, he had taken classes at a local acting studio. Although not a born actor, over the years Shiloah learned how to add a measure of theatricality

to everything he did. It was as though all his life he played a role in a tale of espionage with a very small cast of fellow actors, spinning a rich web of fanciful legends and tall tales. He became the butt of many jokes, like the one about the man who gets into a taxi and won't tell the driver where to go because his destination is 'top secret'. He was also jokingly accused of hiding important information from himself, even when there was nothing of any substance to hide.

• • •

Shiloah constantly sought ways of developing intelligence-sharing and strategic cooperation with friendly nations – first with the British and later with the Americans. From the time of the Arab riots of the 1930s (which later developed into what became known as 'The Arab Revolt'), he was among the prime movers behind a concept designed to combine the attainment of political and military power with a realization of the Zionist dream. The concept, which he tried to implement with some variations both before and after the establishment of the state, called for developing operational cooperation on covert intelligence and espionage matters with foreign allies, carrying out 'special operations' deep in enemy territory and seeking political allies in unexpected places. In this way, with the help of well-connected Jewish communities around the world, Shiloah believed that the Jewish community of Palestine – and later Israel – could be turned into a major partner in international diplomacy and intelligence, a force that would have to be reckoned with and with whom it would be 'good to do business'. Was there a country in the world, he reasoned, where you couldn't find Israelis and Jews, all closely knit, with privileged access to a veritable treasure trove of information, often with the added advantage of holding key public and private positions that enabled them to pull all the right strings? Was there a country in the world where Jews did not wield real or imagined power? If the State of Israel were to use these advantages wisely, Shiloah suggested, it could become a 'strategic asset', or a 'strategic partner' – a player on the field of intelligence with access to highly privileged information, and equipped with an almost limitless potential for gathering more. The Jewish community of Palestine, and later the State of Israel, could become an intelligence asset of the first order that would be worth dealing with on a 'give and take' basis in this clandestine world, where diplomatic and strategic information is constantly being either discovered or generated virtually out of thin air.

This was the world Shiloah moved in both before and after the State of Israel was created: a world where projections were made into the future and where attempts would be made to alter its course; a world of intelligence gathering and dissemination, of disinformation and strategic and political gambits played out daily for the greater benefit of the State of Israel.

He was 'Mr. Intelligence', the first among the major functionaries of the Zionist movement and the state-in-the-making to declare outright, at the beginning of the Second World War, that the Jewish community in Palestine and the Jewish state that would come into being in the future needed an intelligence service. Shiloah lost no time practicing what he preached by going about setting up the Israeli intelligence apparatus as soon as he was given half a chance – directly after the establishment of the state.

'Intelligence' refers both to information-gathering and espionage, as well as clandestine, top secret 'special ops' (special operations) aimed at preempting hostile actions by enemies and opponents, mostly on their own turf; operations for which no one is ever in a hurry to take responsibility and which exist in the vague overlap between the preservation of law and order on the one hand and self-defense on the other, whenever issues of vital national security are at stake. This was particularly true during the period when the State of Israel was being formed, or when protecting and looking after the interests of the Jews of the Diaspora were involved. Given the

development of Israeli history since 1948, it is hard to say whether Israel has not remained ‘a state-in-the-making’ even after its formal establishment as a national entity, still wrestling with the same problems with which Shiloah dealt throughout his adult life. What is undoubtedly clear is that this was the case until 1959 – the year of his untimely death.

Every nation has its own intelligence apparatus with its own distinctive mythology. It was the English who coined the term ‘intelligence’ in the image of their unique national temperament – a lifestyle and code of behavior that was predominantly cerebral, based on the joining together of intelligence, insight and a broad knowledge of the facts, and the ability to put all of these elements to discriminating use. Everything in this approach to life favors brain over brawn. To this one must add the romantic aspect of British intelligence – the concept of a sporting contest or duel, where one mind is pitted against another, one gentleman against another, one professional against another. In these contests, when each side invents its own rules of the game in order to survive and accomplish its mission, victory is determined by the superior resourcefulness and ingenuity of a lone combatant operating in hostile territory. This is the archetypal formula of the myths surrounding British intelligence, espionage and counter-espionage, with their tales of the courageous yet despondent, intelligent yet frustrated loner who, more often than not, comes to a tragic end. Beyond this are other aspects of classic British intelligence tales: the code of personal ethics and discipline, the well-oiled machinery of inter-departmental cooperation and clear-cut divisions of responsibilities and operational areas. It was no accident, however, that beyond this common basis of British intelligence, different periods of history and different regional activities generated a veritable beehive of special services, each devoted to a different aspect of the intelligence world. To each his own.

The British created a vast empire from scratch and defended it almost effortlessly by the judicious application of the ‘divide and rule’ formula: setting their enemies against each other so that the balance of power could be maintained with a minimal use of force.

The Americans, for their part, created an intelligence apparatus that was in fact a massive industry for espionage and ‘special ops’ – a secret conglomerate serving the State Department and the Pentagon, working with them for the most part but sometimes also against them. However, unlike the English model of individual virtuosity, the American system was founded on the efficiency of the system, the ‘Limited Liability Company for the Creation and Marketing of Special Services and Operations’ – the ‘Company’ as the CIA is known. This is an organization that functions virtually as a state-within-a-state, either within the limits imposed on it by the government, or, at times, beyond the pale of the law and in direct opposition to Congressional decisions or to policies established or decided upon by various ministries. The CIA has even been known to operate at times without the President’s – or his aides’ – knowledge or approval. Senior officials do not always know – or do not know *exactly* – what this enormous, globe-spanning organization is doing for them or in their name. What the professionals of the CIA seem to be saying to the ‘amateurs’ voted into office by the people, is that ‘what’s good for us is good for America and what’s good for America is good for us, therefore you must give us your blind trust’. Which is good enough until, from time to time, congressmen or other government officials decide to betray this brand of trust and look into the affairs of the CIA, where they usually uncover peccadilloes committed by one official or another. The official is duly tried and ultimately relieved of his or her duties. But time passes, and invariably someone picks up where his predecessor left off, using more or less the same methods – until his time comes to be caught red-handed and sent packing. And so the system lives on as long as the state is willing to grin and bear it.

During the Soviet regime in Russia, the intelligence apparatus was a ‘state-above-the-state’ with operational leeway far beyond mere ‘intelligence’ or ‘special ops’. It was a frighteningly powerful, highly centralized and hierarchical organization, dealing in internal and external intelligence of every imaginable kind, zealously devoted to the requirements of ‘national security’ as it perceived it, and unquestioningly obedient wherever the struggle against so-called ‘enemies of the state and the Revolution’ was concerned. During the greater part of Russian history – perhaps even to this day – the intelligence apparatus has a vast power base, overshadowing all other institutions of government and civic power, and deeply feared both inside the country and beyond its borders. It was the moving force behind the Soviets’ race for an expanded military capability through the development of science, technology and industry. The pace at which these were developed leads one to believe that a major part of Soviet strength in all these areas could be attributed to its espionage capabilities, which could provide its leaders with virtually any information they needed. Most scientists around the world unwittingly worked for the KGB in one way or another, since the all-powerful organization had no trouble simply lifting the fruits of their labor at will. Espionage was conceivably the most important industry in the former Soviet Union.

Traces of all three of these models of intelligence services can be found in the Israeli machinery of government, from pre-state days to the present. The British influence from Mandatory times, for example, can be found mainly in the legal and public administration systems, many of which are still in place in present-day Israeli bureaucracy. The eastern European influence can be found in the administrative and executive government functions which date back to the earliest days of revolutionary socialism – the ideological breeding ground for most of Israel’s ‘Founding Fathers’. Finally, pervasive American influences have become the models – for better or for worse – in every walk of life in Israel. Although the basic structure of Israeli administration was directly descended from the British formula, all these modes of government left their mark on the Israeli intelligence community in its early years.

From its earliest beginnings, however, Israeli intelligence possessed a unique character of its own that made all the difference. Part of it evolved out of its earliest beginnings – the voluntary underground movements in Eretz Yisrael⁵ and outside it during the period of ‘the state-in-the-making’, before there was a government, an army, an elected parliament or any of the instruments of law and order. Its truly embryonic stages can be found in the efforts of Zionist leaders to protect people and property in the Yishuv⁶ in Palestine and in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora, in the illegal immigration and blockade-running aimed at circumventing the British ban on Jewish immigration to Palestine,⁷ the clandestine arms procurement and manufacturing under the noses of the Mandatory authorities, or the Hagannah’s ‘SHAI’,⁸ an early intelligence operation aimed at gathering information on Arab intentions. At the same time, the institutions of the Jewish community engaged in an ambivalent relationship with the British authorities, on the one hand cooperating with the army and the police on various security matters, while on the other engaging in clandestine operations aimed at enhancing the Yishuv’s military capabilities and trying to do whatever it could to save the remnants of European Jewry during the war and in its aftermath. These were the ‘illegal’ precursors of the official, legally constituted Israeli intelligence community including the Mossad.

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Reuven Shiloah was an ideas man, a man of stratagems, not an operative in the field, nor an administrator or an organization man. His fertile, restless mind was not suited to the methodical,

routine nature of office work. This was one of the fundamental weaknesses in his character, often exploited by opponents and rivals alike, those efficient ‘organization men’ of the Foreign Ministry and the intelligence community. Nevertheless, he played such a crucial part in the convoluted, crisis-ridden story of the creation of the Israeli intelligence services that they were profoundly influenced by the innovative strength of his ideas and operational concepts. He was involved in all the stages of Israel’s transition to a sovereign state, from the Hagannah to the IDF, from SHAI to the three distinct branches of Israeli Intelligence: the Intelligence Branch of the IDF, the GSS (General Security Service) and the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry, which functioned as a state intelligence organization under various names (*‘Da’at*, *‘Binah’* and others)⁹ until its painful and traumatic dismantling by Reuven Shiloah and the establishment of the Mossad in its place. His successor at the Mossad, Isser Harel, reaped the fruits of Shiloah’s labors and inherited a properly functioning, solidly based organization, unencumbered by irksome connections with the past.

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One of Shiloah’s major contributions to Israeli foreign policy was the concept of the ‘Peripheral Alliance’ that he developed after he made the official move into the area of foreign policy and diplomacy, first as Minister in the Israeli Embassy in Washington, and later at the Foreign Ministry when he returned to Jerusalem. This concept was part of a more comprehensive security strategy that he developed, tailored to fit the needs of a country under siege and surrounded by deep-seated Arab hostility, which called for creating a ‘strategic alliance’ with the US and Europe, and integrating Israel into the western front led by the US. Both of these concepts, initially proposed by Shiloah, eventually became the cornerstones of Israeli foreign policy.

All this was typical of the man and his destiny – to have others adopt his innovative foreign policy ideas and bring them to their fulfillment after his death. His was the fate of the pathfinders who sow the seeds but never manage to reap the harvest. He suffered many setbacks in his lifetime, but had some important successes as well, which, by their very nature, were ascribed to the State of Israel as a whole. Israel’s status today as a strategic asset in American Near East foreign policy is virtually taken for granted, as is its standing as a strategic partner with whom the Americans hold regular annual meetings to discuss strategic coordination and other matters of mutual interest. American foreign aid to Israel, which is unique in its scope, is similarly taken for granted. Shiloah embraced this American orientation from the very early years of the state, at a time when the Americans and even most Israelis showed little interest in it. His ultimate goal was what he called a ‘comprehensive affirmative plan’ by the West for the Middle East, in which Israel would play a central role, thus reducing the possibility of a confrontation between Israeli needs on the one hand and western interests in the region on the other.

This was not an easy task by any means. The Jewish Yishuv and the fledgling State of Israel that followed it found many potential avenues of development closed off by the powerful influence of Arab hostility and the effectiveness of the Arab boycott on countries trading with Israel. Both before and after the establishment of the state – well into the 1960s and 1970s – one of the main tasks facing the political leaders of the country was to find cracks in this wall of hostility, or to seek ways of circumventing it altogether in order to penetrate the sources of international decision-making: to seek out the ways – known only to a select few – to enter the back rooms where position papers were drawn up or where policy proposals that were to be handed to the political leaders of the major powers for their approval were hammered out.

Reuven Shiloah was the embodiment of this indirect method of diplomatic penetration. Many

of the people he worked with at the time remember his uncanny ability to open any door in the corridors of power – with or without an invitation – the moment he became convinced of its importance to the cause. This style of diplomatic penetration, always oblique, achieved seemingly by accident, or through simple tenacity, was honed by him into a veritable technique: first get your head in, then a foot and you're in.

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Shiloah was the son of a well-known Jerusalem rabbi, Rabbi Aharon Zaslansky, author of many religious tracts on questions of *mitzvot*¹⁰ relating to the Land of Israel, and later in his life honored by the title of Distinguished Citizen of Jerusalem. Over the years the elder Zaslansky changed his political orientation from the well-entrenched traditional Orthodoxy, which was for the most part opposed to the Zionist movement, to the Zionist-oriented Mizrahi Party. His son, Reuven Zaslansky,¹¹ completed the shift begun by his father, moving from the milieu of his maternal and paternal grandparents in the ultra-Orthodox Jerusalem neighborhood of Meah She'arim, to the liberal, secular world of the Jewish labor movement in Palestine of the 1920s. This became his new spiritual home, the adopted family with which he felt thoroughly comfortable yet where he still remained an outsider, where the central qualities of his character came to light – his utter devotion, zealous motivation and total belief in the aims of the Zionist endeavor. These qualities, as we shall see, were a significant part of the private and public story of Reuven Shiloah.

The art of acting, which he studied briefly as a youth, helped him fashion the persona of a man of power and influence capable of pulling many strings behind the scenes. In his early years of public service this aura served him well, but in his later years, when he tried to come out of the shadows and take center stage, to claim the limelight not as a go-between for other people or issues but as a political personality in his own right – this persona became a drawback. The real political authority he wielded was always unofficial, implicit, based on his important behind-the-scenes activities, and the power, real or imagined, that they gave him. His status as a close confidant of the nation's leaders lent a great deal of weight to his reputation in the eyes of all those who dealt with him professionally. Nevertheless, toward the untimely end of his career, what he truly desired was the official sanction of formal authority that goes with political and diplomatic appointments.

Many of those who knew the man and talked about his achievements, among them even some of his former opponents, repeatedly, and with genuine pain and regret, raised the question of how a man like Reuven Shiloah was never given even an ambassadorial posting – particularly when they considered some of the other ambassadorial appointments made by the Foreign Ministry after 1948. Former Israeli ambassador to Germany Asher (Arthur) Ben-Nathan, who strongly opposed Shiloah's move to dismantle the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry and create the Mossad in its place, claims that Shiloah was a giant compared to many of those given important diplomatic posts. Ben-Nathan notes that the most frequently voiced excuse – that Shiloah was 'not suited' for diplomacy, that he was most effective in private dealings and was not cut out for public appearances – is facile and unsatisfactory.

Many people who were asked about this after his death, among them some of the public figures who were instrumental in blocking his way in one way or another, were hard put to find a suitable explanation. One of the most prominent of these was Moshe Sharett, with whom he worked very closely for many years, and who used to call him – with a mixture of admiration and bemusement – 'a one-man reconnaissance unit'. But there were many others, including

David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir, who had difficulty finding an answer to a question they never fully articulated in their own minds: what was it about Reuven Shiloah's character and *modus operandi* that prevented him from sticking to the straight and narrow or playing according to the rules of the political game – even at the highest levels of power?

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Certain characteristic elements of Reuven Shiloah's life story followed him even beyond the grave. At a memorial service held in June 1959, thirty days after his death,¹² Teddy Kollek (the long-time mayor of Jerusalem who was then Director-General of the Prime Minister's office) announced the establishment of a research institute for contemporary Middle Eastern studies, to be named after Reuven Shiloah. Kollek told all those gathered at the ceremony that it was Shiloah himself who had originally conceived of such an institute, and in the last few months before his death had actively sought support for the idea. Indeed, in what was to be his last official letter, written on 28 April 1959, less than two weeks before he died, he discussed the subject with the President of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Professor Benjamin Mazar. The timing turned its contents into a part of his last will and testament.

According to Kollek, the aim of the institute would be to promote scientific investigation into contemporary Middle Eastern issues, and to develop a deeper understanding of present-day regional problems. Research in the institute would concentrate initially on the Arab countries, and would later include Africa and Asia. The institute would also seek the dissemination of Israeli viewpoints on regional problems in various international forums, publish academic research in both journal and book form and cooperate with other institutes for Near Eastern studies around the world. The Institute, an independent body, headed by a Board of Governors and an Academic Committee, was to be established in Tel Aviv as a joint project of the IDF, the Foreign Ministry, the Defense Ministry, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Israeli Oriental Society. Plans for its future development included incorporating the institute as the backbone of a central Institute for Foreign Relations which was being planned at that time.

The Shiloah Institute was duly established at Tel Aviv University, and within a few years gained international recognition as one of the more important institutes of Middle Eastern studies in the world. It was entirely in keeping with Shiloah's life story that the institute bearing his name did not manage – or perhaps did not even try – to produce a single research paper in his memory, devoted to his life and achievements. Reuven Shiloah's activities in the service of the nation during three critical decades of Arab-Israeli relations, or his contributions to the enhancement of Israel's status in the area, to the peace efforts and to negotiations with the Arab countries, in which he unquestionably played a very prominent role, were never the subject of any scientific or historical research. Within a short time, the name 'Shiloah' became simply the name of an institute, and few people involved in its work really knew or cared about the man behind the name. The final irony was even more bizarre: a donor appeared on the scene, seeking a way to commemorate Moshe Dayan, and insisted that the memorial tribute be situated at Tel Aviv University. The result was the creation of the 'Dayan Center' into which the Shiloah Institute disappeared without a trace. It would seem that no man can truly escape his destiny – either in his lifetime or after his death.

NOTES

1. The Jewish Agency was established in 1920 as part of the British Mandate, with the aim of representing the Jewish nation before the Mandatory government and cooperating with it to create the 'Jewish national home'. As it developed it became the executive arm of the World Zionist Federation. After the creation of the state, immigration and contacts with the Jewish

communities of the Diaspora became its primary responsibility.

The Hagannah was the 'official' military self-defense organization of the Jewish community in Palestine before the establishment of the state, and the military formation that fought Israel's War of Independence. There were a number of rival, so-called 'underground' organizations that operated mainly against the British at that time.

2. There is an untranslatable pun here: the Hebrew word for 'institution' is '*mossad*' the name that was given to the widely known Israeli Secret Intelligence Service (ISIS).
3. Mapai – an acronym for Mifleget Po'alei Eretz Yisrael, the Workers' Party of Palestine, a Zionist-Socialist party founded in 1930, which played a central role in all the Jewish institutions in Palestine before the establishment of the state, and was the ruling political party in the State of Israel from 1948 to 1977.
4. Former Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations, and later Foreign Minister.
5. lit., 'The Land of Israel' – the name used by the Jewish community of Palestine to designate the country before the establishment of the state. On all official documents in Hebrew the country was known as 'Eretz-Yisrael-Palestine'.
6. *Yishuv* literally means 'settlement', but by extension it became the name for the prestate Jewish community in Palestine as a whole.
7. At various times during the Mandate (1922, 1930 and 1939) the British government published White Papers that limited, in one way or another, Jewish immigration to Palestine. The most painful of these, as far as the Jewish people were concerned, was the last one which made it virtually impossible for the remnants of the Jewish communities of Europe fleeing the Holocaust to enter into Palestine. The Yishuv fought these edicts officially by trying to bring pressure on the British government, and illegally by bringing in thousands of refugees through the British blockade of Palestinian waters.
8. Abbreviation of the Hebrew '*Sherut Yedi'ot*' – Information Service.
9. *Da'at* in Hebrew means knowledge and *binah* means wisdom.
10. The Hebrew word for religious duties. According to rabbinical tradition there are 613 such duties in the Bible.
11. During all the pre-state period, Reuven Shiloah was known as 'Zaslany', a variation on his original family name – 'Zaslansky'. After the establishment of the state, he officially changed his name to his intelligence code-name: 'Shiloah'. He will be referred to here as 'Zaslany' up to 1948, and subsequently as 'Shiloah'.
12. According to Jewish tradition, on the thirtieth day after a death – known as the '*shloshim*' (thirty in Hebrew) – the members of the family go up to the cemetery to unveil the tombstone and hold a memorial service.

PART ONE
THE POWER OF THE TRIANGLE

‘In’ or Not ‘In’

Reuven Zaslany was a teacher by profession and inclination. He completed his teachers’ training between the years 1923 and 1928 at the Hebrew Teachers’ Seminary in Jerusalem, which at the time was a first-rate institution with a unique faculty and student body. The school was noted for its scholarly atmosphere, and its faculty list read like a *Who’s Who* of Jewish educators, many of whom have long since become a part of the history and folklore of Jewish education in Eretz Yisrael: the principal and founder of the Seminary was the founder of the Hebrew Language Committee and the Teachers’ Federation, David Yellin, and his deputy was the historian and future Minister of Education, Ben-Zion Dinur (Dinburg). Both of them were held in high regard by the students. The Bible and Hebrew language teacher was H. A. Zuta, and the Geography teacher was A. Y. Bravver. Ben-Zion Netanyahu (father of Yonatan ‘Yoni’ – of Entebbe fame – and Binyamin ‘Bibi’ – leader of the Likkud Party and subsequently Prime Minister) who studied with Zaslany at the Seminary, remembers the teachers as ‘very professorial. They were in fact university-level lecturers – all unusually interesting and highly idealistic who comported themselves with great dignity. They came to Eretz Yisrael as committed Zionists, and took their jobs very seriously.’ Netanyahu particularly remembers Bravver who was a very strict and demanding teacher. ‘But Reuven and I liked him a great deal’, Netanyahu recalls. ‘We frequently went on hikes with him throughout the country. Bravver would ride on a donkey and we’d follow behind on foot – in the Judean Desert, to places like ‘Ein Farah and Wadi Kelt. We spent a lot of time visiting the monasteries there. We loved hiking, and traveled throughout the Galilee and the Negev Desert. That was during the 1920s which was one of the most peaceful times of the Mandate.

‘Reuven Zaslansky’, Netanyahu recalls, ‘was an outstanding student, among the best in the class. A very gifted and serious student. He was not an extrovert, or loud in any way, or very exuberant either, though he did smile on occasion and had a good sense of humor. He gave the impression of being a very decent and responsible person, and I always enjoyed myself in his company. Studying with him was always a pleasure, and I thought a great deal of him. He seemed to me a very perceptive person, always respectful toward his colleagues. I could perhaps characterize him as bright, though not brilliant. Reuven and I were among the youngest in the class. All the others were a few years older,’ Netanyahu says. But it was not only a question of age.

It was at the Teachers’ Seminary that a problem emerged which was to haunt Zaslany throughout his life. Some of the second-year students at the Seminary were older men, in their

twenties. They were *halutzim* Zionist pioneers who had immigrated to Eretz Yisrael from eastern Europe but soon dropped out of the idealistic work groups which, as part of their contribution to the Zionist dream, worked in construction and agriculture in various places in Palestine. Those who left the work groups did so for a variety of reasons: malaria or other illnesses, or simply because they wanted to continue the studies they had cut short in order to come to Palestine. Nevertheless, regardless of how long they actually engaged in this idealistic manual labor, they retained the special aura of the early pioneers long after the pioneering spirit had disappeared.

Zaslany's story was different. He was from Jerusalem, a native-born '*sabra*'¹ – a term used at that time derogatively to describe an outsider, either from one of the old families of the Yishuv, or from one of the founding families of the early collective farms of the First Aliya.² The *halutzim*, the young pioneers, looked down on the *sabras* – or '*sabress*' as they were mockingly referred to then.

Former ambassador Ya'akov Tzur, who studied with Zaslany's sister Rivka Levitt at the 'Gymnasia' secondary school in Jerusalem and knew the family well, describes in his memoirs the sense of estrangement and alienation that was the lot of these Jerusalem-born children of the old Yishuv. They looked and dressed differently, typically wearing knickerbockers, knee-high black stockings and peaked caps. 'When we went down to Tel Aviv', Tzur relates, 'we looked ridiculous'. Tel Aviv in those days was a completely different world from Jerusalem, a modern metropolis with electricity and running water (unknown luxuries in Jerusalem until the late 1920s), where people dressed differently – in short trousers and open-necked, short-sleeved shirts – and had a totally different approach to life.

The abrupt switch Reuven Zaslany underwent from his childhood years marked by alienation and mockery, to adulthood in the secular, socialist world that was to become his second home, left its mark on the young boy who came from the 'outside'. 'He never belonged to any of the pioneer work groups, never toiled in the sun on the roads, in construction, or in the quarries. At the time, being a *po'el* (manual laborer) was a mark of distinction. Reuven had no claim to that status,' relates Eliyahu (Epstein) Eilat.³ Eilat himself belonged to a pioneer work group from the left-wing Hapoel Ha-Tsa'ir youth movement which worked in the settlement of Rehovot, and even in Ma'an in Jordan. In 1927, after a severe earthquake caused serious damage in large parts of Jordan and Palestine, his group was mobilized to help in the reconstruction. This was where Eilat met Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, a major figure in the Zionist movement, who became second president of the State of Israel. Zaslany made Ben-Zvi's acquaintance through his friendship with Eliyahu Eilat. Eilat actually worked as a *po'el* for only a few years, but this period, however brief, marked him as a *halutz* for life – at least in his own eyes. One basic fact emerges from all this: throughout the early years of the Zionist movement in Eretz Yisrael, Zaslany was regarded as being different from the rest of the top members of the Jewish Agency's Political Department.

This distinctive, forgotten taste of the late 1920s in Palestine, and the qualities of many of the people who figured prominently in the life of the Yishuv at the time, is confirmed by Avraham Biran, another former classmate at the Teachers' Seminary, a former diplomat and one of Israel's foremost archeologists. Biran began his career in public service as a Regional Officer for the Mandate in the Jezreel Valley during the Arab Riots (1936–39), directly responsible to Zaslany, by then an official in the Political Department of the Jewish Agency.

His family were among the founding families of the first settlements (*moshavot*)⁴ established during the First Aliya by Jews of the old Yishuv from Jerusalem and Safed. They were true pioneers, who endured years of suffering and hardship before their farms finally turned a profit. Their solutions to the rigors of life in Palestine at the time were very different from those

championed by the pioneers of the subsequent waves of immigration, the Second and Third Aliya, and they were stigmatized as reactionary members of the 'old Yishuv' and, more importantly from the *halutzim*'s point of view, as the enemies of Jewish labor.⁵

Beyond his identification with the stigma of 'the old Yishuv', Zaslany's estrangement within the Zionist establishment was also influenced by his marriage to Betty Borden, a young American from a Zionist family in New York. He met her while he was studying at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and making a living by teaching Hebrew to English-speaking immigrants, many of them idealistic young women like Betty. Quite naturally these women, who came on *aliya* from different countries – the United States, England and South Africa – and shared a common native tongue, became close friends, and all of them married *sabras* or veterans of the Yishuv. This group of immigrant women from English-speaking countries created a unique social milieu for their husbands, a sort of 'foreign enclave' that Zaslany married into, adding yet another layer to the 'difference' between himself and his colleagues.

The native-born '*sabras*' sense of inferiority *vis-à-vis* the *halutzim* is even more poignantly evident in the words of Me'ir Shilon, a descendant of a family which lived in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem for many generations. To this day he cannot conceal his admiration for Reuven Zaslany, the son of Rabbi Zaslansky of the old Yishuv, who was the first of his kind to carve a niche for himself among the *halutzim*, leaders of the Histadrut (the General Federation of Labor) and the Jewish Agency, and to be accepted by them as one of their own.

How right he was – and how wrong. Up to the time of his death, Zaslany indeed moved in the innermost circles of power. He was the closest and most trusted advisor to David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Shertok and all the political leadership of the Yishuv and later of the State of Israel, and the founder of the world-renowned Israeli Secret Intelligence Service, the Mossad. Nevertheless, despite all of his extraordinary achievements, he never managed to shake off the sense of alienation and otherness that haunted his relations with the political establishment of the country. 'In' or 'out' 'one of the boys' or not – this is perhaps one of the most important keys to understanding his character, his behavior and his manner with other people.

Zaslany was dedicated beyond measure to his work – more so than many of his colleagues. A loner who was, in many cases, more far-sighted and perceptive than others about developing trends in world and regional politics, he was quick to champion new initiatives and seek innovative solutions to problems while others stuck to their well-worn modes of thought.

Still, he was not a *po'el*, not a *halutz*. And ultimately he was left out. The Foreign Ministry reserved its appointments for 'Anglo-Saxons' – as all native English speakers from anywhere in the world are called in Israel. This is an incontestable fact, one that helped the leading 'AngloSaxon' bureaucracy of the Foreign Ministry 'shoot down' Reuven Zaslany, the 'Israeli-born outsider', and his ideas about new ways to integrate Israel into the Middle Eastern policies of the western powers, or reorganize the Foreign Ministry.

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Reuven Zaslany's connection to the Hagannah, which he joined at a very early age, sheds light on a different aspect of his life story. 'Reuven joined the Hagannah at the age of 15 (in 1924), and carried out all his duties with total devotion, particularly during the Arab Riots of 1929,' recalls Me'ir Shilon.⁶ Shilon and Zaslany were in the Hagannah together for a long time, and studied at the same time at the Teachers' Seminary. When they graduated in 1928, Reuven began studying Near Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His aptitude for studying served him as well at the university as it did in secondary school, and he took his Arabic studies

very seriously. It was there that he first met Eliyahu Eilat, who had begun studying there a year earlier. Eilat recounted that one of Shiloah's professors, Professor S. D. Goitein, was convinced that he could have had a very successful academic career, and he was very sorry that Shiloah did not complete his degree.

When they completed their studies at the Teachers' Seminary, Me'ir Shilon went to Baghdad to become a Hebrew teacher in the local Jewish community. 'When I returned two years later', he relates, 'I found a completely different Reuven Zaslany. He had completed three years of university studies, but had decided not to go on for his degree. He told me that he had made up his mind to take up the teaching position that I had vacated in Baghdad. He had also joined the Mapai Party, and had been very active in the elections, and in the meetings and lectures held by the Young Socialists (the younger members of the party). It was there that he attended lectures given by Moshe Shertok.⁷ That was the beginning of their long-standing relationship.'

Zaslany's first steps into politics were guided by Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, the Chairman of the National Committee,⁸ who had been asked by the Jewish community of Baghdad to provide them with teachers. It was Ben-Zvi who recommended Zaslany for the post, and suggested that he serve both the National Committee and the Jewish Agency in a double capacity: as a Hebrew teacher in the Jewish community of Babylon (as it was called then), and an instructor in the local Zionist youth movement. In the latter role he also represented the Jewish community of Palestine to the Arab 'neighbors' in Iraq, and was to spend time studying the language and the local customs, observing local developments, developing personal contacts for the future and reporting back on all these to his superiors in Jerusalem.

Thus it was that at the beginning of August 1931, before he was even 22 years old, the young Jerusalemite was sent to Baghdad by the Jewish national institutions – the National Committee of Knesset Yisrael and the Jewish Agency – to take up his post as a teacher in one of the Jewish schools in the city. His work at the school, and particularly as an instructor in the Zionist Ahi-ever (Hebrew Brother) youth movement, served as a convenient cover for other aspects of his mission in the local Jewish communities and in the Arab community outside beyond it.⁹ With the help of influential members of the Jewish community of Baghdad, Zaslany met with Iraqi journalists and other public figures. Almost instinctively he started weaving a net of future intelligence contacts. At one point he suggested recruiting a young Iraqi as an informant, and paying him indirectly for his services by commissioning articles from him, regardless of whether or not they were published. Moshe Shertok, who was responsible for Zaslany's mission to Iraq, turned the idea down, possibly for ethical reasons, but also possibly, as he himself explained to the young Zaslany, so as not to 'burn' the contact and prevent him from becoming an untainted political leader who might be an ally of the Zionist endeavor of the future. The Political Department under Shertok's leadership was not opposed in principle to paying Arab leaders for their services, as was the case, for example, with payments made by the Jewish Agency to the leader of Transjordan, Emir Abdullah. What does emerge clearly from this incident is the difference between the two approaches – that of the student who created his own techniques of *realpolitik* instinctively, and that of the mentor, who was guided throughout his career by an ethical sensitivity and a penchant for sermonizing.

Later in his mission to Iraq, particularly on his second trip, Zaslany was also asked to keep an eye on anti-Zionist elements within the Jewish community, particularly Communists who had been exiled from Palestine to Iraq. His first reports to Shertok on their activities concerned a particular Communist whom he named, and asked for advice on how to proceed in his case. When Shertok did not respond to his query, Zaslany wrote to his two other 'operators', Yitzhak

Ben-Zvi and Dov Hos, telling them that he had decided to hand the Communist's name over to the Jewish community. The leaders of the community, in turn, turned him over to the Iraqi authorities, who immediately jailed the Communist. Zaslany's recommendation for handling the case in this manner was aimed, as he described it, 'to uproot the evil at the source' – wording that befits a zealous agent, wholly devoted to his mission and the people who sent him.¹⁰

With the help of the contacts he made in Baghdad, which could not yet actually be called 'intelligence' contacts, Zaslany managed to get his hands on a British document of great importance: a complete copy of the British 'Report of the Conference on the East'. This conference, which was headed by Commonwealth Secretary Winston Churchill, met initially in Cairo, then completed its deliberations in Jerusalem in 1922. Its recommendations – most importantly, to cede Transjordan from the British Mandate over Palestine – delineated the final borders of Palestine under Mandatory rule.¹¹

Reuven Zaslany summed up his first mission to Iraq as 'an emotional and intellectual schooling ... it was there that I in fact became a Zionist'.¹² Clearly, the two tours of duty in Baghdad set the stage for his later career of public service in intelligence, politics and diplomacy. This was particularly true of his connection to the future Zionist-Israeli intelligence apparatus, which Zaslany was to found, and upon which he was to leave a strong personal and professional imprint.

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The person who was most instrumental in starting Zaslany out on this path of public service was Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. Ben-Zvi and his wife, Rachel Yana' it, were influential figures of long standing in the Jewish labor movement, and their cottage in the Rehavia quarter of Jerusalem was a central meeting place for functionaries of the Zionist movement, a 'common room' where new ideas were hammered out, and where decisions were made concerning the future of the Yishuv and the Hagannah. The Ben-Zvis' interest in young men and women studying Arabic culture and regional politics first brought Zaslany into their circle, and set the stage for their abiding friendship. In time, the Ben-Zvis' Rehavia cottage became Zaslany's second home in Jerusalem.

Zaslany was born in the Sha'arei Pina section of the ultra-Orthodox Meah She'arim quarter of Jerusalem. Soon after his birth in 1909, the family moved to the Bokharian quarter, and from there to the Zichron Moshe neighborhood, where they remained for many years. Reuven's father, Rabbi Aharon Yitzhak Zaslansky, died in Jerusalem in 1978 at the age of 92, many years after the death of his first-born son, Reuven, who died in 1959 at the age of 49. Despite his roots in the ultra-Orthodox area of the city, Rabbi Zaslansky was a dyed-in-the-wool religious Zionist,¹³ who was constantly at odds with the rabbis of the old Yishuv. During his term of office as head of the Jerusalem Religious Council, he led the fight for Zionist ideas against the anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox circles of the city.

'Their house was in fact quite liberal, and no longer very religious', recounts Eliyahu Eilat. 'Reuven had two brothers and two sisters, and they were all very modern in their dress and their schooling.' The Zaslany brothers and sisters, however, tell of an ongoing struggle they waged at home in order to be allowed to pursue their liberal inclinations. Rivka, the eldest, remembers heated arguments with their strict father who, despite his children's obvious lack of enthusiasm, tried to teach them choice passages from the Talmud.

Reuven was the favorite of the family, and quite spoiled by them all, but he left the house and abandoned his religious way of life as soon as he entered the Teachers' Seminary. Years

afterwards, when dining on pork or seafood – both strictly prohibited in a kosher Jewish household – he would talk about the distance he had put between himself and his Orthodox upbringing. Nevertheless, something of the Meah She'arim boy stuck to him throughout his life.

From a very early age he made a living teaching Hebrew, arithmetic, and English. After he left his parents' home he lived for a while in a rented room in an apartment owned by musician and music teacher Sidney Seal, a colorful and well-known Jerusalem figure of those days who had a lasting influence on the young Zaslany. It was at that time, too, that Reuven joined Many a Arnon's acting studio which held classes in the old Lemmel School. Years later he told his wife, Betty, that for a while he actually considered joining the 'Ha-Ohel' theater company to follow a career in the theater. He was a gifted mimic, and often regaled his family with imitations of friends and acquaintances. Occasionally, at the end of the Yom Kippur fast, he would show up at his grandmother's house and give a very good impression of someone who had indeed fasted all day, even though he had spent the day stuffing himself with food and making merry in Sidney Seal's apartment. These minor dramatic successes notwithstanding, he soon realized that he was not cut out for the theater, though his flair for acting was to serve him well later in his political career. His attraction to the theater was all the more strange in the light of the fact that he was truly reclusive by nature and shunned public appearances, preferring meetings in the wings than performing on center stage. These traits carried over into his relations with his family which were distinctly cool, although by all accounts he did bear his share of familial duties, and was always ready to help if asked.

His father, Rabbi Zaslansky, was a good looking man, tall and impressive, and his mother was short and stout. Of the five children – three boys and two girls – only Reuven and the youngest daughter, Malka, resembled their mother. Of all his siblings, he was closest to his brother, Dr. Aryeh Zaslany, the psychiatrist, who was a year younger than he, and who also died at a young age. Aryeh studied medicine in Italy, and joined the staff of the Hadassah Hospital when he returned. During the Second World War he joined the British Army, and in this capacity helped Reuven later in his contacts with Orde Wingate.

In 1933 the Zaslansky family moved to Akiva Street in the middle of town, and later Reuven helped his parents move to a place nearer his own house, where they remained until their death. Reuven and Betty and their two children lived in a number of apartments in the Rehavia quarter, in close proximity to many other high-ranking civil servants. It was perhaps typical of his restless nature to move so frequently – as though he felt that there was nowhere where he really could really be at ease.

Betty Shiloah (n'e Borden) was born in 1912 in New York to a nonreligious Zionist family. Her father was very active in the Poalei Zion (Workers of Zion) movement, and her mother in the Pioneer Women, and they brought Betty up in the Zionist-Socialist tradition, with little emphasis on religious Jewish tradition. She met Reuven on her first trip to Palestine in 1933. She stayed there for a year, then returned to the United States to complete her degree in social work. She finally emigrated into Palestine in 1936, arriving in the country right in the middle of the Arab Riots of 1936. Soon after she arrived she began working at the Hadassah Hospital as a social worker. The Jerusalem of the 1930s was a fascinating place for the young woman from New York, and she soon decided that that was the place where she wanted to live. Reuven, it would seem, was part of that fascination. As a Zionist-Socialist whose parents were active in the movement, she found a great deal in common with the energetic, highly-motivated Zaslany. She recalls that Reuven was a very persistent suitor – just as he was in many other things in life. They were married in 1936, and she soon had to adapt her life style to his: non-stop work, around the

clock. ‘In any case I used to go out to work’, she later recalled, ‘so it worked out fine’.

Their son, Dov (nicknamed ‘Doubie’) was born in 1941, soon after Betty started working at *The Jerusalem Post* as a language stylist and also in the advertising section. Their daughter, Naomi, was born in 1948, and her birth is connected in Betty’s mind with an unpleasant memory. ‘I went to the United States to have the child’, she recalls, ‘and I can’t forgive myself for it. I felt as though I was a burden. Reuven had moved to Tel Aviv in November of 1947 to work with Ben-Gurion at Mapai headquarters, but I didn’t want to move. When I finally did agree to come to Tel Aviv, Reuven came to get me in March 1948, the same week that he was injured in the car-bomb explosion at the Jewish Agency building. It was only three weeks later, when his wounds had healed, that we all finally moved to Tel Aviv, in the last convoy that left Jerusalem before the Arab siege began in earnest. I flew to the States in April, Naomi was born in June, and in September I flew back. Reuven was a wonderful father. He didn’t see his children much, but he had a great deal of patience with them when they were together. He treated everybody as though he were a teacher and an educator, and his children were no exception. Still, I bore the main burden of their education and upbringing.’

Doubie remembers Reuven as a patient man with a wonderful sense of humor, and a strong presence. His father never had to raise his voice with them – one look from him was enough to bring the children to order. He loved to play games and take bets, his son recalls. Doubie particularly remembers his father’s habit of suddenly challenging friends, and even casual acquaintances, to ‘exchange pens’ or ‘exchange watches’. Some of the people won, others lost in these sudden exchanges of personal belongings, although, according to Binyamin Gibli, head of Army Intelligence in the 1950s, who on occasion was the victim of these pranks, ‘...not everyone appreciated this sense of humor’.

This adventurousness and willingness to go along with a dare was evident in many of Zaslany’s ideas and initiatives, yet at the same time, he was also very restrained and often elaborately careful in his dealings with people. Leah Ben-Dor, for many years the editor of *The Jerusalem Post*, an English-language daily, and a long-time friend of the family, who worked with him on various secret operations from the 1930s through to the beginning of the 1950s, relates how he cautioned her against pilfering British Army documents during her service in the British Army, despite the proven value of the documents she obtained in this manner. During his career in public service, this kind of apparent hesitation on his part was interpreted by some of his colleagues as a sign of weakness or lack of resolve.

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It was through the Ben-Zvis that Reuven Zaslany first became acquainted with some of the more famous of the ‘Gymnasists’ (pupils of the famous Tel Aviv secondary school – the Herzliya Gymnasia): Dov Hos, Moshe Shertok and Eliyahu Golomb – the famous ‘brothers-in-law’,¹⁴ all of whom were to play key roles in the Zionist movement and with whom Reuven was to be closely connected for many years. The ‘Gymnasists’ were regarded as the ‘First Generation of the Redemption’, the ‘new Hebrews’, and that is also how they perceived themselves: as the first generation totally devoted to the creation of the Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael. Theirs was a different world altogether. Moshe Shertok and Eliyahu Golomb were graduates of the first class at the school, which included many children of early pioneers, and others who had either been sent by their parents or came by themselves from eastern Europe to study in Palestine. They were the generation between the Second Aliya and the Third Aliya, and closest in spirit to the Palestine-born youth of the first years of the Hano’ar Ha-Oved labor-oriented Zionist youth

movement. That is perhaps the reason why they drew Reuven Zaslany into their circle and regarded him as one of their own. He, in turn, became the most faithful of the followers, deeply committed to his new beliefs and loyalties, a man with a mission throughout his life – just like them.

And so it was that Reuven Zaslany was brought into the inner circle of the ‘tribe’ that dominated the politics and ideologies of the Jewish labor movement in Palestine. The Ben-Zvis and the ‘brothers-in-law’ were the embodiment of these interwoven relationships of Zaslany’s new, expanded family. Of the three ‘brothers-in-law’, Dov Hos was his closest friend and mentor. Zaslany’s son Doubie, who was born a year after Hos’s death, was named after him as a tribute to this abiding friendship. Hos hand-picked Reuven to work with him in the Political and Arabic departments of the Executive Committee of the General Federation of Labour, which was the most powerful administrative organization in the labor movement and indeed of the entire Yishuv. Reuven worked as Dov’s assistant on trade union matters among the Arab employees of the railway workers in Haifa and the harbor in Jaffa who were members of the Histadrut. In this capacity, Reuven helped organize them into a labor union, and fought to improve their working conditions. This work demanded a great deal of patience and persistence. In terms of the Zionist labor movement it involved breaking new ground: making contacts with Arab workers, and instilling in them the belief in their ability to create their own union in order to fight for better conditions, and what is more, to do it in cooperation with the Jews and under their instruction. Under Hos’s tutelage, Reuven also nurtured contacts with British police officers and high-ranking officials in the Mandatory government who dealt with labor relations and determined the rules of the game in the country at that time. Reuven soon learned that it was possible to appeal against or even oppose their decisions, and it was also possible, so it transpired, to try to persuade them using calm but persistent negotiating.

This was the beginning of Zaslany’s education in the ways of the Arab population of Palestine and in developing contacts with the British Mandatory authorities. He had to learn by experience how to maneuver between the two, since the British were equally capable of either obstructing his dealings with the Arabs or using them to their advantage. Moving between the Arabs on one side and the British on the other taught Zaslany, in his first years of public service, how to negotiate the Jewish-British-Arab ‘triangle’ – extracting the maximum benefit from Jewish activities among the Arabs of Palestine, either with the help of the British or despite their interference – depending on the nature of the relations and the complex web of conflicting and complementary interests within this ‘triangle’. Reuven, Hos’s most adept pupil, was about to become a master of the ‘triangle gambit’ and its contribution to the furthering of the Zionist cause.

Dov Hos was one of the leaders of the Yishuv and the Hagannah whose true contribution in the pre-state days has never been fully brought to light. In the annals of the period, he has almost been forgotten. He was a man of unusual personal charm, warmly remembered by all those who knew him. Both he and his wife were tragically killed in a car crash in 1940, putting an end to the story of Dov Hos long before he had the chance to scale the heights he was undoubtedly capable of reaching. Conceivably, part of the reason for the fact that he has slipped out of the general recollection of the period was not only his untimely death, but also the fact that he was largely overshadowed by the greater public visibility of his two brothers-in-law, Moshe Shertok and Eliyahu Golomb.¹⁵

Dov Hos was a man of many missions, always prepared to take on anything and everything that he was asked to do, even if it prevented him from following through on any one of these

endeavors. Some of this restless moving from one thing to another may have rubbed off on Zaslany as well. ‘Dov Hos studied at the London School of Economics, and was well-versed in English culture’, recounts Israel Galili. ‘He was the Histadrut representative to international conferences, where he met with people from England and the Commonwealth as well as various Arab officials. He was also in charge of Histadrut relations with the British Labour Party of the 1930s, which were the years of great friendship between the Labour Party and the major trade union in Palestine. The fact that he had very good contacts within the British political establishment served him well in his dealings with officials of the British Mandate in Palestine. He knew how to take advantage of his personal contacts in London in his dealings with high-ranking Mandatory officials – such as the negotiations with them on behalf of the Histadrut concerning labor relations, preventing police intervention in labor disputes, legal defense, imprisonment and other related subjects. Basically, what he was aiming for was to make it possible for the Histadrut to function unhampered by the authorities.

‘All these activities and qualities were reflected on Reuven Zaslany during the time they worked together,’ recalls Galili. ‘I know that they were very close friends and that Dov instilled in him the orientation towards the leaders of the British Labour movement. This, for Reuven, set him on his socialist path. Reuven had not been a member of the youth movements, and it was only through his contact with Dov Hos that he arrived at his own self-definition as a *bona fide* member of the Jewish labor movement in Palestine.’

Reuven regarded Dov Hos as his mentor, and, according to his good friend Ehud Avriel, he frequently mentioned this. Avriel was one of the small group of people closest to David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Shertok, and he knew Shiloah very well and respected him greatly. ‘The greatest impression he made on me was the fact that he began his career as a Jewish teacher in Baghdad. His memories of that time came up again and again in our talks, in the analogies that he drew from his Middle Eastern experience. Reuven was a Jew from Jerusalem and Meah She’arim, and was the only authentic Middle Easterner among us. His whole demeanor bespoke a Middle Eastern intellectual, but he was more than that. There was in his personality a blend of Meah She’arim and Baghdad, together with the sophistication of the European political salons’, Avriel continues. ‘When he spoke to his English colleagues he did so like a young don from one of the English universities, who keeps most of his information to himself since it is so highly classified. In this way he aroused the curiosity of his interlocutors, English and American alike, to the point where they felt they needed – in order to expand their understanding of the Near East – to maintain an ongoing dialogue. The people he was interested in sought out his company’

‘The European air he bore came mostly from Moshe Shertok. He taught all of us’, Avriel explains. ‘Reuven himself regarded Dov Hos as a mentor. He respected and admired him greatly. Hos was regarded by Shiloah and by many others as the one among them best suited to create contacts and instill a sense of confidence in potential enemies and turn them into allies. Everyone else in the top echelons of the party and the labor movement tried to imitate Dov Hos in this, including Reuven, of course.’ And indeed this was a facet of Reuven’s character that remained with him throughout his life: the challenge, veering on an obsession or missionary goal, to conquer the minds and hearts of all the hostile gentiles who opposed the Zionist dream, and turn them into friends and allies. It was a plot-line that surfaced in his life story again and again.

‘Reuven read foreign literature more than any of us’, Avriel continues. ‘He used the time he spent traveling abroad to do so, the long hours of waiting, the sleepless nights filled with cigarette smoke and the taste of coffee and cognac. He was always up to date on new ideas, new books and people in the news. As far as that was concerned – he was the first among equals. He

had a much more creative turn of mind than all of us, constantly trying to develop and implement new paths of cooperation with the British during the Mandate, and with the Americans after the establishment of the state. The example of the paratroopers sent behind German lines during the Second World War is a case in point [see below, [Part Two, Chapter 6](#)], not to mention the way he overcame all the obstacles that hampered the planning and execution of these missions, and the entire concept of the ‘Peripheral Alliance’ of the fifties that was his brainchild.’

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Between trips to Iraq (between October 1932 and May 1934) Reuven Zaslany was very busy. He continued studying at the university, although he did not complete his degree, and, just prior to his second trip to Iraq, offered *The Palestine Post* (the forerunner of *The Jerusalem Post*) his services as a reporter. In this period, between the two trips to Iraq, and perhaps even before the first one, Reuven also began working for RAF intelligence. ‘I was secretary to the head of Air Force Intelligence Patrick Domville.’ He referred to this many years later in an unpublished interview that was full of gaps and contradictions. ‘I was sent to do this by Ya’akov Patt, Hagannah commander of Jerusalem, and relayed information to him on security matters.’ Reuven kept up his contacts with Domville throughout his second trip to Iraq, with the full knowledge and approval of Dov Hos and, apparently, other members of the leadership of the Yishuv. The special relations between some of the officials from the Jewish Agency’s Political Department and from the SHAI with British intelligence services continued in various ways until the end of the British Mandate in 1948.

When Reuven returned to Iraq, equipped with a letter of recommendation from Domville, he expanded his network of contacts¹⁶ and began pursuing another initiative which he was to deal with repeatedly in the years to come: he began researching the situation of the Jewish community throughout Iraq, and for this purpose took a special trip to Kurdistan. He submitted an impressive account of the entire region and of the state of the Jewish communities there.¹⁷

In communiqués he sent to his three constant correspondents, Ben-Zvi, Hos and Shertok, Reuven pointed out the advantages to be gained from the influence of the Jewish community on the Iraqi press. The Arabic press in Baghdad is almost entirely under the influence of the Jewish community, and it is very important to explain to their Committee what I want them to get into the Arab papers.’¹⁸

During this second trip he also tried to encourage the Jews of Baghdad to emigrate, legally or illegally, to Palestine. In one of his communiqués he noted that it would cost 8–10 dinars a head to get 200–250 people to go to Palestine. He recommended sending *aliya* representatives to Iraq, and perhaps even to train Iraqi Jews who had already immigrated to Palestine to return to Iraq as local immigration officers. The tone of his messages on this issue was biting as he urged his superiors not to let the opportunity slip away. ‘We have done nothing to help this large group of people who are ready and willing to immigrate to Israel. Poland, Rumania, Germany, America, etc. – we have sent *aliya* representative to all these places ... but not to Baghdad ... and it’s about time, now at least, that we give this issue serious thought.’¹⁹

In July 1934, only two months after his arrival in Baghdad, he was asked by the Iraqi authorities to leave the country. Apparently, reports concerning his trip to Kurdistan added fuel to the suspicions against him – particularly on the background of the growing hatred for the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine and for the Zionist endeavor as a whole, and the increasing hostility of the Iraqis toward the Jewish community in Iraq and its ties with the Jewish settlement in Palestine. Upon his return to Palestine, Reuven Zaslany began working for the executive

committee of the Histadrut, the General Federation of Labour, and he began working for Dov Hos as his assistant in labor relations.

At the same time, Reuven took on another job at the request of Shaul Avigur (Meirov) who, a short time before that, was appointed as one of the two commanders of the Hagannah. The job consisted of collating all the information coming into the Arabic section of SHAI from many different sources. After the Arab riots of 1929, the Hagannah command was reorganized and two coordinators were appointed, one from the 'Right' and one from the 'Left'. The first coordinator from the left-wing labor movement was Dov Hos, who was replaced soon afterwards by Avigur.

During that time, strong ties were established between the national headquarters of the Hagannah and the Political Department of the Histadrut, and Avigur soon decided to restructure SHAI, the information service of the Hagannah, and put it on a solid institutional basis, rather than relying on the existing haphazard system of reports filed by scattered sources on their personal initiative. The official history of the Hagannah states that Avigur asked Zaslany 'to collect and organize all the scanty and irregular information that arrived at the Hagannah center. Since the Hagannah did not have enough money to pay a full-time salary for this job, Zaslany spent most of his time at his job in the Histadrut, and only part of his time in the Hagannah.' The truth was that not long after he began working in the Histadrut, he set his sights on a position in the more prestigious Political Department of the Jewish Agency, and said so to Dov Hos, who was not about to stand in his way.²⁰

The time that Reuven spent working in the Histadrut established him as a valuable member of the national leadership. Ben-Gurion, who was elected Chairman of the Jewish Agency in November 1935, wanted Zaslany to become his private secretary, and Hos told Reuven of Ben-Gurion's written request to that effect. However, as would be the case many times later on in his career, he vacillated between the conflicting requests of Ben-Gurion and Shertok, who wanted him to work at the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. Eventually he chose a full-time job at the Jewish Agency under the head of the Department, Moshe Shertok, rather than becoming secretary to the Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, David Ben-Gurion.

NOTES

1. Sabra – prickly cactus, a term borrowed from nature to describe the native-born Israeli: prickly on the outside, sweet on the inside.
2. *Aliya* – Literally 'going up', figuratively referring to Jews immigrating to the Holy Land. The history of the Zionist movement includes three major waves of immigration, numbered in sequence (the First, Second and Third *Aliya*), between the latter part of the nineteenth century until the late 1920s.
3. First Israeli ambassador to the United States, later ambassador to England and President of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
4. *Moshava* means, literally, 'settlement', but it also denotes a particular form of rural, partially communal farming village.
5. One of the most inflammatory controversies of the early years of the Jewish Yishuv concerned what became known as 'the conquest of labor', i.e. the attempt by the *halutzim* to force established farmers of 'the old Yishuv' to help the Zionist cause by employing only Jewish workers, even if it cost them more than the readily available – and considerably cheaper – Arab labor.
6. According to Reuven's service file in the National Archives (#3477/4), which he apparently filled out himself, he joined the Hagannah and SHAI in 1929. Shilon's memory may be playing tricks on him. Be that as it may, Zaslany often gave different and contradictory details about his life in interviews and questionnaires – even when they were totally harmless – as though to cloak himself in utter secrecy.
7. Originally named Shertok, he changed his name to the Hebrew 'Sharett' after the establishment of the State. An enormously important figure in the Zionist movement and in the State of Israel, Sharett headed the crucial Political Department of the Jewish Agency (see note below) from 1938 to 1948, and after the establishment of the state served as Foreign Minister and Prime Minister. He will be referred to here as 'Shertok' until 1948, and then as 'Sharett'.
8. *Ha-Va'ad Ha-Leumi shel Knesset Yisrael* – the National Committee was the highest governing body of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine, elected by a Council of Representatives, and recognized by the Mandatory government as the official representatives of the Yishuv in all matters relating to religion, education, social welfare, public health and, later, during the Second World War, civil defense.

9. In his capacity as Secretary of the Political Department, Shertok approved the payment of '3 a month to Reuven Zaslany, as of 1 Dec. 1931. This was in response to a request sent by Zaslany to the Director of the Political Department, Haim Arlosoroff. The request was approved within a few days. State Archives, Foreign Ministry Files, 4373/3.
10. Ibid., 4372/2.
11. Reuven to Shertok, 3/8/32. Zionist Archives S25/7811.
12. 'Diyoknai: Reuven Shiloah, or Silence is Golden', *Ma'ariv*, 29/5/53.
13. The term 'religious Zionism' refers to the centrist religious political parties in Israel who identify with Zionist ideology and regard the establishment of the State of Israel as a first step in the redemption of the Jewish people. The ultra-Orthodox *haredi* religious groups do not recognize the state or Zionist ideology, and believe that redemption can only be brought about by the coming of the Messiah.
14. Known as 'the brothers-in-law' because both Dov Hos and Eliyahu Golomb were married to Moshe Shertok's sisters. Later, a fourth 'brother-in-law' was added to the family – Shaul Avigur (Meirov) whose sister, Zipporah, married Shertok.
15. These descriptions of Dov Hos are based on various records, among them many personal recollections. His achievements in the establishment of the Hagannah from its earliest beginnings in the First World War as a member of the 'Gymnasists' in the 'Jaffa Group' are described in detail in the *Hagannah Book*. His work in the General Federacion of Labour, particularly the development of its air and sea services, is related in scattered material found in the memoirs of some of the more prominent members of the Histadrut, in the Archives of the Labor movement.
16. During his second trip to Iraq he received a letter from Patrick Domville, dated 8 July 1934, with the following message: 'Do you want me to send you your money, or should I give it to somebody here? I will try to get you a job and I hope I will find something for you when you return.' State Archives 3743/2.
17. For details of Zaslany's trip to Kurdistan, see his letter of 12 July 1934. Zionist Archives A116/65, and an interview with Eliyahu Eilat.
18. Zaslany to Ben-Zvi, 7 June 1934. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. From an interview with Eliyahu Agassi, an employee of the Arabic Department of the Histadrut.

Friends and Enemies

The year Reuven Zaslany began his work in Iraq, 1931, was a year of changes in the leadership of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement. This was occasioned primarily by the shock of the 1929 Arab riots,¹ and the turning point they signaled for the Jewish settlement in Palestine. For all three major elements of the Palestine situation – the Jews, the Arabs and the British – this was a time for stock-taking and for reconsidering perspectives on the history of Palestine and the struggle for its future. The catalyst for this change was, more than anything else, the shift in the balance of power between the Arabs and the Jews in the Arabs' favor following the success of their sudden attack on the Jewish community and the consequent shift in British policy toward the two sides.

In the Zionist camp, it was clear that a change of policy was needed toward all aspects of the struggle for Eretz Yisrael: settlement, politics and particularly self-defense – the most neglected area of all. One of the immediate results of this retrenchment was the creation of a long-range, strategic approach to the expansion of Jewish settlement, land purchases, and a new realization of the importance of the Hagannah and the need to bolster its real military capabilities. The need for reorganization brought to the fore long-standing conflicts within the Yishuv and the Hagannah itself concerning the required changes in the organization – conflicts that ultimately led to a split. Criticism about the lack of preparedness that led to the surprise Arab attack grew in intensity, particularly in relation to the glaring lack of advance information on Arab intentions and the woeful lack of trained defenders who might have held off the attackers and defended the unarmed Jewish communities. These rivalries reverberated beyond the Hagannah, as old hatreds between Mapai and the Revisionists² flared, with the Hagannah accusing the Revisionists of being directly responsible for the 'Western Wall Incident' that incited the Arab riots.³ The first fruits of this reorganization began to appear in 1931. The Histadrut, the strongest organization in the Yishuv, regarded itself as bearing the primary responsibility for defending the political and security interests of the labor movement and of the Jewish settlement in Palestine as a whole. This was emphasized by the election, for the first time, of a representative of the labor movement, Haim Arlosoroff, to the Directorate of the Jewish Agency at the World Zionist Congress in July 1931, and his appointment as head of its Political Department. This happened in the very same year that one of the pillars of the labor movement, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, was elected Chairman of the Va'ad Ha-Leumi (the National Council) for a full term of office (he had held this post before, but only partially and temporarily), and the socialist Mapai Party emerged as the dominant political party in *Knesset Yisrael* – the highest governing body of the Yishuv.

At the same time, other leading members of the Mapai Party began making a move toward assuming political leadership of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement. Haim Arlosoroff, now head of the Political Department at the Jewish Agency, and Dov Hos, head of the Political and Arab departments of the Histadrut, and in charge of liaison with the Labour Party in England, exchanged ideas with Moshe Shertok, Secretary of the Political Department, about 'the change for the worse in British policy toward the Zionist endeavor' and 'the need for Zionist intelligence in the years to come'.⁴ 'On some long walks we took around the Rehavia neighborhood', Yosef Avidar recalled, 'Arlosoroff tried to persuade me to set up a strategic intelligence operation. This was before November 1932. I turned him down. I didn't think I was the right person for the job. I suggested Shaul Avigur. Arlosoroff's response was that he wasn't 'European' enough. Already at that stage Arlosoroff believed that we needed to prepare for the establishment of a state. He talked about drawing up blueprints for institutions and proper governmental frameworks that would be capable of preparing operational plans and gathering intelligence – including in the area of political espionage. He stressed the need for political-strategic espionage.'

This was the milieu into which 'youngsters' like Zaslany and Eliyahu Eilat were drawn at the beginning of their public careers. This was the rationale behind Eilat's trip to Beirut to study and the financial help he received while he was there – £5 sterling paid to him directly by Arlosoroff in the Jewish Agency, on top of his salary as a reporter for *The Palestine Post*, Reuters and the Hebrew daily, *Davar*. This was also the reasoning behind Reuven Zaslany's similar arrangement in Baghdad: apart from the salary he received as a teacher, he was also paid '3 sterling a month directly by the Political Department. These first, temporary assignments for the two young men would yield benefits later, upon their return to Palestine.

In British government circles at that time there was growing disappointment over the slow pace at which the Zionist movement was realizing its national aspirations, and British policies implemented in Palestine as a result of the Balfour Declaration of 1917⁵ were questioned. Arab opposition to these policies manifested itself in a deepening hatred toward everything British, and incitement against His Majesty's Government's policies throughout the Arab and Muslim world. This caused a serious erosion of Britain's status in the region. One indication of this British change of mind was the Passfield White Paper of 21 October 1930, which was based on the Hope-Simpson Report from 22 August of that year. The document's principal conclusion was that because of the conflict of interests between the Jews and the Arabs there was no more room in the country for additional Jewish settlers, and it was therefore recommended that immigration quotas for Jews be severely reduced. The Jewish institutions in the Yishuv mounted a major diplomatic campaign against this edict, enlisting the help of leading political figures in England such as Ernest Bevin, who was then regarded as a great friend of the Zionist movement in the British labor unions and the Labour Party. Under severe pressure from the Jewish community inside Palestine and outside it – including the mass resignation of the entire leadership of the Zionist Federation and the Jewish Agency – Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald wrote a letter on 14 February 1931 to Haim Weizmann, President of the Jewish Agency Executive, canceling the implementation of Passfield's White Paper. Its implications, however, were very clear.

The Arab riots of 1929 brought in their wake significant policy shifts and a re-evaluation of the Mandatory administration as a whole, as well as a complete reorganization of the British military and police forces in Palestine. The Mandatory Police Force was overhauled and General Herbert Dowbiggin, a police commander serving in Ceylon, was brought in to be its chief.

Less widely known in this context is the reorganization of the RAF intelligence apparatus in Palestine. This was the military arm of the Mandatory government which was made responsible

in 1922 for intelligence gathering and the defense of Palestine and its immediate neighbors. The 1929 riots, which caught everyone completely by surprise, proved that it had failed in its principal task – maintaining law and order in the country. Furthermore, the ‘minimalist’ concept of defense they employed, based mostly on advance intelligence and preemptive military actions, had totally collapsed. The ‘minimalist’ concept used paid informers, Jewish and Arab, who were supposed to give the authorities advance warning about unusual tensions among the Jews or the Arabs, and alert the military in case of impending disturbances. RAF intelligence was backed up by highly mobile RAF units, equipped with light aircraft and armored cars, who were supposed to intervene in case of riots or guerrilla actions of any kind. They were mainly stationed at the airport in Lydda, while a few elements operated out of the airport in Haifa.⁶

This method of local defense, which had been successfully implemented against Bedouin raiding parties in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Transjordan, and particularly against the Wahhabi tribe in Wadi Sirhan in Transjordan in 1925, failed on two counts in the riots of 1929. It did not provide the necessary early warnings, and it deployed forces wholly unsuited to the task of quelling riots in urban areas.

The result of all this was a two-pronged decision on the part of the Mandatory authorities: on the one hand they decided to strengthen the RAF military-political intelligence apparatus and, on the other, they decided to forego their dependence on solitary informers, and to develop instead cooperative ties with major institutions such as the Histadrut and the Hagannah, on the Jewish side, and similar organizations on the Arab side. At the same time the Police Force and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), both of which dealt mostly with criminal cases but frequently handled political cases as well, were considerably reinforced. Locally recruited patrol forces – the ‘*notrim*’ (‘guards’ in Hebrew) – who were deployed mainly for train guard duty and for safeguarding public installations, were similarly reinforced. Under this new security framework, military intelligence and the various police departments often found themselves at loggerheads on operational concepts, particularly concerning the people on whom they felt they could rely for operational support among Jews or Arabs.

It was during this reorganization that Patrick Domville, a British undercover expert, was brought in to head the RAF intelligence unit in Jerusalem, and Reuven Zaslany was sent to work for him as translator and secretary and as liaison officer between the British and Ya’akov Patt, head of the Jerusalem Hagannah, and Dov Hos at the Jewish Agency.

Patrick Domville was a flamboyant, fascinating and controversial man, who played an important role in the Jewish Agency’s political struggle with the British authorities, particularly on issues pertaining to security. His involvement in these matters was much more extensive than was previously known and practically nothing has been written about him. After his tour of duty in Palestine, he returned to England and, sadly, ended his days in poverty and drunkenness. One of the people who knew him well during various periods of his life, and up to the time of his death in London, was Eliyahu Eilat.⁷

‘Domville was of Irish Protestant stock’, Eilat related. ‘He came to Palestine from Baghdad with the rank of Captain (Flight-Lieutenant), and was a highly-trained professional soldier who worked under the head of British intelligence in Palestine, Brigadier Ritchie, and helped us a great deal. Ritchie came to Palestine from Kenya, and did not know much about what was going on in the country at the time. Domville was very closely connected to the Nashashibi family, and was well-known for his hatred of the Mufti.⁸ The fact that he regarded the Mufti as the greatest danger to law and order in the country brought him in direct conflict with the Mandatory government, which, at that time, was making every effort to avoid offending the Mufti in any

way.

‘Reuven Zaslany’s close association with Domville helped shape the British officer’s policies concerning the Arab-Jewish conflict, and he in turn supplied us with important information concerning the Mufti. We weren’t too happy about his support of the Nashashibis, but his opposition to the Mufti was of great help to us.’⁹

As assistant to Domville (and to his successor Anthony Simmonds), Reuven Zaslany helped the Political Department of the Jewish Agency exploit the rift between the British Intelligence services – which supported the Hashemite family, and the Mufti’s enemies, the Nashashibis – and the civil administration that supported the Mufti.

‘Domville was no fool’, Eilat continued. ‘He received a great deal of information from us (through Zaslany), and used it without divulging his sources.’ This in itself was very helpful but it did not bring about any significant changes in British policies toward the Jewish-Arab conflict in Palestine. Domville was on very good terms with the High Commissioner, Sir Arthur Wauchope, who frequently invited him to dinner to sound him out on the situation in Palestine. Domville was also on friendly terms with Moshe Shertok and Yehoshua Gordon, head of the Security Branch of the Political Department, who was in charge of liaison with the British on matters pertaining to police, the Home Guards and other security matters, all of which turned him into an important political ally for the Yishuv.¹⁰

One example of this was Domville’s consistent support of Jewish positions in meetings of the Mandatory Joint Committee on Security, on which he sat as the intelligence expert, together with representatives of the police and the secret services, and the Chief Secretariat. According to Yisrael Galili, this committee dealt with issues that were of vital importance to the Jewish Agency and the Hagannah. Reuven would learn from Domville in advance which issues were on the committee’s agenda, and then try to secure Domville’s support for the Jewish point of view prior to the discussions. Galili recalled that Moshe Shertok, and even David Ben-Gurion, would often seek out Domville’s advice and support before any meeting with the High Commissioner or the Chief Secretary.

When he was Israel’s Ambassador to England, Eliyahu Eilat followed Domville’s tragic decline and tried to help him as much as possible out of gratitude for his aid to the Jewish cause in Palestine. ‘He died in the early 1950s of drink and poverty’, Eilat recalls. ‘Whenever he called me I used to prepare a crate of gin for him. I arranged a job for him at *Marks & Spencer’s* as a guard, but they constantly threatened to fire him because he was always drunk. When he lived in the prestigious Talbiyeh quarter in Jerusalem’, Eilat recounts, ‘he was a very pleasant, hospitable man who introduced me to many influential people. But in London, whenever we invited him over, he would refuse. He had nothing to wear, and despite his wretched condition, he retained his self-respect. He refused to accept any financial help, and spent all of his pension on drink.’

Emmanuel Vilensky (Yelan) who headed the Haifa branch of SHAI in the 1930s, and held a number of important intelligence posts between 1940 and 1944, saw Domville in a different light altogether, comparing him unfavorably with another staunch British ally of the Zionist cause – Charles Orde Wingate. Yelan worked with the British on security matters from the 1930s up to the establishment of the state, and was always suspicious of Domville’s true motives. ‘He was a homosexual and a friend of the Arabs. He was no friend of the Jews,’ he claimed.

Orde Wingate, who played a unique role in the history of Israel’s defense forces, was an intelligence officer attached to a British artillery unit. In fall 1936 he was posted to Haifa, to the headquarters of General Dill, commander of the Galilee region, as an Arabic expert. He was fluent in the language after studying it thoroughly during a tour of duty in Sudan. ‘In Haifa

Wingate met Strange',¹¹ Yelan said, 'who shared his harsh criticism of the pro-Arab British policy during the Arab Revolt, and of the Mandatory forces' failure in containing the violence. It was Strange who first introduced me to Wingate.'

In time, Wingate became known as '*ha-yadid*' – 'the friend', reflecting, it is thought, his profound influence on the Jewish self-defense forces in the making, but in fact the source of his nickname was much more prosaic: it was the code word Shertok and Zaslany used for him in their phone conversations, referring to him as 'Yelan's friend'. Describing Wingate's first meeting with Shertok, Yelan recalls that the British officer remained standing throughout the meeting, and finally said to Shertok, 'You're flirting with your enemies, and provoking enmity among your friends'. He then left the room abruptly, slamming the door behind him. Shertok later phoned Zaslany to ask him about the eccentric Englishman, and Zaslany replied, 'Manola [Yelan's nickname] thinks that he's important to us, and that we haven't paid enough attention to him.' Shertok urged Zaslany to get him a Hebrew teacher and look after him properly.

According to Yelan, Wingate and Zaslany met frequently and became close friends. 'Wingate had great respect for Zaslany and consulted with him often', he recalled. This is borne out by other people who were associated with Wingate at the time, such as his assistant, Avraham Akavia and his Hebrew teacher, Yehudah Ya'ari. 'Wingate would praise Zaslany lavishly', Akavia notes, 'and for Wingate to speak favorably of anyone was a rare thing indeed'.

Wingate held extreme views on the ways in which the Jewish community should deal with Arab hostility and violence. As Zaslany told Leah Ben-Dor, 'The friend's idea for quelling Arab riots was to deport the inhabitants of any Arab village who attacked nearby Jewish settlements, and to expropriate their lands for the JNF.¹² This way, he claimed, they'll go and live among their brethren, and the Jewish National Fund will have more lands at its disposal.' According to Ben-Dor, Zaslany rejected this suggestion out of hand. First of all, he argued, the English would never allow it, and second, as Zaslany put it, 'Wingate won't have to spend the rest of his life with the Arabs as neighbors – we will.' Wingate's Hebrew teacher, Ya'ari, describes a different aspect of the man's nature: 'He was very angry with the Jewish leadership for not reacting to Hitler in a more forceful way. He believed that if Haim Weizmann had slashed his own throat the entire world would have sat up and taken notice.' And it was just such an act that Wingate himself was to attempt later during the Second World War, and live to regret. When Reuven Zaslany visited him in hospital in Alexandria following his suicide attempt, Wingate told him that he feared that his rash act would deter Ben-Gurion from appointing him to head the Jewish Army in the approaching War of Independence. Wingate was not aware of the fact that he did not stand a chance to begin with.

A third British officer who was to play an important role in the relationship between the Mandatory authorities and the Jewish national leadership was Anthony Simmonds, who replaced Domville in 1937. As was the case with Wingate and Domville, and despite the many differences between them, Zaslany was influential in shaping Simmonds' sympathies toward Israel. Simmonds met Reuven Zaslany for the first time in May 1934, when his battalion was moved from Egypt to Palestine. He spent a year in the country with his unit and then went back to Egypt. In 1936, immediately after the outbreak of the Arab Revolt, the battalion was returned to Palestine, together with Simmonds.

On 1 May 1936, soon after his arrival in Palestine, Simmonds was given a special commission to set up a military intelligence unit. In the months that followed, Simmonds and Zaslany met regularly as part of their respective duties. Simmonds recalls that he was the only British officer who chose to live in the Rehavia quarter, among Jewish friends, and not in

Talbiyeh like most of his colleagues. He also recalls many arguments he had with British Police officers because of his attitude toward the Jews. This tension was not unusual, Simmonds claims, in view of the differences of opinion between the military intelligence and the CID, the latter being strongly opposed to any actions directed against the Mufti and his people.

According to Simmonds, he took over Domville's job in August 1937, when Mandatory officials decided to merge military intelligence with RAF intelligence – an arrangement which lasted until the end of the British Mandate over Palestine. As 'Political Officer', Simmonds was now responsible for both military and political intelligence. The strong ties that were forged between Simmonds and Zaslany would, in due course, have very important results both in the suppression of the Arab Revolt, and during the Second World War, when Simmonds was at the head of the special military intelligence unit responsible for rescuing British prisoners and escapees from behind German lines.

The story of these three Englishmen – Domville, Wingate and Simmonds – supporters of the Zionist cause from within the Mandatory government, helps to underscore Reuven Zaslany's attempts to develop contacts with representatives of the major powers with interests in the region – first with the British and then with the Americans – for the benefit of the Yishuv and the state.

NOTES

1. The worst incident of these riots was the massacre of the Jewish community in Hebron – a total of 68 men, women and children were killed, scores wounded, and the entire Jewish settlement in Hebron was looted and desecrated. The total number of Jews killed throughout the country in these riots was 133. More than 300 were wounded.
2. The right-wing, nationalist movement founded by Ze'ev Jabotinsky in the 1930s in opposition to the reigning pro-British factions of the World Zionist Federation led by Haim Weizmann. Among its more inflammatory claims was its call for Jewish sovereignty over all of Biblical Israel 'from the Euphrates to the Nile' and 'both banks of the Jordan'.
3. The Western Wall was the site of numerous violent incidents, with the Arabs claiming their historical rights over it despite its Second Temple origins. The Jewish community of Palestine fought for control over the Wall, with the Revisionists led by Jabotinsky frequently engaging in fights with Arabs on the site. It is generally thought that the riots of 1929 developed out of one of these violent incidents at the Wall.
4. From an interview with Yosef Avidar about his conversations with Arlosoroff and Dov Hos.
5. Published in 1917 by Lord Balfour, stating, most importantly, that 'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People.'
6. Most of the details appearing here are based on an interview with Anthony Simmonds, who headed the network of informers, and on his own unpublished manuscript, and various other sources.
7. The description here of Patrick Domville's life and duties is based mainly on interviews with Eliyahu Eilat, Emmanuel Yelan, Yisrael Galili and the British Army intelligence operative, Anthony Simmonds, who, by his own account, took over from Domville in August 1937. However, it is possible that Domville continued in his job even after that date.
8. Haj Amin el-Husseini, the leading religious authority for the Arabs of Palestine and, in this capacity, a very powerful figure in the Arab community.
9. In various books he wrote on the period, Eilat gave this account:
The Mufti hated the Hashemites for collaborating with the British who brought the Hashemite family from the desert and installed them as rulers over the Arab inhabitants of Palestine. The British administration supported the Mufti mainly because he was the most powerful figure in the Arab community in Palestine, and the British were opportunists. They proceeded in this matter according to the Arab proverb: 'If you can't cut off your enemy's hands, kiss him.' It was Ronald Storrs, during his term as Governor of Jerusalem, who began the courtship with the Mufti. Years later, in London, when I spoke about this to Herbert Samuel (who was the first High Commissioner for Palestine under the Mandate), he told me that the Mufti promised him that he would maintain peace in the country. That, of course, was utter nonsense to begin with.
10. In a letter to Zaslany from 7 Sept. 1934, Dov Hos wrote the following about Domville: 'I think he is the best spokesman of the Zionist cause *vis-à-vis* the British'. State of Israel Archives 3743/3.
11. Capt. Roy Strange, head of intelligence in the North.
12. *Ha-keren ha-kayemet le-Yisrael* – the fund-raising and land-purchasing arm of the Jewish Yishuv.

The ‘Tripartite Cooperation’ against the Mufti

Shortly after Reuven Zaslany began working full time in the Political Department in 1936, riots broke out among the Arab population of Palestine, leading to what eventually became known as ‘The Arab Revolt’. At that time the Department was undergoing rapid changes to deal with the unprecedented political situation produced by the riots. Contacts with the British Army now became vital to the defense of the Yishuv, and Colonel Frederick H. Kisch, who headed the Political Department until 1931, was appointed liaison officer between the British Army and the leadership of the Jewish Agency¹ under the overall supervision of Yehoshua Gordon, head of the Security Division within the Political Department. Kisch was asked to oversee the use of facilities and housing in Jewish settlements by the British Army, and monitor relations between British Army personnel and the residents of these settlements.² Zaslany was appointed Kisch’s assistant, and one of his first initiatives was to set up a network of ‘Hospitality Committees’ for the benefit of British officers and soldiers.³ He believed that these local committees would help generate good personal relationships with members of the British armed forces, officers and men alike, and thus help the Yishuv on two levels: gathering information and telling the story of Zionism – its history, aims and objectives – to all those British Army units that had been rushed to Palestine in the wake of the disturbances. Zaslany firmly believed that this would help counter the pro-Arab propaganda which was supported by the great majority of Mandatory government officials.

Such were the modest beginnings of the man in this new and much sought-after area of political activity. It would not be too long before Reuven Zaslany would no longer be satisfied with his minor role in the system, and would branch out in an attempt to develop new contacts and explore hitherto untried modes of cooperation with the British army, the CID and all the other arms of the British administration involved in putting down the Arab Revolt.

Together with his efforts to cultivate contacts with elements of the British security forces, Zaslany was also responsible for coordinating between the various regional and independent SHAI networks. Their principal task was to report on activities of hostile Arab groups – relations between Arab families and clans, the general atmosphere among the various Arab factions, and preparations for strikes or raids on Jewish settlements.⁴ These reports were submitted both to the Hagannah commanders and to the Jewish Agency, in other words – to Reuven Zaslany. Together with Eliyahu Sasson, with whom he worked very closely at that time, Zaslany collected these reports, and attempted to establish a unified, country-wide network of operatives to run informers on Arab activities both inside and outside the country.

Reuven Zaslany reviewed all this material in an effort to develop a comprehensive picture of the situation. In January 1937, for example, he reported to his superiors that the cessation of the general strike in October 1936, and of the other strikes and disturbances initiated by the Arab population, was only temporary, and that under the prevailing circumstances, the Arab leadership would be forced to renew the rioting, and even step it up in the very near future. This, as it transpired, was a very precise assessment of the state of affairs in Palestine at that time.⁵ In September 1938, Zaslany was appointed by the Political Department of the Jewish Agency as intelligence and security liaison officer to British intelligence (otherwise known as the Military-Political Intelligence of the Royal Air Force) and the CID. One account of his activities in this respect reads as follows: 'By that time he had already realized that our most important asset in our relations with the British was the fact that our knowledge of the situation in the region was deeper and much more extensive than that of the British authorities, and that the information we had could be used to our advantage'.⁶ These contacts with the British came fully into play with the resumption of Arab terrorist activities, after a one-year lull, signaled by the killing of Louis Andrews, governor of the Galilee region, in September 1937. This could no longer be described as a 'disturbance' aimed against the Jewish Yishuv, but was rather a direct challenge to British rule in the country. The British authorities responded to the killing with strong measures. They ordered the dismantling of the Supreme Arab Committee, exiled all its members, removed the Mufti, Haj Amin el-Husseini, from his post as President of the Supreme Muslim Council,⁷ and turned the waqf from an autonomous Arab political entity into a regular governmental department. At the same time, British Army and police units stepped up their military activities against Arab terrorism, in an effort to put an end to it.

Moshe Shertok and David Ben-Gurion were in London at the time, and Zaslany kept them informed about the situation, as he was to do in later years, first as a reporter on current political and security matters, later as a personal advisor, and finally as a major contributor to policy decisions and a partner in their execution.

During these hectic months, Zaslany worked closely with Eliyahu Sasson. In October 1937 the two men went to Cairo and reported to Shertok on the movements of the Mufti, who had fled Jerusalem to Lebanon and, as they learned, had called a meeting of Arab leaders to plan the continuation of the revolt. Zaslany and Sasson collected intelligence on these developments in Beirut and Damascus and reported to Shertok:⁸ 'We are facing an intensification of terror and political action in Palestine and in the Arab countries, in anticipation of the arrival of the Technical Committee' in Palestine.⁹ As the disturbances in Palestine escalated, Syria gradually emerged as the center of the Arab Revolt. It was there that plans were worked out for the prolongation of the revolt, and most of the fund-raising and propaganda activities were carried out. At the same time, Syria was also the breeding ground for the so-called Arab Peace Gangs', created in an attempt to counter the activities of those factions involved in the Arab Revolt. The interests of these groups coincided with those of both the Jews and the British and, consequently, they received help from both. This, in a way, was the embryonic beginnings of what became known as the 'Covert Cooperation' with the British that was to develop later.

The creation of the 'Peace Gangs' was spontaneous, and occurred independently in numerous, far-flung villages. They were a grass-roots movement, created with the sole aim of defending Arab lives and property, homes and families.¹⁰ It is important to note, in this context, that according to some estimates, during the three years of the Arab Revolt, some 6,000 Arabs were killed, and of this number only 1,500 were actually killed by the British or the Jews. The great majority – 4,500 – were killed during acts of internal Arab terror carried out by terrorist

gangs against their brethren.¹¹ The actions taken by the British and Jews in this respect did not create something altogether new. They merely aided the development of these genuinely spontaneous Arab self-defense efforts aimed against the Mufti's terrorist gangs. The only question was to whom and when to extend this support. With these regional developments in mind, Zaslany began to concentrate most of his efforts on Syria. On 29 January 1938, on orders from Shertok, Zaslany and Sasson went to Syria to meet with the leaders of the Syrian 'National Bloc', headed by Lutfi el-Hafar. In their talks with el-Hafar, they discussed the positions held by official Jewish institutions regarding the attempts to solve the problems facing the region through negotiations: 'as for the Arabs of Palestine, we never declined to meet any Arab, whether moderate or extremist, who asked for a meeting. We tried repeatedly to initiate such meetings, but nothing ever came of any of them.' This is how Zaslany and Sasson summed up their meetings with the heads of the Syrian 'National Bloc'.¹² During a lull in his activities on the Syrian issue, Zaslany also took part in the preparations for the establishment of Hanita, the first of the 'Tower and Stockade' settlements in the Yishuv.¹³ He participated in the efforts being made to prevent the new settlement from being attacked, and met with the Lebanese authorities to try to reach an agreement with them that would ensure proper security arrangements (following discussions on this issue between Shertok, who advised Zaslany, and the Prime Minister of Lebanon).¹⁴ Zaslany and Sasson returned to Syria at the beginning of April 1938. The reason behind this trip was the deepening rift between the head of the Mufti's terrorist gangs and Fakhry Abd-el-Hady, a former head of the gangs who had shifted his allegiance and joined the anti-Husseini Nashashibi faction. Zaslany attempted to strengthen the tripartite British-Jewish-Arab anti-Husseini coalition that had joined forces in a fight against a common enemy. The British Consul in Damascus, Gilbert McKereth, was particularly active in this respect. He provided Fakhry Abd-el-Hady with monthly payments, and raised funds to facilitate his return to Palestine to organize local Palestinian 'Peace Gangs'.

The relations between Zaslany and the British Consul in Damascus were also useful from another angle – playing various elements of the British presence in Palestine against each other by exploiting their differences of opinion on how to handle the developing situation (such as, for example, the later conflicts that emerged between military intelligence in Palestine, which supported the Hashemites and their local supporters, and the CID, which preferred to appease the Mufti, the enemy of Emir Abdullah and his supporters). The British Consul in Damascus agreed with the criticism leveled against the British authorities in Palestine and the hesitant nature, as he described it, of British policy in Palestine. He asked Zaslany and Sasson to maintain direct contact with him in order to exchange information on Arab leaders and on organizations involved in gun-running, as well as former gang members – all this in order to coordinate actions against the Mufti's gangs.¹⁵ In return for their public call for peace, and support for the partition plan, the Arabs involved in these peace efforts demanded financial support, a cancellation of outstanding loans and Jewish lobbying on their behalf with the British powers-that-be in Palestine – something which had indeed occurred on more than one occasion in the past.¹⁶ Based on his many meetings in Damascus, Beirut and along the borders of Palestine, Zaslany did not believe that the activities of the terrorist groups would die down of their own accord. In a number of memoranda submitted to Shertok, Zaslany warned of pending attacks on Jewish settlements, and cautioned that the British authorities had no intention of sending forces to the northern or eastern borders of the country to head off the deployment of the gangs in those areas.

At the beginning of June 1938, Zaslany and Sasson traveled to Syria and Lebanon once again,¹⁷ and renewed contacts with their informants (mentioned by name in the communiqués

sent to Jerusalem). 'Zaslany believes', Shertok wrote in his diary, 'that the Mufti is having difficulty raising money and that is why he is making every effort to pull off something spectacular that will give his fund-raising campaign a boost. We have received reports, Zaslany writes, that the terrorist headquarters in Syria informed their local commanders that they simply cannot expect any further payments for their upkeep and that they should see to their own needs. This has led to renewed attempts to take money from people by force, and that explains the escalation in internal Arab terror activity. Relations between the various gangs are not good. They operate independently of each other, with each one of the separate leaders claiming to be the supreme commander.'¹⁸ As the British stepped up their counter-measures against the Arab gangs, the 'Revolt' became ever more like an Arab civil war. The British Army, aided by the Nashashibis and their 'Peace Gangs', and using information supplied to them by a number of different SHAI offices, employed increasingly brutal and effective measures against the Mufti's gangs and his men from the Husseini faction.

Reuven, for his part, used information supplied to him by SHAI operatives to broaden his cooperation with the British. They met with the 'Peace Gangs' and helped them and their men with funds and intelligence on the Mufti's gangs. Those who were willing to join the war against the gangs were promised pardons for their past activities, protection and, most importantly, real help in their fight against their common enemy, as the British employed tough search procedures and extensive punitive campaigns in which villages were searched and hundreds of houses belonging to the Mufti's people were demolished.

On the Jewish side, as we have pointed out, it was the regional SHAI offices which took an active part in this three-way cooperation. Without a central organization of their own, these offices operated under Zaslany's supervision, acting on behalf of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. The SHAI officers and the Political Department personnel had the advantage of possessing extensive knowledge of the areas in which they operated. They were well acquainted with their Arab neighbors, and were well-versed in their customs and habits. Ezra Danin, who ran the SHAI network in Hadera, had an information network spread out through the entire Sharon region, from Pardess Hannah to Kfar Saba, directly opposite the dangerous Arab 'Triangle', the hilly area in the central region of Palestine which provided refuge and staging areas for terrorist groups.¹⁹ The informers employed by the SHAI officers came from all walks of life: guards, shepherds, scrap dealers, produce hawkers – who walked their donkeys right into the Kaukji camps – land agents, butchers and cattle thieves who did business with Jewish butchers. Danin and other SHAI personnel transmitted all this information about the gangs and options for actions against them, to Zaslany, to British army officers involved in the fight against the gangs, and to military intelligence.

'At some point, the Jewish Agency managed to 'sell' me to RAF intelligence which was stationed in Shechem (Nablus)', Danin relates. The 'sale' was pushed through by Yehoshua Gordon of the Political Department, and from that time on, until 1948, all the information I gathered was passed on to the British Army. Most of the information on the gangs that we passed on was exact, and that enhanced our credibility in the eyes of the British army and police. All of this material came to Reuven Zaslany's desk first, and it was his job to make a deal on it with the British in return for various demands we made on them', such as matters pertaining to the *notrim* – the Home Guards – and various other Hagannah activities relating to the common anti-Arab front in matters of security.

Operations against the gangs continued throughout the Second World War. After the Arab Revolt died down, it was feared that the gang members would help the German Army should it

invade Palestine, and would use the opportunity both to settle their accounts with the pro-British leaders of the opposition, and to massacre the Jewish population. Danin adds, 'We continued to gather information on the members of the gangs and to piece together evidence against them of acts of murder against Englishmen, Jews and Arabs. This information led to the capture of scores of suspects, some of whom were hanged and others sentenced to extended prison terms.' (In 1941 Ezra Danin took part in the organization of a joint Arab-Jewish guerrilla network that was to be commanded by Moshe Dayan and operate behind German lines should the country be overrun. This 'Dayan network' is discussed below.)

In the winter of 1939, Reuven temporarily left the security issues of Palestine to participate in the Jewish delegation to the 'Round Table' discussions held in London on the Palestine issue. Among other things, he was asked to try to obtain inside information on discussions held by the Arab delegations among themselves and with the British. After a short break, he returned home to Palestine to continue gathering information on Palestinian Arabs and the remnants of the gangs, since there was still a danger that they might renew their activities. Together with Eliyahu Sasson, he put together an interim report on the situation, including proposals for future actions: 'We should see to the establishment of an influential Arab organization that will be willing to cooperate with us and that we will be able to count on in our search for an agreement...', the two men wrote in the introduction, adding that 'an organization like that can only be created if it is based on goals common to both sides'.²⁰

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In retrospect, these joint operations with the British against the Mufti's gangs during the final stages of the Arab Revolt were the breeding ground for some of Reuven Zaslany's future diplomatic concepts, which later developed into the 'Peripheral Alliance' of the late 1950s, and his attempts to ensure Israel's status as a 'strategic asset' for the West. At the heart of all this lay an idea that Zaslany had pursued religiously since the days of the Arab riots: the creation of a Jewish-British-Arab 'Triangle', based on common interests and goals, first inside Palestine, and later in the immediate region and beyond.

One such common enemy was, of course, the Mufti and his men who, apart from their ongoing struggle against the Zionist endeavor and the British Mandatory government that sanctioned it, were also engaged in a conflict with opposing factions among the Palestinian Arabs. Facing him and his Arab and British supporters was a joint Jewish-Arab-British alliance. Other such common enemies were the Germans and the Italians, particularly in the early stages of the Second World War, when the support of the Jewish Yishuv on certain issues, for short periods of time, and on various sectors of the front, was thought to be an essential element in the defense of Palestine. Such was the case, too, in later years when the common enemy was the combination of radical Communist and regional subversion, and the danger of Soviet expansion or even military intervention. In these special cases, Israel was regarded as an element that might assist in containing, deterring or even preempting all or some of these threats.

In this way intersecting fronts were created, internal-Arab and internal-British or internal-American, which the Zionist movement and, later, the State of Israel, could use as a basis for joint operations. In all of these 'triangles' of common interests which Reuven Zaslany was instrumental in creating, regardless of their relative success or failure, Israel – or the Zionist movement before the state was created – was the junior and weaker partner, and as such was exposed to greater dangers than the senior partners, whatever the outcome. Failure in any joint operation such as these certainly put the Yishuv in danger, while the Jewish contribution to

successful cooperative operations were all too soon forgotten. This is exactly what happened after the British suppression of the Arab Revolt, which was achieved with considerable help from the Yishuv. With this help the British managed to put down the Revolt, but then went about seeking compromise agreements with the Arabs – at the expense of the Jewish people in Palestine. The most tangible result of this development was the infamous British White Paper that closed off Palestine to Jews fleeing from the horrors of the Holocaust.

Even with the benefit of hindsight, all this does not call into question the wisdom of these attempts at cooperation. The moves leading to the White Paper policy would have been initiated irrespective of the cooperation of the Jewish Agency or the Hagannah in suppressing the Arab Revolt. The same applied to all the other instances of cooperation that, more often than not, involved real risks and produced a feeling of having been let down by an ungrateful ally. Great Britain. This cooperation with the British did, however, enable the Yishuv to achieve many things that it could not otherwise have achieved on its own, such as a growing military potential, the establishment of advantageous bargaining positions and a general retrenchment – even if these in themselves were not enough to ensure Israel a favorable outcome to its endeavors. No form of cooperation or alliance could change the geopolitical and strategic fact of the superiority of the Arab Muslim forces over the forces of the State of Israel and the Jewish people – in land, population, number of votes in the UN and accumulated oil profits. This lopsided match-up of relative strengths is what determines the international community's need to mollify the Arab and Muslim countries, collectively and individually, even at the expense of the vital interests of the State of Israel and the Jewish people, regardless of their not insignificant importance and strength. The cooperative efforts are, basically, a counterweight, creating fleetingly beneficial situations whose outcome often outlives the particular constellation that produced them in the first place.

Beginning in the 1930s, the sometimes halting but nevertheless ongoing British-Jewish cooperation in the fight against the Arab Revolt resulted in a significant growth of military and defense potentials, as well as strategic settlement operations, in the Yishuv and the state-in-the-making. These various ventures into political, military and intelligence cooperation sowed the seeds for the strengthening of the State of Israel and the Zionist endeavor, and even for the long-term integration of Israel into the region.

NOTES

1. Zionist Archives S25/4433.
2. 'Brigadier Kisch, Soldier and Zionist', *Ma'arachot*, p.41.
3. These committees were first set up in Tel Aviv, followed by others in Jerusalem and Haifa. Zionist Archives S25/6275.
4. It is difficult to determine where the line was drawn between the intelligence activities of the Political Department and those of the Hagannah in the period preceding the establishment of a country-wide SHAI network in 1940.
5. Appears in a memorandum from Reuven Zaslany to Eliezer Kaplan, 'Security in the Country', Jan. 1937. Zionist Archives S25/8928.
6. From a personal archive.
7. Three weeks after his removal from office the Mufti fled the country, following a slipup by the British police, who should have put him in jail but failed to do so in time.
8. Sasson and Zaslany to Shertok, 24 Nov. 1937, Zionist Archives S25/3639.
9. The reference is to the Woodhead Committee that was set up in Jan. 1938, ostensibly to present detailed and practical suggestions for the implementation of the Peel Commission proposal for the partition of Palestine. The Peel Commission was set up in May 1936 and submitted its proposals in July 1937. In fact, the 'Technical Committee' was set up to bury the plans for the partition of the country, which had been rejected by the Arabs, and created controversy among the Jews, and even the British withdrew their support from the plan immediately after the Commission's conclusions were made public. All these events are the background for the events described in this chapter, and Reuven Zaslany's actions in this period.
10. Yuval Arnon-Ohana, *Fellahin in the Arab Revolt in Eretz Yisrael*, p.145.
11. *Ibid.*, p.140.
12. Memo of Zaslany and Sasson's meetings in Syria, 29–30 Jan. 1938, Zionist Archives S25/3639. These conclusions could

have applied to any of a number of similar meetings that took place in other Arab countries as well.

13. Prefabricated settlements put up overnight by Jewish settlers in a number of strategic locations in the country as part of an extension of the Jewish Yishuv, so named for the guard tower and stockade-type walls put up first to provide protection as further building went on within the compound.
14. Moshe Shertok, *Political Diary*, Vol.III, p.88.
15. Zaslany and Sasson report on their trip to Damascus and Beirut, 4 April 1938, Zionist Archives S25/3639.
16. According to reports by Ezra Danin and Yehoshua Palmon, and Yuval Arnon-Ohana's book *Fellahin in the Arab Revolt in Eretz Yisrael*, pp.157–8 and elsewhere.
17. This is supported by an expense account handed in to the Financial Department of the Jewish Agency between 1 and 6 June 1938, Zionist Archives SI/284.
18. Shertok, *Political Diary*, Vol.III, p.149.
19. The quotes from Danin are based on an interview with him and about his book, *Documents and Characters*.
20. Zionist Archives S25/3100.

PART TWO
COOPERATION AND DISAPPOINTMENT

‘Covert Cooperation’ in the Defense of the Country

The Second World War brought about fundamental changes in Palestine and in the Middle East as a whole. The Zionist leadership in the country found itself facing both the limits of its own power and a tragic dilemma, the likes of which had rarely been encountered before in the annals of Zionism. It is only in retrospect that we can determine that the Arab threat of renewed violence and murder did indeed remain just a threat. At the time it was not at all clear that this would be the case. The shadow of the ‘events’ (as the Arab Revolt was called) and the danger of their resurgence through attacks on isolated Jewish settlements or in the mixed-population cities, caused grave concern in the Yishuv, as well as in the Jewish Agency and the Hagannah, particularly in light of the advance eastwards of the Axis armies. At that time, Reuven Zaslany and the people of SHAI, particularly Ezra Danin, continued their joint efforts with the British security forces to find the leaders of the gangs and to put them behind bars.

At the same time, the British continued to tighten their stranglehold on the Yishuv and the Zionist endeavor. The White Paper policy was approved by the Cabinet in London, and shortly afterwards the edicts against Jewish immigration, land purchases and further Jewish settlement in most areas of the country were put into effect. Only the decision on the constitutional proposal to turn Palestine into an Arab country was postponed until after the war. The Jewish campaign against this clause in the White Paper was also temporarily suspended, but it was clear that the struggle against it would have to be waged in due course, and that it would conceivably be the most crucial fight for the future of the country and the Zionist movement. The political and security-military preparations for this fateful struggle were at the forefront of all the efforts made by the leaders of the Yishuv and the Jewish Agency. But this was not only preparation for the future. In the Yishuv, the process of strengthening the military potential of the Jewish community in anticipation of a major struggle continued apace, while the Mandatory government, for its part, pursued its policy of attempting to weaken the Jewish settlement in Palestine as much as possible, in advance of an inevitable political settlement in the future.

The process of turning the White Paper policies into specific laws and implementing the various edicts relating to immigration and settlement continued relentlessly. Political and public opposition to these laws surfaced occasionally, but not for long. The mass demonstrations subsided after a short while, flaring up briefly from time to time during the various stages of legal implementation and enforcement of the edicts, or with the arrival of each new immigrant

ship. When the illegal immigration into Palestine ceased for a few years, the struggle against the White Paper died down. The Yishuv was wary of antagonizing the British government and its army and police forces during wartime, and it was generally felt that the fight should be deferred until after the war. The fear was that violent opposition, demonstrations or acts of rebellion against the White Paper would jeopardize the achievements of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine (the way in which the Arab Revolt was crushed by the British, particularly in its final phases, and the destruction wrought upon the Arab population as a result, stood as a very real warning in this respect). Beyond all this there was also the desire on the part of many people in the Yishuv to join the fight against the common enemy – Nazi Germany. This was the cruel and tragic dilemma that faced the Jewish community in Palestine, even though it was clear from the outset where its priorities lay.

David Ben-Gurion offered one solution to this dilemma when he coined the phrase ‘We must fight Germany as though there were no White Paper, and fight the White Paper as though there were no war’.¹ But this was a verbal glossing over of a truly impossible dilemma of national helplessness. In fact, there was no viable alternative. The Yishuv in Palestine, and the World Zionist movement had neither the desire nor the power to stand by as the war against Hitler raged on, endangering the very existence of the entire Jewish people. It was felt that despite the continuing implementation of the White Paper policies, Britain’s efforts to win the war should not be hampered in any way. What is more, in the Yishuv there was a readiness to mobilize the forces of the Yishuv to help the British in their war against Hitler. At the same time, the Jewish leadership in the country was resolved to continue strengthening the economic and security capabilities of the Yishuv in preparation for the future.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising to find that there were many conflicting ideas about just where the emphasis should be placed in the Yishuv’s efforts to help the British war efforts. The leaders of the Yishuv and the Jewish Agency were divided on these issues, particularly on the question of enlistment into the British Army, which was fraught with obstacles, delays and limitations imposed by the British themselves. The Zionist leadership favored drafting the Jewish people – flags, symbols and all – into the war effort by creating a ‘Jewish Army’ or ‘Jewish Force’, but this initiative was repeatedly thwarted by the British.

There were people and groups in the Yishuv and the Zionist leadership who regarded strengthening the defense posture of the Yishuv in Palestine as the prime priority, both as a preparation for the possible renewal of Arab terrorist attacks, and as a hedge against future political and military struggles. Others placed greater emphasis on the political advantages that might be gained from cooperation in the war effort. They hoped that the political aspirations of the Zionist movement would be recognized after the war just as the right to a ‘national home’ had been recognized by the British in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 after the First World War. Still others simply could not stand idly by without participating somehow in the fight against the Nazi criminals.

The British were not at all eager to accept the helping hand extended by the Jewish people for their war with Germany. Yet Reuven Zaslany, who was responsible for the secret ties with the British in Palestine and the Middle East, sought ways to bring the Yishuv into the war against Germany, and looked for intelligence units which might be interested in what the Yishuv had to offer. All his efforts in this regard ran into difficulties and stubborn opposition.

As far as the British were concerned, appeasing the Arabs to prevent their joining the war on the side of the German or the Italians was their first priority. The British also feared that

the demand for a large scale military draft among the Jews is nothing but a cover for the

creation of a Jewish army. As they saw it, this demand had little to do with the World War and a great deal to do with the struggle for Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews, and possibly the Zionist struggle against British policies in Palestine.²

Fear of the potential military strength of the Yishuv troubled the British and was one of the main reasons for their repeated rejection of proposals for cooperative action against the Germans. The British overestimated the actual and potential military strength of the Yishuv, and constantly sought ways to limit it even during the war itself, despite the fact that the struggle against the White Paper had all but ceased. By a strange paradox, it was the 'Census of Volunteers' proposed by the Jewish Agency in September 1939 that contributed to the suspension of opposition to the White Paper policies. The census had three main aims: strengthening the economy of the Jewish Yishuv, bolstering its defenses and helping the British Army in case of an invasion. Altogether some 130,000 men and women signed up for these three categories.³

The actual number of volunteers, in each of the various forms of volunteering in the Yishuv, never even came close to that imaginary number, but the census's apparent show of strength truly disturbed the British and provided them with the reason they needed to refuse to train so large a force, and to initiate efforts to disarm the Hagannah of its supposedly substantial quantity of arms. A number of times during the war surprise searches were carried out in *kibbutzim*, demands were made that arms be handed over or registered with the authorities and Hagannah personnel were imprisoned. The bizarre case of the imprisonment of 43 Hagannah commanders one month after the 'Census of Volunteers' can be regarded as the first reaction to the census and its implications. The civil and military authorities of the Mandatory government feared that the Jewish community of Palestine would, in time, take arms against British rule in the country.

It was only when the danger of an invasion of Palestine by Axis forces grew, that military considerations relating to the defense of the country began to outweigh political reservations about the Jewish Yishuv and its institutions. There were three periods during the war when the threat of an Axis invasion of Palestine became very real, and three corresponding waves of British willingness to involve the Jewish Agency in the defense of the country.

The first of these threats occurred in June 1940, when Italy joined the war on the German side and France fell to the Nazi armies. This was exacerbated in July 1940 when the French military forces in Syria capitulated to the Germans. The fear of an invasion from outside the country was attended by fear of an Arab uprising inside the country that would provide assistance to the invaders. The second period of danger accompanied by a wave of British willingness to include the Yishuv in its defense plans for Palestine came in April-May 1941, after the German conquest of Greece and Crete, and the uprising in Iraq led by the pro-Nazi Rashid Ali el-Kilani. The third wave occurred one year later, when the German army reached el-Alamein, and there was fear of a German thrust into Russia through the Caucasus, that might continue in a giant pincer movement, from north and south, into the Middle East.

At these three points in the war the Allied fortunes were at their lowest ebb and the British forces in the Middle East faced their greatest danger. At each of these moments in history, a few tiny cracks appeared in the otherwise solid front of British opposition to Jewish offers of help, only to be quickly closed up again when the danger abated. These moments of weakness allowed the Jewish Agency to again try to penetrate the cracks and open up new avenues of practical cooperation in the war against the common enemy. Each of these attempts did, in fact, develop up to a point, despite British efforts to cut them off.

Cooperation with the British war effort took many forms. It began with contracts for the

construction of army bases and roads throughout Palestine and the neighboring regions, and continued with the development of the local food, textile and steel industries, all of which expanded largely through trade with the British Army in Palestine. This economic activity produced a temporary prosperity in Palestine after the crises of the end of the 1930s, and made a real contribution to the economic vitality of the Yishuv as it prepared for an uncertain future. Throughout these developments, repeated attempts were made to open up the British Army to Jewish volunteers from Palestine, only to be met by strenuous British opposition. Ultimately, these efforts bore fruit and a Jewish Brigade was created in the British Army, albeit at the very final stages of the war.

Other forms of cooperation fared little better, despite determined efforts to overcome the entrenched opposition of the Mandatory authorities. For his part, Zaslany sought to establish special forms of cooperation in the field of intelligence and 'special ops' in neighboring enemy countries, such as Syria and Lebanon (which were known then collectively as Syria), both of which were under French Vichy rule.⁴ Heading these efforts on the part of the Yishuv was the director of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, Shertok, but there had been previous independent attempts to establish such forms of cooperation. The first of them was the initiative of the President of World Zionist Federation, Dr. Haim Weizmann in London, immediately after the outbreak of the war. Among other things, Weizmann suggested collecting information from Jewish refugees from Germany and the occupied countries of Europe concerning scientific, industrial and transportation infrastructures throughout Europe. It was this initiative that led to the establishment of the office in Haifa, run by the head of the local SHAI office, Emmanuel Vilensky. David HaCohen, who had close personal ties with British military personnel through his work in the Histadrut-owned construction company, *Solel Boneh*, which had won a number of major construction contracts for the British Army, proposed a plan to use Jews in Rumania and the Balkans to carry out acts of sabotage that would cause severe damage to infrastructure in those countries and thus hamper German war efforts.⁵

As the man in charge of all these contacts on behalf of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, Zaslany naturally stepped into this picture, directing virtually all his energies into this channel of activities, until eventually he turned to other security matters. During summer 1944, which was a transitional period in his work, Zaslany continued to work with Sasson on Arab affairs, and with HaCohen on British and anti-German affairs. The *modus operandi* was typical of Zaslany: initially working with a partner and later, slowly but surely, taking control. He used this approach when dealing with Arab, Middle Eastern, British and, later, American affairs. He was also the only person in the top echelons of the Political Department who was capable of serving as an intermediary between Arab affairs and British and anti-German affairs, and extracting benefits from their intersection. In his contacts with the British and the Americans he presented his own accumulated knowledge and information collected by the SHAI offices and the Political Department. When talking to the 'Arabists' of the Jewish Agency and to Hagannah commanders, he presented the demands and possibilities of all the foreign elements in the Middle East equation, whereas in his relations with his own political mentors, he found a way of representing both of these views as a kind of focal point of a three-way 'mediation'.

At the beginning of the war, Zaslany was party to HaCohen's initiatives which called for joint action in the Balkans – perpetrating acts of sabotage against the Germans with the help of operatives sent out from Palestine. Later it was suggested that Hagannah experts be sent out to set up underground resistance groups among the Jewish population in the occupied countries, or countries that were in danger of being overrun by the Germans. That was the first stage of the

efforts made by various Zionist bodies in Palestine to undertake joint operations with the various branches of British intelligence.

Plans for joint actions in the Balkans never materialized, but they did serve to create personal and institutional contacts for future cooperation. They also set the precedent that representatives of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency did not operate as individuals drafted into the British Army and subject to its discipline, but they acted rather as representatives of the Jewish institutions and the Hagannah, and they had a double, Jewish-British, allegiance with all its associated problems and complexities. This precedent was established in the first agreement between the British and the Hagannah concerning operations in the Balkans, whereby Hagannah operatives were ensured maximum independence to prevent them functioning merely as hired sabotage and espionage agents. This was the reason why HaCohen and Zaslany refused commissions in the British Army that would have required them to accept Army discipline and orders.⁶

When Italy joined the war on the Axis side on 10 June 1940, Palestine suddenly found itself on the front line of the war in the Middle East. The importance of the Jewish community to any security arrangement was multiplied tenfold, and the danger of an Arab uprising was taken very seriously both by the leaders of the Yishuv and by the British Army. This set the stage for the initiation of the second stage of covert Jewish-British cooperation, this time in the Syrian theater of operations. Consequently, Jewish Agency officials involved in developing contacts with the British transferred their attentions to Cairo to the Headquarters of the British military forces in the Middle East.

Shertok and Zaslany spearheaded these efforts on behalf of the Jewish Agency which opened a new and important, but ultimately tragic and disappointing chapter in the history of 'covert cooperation' with the British during the war: the cooperation with the 'Special Operations Executive'. This was a unit that took shape slowly and was called by many names during its formative years. It was established for the express purpose of organizing local resistance cells and promoting acts of sabotage behind German lines in the occupied countries and was manned mainly by university scholars and businessmen who joined the army during the war, and amused themselves with both practical and highly imaginative plans, in contrast to the 'professional' and 'dry' combat and intelligence men. The members of the unit proposed numerous ideas for economic and psychological warfare, and for special operations behind enemy lines. Ultimately, the organization was placed under the command of the Ministry for Economic Warfare, headed by Labour Minister Hugh Dalton, and given the name 'Special Operations Executive' (SOE).⁷

Plans were laid with the head of the SOE in Cairo, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir John Pollock, for sabotage operations on roads and railways, and for intelligence operations in Syria (after the fall of France on 22 June and the surrender of the French Army in Syria in July 1940). It was against the background of these developments that the 'Fake-Arabs' unit⁸ of the Hagannah was created, preceding the creation of the famous 'Palmach', and initiating the illustrious tradition of its clandestine operations.⁹ At the same time, and even before this, propaganda operations were mounted in Syria, assisted by HaCohen in whose Haifa home the Free French set up their radio transmitter. In addition to these radio broadcasts, leaflets were distributed in Syria and Lebanon by a network of agents run by Tuvia Arazi. These propaganda activities were decided upon in talks held with Brigadier Clayton, Head of Army Intelligence at British Army Headquarters in Cairo, with the active participation of Reuven Zaslany.¹⁰

These were the first steps. At the same time other plans were in various stages of planning and execution. HaCohen participated in some of the meetings in Cairo, but only Zaslany made

every effort to attend them all. 'I was not all that enthusiastic about meeting with British officers in Cairo', admitted HaCohen in his memoirs of those days, in an attempt to point out the differences between himself and Zaslany. Zaslany's dogged persistence in his attempts to sway British officials to accept his proposals for cooperation is also attested to by Ya'akov Tzur, who was a Jewish Agency representative in Cairo at the time, and Cairo-born Emil Najjar, who was then making the first steps in his involvement with Zionism. Whatever the case, these negotiations were broken off toward the end of 1940 when the immediate military dangers temporarily abated.

During this period of waiting and uncertainty, Zaslany visited the Jewish volunteer unit in Cairo whose members had been accepted into the British Army – but only in service capacities, not into combat units. He continued collecting the reports that came in from his various informers (particularly Ezra Danin and Hillel Landsman), as fears grew of renewed unrest in the Arab countries and gun-smuggling from Syria into Palestine. At the same time Zaslany continued his efforts to acquire arms for the self-defense of the local Jewish community.¹¹

Zaslany's concern over the state of affairs continued to grow. The 'Operation of the Thirty' – a code name given to the 'Take-Arabs' network that operated in Syria until the beginning of 1941 – was in fact the only instance of cooperation that took place at that time. A first group of twelve 'Fake-Arabs', under the command of Yehoshua (Josh) Palmon, went into operation in Beirut and Damascus. Their objective was to make preparations for sabotaging roads and railways, airports, ships and harbor installations, as well as oil pipelines and refineries,¹² in an effort to help prevent a German invasion of Syria. However, the invasion never took place, and the men of the unit were left in Syria with nothing to do. Attempts to establish ongoing Zionist-British cooperation were stalled, as Reuven noted in a report to Shertok, suggesting that this was not 'a chance breaking off of contacts because of personnel changes in the D Department [a nickname for the SOE], but a deliberate attempt to avoid any kind of dependency on the Jewish Yishuv'.¹³

Zaslany thought that the 'Fake-Arabs' operation did not justify the tremendous efforts made by the Political Department and the Hagannah to generate areas of cooperation with the British, and he foresaw its disbandment if no significant changes occurred in the overall situation. He called for the implementation of practical and organizational steps as part of the preparations for a possible German invasion of Palestine. A few months later, the sought-after change occurred, as the Allies suffered a series of defeats at the hand of Rommel's Afrika Korps in the Western Desert. This led to a resumption of talks between representatives of the Yishuv and the British that took place in the first few months of 1941.

During this period of Allied setbacks in North Africa and the Balkans, there was growing unrest in the Arab countries and among the Arabs of Palestine. Tension was on the rise in the Yishuv too, as it faced a possible resumption of Arab acts of terror, and later, the threat of a German invasion. At this time, and as part of the 'covert cooperation' between the Yishuv and the British authorities, the Political Department relayed reports about these developments and regroupings among the Arabs.

On 3 April 1941, a pro-Axis revolution broke out, led by Rashid Ali el-Kilani, and strongly supported by the Mufti, Haj Amin el-Husseini (who fled from Syria to Baghdad in October 1939). On 18 April, a British force from India reached Basra. On 30 April the Iraqi Army surrounded the RAF base in Habaniya and the British Embassy in Baghdad. The siege of Habaniya was eventually broken by local British forces, but before this happened a small contingent of reinforcements was sent from Palestine to help free the besieged Britons (among those participating in this British initiative – whose efficacy and necessity was in doubt from the

outset – were a few leaders of the IZL, led by David Razi'el). After prolonged deliberation, the British finally took action in an operation designed to put down the revolution and recapture Iraq. The campaign for the conquest of Iraq began on 7 May, and was completed by the end of that month. Rashid Ali el-Kilani and the Mufti both fled to Iran.

It was at that time the British High Command decided to conquer Syria, despite opposition from no less a figure than the commander of the British forces in the region. The campaign began on 8 June, and took five weeks of bitter fighting to complete. During the weeks and months that preceded this decision by the British, Zaslany was in constant contact with Brigadier Clayton, in an attempt to speed up the inclusion of units and representatives of the Hagannah in the plans being drawn up for the conquest of Syria. The first concrete result of these intensive efforts was a special course on amphibious landings and sabotage given by the British in winter 1941 at the Tel Aviv Convention Grounds, on the banks of the Yarkon River. The course was attended by 30 men, from among the best the Hagannah had to offer at the time, many of them members of the so-called 'Special Companies'.

In May 1941 the commanders of the SOE in Cairo asked the Jewish Agency to activate a plan to insert a unit into Syria to sabotage the oil refineries in Tripoli. It is quite conceivable that this operation was planned by British HQ in Cairo not as part of the conquest of Syria, which the British command opposed, but rather as part of the campaign against Iraq, which was still underway. Reports had been received that German planes were being rushed to aid the pro-Nazi rebels, and that they were refueling in Tripoli. Whatever its origins, the fact remains that the operation was hastily put together and inadequately planned, and ended disastrously: all 23 of the Hagannah men who set out for Tripoli by boat from the north of Palestine disappeared, never to be heard from again, and the refineries remained intact. It was perhaps a quirk of fate that the commander of the IZL, David Razi'el, and some of the best officers of the Hagannah were killed in operations of dubious value, mounted by the British to quell a pro-Axis rebellion in Iraq. Be that as it may, all of them fell in the 'cooperative front' with the British in their fight against Hitler, and as such played a part in the birth of the Jewish fighting force that was to grow out of this cooperation.

The story of the 'twenty-three of the boat' is a tragic one, particularly since opinions were split over its actual potential for causing any real damage even if it had succeeded. Some of the Hagannah's finest men, many of them already marked for future leadership, who eagerly sought to take part in the operation, fell in this doomed mission. What exactly happened to the 23 men has never been discovered, and their story has become one of the great tales of heroism and examples of the Palmach spirit, serving as a model for generations of Jewish soldiers embarking on secret missions.

NOTES

1. A slightly different version is quoted by Yoav Gelber in his book, *Volunteering, and Its Place in Zionist and Settlement Policy* (Yad Ben Zvi) p.158, According to Gelber, Ben-Gurion said at a meeting of the Mapai Central Committee on 12 Sept. 1939, 'We must help the army as though there were no White Paper, and we must fight the White Paper as though there were no war.'
2. Ibid., p.205.
3. The census was more than anything else a moral-demonstrative act because it did not oblige the volunteers to take part in any immediate activities. However, it did serve as the basis for the myths about the supposedly 100,000-strong Hagannah army, which had a telling effect on important British policy decisions from the time of the census until the end of the Mandate. The Arabs were equally influenced by this supposed show of Jewish military strength.
4. At the same time, the Revisionist movement in the Yishuv, led by Dr. Aryeh Altman, made its own attempts at cooperation with the British, offering volunteers from the Revisionist Party, particularly from among the paramilitary Irgun Zva'i Leumi (IZL), which had split into rival factions and was undergoing a severe crisis. Many of its members preferred to join the British Army and its special units, chief among them David Razi'el who was killed on a mission to Iraq.

5. David HaCohen, 'A Time to Tell', *Am Oved*, the entire chapter. Together and Separately in the Second World War', pp.135–85; Gelber, *Volunteering* (note 1) Vol.1; *The History of the Hagannah*.
6. *The History of the Hagannah*, Vol.III, [Part 1](#), p.358.
7. This unit had a parallel unit in the Army in the Special Operations Division of the British General Staff, and in the Headquarters of the Middle East forces that resided in Cairo. It was known as M04 (Military Operations 4). These names appear interchangeably in the internal communiqués of the Israelis who were in contact with them.
8. The word in Hebrew for this unit – 'mista'aravim' – is based on a verb made out of the Hebrew word for Arabs – *aravim* – to create a new word meaning 'those who become Arabs'. The word carries other connotations as well since it sounds like *mistrim* – hiding, or *mista'arim* – storming. Interestingly, the word was revived in the IDF during the Intifada (1987–93) when undercover antiterrorist units were set up to operate in Palestinian towns and villages.
9. The word 'Palmach' is an acronym made up of the two Hebrew words, *Plugot Mahatz* or 'Storm Companies'. The unit bearing that name became one of the Yishuv's prime fighting forces, and the breeding ground for both the Israeli Army's military tactics, and most of its political leaders, among them Moshe Dayan, Yigal Allon and Yitzhak Rabin. Its disbandment by first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion after the state was established, in favor of the newly-formed national army, the Israel Defense Forces, caused a major controversy in the country.
10. HaCohen, 'A Time to Tell', pp.147–52.
11. Report by Hillel Landsman, 6 June 1940.
12. *The Short History of the Hagannah*, p.352.
13. Zionist Archives S25/359.

The Danger Draws Near and Fades Away

A few days before the twenty-three went out on their mission, Hagannah National Headquarters decided on the creation of the Palmach, which was to 'join the battle immediately' and 'carry out actions against the regular army of the enemy, with or without the help of friendly forces (the British armed forces)'. The decision was made on 15 May 1941, but it was preceded by a number of operations carried out by men who were earmarked to take command of the new fighting force. Among these was the operation of the twenty-three men, as well as reconnaissance patrols carried out inside Syrian territory in anticipation of a British invasion into that country. All these are regarded today as the first Palmach operations, even though the unit was formally constituted only some time later.¹

The Palmach's first commander was Yitzhak Sadeh, who appointed Yigal Allon and Moshe Dayan as company commanders, charging them with the task of recruiting volunteers. Dayan's company was pressed into service before the actual start of the invasion of Syria on 8 June 1941, and charged with entering Syrian territory to carry out reconnaissance patrols and keeping roads clear for the Australian Army units that were due to operate in that sector. Dayan's unit crossed the border the night before the invasion, and, after attacking and taking a police station that housed a regional command post, came under heavy fire from French Vichy forces. During the fierce firefight that ensued, Dayan incurred the injury that led to the loss of one eye, a fateful wound that would change the course of his life. Despite the swashbuckling aura it lent him, the famous black eye-patch he wore to cover his shattered eye was, for him, deeply distressing. 'For the next seven years he did not return to combat duty... he was relieved of his command... and when he finally recuperated physically, he went into a deep depression', writes Shabtai Tevet in his biography of Dayan. 'As far as the Hagannah was concerned, I was an invalid, unfit for action, and that was exactly how I felt about myself, Dayan himself remarked, referring to this period in his life. 'As he followed the careers of his contemporaries in the Hagannah his depression only deepened... For a while, all seemed lost.'²

It was Reuven Zaslany who brought him out of this unfortunate state of affairs, and it happened almost by accident. While Dayan was being treated in hospital for the wound to his eye, he moved into his parents-in-law's home in the Rehavia quarter of Jerusalem. At that time the Zaslany family lived on the ground floor of the same apartment building. 'While visiting [Dayan] at his bedside, Zaslany was impressed by his wisdom and insight, and shared with him many of his thoughts on the situation in the country, eventually offering him a job in his department in the Jewish Agency. Moshe accepted the offer.'³ This was part of the third stage of

the secret British-Jewish cooperation which focused at that time on the defense of the country and of the Jewish Yishuv before or after a possible German invasion. Dayan writes:⁴

One of the issues on the agenda of the Political Department was how to ensure the continued existence of the Jewish community in Palestine should the Germans invade the country. German successes on the eastern front aroused fears of an invasion through Turkey, while Rommel's victories in North Africa brought into prominence the possibility of an invasion from the south. Among other things, plans were discussed for various ways of transmitting intelligence to the Allies should the Germans overrun the country. British intelligence asked Zaslany for a proposal for the creation of an underground network that would gather military intelligence and relay it somehow to the British. I took it upon myself to organize this network... In August 1941 I submitted a detailed proposal... the British approved the plan and in September 1941 a course was held for 20 wireless operators... The network's official name was PS. (for Palestine Scheme), but it was known as 'Moshe Dayan's network'... I suggested that if the Germans took Palestine, we would increase our intelligence-gathering activities, and add to the group of wireless operators units of 'Fake-and add to the group of wireless operators units of 'Fake-Germans' that we would train. As I saw it, the best way to gather information would be to enlist the help of Jews who could look, speak and behave like Arabs or Germans. Part of this plan was actually realized, though in a different manner... The idea of setting up a German unit and an Arab unit was later actually carried out in the Palmach.

Zaslany was in charge of overseeing the implementation of this plan, and urged the British to complete their preparations as quickly as possible. On 17 January 1942, Zaslany received word from the British officer in charge of the operation, including details of the various broadcasting stations, the operators, etc. – all according to their deployment in various parts of the country, in Hadera, Haifa and Tiberias. He also noted the names of liaison officers in the regional police headquarters who should be approached if the need arose for defensive measures of any kind.

In his reply, Zaslany described the training program that was required and various issues that had to be dealt with, and pointed out some of the technical aspects of the radio broadcasts. He suggested appointing someone to help Dayan in his overall responsibility for the operation, and appended a budget proposal. He was sharply critical of the British for their slow response. On 3 February of that year he wrote, 'Our organization will have to be operational – if at all – by next spring, and I feel that at the present rate of progress my people will not be sufficiently trained to operate effectively.' In addition to the training that was to be provided by the British, Zaslany tried to expand the 'Jewish part' of the plan, requesting 'to allow us to determine the training program'.⁵

When the danger of German conquest of the Middle East receded, in the latter half of 1942, Dayan's network was disbanded and Dayan himself returned to his home in Nahalal. Zaslany and Dayan were to work together again years later during the negotiations with King Abdullah of Jordan and his representatives, in the final phases of the War of Independence and after its conclusion.

While the 'Moshe Dayan Network' was one of the first Jewish networks to actually be involved in the planning and execution of operations, it was not the only one. It was part of a long line of British and Jewish plans that went through various stages of planning and execution, some during the first wave of preparations for an invasion in the beginning of 1941, and some during the second wave in the spring of 1942. In the beginning of 1941 Palestine once again

seemed to be under threat of German invasion, and the British were looking for allies and agents in the region who would operate underground intelligence and resistance cells before the conquest and afterwards should it succeed. At the same time the British were also preparing plans for a retreat, by land or by sea, out of all or part the Middle East to East Africa or India.⁶

According to these plans, resistance cells would be set up to carry out sabotage and guerrilla warfare operations such as blowing up roads and bridges, laying mines and attacking German transport routes, so as to facilitate as orderly a British retreat as possible. Further plans included reporting on enemy movements and continuing the guerrilla actions behind the German lines in Palestine following a British pull-out. Similar plans were drawn up for other Middle Eastern countries. There were a number of possible avenues of retreat from Palestine – to the south or to the east, depending on the direction of the German advance – and a number of ‘Palestinian’ plans were drawn up accordingly, known variously as the ‘Great Plan’, the ‘Small Plan’ and others, and all of them – including the Dayan Network – became known as ‘PS.’ – the Palestine Scheme.

One of these plans is briefly mentioned in *The Short History of the Hagannah*: ‘Within the framework of the contacts between the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, and the Special Operations Executive (SOE), Yitzhak Sadeh and Yohanan Ratner presented Lieutenant-General Wilson ... with a plan for partisan action against enemy transportation and vital industrial interests.’⁷ Zaslany, who was the chief liaison officer to the British Army, spelled out the details: ‘To draft a Jewish force which, in the case of a British withdrawal, would remain, in either Arab, German, or Italian disguise, and carry out acts of sabotage and underground activities against the Nazi rule.’ The Political Department provided the British with groups of volunteers who were trained by British and Jewish instructors in wireless operation, explosives and other skills, and then drafted into the Hagannah.

On 8 March 1942, the National Headquarters of the Hagannah approved the inclusion of Palmach companies in the plan. As early as April, the first course for explosives and sharpshooting commenced, and other courses, in reconnaissance skills, began soon afterward. The first group completed its training at Kibbutz Mishmar Ha-Emek north of Tel Aviv, on 30 May 1942.⁸

A ‘German Unit’ was established as part of the preparations for a German invasion. Still later, as the possibility of conquest by Rommel loomed larger, Yitzhak Sadeh and Yohanan Ratner proposed what became known as the ‘Haifa Plan’, according to which ‘Haifa and its bay, the Carmel mountains and the Galilee range around the Jezreel Valley, would turn into a fortified enclave that might have a chance of mounting a defense and holding out against the Germans.’⁹

Fortunately, none of these plans were ever put to the test. The cooperation between the Palmach and the SOE ended on a very sour note, a fact that ultimately caused great harm to other forms of Jewish-British cooperation that had nothing to do with the Palmach. After Rommel’s defeat at el-Alamein, and the fading of any imminent danger of invasion, the British decided to terminate their cooperation with the Palmach, and the training camp at Mishmar Ha-Emek was dismantled. An argument arose concerning arms that the British refused to return to the Hagannah, and in retaliation, on 28 March 1943, a Palmach platoon from Kibbutz Yagur (near Haifa) went out to the SOE training school on the Carmel and removed 277 rifles and 22 machine guns from its arsenal.¹⁰

For Zaslany this was a terrible blow. The arms were stolen from a British Army facility where SOE personnel serving on all the war fronts were trained. It was also one of the more important conduits of cooperation that Zaslany had taken such pains to cultivate. He had hoped

to maintain it as a basis for expanding areas of mutual cooperation for the benefit of both sides. The arms robbery played right into the hands of those British officials – many of them from within the Mandatory administration – who had called for a cessation of all forms of cooperation with the Hagannah and the Jewish Agency. Following the theft of arms from one of their facilities, SOE officials – who had set up an office in Jerusalem for the express purpose of strengthening ties with the Political Department of the Jewish Agency – now gave their support to these calls.

• • •

During the heyday of the ‘cooperation’ that preceded this crisis, representatives of the Palmach would meet to discuss their activities with the representative of the SOE, Abba Eban – then known as Major Aubrey Eban.¹¹ Eban’s career – like Dayan’s – crossed paths with Reuven Zaslany’s at a number of points in their personal history, the first of which was to prove fateful. Years later Abba Eban was to recall that

the SOE was in a highly paradoxical position which only full-scale war could have resolved. While the right hand was lashing out, jailing, and creating havoc, the left hand was encouraging and nurturing a Jewish fighting force. And Reuven was right in the eye of this storm. Even the idea of bringing me into all this was his. The English said: ‘what we need is a liaison officer who will be our subordinate. This way you will not divulge any information to him.’ This seemed an insoluble problem. Reuven remembered that there was only one officer who could handle this paradox. He came to Cairo, and within two days he convinced me and my commanding officers, and it was all arranged.

He was my first instructor in the ways of Palestine. I came to Jerusalem as a staff officer, and took up residence in Bethlehem Street with other British officers, and the very next day he came and took me to a meeting in Tel Aviv with the leaders of the Jewish Yishuv: Berl Katzenelson, David Ben-Gurion, and Eliyahu Golomb. I felt that Reuven was very loyal to me. He arranged a meeting with Berl, and sat in on it listening avidly to everything I had to say. He was a modest man, with a desire to create contacts between people and no desire to interrupt or interfere. He was like a father who has brought along a gifted child and wants him to show off everything he knows.

He initiated many activities. He was constantly scrutinizing our system looking for cracks. Things that were well taken care of by others he left alone. He was constantly looking for new areas of activity, in which he would operate and get others involved.¹²

And that is how it was during the war, when Zaslany looked for cracks in the system and for areas of potential cooperation with the British in the war against Hitler, using this cooperation as a fulcrum for building up the military and defense capabilities of the Jewish Yishuv of the future, and even for organizing the Jews of Europe to participate in plans for rebellion and rescue. In this too, he struck out on his own and was one of the first to propose operational plans, even though initially no one was willing to listen to him.

Reuven Zaslany, who as early as 1941 had already criticized the Yishuv for its lack of initiative on cooperation either in Palestine or elsewhere in the region, began seeking others areas of operation. He was one of the first people to propose the establishment of resistance cells among the Jewish population in occupied Europe. He conceived of the possibility of sending people who had escaped from those countries back into their home territory to organize and

command Jewish resistance groups that would operate against the Nazis. Zaslany proposed that they be trained at an annex adjacent to the SOE school on the Carmel. At that time, the leaders of the Yishuv were involved in preparations for the possibility of a German invasion, so it was only a year later, toward the end of 1942, when the danger of German conquest had passed, and new tasks were being sought for the Palmach, that some practical ideas were raised about using Palmach units in a manner suggested a year earlier by Zaslany. Only then did these plans begin to take shape.

The first news of the systematic annihilation of the Jews of Europe only began filtering into Palestine during summer 1942. This news was verified in November of that same year. The Political Department of the Jewish Agency began searching for ways to respond. Shertok went to Cairo to look into the possibility of drafting Jewish volunteers from Palestine into British commando units, and discussions were held about the possibility of sending Jewish volunteers to Europe. Zaslany was asked 'to look immediately into the real possibilities of help and action from other countries'.¹³ This was supposed to have been the fourth stage of the covert cooperation with the British, aimed at seeking ways to organize resistance among the Jews of Europe, and looking for possibilities of rescue and immigration during and after the war.

NOTES

1. These and other details concerning the beginnings of the Palmach and its first operational initiatives as part of the cooperation with the British are based on *The Short History of the Hagannah*, pp.322–3, Moshe Dayan, *Milestones*, pp.48–9, and other sources.
2. Shabtai Tevet, *Moshe Dayan*, pp.217–18.
3. *Ibid.*, p.219.
4. Dayan, *Milestones*, pp.52–3.
5. Letters exchanged between 17 Jan. and 3 Feb. 1942, Zionist Archives S25/359.
6. Details of the various plans for a retreat that will be described below appear in *The Short History of the Hagannah*, as well as other sources, including an interview with Anthony Simmonds.
7. *Ibid.*, pp.326–7.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, pp.328–9.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p.327.
12. From an interview with Abba Eban.
13. Zionist Archives S25/359.

The Parachuting Operation – Between Evasion and Escape

Throughout 1943, Reuven became more deeply involved in cooperative projects with the British, particularly regarding the issue of sending Jewish volunteers from Palestine into Europe. Beyond the limited joint actions with the SOE, another channel for cooperation opened up, this time with another department of British intelligence: 'Evasion and Escape', or 'MI9'. This unit's main task was to arrange escape plans for British POWs or soldiers on the run behind German lines. The unit's operations expanded as it turned its attentions mainly towards the extrication of air crews downed over enemy territory. As the number of bombing runs over Germany and the occupied countries increased, so did the number of air crews in need of rescue operations. The shortage of experienced air force personnel and the length of time needed to train new crews made these rescue operations a high-priority issue.

One of the MI9 units was set up at British Armed Forces HQ in Cairo to cover operations in south-east Europe. Heading this unit was Lieutenant-Colonel Anthony (Tony) Simmonds, whose military record included participation in the defeat of the Italians in Ethiopia (where he served as Wingate's second-in-command) and the SOE in Palestine. Simmonds later related that he was greatly helped in both of these duties by Reuven Zaslany personally, and, through Zaslany, by the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. Most of the ideas for cooperation in the question of clandestine parachute drops into Europe came from Zaslany, according to Simmonds.

The MI9 unit in Cairo operated under the command of a wing known as the 'A Force' headed by Brigadier Dudley Clark, a legendary intelligence officer who, according to Simmonds, was a master at deception and stratagems designed to lead enemy intelligence astray. Clark had served in Palestine during the Arab Revolt under General Wavell, and Simmonds served under Clark at that same time. Wavell was well known for the emphasis he placed on deception tactics in all of his operational planning. In this he was a true follower of the legendary Winston Churchill who, during an argument with Stalin in August 1942 on the possibility of opening up a second front in Europe gave a most succinct definition of the need for 'strategic deception' in wartime: 'Truth', the great British leader said, 'must have a bodyguard of lies'.¹ During those years of close cooperation with British intelligence officers, Zaslany soaked up this approach to military operations and was constantly making suggestions concerning 'strategic deception' in his own work in Palestine.

Simmonds, who was placed in command of the MI9 unit in Cairo in September 1941, recalls

that the creation of the unit was occasioned by the military setbacks suffered by the Allies in Greece and Crete, which ended in a painful retreat by sea and thousands of Allied soldiers and officers being taken prisoner by the Germans. Apart from the British prisoners of war who attempted to escape from their German captors, there were many others who managed to evade the Germans by setting sail for Turkey on Greek boats of various kinds. Many Greeks and people from other Balkan countries who had joined the Allied armies to fight the Germans were also rescued with the help of MI9.

Throughout the war, Constantinople served as a center for espionage and secret service operations of both the Allies and the Axis countries, as well as a staging area for the organization of rescue operations for the Jews of Europe. The British secret services established a base on an island off the Turkish coast that housed some of these services, as well as units involved in rescuing escapees and British soldiers and airmen trying to return to their original units. It was there, and more particularly in Turkey, where the rescue paths of British POWs and the Jews of Europe crossed. This was also where the former friends and colleagues, Reuven Zaslany and Tony Simmonds, crossed paths once again.

At the beginning of 1943, Zaslany and Ze'ev Shind, who was one of the leaders of '*Aliya Bet*'² and ran its branch in Constantinople, signed an agreement with Simmonds³ on cooperation between the Jewish Agency and MI9 in an attempt to drop Jewish parachutists from Palestine into Nazi-occupied territories. Their objective was to help get Jews out of Rumania into Turkey, and to prepare safe houses and hideaways for British escapees on their way from occupied Europe through the Balkans to Turkey. The importance of this operation increased in direct relation to the rise in the number of Allied bombing raids and the consequent rise in the number of airplanes downed and air crew members in need of rescue.⁴

Compared to the SOE, which grew into an enormous operation toward the end of the war, the MI9 was, in fact, a very small unit working with limited manpower and a minimal budget. Nevertheless, more parachutists from Palestine worked in cooperation with MI9 than with the SOE. According to Shaul Avigur, only 26 out of a total of 32 parachutists trained for the mission actually went out on one, and of these, 21 did so through MI9.

The agreement with Simmonds was a tiny beacon of light in the otherwise gloomy fortunes of the Political Department with regard to its attempts at cooperating with the British. It was reached shortly after news of the annihilation of European Jewry prompted the Jewish Agency to adopt an idea, proposed some time earlier by Elyahu Golomb, to create a Jewish 'commando' unit made up of Jewish soldiers serving in the British Army, which would be sent into occupied Europe to rescue Jews. The first feelers were put out in November 1942 by the head of the Political Department, Shertok, during a brief stay in Cairo en route to London. Following the Jewish Agency's decision in this matter, Bernard (Dov) Joseph and Reuven Zaslany went to Egypt to discuss the issue with British civilian and military authorities.

On 20 January 1943 Zaslany met with General McCreary, Chief of Staff at the Middle East Headquarters in Cairo, and proposed that the Jewish Agency draft 500 men and women who had come to Palestine from the countries that the British were about to enter, and help place them behind German lines. Zaslany suggested that, when the time came, these people would form a nucleus for the establishment of Jewish underground networks in the service of the British. At this meeting Zaslany noted that persecution of European Jewry had reached such proportions that there was virtually nothing that could make their situation any worse. The reply he received from McCreary was evasive.⁵

One week later, Bernard Joseph repeated the offer in a meeting with another British officer.

He explained that one of the main reasons for the Jewish Agency's proposal was the lack of any form of resistance on the part of Europe's Jews to their gradual annihilation. A group of 500–1,000 commandos, dropped initially into Poland, would be able to organize large resistance groups inside the ghettos. Shertok also raised the idea in a meeting with the Minister for War, James Grigg, in February 1943. Grigg relayed the proposal to the Supreme Allied Commander in the Middle East, General Alexander, in Cairo, together with a note recommending that Shertok's offer be turned down.⁶

Staff officers at British headquarters in Cairo who discussed Zaslany's proposal to Grigg also recommended that it be turned down. Chief among the reasons given was the possible danger to internal security in Palestine posed by the presence of a large group of well-trained Jewish soldiers that might become a nucleus of resistance to British authorities after the war (the Chief Secretary of the British Mandatory government referred to the proposal as 'extraordinary *chutzpah*'). It was also suggested by these officers that Jews were not too popular in the Balkans and that their cooperation with the British in the field might have a negative effect on the local population.

The main problem facing the British was how to avoid accepting the proposal without creating a stir in London. The Deputy Chief of Staff, General Steele, suggested that their rejection be explained by the feeling that potential German reprisals for an operation such as this would far outweigh the benefits that might attend the creation of a Jewish commando unit.⁷ British opposition to a Jewish commando unit surfaced again at the beginning of 1944 when a plan similar to the one put forward in 1943 was suggested, calling for armed resistance against German occupation forces by the Jews of Europe, particularly in Hungary. This plan was turned down for the same 'secret' political considerations and with the same convoluted excuses. Only a bare minimum of such parachute operation were actually carried out.

British rejection of the proposed plan at the beginning of March 1943 resulted in a serious crisis in the relationship between the Yishuv, the Jewish Agency and the British authorities. The contacts that had already been built up with various branches of the SOE during the three years of covert cooperation up to that time also suffered a major setback occasioned, as mentioned before, by the arms raid carried out by members of the Palmach on the SOE training base on the Carmel. Referring to this incident some time later, Zaslany said, 'after that arms theft ... a fundamental change occurred in our relations with British intelligence. Relations with the department that we had worked most closely with, and with which we had had a very productive relationship were virtually cut off. From the moment the raid was discovered in Haifa, the British set about organizing a unit like the one we had proposed in Syria, made up of Armenians, Maronite Christians and others.'⁸

The feeling among the leaders of the Yishuv at the time was that the arms raid was the main reason for the policy shift that put an end to the Agency's grand plans for cooperation, but since that time, British archival material relating to that period has been made public, and we have learned that the British rejection of the Agency's proposal stemmed primarily from diplomatic considerations. Clearly the arms theft did color the relations between the Agency and members of the SOE operating in the Middle East. The two sides continued to cooperate even after the event, but on a much smaller scale, and all Zaslany could do was to try to take advantage of small cracks in the wall, or matters of local intelligence interest to the British secret services, in order to get Yishuv agents into the Balkans and later into Hungary.

And indeed, at the same time as the ambitious commando unit plan was turned down, contacts continued on the possibilities of cooperation on a much more modest scale. Plans were

drawn up to send out a small number of parachutists through Simmonds' MI9 and through the SOE, such as the few wireless operators co-opted to a British mission to Tito's headquarters in Yugoslavia, and later to a number of other countries in south-eastern Europe. This was of vital importance to the British since they were in need of radio operators to maintain contact with Tito, and, lacking any other solution, they turned to Zaslany for help. Randolph Churchill, who was one of the British liaison officers to Tito, made a special point of requesting this help. Churchill met Zaslany a number of times in Cairo and in Bari, Italy and, many years later, spoke very highly of him to the historian Martin Gilbert.⁹ Following a British request to the Jewish Agency concerning volunteers for missions to Rumania and Bulgaria, Zaslany replied that there were a great many men and women who were willing to undertake missions to the Balkans, and he appended a list of potential agents.¹⁰ The next step was a meeting in Jerusalem between Eliyahu Golomb and Reuven Zaslany with representatives of the Inter-Service Liaison Department (ISLD, a cover name for MI6),¹¹ which maintained regular contacts with the SHAI office in Haifa. Zaslany proposed a number of possible agents for the missions, and pressed to begin their training immediately, even before the details of the operations were finalized.¹² Representatives of ISLD interviewed a number of candidates, and then Golomb and Zaslany went to Cairo to put the finishing touches to the plan. It was agreed that the Jewish Agency could be in contact with 14 volunteers who would go to Cairo, but the moment they actually embarked on the mission, contact between them and the Jewish Agency would be handled solely through British channels. 'For security and possibly other reasons as well', Zaslany wrote in a memorandum dated 7 May 1943, 'the British refused to allow us to maintain an independent channel of communication with our agents'.¹³

The SHAI office in Haifa supplied the parachutists with information from various departments of British intelligence. Shaikheh Dan, who was to jump into Rumania as part of this operation, recalls that when he volunteered for the mission (he heard about it while serving in a British artillery unit stationed in Tripoli, Lebanon), he was immediately taken by Zaslany to the SHAI office in Haifa, where Dan was instructed to review the material for three or four nights. 'I became very friendly with Zaslany right from the start, and he was the one who took care of everything to do with the jump, and was a good friend in the best sense of the word', Dan relates. It was only with Zaslany's help that Shaikheh Dan managed to persuade Simmonds to go on with Dan's mission. Simmonds was opposed to the mission since he felt that it had virtually no chances of success. Dan commented, 'I will never forget how Zaslany handled that meeting. Reuven told him that if I didn't go through with it I'd be an emotional cripple for the rest of my life; that I had a large family in Europe whose fate was totally unknown and I wanted desperately to rescue Jews wherever possible. I spoke in Hebrew and Reuven translated into English. In the end, Simmonds agreed.'

Alongside his negotiations with the British on methods of cooperation, Zaslany opened up another yet channel of cooperation – this time with the Americans through the OSS (the wartime predecessor of the CIA) – in order to find some way to send agents from Palestine into Nazi-occupied Europe. One of the volunteers for this mission was Ephraim (Ephra) Dafni, who actually did make the jump into Yugoslavia later on. Dafni joined up, underwent training and prepared to go out on the mission in March of 1943.¹⁴

According to Dafni, the story began with a meeting at the American Consulate in Jerusalem together with Reuven Zaslany and a consular official. A short while later, Dafni was taken to parachute training at a British training base in Ramat David. From there he went on to Cairo for additional training in a number of specialist courses. The plan called for him to be dropped into

Yugoslavia, and from there he was to proceed to Austria. A number of last-minute problems caused the mission to be delayed, and Dafni waited for the go-ahead in Bari. When representatives of the British Minister of State at Bari became aware of the plan, they demanded that the mission be abandoned, claiming that the Americans had no authority to drop Palestinian citizens, who were by definition British subjects, into European countries. Thus the British managed to close off another avenue of assistance to the Jews of Europe.

A short while after that, further difficulties sprang up concerning the parachutists' mission to Europe. The volunteers refused to join the British Army, claiming that they had received no orders to that effect from the Agency. This directly contradicted the agreement that Zaslany had been instrumental in designing, and Smith-Ross, of the ISLD, asked Zaslany to intervene and arrange for the volunteers' enlistment. Despite his intervention, the volunteers stood their ground and refused to be drafted into the British Army, and the British in return threatened to send most of them back to Palestine. According to Yehuda Bauer,¹⁵ Zaslany was upset by this turn of events, claiming, 'this is the second time the volunteers have refused to comply with an arrangement agreed upon between them and us (the first time had to do with the salaries they were to receive through us). This cannot go on, and we must draw definite conclusions once and for all. Otherwise, the entire operation will fail, and we will bear responsibility for the failure.'

These difficulties, as well as other obstacles that emerged, persuaded some of the leaders of the Hagannah to consider far-reaching options, even to the point of putting an end to the cooperation altogether.¹⁶ Zaslany, of course, felt differently about it all, and pressed for the continuation of the plan:

It is my opinion that we will be making a serious mistake if we reach that kind of conclusion. I don't want to touch on the diplomatic advantages of our cooperation with this department – these things are well known. I would like to touch on the domestic side of it – the Jewish Diaspora in Nazi-occupied Europe is being annihilated. Our only hope, the only ray of light that gives them the spiritual will to go on fighting for their survival is our endeavor in Eretz Yisrael. Every written line, every scrap of news from the country creates new waves of hope. We have the opportunity to send a number of emissaries to bring the voice of the Yishuv to the Diaspora – would we ever be forgiven for not seizing the opportunity that has been afforded us?

And indeed, in the months that followed, Zaslany held many meetings with British intelligence officers and Army commanders in Cairo and Jerusalem to try to smooth out all the wrinkles that hampered the execution of the parachutists' operation in occupied Europe – among them the arrangement of salaries and insurance for their families. He continued to work tirelessly on the parachutists' operation which was finally launched in May 1943 and continued without a break until summer 1944. The first of the volunteer parachutists, Peretz Rosenberg, from the village of Nahalal, embarked on his mission – to reach Tito's headquarters in Yugoslavia – on 23 May 1943. Rosenberg had been proposed earlier for a similar mission by Dayan at the request of the SOE, when the British asked him for help in finding a wireless operator. At the beginning of October 1943, two agents were sent by the 'A Force' to Rumania and were captured. Zaslany refused to let this stop the operation. On 9 November 1943 he traveled with Enzo Sireni and Zvi Yehieli to Cairo to meet with representatives of the 'A Force' to discuss further missions for parachutists from Palestine.¹⁷

During that same month, and later, toward the end of 1943, Zaslany met with Lawson and

Smith-Ross, both of the 'A Force', to work out the details of a penetration into Rumania and Hungary. Following intensive organizational efforts, two more agents were sent to Rumania and they, too, were captured. They did, however, manage to make contact from inside their prison with the Zionist organization in Rumania. After endless efforts, five more volunteers were dropped into Rumania (among them Shaikeh Dan). They immediately began organizing self-defense units for the Jews of Rumania, just prior to the surrender of the Rumanian army to the Russians. After the Russian conquest of the country, the four parachutists taken prisoner earlier were released and joined the other five, creating a group that functioned as the Palestinian mission to the Zionist pioneer organizations and to the 'escape' and 'illegal immigrations' projects.¹⁸

The little that was eventually achieved by the parachutists' operation was marred by endless differences of opinion as to the ways of getting into Rumania and Hungary. Questions were asked about whether the drop should be coordinated beforehand with local underground groups, who had been totally penetrated by Nazi agents and were probably responsible for the arrest of those volunteers who had been captured, or whether the parachutists should go in on a 'blind drop' without any prior coordination and with less chances of being caught, but with the added risk of encountering Nazi soldiers and their allies, or being handed over to the Nazis by the local populace.

These arguments pertaining to many different aspects of the operation persisted between the volunteers and their operators in the Jewish Agency, as well as among the British secret services and British military and civilian authorities. In March 1944, Zaslany was called to Cairo to settle the differences and make sure that the parachutists went out on their missions. As was his habit, he tried, in long conversations and with a great deal of patience, to find compromise solutions and convince the disputing sides to accept them. By the middle of March, Zaslany had achieved his mission and returned to Palestine, reporting to his superiors that the volunteer parachutists were on their way to Italy from where they were to be flown in over Yugoslavia.

Zaslany took advantage of his stay in the Egyptian capital to strengthen his ties with the American OSS, and interest them in the Jewish Agency's offer to drop 'Commando Units' from Palestine into enemy-held territory in order to organize underground resistance cells against the Nazis. According to Zaslany, the Americans expressed interest in the idea, and were willing to take on the organization of such an operation on condition that the volunteers' main objective would not be mentioned and they would be regarded as American espionage agents.

The plan was ultimately scuttled following strenuous British opposition, but the Americans did prove willing to meet in order to discuss various other possibilities for cooperation, thus laying the ground for wide-ranging relations between Israel and the American secret services in the future. Zaslany continued to pressure his colleagues in Palestine to prepare additional volunteers for these missions, claiming that the OSS was willing to take agents into Poland on condition that they go through Hungary, but this plan, too, ultimately failed to materialize.¹⁹ In April, Zaslany returned to Cairo to continue his meetings with Clayton. Together with Eliyahu Eilat he made contact with Tito's people who agreed to meet with officials from the Jewish Agency in return for medical treatment for their wounded. Zaslany also met with representatives of underground organizations in Czechoslovakia.²⁰

At the same time, he continued his never-ending efforts to generate joint operations with the British army, trying to do so this time by exploiting the differences of opinion he knew existed between British intelligence services concerning cooperation with the Yishuv. Zaslany tried to push his defense plans forward by applying directly to 'Force 133', a unit that operated under the

egis of the SOE, and was rapped on the knuckles for his efforts: 'Force 133 is under the jurisdiction of headquarters and it is not advisable for Zaslany to try to peddle his plans to junior officers.'²¹

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On 7 May 1944, Zaslany reported the departure of two parachutists on their mission, and dealt with organizing the departure of additional agents to Rumania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Italy and Bulgaria.²² Some time later, he reported in greater detail on the operation, on the target countries and on the contact that was being maintained with those who had already been rescued. In this report, he also noted the difficulties involved in the operation, and at the end of the memorandum he noted that if everything went according to plan, within two to three months (by August 1944), there would be about 30 Agency-trained agents in various European countries.²³ And indeed, during the course of that year, agents were dropped into Yugoslavia, Hungary and Slovakia. The total number of parachutists sent in was 26, while six more were prepared for additional missions which they eventually did not carry out for a variety of reasons. Of these, 12 were captured and 7 were executed. The number of volunteers who actually went out on operational missions was only a small percentage of the 250 Jews from Palestine who had originally volunteered to parachute into Nazi-occupied European countries. One hundred and seventy of them underwent training in Palestine, and another 70 were soldiers in the British Army who would have been dropped behind German lines had it not been for the cancellation of these and various other operational plans.

Over the years there have been many – and conflicting – assessments of the effectiveness of the parachutists' operations, both in terms of the real assistance they provided to Jews in defending themselves and escaping or immigrating to Palestine through the illegal immigration operations (the parachutists who took part in this operation were the first to organize illegal immigration to Palestine from the Balkan coast), and in terms of the assistance they provided in rescue operations for British and American POWs and escapees. Shaikeh Dan, who was dropped into Rumania on 4 June 1944 and evaded capture, remarks in the introduction to his book that

all those who worked with me and are now living in Israel, remember well how we rescued thousands of Jews during the war. Hundreds of orphans who were about to be sent back from Rumania to Russia, came here and they are in the country today – survivors and saviors. There is no need for any hard evidence to prove that the immigration of tens of thousands of Eastern European Jews was the direct result of the operations of the anonymous agents sent from Eretz Yisrael.²⁴

Reuven Dafni, who was dropped into Yugoslavia on 13 March 1944, tells of the rescue of 124 British and American air crew members downed over Yugoslavia. 'We organized the local population, printed up leaflets and promised payment to anyone who would rescue anyone who parachuted in the area. The partisans were also given orders to help any parachutists and transfer them to the Adriatic coast. There they were picked up by boats that took them to Italy.'

These are two accounts, related many years after the events by two of the men who participated in and survived the operation. There are many other stories of the exploits of the parachutists, particularly concerning escape routes and illegal immigration, and the organization of self-defense operations immediately after the war in Europe. One of the best-known parachutists taking part in the operation was Enzo Sireni, one of the heads of the Aliya Bet

Institute, among the chief instructors of the parachutists and one of the heads of the entire operation. Sireni jumped into northern Italy on 15 May 1944, and was captured soon afterwards by the Germans. He was interrogated and then sent to the Dachau concentration camp, where he was murdered six months later.

The most famous of the parachutists, Hannah Szenec, parachuted into Yugoslavia in March 1944, was captured in June of that year when she tried to cross the border into Hungary and was executed that November. She, Enzo Sireni and all the other parachutists who were killed during this operation have become legendary figures in the history of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine. The myth itself is greater in scope than the actual operations they managed to carry out. The fact that there were not more men and women who actually took part in the operation was no fault of the people involved, but rather the direct result of evasive tactics on the part of the British, who were reluctant to allow them to carry out their missions, and without whose approval none of the operations could take place. What the British did ultimately clear for operation and helped carry out was too little and came too late. This was a lesson Reuven Zaslany – perhaps more than anyone else – was to comprehend fully to his deep and bitter disappointment.

NOTES

1. Churchill used this phrase to try to persuade the Russian leader of the importance of employing strategic deception before opening up a second front in Europe. In retrospect, it does raise a smile to think that the grand masters of disinformation – the Russians – needed Churchill's advice on this.
2. Literally 'Immigration B' – the name given to all the operations involved in the illegal immigration of Jews into Palestine following the ban on Jewish immigration imposed by the Mandatory authorities.
3. The 'Danny-Tony Agreement' 15 Jan. 1943. Zionist Archives S25/8883. 'Danny' was Ze'ev Shind's code name.
4. The importance of this operation was to grow even more after the Allied bombing of the Ploesti oil fields in Rumania in 1943, during the course of which dozens of allied planes were downed, and rescue operations had to be mounted to pick up hundreds of American and British pilots and navigators. The Americans set up a similar organization and they too turned to Jewish parachutists for help, but this was closed down by the British, who claimed that the parachutists from Palestine were British citizens.
5. Yoav Gelber, *Volunteering and its Place in Zionist and Yishuv Policies*, p.692.
6. *Ibid.*, p.693.
7. *Ibid.*, p.694. All these facts are based on various British stenograms of staff meetings following the meetings between Zaslany and the British Chief of Staff, 20, 28 Jan. and 6 Feb. 1943.
8. Zionist Archives S25/205, p.10. Also, S25/7902, 27 Nov. 1944.
9. From an interview with Churchill's biographer, Martin Gilbert. This is corroborated also by the account given by Ephraim Dafni of a meeting he participated in between Randolph Churchill and Reuven Zaslany concerning meetings with Tito.
10. The reply was sent to Captain Silas, 5 Jan. 1943. Zionist Archives S25/8909.
11. It is possible that MI6 wanted to use the parachutists from Palestine for espionage operations as well since all the candidates were native speakers from the countries they intended to penetrate.
12. Zaslany to Smith-Ross, 25 Feb. 1943. Zionist Archives S25/8908.
13. *Magen ba-Seter*, p.212. Details of the visit to Cairo on 3 May 1943. Zionist Archives S25/8915.
14. On 6 Jan. 1943, an OSS representative reported to Zaslany that Ephraim Dafni went to meet other agents from his organization in order to finalize the details of his training. Zionist Archives S25/8988.
15. In *Diplomacy and Underground*, p.332.
16. *Magen Ba-Seter*, p.212, memo by Zaslany 7 May 1943.
17. Yoav Gelber, *The Standard Bearers*, p.160.
18. *A Brief History of the Hagannah*, Vol.1, p.354.
19. Zaslany to Dov Yosef, 5 March 1944. Zionist Archives S25/70.
20. Gideon Raphael report, 2 May 1944. A.T.H. 14/489.
21. Yoav Gelber, *The Standard Bearers*, p.171.
22. Zaslany to Yitzhak Kleinbaum, 7 May 1944. Zionist Archives S25/816.
23. Zaslany memo, 16 May 1944. Zionist Archives S25/816.
24. *Blind Jump*, p.20.

‘An Element of Evil’

During the long months of 1943–4, Reuven Zaslany doggedly pursued his attempts to get as many Jewish volunteer parachutists as possible into Europe, no matter how few their number. Around the same time, toward the end of 1943, a much more ambitious plan for self-defense in Europe came up for discussion. This was a wide-ranging plan that Zaslany had initially proposed in 1941 together with, or alongside, another plan proposed by Eliyahu Golomb. When this plan was first proposed, the full extent of the Holocaust was not yet known, and it was not discussed very seriously. Later, in the course of 1943, Zaslany was busy with attempts to get the parachutists’ operations approved by the British, and again discussion was delayed. During this entire period, however, and particularly throughout 1944, Zaslany broached his plan repeatedly at official meetings, until it was finally accepted by the Jewish Agency under the official title of the ‘Self-Defense Plan for European Jewry’, and became his principal concern. In fact, the original concept was based on an idea for the rescue of the Jews of Hungary with British help through the employment of a large-scale resistance organization, a plan which could have actually been put into operation if the British had indeed been interested in saving the Hungarian Jewish community and subverting the execution of German plans for the annihilation of Hungary’s Jews, at least in its final stages. This was the climax of the fourth stage of the efforts to establish covert cooperation with the British during World War II – the stage that was ultimately undermined by the British.

In the course of 1944, the grand plan dwindled until very little was left of the original concept. The actions taken to implement it had tragic consequences and the operation’s meager results were achieved only through frustratingly hard work. The overall failure of Zaslany’s ceaseless labors in the field of Jewish resistance and the rescue of European Jewry from destruction by the Nazis must be taken into account in the argument that has arisen among some historians of the war who have criticized the leadership of the Yishuv, headed by David Ben-Gurion, for its indifference in the face of the Holocaust. There are others who claim that, as a political realist, Ben-Gurion understood that there was no practical way to overcome British opposition to the rescuing of the Jews of Europe and opening up the Promised Land for their salvation. This was why, so the reasoning goes, he concentrated his efforts on the political struggle for Eretz Yisrael and the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state. Be that as it may, no one can accuse Reuven Zaslany of indifference to the fate of European Jewry or of doing nothing to counter the chilling ramifications of the ‘Final Solution’, which the Nazis went about implementing while the Allies did nothing to impede its progress in any way. Zaslany fought a

losing battle on this matter and, after suffering so many disappointments and frustrations, he summed up the British response to it all being rooted in 'an element of evil'.

The 'Self-Defense Plan for European Jewry' was outlined in two memoranda submitted to the military and civilian headquarters in Cairo. These were later sent on to London for further deliberation. One memorandum, written by Zaslany, was submitted to Brigadier Clayton, and the second, written by Shertok, was submitted to the resident British Minister in Cairo – Lord Moyne.

In January 1944, Zaslany went to Cairo and handed Clayton his proposal, under the heading 'Proposals for the Organization of the Jewish Communities of the Balkans to Resist the Nazi Murders'. In his proposal, Zaslany stated that five million Jews had already been murdered by the Nazis in Europe. A resistance operation – even if it did not manage to save the lives of many Jews – would at least raise the stakes for the enemy in terms of time, men and material. Zaslany wrote:

The idea that surrender and acceptance will lessen the enemy's resolve has been utterly disproved. Annihilation, wherever they managed to carry it out, was complete with or without resistance of any kind. Even if they had put up resistance it could not have lessened the dimensions of the tragedy which, in any case, has reached a peak of horror. In the few cases where there was any form of resistance, the enemy suffered losses, and had the struggle been better organized, it might have been possible to save some Jewish communities and cause great difficulties for the enemy... On their own, without moral support and professional training, the Jews of the Balkans will not be able organize any kind of resistance. Therefore, the suggestion is that a few select people from Palestine, with prior training and a thorough knowledge of conditions in the Balkans, should penetrate into the area with the object of setting up an organization. These people will have to maintain contact with British headquarters and operate under its supervision, and their actions will be coordinated with the overall strategy of the war.¹

Shertok added more details in his version of the proposal. He suggested carrying out the operation in four countries: Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary and Slovakia, and sending two men – an organizer and a wireless operator – immediately to each of these countries, to be followed by 'larger groups of at least fifty people to each country [in order] to bring equipment, to increase opposition and to assume command over guerrilla activities'. Shertok indicated that all of these people should be Jews from Palestine, either military personnel or civilians, who would operate under the control of the British Army.²

The official responses to the plan were negative. Various reasons were given by the British authorities with different degrees of intensity. Sir William Croft, the British Foreign Minister's chief civilian advisor, penned the following on Zaslany's memorandum: 'I'm afraid that the means required for these operations are so considerable that the idea of allowing the Jews to defend themselves and thus be saved from annihilation will not have any effect at all on the situation. The proposal must be looked into on a purely operational basis.'

Shertok's proposal was given a much more hard-line political response on the part of British HQ in Cairo, possibly because of the emphasis he placed on the functions the Palestinian Jews would fulfill in the creation of, and command over, guerrilla units. HQ's response was as follows: 'Our resources are limited and under the present circumstances we cannot take upon ourselves the responsibility of organizing and supporting special resistance groups limited to only certain kinds of personnel, even if the idea itself is a worthy one. This undoubtedly fits the

case of Shertok's proposals, which are politically unacceptable.'³

The military's political reasoning in opposing the participation of Palestinian Jews as a special resistance group in Europe was in line with the prevailing political stance of the architects of British Middle East policies who were opposed to the creation of any kind of Jewish military force. Sir Harold McMichael, the High Commissioner for Palestine, said so quite plainly when he claimed that 'any avoidable expansion of the opportunities given to the Jews of Palestine to train in the organization of guerrilla warfare, should be condemned, in keeping with the country's internal security needs for the foreseeable future. Even the training they have received in the past, when the enemy threatened this part of the world, gave rise to serious concern.'⁴

In his memorandum to Clayton, Zaslany tried to downplay the organizational and command duties of the 'Israelis' in his plan. Because of his extensive experience in working closely with the British, he was fully aware of their reservations and understood why they opposed the plan. It may well have been his careful wording that prevented the proposal from being rejected out of hand. Ultimately, however, his efforts proved futile. At first he did have some hopes for it since the Agency plan received partial support in Cairo. Y. S. Bennett regarded it as 'a reasonable plan that was worth looking into seriously'. British headquarters, however, remained adamant, demanding that the Zaslany-Shertok plan be turned down. It was only after the German invasion of Hungary (on 19 March 1944) that their attitude changed somewhat. In meetings with Clayton, Zaslany reviewed the ramifications of the invasion into Hungary. British hopes for the creation of a Hungarian resistance group fell through, and all the attempts carried out by the British Army during May and June of that year to infiltrate units of the SOE into Hungary from Yugoslavia failed.

Under these new circumstances, it was easier for Zaslany to turn Clayton from a staunch opponent to a strong supporter of the plan. Following a meeting with Zaslany on this issue, Clayton wrote a memo in which he came out strongly in defense of the operation. Clayton quoted Zaslany in his memo, saying 'The circumstances foreseen in his [Zaslany's] and Shertok's memos have now actually come to pass. Hungary and Rumania have been conquered by the Nazis, who have already announced over the radio their plans for the deportation of one million Jews from Hungary.' Consequently, Clayton added, if any action were to be taken it should be done immediately, and he felt that 'the opposition to the plan coming from Jerusalem does not have any real basis.' He tried to allay his colleagues' concerns of which he was well aware: 'There is no intention of training these Jews in guerrilla warfare (in any case they are already well-versed in it), but rather to train them as parachutists and possibly as wireless operators. It would seem that there is no great danger in this, because one cannot assume that the Jews would be able to land paratroopers in Palestine, and, to quote Zaslany once again, we should jump at the opportunity to remove a few score tough Jews from Palestine.'⁵

None of this swayed the British authorities. On 1 May 1944, Shertok was informed that his proposal had been turned down. Zaslany refused to accept this rejection as the end of the road and tried to overcome the obstacles that had been put in his way. In a meeting held between representatives of the Aliya Bet Institute, the Political Department of the Jewish Agency and Joel Brand, they learned about the existence of a Zionist underground in Hungary. Acting on this information, they decided to redouble their efforts to pressure the British into approving the Agency's plan. Shertok was supposed to have done something about this in London and on 9 May, Reuven embarked for Bari, Italy to meet with representatives of the British secret services, and with the British Resident in Italy, Harold Macmillan, to discuss the plans for penetration into Hungary.

Zaslany managed to persuade the British officials he met at Bari, including Macmillan, of the importance of his plans concerning Hungary, but opposition to the plan finally overcame all his efforts. 'Once again I broached the demand to create a Jewish defense organization in Hungary with the help of Jewish fighters from Palestine, as one of the most effective ways to save Jews', Zaslany wrote in a memorandum summing up his mission to Bari which lasted from 9 to 21 July.⁶ 'This plan was proposed by the Political Department to the British authorities in Cairo and in London as far back as February of this year, and was turned down.' The plan called for

an immediate insertion by air of dozens of our men into Hungary in order to strengthen and activate the existing Jewish-Zionist underground there, and to establish a military base on the Yugoslav-Hungarian-Transylvanian border, to serve as a central meeting point for Jewish youth from Hungary and Transylvania, and as a center for defense and escape operations from these countries. These operations must be carried out in cooperation and coordination with the British military authorities, and the Yugoslav partisan groups. The human resources for this operation will be drafted partly from Palestine, and partly from Palestinian units in the British Army.

Zaslany wrote:

Immediately before my departure to Italy, a cable arrived from Moshe Shertok in which he notified me that he had presented the proposal to certain people in authority in London, and suggested that I look into the matter in Italy. He also notified them that he had spoken on this matter with Randolph Churchill who had given the proposal a cold reception. In my meeting with Churchill it transpired that Shertok was somewhat off the track since Randolph is very favorably disposed towards the plan, but does not have the authority to deal with it... In fact, while he was still in London, he sent a memo written by Shertok on this issue to General S. who was in charge of organizing resistance groups and underground organizations in central and eastern Europe [and] expressed a willingness to recommend the operation to those people in Bari dealing with this issue.

Zaslany reported in great detail on his meeting with the various officials in charge of the Balkans and the Hungarian sections in the SOE, and on the promises of support he was given for the plan, 'particularly in view of the fact that the British officials in Bari recommended the plan'.

Zaslany set out on the mission to Bari after receiving optimistic reports from Shertok about his negotiations in London. On 21 July Shertok wrote that the first part of the insertion plan had been accepted and that the British would contact him about it. Shertok added that the second part – creating a center for refugee absorption and operations near the triangle of borders, Yugoslavia-Hungary-Transylvania – had been rejected.

In Bari, Zaslany met with Tito's representatives in order to try to assess their willingness and ability to assist in carrying out the operation, and came away disappointed. 'They are all second-string officials and have no ability to decide anything or influence anyone.'⁷

But the bitterest disappointment was yet to come. He continued to hope against hope that the British would eventually need the resistance plan he had proposed. He based his hopes on the fact that 'all the efforts of the British authorities to create resistance and underground groups had failed', particularly in Hungary which, 'in terms of the underground had been the greatest disappointment of all the European countries'. His hopes also stemmed from the fact that

‘contacts with various underground organizations in Europe had in many cases had serious diplomatic repercussions, while there was no reason to assume that the Jewish Agency would want to take over Hungary after the war.’ The last of his assumptions was ‘the feeling of guilt and the attempt to repair the damage done to the Jews of Europe by the constant disregard of our demand to allow them to fight for their lives and their honour.’⁸

And indeed even the British security authorities were convinced that it was an ‘attractive proposal’, and the ensuing British intelligence evaluation stated:

There is no doubt that if it is possible to forge successful ties inside Hungary, it will be of value to us. Right now we hardly have any intelligence from Hungary and no actions are being taken against the enemy. If the enemy retreats to the Danube-Saba line it will be of great benefit for us to have cadres inside the country, not only for espionage, but also to generate resistance to the enemy.

This was followed immediately by a caveat: ‘Although it is possible that there will be opposition on political or religious grounds for using the Jewish Agency for our purposes, it is also possible that there won’t be any opposition to choosing some of them, preferably from among those already serving in North Africa or Italy.’⁹

The plan was also supported by the Prime Minister’s personal assistant for intelligence affairs, Major Desmond Morton, while the High Commissioner for Palestine, Harold McMichael, strenuously opposed it. McMichael was supported in his views by Lord Moyne, who said that ‘the use of any organized group in close contact with the Jewish Agency is undesirable and dangerous’. He demanded that the plan be reduced to the use of ‘a few Jews from Palestine and other places’.¹⁰

The mountain of correspondence with the resident ministers in Bari, Cairo and Caserta, Tunisia, finally gave rise to an agreement to send in ten Hungarian-born Jewish volunteers who had already had intelligence training – that was all. Macmillan gave his approval only on condition that the Palestinian volunteers ‘serve under the command of SOE and not as a group under Jewish supervision from Palestine.’¹¹

This limited approval was applied, it would appear, to parachute drops already in the pipeline. It was finally handed down only after a disastrous seven-month delay from the time the original large-scale plan was rejected and submitted for reappraisal; after the failure of Joel Brand’s attempt to work out his deal with Eichmann involving ‘Jews for lorries’; after the mechanism for the annihilation of Hungary’s Jews was already in full swing; and after the Allies, apparently deliberately, refrained from making even a single bombing raid on the cremation ovens or the railroad stations or tracks used by the Germans to lead the Jews of Europe to their death.

When Zaslany realized in Bari that things were not progressing at a satisfactory rate, he went to Cairo to try to find out why. Initially he was unable to discover the reasons for the delay, but diligent probing brought to light the following cable in British Army HQ:

Concerning the plan submitted to you by Zaslany of the Jewish Agency, it has been decided after consultation with the Foreign Ministry and the Commonwealth Office, that diplomatic considerations outweigh the military advantages that can be gained from the plan, therefore it is not to be carried out.

Reporting on this information, Zaslany added the following: ‘Once again the opponents have had

the upper hand, and once again we have lost out on the possibility of coming to the aid of the Diaspora.’ A week later, Zaslany wrote to Shertok, ‘Even if the plans were to be approved now, it might be too late.’¹²

In September 1944, after writing a few more letters from Cairo expressing his concern about these developments, and calling attention to the possibility that the plan would be shelved by the British, Zaslany succinctly summed up the status of the ‘Resistance Plan’ he had worked so hard for as follows: ‘The mountain didn’t even turn into a molehill.’ His deep disappointment and bitterness ring out clearly in a letter he wrote to Shertok. During the war, so he wrote, he gave credence to British considerations and explanations for rejecting the Jewish Agency’s suggestions, but this operation was politically ‘clean’, and even the military authorities realized its potential. ‘Apparently there is an element of evil in our allies. After the plan was approved by the military and by the central government in London, some unknown hand caused it to be abandoned.’¹³

Thus the death knell was rung on the grand plan aimed at creating and organizing a resistance movement that might have helped delay the implementation of the Final Solution in Europe, and saved some of the Jews of Hungary who were being sent to the gas chambers during the very days, weeks and months of 1944 when Zaslany was trying so desperately to secure British approval for his plan. This bitter pill was sweetened only slightly by the knowledge that during those months a handful of volunteers were in fact dropped into Europe to carry out the mission. But it was too little and too late, and the enormous efforts made to do something, however minimal, to attempt to save the Jews of Hungary, were never translated into action – all because of British opposition. It was the British who rejected, one after another, all the plans submitted by the Political Department of the Jewish Agency to try to rescue the Jews of Hungary.

• • •

Following the failure of this plan, Reuven Zaslany ended his duties as liaison officer between the Political Department of the Jewish Agency and the British secret services. He was replaced by Teddy Kollek, who had begun working in the Political Department as Zaslany’s assistant, and who in time also became a close personal friend and colleague. Kollek was, in many ways, Zaslany’s exact opposite with his lighthearted, open, ‘Viennese’ attitude to the world, his Continental demeanor and enormous personal charm, a man for whom the entire world was his stage, and everyone his friend. Kollek could not and did not try to compete with Zaslany’s comprehensive knowledge, his methodical tenacity and originality. Like Zaslany, he moved between his admiration for the strong, authoritarian and fearless Ben-Gurion, and his total personal loyalty, esteem and fondness for the anguished, vulnerable Shertok, who could not help forever seeing both sides of any coin – particularly when he became Prime Minister. Most of the time, Shertok and Ben-Gurion managed to work well together, Shertok serving as the loyal, efficient, complementary assistant to ‘the Old Man’, as Ben-Gurion was called. All this until the tragic and perhaps inevitable breach that divided them after the establishment of the state.

Teddy Kollek managed to maintain his loyalty to both these men, while at the same time keeping up a good working relationship with their assistants. In due course, Kollek was to become one of a ‘trio’, together with Ehud Avriel and Reuven Zaslany, a relationship that was based on mutual esteem, affection and even some hidden rivalry and competitiveness over who had the Old Man’s ear or Shertok’s approval. This was a trio of ‘operators’ blessed with initiative, resourcefulness and the ability to improvise, men who were never content merely to be the prime minister’s ‘yes-men’. These special qualities gave them their unique standing with

both Ben-Gurion and Shertok. Reuven was the ‘first among equals’ in this triumvirate. The initiatives and ideas he championed relating to the diplomatic and security strategies of the state-in-the-making continued to serve as guiding lights at the highest operational levels of the State of Israel long after his premature death. Formally, however, his two colleagues were eventually appointed to higher office in the state apparatus: Ehud Avriel became an ambassador and a Director-General of the Foreign Ministry, while Kollek became the powerful Director-General of the Prime Minister’s Office and long-time mayor of Jerusalem. Reuven Zaslany never achieved such high administrative or diplomatic status. In terms of his informal authority he was, undoubtedly, first among equals, but from the point of view of his formal standing in government circles, he was forever cast in more minor roles. This story, with all its twists and turns, began when Teddy Kollek took over the position in the Jewish Agency vacated by Reuven Zaslany.

A short while before that, as persistent British opposition made it clear that the parachutists’ operation was doomed, Zaslany expressed the desire to take on another job – preferably in London.¹⁴ Ultimately he was to set sail for the United States and not for England, possibly because of his disappointment over the final failure of his defense and resistance plan. Or perhaps it was yet another vacillation between London and New York, Washington and Jerusalem, and between the conflicting wishes of Moshe Shertok and David Ben-Gurion, each of whom had their own preferences for using Reuven Zaslany’s unique capabilities.

NOTES

1. Zaslany to Clayton, 25 Jan. 1944 – PRO FO/921/152. Appears in Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939–1945*, pp.236–41.
2. Ibid.
3. 28 Feb. 1944, *ibid.*
4. Ibid. 8 March 1944.
5. 6 April 1944, *ibid.* This last point in Clayton’s memo, about the weakened state of the Jewish fighting force in Palestine rather than vice versa, is typical of Zaslany’s technique of persuasion: to try to identify with the point of view of the other side – first the British and later the Americans – who have the power and status to decide, in order to soften their opposition to the Jewish and Zionist positions, and even to gain support.
6. From the records of the Political Dept. The Reuven Zaslany memo, *Magen Ba-Seter*, pp.216–18. All the following quotes are from this memo unless otherwise noted.
7. Zaslany to Shertok in London through General Dickin who left for London. Z-4/10398, 17 July 1944.
8. Zaslany memo, from the records of the Political Department, *Magen Ba-Seter*, pp.216–18.
9. Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939–1945*, pp.239–40, and sections quoted by him from PRO FO 921/152, 24 July 1944.
10. Ibid. p.240. Lord Moyne to the Foreign Ministry, 2 Aug. 1944.
11. Ibid. From the Foreign Ministry in London to Lord Moyne, 16 Aug. 1944.
12. Zaslany in Jerusalem to Shertok in London, 11 Aug. 1944. Zionist Archives S25/6651.
13. Zaslany to Shertok, 23 Sept. 1944. Zionist Archives S25/6651.
14. Zaslany in Jerusalem to Shertok in London, 15 Aug. 1944. Zionist Archives S25/6651.

‘We Need an Intelligence Service’

Reuven Zaslany’s main conclusions in the report he submitted to the Political Department of the Jewish Agency on the various episodes of the ‘Covert Cooperation’ project that he led during the Second World War included the following:¹

The colleagues sitting here in this room are in no need of explanations concerning the importance of the institution known to us as SHAI to the political life of a country – an importance which is not limited only to information-gathering... ‘Intelligence’, which has no satisfactory translation into Hebrew, is a political instrument of the greatest importance, particularly in this kind of war. And I believe it will become a permanent instrument of policy in the coming years ... just as it has in the countries of the world. I believe it must develop and perfect itself and become a permanent part of our machinery of government as well.

We managed to remain independent, to be partners and not hired agents. In every aspect of our work we were guided by the idea of being regarded as an independent political entity and not just another contribution to the war effort... In every aspect of our military and industrial endeavors throughout the war, in every contribution we made to the war effort, we always strove to remain independent, to function as a partner, equal in degree if not in numbers... However, in the field [of intelligence] it was much more difficult to insist on our independence than in other fields of diplomatic activity... I believe we came through honorably in this test of our ability to act and to cooperate on operational matters, without turning into hired agents of the responsible bodies.

Zaslany listed the limitations and the difficulties that attended this operation:

- First of all – a lack of personnel. We do not have trained professionals. We are all very wise and very clever, but simply do not have people who have been trained systematically in the profession... Even more serious is the lack of psychological preparedness. The whole mechanism of intelligence-gathering is repugnant to our people. We tend to regard the profession with suspicion and revulsion.
- The second problem: our colleagues’ prejudice against this profession, resulting mostly from many generations of lack of experience in what properly constituted political life, presented us with many obstacles, and created serious difficulties in relationships with our allies.
- The third factor... was that that we, just like our allies, all of them, did not foresee the

coming events. Nobody was prepared for war.

- An additional factor, which encumbered us in our work, were the diplomatic and psychological complications that developed between us and our most important ally – Great Britain. Our people had difficulties cooperating with Great Britain.
- Another factor, a technical one, was the exaggerated centralism of our intelligence, not as a system but out of a lack of any viable alternative. This in sharp contrast to the methods employed by our allies or the Axis countries. There, those people involved in military information are not involved in political information. In those countries, apart from one central office where information is shared, there is a great deal of compartmentalization, which enhances security and specialization. In our apparatus, all operations were concentrated in one institution shared by the Political Department and the organization [the Hagannah] – which provided us with the human resources for this work.

Zaslany's thoughts on this issue, on the need for intelligence and the various problems involved in its operation, were truly prophetic. They were similar to the conclusions drawn by the United States at the same time from its wartime experiences – conclusions which ultimately led to the establishment of the CIA in 1947.

Further on in the report Zaslany summed up the joint operations with the British:²

If we did manage to work in cooperation with the British, it was due to efforts originating in London, not in Palestine... While it is true that even before contacts were created in London we offered our help to people we knew, and with whom we had developed friendly relations during the riots of 1936, mutual suspicion in Palestine ran much deeper than in London. There the people who worked in these areas had had no prior contact with the Middle East – with the Mandatory administration, the Commonwealth Ministry or the military apparatus against which we had struggled and fought so strenuously. In London, too, they were unencumbered by mistakes of the past, and therefore it was easier to negotiate with them on possible areas of cooperation than with their counterparts in Palestine.

Those people [in England] who had only recently entered this line of work, and regarded it as a temporary wartime mission, were much more willing to cooperate with us than the veterans – who were extremely hesitant... The decision taken by the central British intelligence apparatus to cooperate with us was reached at the time of the military setbacks of 1940 in Europe. When they realized that France was going to fall – and no one really knew what would happen in this war – they began looking for new allies and support, and this is what brought about their favorable response to our suggestions for cooperation.

Here Zaslany went on to describe the relationship established with the institution known as 'D' :³

After negotiations in London it was decided that we would take responsibility for organizing a Jewish underground cell in Europe – as an aid to the Allies. In their correspondence the intelligence people referred to our organization as 'The Friends', and the name is not coincidental. It carried a deeper meaning, because the people running the institution at that time were truly convinced that the Jews were indeed friends of the Allies, and fully prepared to make any sacrifice that might be called for. Initially, this institution was an independent one, but after a while it had to get used to working within the overall

military framework of the British Army. This hampered attempts to expand operations, and most of the proposals for operations put forward by this unit were rejected by the British authorities in Palestine. A few days ago I looked through the file of correspondence between that unit and ourselves. We proposed ideas and plans – they were very excited about them and told us to begin making preparations, and we drew up plans. Then suddenly we were informed – the decision was negative, in most cases for military reasons, but that was just a polite excuse.

The same unknown hand – the administration in Palestine, the Commonwealth Ministry and the Foreign Ministry – brought about the cancellation of these plans. At the last minute they came and told us: the military and strategic benefits which might ensue from such cooperation would bring about diplomatic losses on the other end. This intervention caused many of the operations that we could have carried out successfully – saving thousands of lives in the process – never to reach operational stages.

Zaslany noted, for example, negotiations he held with this unit concerning the idea of setting up transmitters and inserting trained agents in the Balkans in order to create a nucleus of resistance should these countries be overrun by the Nazis. ‘We submitted a detailed proposal that came to nothing – because of opposition on the part of some unknown party.’⁴

‘The peril approaching [our country’s borders]’, Zaslany continued, ‘caused even the staunchest opponents to cooperate ... and negotiate with us. What a shame this threat didn’t last longer... then perhaps some precedents for cooperation might have been set in place that would have served us well in the future.’ Zaslany goes on to note in detail the operations that were carried out within the framework of this perfunctory cooperation: the preparation for the invasion of Syria through propaganda, political ties and acts of sabotage, as well as the mission of the ‘twenty-three of the boat’ aimed at sabotaging the oil refineries in Tripoli, running the secret Free French radio station and more.

‘It was us who saved de Gaulle’s people in Syria and got them out to Palestine – with the full knowledge and cooperation of the British. Some of our men were taken prisoner in these operations. Tuvya Arazi was wounded, Sasson and a few other colleagues were sentenced in absentia to 20 years imprisonment.’ Zaslany continued in his report to relate events that occurred at the time of el-Alamein, of the plans for retreat and of the beginnings of the Palmach. ‘We prepared the organization for operations in Syria and Iraq, but nothing came of it. In Egypt all we had was a cell in Alexandria... Once the German threat to the area was overcome in el-Alamein, cooperation with the British diminished, and later stopped completely.’

Further on in his report, Zaslany described cooperation with MI6 through the interrogation office in Haifa, a model of cooperation that later served as a prototype for similar cooperation with the United States in eastern Europe.

In the beginning there was a temporary, one-time connection – for the purpose of gathering military and industrial information on Germany and Italy from European Jews who came to Palestine. Contact with them was more difficult. The people of MI6 were used to using paid employees who were accustomed to taking orders in return for their salaries. Our people said – we take orders only from the Jewish Agency. British Intelligence agreed to cooperate with us only in the event of real danger or a case where there was no alternative. After investing a great deal of effort, we achieved some measure of friendship, but at times they felt that they would be better off without our cooperation. Had our only function been to supply them with agents, our overall cooperation with them

might have been broader.

The interrogation office set up in Haifa in 1940 was one of the Political Department's most successful projects. This institution contributed a great deal to the war effort and did much to enhance our position in the eyes of the Allies – not just the British. We made sure that the Allies received certain reports that were the result of independent research and information-gathering on the part of the Jewish Agency.

In the course of its work, the office interrogated over 5,000 people, and submitted over 2,000 reports with more than 900 hand-drawn maps and hundreds of photographs. London and Cairo responded with over 400 remarks on these reports, and we were asked to obtain additional information on certain issues, or to provide more details in supplementary reports. We were also congratulated by London every time we managed to get our hands on important pieces of information.

Further on in his report, Zaslany referred to the frustration that attended the parachutists' operation:

We told the British we have to get into Europe. You need men, we have volunteers. Let's put together a joint operation in which people will undertake a double-barreled mission with no conflict between the two parts. Nevertheless there were many obstacles. We know of one certain ministry to which we proposed sending out agents on a combined mission, and were turned down. Only after the same ministry's efforts to put their own agent in place failed did they accept our offer.

Our proposals and plans for sending out agents were based on detailed information gathered by the interrogation office: where the agents were to go, who they must contact, etc. The British learned from experience that operations based on our information were successful, and in most of those cases where they disagreed with us, their own operations failed. The people in Haifa who gathered the information did so out of a true sense of mission, yet we suffered from ongoing British suspicion concerning their motives on the one hand, and on the other hand from the repugnance with which our comrades regarded any cooperation with British Intelligence.

Zaslany told of two agents who refused to join the British Army. Their refusal to go out on the mission might have struck a death blow to the penetration operation to the Diaspora 'but I can understand their feelings, because it's a long-held tradition resulting from emotional and political complications. This factor put paid to much of our work and we need to know how to overcome it in the future.'

Zaslany concluded his report by reiterating his remarks, which were his prime lesson for the future:

I brought this general description of the situation of intelligence work for one reason: in the coming years intelligence, and everything surrounding it, will continue to play a central role in the political and economic activities of the Allies. Britain and the United States learned a bitter lesson from their disregard for this element in their policies, and it is safe to assume that after the war they will leave many intelligence operations in place in Europe. We too will have to operate in Europe. That's where immigration will come from. We will have to continue to cooperate with them – or to find new modes of cooperation with these institutions.

In that same meeting, Eliyahu Sasson said the following about Zaslany:

During these past years I have spent a great deal of time with Reuven. I know that he has been working completely on his own on all these things. He did not have many partners and it is unfortunate that he is leaving the department and handing it over to others who have come into this work only recently. I am not certain that, given his knowledge, and the scope of the issues he dealt with, he should have been allowed to leave us.

Following Sasson's statement, Shertok remarked that the responsibility for Zaslany's move abroad (he was due to leave for the United States in the middle of December), was his alone, and noted that 'the contacts that we made during the war should be given over to our permanent offices in London and Washington. This will be part of Reuven's job there.'

From this point on Zaslany entered into an interim phase in his life, which was to come to an end at the beginning of the War of Independence. This period was also a transitional phase in the entire international orientation of the Zionist movement, which shifted its allegiances from Britain to the United States, from London to New York and Washington. In this too, Reuven Zaslany was a trailblazer. His contacts with the OSS in Cairo were the foundations for relationships that were to be continued into the future. During this period, too, Zaslany vacillated between Shertok, who clung to his British affinities, and Ben-Gurion, who had already made the move and shifted his interests, activities and thoughts to the American arena.

NOTES

1. The Zaslany Report on cooperation during the war, Zionist Archives S25/7902. The report that was submitted two months after he left the position he held in the Agency since the beginning of the war was entitled *Cooperation with the British Secret Services During the War Against Germany and Italy*, and later *Cooperation with the Intelligence and Underground Authorities of the Allies, particularly Britain, and the Jewish Agency as Representatives of the Organized Jewish Community and the Zionist Movement*. All the following quotations are from this report. Although some of what is contained in the report has already been mentioned, we have included it here both as an addition to the final report and to illustrate Zaslany's image of himself and of his work in this fateful time of his life and the history of the Jewish settlement in Palestine.
2. The report appeared shortly after the events it covered, and it was never seriously challenged, even after the secret British documents pertaining to this time became available to the public.
3. Initially, 'D' was a special duties department in the Foreign Ministry. Later it was included in the SOE (Special Operations Executive) which was, as we have noted, a unit belonging jointly to the War Ministry, in other words to the Army, and to the Ministry of Economics, and maintained a parallel operational military branch in the General Staff, as well as a theater of operations HQs, including the Middle East HQ in Cairo.
4. The reasons for the repeated postponement of the plan by the British have been detailed above. Zaslany himself could not have known about them. On the other hand, he might have known, or surmised, and yet have refused to give up on his efforts to break down British resistance to the idea.

PART THREE
TOO MANY DUTIES

From Zaslany to Shiloah

In December 1944, Reuven and his wife Betty set sail on a perilous four-week wartime sea voyage to the United States. Zaslany used the time to recuperate from the many frustrations and disappointments that he suffered during the latter phase of his work in the Jewish Agency. Shortly after his arrival in the United States he began a new chapter in his career – a chapter that was strongly based on all of his earlier achievements.

At the end of January 1945, Zaslany met with the people of the ‘Eastern Division’ of the State Department and its counterpart – the ‘Eastern Division’ of the War Department.¹ ‘Some of the talks we held in Washington were attended by people we came into contact with over the past few years in the course of our work in Palestine and Cairo. I may have to go to Washington a number of times to continue these talks and reach some kind of conclusions on practical proposals that we discussed.’²

One of the issues that was being discussed at the time was the creation of an operational center in Switzerland to coordinate combined operations for rescuing Jews and gathering intelligence in Germany. Zaslany held talks about this proposal with people from the OSS whom he had already met before in a different context.³ He reached an agreement with them that the Jewish Agency would provide the OSS with high-class intelligence information and assistance in joint operations in the Middle East and Europe in return for American help in running agents from Palestine inside Germany and Austria.⁴ It transpires from letters he wrote then from the United States, that he received Moshe Shertok’s approval for making contacts with the OSS before he had even left Palestine, particularly with those departments in the organization that were willing to discuss cooperation, and especially in the area of anti-Nazi intelligence work.

Zaslany submitted reports on meetings with various officials, among them a man named Penrose, who he had met in Cairo during the war when the American official was head of OSS operations there.⁵ Zaslany and Penrose agreed to mount a joint operation to uncover Nazi organizations, particularly those operating under the cover of Jewish or anti-Nazi groups. Discussions were held on the Jewish Agency’s candidates for missions in unoccupied European countries and for coordinating the work with the OSS. Reuven proposed himself, Teddy Kollek and Ehud Avriel for the job. Of the three, he felt that Avriel was best qualified, but he added that responsibility for the operation could be split between himself and Avriel. This is yet another testimony of the close coordination between these three men at that time. This is further supported by the fact that Kollek was a recipient of most of Zaslany’s correspondence during this period.

In another meeting in the Research Department of the Middle Eastern Wing of the OSS, Zaslany reached an agreement with their representative in the Middle East, Louis A. Frachtling, on cooperation with the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. Zaslany gave the OSS material pertaining to the Middle East, particularly on social, political, economic and other issues in Palestine, all of which was based on the expert opinion of Eliyahu Sasson, David Horowitz, Ezra Danin and others.⁶

Following Zaslany's initial contacts with OSS representatives in the United States, Gideon Raphael met with another representative of the organization who came to Palestine to look for candidates to enter into Austria through Soviet-held territory. Gideon Raphael headed another interrogation office in Haifa that had broken off from Emmanuel Yelan's operation because of personal rivalries.⁷ Raphael's office was in charge of a number of areas relating to security interrogations of Jewish immigrants who arrived in Palestine from Turkey by way of Syria during the war, some of whom, it was feared, were Nazi spies. The interrogations were carried out in cooperation with Security Intelligence Middle East (SIME, Middle Eastern version of MI5).

Raphael's office was also entrusted with the task of eliciting incriminating information on Nazi war criminals from Jews who came to Palestine from Europe. In 1945 this material was handed over to the international committee on war crimes located in London. These operations continued until the end of the war in close cooperation with British MI6. One of the ideas was that Haim Weizmann would use this material to prepare indictments on behalf of the Jewish people against the Nazi war criminals who were to be tried at Nuremberg.

The office's third task was to gather information on the private and communal Jewish property that had been stolen by the Nazis during the war. It was for this purpose, Raphael relates, that he was sent to Germany and Austria. The material collected by the office later served as the basis for the damages and reparations suits that were submitted to the government of West Germany.

The 'contractor' for all these activities *vis-à-vis* the British and the Americans was Reuven Zaslany, who promised them that he would provide them with all the information gathered for these purposes (not all of which was thoroughly checked out or reliable, Raphael notes). Zaslany used this material first and in return for its contents was given information that, more often than not, he kept to himself. His colleagues often complained that he did not share with them the information he had at his disposal, including information that was important to them for the execution of their duties.

In April 1945 Raphael made the following report to Zaslany in the United States: 'Cooperation with the British security services (SIME) here has provided them with some positive results and is still continuing. They will soon end their assignment because of the lack of immigration. In the past few months I was in charge of collecting material on the country and the region for the OSS... The most important thing is for us to be able to get to places where there are still some Jews left and it's clear to us that without cooperation we will not succeed in reaching many places.'⁸

Restless and active as ever, Zaslany found another channel for his activism on his first trip to the United States: an intensive public relations campaign among American opinion-makers. He met frequently with journalists, commentators and advertisers. He criticized the lackluster performance of people and institutions involved in Zionist public relations – which of course did little to enhance his popularity among them. Their efforts, he felt, compared very unfavorably with the successful mass propaganda efforts carried out by the 'Committee for Salvation'⁹ and

the 'Committee for National Liberty' led by Peter Bergson (Hillel Cook) that had been set up by the Irgun¹⁰ and was very active before and during the war. It is difficult to fault Zaslany's criticism of the Zionist movement and its leaders in the United States. And this is, indeed, a significant question that has given rise to an increasing number of queries and criticism to this day – was there or was there not gross negligence in activities aimed at publicizing the plight of European Jewry public knowledge, and in actions actually carried out to save the remnants during the Second World War and after it? Was there not a tragic shortsightedness – or blindness – among the leadership of the Zionist movement in the United States, and could not more have been done? Reuven did as much as he could, but there can be no doubt that in the final analysis, not enough was done.

After a number of visits to Washington, Zaslany strongly protested the deplorable lack of contact between the American Zionist institutions and US government offices and the press. He was deeply impressed with the strides made by Arab propaganda there, and recommended that the representation of the Jewish community of Palestine in the United States be strengthened – a recommendation that he was to repeat incessantly. He also demanded that more material and information be dispatched from Palestine to these representatives in the US.¹¹

He repeatedly warned his colleagues of the growing strength of Arab propaganda, particularly in light of the San Francisco Committee which was about to be convened (on the eve of the creation of the United Nations Organization). He wrote to Shertok at this time:

There is a feeling that apart from the three acknowledged leaders of the world a fourth has been discovered [the reference is to King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, who figured very prominently in American public opinion at the time], who enjoys virtually similar status... If we don't do what we must do and in good time, we will be a hair's breadth away from a Middle Eastern policy of appeasement.

And he continued in this vein in another letter, this time to Eliyahu Golomb:

we must destroy the Arab myth and fight with all our might against the assumption that the solution to the question of Palestine is contingent on Arab consent ... We must make certain that if no immediate declaration of independence can be made, the issue will not be submitted for deliberation by the new international body ... We must not let the governments of America or Britain off the hook in this matter.¹²

Reuven Zaslany arrived in San Francisco for the opening of the United Nations on 26 April 1945, together with Eliyahu Eilat and Gershon Agron – all three of them as observers. Their duties involved aiding and advising the representatives of the Jewish Agency in the United States during the conference. Zaslany lobbied media representatives and writers intensively during the event to try to gain support for two main objectives. The first was to prevent the election of an Arab representative to the committee that was being established to deal with the issue of 'trusteeship' over countries under the mandate of the defunct League of Nations, among them Palestine (the committee was supposed to decide, among other things, if Palestine was to be defined as a territory under the sole trusteeship of Great Britain). The second aim was to ensure that the rights of the Jews in Palestine would be protected in any decision regarding territories held in trust.¹³

During the conference, Zaslany sent letters to Teddy Kollek and Ze'ev Sherf¹⁴ in which he outlined proposals for organizational changes in the Zionist institutions in the United States. This

was a frequent habit of his – writing letters to friends and political leaders suggesting plans for improvement in various areas in the hope that his proposals and criticisms would eventually reach their mark. In this case, these friends-cum-correspondents – Kollek, Sherf and others – served in key positions and were thus convenient conduits for Zaslany's highly critical and sometimes downright unpleasant reports.

Meanwhile, he was also involved in much more pressing issues. Eliyahu Eilat summed up Zaslany's contribution to their cooperative efforts as observers in the San Francisco Conference thus:¹⁵ '...[He] knows everyone – great and small. He is well versed in the finest nuances of differences between the various factions, organizations and personalities ... he has already made many contacts and opened the way for many more. Our cooperation during the conference was very successful and created the possibility for continuation in this vein in Washington and New York after the conference.' Eilat was highly impressed with Zaslany's ability to adapt himself to the American way of life and mind-set: 'The Reuven I met had become a complete American, taking to the customs of the country like a fish to water ... he even speaks American.' While all this was well and good, when the conference was over he was forced to deal with the recurrent problem of planning his next move: from the end of the conference until July 1945 he was not at all certain what his next job would be. Was he going to remain in the United States, as Ben-Gurion wanted, or move to London on Shertok's recommendation? He seems to have preferred the latter, or so at least he wrote to Shertok.¹⁶

Ben-Gurion, as we have noted, believed that the focal point of Zionist politics had already moved from England to the United States, where major fundraising efforts were underway, and where weapons-manufacturing equipment was being purchased for *Ta'as* – the fledgling military industries of the Hagannah – on the recommendation of the company's director, engineer Haim Slavin. In June 1945, Ben-Gurion arrived in the United States, and on 1 July a major – and ultimately historic – meeting was held, chaired by Ben-Gurion with the participation of Eliezer Kaplan (economic advisor and subsequently Israel's first Minister of Finance), Zaslany and 19 friends of the Zionist movement, to create a special fund (the so-called Sonneborn Fund, named after the man who headed this special fund for arms procurement, which was not then altogether legal in the United States) to help defray the costs of immigration and defense, including the equipment for *Ta'as*. At that meeting it was decided that the money raised for this fund would be divided equally between these two aims.¹⁷

Zaslany became involved in these activities at that time, but only briefly. He was to return to work on this later after yet another move, this time to London at the beginning of August 1945, for the first postwar World Zionist Committee. Once again, he was dissatisfied, and he was unable to find his rightful place in the event. 'If my staying here', he wrote, 'will not be accompanied by a serious effort at reorganization and a clear definition of my areas of responsibility, I fear I will just be yet another lost soul wandering around the corridors at Great Russell Street, and I am simply not up to that now.'¹⁸

Once again he packed his bags and set sail, this time back to the United States, for what was supposed to be a 4- to 6-week stay. In the event, it lasted much longer since there was a great deal of work to be done. Upon his arrival in America, on 18 October 1945, he embarked on professional tours and picked up where he had left off in his activities for the special immigration and arms procurement fund. 'Reuven was one of the men who laid the foundation for the defense fund in the United States by virtue of his contacts with Sonneborn', recalls Mina Ben-Zvi, who was a member of the arms procurement mission. 'Everything was done at parties held in the homes of wealthy people, with Reuven seeing to all the arrangements. He had no qualms about

calling up a very wealthy person and saying: I want to see you, and an hour later showing up on his doorstep. He had the *chutzpah* to go anywhere he thought he could reap some benefit ... Ships for immigration were bought by Ze'ev Shind, and arms manufacturing machinery was purchased by Engineer Slavin... but the impetus to open the right door at the right time came from Reuven.'

After a visit to Palestine at the end of February 1946 to bring himself up to date on local developments, and a trip to Egypt with Eliyahu Sasson,¹⁹ Zaslany flew to London with Kollek at Shertok's request. This was at the end of April in advance of the proposed 1 May publication of the findings of the Anglo-American Committee. Upon his arrival in London, Zaslany submitted a detailed operational plan to Shertok and was promised that it would be discussed with the local officials at Great Russell Street. Zaslany was appointed assistant to Joseph Linton who headed the office at the time, but the long-awaited discussion of his proposals was repeatedly postponed. Once again he grew disappointed and restless. He did not understand why Shertok had called him so urgently to London, and made his position quite plainly: 'If I'm not given an independent area of responsibility, there is no point in my staying here.'

Indeed, three months after his arrival in London he moved to Paris, and spent most of 1946 working in the Jewish Agency offices in western Europe, particularly in Paris, together with David Ben-Gurion. In August of that year, the Board of Governors of the Zionist movement met in Paris following the events of the so-called 'Black Sabbath'.²⁰ In November 1946, Zaslany arrived back in Palestine, close to the time Shertok and his colleagues were due to be released from the British military prison at Latrun, and on 10 December he went to Basel to participate in the first World Zionist Congress to be convened after the Second World War.

At the beginning of January 1947, Zaslany was back in London where he took part in a conference of senior Political Department officials representing the Jewish Agency in various European countries, and demanded that more aggressive diplomatic action be directed toward certain military circles in London and Washington which, he felt, were influential in shaping British and American foreign policies. He called for the preparation of a pamphlet dealing with 'The Strategic Value of a Jewish State', and suggested setting up a center in Jerusalem to disseminate basic facts and information about Palestine and the Middle East to various centers in Europe and the United States.²¹

On 10 January, Zaslany returned to Palestine, and in February he resumed his work in the Political Department, this time as an advisor on special affairs to Shertok – but only for three months. It is quite conceivable that during these months – January to May 1947 – he assisted the Hagannah and SHAI in their attempts to curb the activities of the Jewish underground organizations, the IZL and the LHI.²² The actions taken against these organizations were the operational consequences of a decision reached by the national institutions of the Yishuv stating that 'the authority of the Zionist movement in the political struggle, must be recognized by all, and all acts of terror are to be banned. What is more, strong measures must be taken against intimidation and coercion practiced by the Irgun and the LHI.'²³

At the beginning of May 1947, in anticipation of the critical discussions planned for the UN session on the future of Palestine, Zaslany returned to the United States and joined the Jewish Agency's delegation to the organization at Lake Success. In the months that followed, Zaslany carried out various tasks in a number of different areas. These were months of crucial diplomatic activities surrounding the fate of the Yishuv, before the almost inevitable military confrontation between the opposing sides. Among other things, he again went to Egypt with Eliyahu Sasson and met with the Secretary of the Arab League, Azzam Peha, and other Arab officials, to try to

sound out the potential for cooperation between the Jewish Agency and the various Arab countries.²⁴

For Zaslany this was a brief period of transition before the beginning of an entirely new chapter in his life highlighted by the UN General Assembly's resolution of 29 November 1947 approving the Partition Plan for Palestine – in other words, the creation of the State of Israel and the first steps toward a machinery of national government, particularly in the area of security and intelligence. Among other things, Zaslany and Yehezkel Saharof were asked to maintain contacts with the British Police, and in this capacity Zaslany met with the Inspector General of the Police, Colonel Gray, and with his second in command – and head of the CID – A. P. Giles. This was all in anticipation of the outbreak of renewed hostilities by the Arabs against the Yishuv.²⁵

When riots broke out following the UN decision, and when it became clear that this was the beginning of a full-scale war, Zaslany was asked to move his offices to the 'Red House' in Tel Aviv (Mapai Party headquarters), which at that time housed Ben-Gurion's office and served as both political and military headquarters. He was put in charge of Arab Affairs' – collecting all available information on Palestinian Arabs and on the neighboring Arab countries. Given this somewhat amorphous appointment which, nevertheless, carried broad responsibilities, Reuven Zaslany found himself among the founders of the intelligence and security services of the future State of Israel.

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With the establishment of the state, Reuven Zaslany officially changed his name to Shiloah, his 'underground' code name. He could not have found a more symbolic name: 'Shiloah' – derived from the Hebrew root 'shalah' (שלח) meaning among other things a mission, or a messenger – suited him perfectly. He was forever the top-level emissary sent on special, highly classified missions; he was also a missionary for the Israeli cause, out to persuade Jews and Gentiles alike of the justice of his cause. Perhaps this was also in part a memory he retained from his father's house of the 'meshulah' – the messenger sent by the heads of the communities in Eretz Yisrael to the Jews of the Diaspora.

In this period Reuven Shiloah became the agent of many missions – too many, as we shall see – on behalf of the two great leaders of the time, David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Shertok – now officially named 'Sharett'.²⁶ He was very highly regarded and profoundly trusted by both of them, and as such was found to be the most suitable man for sensitive and covert missions on behalf of the state. He was incapable of refusing any of their requests, possibly because he always wanted to know everything, to be involved everywhere and to be in possession of all the information. All this was the source of a great deal of tension, and led him to take upon himself everything that he was asked to do and more than he could effectively carry – until he was finally crushed by the burden.

NOTE

1. It was only in 1947 that the United States created by law a Defense Department which included the three formerly independent ministries of the three military arms: Air Force, Army and Navy, as well as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Council.
2. Zaslany to Kollek, 9 Feb. 1945. Zionist Archives S25/427.
3. Office of Strategic Services. The commander of the OSS was General William Donovan. David Ben-Gurion held meetings with him as well as with other officials in Washington in Dec. 1942, and submitted a memorandum to him about the Jewish military operations during the war, and their contribution to British war efforts, as well as proposals for creating a Jewish army both inside and outside Palestine. OSS officials visited Palestine during the war, but Palestine was outside their area of responsibility which, in terms of intelligence and special operations in the Axis-occupied areas of Europe, concentrated on

- the war against Hitler. Zaslany tried to enlist their help in the plans for resistance and the paratroopers' operations, but the British blocked all of these plans. Report of the Investigation Bureau in Haifa, 3 Dec. 1944. Zionist Archives S25/8907.
4. Zaslany to Kollek, 25 Feb. 1945. Zionist Archives S25/427.
 5. Zaslany's calendar indicates that he met with Penrose quite frequently. This is borne out by the following partial list of their meetings in the early part of 1945: 26 Feb., 5, 9, 10, 27 March, 7 April.
 6. Zaslany to Kollek, 7 March 1945. Zionist Archives S25/1427.
 7. From interviews with Gideon Raphael and Emmanuel Yelan.
 8. Raphael to Zaslany, Haifa, 5 April 1945, Zionist Archives S25/816.
 9. Created by the Jewish Agency in 1942 to aid the Jews in Nazi-occupied countries through contacts with the leaders of Jewish underground organizations and the creation of operations centers in neutral countries and sister 'committees for salvation' in other countries.
 10. Short for *Irgun Zva'i Leumi* – National Military Organization, Etzel, – the right-wing underground organization led by Menachem Begin.
 11. Zaslany to Eliyahu Eilat and Moshe Shertok, March 1945, Zionist Archives S25/1816.
 12. Ibid. Zaslany to Shertok and Eliyahu Golomb, 23 March 1945.
 13. Zaslany to Kollek, 8 May 1945, Zionist Archives S25/5334.
 14. Ze'ev Sherf was a promising young Jewish Agency official who years later served as a minister in Golda Meir's government.
 15. Eliyahu Eilat, *The San Francisco Conference*, pp.85–6.
 16. Shertok to Ben-Gurion, 26 June 1945 and Zaslany to Shertok, 3 July 1945, Zionist Archives S25/651.
 17. *The Short History of the Hagannah*, p.459.
 18. The building at 77 Great Russell Street in London was home to the offices of the Zionist Federation in England, and it was from there that the President of the World Zionist Congress, Haim Weizmann, carried out most of his political activities. Thus the address itself was identified with the function of the organization. The quote from Zaslany appears in a letter from Zaslany to Kollek, 11 Aug. 1945.
 19. Zionist Archives S25/6651.
 20. On Saturday, 29 June 1946 the British authorities in Palestine embarked on a massive operation against the Jewish Yishuv in an effort to stop the actions being taken by the Jewish community against the British Mandate in general, and against the edicts of the White Paper in particular. Tens of thousands of British soldiers spread out all over the country, arrested and interrogated thousands of Jews (among them four top-ranking officials of the Jewish Agency: Moshe Shertok, Dov Yosef, Yitzhak Greenbaum and Rabbi Fishman-Maimon); mounted intensive searches for arms in kibbutzim; broke into the offices of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, the Histadrut in Tel Aviv and other institutions of the Yishuv, searching for incriminating evidence and causing extensive damage to these buildings in the process. Seven Jews were killed and scores were wounded in the action. The Hagannah knew in advance about the planned 'Operation Broadside', but even though they broadcast it openly over the Hagannah underground radio in an effort to prevent its execution, the British went ahead with the operation. In the final account, apart from one major arms cache uncovered in Kibbutz Yagur just north of Haifa, the entire operation yielded very little.
 21. From a private archive.
 22. Acronym for *Lohamei Herut Yisrael* – literally: Fighters for Israel's Liberty. An extreme right-wing underground organization founded in 1940 by Avraham Stern after splitting off from the Irgun. LHI was opposed to any form of cooperation with the Hagannah and to any reduction of terrorist activities against the British during the Second World War. Among its most dramatic exploits was the assassination of British Minister for the Middle East, Lord Moyne, in Nov. 1946. Stern himself, after whom the British nicknamed the organization the Stern Gang, was killed by the CID in Tel Aviv in 1942.
 23. Decision of the plenum of the National Committee, 19 Jan. 1947. *A Chronology of the History of the New Jewish Settlement in Palestine* (Yad Ben-Zvi) p.254.
 24. According to Zaslany's appointment book. See too Eliyahu Sasson, *On the Road to Peace*.
 25. 27 Oct. 1947. Zionist Archives S25/5672.
 26. Here too, there is a symbolic ring to the name: derived from the Hebrew root 'sharet' (שָׂרַת) meaning 'to serve'.

War on Three Fronts

The creation of the State of Israel during the War of Independence was a time of new beginnings – and endings. It was the end of the British Mandate over Palestine, the end of the Hagannah. A Hebrew state, soon to become the Jewish State named Israel, came into existence, and many organizations, institutions and official positions came to an end or were replaced by others – not easily, and in many cases, not happily. Tragedies occurred in this process, as people once regarded as indispensable to the creation of the state found themselves shunted aside once the state was established. The opposite was also true – people who were relatively unknown suddenly bloomed in the heady atmosphere of the new beginnings. It was a changing of the guard: new people, new methods. There was little time and little experience to draw on. Many unprecedented problems demanded immediate decisions, temporary solutions and makeshift arrangements that subsequently became permanent. An atmosphere of improvisation prevailed, of groping blindly towards the future and acclimating to new and constantly changing conditions, uncertainties, illusions and hopes. There were, of course, many disappointments. There was the chaos of a state born in the midst of a cruel and savage war, forced upon a Yishuv which had prepared itself for a different war, a different state. These were the birth pangs of a state and its sovereign government – a ‘barefoot bureaucracy in khaki and a top hat’,¹ a mélange in which many people had difficulty finding their rightful place. Some were pushed aside immediately, others after longer or shorter periods of transition.

Reuven Shiloah now moved into these momentous developments. He was entrusted with many tasks, perhaps too many, but true to form, he took them all on and found himself fighting too many battles on too many fronts at once. Had he chosen only one of the responsibilities offered him, or merely turned down a few, more of the ventures he did undertake might have succeeded, and those in which he failed might not have been undertaken at all. Beyond all that, however, his imprimatur was unmistakable on everything he touched.

Between 1948 and 1952, Shiloah pursued three main operational avenues simultaneously. The first – the so-called ‘Wars of the Jews’,² – was characterized primarily by the conflicts that attended the creation of the Mossad, the intelligence organization founded on the ruins of the defunct SHAI (which had split up into three separate bodies) and by the dismantling of the newly formed Political Department of the Foreign Ministry, which was stillborn as a result of its conflicts with Army intelligence, which successfully spread its authority over more and more operational areas.

The second avenue – which could be paraphrased as the ‘Wars of the Arabs’ – was

dominated by the talks with King Abdullah, which were to end with no tangible results when the king was assassinated.³ Here, too, there were questions that remained unanswered, particularly concerning whether or not things could have been handled differently, and whether the opportunity to reach a formal treaty, rather than an armistice agreement, had not been wasted. The foundations for Israel's special relations with Jordan, which were indeed quite different from its relations with the other Arab countries, were laid at this time.

Shiloah's third avenue of development might be called the 'War of the Gentiles': Shiloah's tortuous, but ultimately successful struggle to set up a *modus operandi* for covert cooperation with the CIA. Although the suggestion encountered stiff opposition from both the American and the Israeli sides, this initiative was regarded at the time as a major breakthrough, and as possibly the most important point on the long road toward improving relationships between Israel and the United States. It is difficult today to understand the magnitude and singularity of this achievement. However, until beyond the middle of 1951, when the results of this breakthrough finally began to make an impact, relations between the American administration and the State of Israel were at a low ebb. There was much mutual suspicion and alienation, and even outright antagonism, that surfaced openly during various stages of the War of Independence, and even beyond – until the very end of the Truman administration.

On the one hand, the US was the first to recognize the State of Israel, to establish full diplomatic relations with the new state and to provide crucial financial aid. At the same time, it placed a total embargo on arms sales to Israel and prohibited all manner of arms exports to the country. Ultimately, it was shipments of Soviet arms to Israel via Czechoslovakia that tipped the balance of the war and ultimately saved the life of the fledgling state.

Throughout the war, until the signing of the armistice agreements, there was a growing conviction in the American administration that steps should be taken to placate the Arab countries after their defeat, and to win their support. State Department officials believed this could be achieved by cooling US–Israeli relations in general and by demanding that Israel agree to certain concessions, namely to redraw the border in the Negev, repatriate the Palestinian refugees or pay reparations and accept the permanent internationalization of Jerusalem, as conditions for a peace agreement between Israel and the Arab countries. When terrorist infiltration into Israel increased in the 1950s, Washington added to this list diplomatic pressure aimed at deterring Israel from taking retaliatory action. The United States turned a deaf ear to Israel's claims that the sole aim of the military operations carried out by its army against Arab objectives across the border was to protect the citizens of Israel from Arab terrorist infiltration into the country for purposes of murder and theft. US officials gave unconditional support to the UN observers (appointed to oversee the implementation of the armistice agreements) who had little understanding of Israel's need to defend its cities, towns and citizens.

This was an American 'freeze out', stemming, perhaps, from second thoughts in the administration about its support for the establishment of the state. American officials also had reservations about Israeli policies, and a deep-rooted suspicion of the left-wing politics of Israel's ruling parties with their socialist orientation toward the so-called 'forces of the future', particularly in relation to their influence on Israeli youth and the higher echelons of the military.⁴

There were reservations on the Israeli side as well. The nature of US–Israel relationships had always been hotly debated, particularly – though not exclusively – within the left-wing Mapam Party.⁵ The same debate went on even among the leaders of the more centrist long-ruling Mapai Party, which, over the years, moved very slowly from 'neutrality' to 'non-alliance', and from

'non-alliance' to a European, mostly Franco-German orientation, while the shift to the American orientation came about only during the 1950s and 1960s. In the first years of statehood, however, Shiloah's attempts to cooperate with the CIA were highly controversial and were developed in great secrecy. They were approved, of course, by David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett, but no one else, even at the highest levels of government circles, either knew of or approved of the process.

As was his habit, Shiloah tried to find ways to forge ties with friends and colleagues abroad who might be interested in the unique intelligence material that he had to offer them. Together with his assistant and closest partner, Kollek, Shiloah sought the kind of personal contacts that would lead him to the proverbial 'back rooms' where American foreign policy was hammered out. This third avenue of the new chapter in his life was to become the principal thrust of all those that followed.

There should be no mistake, however: these three avenues of Shiloah's work were closely intertwined all along, breeding many other operational pathways along the way, albeit chaotically, feverishly and repeatedly diverging, blending and weaving in response to developments. This was Shiloah's greatest problem – his penchant for fighting battles on all three fronts at once. The following chapters of this section of the book will be devoted to each one of them in turn,

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A few months before the establishment of the state, at the end of 1947, Reuven Shiloah was transferred to the 'Red House' – Mapai Party headquarters in Tel Aviv. He was given responsibility for reporting on Arab issues' to the people of the Political Department who remained in Jerusalem. He served as a liaison between the General Staff and the Foreign Ministry and between Ben-Gurion and Sharett. This was the front line of Israel's policy-making at that time, and Shiloah was situated right at the heart of this nerve center. He carried out his duties in his singular way, always adapting his reports to suit the recipient's point of view when reporting to one side about the other. In this fashion he was 'a man for all seasons', smoothing out ruffled feathers on all sides as best he could.

Among his many achievements at the time was the establishment of the Government Press Office, which he set up together with a small group of colleagues. It was there that he held frequent meetings with foreign journalists who came to the country to cover the war. He thoroughly enjoyed explaining Israel's situation and problems to the 'goyim',⁶ in their own terms, without preaching to them. It was a good exercise in Zionist Middle Eastern *realpolitik*. In return he drew information from them about the doings in the Arab capitals that they visited in the course of their work. Elkana Gali, who worked as Shiloah's assistant during that time, recalls that Shiloah once told him that if anyone asked him how he knows what he knows, he should answer: 'Knowing is my business'. A typically off-the-cuff Shiloah remark.

Another typical *modus operandi* that he often resorted to from the very beginning of his public career was the nurturing of inside contacts. His assistant, Gali, was a case in point. When the state was established, Gali was first appointed as secretary to Foreign Minister Sharett and then, after serving in a number of different positions in the Foreign Ministry, transferred to the Prime Minister's Office, where he became secretary to Ben-Gurion. Shiloah was instrumental in securing both of these appointments for Gali in the offices of the country's two leaders, thus ensuring himself easy access to their presence. In a similar manner Shiloah always found time for secretaries, assistants and people otherwise associated with major figures in both Israeli and

international politics. This personal touch helped him ‘sneak past’ many a bureaucratic hurdle to reach the people he needed to see at times of crisis and decision. He would often just happen to ‘be there’ at a critical moment, to see what he could and hear what he could, to ask and answer and arouse interest in what he had to say. When he wanted to be in the right place at the right time and create opportunities instead of waiting for them to come along of their own accord, he rarely waited for a formal invitation.

One of the more important missions he was entrusted with in February 1948 was a trip to London aimed at finding, if possible, some answers to an issue that troubled Ben-Gurion: he needed to know as much as possible about British intentions relating to the method and timetable of their departure from Palestine. Shiloah himself described this mission in the style of the time: ‘To try to find out if there is a British conspiracy against us’, and ‘to contact key persons and arouse in them some concern about what is going on in the country’ and ‘to find out if there are any parties in the British government that could be persuaded to work in our favour’.⁷

After scores of meetings with officials of the Colonial Ministry, the Army, members of Parliament – mostly Tory – the press and many others, he reached the conclusion that

there is no Cabinet-level decision to oppose the Partition Plan. No one wants to tamper with the UN’s decision on this issue. Their aim is to leave the country with minimal losses in personnel, money or equipment, and retain maximum Arab support in the process.

Shiloah also noted that the Middle East experts in the British Foreign Office

think that the UN decision cannot be implemented, and this concept lies behind their activities in England, in the Arab countries, and in Palestine. They have a great deal of influence and have managed to persuade quite a number of people, including some of our friends, that the Partition is a burden ... [and] cannot be implemented.

Shiloah received the impression that the opponents of the Partition Plan

are dreaming of reviving the Morrison Plan,⁸ ... [and] believe that a collective military alliance with the Arabs is a real possibility ... This is the reason why they are so strongly opposed to the establishment of a large, strong Hebrew state, and this is why they are doing everything they can to curtail Jewish preparations, and strengthen the Arabs. All of this is being done, however, without a direct order from the Cabinet to this effect, and without making any attempt at undermining official British policy.

In his report, Shiloah went on to claim that ‘there are no real signs of any serious British aid to the Arabs in their war against us. Some arms shipments based on long-term contracts are going through, but these are in very limited quantities.’ He felt that ‘there is no need to fear a deterioration of the situation in the country as a result of British intervention on the Arab side. The Cabinet decisions are binding, and are guaranteed by the two highest-ranking British officials serving in the country – High Commissioner Cunningham and the Army Commander Macmillan.’

Shiloah may have been off course on one or two counts, but overall, his mission to evaluate the situation proved correct in relation to the main issue: the British would honor the Cabinet decision to bring the Mandate to an end and leave Palestine, and would not intervene in the Arabs’ favor, but would support any plan to limit or cut down the size of the Jewish State. And

indeed, this was the way events unfolded, despite deep-seated feelings to the contrary on the part of British officials and army personnel.

Shortly after returning from this trip, Shiloah was injured in the car-bomb explosion of 15 March 1948 that rocked the National Institutions Building in Jerusalem, which housed the central offices of the Jewish Agency and was the virtual seat of Israeli government. The attack occurred during one of the darkest periods of the War of Independence, before Israel's independence was secured. The circumstances surrounding Shiloah's injury were vividly recalled by former President Haim Herzog, whose wife, Ora, was also wounded in the blast.⁹ 'Two and a half hours [after the blast], at exactly one o'clock, as he had promised, Haim Herzog arrived at the United Nations office to take the Norwegian Colonel Rocher-Lund,¹⁰ to lunch. He apologized for his wife's absence on account of her injuries, and begged forgiveness for his somewhat messy attire. The two then went to pick up Reuven Shiloah, a high-ranking official in the Jewish Agency. He too had been wounded in the blast and his head was completely wrapped in bandages, except for four tiny holes, for his eyes, nose and mouth. The three had a glass of sherry, and then sat down to lunch: Shiloah, sipping his soup through a straw sticking out of one of the holes in the embalmer's mask covering his entire face; Herzog, wearing a shirt stained with splotches of his wife's blood (he had managed to take her to an ambulance before coming to the meeting); and the Norwegian, whose mood kept shifting from amazement to awe ... "Good God", he whispered, "no one is going to stop a people like you".

The wound left a diagonal scar on Shiloah's cheek that added an aura of mystery to his expression, yet was so typical of the man that he seemed to have born with it. After a short period of recuperation, Shiloah moved to Tel Aviv with his wife, Betty, who until then had preferred to remain in their flat in Jerusalem, in the British security zone of Talbiyeh.

From that point on, Shiloah worked as intensely as ever in his many capacities at the political and military headquarters of the Yishuv in Tel Aviv. One of these was to maintain contact with representatives of the United Nations in Israel on behalf of Ben-Gurion and Sharett (the meeting with Rocher-Lund after the bomb attack in Jerusalem was one such instance). At the beginning of June 1948, he assisted Sharett in his contacts with the UN mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte, on issues relating to the temporary cease-fire, and participated in the meetings with Ben-Gurion when the results of these negotiations were reported. At the end of the same month, Shiloah met with various representatives of the UN (particularly Readman and Mohn). It was he who, at Sharett's behest, submitted to Mohn the Israeli government's agreement to a ten-day cease-fire, and demanded that the UN representatives see to it that the cease-fire be meticulously observed by both sides.¹¹

One of Shiloah's most important functions at that time was to maintain constant personal and operational contacts between Prime Minister and Defense Minister David Ben-Gurion, and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett. Yigael Yadin, then Head of Operations in the General Staff and acting Chief of Staff (during the extended illness of the IDF's first Chief of Staff, Ya'akov Dori), described this aspect of Shiloah's work: '...This was a long period in which a delicate balance was maintained between the pursuit of the war and the development of foreign relations, because we fought in between repeated cease-fire arrangements. The dates set for each of these cease-fire agreements determined our operational planning, and vice versa – when the planning or execution of an operation was not yet complete, every effort was made to postpone the implementation of a cease-fire by a day or two... Intelligence affairs at that time were run by a number of different bodies, and the liaison between them all was by Reuven Shiloah. He possessed a talent that some considered a drawback – the ability to present issues and straighten

out affairs very quietly and discreetly. He would never pound on the table. He would come in quietly, present a problem, analyze it, try to persuade the parties on what should or should not be done... He was blessed with the ability to read a political situation clearly and comprehend military intelligence reports, zeroing in immediately on potential dangers or weak spots in the information itself, and consequently was able to refer each issue to its proper place – to the political leaders, or to the Minister of Defense David Ben-Gurion... Ben-Gurion and Sharett both had absolute trust in Shiloah. There were objective reasons for friction between the two leaders which were very serious and could have caused many problems. Shiloah would see to it that these flash-points never ignited, smoothing things out and arranging them to everyone's satisfaction. It was absolutely imperative that the personal tension between Ben-Gurion and Sharett not cause them to stop talking to each other.'

Shiloah was Sharett's liaison man and trusted advisor, and headed official Israeli missions to a number of United Nations forums in New York and Paris at various stages of the War of Independence. He drew up detailed reports for Sharett from meetings of the government and the General Staff, and kept him abreast of developments on the war fronts such as the battles in the Negev and the encirclement of the Egyptian Army.¹² He reported to Sharett on the discussions held in the General Staff on the question of Latrun,¹³ 'Concerning the issue that he disagreed with you about', he writes in his circumspect fashion, referring to Ben-Gurion's position on this issue, 'he intends to raise the question again at the cabinet meeting. But experts have told him that the chances of success in this operation are totally dependent on other operations that need to be carried out simultaneously on other fronts.'¹⁴

Shiloah was also privy to reports concerning contacts with UN observers during the fighting, as they were reported to Ben-Gurion, Dori and his deputy, Yadin. Thus, for example, after a series of meetings with General Reilly (Head of the UN observers' force) concerning the Faluja salient,¹⁵ Yadin, Dori and Shiloah met with Ben-Gurion and reported to him that the Egyptian units surrounded in the salient had given up hope of ever receiving any military aid from their own army, and that their only hope was a negotiated surrender.¹⁶

Yadin recalls another instance of Shiloah's special standing with Ben-Gurion and Sharett, following a joint trip they made to a session of the special UN General Assembly that met in Paris in November 1948 during Operation 'Ten Plagues'.¹⁷ There was a lull in the battles, and Ben-Gurion wanted to press on with an offensive on the front. Sharett was opposed to any further military actions at that time and cabled Ben-Gurion from Paris cautioning against attacking the Iraq Suweidan police fortress.¹⁸ Ben-Gurion sent Yadin and Shiloah to Paris to convince Sharett of the necessity of this operation and to bring the Israeli delegation up to date on the overall military situation of the war. 'First of all', Yadin related, 'I met with Reuven in order to discuss the tactics that might be used to persuade Sharett to agree. Then we met with Sharett, who regarded Shiloah as "his man". That was Reuven's special talent – to make everyone feel that he was working mainly for them.' While his two messengers were in Paris, Ben-Gurion postponed any further decisions on these issues.¹⁹

Toward the end of November 1948, after their return from the UN General Assembly in Paris, and at the request of the UN mediator, Yadin and Shiloah were appointed as liaison officers to the head of the UN observers' force on issues relating to future arrangements.²⁰ This appointment opened up a new channel of negotiations for Shiloah, leading first to diplomatic negotiations with UN personnel, and later, to his appointment as head of the Israeli delegation to the armistice talks with Jordan at Rhodes, which resulted in the signing of the armistice agreement between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Shiloah also played a major

role in the secret talks with King Abdullah, which were beginning at that time. ‘Shiloah asked me about the negotiations with Abdullah’, Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary on 21 November 1948. ‘I told him that my suggestion is that they begin the talks in Paris, and when they reach a more practical stage – the talks should move to here.’,²¹

Throughout that period, Reuven was also involved in the establishment of all the various branches of intelligence set up by the new Israeli government. It was Ben-Gurion who decided to go ahead with this restructuring, and did so in consultation with Shiloah, who was already regarded as the most senior government official in the area of intelligence work. Haim Herzog, years later Head of Army Intelligence and later yet the fifth President of the State of Israel, also participated in these consultations. During the war, Herzog had served as an intelligence officer in the British Army, and now placed his considerable expertise at the service of the state. Through their close cooperation in those early years of Israeli intelligence, Shiloah and Herzog became good friends, working closely with Yadin.

On 7 June 1948, three separate intelligence branches were set up to replace the Hagannah’s SHAI, which had previously been responsible for all three.²² These three services were the following:

- Military SHAI – headed by Isser Be’eri and Haim Herzog. This was to deal with battlefield intelligence, counterintelligence, internal security in the Army, wire-tapping, military censorship and special operations.
- Internal SHAI – headed by Isser Halprin and Yosef Yizraeli, under the supervision of Reuven Shiloah and David Ben-Gurion.
- Diplomatic/external SHAI – headed by Reuven Shiloah. For the duration of the war, this was to be under the supervision of the Ministry of Defense, and later possibly placed under the aegis of the Foreign Ministry.

In that same month the Foreign Ministry set up its Political Department. Boris Guriel, who was the head of the political department of the SHAI,²³ until that time, was put in charge, and obliged to report to Reuven Shiloah, who was appointed Special Advisor at the Foreign Ministry.

All of this reshuffling sowed the seeds of trouble. Shiloah was given numerous areas of responsibility without a clear chain of command, either upward toward his superiors or down toward his subordinates. He was responsible both to Sharett in the Foreign Ministry and to Ben-Gurion in the Prime Minister’s office and the Ministry of Defense, on top of which he himself was responsible for the newly created Political Department at the Foreign Ministry, the External/Political SHAI and the Internal SHAI.

There were many overlapping areas and consequently much friction among these various branches of the Israeli intelligence apparatus. To a great extent this was the result of the lack of a tradition of statehood in a young country born in the storm of warfare, the lack of personal and professional experience in these areas, and a touch of recklessness and dilettantism, mixed in with a profound sense of personal mission on the part of all the *dramatis personae*. The dismantling of the SHAI network was traumatic, particularly for the veteran volunteers of the ‘Arab’ SHAI, who had been deeply involved in intelligence work since the days of the Arab riots, and were now being sent home with the feeling that they had outlived their usefulness and were being discarded. The new branches of intelligence began squabbling over the legacy of the SHAI network, and over the creation of new methods and norms within the framework of an independent state, norms that were not at all clear even while they were being put in place. This was a period of intense experimentation, as attempts were made to divide up areas of

responsibility, authority and operations, and at the same time to settle personal, administrative and operational differences. The man most targeted for complaints, lobbying, bypassing obstacles and staking out claims, the man who was thought to be Ben-Gurion's and Sharett's closest advisor, was Reuven Shiloah.

Records of these initial experiments and trial runs are scattered throughout Ben-Gurion war diaries, and in *The Book of Documents*,²⁴ and Shiloah figures prominently in all of them. Following the assassination of UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte, talks were held on the liquidation of the LHI Jewish underground movement and a nation-wide roundup of LHI operatives. Shiloah was involved in all the consultations with Ben-Gurion concerning the special forces that needed to be drafted for such an operation.,²⁵ As part of his responsibilities as 'Special Advisor', Shiloah was also involved in the issue of the Palestinian refugees. According to Ben-Gurion's diaries, Yosef Weitz raised the problem of the 100,000 Arab refugees concentrated in the central Galilee region who, Weitz suggested, needed to be – as he put it – 'harassed out of there'. Weitz suggested to Ben-Gurion that this indirect operation, which was to be pursued through Arab intermediaries, be run by Reuven Shiloah with 'the help of the [Refugee] Committee'. The diary adds, 'Weitz requests that I give Shiloah the instructions to do it.'²⁶ At the same time, first steps were being taken towards the coordination of intelligence operations. Shiloah and Chief of Staff Dori, in a meeting with Ben-Gurion, agreed that 'for the meanwhile, the central index [sic] should be in the Army, but it will be subordinate to the Prime Minister's office. Agreement has been reached on standardization of reports, and that will be done. Isser Be'eri opposed the Coordinating Committee. *It must be agreed by everyone that the Army is a single entity in the state, and the tradition of the Hagannah in this respect, must be dropped.*'²⁷

This was a key policy statement by Ben-Gurion, noted almost offhandedly in his diary and entirely typical in that respect of the complex problems that beset the state in its first independent steps.

NOTES

1. A fanciful description of Israel's early diplomats that was popular at the time.
2. Borrowed from the name of the chronicles of the Second Temple period written by Josephus Flavius.
3. The King was assassinated on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem on 20 July 1951. The present king of Jordan, Hussein, then a young boy, was at his side when he was gunned down.
4. Many of the highest-ranking officers in the elite Palmach units were brought up under the influence of the Stalinist-leaning Mapam Party, and its Ha-Shomer Ha-Tsa'ir youth movement.
5. Mapam – an acronym for *Mifleget Poalim Meuhedet*, the United Workers' Party – was known in pre-state days and later for its support of, and ties with, the Communist Party in the USSR.
6. *Goyim*: A Yiddishized Hebrew word meaning 'gentiles', and used in a mildly derogatory fashion to denote non-Jews.
7. Shiloah report on his trip to London, 7 March 1948. *The Book of Documents A*, pp.430–2, Zionist Archives S25/7706.
8. The Morrison–Grady Plan, from Sept. 1946, proposed autonomous Jewish districts next to autonomous Arab districts and areas under direct British rule, on top of the central government of the country as a whole. Jewish immigration to Palestine would still be limited and the Jews would, in fact, remain a permanent minority.
9. Dominic Lapierre and Larry Collins, *O Jerusalem* (Schocken 1978) p.169.
10. A member of UNPAC – the United Nations Palestine Committee – that was supposed to oversee the implementation of the Partition Plan.
11. *The Israeli Book of Documents*, 1, pp.310–11.
12. *Ibid.* 2, Document #53, p.87.
13. An important strategic point mid-way between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, where a number of bloody battles took place over the police fortress that overlooked the Ayalon Valley and the foothills of Jerusalem. It was the site of one of the Israeli Army's most controversial defeats at the hands of the Jordanian Legion.
14. At the cabinet meeting of 26 Sept. 1948, Ben-Gurion proposed embarking on a military action in Latrun, even without any direct Arab provocation. Most of the members of cabinet disagreed. *Ibid.* 1, Document #557, p.658.
15. An area in the north-eastern section of the Negev where the Israeli Army totally surrounded the Egyptian forces involved in the fighting there. Among the more famous of the Egyptian officer who fought there was Gamal Abdul Nasser.

16. *Ben-Gurion Diaries*, Vol.3, p.840.
17. Also known as Operation Yoav, this was an all-out infantry, armor and air attack on the Egyptian Army in the southern part of Israel, which was begun on 14 Oct. 1948. Although it did not ultimately achieve all of its aims, the operation was a huge success, lifting their siege on the Jewish settlements in the Negev, and moving the Egyptian forces and the front lines of the fighting in the Negev far to the south.
18. Located in the northern Negev, and held by the surrounded Egyptian Army. Eight separate attempts were made to take the fortress before it finally fell to the Israeli Army.
19. *Ben-Gurion Diaries*, Vol.3, pp.830–1.
20. *The Book of Documents*, Vol.2, p.200.
21. *Ben-Gurion Diaries*, Vol.3, p.837.
22. The nation-wide SHAI network was operational from Sept. 1940 until the establishment of the state in 1948. Before this larger network was established, there were individual SHAI officers in various areas of the country under the command of local Hagannah commanders, and in nation-wide coordination with the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. These decisions are mentioned in Ben-Gurion's *Diaries of the War*, pp.494–590.
23. Its function was to gather information on the British – army, police, administration, etc. Based on interviews with Boris Guriel and others.
24. Compiled by Abraham Tutin, and relating to the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine 1917–1947. The book was submitted to the UN General Assembly in New York, May 1947.
25. *Ben-Gurion Diaries*, Vol.3, pp.838–9.
26. *Ibid.*, p.721, 26 Sept. 1948. The editor of the diaries explains here that the refugees in question were those who fled to Arab villages in the Galilee and were not taken in by the inhabitants for lack of space, food and water. Weitz suggested that the villagers, as well as the Syrians and the Lebanese serving in Kaukji's Army of Salvation', should be encouraged to send the refugees away from the front lines. The refugees in the south, Weitz suggested, should be directed eastwards, to the area of the Hebron mountains held by the Jordanian Legion.
27. *Ibid.*, pp.705–6, 20 Sept. 1948.

The Creation of the Mossad

The decision to dismantle the SHAI network and reconstitute the state intelligence apparatus in three separate intelligence services – Army intelligence, an internal security service and a diplomatic-external espionage network – was, as we have noted, taken hastily in June 1948, and inevitably created much friction and controversy between the three embryonic branches concerning the actual division of responsibilities between them. The Political Department of the Foreign Ministry, for instance, initially functioned both as a diplomatic intelligence service and as an internal security and counterintelligence service dealing with embassies and consulates established in Tel Aviv.

When this decision was taken, the British forces had not yet completed their evacuation from Haifa, where they still maintained a consulate as a last vestige of Mandatory rule. Contact with the consulate was maintained through a representative of the Political Department in Haifa. The consulate was also a prime objective for the acquisition of information and documents on British contacts and arms deals with the Arabs, made in blatant contradiction to official British policy. There is an apocryphal story relating to the consulate which was typical of the unprofessional atmosphere of those days. The branch of the Political Department in Haifa (known as ‘*Da’at*’) hired the services of a wellknown Haifa safecracker to break into the consulate safe. The man, a veteran of many such exploits in his home town of Warsaw, set to work swearing mightily in Yiddish and Polish until he finally managed to open the recalcitrant safe and lay hands on the incriminating documents. When one of the heads of the Political Department, Boris Guriel, handed them over to Sharett, the Foreign Minister turned up his nose and insisted that he did not want to know how these documents were appropriated. This, of course, did not stop him from using them for diplomatic and propaganda purposes.

Whether or not this story is actually true is irrelevant. It merely highlights the time it took before counterintelligence in the State of Israel – which was temporarily carried out by the *Da’at* branches in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem as a carry-over from the pre-state days – became fully methodical and professional as part of the General Security Services (GSS).¹ This was only one example of the need that arose, almost immediately, for coordination between the intelligence services – not only between *Da’at* and the GSS but mainly between *Da’at* and the Army Intelligence Corps.

Lieutenant Colonel Haim Herzog was deputy head of Army Intelligence, under its first chief, Isser Be’eri. When Be’eri was suspended in December 1948, Herzog was appointed acting head, and then promoted to head of IDF Operations Branch, which included what was then the

Department of Army Intelligence. The events surrounding the suspension and eventual court martial of Isser Be'eri (known as 'Big Isser'), was yet another instance of the labor pains that attended the creation of mechanisms of statehood in the middle of a bitter, protracted War of Independence, and the long and painful breaking away from the singular atmosphere that reigned in pre-state days. Not everyone involved in these transformations was able to distinguish clearly between what was acceptable in a democratic state and what was not, what was permitted and what was prohibited – even in wartime – or between the possible and the impossible. Many of these people felt their way through this transition, and the country frequently paid a high price for the lessons learned along the way by the inexperienced amateurs who filled key positions in the fledgling administration. It was not always possible to distinguish between the charlatans who sounded as if they knew what was involved in running a country, and those who had either acquired true expertise while serving in foreign armies, particularly the British Army, or were truly capable of grasping the fundamentals of statehood. Under conditions such as these, people with bona fide intelligence experience, like Herzog, were worth their weight in gold for the newborn state.

During this early period of the budding Israeli intelligence services, the personal and professional friendship that developed between Herzog and Shiloah, and their common understanding of intelligence matters, was both important and beneficial. 'My appointment as head of Intelligence came through on the strength of Shiloah's personal recommendation', says Herzog. The two of them joined forces to set up the basic structure of the intelligence community of Israel, Herzog bringing into this partnership his British-based experience and knowledge, and Shiloah, his typically Israeli resourcefulness and inventiveness. Despite the fact that Shiloah was a native-born Jerusalemite and 'Palestinian', it was he who developed close personal contacts with people from the British intelligence and security services in the Mandatory government and in British HQ in Cairo. His knowledge of English manners and customs grew out of personal experience gained through his years of cooperation with British officials in various capacities. He was also an avid reader of British and American literature. From the days of his apprenticeship under Dov Hos, he was deeply influenced by the English mentality. Many of the people he came into contact with noted a quality in him which was rare in his circle of friends: he knew how to listen patiently, bringing his bright, penetrating gaze to rest on his interlocutors as he concentrated on what they had to say. He tended to share his thoughts with people, and had a flair for true, frank dialogue. He expressed himself carefully, rarely ever responding instinctively or without due consideration. He made every effort to understand his interlocutors' point of view, to see the other side of an issue, and to try to find the common thread between his views and theirs.

Another typically 'English' attribute that characterized Shiloah was his combination of the extreme and the moderate. In everything that had to do with operational methods, or what is known in intelligence parlance as 'dirty tricks' or 'special ops', he was daring and farsighted, forever seeking novel concepts, breaking established modes of operation and trying to find similar breakaway patterns in his colleagues' ways of thinking. At the same time, he was a moderate in his views and his politics, a trait that expressed itself clearly in his patient, unhurried long-range efforts to strike fair compromises. These qualities did him little good in his contacts with the Israeli 'pushers' that peopled the young intelligence community and up-and-coming government bureaucracy. In this sense, his background and upbringing made him a true rarity – a native born Middle Easterner, a Jerusalemite from Me'ah She'arim and Baghdad, who, as his friend Ehud Avriel described it, had the manners and demeanor of an English don.

What eventually became known as the ‘Mossad’ – The Institute for Intelligence and Security² – was created by Shiloah step-by-step in his own image, using trial and error, with the help of his friend, the Irishborn and English-bred British intelligence officer, Herzog. As early as August 1948, Herzog submitted a proposal based on his experience in the British intelligence community for the restructuring of the IDF Intelligence Corps. A few months after his proposal was accepted, he approached Reuven, as the ranking official of the Israeli intelligence establishment, with the suggestion that he take the first step – creating the ‘Supreme Committee for Inter-Service Coordination’. Herzog first put forward this proposal in September 1948, and then again at the beginning of 1949. Shiloah, however, was unable to respond immediately, since at that time he was deeply involved in the secret talks with emissaries from King Abdullah, and later in the armistice talks with the Jordanians at Rhodes.

After the signing of the Armistice agreements at the beginning of April 1949, Shiloah returned to Israel, and the ‘Coordination Committee’ was finally set up, holding its first meeting under his chairmanship on 8 April. The participants were the heads of the three branches of intelligence services and their deputies – Army Intelligence, the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry, and the General Security Service – as well as the Commissioner of the Police and his deputy. A routine of weekly meetings was established, during which all the bodies involved were updated on current issues, priorities for future activities were set and overlaps among the various services were ironed out.³

As time went on, the committee discussed and eventually carried out a restructuring of the mutual arrangements between the services, as some of the hastily-made arrangements from June and July 1948 proved unwieldy or inefficient. Not long after the creation of the committee, tensions and serious conflicts surfaced, particularly between the Political Department and Army Intelligence, stemming from the structure and function of the Political Department within the framework of the Foreign Ministry, a department that was created *ex nihilo*, and was fated from the outset to compete with Army Intelligence for authority and territory.

This was a contest between an economic and diplomatic intelligence apparatus and a military intelligence, or between free-flowing intelligence gathering, with all the audacity, amateurishness and recklessness of beginners, and an intelligence organization based on tight professional discipline and efficacy, as befits any military unit. The most important point in all this was the fact that it was all part of a genesis, part of the labor pains that attended the birth of the structures of proper statehood, in one of the most treacherous and dangerous areas of all one in which even long-established states, with centuries-old traditions of civil service, slip up. Shiloah dealt with these momentous difficulties by listening with great patience to all sides, seeking workable compromises and avoiding making premature decisions.

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The form taken by the Foreign Ministry’s version of the Political Department had its origins in the days of the Hagannah, according to Asher Ben-Nathan, who was in the eye of the storm during the controversy over the department. Ben-Nathan, who later became Director-General of the Foreign Ministry and served as Israel’s ambassador to both Germany and France, worked with Shiloah between 1948 and 1951, after working with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion at Mapai headquarters in the Red House, and at Hagannah HQ in Ramat Gan. ‘Ben-Gurion knew me from my duties in Europe during the war, and I began working in his office in December 1947 (at the recommendation of Shimon Peres whom I first met at the Zionist Congress in Basel in 1946). From the Prime Minister’s office I maintained contact with the Hagannah’s SHAI

office in Paris, which served as a clearing house for all SHAI activities in Europe.’

‘I held many talks with Shiloah both at the Red House and at IDF headquarters in Ramat-Gan concerning intelligence operations in Europe’, Ben-Nathan recalls. Ben-Nathan, with his ‘gentile’ – even Aryan – looks, must have impressed Shiloah. He certainly had something unique to offer Shiloah, who was always on the lookout for new ideas and tricks of the trade. From his office in Vienna, as commander of the *Ha-Briha* escape organization in Austria,⁴ ‘Arthur’ (as he was known then) moved easily throughout Europe, crossing borders with fake passports and arranging escape routes to Palestine for displaced Jewish refugees and survivors. As an operative in the field, Ben-Nathan – not surprisingly – found a great deal in common with Shiloah and between them they felt they complemented each others’ abilities. Although their friendship eventually ended in an acrimonious argument, now, many years later, Ben-Nathan recalls Shiloah with deep respect. He was very much aware of Shiloah’s weaknesses, but also highly appreciative of his strengths. ‘He suggested that I help set up the Political Department – the intelligence arm that was in charge of information gathering and operations abroad. I was given an appointment in the Foreign Ministry and was put in charge of operations. From September 1948, I directed operations from Israel, and from then until January-February of 1951 operational headquarters moved to Paris.’ In fact, these new headquarters simply took over from the SHAI bureau that had operated in Paris up to that time.

In Ben-Gurion’s diaries there is an entry describing a meeting in which Ben-Nathan reported to Ben-Gurion on ‘the establishment of an intelligence network covering five countries and centered in Paris. They gather information about Arab arms procurements, and about Arab activities in general. Economic ties between Arab countries and Europe, the foreign policies of France, Italy, Belgium, and Great Britain *vis-à-vis* the Near East, assessing the *goyim*’s knowledge of the Near East. They get material from French and Italian intelligence services; so far they’ve spent three thousand Palestinian pounds a month; there are 15 people from Eretz Israel apart from the technical staff. There are also some volunteer agents.’⁵

These laconic entries in Ben-Gurion’s diaries are a fitting description of the initial activities of the Political Department in Europe. But later on, complications set in. A short time after Ben-Nathan began his work in the Political Department, Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett appointed Boris Guriel as head of the Department. Prior to that, Guriel had been the head of the Political Department of SHAI, which was supposed to keep an intelligence and security watch over all the British and foreign bodies in the Mandatory administration. Guriel, who served in the British Army, talks glowingly of the achievements of the Political Department in obtaining inside information from British and Jewish informants within the British Army and Mandatory police installations. Thus, for example, through its agents in the Surveyor’s Department, the Political Department acquired detailed information on the practical preparations being made for the evacuation of the British Army from Palestine at the end of the Mandate. ‘This was a key issue in the military and political strategy of the leadership of the Yishuv, and David Ben-Gurion was very excited when he received reliable information on these matters’, Guriel recalls.

There is no question that the traditions of SHAI’s Political Department had a major impact on the character of the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry, which took on some of the former SHAI personnel and adopted some of its operational methods. This was particularly true during the chaotic times of the end of the Mandate and the British evacuation of Palestine, when the various authorities, Jewish and British, were indistinguishable. Ben-Nathan brought the approach of a ‘field operative’ with experience working in Europe to the Political Department, and the result was a ‘territorial’ and functional division of responsibilities between him and

Guriel – whose people worked in branches of the Political Department in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa.

‘Guriel was mainly responsible for the research and theoretical aspect of the Department’s activities’, Ben-Nathan recalls. To make things even more complicated, this department and its two heads – Guriel and Ben-Nathan – were under the overall supervision of Shiloah in his capacity as Sharett’s Advisor for Special Affairs, and as the coordinator and overall arbiter of all state intelligence operations. Shiloah maintained the contacts between the Department and Ben-Gurion and Sharett, and insisted that all communications in this respect go through him. But Shiloah’s supervision, according to Ben-Nathan and Guriel, was too loose and suffered from a lack of attention to details. They both suggest that this was the reason for the conflict that eventually erupted between both of them and Shiloah – his desire for exclusivity in all contacts with Ben-Gurion.

What eventually emerged was ‘a mish-mash of command and supervision’ over ‘a mish-mash of an open and covert Political Department’. This department was known by various names – Research A and Research B (Operations), and *Da’at A* and *Da’at B* – dealing at one and the same time with information-gathering (espionage), research and operations in the field. The operations branch of the Political Department gathered information on political, military and economic affairs in the Arab countries. The Jerusalem branch continued to gather information on the foreign consulates and the international organizations functioning in Jerusalem, through wire-tapping and agents using ‘kosher’ and ‘non-kosher’ methods. Jerusalem was then in a transitional phase, changing from a city under Mandatory rule monitored on behalf of the UN by foreign consulates to the future capital of the State of Israel. It was a zone for both counterintelligence and deliberate espionage. The same applied to foreign consulates and embassies set up in Tel Aviv, and the British Consulate in Haifa, which played a very important role in the final days of the Mandate. All the so-called ‘dirty tricks’ were carried out then by a group of enthusiastic, motivated, resourceful and dedicated youngsters. Thinking small’ was a concept they abhorred – they were the state and the state was each one of them, the men and women who in later years were to take up important posts as ambassadors, university professors, top businessmen. It was their amateurish, youthful exploits that paved the way for the established, methodical secret services that demanded special skills, professionalism and experience.

The Research Branch, headed by Mordechai Gazit, dealt with the evaluation and categorization of material, and setting out guidelines for information-gathering activities. It was located in Tel Aviv, while the Operations Branch was based in Paris and worked throughout Europe. Operations dealt in information-gathering and special operations without paying much attention to what people on the home front had to say. The operations included not only acquiring information and documents in various ways, but also sabotaging Arab military equipment and – for lack of any proper government funding – even generating its own revenues through smuggling and a variety of financial manipulations. ‘Minister of Finance, Eliezer Kaplan, was not willing to provide regular funding, and the Department had to finance its own operations. The treasurer, Gershon (‘Gigi’) Peres, Shimon Peres’s brother, saw to that’, relates Boris Guriel. Gigi Peres himself said on this issue, ‘Our budget was £16,000 annually which at that time was the equivalent of \$50,000 – and simply not enough for anything’. The Department also tried to locate and safeguard funds deposited in Swiss banks by Holocaust victims before the war.

This early period of Israeli intelligence work is replete with tall tales and myths, some of them based on actual events, others no more than fairy tales and malicious rumors about the

inexperienced, yet highly resourceful ‘spies’ who were willing to try anything – including the impossible – to get what they were after. They had no real official standing, and there were no rules and regulations, no contracts or salaries, or even state laws, for that matter, to protect the thin line between the permissible and the prohibited. This was virgin territory in that amorphous period between the old era of the Jewish Agency and the Hagannah, and the new era of the state with all its machinery of government.

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Beyond the stories, smears and controversies surrounding the Department, there was a core of hard facts upon which the other branches of intelligence frowned. Army Intelligence and the General Security Service had attachés in Political Department branches abroad (the General Security Service gathered information abroad as well, on issues of internal security, counterintelligence and security clearances of government appointees), but the intelligence body that felt itself most constrained by the activities of the Political Department was Army Intelligence.

The first step toward changing this situation was made by Lieutenant Colonel Binyamin Gibli, at that time Deputy Head of Operations in the General Staff. One of his staff officers, Major Haim Gaon, was sent to Paris to see if there was any way to improve military intelligence-gathering through the Political Department’s branches in Europe, and in his report he concluded that this was not an achievable goal. In December 1949, Gaon was sent again to Europe, this time as an independent agent of the Information Gathering Division of Operations Branch. Gibli instructed him to recruit sources and agents who could be sent into Arab countries and operate there under his control. This task was carried out independent of the activities of the Political Department, and without any form of approval or coordination with Foreign Ministry officials in any capacity.

Another step toward working out a blueprint for operations in the intelligence community was taken some time earlier, in July 1949. Reuven Shiloah submitted a proposal to Ben-Gurion suggesting the establishment of ‘a central institution for problems of intelligence and security’, that would work out of the Prime Minister’s office. This would be the second step after the establishment of the ‘Supreme Inter-Service Coordinating Committee’. According to Shiloah’s proposal, the duties of the chairman of this institution would be very similar to those of the Prime Minister’s Advisor on Intelligence Affairs.

The heads of the services, who participated in April-May 1949 in meetings about the new ‘institution’ proposed by Shiloah not long after the establishment of the Inter-Service Coordinating Committee, were not altogether pleased with many details of the proposal. They all accepted Shiloah’s status as ‘first among equals’, but were not prepared to voluntarily cede additional authority or to allow him to prevent overlapping of activities between the various services. Nor were they willing to give him control over the order of priorities for the various services involved. Each service defended its own bailiwick, and opposed any attempt to restrict its field of operations or independence. This set the pattern for a problem that in fact has remained to this very day – that of creating a real controlling link between the politicians and the heads of the intelligence services.

Ben-Gurion was aware of the problems posed by Shiloah’s proposal for a new institution, and only five months later, on 13 December 1949, did he finally entrust Reuven Shiloah with the task of creating and heading the ‘Institution for Coordinating Activities of the State’s Intelligence Services’. Shiloah was to do this as part of his duties as Special Advisor in the Foreign Ministry.

He would report directly and regularly to the Prime Minister, while administratively his office would be incorporated in the Foreign Ministry.

This decision in itself still did not solve the problem. While Shiloah was busy once again in negotiations with King Abdullah over the question of Jerusalem, the personal and organizational conflicts between the Political Department and Army Intelligence intensified. The Korean War, which broke out on 25 June 1950, added fuel to the fire, since it generated some trepidation that Arab countries would take advantage of global tensions aroused by the war to try to embark on a 'second round' in their battle against the State of Israel.

This fear of a second round was in the air even before that time, but intensified as American military fortunes in Korea took a turn for the worse, and as Israel was asked to contribute to the overall effort of this UN-originated war. The Korean War widened the rift between East and West, and this also affected the Middle East. The possible ramifications of the war in the East on the Israel-Arab conflict were discussed at length and in depth in political, academic and intelligence forums in the country.

Army intelligence was not capable of providing the General Staff with information and assessments on the preparedness of Arab armies for the possible outbreak of warfare in the region at that time. That was the reason behind the decision taken by Army intelligence during the course of 1950 to send officers to Europe to gather vital military information on the Arab countries. From that time on, Army intelligence insisted on its total independence on all matters pertaining to operations in Arab countries, even to the point of forgoing prior coordination with other intelligence services.

Binyamin Gibli, head of Army intelligence at that time, claims that the argument was in fact much more comprehensive, touching on the central issue of which of the services was to be the ranking intelligence service in the country, which of them would be responsible for preparing the national assessment and which would be in charge of technical services and of operatives abroad.

In February 1950, an agreement between the two sides – Army intelligence and the Political Department – was brokered by Reuven Shiloah, according to which the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry (still known as *Da'at*) would be responsible for gathering all military intelligence from abroad for the day-to-day work of Army intelligence in Israel. Representatives of IDF Intelligence Branch would be co-opted, for the length of their service, to the Political Department and would serve under the heads of its branches.

This agreement was never implemented, however, and the Army Intelligence Corps continued to send special envoys to Arab countries on its own behalf, without any prior coordination with the Political Department. Some employees of the Political Department now confess, in retrospect, that they were in fact too full of their own importance, too much an exclusive club, and that instead of involving their clients (the other intelligence services) in decisions and operations, they operated on their own, saying to the other services: 'this is what we've got – take it or leave it'. There were also personal motives for wanting to serve abroad: Israel at that time was under a regime of severe austerity rule,⁶ and Army officers were angry with the people of the Political Department who, as they saw it, received the best deal. This was also the background for many acrimonious accusations and counter-accusations between the services regarding the supposedly extravagant lifestyles enjoyed by some of the officials in the face of the glaring shortage of operational funds.

It was with these deep-seated conflicts in mind that Reuven Shiloah set out, in September 1950, on a trip to Europe and the United States. During this trip he tried to suggest modes of cooperation and agreement between Army intelligence, the Political Department and the GSS, all

of whom were already operating in the field independently. His efforts were unsuccessful and his activities in Europe infuriated both Gibli, of Army intelligence, and Isser Har'el, head of the General Security Service – who were to become bitter rivals in the next round of power struggles between the Mossad and Army intelligence. At that point, however, they shared a joint interest in whittling down Shiloah's authority and acknowledging him as their superior in name only. They feared that he had made deals on this trip of which they were not aware, or with which they disagreed on operational grounds. They cabled Shiloah in New York demanding his immediate return to Israel. Shiloah continued his mission in the United States but tried at the same time to put their minds at ease by assuring them that he had not made any such deals or any important decisions. All he had done, he said, was to look into the problems, trying to find ways to generate cooperation and coordination between the various branches of the intelligence services.

In retrospect, this was a sign of weakness on his part. Reuven Shiloah, who had been appointed by the Prime Minister himself, found himself under attack by two men who, at least on paper, were his subordinates, yet he attempted to justify his activities to them in order to head off opposition and conflict. In doing so he weakened his own position and prestige. On the other hand, professionally speaking, he saw their point of view and did not feel he had the right to turn down their demands, particularly those made by Army intelligence. Upon his return in December 1950, he called a meeting of the Supreme Coordinating Committee, only to discover that the conflicts had deepened. He consequently realized that there was no choice but to concentrate all intelligence operations abroad under one roof. He brought the issue to Ben-Gurion and received his approval for the move. All of these intricate maneuvers took place during the third round of the secret talks with King Abdullah and his representatives, a fact which perhaps limited Shiloah's ability to deal properly with internal problems from the outset. Be that as it may, Ben-Gurion approved Shiloah's idea to combine all the elements of Israeli intelligence operating abroad under the umbrella of a 'Coordinating Institution' which would be under his command. On 28 January 1951, Shiloah held a meeting of the Supreme Coordinating Committee and stated his full support for the stand presented by Army intelligence.

At this meeting, Shiloah stated that if the military situation in the world and in the region were to deteriorate, Israel would have no cards to play because the endless infighting had paralyzed the intelligence services, leaving them with no assets with which to assist the Allies should the need arise. If the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister or the Chief of Staff were to ask him if Israel's intelligence apparatus abroad were prepared for an emergency situation, his answer would have to be negative, he claimed.

Reuven Shiloah stressed that the Chief of Staff and his staff officers could not carry out their duties and responsibilities without proper intelligence. The General Staff needed to have maximum control over intelligence information throughout all the stages of its acquisition, from interrogating sources to drawing conclusions. It could not abide the possibility that these sources might not have been properly briefed or that their information had not been well used. When the General Staff agreed to Shiloah's demand to hand the task over to another body – the Political Department – the latter did not go out of its way to satisfy the demands of the military.

The fact was that the General Staff felt that its objective had not been completely achieved, Shiloah continued. It made no difference whether the Political Department could prove that it did the utmost to deliver the goods the Army needed or wanted – the General Staff could not agree to a situation in which its own operatives were given a different sets of priorities. The Army wanted to set its own priorities – to supervise the envoys, to brief agents and to arrange for swift transfer of the material. Shiloah justified the criticism leveled by Army intelligence against the Political

Department, which theoretically was supposed to serve its needs. Nevertheless, he stated his firm belief that a central intelligence institution – the Mossad – had to be created, and that it, not Army intelligence, should be in charge of coordinating all espionage operations outside Israel.

Intelligence work abroad, he felt, had to be run from one central bureau, and, as he put it,

I cannot accept the creation of separate services abroad... after consulting with the Prime Minister, I was given his authority to inform you of the arrangement for information gathering abroad in the future... I suggest that it should all be handed over to a central coordinating institution that will run operations abroad. Decision-making and priorities will be in the hands of a neutral central body that will see to the needs of all its clients – IDF General Staff, the Foreign Ministry, the GSS, and the economic ministries. This central body will have a staff that will be made up of representatives of all the services.

A short time later the issue was brought to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion for a final decision. At a meeting held in his office on 8 February 1951, Ben-Gurion said,

If this were peacetime, I would prefer that intelligence from abroad be handled by the Foreign Ministry, certainly not the Army. But Israel is not at peace... Given the present situation in the world ... when the danger of war is still very real, intelligence must take on risks and daring operations, and this must not under any circumstances involve or complicate the orderly and legitimate operations of the Foreign Ministry.

Ben-Gurion did not accept Sharett's demand that heads of Foreign Ministry missions abroad should have veto power or any form of control over intelligence operations. The Prime Minister stated flatly that intelligence gathering abroad should be taken out of the Foreign Ministry immediately and that all activities should be united in a new, unified framework that would be responsible to the Prime Minister's Office, in accordance with Shiloah's recommendation. Shiloah was asked by Ben-Gurion to submit a detailed proposal.

What this meant, in effect, was that the Political Department as it was constituted then – and only the Political Department – would be dismantled, and its areas of responsibility would be transferred to another body, while the rest of the intelligence service were to remain more or less intact. This caused deep bitterness among the people of the Political Department both inside Israel and abroad. Within days, all the heads of *Da'at* missions abroad were recalled to participate in an emergency meeting in Jerusalem, in the course of which they all expressed their strong opposition to the Prime Minister's decision.

The director of the Political Department, Guriel, was relieved of his duties by Foreign Minister Sharett, and on 2 March 1951, Ben-Nathan, the entire directorate and heads of branches of the Department, handed in a collective letter of resignation. The so-called 'Spies Rebellion' was a traumatic event in the brief history of the state, and Shiloah responded very harshly to this act of insubordination. It was not only an attempt to undermine his authority, but, as he saw it, it was an act of outright rebellion against the authority of the state itself. Some of the perpetrators of the 'rebellion' were barred from any further employment in the Foreign Ministry, while others were barred from further employment in any branch of government service. There were others he classified as virtual 'security risks', for fear that they would set an example for employees of the Political Department abroad who had not yet joined the 'rebellion'. He demanded that these alleged 'security risks' have their passports revoked. Eventually some of those involved in the affair were forgiven and continued to work for the Foreign Ministry or joined it later.

Some of the ‘rebels’ subsequently claimed that Reuven Shiloah turned down their proposal for a period of transition during which Asher Ben-Nathan, the ‘rebel leader’, would work together with his replacement, Haim Ya’ari, and that the lack of a suitable period of transition actually caused serious difficulties in the work of the Political Department. However, no one has been able to prove this claim satisfactorily. Neither the ‘rebellion’ nor the ‘excommunication’ lasted very long, and shortly after the initial flare-up, most of the branch chiefs retracted their letters of resignation. Deep-seated feelings of resentment remained, however. Most of the people directly involved in the affair, as well as some who were not, regarded Reuven Shiloah’s behavior in this case as overly zealous, indicating not strength and authority but rather the opposite personal and administrative weakness. One fact was inescapable Shiloah had won the day in a battle that he had been waging for nearly two years. He managed to create the unified Mossad for operations abroad and to establish the state’s authority over its intelligence services. This was a signal achievement in the annals of the Israeli intelligence community and perhaps in the entire history of the fledgling Israeli democracy. The only unanswered question is whether or not this striking achievement could have been reached by other means. There were those who felt that Shiloah came down too hard on the ‘rebels’, while others thought he was too lenient and that he needlessly postponed forcing a decision that should have been reached earlier.

Throughout this entire affair, Sharett gave Shiloah his full support, approving all of Shiloah’s actions against the ‘rebellion’, even though it meant, in effect, that Israel’s diplomatic intelligence would be taken out of the Foreign Ministry. When Asher Ben-Nathan handed in his resignation, Sharett said to him: ‘One thing I learned from my service in the Turkish Army was that if two officers get into an argument, they have to be separated.’ Ben-Gurion agreed with this concept entirely. On the day of the collective resignation he gave his final approval to the new arrangement for intelligence gathering and made his views on the issue crystal clear in a letter to Shiloah:

The service abroad will be unified. All employees co-opted to this service from ministries or other services, will be solely at the disposal of the service throughout their tour of duty abroad ... The intelligence service abroad is responsible to the Prime Minister and is an integral part of the Coordinating Institution. The head of the service will be the head of the Coordinating Institution of the country’s services in the country. It is he who will present proposals to the Prime Minister, after consultations with representatives of the various services, and will run operations abroad ... The activities of these services, in the country and abroad, are to be concentrated and coordinated in the Coordinating Institution that you will direct.

Thus Reuven Shiloah was ‘crowned’ by David Ben-Gurion as the central coordinator of all Israeli security and intelligence services, and the Mossad, headed by Reuven Shiloah, was officially launched on 1 April 1951.

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With the creation of the Mossad and Shiloah’s appointment as its head, Haim Ya’ari took over Ben-Nathan’s position, which underwent functional modifications. At the same time as the Mossad was established, an ‘Authority for Information from Abroad’ was set up inside it, as the heir to the operational division formerly headed by Ben-Nathan. This became the Mossad’s operational arm, which became the information-gathering/operational arm of all the services

operating under the Mossad and Reuven Shiloah. This unit soon became known as the 'Green Authority', so named after Ya'ari's code nickname – 'Green'. Shiloah had two deputies/assistants: Izzy Dorot from the GSS, who was lent to Shiloah by Isser Har'el, and Akiva Levinsky, who was in charge of economic affairs.

'I took over from Asher Ben-Nathan, and worked with Reuven for nearly two years', Haim Ya'ari recalls. 'I was on loan from Army Intelligence because I had been responsible for setting up the technical services unit that was used jointly by all the intelligence branches, and even though they didn't trust each other one bit, they had complete faith in me because I proved that I could serve all of them fairly. In fact we worked together – Reuven Shiloah was the head of the Mossad and I was the head of the Operational Department. On anything to do with policy decisions, he was the one with all the answers. He did not interfere in operations. He relied on me, and did not go inquire after details of my work. Reuven Shiloah was not an operations man, he had assistants whom he selected for those jobs. He was a brilliant man and capable of dreaming up intricate diplomatic intrigues. He had an extraordinary political imagination which grew out of his great analytical ability, but he was no good in operational matters, because he did not have an operational imagination, and was not interested in the finer details of the operations we carried out.'

In this respect, Ya'ari and Ben-Nathan are in total agreement. Ben-Nathan had many reasons not to like Shiloah; nevertheless he said, 'Given the spectrum of people we have in the intelligence services today, Shiloah seems like a giant. He was possessed of keen political instincts, enormous curiosity, a gift for conversation, and could be very persuasive when he set his mind to it. What he lacked almost completely was a knack for organization.' This was the generally accepted view, and almost everyone who knew him agreed that his many and varied talents could not be truly fulfilled in a job that required the services of a superb organizer and operations man.

Yigael Yadin also regarded Reuven Shiloah as an ideas man, capable of creating highly original operational and theoretical concepts, but not as an organizational man, or a 'doer'. As early as the 1950s Shiloah suggested establishing special relations with Ethiopia and Iran – an idea that he later developed and began carrying out, and was followed up after his death by his successors. It was a concept that became one of the basic tenets of Israel foreign and defense policy, Yadin added. 'Reuven was a past master of deception. His mind was built for it. I had long discussions with Moshe Sharett during which I tried to sell him the idea of setting up a department for psychological warfare. Sharett was opposed to it, and responded with something like: "what do you mean – we're going to lie brazenly?" Reuven accomplished a great deal in this area.'

Throughout this period, from the establishment of the state up to the time of his resignation, Shiloah laid the foundations for the relations between the Mossad and the CIA – a fact that was revealed in a CIA document made public by the Iranians after their seizure of the American Embassy in Teheran in 1979. This paved the way for cooperation with other foreign secret services, which brought many benefits to Israel. He created an economic unit within the Mossad as an instrument of economic warfare and economic espionage, laying down the foundations for wide-ranging Israeli and Jewish actions to counter the Arab boycott.⁷

He was a great believer in long-range policy planning, and, according to his deputy at the Mossad, Akiva Levinsky, he began talking about the eventual creation of a European Common Market and the need for Israel to find its place in the processes of rehabilitation and unification that were taking place in post-war Europe long before any of this actually happened. However, in

the final analysis, all the innovative momentum that set the stage for long-term policy decisions of the future ultimately did not stand Reuven Shiloah in good stead. There was something missing that was characteristic of his destiny. 'With the dismantling of the Political Department, Shiloah in fact cut off the branch he was sitting on', suggests Ben-Nathan, 'because what that meant was the end of the intelligence arm of the Foreign Ministry – which was his power base. Since he had never actually commanded operations in the field and since he was not an organization man, it was easy for Isser Har'el to claim that he was not suited for the job. And after Shiloah "killed" the Political Department and its people, Isser did the same thing to him.' In other words, Shiloah lacked not only organizational and operational skills, but also the talent for the bureaucratic infighting he needed in order to claim his share of authority and power. He was not a bureaucrat, and this was a weakness that also surfaced in his relations with the top echelons of the Foreign Ministry, where Shiloah faced the Director-General Walter Eytan, a proven administrator who knew how to get things done and how to put together the group of Anglo Saxons' in the Ministry who were his closest advisors. Reuven Shiloah was left out on both counts. He did not know how to maneuver for a bureaucratic power base – neither in the intelligence community nor in the diplomatic circles of the Foreign Ministry. He was 'first among equals' in his true intellectual worth but last among equals in his understanding of bureaucratic tactics.

The creation of the Mossad was plagued with problems from the outset, and given Shiloah's track record, he had many enemies waiting in the wings for him to make a mistake. The first major fiasco was the collapse of the intelligence network in Iraq, which occurred in May-June 1951, and cost the lives of Yosef Batsri and Shalom Salah, both hanged on 19 January 1952, and landed Yehuda Tager in jail for a long period. After the network's initial successes, this was a terrible blow. It is highly doubtful whether Shiloah had any personal or operational responsibility for what happened, but he was the head of the Mossad, the intelligence organization that had just been created at his behest, and the ultimate responsibility was his.

Then there was the affair of Ted Kros (or Keros – his Hebrew name was David Magen), the Political Department official in Rome, who was accused of being a double agent for the Egyptians, was brought back to Israel and was given a 15-year prison sentence. A number of people from the Political Department, among them the former department head, Guriel, believed the man was innocent and testified in his defense at the trial. Even after his conviction there were people who believed that his trial and imprisonment were an attempt by the Mossad to show the former Political Department and its people in a bad light. Others felt that he was the victim of carelessness and inexperience in dealings with the Egyptians. This unpleasant affair must have deeply distressed Shiloah, and possibly helped plant in his mind a sense of failure and a feeling that he was unsuitable for his job, even though no one claimed that he was in any way responsible for what happened. Failures like these are part and parcel of the day-to-day experience of any intelligence service and are bound to occur at one time or another. It was Shiloah's bad luck that these affairs happened in the Mossad which he had so recently created.

It appears that not too long after his appointment as head of the Mossad – barely a year later – Shiloah began toying with the idea of resigning. The first written intimation of his intentions appears in Ben-Gurion's diaries. In an entry for 7 June 1952 (after Shiloah had returned from one of his visits to the United States), Ben-Gurion writes: 'Reuven Shiloah came to see me. He was pleased with the results of his trips to the United States. Reuven wants to leave espionage work and devote himself to political affairs.' In an entry in the diary from a month later, Ben-Gurion wrote that Reuven suggested either Gibli, Levinsky or Isser Har'el as possible replacements, and

added: 'I have to talk to Sharett about this.'

Shiloah's friend Haim Herzog, then Israeli Military Attache in Washington, heard about these thoughts of resignation from Shiloah himself on his visits to the American capital on office business. Shiloah said that he wanted to leave the Mossad and go into diplomacy, and asked Herzog if he would be interested in replacing him as head of the organization. Herzog, who was keen on pursuing his military career, turned the proposal down.

What was it that prompted these thoughts of resignation so early in his career? Many of those intimately acquainted with the Israeli intelligence community believe that it was Isser Ha'el who undermined Shiloah's authority and his self-confidence – neither of which were too solid to begin with. Isser Har'el – they claim – knew how to sow doubts in Ben-Gurion's mind about Shiloah's suitability, and at the same time to win Ben-Gurion's complete faith in himself, which, in fact, was borne out in full not long afterwards. It is reasonable to believe that Shiloah was aware of the deepening erosion of his position, and that this hastened his decision to step down.

Isser Har'el, who was the head of the GSS, has repeatedly denied complaining about Shiloah to Ben-Gurion. The facts, however, do not bear him out on this issue. In an entry for 24 May 1952, Ben-Gurion writes in his diary: 'Isser came to see me. He believes that Reuven has failed in his job.' This is a key statement. It is not too far-fetched to speculate that Har'el said this to Ben-Gurion more than once, and if Ben-Gurion took the trouble to make a note of it in his diary, the idea must have taken root in his thoughts. These are, of course, only assumptions, but it is hard to avoid making the connection between Har'el's complaint that Shiloah had 'failed' and Shiloah's own statement – just two weeks later – that he wanted to 'give up espionage'.

Isser Har'el was not a man to beat around the bush. Even his close associates – among them Izzy Dorot – say openly that Har'el advised Shiloah quite frankly and bluntly to hand in his resignation. According to these accounts,⁸ Har'el said to Shiloah, 'If you don't leave – you'll be forced out. If you don't go of your own free will I'll see to it that you'll be asked to leave. You mustn't go on, you're destroying everything.' Further evidence of this can be found in Michael Bar-Zohar's book *The Man In Charge*, where Isser Har'el is quoted saying bluntly to Shiloah 'you cannot run the Mossad. You have to resign.' Shiloah's deputy [Izzy Dorot] was of the same opinion, and said so to his superior.

Despite all these accounts, it is difficult to establish with any certainty which – if any – was the principal cause of his resignation as head of the Mossad. In his letter to Ben-Gurion, Shiloah said that he would like to be relieved of the day-to-day running of the Mossad, and to remain chairman of the Services Committee and Special Advisor to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister on diplomatic and intelligence matters. And so it was: in September 1952 he stepped down as head of the Mossad and was succeeded by Har'el. Within a short space of time he found that the supposedly important position of Chairman of the Committee of Heads of Services and advisor to the Prime Minister and to the Foreign Minister did not carry any real weight, and that, in fact, he had been 'kicked upstairs'. In March 1953, he resigned his position as Special Advisor, and transferred to the Foreign Ministry without a definite appointment or clearly defined status.

Shiloah's resignation from the Mossad actually went into effect earlier than planned and for a totally unexpected reason – on 20 September he was involved in a serious car accident in which he incurred severe head wounds and was hospitalized for an extended period. He was traveling late at night from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem when his car overturned near the village of Motza on the outskirts of the capital. The extended period of medical treatment, hospitalization and convalescence that followed must have had an influence on his second decision – to leave the

intelligence world altogether.

There was another failure, revealed only after his resignation from the Mossad, which may also have figured in his decision to leave intelligence work behind. This was the bizarre affair involving a senior journalist from the prestigious Labor newspaper *Davar*, Dan Pines. Pines managed to persuade both Sharett and Shiloah that a Zionist underground existed in the USSR, headed by former colleagues of his in the Zionist-Socialist movement. (Dan Pines was a 'Prisoner of Zion'⁹ who spent years in Siberia and whose release was won through the intervention of Gorky's widow.)

According to Pines, one of his many friends from the past, who had by then become a very high-ranking official in the Soviet hierarchy, contacted him and suggested that they meet secretly. Pines fired Sharett's imagination with stories of a totally fictitious, non-existent 'Neo-Bilu' Zionist underground,¹⁰ and Shiloah followed Sharett into the same trap. Pines told of three secret meetings he had held with his contact – in Paris, Copenhagen and New York. He even managed to pull the wool over the eyes of some Israeli intelligence agents who were involved in the operation, and was able to obtain money from them to cover his expenses. The person who eventually uncovered the sting was Har'el who did so on his very first day in office as head of the Mossad, when he was asked to approve an additional \$5,000 for yet another of Pines's trips.¹¹

The affair was eventually investigated by an unofficial internal committee appointed by Sharett. The committee held 26 meetings, and even sought the help of graphologists. In the course of their investigation, a typewriter was found in the offices of the *Davar* daily newspaper on which Pines had written all the letters he claimed had been sent to him from Russia, and some of his relatives who had participated in the 'operation' were also tracked down. The committee submitted its findings in February 1953, a short time before Shiloah's second and final resignation in March.

According to the accounts of many people close to the events, among them Ben-Nathan, Har'el took advantage of the car accident at the end of August 1952 to hasten Shiloah's departure. Har'el was heard to remark about Shiloah after the accident that 'a car after an overhaul is not the same car anymore'. But the true picture that emerges from the sequence of events is that Reuven Shiloah lost out in the power struggles that were being waged between the different intelligence services. His job was an administrative, organizational and operational one to which he was simply unsuited. Each of the heads of services managed to carve out a significant measure of independence, and Shiloah could never make them heed his authority. This was particularly true of Har'el, who gradually won the trust of Ben-Gurion and convinced him that they had no choice but to replace Shiloah, and that he, Har'el, should be the one to take his place.

Despite all this, it is conceivable that Reuven Shiloah might have overcome all of these obstacles and might have gone on to have a successful career as head of the Mossad and of the entire Israeli intelligence community if only he had concentrated solely on those jobs in all their complexity – if he had not been involved at the very same time in secret talks with King Abdullah, or in armistice talks with Jordan at Rhodes, or the Lausanne Conference,¹² and other tasks and missions too numerous to mention – if only he had not spent his energies, time and attention on so many different things at once. But that is exactly what Shiloah did, and this 'if only' will always remain a unprovable hypothesis. That was the measure of the man, that was his character and his destiny.

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After Shiloah's second resignation, the question of his replacement as chairman of the Services Committee and as the person responsible, on behalf of the Prime Minister, for the country's intelligence services, figured briefly on the Prime Minister's agenda. A number of people were suggested to Ben-Gurion, all of whom were outflanked by Isser Har'el. Ben-Gurion soon appointed Har'el as head of the Mossad and at the same time canceled the appointment that Reuven Shiloah had held only for a few months after his initial resignation from the Mossad as the Prime Minister's Advisor on Intelligence Affairs. Under Har'el's influence Ben-Gurion decided to dispense with this function of Intelligence Advisor, a position which to this day has never been filled and which, according to some people close to intelligence affairs, has been the root cause of all the problems and embarrassments of the Israeli intelligence community.¹³ When Isser Har'el, in his turn, was forced to resign from the Mossad and Me'ir Amit was appointed in his stead, Har'el made an unsuccessful attempt to revive this appointment for himself. He too eventually left the intelligence services a saddened and embittered man.

It is important to point out in this context that Ben-Gurion was much more involved at that time in issues pertaining to internal security than in espionage activities abroad, and consequently it was only natural that he was much closer to the head of the GSS than to Reuven Shiloah. That was not the only reason for his actions, however. There is no question about the fact that Har'el was highly successful as head of the Mossad. He inherited the organizational and functional infrastructure and the operational concept of the Mossad from his predecessor. However, unlike Shiloah, Har'el turned out to be a superb administrator and an equally adroit operations man, a man with almost unlimited self-confidence, who drove full steam ahead unencumbered by intellectual doubts of any kind, or uncertainty about his own limitations or weaknesses. Ben-Gurion allowed this ambitious and power-hungry man to create a 'state within a state', without any form of supervision over either the organization or the man at its helm. This was to turn out to be one of Ben-Gurion's more fateful mistakes.

A short while after being appointed head of the Mossad, Har'el was named by Ben-Gurion as Head of Security Services. In fact, he was in charge only of the GSS and the Mossad. Ben-Gurion jealously guarded the independence of the Army Intelligence Branch and its position in the intelligence community, as the body responsible for the 'national intelligence assessment', and did not allow Har'el to extend his authority over Army intelligence as well. Whether he actually aspired to it or not, Har'el never managed to gain control over the entire intelligence apparatus, and that was the Achilles' heel that led to his downfall. Nevertheless, during the 1950s he enjoyed unprecedented power and the unlimited trust and admiration of Ben-Gurion – until the breakdown in their relations following Har'el's handling of two serious espionage mishaps: the so-called 'Lavon affair' and the 'German scientists' affair'.¹⁴ Har'el's demise followed upon the unchecked growth of his power. As the Hebrew saying has it, 'the Golem rose up against his creator'¹⁵ and his great supporter, Ben-Gurion, discovered this all too late. Ten years later, in 1963, these affairs caught up with Isser Har'el, and he was forced to vacate his seat as head of the Mossad in favor of the head of Army intelligence, Amit.

Reuven Shiloah – the man who established the Mossad and laid the foundations for the intelligence community of the State of Israel – never lived to see the day.

NOTES

1. This happened in July 1950, when by an act of the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset, the GSS became a civilian body.
2. The word *mossad* in Hebrew means 'institute', and the name 'Mossad' was simply a shortened version of the official name

- given to the organization when it was legally constituted by the Israeli government.
3. As of 1 July 1949, Haim Herzog was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Committee based on his position as head of Army intelligence. In June 1950, he was replaced by Binyamin Gibli. The committee – known as the Committee of Heads of Services (CHS) – exists to this day.
 4. The Hebrew word *ha-briha* means ‘the escape’, and the reference is to the escape organization for Holocaust survivors that was created spontaneously in 1944 by Jewish members of the partisan units and remnants of the ghetto fighters. This improvised apparatus eventually became more and more organized, helping thousands of Jewish refugees to make their way out of war-torn Europe to Palestine. Many of *Ha-Briha*’s activities were coordinated with the help of Jewish soldiers in the British Army’s Jewish Brigade, causing the British a great deal of embarrassment. *Ha-Briha*, which was organized and run from outside Palestine, worked closely with the illegal immigration operation – Aliya Bet – that was set up by the Yishuv inside Palestine. The moral and political pressure these organizations brought to bear on the British authorities undoubtedly hastened British departure from Palestine, the end of the Mandate and the creation of the State of Israel.
 5. *Ben-Gurion Diaries*, Vol.3, p.888, 20 Dec. 1948.
 6. From 1949 to 1951 the State of Israel received over 1.5 million Jewish refugees from all over the world, severely straining the financial capabilities of the fledgling country. One of the ways to cope with this enormous economic burden was to implement an ‘Austerity Plan’ which including nation-wide rationing of food and petrol.
 7. After the establishment of Israel the Arab League decided to boycott any country that had trade relations with Israel, in an attempt to create an economic stranglehold over Israel.
 8. Based on interviews with Haim Ya’ari and others, and private archives.
 9. The term used to describe Russian Jews incarcerated in jails or exiled to Siberia merely because of their Jewishness.
 10. The Bilu movement was one of the earliest Zionist organizations, established in Russia after the pogroms of 1881, and devoted to reviving Jewish national life and the Hebrew language in the Land of Israel. They first came to Palestine in 1882, and became known as the First Aliya – the first wave of Zionist immigration. The word Bilu is an acronym made up of the first letters of the Biblical saying: *Beit Yisrael Lechu VeNelcha*: ‘ House of Israel, let us go’.
 11. A detailed account of the Dan Pines Affair – ‘Our Man in the Politburo’, was written by Amir Shapira, and appeared in the Israeli daily *Al Ha-Mishmar*, 5 Sept. 1975.
 12. The venue of the UN Palestine Conciliatory Committee, which began its sessions in Lausanne on 26 April 1949.
 13. It is interesting to note that the Agranat Commission, appointed to investigate the reasons for Israel’s failures before and during the Yom Kippur War, gave high priority in its operative recommendations for the creation of the function of an Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister.
 14. The Lavon affair, named after then Minister of Defense Pinhas Lavon, was a bitter, long drawn-out affair that split the political community in the country for many years, and was sparked by the uncovering of an Israeli spy ring in Cairo, leading to the execution of one of its members and the lengthy incarceration of the others. The ring was uncovered because of an ill-conceived and badly executed plan designed to foment tension between Egypt and Britain, and the question of ‘Who gave the order?’ to set off the explosive charges that blew the group’s cover, led to almost open warfare in Israeli politics. The German scientists’ affair was also connected to espionage in Egypt, this time involving German scientists employed by Egypt in its nuclear program, and its aeronautic and rocket engineering programs.
 15. The reference is to the mystical, pre-Frankenstein, tale of the *golem* – humanoid creature – of Prague, supposedly created by the Maharal Rabbi in the eleventh century out of earth and breath. After coming into being the *golem* developed a mind of its own and rebelled against his creator, forcing the well-meaning rabbi to destroy his wondrous creation.

The Talks with Abdullah

Throughout this entire period, Reuven Shiloah played a central role in what became known as the ‘secret talks with Jordan’. These were the talks with King Abdullah of Jordan that have left us with two unanswered questions: (a) could Israel have gained more from that covert channel than it did at the official armistice talks, and (b) why did the talks end the way they did? The talks with Abdullah, and later with his grandson and heir, Hussein, comprise a chapter in the history of the State of Israel and the Zionist movement made up of many different and complex episodes. They began during Abdullah’s troubled lifetime, from the time when he was still the Emir of the principality of Transjordan, and continued long after his assassination. Conceivably these episodes will continue well into the future, as long as these two countries share a border and a history.¹

Israel and Jordan are, in fact, two very close neighbors,² with many overlapping areas of interest and many levels of diplomatic ties, both overt and covert. Both are deeply involved in the still unresolved issue of the Palestinians, with which the two countries have been struggling together since the Six Day War, when Israel took over from Jordan as the sovereign authority in the ‘West Bank’ with its large population of refugees. But the profound, complex connection between the two countries began in the days of the Mandate, when Transjordan was, at least on paper, the eastern part of Mandatory Palestine, and continued throughout the War of Independence and the signing of the Armistice Agreement.

The Armistice Agreement of 1949 was merely the visible part of a vast undercurrent of contacts and negotiations, arrangements and understandings, between Israel and Jordan that continued to develop from that time to the present day. Reuven Shiloah, together with Eliyahu Sasson, Moshe Dayan and others, played a major part in the earliest of these connections: the secret talks with King Abdullah of Jordan, which were initiated toward the end of the War of Independence and continued after it was over. True to form, at the time of his deep involvement in these talks, Shiloah was also the head of two important official delegations: the Israeli delegations to the armistice talks with Jordan in Rhodes, and the delegation to the meetings of the Palestine Conciliation Committee in Lausanne.

A convenient place to begin the story of Shiloah’s involvement in the talks with Jordan is an entry in Ben-Gurion’s diary from 21 November 1948, an entry comprised mainly of a detailed list of issues for discussion. ‘Shiloah asked me about the negotiations with Abdullah’, Ben-Gurion wrote. ‘I told him that I recommend that we begin the talks in Paris.³ When they begin to have some substance – the talks should be moved to here. Border lines can be discussed only here. We

must straighten out the Latrun line, get free access to the University in Jerusalem [on Mount Scopus], to move the border in the center of the country eastwards, in return for which we will be willing to move the eastern border in the south of the country to the west, and to give Gaza (once it's taken) to Abdullah. Reuven suggests – Gaza as a free city, under tripartite control – Jewish, Egyptian and Transjordanian.’⁴ At about the same time, the first direct and official contacts between Jordan and Israel concerning Jerusalem were held in the capital. On either side of the negotiating table were the two military commanders – Israeli and Jordanian – of the Jerusalem District: Lieutenant Colonel Moshe Dayan for Israel and Colonel Abdullah a-Tal for Jordan. Shiloah was involved in these contacts only indirectly, and was responsible for briefing the Prime Minister on the progress of the talks. The two officers met several times to prevent clashes between the two sides, and discussed far-reaching plans for territorial trade-offs in the Jerusalem area. A-Tal, for example, proposed returning the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem to Israeli rule in return for the Katamon Quarter in the southwestern part of the city. However, neither of the two military men had the authority to actually decide on these issues, and consequently the plans remained on paper only.

On 30 November 1948, the two sides finally signed a Truce Agreement in Good Faith’ that put an end to border skirmishes and determined mutually acceptable truce lines in the city, as a prelude to, and a basis for, the Armistice Agreement that was to follow. An effective cease-fire was agreed upon, a direct phone link was established between the two district commanders and Israel was allowed to maintain a small contingent of maintenance personnel on the abandoned campus of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, and send up a fortnightly convoy to change shifts and bring in basic provisions. Shiloah was not directly involved in the early stages of the military commanders’ negotiations, but both he and Yigael Yadin were expected to receive reports and keep abreast of developments, and report back to Ben-Gurion.⁵

Jordan’s and Israel’s vested interests in Jerusalem overlapped on many counts: neither country was interested in having the city proclaimed an international city, as stipulated in the UN Partition Plan, and both countries preferred to divide the city along the established truce lines. The agreement hammered out on the Jerusalem issue was a limited one, and some of the thornier problems ensuing from the division of the city remained, in effect, unsolved. Nevertheless, both countries placed a premium on observing the letter and the spirit of the agreement, and indeed, barring minor infringements, the agreement did in fact hold throughout the remaining period of the War of Independence and the signing of the Armistice Agreement, and later up to the Six Day War.

Overall, the ‘Commanders’ Agreement’ on Jerusalem provided a firm basis for further negotiations between the two countries – this time with the King of Jordan, first through emissaries and later with King Abdullah himself.⁶

The ‘Commanders’ Talks’ on Jerusalem were suspended by Israel in the middle of December 1948, and on 25 December, negotiations with Jordan were renewed in a meeting between Reuven Shiloah, on the authority of the Israeli government, and Shawakat a-Sati, King Abdullah’s physician and trusted advisor. Both Moshe Dayan and Abdullah a-Tal attended these talks. The actual objective of the talks was never determined very precisely, but the two sides discussed the Armistice Agreement, and even the possibility of a peace agreement and friendly relations between the two countries. This meeting was held while the war was still raging on other fronts, particularly in the south where, in December 1948, the IDF launched Operation Horev aimed at pushing the Egyptian Army out of the Negev and back into the Sinai Desert.

The meeting was preceded by a series of talks between Eliyahu Sasson – who had returned to

Israel from Paris at the beginning of December and King Abdullah's advisors. While most of the outstanding issues between the two countries were discussed in these talks, their main aim, as far as Israel was concerned, was in fact to hold the Jordanian front and possible Iraqi intervention – in abeyance while the IDF was involved in Operation Horev in the south. In this respect, the talks with Jordan achieved their aim. On the official level, negotiations with King Abdullah's representatives were handled by Shiloah and Dayan. It is quite reasonable to assume that Ben-Gurion had reservations about Sasson's support for Jordanian annexation of the West Bank.⁷ In Ben-Gurion's opinion, Sasson played his hand on this issue too early in the negotiations. The Prime Minister, at that stage, had made no public announcement of his support for the annexation, mainly because of the fact that the Jordanian-Israeli border had not yet been demarcated, but also because of his persistent suspicions concerning the true intentions of the British in the region.

At a meeting with members of the Foreign Ministry staff, held on 18 December, Ben-Gurion stated that he favored pursuing the talks with Abdullah because the time had come to end the war in order to facilitate Jewish immigration into Israel. 'I have my doubts', he said, 'to what extent the British will allow [Abdullah] to make peace... It will be difficult, because of security considerations, for us to accept the annexation of parts of Eretz Yisrael to Jordan. An Arab state in the western part of Palestine is less dangerous than a state with ties to Transjordan and perhaps later to Iraq. Secondly, why should we annoy the Russians for no good reason [the Russians opposed any changes in the region that would strengthen British-oriented Jordan]? And thirdly, why should we do so if the other Arab countries are opposed to it? This does not mean that we will not agree to it under any circumstances – but it can be accepted as one clause in an overall arrangement, that will include the question of borders in Latrun, Jerusalem and the "Triangle".'⁸

These differences of opinion between Ben-Gurion and Shiloah on the one hand, and Sasson on the other, surfaced again in renewed consultations held at the end of December and the beginning of January. Sasson once again stated his support for Abdullah and Jordanian annexation of the West Bank, while Ben-Gurion still feared the British, who, he believed, virtually controlled Jordan, and who, he thought, might even attempt a military thrust through the Negev. Ben-Gurion also stated his preference for making peace with Egypt over making peace with Jordan, particularly at that time when the end of the war was in sight, and when Israel and Egypt were at odds with each other over their conflicting interests in the region. This was true regarding the Negev and even more so regarding the Gaza Strip. Both Sharett and Ben-Gurion were inclined to hand it over to the Egyptians rather than to the Jordanians. In any case, at that time, Ben-Gurion was clearly not inclined to give Jordan preference over Egypt in any of the negotiations.

Ben-Gurion must have regarded Shiloah and Dayan – as opposed to Sasson – as the more faithful advocates of his reservations concerning the annexation of the West Bank in those early stages of the negotiations with Abdullah. Indeed, in the meeting between Shiloah and a-Sati on 25 December, it transpired that the distance between the two sides' opening positions was still considerable. Abdullah's representative demanded the return of Jaffa, Lod and Ramleh,⁹ and – most significantly – allowing Arab refugees to return to these towns. His reasoning was that this would strengthen Abdullah's position in the Arab world, and consequently make it easier for him to reach a negotiated peace settlement. Shiloah said that he would raise the issue for decision in the government. He was personally of the opinion that since most of the outstanding problems between the two sides were deeply interconnected, they should be dealt with as a single, albeit complex, whole, rather than as separate issues.

I added that despite our desire to help the King in his delicate situation, we do not feel obliged to make a token gesture of any kind. It was not we who attacked the Arabs, and it was not we who lost the war. We are willing to sit and negotiate and weigh any offer seriously.¹⁰

Shiloah put two questions to his opposite number, Dr. a-Sati. First, he asked if there was any substance to the rumors of differences of opinion between the King and his Prime Minister, and whether the Jordanian Prime Minister knew about the secret talks with the Israelis. A-Sati gave a partially affirmative answer. Second, he asked a-Sati if the British knew of these talks and whether they were being consulted on their progress. This latter question was a clear reflection of Ben-Gurion's unflagging wariness concerning Britain's true intentions in the region, particularly his suspicion of their plan to set up an army base right in the middle of the Negev – an issue that did indeed come up indirectly later during the negotiations with Jordan. Shiloah was promised an early reply, and at his third meeting he was informed by his Jordanian opposite number that 'the British do know about the talks and approve them. They want to achieve a peaceful solution.'¹¹

The second meeting, which took place on 30 December, was attended by Shiloah, Dayan and a-Tal. The Israeli point of view, as Shiloah presented it, was that the actual front lines between the opposing armies at that time must serve as a starting point for the negotiations, not the partition plan, nor, for that matter, the Bernadotte plan, which was even more constricting. Israel also insisted that the talks concentrate only on problems between Jordan and Israel, and not range further afield to Israeli-Arab problems in general – unless the King announced that he was authorized to speak on behalf of the other Arab countries. 'Dayan suggested that we separate the issues relating to the King and us, from issues relating to our relations with the other Arab countries. A-Tal agreed.'¹²

Shiloah spelled out the issues to be resolved between Jordan and Israel: reversion of the border between the two countries to the original Mandatory borders, renewal of work at the Dead Sea Works and the fate of the equipment belonging to the potash works and to Kibbutz Beit HaArava at the northern end of the Dead Sea,¹³ and, of course, the question of Jerusalem. A-Tal rejected Shiloah's border demands, stating categorically that Jordan had not abandoned its claim to the Negev, and he therefore suggested that this point be left to the general talks. On the issue of Jerusalem, a-Tal said the King was thinking of a solution involving the division of the city between Jordan and Israel. 'Arab areas would go to him and Jewish areas to us' – that was the way Shiloah reported a-Tal's proposal. The question of Arab or Jewish enclaves in either sector could be solved by territorial exchanges or safe passage routes, along the example of the arrangements that had been made on the Hebrew University campus on Mount Scopus.

Shiloah went on to state Israel's opposition to the annexation of the Arab area of western Israel to Jordan. Even the most recent UN General Assembly resolutions, he said, had not gone so far, and then proceeded to enumerate the rest of the problems: the railway line to Jerusalem,¹⁴ Latrun, POWs and compensation, and political and economic relations. Abdullah a-Tal said the King had begun making efforts to get the Iraqis out of the Triangle and that he was authorized to speak on their behalf as well. He presented demands that appeared to be, on the face of it, far-reaching: including Ramleh and Lod in the territorial borders of Jordan, maintaining Arab control over Jaffa under Israeli sovereignty, with free access arrangements similar to the Jerusalem Corridor and, naturally, the issue of Jerusalem itself. Dayan raised the question of refugee resettlement in Jordan and a-Tal replied that they should be given the right to choose. Those who preferred to return to their homes inside Israel, he claimed, should be allowed to do

so. When Shiloah asked about Jordan's stand on the Negev, a-Tal replied that the King was willing to leave parts of the Negev in Israeli hands with two provisos: free passage for Arabs on the Beersheba-Gaza road, and placing the coastal strip between Gaza and the Egyptian border [the so-called 'Gaza Strip'] under Jordanian jurisdiction.

The third meeting, held on 5 January 1949, was attended by the same teams of negotiators (Dayan's military adjutant, Major A. Broide, participated in all these meetings).¹⁵ When a-Tal was asked for specific details on the King's demands on the Negev, he spelled them out: free passage to Egypt, allowing the 100,000 Bedouin inhabitants of the Negev to remain on their lands and the fulfillment of strategic needs. He did not elaborate on whose needs he was referring to, but the context of the demand in the talks pointed to the British. He was also asked about the King's position *vis-à-vis* Jerusalem, and he proposed a detailed plan for the division of the city as follows: the Old City, Katamon, the German Quarter and other parts of the southern quarters of the city would remain in Jordanian hands, while the rest belong to the Jews. The Talpiyot quarter and Kibbutz Ramat Rachel [both at the southern end of the city borders, on the way to Bethlehem] were also to be included in Jordanian territory, in exchange for Israeli sovereignty over Romema and Lifta in the western part of the city. A-Tal suggested that the border between the two parts of the city run along King David Street, which would be under international control.

Dayan pointed out to a-Tal how unrealistic this plan was, and said that it made more sense to talk about exchanging areas in the south of the city for Sheikh Jarrah [between the Old City and Mount Scopus], which would give Israel territorial contiguity with the Hebrew University. A-Tal responded that such an arrangement was unacceptable since it would separate Arab Jerusalem from the city of Ramallah to the north, and that the only possible solution in that area was a special road between Jewish Jerusalem and Mount Scopus. Shiloah and Dayan proposed a solution involving international control over the Old City, and a-Tal replied that they were willing to give the Israelis the Jewish Quarter in the Old City and ensure safe passage to the quarter.

At these three meetings, which served as a prelude to the meetings with King Abdullah himself, all the most hotly-contested issues between the two countries were discussed. These issues underwent a number of transformations in the direct talks with the King which began a few days later, and proceeded in three phases:¹⁶ the first phase was devoted to talks on the peace agreement between the two countries; the second phase focused on discussions on a non-belligerency pact; the third phase centered on considerations of a minimal agreement which would ensure the full implementation of the Armistice Agreement between Israel and Jordan (signed at the beginning of April 1949), particularly Clause 8.¹⁷

The fourth meeting in this series was attended by King Abdullah himself. On 13 January 1949, Abdullah a-Tal invited Moshe Dayan and Reuven Shiloah to meet with King Abdullah at his palace in Shuneh. However, that was also the first day of the armistice talks with the Egyptians. Shiloah went to Rhodes to participate in the opening round and had to forego the first meeting with the King. From that point on, the talks with the Jordanians continued along two parallel tracks with Shiloah involved in both, although not in all the stages of the negotiations.

One track was the continuation of the secret talks with King Abdullah, which Shiloah attended only at a later stage due to his obligations to the armistice talks in Rhodes and the Palestine Conciliation Committee at Lausanne. These talks with the King were handled by Dayan and Sasson, with the occasional participation of experts on Arab affairs such as Yehoshafat Harkaby. The second track was that of the Jordanian-Israeli armistice talks at

Rhodes, which Reuven Shiloah led on the Israeli side. In addition to these two tracks, there was also an ‘unofficial’ one when Sasson, on occasion, transmitted messages in Arabic to the King asking him to intervene in order to overcome obstacles that cropped up at various points during the negotiations.

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From Rhodes, Shiloah reported on talks he held with the political advisors of the Egyptian delegation, among others. After the signing of the Armistice Agreement with Egypt (on 24 February 1949), Shiloah was also indirectly involved in the talks with the Lebanese delegation, which took place at the northern border point of Rosh Ha-Nikra on the Mediterranean Sea. The Armistice Agreement with Lebanon was signed on 23 March 1949, but up to the signing itself Shiloah continued to send messages to Sharett from the UN mediator Ralph Bunche, and Sharett updated Shiloah on the controversial issues, enlisting his aid to soften Bundle’s positions on these issues.¹⁸

Shiloah also served as an intermediary between UN mediators and policy-makers in Israel during the talks on the armistice agreement with the Syrians. These talks proved to be the most difficult of all and began a month after the others. However, Shiloah’s most important contribution to the armistice talks as a whole was his participation in the negotiations with the Jordanians, particularly in his lengthy discussions with Ralph Bunche and his aides.

The official talks with Jordan at Rhodes, led on the Israeli side by Shiloah, began on 28 February 1949, after the Dayan-Sasson talks with *Reuven Shiloah – The Man Behind the Mossad* King Abdullah, and after separate talks held by Dayan and Ya’akov Shim’oni with Abdullah’s representatives – all of which were aimed at softening Jordanian positions on the major issues of the negotiations and on their opening stances. In the meantime, Israel ended the arguments on the border demarcations between Jordan and Israel in the southern Negev and along the Dead Sea shore by launching Operation Ouvdah, during which the IDF completed the conquest of the southern Negev and the Dead Sea shoreline, from Sodom to Ein Gedi. That effectively put an end to Jordanian demands for a division of the Negev between the two countries. The Jordanians tried to apply international diplomatic pressure in order to interfere with the military operation and there were some skirmishes between the two sides along the border, but once the operation had achieved its objectives, a cease-fire agreement was signed between Jordan and Israel, and in Ralph Bundle’s report to the Security Council of the UN of 22 March, Israel’s control over these areas was regarded as a *fait accompli*.¹⁹

Throughout all of this, talks were underway in Rhodes on all the issues relating to the armistice. The main question was the pullback of the Iraqi Army from the Triangle, and the demarcation of the Armistice lines in the area they were to vacate in return for Israel’s agreement for Jordanian Army units to replace the Iraqi forces in that area. Israel also demanded that Wadi Ara [a valley connecting Hadera in the west with Megiddo and Afula to the east] and its southeastern ridge be included in Israeli territory. Full agreement was reached on all of these issues.

Shiloah cabled Walter Eytan, Director-General of the Foreign Ministry on these developments,²⁰ citing a talk he had held with Riyadh Moufallah, who, he claimed, was

regarded as the King’s envoy and close advisor... His main points: Nuri Sa’id (Iraqi Prime Minister) would not be able to take part in the armistice talks for fear of being assassinated. In general, the Iraqi government does not have effective control over the

country. The only solution is to hand the Triangle over to the Jordanians. The Jordanians will be willing to make minor border adjustments immediately, and more significant changes during peace talks... if they agree to far-reaching changes at this stage the King will be accused of treason. This is a hint that our threats concerning the Triangle are delaying any further trade off.

Shiloah asked for instructions on how to handle this issue, and he was told to wait until Dayan arrived. At the same time, Dayan met first with Abdullah a-Tal, and, after coordinating schedules, with the King himself at his palace in Shuneh. Harkaby accompanied him as his interpreter. At these talks Dayan conducted the real negotiations on 'the present Iraqi positions and the changes we have asked for'. The agreement with the King was finally signed on 24 March by a delegation that included Walter Eytan, Yigael Yadin, Moshe Dayan and Yehoshafat Harkaby. All the parties involved agreed that this accord would be included in the overall Armistice Agreement between the two countries.²¹

Reuven Shiloah felt uncomfortable in dealing with UN mediator Ralph Bunche, who he had not updated on these developments with Jordan. The fact is that he himself was not aware of all the developments until after the agreement was concluded. Ultimately, the Iraqis accepted the arrangement brokered in their name by King Abdullah, and the Armistice Agreement with Jordan was approved and finally signed on 3 April 1949 – but only after the King himself made a futile last-minute effort to persuade the Americans to pressure the Israelis to cancel the agreement on Wadi Ara that he himself had signed. The President of the United States refused to go along with King Abdullah's attempt to renege on any part of the agreement. This attempt at a last-minute change of heart did little to enhance the King's reliability in the eyes of the Israelis, or their trust in his commitments on other issues.²²

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In the brief lull between Rhodes and Lausanne, Reuven Shiloah joined Moshe Sharett on a visit to Prague on 19–20 May 1949 (according to some sources, American officials claimed that Shiloah was involved in arms procurement there, and was even suspected of making contact with the Soviets). From there he continued on to Washington and New York. In New York Shiloah met with the head of the UN Observer Force, General Reilly and with UN mediator Ralph Bunche in an attempt to soften the Syrian position in the armistice talks, which were deadlocked at that time (the agreement was finally signed two months later, on 20 July). Shiloah wrote to the Prime Minister from New York, saying that President Truman was inclined to lend his support to Arab positions in the conflict, particularly in view of the plight of the Arab refugees. Early in his term of office he had extended similar support to the Zionist cause because of his sympathy for the plight of Jewish refugees after the Holocaust.²³

After a short stopover in Lausanne at the end of June, to check on the latest developments, Shiloah returned to Jerusalem and took part in a series of consultations relating to the stalled discussions. This Lausanne conference was attended by representatives of Israel and four neighboring Arab countries, and was held under the auspices of the 'Palestine Conciliation Committee'. It lasted four months and had two stages. In the first stage (from 27 April to 10 June 1949) the Israeli delegation was headed by the Director-General of the Foreign Ministry, Walter Eytan, while in the second stage (18 July-12 September) Shiloah, who had been a member of the delegation in the first stage, took over as chairman. The interval in the talks between the two stages was exploited for discussion and consultations in Jerusalem in anticipation of the second

round. After his appointment as head of the delegation, Reuven Shiloah put his 'personal method' into action. He tried to 'win over' (a term he was fond of using) the head of the American delegation by establishing close personal ties with him. He succeeded in winning him over with 'constructive suggestions' on plans for economic development in the entire area, for the greater benefit of both Israel and the Arab countries, as well as for the benefit of American interests and the American ethos – not merely for the narrow interests of the State of Israel.

The Lausanne Conference should be viewed in its proper perspective. It was undoubtedly one of the lowest points in Israeli diplomacy during 1949. The Conference was called as one part of a three-part UN General Assembly resolution passed on 11 December 1948. The other two parts reaffirmed the internationalization of Jerusalem and called on Israel to repatriate all refugees who expressed a desire to return to their homes, or to offer reparations to those who decided to remain in exile. These resolutions in fact have never been revoked by the UN body and technically are still valid. For many years they figured very prominently in Arab propaganda, and their spirit still hovers over the Middle East to this day.²⁴

Israel was in urgent need of American economic aid in many areas and of American support for its request to be accepted as a regular member of the UN. The short time span between the UN resolution and the beginning of the Lausanne talks provided the Americans with a convenient opportunity for pressuring Israel. Another such opportunity, used in later years as well, was American economic aid to Israel in all its various forms. As the Cold War intensified, global considerations added weight to these pressures, and Americans became increasingly concerned about defending the Middle East against possible Soviet incursions. 'With the deterioration of the security situation in the world ... the United States is very concerned about security in the Middle East', Shiloah wrote in a note to Sharett from Lausanne.

Stability in the Middle East is a very vital, pressing need for the United States. There is no chance of stability without a solution to the Israel-Arab conflict, and America believes that no solution is possible without appeasing the Arabs... A quick solution is possible only if Israel relents and accepts both injunctions – territorial compromise and an agreement to increase the number of refugees to be repatriated.²⁵

In fact, American intervention was one of the main reasons for the failure of the Lausanne Conference. The US exerted pressure on Israel to agree to terms that were totally unacceptable – forgoing its claims to the southern Negev region, repatriating 200,000 to 250,000 refugees and settling the rest in the Arab countries. Israel was reeling at that time under the burden of dealing with vast waves of Jewish immigration, and was willing to repatriate only 100,000 Arab refugees. As for the southern Negev – the American position was then, and remained until the Sinai Campaign of 1956, that Israeli control over the southern Negev, which creates a wedge between Jordan and Egypt, ran counter to the American strategic concept for the region which supported Arab territorial contiguity. The question of whether territory taken from Israel would go to Jordan or to Egypt was not decided. Israel was not prepared to give up the southern Negev under any circumstances – a position the Americans simply did not understand. Moreover, the United States was opposed to any direct contacts between Israel and the Arab countries participating in the conference. The Israelis, on the other hand, and particularly Reuven Shiloah, felt that their best chance for success lay in the personal approach, as the armistice talks had proven beyond a doubt.

The Lausanne Conference was also doomed to failure because of the simultaneous participation of four Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon) who vied with each

other for championing the most extreme and hard-line positions *vis-à-vis* Israel. It was a bitter irony that this competition for extremism was often at the direct expense of the delegation of Arab refugees who came to Lausanne to follow the negotiations and lobby for their interests.²⁶

Israel was on the defensive at the conference and was willing to consider certain concessions such as the repatriation of 100,000 refugees or the annexation of the Gaza Strip and all its refugees. These issues, together with the question of the status of Jerusalem, also exacerbated internal differences of opinion between David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett, who, at one point in these heated discussions, tendered his resignation to the Prime Minister.

The Arab delegations concentrated all their efforts on achieving far-reaching territorial concessions, while the refugee problem hardly interested them at all. Israel rejected the territorial demands out of hand, and the conference dispersed at the end of the first stage with little chance of reaching an agreement. In the second stage the head of the American delegation, Mark Etheredge, a State Department official who had been notably tough in his attitude toward Israel, was replaced by Paul Porter, who was close to President Truman. His view of the situation at the conference was that there was no chance of reaching an agreement, and it would be preferable to avoid a crisis in Israeli-American relations.

Reuven Shiloah went to great lengths to bring Porter around to the Israeli point of view:

I talked at length about the Negev, I explained the importance of the Negev to every child in Israel and all the Jews of the Diaspora... Robbing us of this region means turning it into a wasteland... Last night I asked him out to dinner... He told me that my arguments had been very persuasive, and that he had discovered that our claims on the Negev were more profound and deeply rooted than he had seen at first. He talked of his support for our work. The President chose him for this mission because of his support of Israel.²⁷

In that same conversation, Paul Porter told Shiloah that he was 'working to set up a committee of experts from the UN who, with the help of Israeli and Arab experts, will examine plans for development and absorption, and the extent of international aid that will be required'. Shiloah jumped at this proposal, but it is also entirely possible that it was he who proposed it in the first place during their conversation. This was an idea that was one the basic tenets of his political credo, one that he was to repeat *ad nauseum* in all his letters, reports and discussions in the years that followed. It was imperative, he claimed, that Israel take the initiative in proposing economic development programs for the Middle East, which would include a solution to the refugee problem.²⁸

In order to head off the crisis that might have followed the failure of the Lausanne Conference, and to prevent the issues in question being referred back to the General Assembly where anti-Israeli resolutions were likely to be imposed, Porter finally proposed a solution to the Middle East problem based on economics rather than politics. He proposed that the PCC set up an economic survey committee that would examine possibilities for resettlement of the refugees in Arab countries, and Israel would propose a plan for regional development in the Middle East. This was eventually the outcome of the Lausanne Conference. The establishment of the survey committee led to the gradual petering out of the Palestine Conciliation Committee.

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The Lausanne Conference created a temporary interval in the direct talks between Jordan and Israel. In the course of the conference there was only one meeting between the two sides outside

the official framework. This was the meeting between King Abdullah and Sharett at the King's palace in Shuneh.²⁹ The meeting was attended by Moshe Sharett, Moshe Dayan, Yehoshafat Harkaby as interpreter and the Jordanian Prime Minister, Toufik Abu el-Hoda. The meeting was called to help overcome various problems that had arisen in the implementation of the Armistice Agreement, and it went on to survey the larger problems that each side was interested in solving. King Abdullah, for his part, raised the issue of peace and the need to prepare public opinion for such an eventuality, while Sharett claimed that things should proceed gradually. The Armistice Agreement laid the foundations. Now we must build the walls through agreements on outstanding issues, and finally we will build the roof which is the overall peace accord', said Sharett. 'The Jordanian Prime Minister said that what we really want to do is to discuss only those issues whose solution will be of benefit to us. Once we get what we want, we'll fold our arms and won't care what happens next. I told him that this was not the case.' Discussions with Abdullah were suspended at that point until the end of the Lausanne Conference.³⁰

In October 1949, Shiloah attended the UN General Assembly in New York, and upon his return to Israel in November, he learned that King Abdullah had asked to resume his talks with the Israelis, this time in order to discuss a peace agreement. A series of four meetings took place (on 27 November, 1, 3 and 8 December), with the participation of Reuven Shiloah, Eliyahu Sasson, and Moshe Dayan on the Israeli side, and Jordanian Prime Minister Samir e-Rifa'i on the Jordanian side. King Abdullah participated in some of the meetings, but only partially.

In these four meetings a draft peace agreement, 'Principles of a Territorial Arrangement (Final)', was worked out, but the hopes of signing it were dashed at a fifth meeting held on 29 December. The circumstances surrounding the preparation of the draft agreement, and the eventual decision not to sign it, have been given many different and conflicting explanations. It is not at all clear if the reason was a British demand that Jordan not place itself in jeopardy *vis-à-vis* the other Arab countries by being the first to sign a peace agreement with Israel, or a last-minute change of heart on the part of the King or his ministers for similar reasons. It is also not at all clear if the Israeli government would have approved the concession in the draft agreement relating to King Abdullah's demand for a Jordanian-controlled land corridor between Hebron and Gaza or between Hebron and Majdal, north of Gaza near Ashkelon. Dayan and Shiloah believed that King Abdullah was not willing to forego his demands for territorial concessions in the Negev. Be that as it may, at the next meeting, so Dayan notes in his memoirs, King Abdullah announced that, as far as he was concerned, the draft agreement was null and void.³¹

In January 1950, contact between the two sides was renewed, and this time the talks concentrated on the problem of Jerusalem. Up until the middle of February of that year, Dayan and Shiloah held three meetings with Samir Rifa'i and Fawzi Moulky, the Jordanian Defense Minister. Their aim was to reach a joint statement in order to prevent the implementation of the UN decision of 19 December 1949 regarding the internationalization of Jerusalem. Jordan demanded control over those Arab sections of Jerusalem that had been taken by the Israelis during the War of Independence (Talbiyeh, Katamon, the Greek Colony, Bak'a and others), while Israel demanded the Jewish Quarter of the Old City and Mount Scopus. These talks also reached a dead end when the Jordanian government decided, on 13 February 1950, to reject all the Israeli demands.³²

A short while later, King Abdullah presented another suggestion. Toward the end of a very unsuccessful meeting, held at his palace in Shuneh on 17 February with Shiloah, Dayan and Samir e-Rifa'i, the King suddenly intervened with a totally new proposal. He suggested that the draft proposal for a peace agreement be replaced by a five-year nonbelligerency pact, which

would include a trade agreement and the creation of joint committees to discuss final peace arrangements.³³ Shiloah immediately embraced the King's proposal as 'a great idea' and the King said in response: if your government will announce its approval of this agreement, I will call a meeting of my government and inform it of Jordan's agreement.

As it transpired, the King's proposal was short-lived. After the initial proposal, Fawzi Moulky was told by the King to meet with the Israeli representatives and – even against his will – to initial the draft agreement, together with Reuven Shiloah and Moshe Dayan on the Israeli side, and Samir a-Rifa'i on the Jordanian side. Abdullah suggested that each side draw up the agreement in its own language, and at the next meeting the two sides would work out a joint agreement.

The next meeting, which took place on 28 February 1950, ended in dismal failure. The Jordanian version of the agreement that was submitted to the Israelis did not include the main clauses concerning non-belligerency, a trade agreement and a five-year time frame. Israel, too, submitted an intricately-worded legal document which included many items that had not been discussed at the previous meeting and even called for an indefinite postponement of the question of Jordanian access to Haifa harbor. Shiloah and Dayan rejected the Jordanian paper, claiming that it fell short even of the Armistice Agreement. The Jordanian government, for its part, met on 1 March and approved in principle the watered-down document that had been submitted to the Israelis by the Jordanian delegation.

Another meeting was held between the King and Shiloah and Dayan, on 7 March, in the course of which the King informed the Israelis that he was facing severe internal problems following the resignation of Toufik Abu el-Houda's government, and promised to renew contact with the Israelis after elections on 11 April and the installation of a new government. The Council of the Arab League met on 25 March and on 1 April and passed a resolution opposing any separate peace treaties or economic or political agreements with Israel, and stated categorically that any Arab country that went ahead with any of these would be expelled from the Arab League. On 13 April the Council passed a resolution stating that steps would be taken against any country attempting to enter into any formal agreements with Israel, including the immediate cessation of political, consular, trade and financial relations. This resolution of the Arab League was passed two days after the elections in Jordan, and bolstered the elected representatives of the Jordanian parliament in their opposition to the agreement with Israel. Indeed, when the newly-elected parliament met for the first time, it was clear that there was a strong majority against the proposed agreement.

For King Abdullah it was clear that the basic political situation had changed and that the new parliament, supported by the Arab League, had managed to undermine his desire to sign a non-belligerency pact with Israel – if indeed this was what he wanted. Nevertheless, the King did not cut off all contacts with Shiloah. Through his personal physician and close advisor, he gave Shiloah advance warning that on 25 April 1950, he would announce the annexation of the Arab part of Palestine to the Kingdom of Jordan. On that very day – Annexation Day – the King met privately and in secret with Shiloah, and notified him of his desire to renew the talks on his previous proposals sometime in May. It is possible that he did so in order to soften Israel's reaction to the annexation announcement. There was also some duplicity on his part in the very fact of his holding a meeting with Shiloah without informing the British Ambassador to Jordan, Alec Kirkbride – who until then had always been privy to the development of the King's contacts with Israel. After the fact, the King asked Kirkbride to tell Prime Minister Sa'id el-Mufti about the meeting, and sound him out on his reactions. Kirkbride had no doubt that the entire

government would resign if the King tried to force them into an agreement with Israel, and that the new parliament would be no less opposed. This rather odd sequence of events may have been an indication of a total loss of direction on the King's part, or else a clever stratagem aimed at drumming up opposition to the agreement with Israel on the part of the government and the parliament, with British and American backing – while he himself was softening up Israel's potential reaction to the annexation of the West Bank with promises of a continuation of the direct talks.

Indeed, two days after his secret meeting with Shiloah, the King met with Shiloah and Dayan. The two of them informed him that the government of Israel viewed the annexation as a unilateral action that it could not sanction, and that there was no possibility whatsoever to separate the issue of a Jordanian-Israeli treaty from that of the annexation. The King asked for time to consult with his new government, and promised to notify the Israelis of the date for a renewal of talks. He told them that he was under threat of assassination from circles close to Syria and Egypt, but that he was convinced of the wisdom of his decision and would not bow to these threats.

This crisis of April 1950 brought to an end the second phase of the talks with King Abdullah – a phase that was meant to bring about a nonbelligerency pact between the two countries. The meetings between the King and his Prime Minister with Reuven Shiloah continued into June, July and August 1950, while in the background a series of border incidents raised tensions between the two countries. When the PCC moved its sessions to the Middle East in August of that year, the King addressed its members, censuring Israel for not acceding to Jordanian demands on the entire eastern Negev region. In September an argument arose concerning the exact demarcation of the borders in the Naharayim region south of Lake Kinneret (known also as 'the Sea of Galilee'), and Israel annexed the disputed area without waiting for a negotiated agreement with the Jordanian government. After another incident in the southern Arava Desert, Shiloah met with King Abdullah at his palace on 12 December, to try to smooth out the misunderstanding surrounding this incident. The possible renewal of the talks was not brought up at all in this meeting, which was, in effect, one of the last gasps of the second stage of the ultimately fruitless talks with King Abdullah.

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In the third and final stage of the talks with Abdullah, which began at the beginning of 1951, attempts were made to reach minimal agreements: to settle in their entirety all the outstanding provisions of the Israel-Jordan Armistice Agreement, particularly Clauses 6 (concerning mutually acceptable border adjustments) and 8. On 19 March, Shiloah and Rifa'i met to discuss these issues, and documents were exchanged between the two governments that ultimately only served to deepen the schism between them on specific details of the agreement. The main bone of contention was the Jordanian demand that the institutions of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus remain under Jordanian rather than UN control. In a letter to the Jordanian Prime Minister, Shiloah stated that 'there can be no doubt whatsoever concerning Israeli sovereignty over the area... all of Mount Scopus ... which was held by Israeli forces prior to the military agreement of 7 July 1948 ... must remain Israeli territory.'³⁴ The Jordanians also demanded that what was known as 'No-Man's Land' between the two borders be divided according to land ownership deeds – a move which would have given the Jordanians a distinct advantage in any settlement – and compensation for Arab property in Jerusalem in return for a Jordanian agreement to pay compensation for Israeli property. Shiloah

expressed his doubts over Israel's ability to pay compensation for Arab property. Israel was willing to consider acquiescing to Jordanian demands to retreat from Naharayim up to the international border, and to consider unblocking frozen Jordanian accounts.

King Abdullah, who was displeased by the impasse brought on by the exchange of letters between Shiloah and Rifa'i on these issues, invited Shiloah to come to meet him and proposed a joint retraction of these letters. Shiloah responded with a letter on 16 April 1951, in which he said, among other things:

In these times, as in the past, we see peace and a full agreement between us as our joint objective for whose implementation efforts must be made immediately. We accept the way suggested by Your Highness and Your Excellency the Prime Minister, in other words – full implementation of all the provisions of the Armistice Agreement, as a prelude to a very broad agreement that will bring to fruition everything we have been aspiring to – the creation and stabilizing of relations of peace and friendship between our two countries.

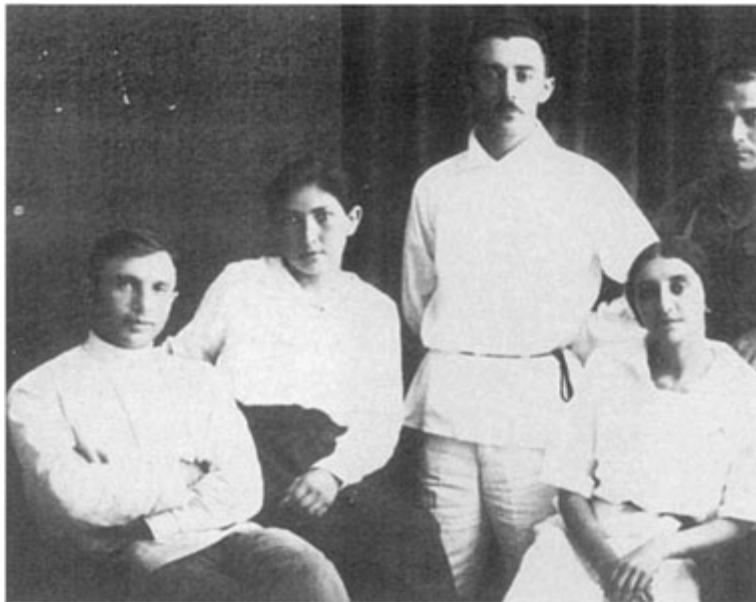
Shiloah's letter turned out to be, for all intents and purposes, both a summation of the negotiating efforts and their obituary, for they ended with no tangible results beyond the outline of a plan for the future. By that time, the political climate had changed and neither side had the desire to move any further forward toward yet another agreement.

At the request of Foreign Minister Sharett, Ambassador Moshe Sasson, a veteran Foreign Ministry official, accompanied Reuven Shiloah to these meetings in their third and final stage. Sasson, who spoke Arabic fluently and was known to King Abdullah as Eliyahu Sasson's son, recalls the special atmosphere of these talks and the reasons for their ultimate failure: 'Shiloah established close personal relations with King Abdullah, based on a great deal of mutual trust. He handled these negotiations with enormous skill, bearing in mind our objectives very clearly at all times, and fully aware of the difficulties that had to be surmounted to achieve them', Sasson recalls. There were difficulties arising from the British position which, as usual, was never very clear or well-defined. And there were difficulties arising from the growing opposition in Arab public opinion in general and in Abdullah's kingdom in particular, to any further agreements with Israel. He was no longer in absolute control, not even over his Prime Minister. These two problems restricted the King's maneuvering power and his ability to reach new agreements', Sasson suggests.

'Shiloah was well aware of these two problems, and when, at one point in the talks Shiloah asked the King about his difficulties in reaching an agreement on a certain issue, Abdullah did not respond, just looked at Reuven and at me and held up crossed wrists to signal to us that his hands were tied', Sasson recalls. At one of the meetings, I turned to the King and, in the manner of a young man, I asked him a direct question: "why do you need to make peace with Israel?" And he replied in his clear Bedouin Arabic: "My son, I want peace because I know that if there won't be peace then there will be another war and another war, and my people will lose. The greater good of my people demands a peaceful solution." But this was not to be.

Moshe Sasson recalls many unusual anecdotes from this series of talks that Shiloah held with King Abdullah. One example concerns the IDF Independence Day parade, which was held in Jerusalem in flagrant violation of the limitations set out in the Armistice Agreement concerning the nature and quantity of arms and military hardware allowed in the city. Shiloah explained to the monarch that this was not an offensive action of any kind, and that immediately following the parade, all the military equipment would be removed from the city. The Jordanians had already submitted a complaint to the Armistice Committee, but Shiloah asked the King not to make an

issue of it. At which point the King turned to his Defense Minister, and, using Bedouin imagery, said, 'And the tribe – when it wants to celebrate, what will it use for its celebration if not its swords?'



1. Among the people who had the greatest influence on Reuven Shiloah's career were the three famous brothers-in-law of the Labour movement in Palestine: Moshe Sharett (Shertok), Eliyahu Golomb and Dov Hos. Golomb and Hos were married to Sharett's sisters. The fourth brother-in-law was Shaul Avigur (Meirov) whose sister, Zipporah, married Moshe Sharett. The four were Shiloah's adoptive family and brought him into the Labour movement, the General Federation of Labour (the Histadrut), the Hagannah and the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. In his eulogy at Shiloah's funeral, Sharett referred to him as 'my younger brother'. Dov Hos brought him into the Arab Affairs and political sections of the Histadrut; Shertok recruited him into the Political Department; Eliyahu Golomb and Shaul Avigur made him a central coordinator of the SHAI, the Hagannah's and the Agency's intelligence network. The young Zaslansky repaid them with the unique contribution to the creation of the Zionist – and later Israeli – intelligence services. In the picture: Moshe Sharett (*standing*) and Eliyahu Golomb (*seated on the left*) with their wives, Zipporah and Ada.



2.3. The young Jerusalemite, from the She'ari Pina quarter of the 'Old Yishuv' in Jerusalem, making his first steps as a teacher in Baghdad, at the Jewish community school, on behalf of the Jewish Agency and the Zionist movement. He was sent there by Haim Arlosoroff, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and Moshe Shertok, and reported to them on his activities. Two photographs from the

Baghdad milieu of 1931: above, on the tennis court (*leaning on the tennis racket on the right*), and below, on the Tigris Bridge (*on the right*).



4. In 1936 Reuven Zaslany married Betty Borden, a social worker and daughter of a Zionist-Socialist family from New York. He taught her Hebrew and was a persistent suitor. She had to adapt her lifestyle to his non-stop work schedule, without vacations, rest or respite. His close friends Dov Hos (*behind and in-between the Shiloahs*), and his wife Rivka (*with the candle on the left*), were his 'best men' at the wedding. Shiloah's son, Dov, is named after Dov Hos, who was killed in a car accident in 1940 together with his wife Rivka, his daughter Tirza and other relatives.



5. Eliyahu Eilat (Epstein) – future ambassador, Reuven’s close friend who introduced him very early on to two of the leaders of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine of the 1930s – Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and Dov Hos. Here, in a picture sent from Venice, are Eilat (*right*) and Dov



6. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, a major figure in the Zionist movement before the state, and second President of the State of Israel.



7. Charles Orde Wingate, intelligence and special operations officer in the British Army. This unique and legendary figure was

known in the Hagannah as 'The Friend', and was the creator of a defense tactic which he named 'Out of the Fences': a form of defense based on pre-emptive offense, which began in the Hagannah and was later adopted by the Israeli Defense Forces. Wingate was sent out of Palestine by his superior officers because of his total identification with the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine, and the Zionist movement. He dreamed of leading the Jewish Army of the future into the battle for Israel's independence.



8. As Advisor for Special Affairs to the Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, Shiloah took on too many duties at once in the early years of the State. On top of his responsibility of creating the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry, which was the embryonic form of the Mossad, he was also involved in the Armistice Talks at Rhodes, in the Conciliation talks at Lausanne and in various negotiations with King Abdullah of Jordan. *In the photograph:* Reuven Shiloah with General Ahmed Zidki Jundi, head of the Jordanian delegation to the Armistice Talks. The main agreement between Israel and Jordan was achieved in the talks with Abdullah.



9. Shaul Avigur (Meirov), head of the Aliya (immigration) Institute, the most senior of all the heads of special services in Israel, and greatly admired by everyone for his great contribution to the security of the Yishuv and for his modesty. He served as one of the two top commanders in the Hagannah following the Arab Riots of 1929. It was he who asked Reuven Zaslany to collect all the information generated by the various branches of the SHAI. *(Above left).*



10. Tony Simmonds – British intelligence officer and a true friend of Israel. Worked with Shiloah during the Arab Revolt of 1936 to root out the Mufti's gangs, and later in the parachuting enterprise in eastern Europe during the Second World War. (*Above right*). Reuven Shiloah was involved, together with Chief of Operations and Acting Chief of Staff, Yigael Yadin, in weaving a delicate balance between the continuation of the IDF's thrust to the South and the UN-imposed truce agreements that threatened to stop the fighting before the completion of Israel's objectives. Coordination had to be maintained, too, between Prime Minister and Minister of Defense David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett, reflecting the pressures and threats brought to bear on Israel by the UN, the United States and Britain to halt the IDF's advance. Yigael Yadin lavished praise on Reuven Shiloah for his successes in these delicate maneuvers.



11. (*top*): Reuven Shiloah (*on the right*) with Eliyahu (Elias) Sasson (*left of Shiloah, in the dark coat*), and Yigael Yadin (*second from the left, with peaked cap*). Shiloah worked in close cooperation with Sasson in the Political Department of the Jewish Agency.



12. Bottom: (from right to left) Dr. Ralph Bunche, UN mediator, US General Reilly, head of the UN Observers Force, Shiloah, and Lt. Col. Moshe Dayan, Commander of Jerusalem.



13. Reuven Shiloah talking to Ralph Bunche.



14. A photograph taken at the beginning of the War of Independence. From right to left: Shiloah, David Ben-Gurion, Brig. Yigael Yadin, Maj. Gen. Ya'akov Dori – first Chief of Staff of the IDF, and Brig. Yigal Allon.



15. Reuven Shiloah and Moshe Dayan were close friends from the time of the Second World War, when Shiloah offered the wounded Dayan a job setting up 'the Moshe Dayan network' for actions behind enemy lines in case of a German invasion of Palestine. Later the two men met frequently during the secret talks with King Abdullah, and later too, during the last stages of Shiloah's life, when he was involved in creating the Peripheral Alliance and in relations with NATO.



16. King Abdullah, with whom Shiloah and Dayan met in an ultimately futile effort to forge a peace agreement between Israel and Jordan.



17. Gen. Walter Bedell-Smith, head of the CIA 1950–52, during the period when agreements were reached on cooperation with the Mossad, headed at that time by Shiloah. The two met frequently when Shiloah was posted as Minister to the Israeli Embassy

in Washington. Bedell-Smith was a true friend of Israel and of Ben-Gurion, whom he met during the Second World War when he was serving as Gen. Eisenhower's Chief of Staff in the European theater.



James (Jim) Angleton was one of the heads of the CIA and one of Israel's staunchest supporters in the 'Company'. He was one of the first intelligence officials to set up ties between the American secret services and those of Israel, through his contacts with Reuven Shiloah, Teddy Kollek and others. Speaking of Shiloah, Angleton said, 'It was a privilege to have known him'. The feelings of deep friendship for Angleton among his friends in Israel never abated, either after his ousters from the CIA or after his death.

18. (top) With Shiloah (*left*) and Memi De Shalit (*right*) in Eilat.



19. (bottom) With Shiloah and Teddy Kollek (*at the edge of the picture on the right*), during a tour of the United States.



20. (top right) Angleton shortly before his death.



21. (bottom right) The plaque installed by his friends in Israel in the 'Jim Angleton Corner' in the park adjoining the King David Hotel in Jerusalem.



22. Allen Dulles was Walter Bedell-Smith's deputy and later his successor at the CIA. He was privy to the establishment of the relations with the Mossad and followed the tradition of friendship towards Israel begun by Bedell-Smith – unlike his more famous brother, John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State in the Eisenhower Administration, whose friendship and admiration for Israel shifted with every attempt made by the US to improve relations with Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser, or with other Arab leaders.



23. Haim (Vivian) Herzog set up the Intelligence Department of the IDF in its first years, in close cooperation with Shiloah, who set up the Mossad and stood at the head of the Israeli intelligence community. Herzog completed the cycle when he was appointed Head of the IDF Intelligence Branch shortly before Shiloah's death.



24. UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. From Israel's point of view he was the most negative element in the entire series of events leading up to the withdrawal of the IDF from Sinai after the Sinai Campaign of 1956. He did whatever he could to reinstate Nasser after his humiliating defeat and felt it was his duty to punish Israel for taking military action against the Egyptian ruler. In memoranda to Abba Eban, Ben-Gurion described him as 'a fickle man of intrigue and a dyed-in-the-wool hater of Israel'.



25. Philip Klutznik, President of B'nai Brith, and first Chairman of the 'Presidents' Club' at its establishment in 1954. Played an important role in the diplomatic campaign that preceded Israel's withdrawal from Sinai in 1956–57. Moshe Sharett described him in his diaries as follows: 'A new star has risen in the skies of American Jewry... Reuven Shiloah has close ties with him, and is investing much time and effort to "educate" him.'



During the hectic time of the creation of the Mossad, the talks with King Abdullah, and the negotiations at the Armistice Talks at Rhodes and the Conciliation talks at Lausanne, Reuven Shiloah 'dropped in' on the special session of the UN General Assembly in Paris in October 1948.

26. (top) Shiloah with Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett (*third from left*) and Israel Ambassador to the UN, Abba Eban (*third from right*).



27. (bottom) Shiloah and Abba Eban (*on the right*) with Gideon Raphael (*seated second from left*) and Moshe Tov and Cy Kenan, founder of the Israeli lobby in Washington, AIPAC.



28. (top left) Asher (Arthur) Ben-Nathan – head of operations in the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry, the first metamorphosis of the Mossad. Ben Nathan was a close friend and retained his admiration for Shiloah despite the bitter conflict between them over the so-called ‘spies’ rebellion’.



29. (top right) While he was serving as Deputy Minister of Defense, Shimon Peres worked closely with Reuven Shiloah in their efforts to integrate Israel into the diplomatic and security arrangements of western Europe.



30, 31. Teddy Kollek (bottom left) began his career as Shiloah’s assistant, and later as his colleague, from the early 1940s onward. Together with Ehud Avriel (bottom right) they were a trio who tried to find a balance between their great admiration for

Ben-Gurion and their respect and fondness for Sharett, their vulnerable, anguished teacher.



32. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion with his three advisors/assistants in the 1950s – his ‘contractors’ for special missions, operations and initiatives: (from right to left) Ehud Avriel, Memi De Shaht, Ben-Gurion and Shiloah.

Another anecdote from Sasson’s stock was the following: ‘One day we brought the King a gift – a crate of oranges, and he replied in kind, giving us a bunch of Jericho bananas. We arrived at Mandelbaum Gate ³⁵ at one o’clock in the morning in the King’s car, which was supposed to go back to Amman that night. We had an arrangement with the police that they were to pick us up at the gate, but for some reason they did not show up. We stood there in the middle of the night, in dark suits, holding a large bunch of bananas. Finally, we hid the bananas under a tree near the building that housed the Joint Jordanian-Israeli Armistice Committee. Reuven said to me, “Let’s talk Hebrew out loud”, and doing so we slowly approached the Israeli checkpoint. We lifted the barrier and walked all the way into town to Ben-Yehudah Street. The following day we asked our representative at the Armistice Committee to get the bananas for us.’

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Contacts with the Jordanian King came to an abrupt end on 20 July 1950 when Abdullah was assassinated at the entrance to the El-Aksa Mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It is hard to speculate how events might have unfolded had he not been killed. On the face of it, it seems highly unlikely that an agreement of any kind would have been signed. The fact was that the lengthy negotiations held with him over a period of three years failed to produce any agreement, either a peace treaty or a non-belligerency pact – or even an agreement on the full implementation of the signed and sealed Armistice Agreement.

Nonetheless, it would be incorrect to regard these talks as totally futile. King Abdullah passed

on to his heir a legacy of special relations with Israel which has been maintained, covertly or overtly, ever since then, based on strong common interests in the continued security of the two countries. Even when hostilities or bloody battles broke out between the two countries, their objectives were relatively limited in scope.

There are other theories about the failure of these talks, about the Jordanian King's true motives at various stages in these contacts and about his difficulties and limitations both internally and externally. There is a 'British version', according to which it was the British who thwarted the King's genuine efforts to reach a peace agreement and later a nonbelligerency pact with Israel. According to this version, the British feared for Abdullah's life and, based on the angry reactions in the Arab world in general and in Jordan in particular, they also feared the backlash that might ensue from a separate Jordanian peace treaty with Israel.

The 'Arab version' is closely related. According to this theory, Abdullah encountered stiff internal resistance to his ideas and he was unable to overcome it, despite his great personal authority as the supreme ruler in a traditional Bedouin society. Three Jordanian prime ministers, either out of deeply-felt personal opposition or out of fear for their lives, preferred to hand in their resignation rather than sign any kind of agreement with Israel.

There is also the 'Israeli version', which suggests that King Abdullah was playing a clever, highly sophisticated game right from the beginning. According to this version, he used his talks with Israel and the threat of a 'separate agreement' as a bargaining card to pressure the other Arab League countries to recognize his annexation of 'the Arab part' of Palestine to Jordan, at least *de facto*. This move was intended also to promote acceptance of the division of control over Jerusalem between Jordan and Israel, and to freeze the call for the internationalization of Jerusalem, as stipulated in the UN General Assembly resolution on the partition of Palestine.

In retrospect, this last version dovetails well with the schedule of the negotiations for a non-belligerency pact as dictated by Abdullah. The announcement of the annexation of the West Bank, including Arab recognition of this move came in April 1950. It was at that time, too, that the non-belligerency talks were suspended. The annexation of what became known as the West Bank was recognized *de facto* by the West on 25 May 1950, together with the publication of a declaration by the Foreign Ministers of the United States, Britain and France recognizing the territorial status quo in the region, and a balancing of the arms flow to Israel and the Arab countries in order for them to be able to defend themselves and play their part in the defense of the entire region. With this double-barreled recognition in hand, King Abdullah was actually free of the need to achieve a separate peace treaty with Israel. All that was left for him to do was to make certain that the Armistice Agreement held fast, particularly in relation to the divided city of Jerusalem – which is exactly what Abdullah was trying to do up to the time of his assassination.

This Machiavellian account of King Abdullah and his motives does perhaps provide, in retrospect, an explanation for his willingness to settle for so little after failing to achieve his more grandiose aims. It would appear that the version closest to the truth involved the British Minister to Jordan, Sir Alec Kirkbride, who served in various capacities in Jordan for 30 years, Reuven Shiloah, who was personally involved in the negotiations right from the very beginning, and, most important of all, Israeli Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, David Ben-Gurion, the man who mapped out Israel's stand in the talks with King Abdullah.

In a conversation that took place a month before the King's assassination, on 28 June 1951, Kirkbride told Moshe Novomiesky, the founder and director of the Potash Works in the Dead Sea, 'People outside of Jordan really have no idea what has been happening there over the past six months. There was a quiet revolution and the capital of Jordan is now controlled by

Palestinians. The country is still called 'Jordan', but it is in fact Palestine, and the King has lost most of his power base.'³⁶ This echoed a similar opinion expressed by Reuven Shiloah in a conversation with the American ambassador to Israel at about that time. During the third phase of the talks with Abdullah, Reuven told the Ambassador that the King's intentions were in the right place, but that they were mostly his own wishful thinking and he did not really have the political clout to realize these intentions which he alone supported.

Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion expressed more or less the same sentiments during the period of the first meetings with Abdullah and his representatives. After the first meeting, he wrote in his diary, 'I am very skeptical about the efficacy of these talks – the old man reminds me of Sokolov'³⁷ Talks softly – with no sense of government in his words, no authority.' After the second meeting a few days later (1 February 1949), Ben-Gurion wrote, 'It is quite clear – the man is useless', and then added a few derogatory words which his editors preferred to leave out of the published manuscript.

It may very well be that these opinions were not the primary motive for Ben-Gurion's skepticism about the talks with Abdullah. At that point, Ben-Gurion felt that his first priorities were elsewhere. First and foremost was putting an end to the war so that the country could prepare to take care of the massive Jewish immigration that was expected in the aftermath of the Second World War. To achieve that aim he was willing to settle for an armistice agreement that left the entire southern Negev, all the way to Eilat, in Israeli hands; prevented the internationalization of Jerusalem and left its western sectors under Israeli rule; and, finally, left Wadi Ara and the Hadera-Afula road in Israeli territory. These, as far as Ben-Gurion was concerned, were vital objectives, the achievement of which would allow the young country to get down to the difficult task of immigrant absorption, integrating the thousands of Jews from diverse communities all over the world into the new Israeli society, and settling the land.

Achieving a peace treaty at that time did not appear to serve as justification for continued military pressure on Jordan in order to wrest more territorial concession from the kingdom. It is more than likely that the major powers would have in any case strongly opposed any further military actions, judging from the American-British ultimatum to Israel to pull its troops out of El-Arish in the northern part of the Sinai Desert near the Gaza Strip. On the other hand, a peace treaty was not worth the cost of concessions on any of the main military gains of the war in Jerusalem and the Negev, or the potential cost of repatriating refugees and thus curtailing the country's ability to absorb the expected masses of Jewish immigrants. Those objectives that had been achieved up to that point, were in fact Ben-Gurion's main aims – no more, no less. He believed that they were the most that could be gained at that time without arousing much more severe opposition in the US or in Britain. Any further pressure on Jordan might endanger the achievements already in hand. The possibility of British military intervention colored all of Ben-Gurion's decisions throughout the War of Independence and beyond. His fear was that all the Jordanian demands on the Negev actually emanated from a British idea of establishing an army base in the Negev, thus posing a constant and very real threat to Israel's security and sovereignty. The joint Anglo-Jordanian military defense pact influenced all of his considerations, causing him to limit the number of objectives he set for himself on the Israeli-Jordanian front.

Israel's diplomatic efforts to secure the achievements of the War of Independence – preventing the ceding of the Negev and Eilat, securing Israel's status in Jerusalem and preventing the return of refugees into Israel – were to continue for many years. The Armistice Agreement with Jordan represented the best that Israel could hope for – taking into account Jordan's status in the Arab world and Palestinian opposition to any kind of separate agreement

with Israel, as well as Israel's readiness to give up hard-won essential gains. Any attempt at further gains would have endangered the very existence of the Kingdom of Jordan, and would have disrupted the special relations between the two neighboring countries, which have served them well to this day.

NOTES

1. This book appeared in 1988, long before the signing of the peace treaty with Jordan in 1994. For many years, from the time of the secret talks with Abdullah, one of the most widely known secrets of Israeli diplomacy was the fact that successive Israeli Prime Ministers – Golda Meir, Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin – as well as other leading Israeli figures like Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres – all met with King Hussein on numerous occasions in search of a formula which would lead to peace. It is not surprising therefore that Jordan was so quick to take Israel up on its peace moves, nor that it is the only Arab country with whom the peace process has developed beyond the paper it was signed on.
2. The border between the two countries is the longest of all of Israel's borders with its Arab neighbors.
3. Ben-Gurion was referring to talks held by Eliyahu Sasson in Paris. He was sent to France at the beginning of July 1948 in order to make contact with representatives of the Arab countries, and met with the Jordanian Minister in London, who came especially to meet Sasson. Afterwards, in Paris during the months of Oct. and Nov., he met with representatives of Jordan in France and England, and with a special envoy sent from Amman.
4. The references here are as follows: (1) Latrun is half way between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, and at the end of the War of Independence was part of a narrow Israeli-held corridor. What Ben-Gurion was suggesting was to widen this corridor to make it more easily defensible; (2) the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, established in 1925 on Mount Scopus, a high ridge overlooking the Judean Desert in the eastern part of Jerusalem, was held by Israeli forces at the end of the war, but was cut off from the rest of the country. Again, what Ben-Gurion was asking was that there should be free access to the University from the rest of Israeli Jerusalem. From 1949 until the Six Day War there was an agreement between Jordan and Israel on access for maintenance purposes only; (3) Gaza, on the Mediterranean, eventually remained in Egyptian hands at the end of the War of Independence, creating what became known as the Gaza Strip – so called because it was indeed an elongated strip of land a few miles wide and some twenty miles long on the Mediterranean just south of the Israeli city of Ashkelon.
5. All the details of the truce arrangements are noted in *Ben-Gurion Diaries*, Vol.3, pp.854–8.
6. The description of the talks is based mostly on the chapter on Jordan in the *Book of Documents*, Vol.3, pp.329–505, as well as on private archives and some details from Ben-Gurion's *War Diaries*.
7. So called because it was a Jordanian salient on the western side of the Jordan River. All the rest of Jordan lies to the east of the river.
8. The mountainous area in the northern sector of the West Bank, today known as 'Samaria', east of the central section of Israel, including the cities of Tulkarm and Nablus. It was invaded by Iraqi forces in May 1948.
9. Two small adjacent towns half way between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, mostly populated by Arabs until they were conquered by the IDF.
10. *The Book of Documents*, Vol.3, document #182, 26 Dec. 1948.
11. *Ibid.*, document #184, 6 Jan. 1949. This question – what was the British stand concerning the success of the talks and had they indeed given up on their concept of excluding the Negev from Israeli sovereignty in order to set up military bases there in the future – was one question among many that have remained open to this day.
12. *The Book of Documents*, Vol.3, document #183, 31 Dec. 1948.
13. Kibbutz Beit Ha-Arava was established in 1939, and became famous for its pioneering successes in growing crops in the saline land surrounding the Dead Sea (by a process of 'washing' the land with sweet water from the Jordan River). It was abandoned, along with the Potash Works, on 20 May 1948, when it could no longer be defended against attacks by the Jordanian Legion.
14. At the end of the war with Jordan, the railway line near Jerusalem was literally on the border, and it was a vital Israeli interest to ensure free and safe passage on that single railway connection to the capital.
15. *Ibid.*, document #184, 6 Jan. 1949.
16. This division into three phases is based on an interview with Eliyahu Sasson, who participated in the third phase.
17. Calling for the establishment of a committee that would make all the necessary arrangements to ensure safe passage on vital road links – the Bethlehem road and the Latrun-Jerusalem road; for a renewal of normal activity in all the institutions of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, and free access to all of them; for free access to the holy places, to cultural institutions and to the cemetery on the Mount of Olives; for a reopening of the water pumping station at Latrun; for the reconnection of the electricity supply to the Old City and a renewal of rail traffic on the Jerusalem line. Of all these issues, only one – concerning the railway line – was actually resolved.
18. *The Book of Documents*, Vol.3, pp.161–3, 2–3 March 1949.
19. *Ibid.*, p.372.
20. *Ibid.*, document #237, 18 March 1949.
21. *Ibid.*, document #248, 23–24 March 1949.
22. This entire affair is recorded in detail in a book by Middle East expert Dan Shifan, *The Jordanian Option*, pp.185–7.
23. Tom Segev, *The Israelis 1949*, p.48, based on *Ben-Gurion's Diaries*, 30 June 1949.
24. Details on this UN decision can be found in *The Book of Documents*, Vol.4, Introduction, p.xii.

25. Ibid., Reuven Shiloah to Moshe Sharett, document #214, 15 Aug. 1949, pp.345–6.
26. According to estimates by Ezra Danin and others, who were in touch with the refugee delegation, there was a chance to reach an agreement on reparations. A leak about these talks coming from the Israeli side aroused the official Arab delegations who scuttled the potential agreement with the refugees, who, in turn, retracted their initial agreement.
27. *The Book of Documents*, Vol.4, document #162, 29 July 1949, pp.264–5.
28. Ibid., Reuven Shiloah to Moshe Sharett, document #214, p.347.
29. Ibid., document #15, pp.33–7, 5 May 1949.
30. In his memoirs, Moshe Dayan mocked Moshe Sharett for doing something that he shouldn't have done at that meeting with the King. 'He corrected the King, telling him that he was mistaken, that China had taken part in the League of Nations. Abdullah repeated his claim, and Sharett, like a schoolteacher facing a recalcitrant pupil, remained adamant. The meeting – and the King's relations with Sharett – were, of course, a lost cause. On the way back home', Dayan relates, 'I asked Sharett what difference it made to him what King Abdullah thinks about China and the League of Nations. He then turned on me in a towering rage: "But China was in the League of Nations"'
31. Ibid., p.89.
32. Mordechai Gazit, 'King Abdullah's Solitariness in his attempts to reach a peace agreement with The People of Israel', *Gesher* 2/111 (Winter 1986).
33. Ibid. The King's proposal included the following details: the treaty would be valid for five years and would be implemented on the territories of the two countries without any adjustments to the borders between them; the two sides would give guarantees in good faith to the UN concerning the safekeeping of the holy places in Jerusalem; there would be talks on special reparations for citizens of Jerusalem for their property; negotiations would be held on the renewal of trade relations, and on opening up Haifa harbor for passage of Jordanian goods; property owners – or their representatives – would be given special permits to cross the border to see to their property rights; joint committees would be set up to discuss problems that would be solved in the peace agreement which would be eventually signed between the two countries.
34. From a private archive.
35. Following the Armistice Agreement, and up to the Six Day War, the Mandelbaum Gate, situated on the border line running through Jerusalem, not far from the Damascus Gate of the Old City, was the only official crossing point between Israel and Jordan for diplomats, UN personnel, or – occasionally – tourists.
36. See Gazit, *Gesher* 2/113, pp.124–5.
37. Nahum Sokolov, writer, journalist, among the leaders of the Zionist movement and President of the World Zionist Executive, 1931–35.

The Covert Connection with the United States

The ceremony inaugurating a newly-planted forest in the Jerusalem hills named after one of the heads of the CIA, James Angleton, which took place in November 1987, eight months after his death, was an extraordinary event in the annals of US-Israeli relations. This ceremony lifted a tiny corner of the veil of secrecy that shrouded Israel's relationship with the CIA in the past, a relationship that was not a very well-kept secret, but which official Israel has been at pains, to this day, to keep as vague as possible. Thus it was that the Israeli press – perhaps for the first time without the cover of quoting 'foreign sources' – publicized the fact that American super-spy Jim Angleton was one of the first people to forge the special relations between the secret services of Israel and the United States. The Israelis who participated in the ceremony revealed to local journalists facts that had already been published in many books in America and elsewhere, but not in Israel, namely that in the beginning of the 1950s, when America was afraid that the USSR was exploiting the mass emigration of Jews from eastern Europe in order to plant secret agents in Israel, Angleton met with Teddy Kollek and through him, established deep personal friendships with the heads of the Israeli secret services, in order to try to head off this potential hazard.

The two ceremonies – the tree-planting in the Jerusalem suburb of Mevasseret Ziyyon, and the dedication of the 'Jim Angleton Corner' near the King David Hotel in town, next to the spot where he used to enjoy the view of the Old City of Jerusalem during his visits in the 1950s – were both attended by his family, a few American friends and many Israeli friends, all of whom had formed a non-profit society expressly for this purpose. It was a moving occasion that proved that Israel does not forget its friends after their death, and James Angleton, who was a legend in his lifetime, was indeed one of the country's most dedicated and ardent friends. The memorial ceremonies in Israel were attended by everyone who counts in the Israeli intelligence establishment. Only a few of those who had been heads of the Mossad or Army intelligence were actually mentioned by name. One person, who was no longer alive, was not mentioned at all among those involved in the warm relationship between Israel and Angleton and his superiors in the CIA – Reuven Shiloah. This, despite the fact that Angleton himself had once said about Shiloah, that 'it was a special privilege to have known him'. Shiloah was the man who laid the foundations for this special relationship; he was the man who dreamt it up to begin with and made it happen, through tireless efforts and innumerable disappointments and setbacks. According to many of those who worked with him, Shiloah was the man responsible for the Israeli intelligence services' positive image among the various secret services around the world – not only in America.

Contacts with the Americans on intelligence issues began when Reuven Shiloah – in 1947, before the official establishment of the state, and in 1948–49, immediately after – started looking for ways to renew his contacts with people from the CIA’s wartime forerunner, the OSS, whom he had met in Cairo and in Bari concerning various operations in Europe, and a short while after the war in Paris and in London as well, in relation to the search for Nazi criminals, and intelligence on the Middle East.

There had been no follow-up to these wartime meetings. After the war, his American acquaintances regarded Israel with reservation and not a little suspicion, and rejected all of Shiloah’s proposals for cooperation. The American administration was highly critical of Israeli policy on the three main issues at stake following Israel’s War of Independence: establishing international control over Jerusalem in accordance with the renewed UN resolution of 11 December 1948, the return of the refugees in accordance with that same resolution which recognized the refugees’ right either to go back to their former homes or remain where they were and receive compensation. Beyond these two issues, there was also the shadow cast by American support for Arab claims to the southern Negev to ensure territorial continuity between Jordan and Egypt. Growing American criticism of Israel’s position on these issues caused Israel’s leaders to dig in and take hard-line positions on all three demands.

Apart from the differences of opinion on the progress of the peace process, various elements inside the American administration had reservations, if not downright suspicions, about Israel’s policy of ‘neutrality’ – even under its alternate title of ‘non-alignment’. It was regarded in Washington as ‘sitting on the fence’ between the two major powers. American administration officials were convinced that every government institution in Israel, in the IDF and everywhere else was rife with pro-Soviet left-wingers, or even card-carrying Communists. So entrenched was this feeling that members of the left-wing youth movement, Ha-Shomer Ha-Tsa’ir, were refused visas to visit the United States. Among the Mapai leadership there were parallel reservations about the relationship with the United States, particularly following American pressures on Israel on these issues. America was seen at the time as a superpower that wanted to ‘tear away the Negev and Jerusalem’, and flood Israel with Arab refugees, at the very time that the newly-established state was staggering under the burden of absorbing massive waves of Jewish immigration from Europe and the Arab countries.

Attempts to generate trust among the heads of the CIA during those years of the Cold War, and the growing polarization between the USA and the USSR, required a courageous stand against the prevailing views, both in the US and among the Israeli leadership. Reuven Shiloah was indefatigable in this respect and never allowed disappointments or setbacks to steer him off course. Despite all the difficulties, he kept trying repeatedly. His perseverance finally paid off when the hoped-for contact was eventually established with the help of James Angleton – the legendary CIA operative, about whose 31 years in the ‘Company’, and about whose deep respect for and friendship with Israel, much has been written. It was he, more than any other American, who helped Israel find its way to the inner circles of American intelligence.

The beginning of this relationship has been described in many different ways. David Martin, in his book *Wilderness of Mirrors*, claims that the special contact began in the final stages of the Second World War, at the end of 1944, when Angleton was head of OSS counterintelligence in Italy. A short while after the German surrender, the OSS was dismantled. From that time until the creation of the CIA in 1947, the vacuum was filled by various local intelligence services. In Italy this service was known as the SSU – the Strategic Services Unit, and that was where Angleton served at the time.

‘Compared to all his other sources, perhaps the most valuable source that Angleton had in Italy was the Jewish underground organization¹ that oversaw the exodus of Holocaust survivors through Italy to Palestine... Angleton won their trust and established a rapport that ultimately gave him special status in the new State of Israel.’ One of Angleton’s trusted friends, Teddy Kollek, explained this connection in almost mystical terms: ‘He found in Israel more faith and more determination to act upon this faith than anywhere else in the world.’

Another American who worked with Angleton on Israeli matters supplied a much more pragmatic explanation. Angleton believed that Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union to Israel could be a potential conduit for the KGB to send spies out to the Middle East, and even to the United States. The KGB was in a perfect maneuvering position at that time, since it could blackmail Jews by helping them leave the USSR in return for their consent to carry out espionage assignments, threatening immediate retaliation against family members left behind if they dared to renege on their part of the deal. United in their objective to expel the Russian agents, the Israelis divulged their sources behind the Iron Curtain to Angleton. Angleton received sensational documents from these sources.

According to another version, the special contacts with American intelligence were initiated in Israel by the IDF’s Intelligence Branch, headed by Colonel Haim Herzog, and later in Washington when Herzog was Military Attaché at the Israeli Embassy there – all in close collaboration with Reuven Shiloah² ‘The governments of Israel and the United States agreed on an exchange of intelligence secrets, and most importantly for Israel, the CIA and the FBI agreed to supply state-of-the-art equipment, including highly advanced code-cracking computers, and to train a select group of Israeli officers in their use’, Steven writes. ‘It was Shiloah’s and Herzog’s duty to evaluate this material and be responsible for the training program and in fact, to run Israeli intelligence for a short while from Washington. A great many KGB agents passed through the Soviet Embassy in Tel Aviv working against Israeli interests around the world. At the height of the Cold War, this became an area of common interest for the Israelis and the Americans, which later turned into a treaty that developed into the special relationship that Israel could count on for many years to come.’

Haim Herzog relates that Nehemiya Argov, Ben-Gurion’s military adjutant, and Reuven Shiloah brought Ben-Gurion to the Intelligence Branch for a visit during the early months of 1949. ‘Ben-Gurion spent an entire day with us. He asked how much I needed for the intelligence budget. I told him \$200,000, and he gave me a note to David Horowitz, then Director-General of the Minister of Finance, to give me \$200,000. Dolek brought the sum down to \$100,000, but this was the first big leap. We sent a delegation to America to purchase sophisticated equipment for the intelligence services. Reuven Shiloah helped me a great deal in all this.’

Foreign sources tell more or less the same story about those early beginnings. According to them, Shiloah set up an office where he interrogated Jews from eastern Europe. Shiloah managed to persuade the Americans that the State of Israel could be of assistance to them in their fight against Communist agents, and assured them that the country would never become a part of the Eastern Bloc. On the contrary, he claimed, Israel could be used to help gather vital information on Eastern Bloc countries.

Teddy Kollek, who served as advisor in the Israeli Embassy in Washington from 1950 to 1952, recalls that ‘the people we talked to were not terribly enthusiastic at first. It took a long time until they accepted our offers of cooperation. It was only in 1950, while I was in Washington, that the whole thing began to develop, and Reuven Shiloah came and sewed up what he had been talking about and trying to do for years.’

The contacts with the CIA was helped along by Fred Gronich, later the representative of the American Filmmakers' Association' in London. According to Kollek, 'he came to Israel during the War of Independence under the name "Fred Harris". He had the rank of lieutenant-colonel in the US Army, and was involved in espionage and intelligence. He was prohibited from leaving the US for fear that the Russians would kidnap him. Nevertheless – he volunteered and served in Israel for quite a long time. He helped former Chief of Staff Haim Laskov a great deal on matters relating to organization and training in the IDF.'³

In May 1951, Ben-Gurion came to the United States to launch the campaign for Israel Bonds. This was a festive and highly emotional visit, particularly for American Jewry, even though the trip was defined as a private visit. Ben-Gurion met privately with President Truman and gave him a gift of a Hanukkah candelabrum.⁴ He also visited West Point and laid a wreath on the grave of Brigadier-General Mickey Marcus, who was killed in action in Israel during the War of Independence. Among others he also met with an American friend from the latter part of the Second World War – Walter Bedell-Smith, who at that time was the head of the CIA.

It was Jim Angleton who arranged this meeting which took place over lunch at CIA offices, and was attended by Allen Dulles, Bedell-Smith's deputy and successor as head of the CIA. Following this meeting, Shiloah was called in to Washington to determine the relationship with the Agency in the future. During those years, the special relationship with the CIA was a counter to the somewhat reserved attitude toward Israel in the State Department. It was a major break in the Administration's stand-offish attitude toward Israel.

It is by now an open secret that it was Israel that conveyed to the United States the text of Khrushchev's historic speech at the 20th Conference of the Communist Party in the USSR, on 24 February 1956, a speech that for the first time revealed in public the horrors of the Stalinist regime. The speech was published in *The New York Times* on 4 June of that year.⁵ Angleton was against publicizing the speech. He was afraid that it would lead to a premature uprising in eastern Europe which Khrushchev would successfully quash, at the very same time that the United States was preparing cadres for an uprising in Hungary. All of these developments in fact occurred exactly as Angleton had predicted they would.

In November 1974, Angleton, then head of the Counterintelligence Department, was fired from the CIA by the head of the Agency, William Colby, following the discovery of internal espionage and illegal wiretappings of American citizens inside the US, which were eventually investigated by Congress. According to one version of the affair which appeared in the press, Angleton was responsible for the internal wiretappings because of his suspicions concerning real or imaginary 'moles' inside the CIA, which, according to his friends in the Agency, had reached pathological proportions. It was suggested too, that he was fired because of criticism he leveled against the policy of detente initiated by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Angleton plays a leading role in a controversial book named *Spycatcher*, written by a former British intelligence agent, Peter Wright. Wright claims that Angleton jealously guarded the contacts between the CIA and the Mossad as his own private turf, and that until the day he left the Agency, he did not allow anyone else to deal with these special relations.⁶

In Martin's book. *The Wilderness of Mirrors*, Angleton is described in a most picturesque manner, as an outstanding personal example to those dealing in 'the dark side of espionage'. According to the author, this is the description of a man caught up and hopelessly lost in a hall of reflecting mirrors where human figures are reflected endlessly, back and front, *ad infinitum*.

Angleton was a man of contrasts, graduating in English literature and Law from Yale, devoted to calm, soothing hobbies – growing orchids and fishing – and at the same time an avid

poker player and connoisseur of thoroughbred racing horses. His Israeli friends also tell of his enthusiasm for birdwatching, and of the cufflinks in iron and gold that he engraved for them. He was also a super-spy, with a highly conspiratorial and suspicious turn of mind and instinctive wariness. He was an obsessive anti-Communist, who regarded every message from 'behind the Curtain' that might be of some benefit to the Russians as an intelligence ploy. For example, he simply did not believe the information concerning the Sino-Soviet rift. One of the explanations given for that was his failure to uncover Soviet super-spy Kim Philby, who served in Washington during the early 1950s. Martin describes Angleton as a paradigm of the entire CIA, in which he served for over thirty years – a scorpion stinging itself in the back and falling victim to the convoluted machinations of espionage and counter-intelligence, running real and imagined double agents.⁷

'Jim's initial attitude toward us was very wary, but later he became a devoted admirer of Israel from an American standpoint', says Memi De Shalit, who first met Angleton during the 1950s when he served at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, and maintained contact with him for many years afterwards. 'Angleton, who was a rabid anti-Communist, changed his attitude toward us when he began to get to know people here, and gradually grew stronger in his conviction that there was no danger of the State of Israel turning Communist.' He had great admiration for the courage displayed by the leaders of the country and for its achievements.

The memorial ceremony in honor of Angleton was attended by former heads of the Mossad Me'ir Amit, Zvi Zamir, Yitzhak Hofi, former heads of Army Intelligence Aharon Yariv, Shlomo Gazit, Binyamin Gibli, and former heads of the GSS Avraham Ahituv and Amos Manor. Among the many friends who were there were former president of the State of Israel Yitzhak Navon, the long-time mayor of Jerusalem Teddy Kollek, and many others who have since died – among them Ezra Danin, Ehud Avriel and of course, Reuven Shiloah, with whom he worked very closely during the first years of the establishment of his contacts with Israeli intelligence circles. Shiloah regarded Angleton as a non-Jew that he was very interested in bringing closer both to himself and to the state. He played an important part in Shiloah's life and was regarded by him as a true personal friend. Angleton, for his part, greatly admired Shiloah for his work, and some of their mutual acquaintances even saw many similarities in their fanatical, insular and suspicious attitude toward their work and the rules of secrecy.

Today, when we are tied to all parts of the American administration with a thousand different threads, this network of relationships seems natural', related Ehud Avriel. 'But when Reuven suggested setting up intelligence and espionage contacts with the Americans, our orientation was a not at all American. What is now taken for granted by every child in Israel was then a very problematic issue.' The left-wing parties Mapam and Ahdut Ha-Avoda were strongly opposed to any American aid of any kind. (The American loan is a form of enslavement', Mapam leaders said in reaction to the American funds lent to the country in desperately needed foreign currency to save the country from bankruptcy.) Some of the Mapai leadership were also slow in relinquishing their traditional 'neutrality' of the early years of the state. Shiloah was different in this respect right from the beginning. He doggedly set out to achieve this change in attitude, believing that it would give the country tremendous strength, and would be 'a chink in the American wall of coldness towards us', Avriel recalled. 'In so doing he laid down the foundations for our relationship with the United States.'

According to foreign reports, these contacts were not limited only to the United States. A CIA document found by the Iranians in the American Embassy in Teheran and later published in full, gives a much broader picture of the relations with the Mossad.⁸ The captured document

states, among other things that 'the Mossad has contacts with many of the security and intelligence organizations in the world ... the Mossad, in cooperation with the GSS, maintains contacts with foreign security services through membership in the 'Kilowatt' organization, devoted to battling Arab terrorism. Its members are the espionage services of Italy, Belgium, West Germany, Britain, Luxembourg, Holland, Switzerland, Denmark, France, Canada, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, and Israel. The Israelis also have informal contacts with other European countries, such as Spain, Portugal, and Austria, which are also, for the most part, dedicated to the prevention of Arab terrorism... Israel's contacts in Africa differed from one country to the other... Intelligence activities in Africa were carried out under the cover of military or political training, arms sales, and development and aid projects... Despite the breaking off of diplomatic relations the Israelis continue to maintain good intelligence contacts with some of the secret services in Africa, among others with the Kenyan service. In central Africa the Israelis are still active in Zaire ... It has also been revealed that Israel aided Ghana in setting up its Army Intelligence. In the southern part of the continent Israel maintains good relations with the security and intelligence community in South Africa. The Israelis have been very active in Latin America... For some time now Israel has been operating in East Asia too. Its security services gave intelligence training to the government of Taiwan, and maintain current contacts there. Israel also has relations with Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, and South Korea, based mostly on exchange of information on terrorism. The Mossad's regional center in Asia is in Singapore... Indonesia, as a Moslem nation, does not have diplomatic relations with Israel, therefore the Mossad's relations with this country are very discreet.'

As for the 'Peripheral Alliance', the captured CIA report says that, 'for years the Israelis tried to break the Arab stranglehold around Israel by getting strongly involved and setting up working relations with non-Moslem Arab countries. In 1958 a tripartite organization called 'Trident' was set up by the Mossad together with the Turkish national security services, and with the Iranian National Organization for Intelligence. Ever since this tripartite agreement was reached, the Mossad's bilateral relations with each one of these countries were considerably strengthened.'

This issue was to be on Shiloah's agenda even after his departure for Washington in September 1953. Until then, during the six long months that passed from the time of his final resignation from intelligence work until his move to Washington, he underwent a period of crisis and recuperation. He went to Switzerland for a few weeks for a vacation and a rest, for the first – and last – time in his life. This was, conceivably, the worst crisis of his career. He had been through many crises before, but this time he was both physically injured as a result of the car accident and spiritually crushed, as a result of his forced removal from his work in close proximity with the leaders of the state, Ben-Gurion and Sharett, with whom he had worked for so many years.

His move to Washington opened a new chapter. It was to be as difficult and as full of disappointments as other periods in his life, but it was marked equally by successes in the long term. In many ways, it was during this time that Reuven Shiloah's unique conception of Israel's status and sources of strength in the international arena reached full maturity. While in Washington he was to emphasize the need to turn Israel into a strategic ally for the United States, and he found many senior officials in the administration who agreed with him. In this thinking he was, once again, far ahead of his time. In Washington he would take the first steps toward the creation of the 'Peripheral Alliance', which was his last major diplomatic effort and a cornerstone of Israel's diplomatic policy for years to come, as an issue of great intrinsic importance as well as a way of strengthening the strategic alliance with the United States.

NOTES

1. The reference is probably to the *Ha-Briha* Organization.
2. According to *The Spymasters of Israel*, by Stewart Steven, p.27.
3. Fred Harris is mentioned in *Ben-Gurion's Diaries* a number of times. Once on 4 Jan. 1949 (Vol,3, pp.927–8), as the person who gave Ben-Gurion an overall evaluation about the problems of the IDF and its officers. He was very critical of the enormous inefficiency in the use of human resources in the army: 'He gave me an evaluation of regimental and Front commanders, and not one of the Front commanders was suited for the position.' Regimental commanders received higher marks, but needed more training: 'The best soldier is Laskov ... Moshe Dayan is excellent, promises a great deal but also needs a great deal more training ... Yigael Yadin – brilliant, but relies too heavily on his ability to improvise, and doesn't work things out to the end.' All very perceptive observations that actually proved to be very accurate over the years.
4. The special eight-candle candelabrum, known in Hebrew as a *hanukkiyah*, which is used during the festival of Hanukkah.
5. The story of how Israel obtained the speech from an official of the Polish Communist Party appeared in a book written by a former head of the CIA, Richard Helms, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*.
6. Peter Wright, *Spycatcher: The Candid Autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer* (NY: Viking 1987) p.347.
7. Helms, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, p.57. Martin tells of a meeting that Kollek held with Angleton and Philby in the United States in 1949. Kollek told Angleton of Philby's left-wing orientation while he was in Vienna during the late 1930s, and said that he had attended Philby's wedding to the Communist Litzi Friedman in Vienna. But Angleton did not suspect Philby in any way, and Philby himself mocked Angleton for that in his writings later. This was one of Angleton's more telling failures, which haunted him for many years.
8. Zmora Bitan, *The CIA Report on the Intelligence and Security Services of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Erez Publications 1982). Translated into Hebrew and edited by Yossi Melman, pp.56–8.

PART FOUR
THE TERRIBLE FIFTIES

Adjusting and Adapting

Arriving in Washington did not mean that Reuven Shiloah could now relax. For him it was like moving from one battlefield to another, from one front line to the next. He did so of his own choice. From the mid-1940s he had always regarded the United States as the front line of Israel's diplomacy, and when he resigned from intelligence work, he asked to be sent to Washington. He was convinced that he would be able to establish good working relations with Israeli Ambassador Abba Eban – as indeed was the case, after a period of adjustment that was far from easy for both men.

That was not the only difficulty. Reuven Shiloah's term as Minister in Washington – from September 1953 to August 1957 – spanned much of what became known in American-Israeli relations as the 'Terrible Fifties', marked by repeated crises and disappointments. Relations between the two countries became much worse before they began to improve once again toward the end of Shiloah's stay in the United States. Even afterwards the two countries had many ups and downs in their relationship before they found the way that eventually led, in the 1960s and the 1970s, to the 'special relations' that prevail today and to the enormous military and economic aid that has poured into Israel since then.

The situation facing Shiloah upon his arrival in the United States, however, was totally different. American economic aid to Israel was limited but was nevertheless vital to the continuing strength of the impoverished young state. The first years of statehood were extremely difficult with food rationing and a dire shortage of essentials, as unprecedented waves of immigration flooded the country from all over the world. Under these circumstances US economic aid was of the utmost importance. This American generosity on the humanitarian level, did not extend, however, to the military and diplomatic spheres, either in relation to day-to-day security in Israel, which was in a critical state, or in relation to the long-range question of resolving the Israel-Arab conflict. On these issues, Israel's representatives in Washington in the early 1950s found themselves in a perpetual uphill battle against mainstream American Mid-East policies.

It was during Shiloah's term of office in Washington that the greatest crisis in the two countries' relationship erupted – the Sinai Campaign and the events surrounding Israel's forced evacuation of the territories conquered during that brief war.¹ It was only after the issue of the pullback from Sinai was resolved that the first signs of an improvement in the relationship between Israel and the US could be discerned. All of this, however, was preceded in Israel by feelings of isolation, fear and a growing disappointment in all its dealings with the US. During

these years, the *fedayeen* (the name given at that time to Arab terrorist organizations) stepped up their infiltration and terrorist raids on border settlements, striking even at heavily populated areas in the center of the country. The IDF responded with a series of retaliatory raids across Israel's borders into Jordan's West Bank and Gaza, which were regularly condemned by the UN Observers' Force and by the Security Council. The United States gave its full support to this one-sided attitude on the part of the UN.

Israel's requests for defensive weapons were continuously rejected, as were its requests for security guarantees – both of which were at the very core of Israel's diplomatic and information activities during 1954–56. These two objectives were targeted by the two prime ministers who served during those years – David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett. Israel's representatives in Washington – Ambassador Abba Eban and Minister Reuven Shiloah – labored long and hard to try to achieve them, but to no avail. At that time, the United States adopted a policy of courting the Arab countries in order to integrate them into the West's plans for the defense of the Middle East – a diplomatic effort that ultimately ended in total failure. The Arab countries, for their part, were deeply involved in enlarging their armies and securing arms to enhance their military capabilities, the high point of which was what became known as the 'Egyptian-Czech arms deal' of September 1955, which was in fact an Egyptian-Russian arms deal.

These were the days of a Republican administration in the US, headed by President Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who were seeking inroads to the Arab world. As far as American policymakers were concerned, the Arab countries were highly desirable partners for the kind of strategic partnership Dulles had in mind, while Israel, on the other hand, was regarded as a nuisance, an unwelcome hitchhiker. Israel was being called upon at that time to endorse the American peace plan for the Middle East, which stipulated severing the Negev from Israel in accordance with the idea of dividing Israel's southern regions into three triangles – Israeli to the north, Jordanian to the east, and Egyptian to the west, converging at one 'kissing point', as it was called in the diplomatic jargon of the time – in order to establish territorial contiguity between Jordan and Egypt, without, so it was claimed, blocking Israel's land link with its southern port city of Eilat. The American plan also called for the repatriation of tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees to the Negev as part of the overall solution to the refugee problem.

This was the unappetizing brew Reuven Shiloah was cast into when he arrived in Washington in September 1953 – the first year of the Eisenhower administration, with the major upheavals it brought in its wake to the American government. After his extensive experience in dealing with British Mandatory Palestine, and particularly during the Second World War, Shiloah was used to snubs aimed at Israel. He was accustomed to setting in motion indefatigable efforts to find side roads and detours when the main roads to support and progress were blocked to Israel and the Zionist movement. The situation in the US capital suited Reuven Shiloah, who had learned well how to swim against the current and to 'win the hearts' – as he called it – of friends, allies and partners who could be helpful. In Washington, Reuven Shiloah was to revert to his old ways – establishing contacts with highly placed officials in order to make Israel an integral part of American policies, rather than an outsider or an obstacle. Given the circumstances at that time, this was a daunting and complex diplomatic challenge.

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A convenient starting point for this chapter in the story of American-Israeli relations is the initiative of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles who, in May 1953, went on a study tour of the

Middle East and Asia. Upon his return to the United States, and based on his findings in the region, he fashioned a new American policy for these regions. His report concluded that

most of the peoples of the Middle East and Southeast Asia are very interested in achieving political independence for themselves and for others. They are deeply suspicious of the colonial powers. The United States is also regarded with suspicion since, as they see it, the NATO Alliance makes it necessary for us to protect or reinstate the traditional colonial interests of our allies.²

This point of view persuaded the Republican administration to try to base its plans for regional defense on the participation of countries in the region, mainly Egypt – the largest and most important of the Arab countries. Egypt, however, rejected the American overtures just as it had earlier rejected British regional defense plans.³

The Americans learned the lesson of these failures and decided to take the initiative in a different way. Their first and most important move was to force the British to abandon their claim on the Suez Canal Zone and evacuate the area. The Americans believed this signal achievement on behalf of Egyptian nationalism – which would be credited entirely to American diplomacy – would persuade the Egyptian ruler to take part in an American-sponsored plan for a Middle East regional defense organization. And indeed, on 27 July 1954, following massive diplomatic pressure from the United States, Britain finally agreed to relinquish its control over the Suez Canal.

The Americans, however, did not have the patience to wait for this move to mature. Either because they felt the need to move quickly, or as a way of forcing Nasser's hand, they actually began setting up their proposed regional defense organization even before Nasser responded to their suggestion. The organization was based on a mutual defense pact between Turkey, Pakistan and Iraq, and soon after it was officially launched, in the beginning of 1954, it became known as the 'Baghdad Treaty'. Egypt never forgave Dulles for this blow to its prestige as the leading country in the Arab world, with which everyone needed to consult before making any major policy move in the Middle East. This was the beginning of the split between the US and Egypt that eventually led to Egypt's orientation toward the Soviet Union. It was the kind of insult to national pride that is unforgivable in the Middle East.

Reuven identified these changes in American Mid-East policies, and the transfer of chief power broker status in the region from Britain to the United States. He wrote a long and detailed letter on these issues to Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett.⁴ A short time after the Suez agreement was signed, Shiloah wrote to Teddy Kollek and Ya'akov Herzog about the new developments in American policies:⁵

The government of the United States is taking an anti-colonial stand in order to prevent Soviet penetration into the area and in order to strengthen regional governments and win them over to the West ... that's why it is willing to pressure its allies, England and France, to give up vital interests ... The oil deal with Iran, the Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the future of the Suez, the new French policy toward North Africa, are all-important stations along the way to easing tensions between the Middle East and the United States ... The people in the Middle East branch of the State Department will demand the continuation of policies that play down the friendly relations between the US and Israel and stress American friendship toward the Arabs, that promise quiet along the borders and a cessation of open conflicts in the UN and other diplomatic arenas, and keep at bay the

need to take a definite stand on the Israel-Arab problem ... [policies aimed at] establishing contacts with [each of the countries in the region] through financial and military aid, and gradually, one by one, bringing the countries in the region into the Turkish-Irani organization and eroding the strength of the Arab League as a defense framework.

Shiloah believed that given these developing trends in American foreign policy, the only way to improve Israel's standing was to propose an 'affirmative plan' that would be acceptable to the Republican administration, and would take into account its interests and plans for the future.

We must put together a clear plan that includes at the very least an affirmative positive proposal for organizing the defense needs of the region, taking into account the justified desires and needs of the Arab countries, as well as a solution to the refugee problem. Without making a real contribution to the solution of these three problems we will not be given a hearing in America, either in Congress or in the Administration ... We must not let the Administration feel that we are on a collision course with American and Western security interests ... It is my best judgment that any angle of explanation or PR that we embrace must make some sort of positive gesture in relation to the security interests of the United States and the West. A policy that is only negative in content will not, under any circumstances, win any serious support, either in public opinion, in the press, among the American leadership, or even among Jewish and Zionist communities.⁶

Even though he had no chance of winning approval for his idea in the Israeli government, Shiloah was to return consistently to this concept of proposing an 'affirmative plan' that could be integrated into American policies, rather than attempting to contest them or reject them out of hand. This was the way he worked and the way he believed things should be done. He was totally convinced of the need for a complete integration of interests between Israel and the United States – to the point where he rejected outright any move that might in any way endanger this kind of reciprocal cooperation.

Thus, for example, both Abba Eban and Reuven Shiloah are well remembered for their opposition to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Nationalist China which, in the 1950s, was like a red rag to a bull for the Republican administration. Shiloah strenuously advocated making every effort to dispel any doubts about Israel's loyalty to the Free World, and avoid annoying those people whom Israel was trying so hard to win over. Both Eban and Shiloah were harshly criticized for their position on this issue, among others, by David HaCohen, who had been the harbinger of the relations with China.⁷

Shiloah looked for ways to prove to well-placed and influential Americans – Jews and non-Jews alike – that Israel could be 'a strategic asset' for the United States and, consequently, should be included in the West's American-led defense plans for the Middle East, and should not oppose them itself, even if these plans meant that the Arab countries would be provided with arms – as long as Israel received arms shipments as well, as part of an overall plan.

Shiloah was one of the only people in the top echelons of the Israeli government who held this view. His terms of reference were, in fact, ahead of their time. The 1950s were years of fear and insecurity in Israel. At the core of Israel's diplomatic efforts were protests against the 'arming of the Arab countries' and cautioning against the abandonment of the State of Israel – while at the same time attempting to prove the justice of its ways as a young country defending itself against terrorist infiltration and murder, even as it absorbed hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors. Israel's position and demands for the support of all people of good

conscience and good will were based on claims of morality and justice, not on *realpolitik* – which worked against Israel and in favor of the Arab orientation of big power policies in the Middle East. In the context of this desperate appeal for justice, championed primarily by Foreign Minister Sharett and supported by Ben-Gurion, Shiloah's more 'practical' concepts, based on issues of national interest and power bases, seemed unrealistic.

In addition, these were the first years of Israeli overtures to Europe (particularly France) on issues of foreign and defense policies. Thus for the mainstream of Israeli foreign policy, *realpolitik* meant focusing on relations with Paris and Bonn – not Washington. It was only in the 1960s that the shift in diplomatic and security orientation toward America would take place, as the United States gradually replaced the European countries as Israel's primary source of arms – a process that reached its peak during the War of Attrition along the Suez Canal that preceded the Yom Kippur War, and from the Yom Kippur War to the present day. Israel's status as a 'strategic asset' for the United States, so long sought by Shiloah, became common diplomatic parlance only in the 1970s.

Upon his return to Jerusalem in September 1957, Reuven joined in the efforts to approach Europe that were led primarily by the Ministry of Defense. He nevertheless attempted to find the common denominator between these two diplomatic approaches – toward the United States on the one hand and Europe on the other – by seeking ways to include Israel in the American-led NATO alliance and by embarking on efforts to establish what became known as the 'Peripheral Alliance', with the blessings of both the United States and the countries of western Europe. A crucial turning point in this shift of orientation, which Shiloah labored so hard to achieve, was the Iraqi revolution of 14 July 1958 which brought down the reigning Hashemite kingdom and replaced it with a Marxist-oriented regime. The West lost what had been regarded as a bastion of pro-western moderation, and the linchpin of its defense plans for the region. The success of this revolution together with the rise of Nasser in Egypt – which brought in its wake a radical expansion of Soviet influence in the area – created a profound shift – in Israel's favor – in the minds and actions of policy-makers in London and Washington.

NOTES

1. In Israeli history, the 1956 war in the Sinai Desert is known as the 'sinai Campaign'. The invasion of the Suez Canal Zone by the French and the British, which took place concurrently, is known as the 'suez War'. Reference here to Israeli as opposed to Franco-British activities at this time, will follow this same distinction.
2. Report on the Middle East, 1 June 1953. *The State Department Bulletin*, pp.831–5.
3. This British initiative, which was proposed in cooperation with the United States, France and Turkey, called for the creation of a regional defense organization (SACME), but never got off the ground because of Egypt's refusal to participate. A joint AngloAmerican proposal from 1952 called for a new Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO), which failed for the same reason.
4. Reuven Shiloah to Moshe Sharett, 9 March 1954. State Archives, 4737/17. In this letter he wrote that 'the plan for a Turkish-Pakistani-Iraqi treaty is an American initiative, while all the plans for the defense of the Middle East – SACME and MEDO – were propounded by the British. Over the past year there has been a fundamental change in the area, and the United States has taken the initiative.'
5. At that time Teddy Kollek was Director-General of the Prime Minister's Office, and the letter to him was sent on 26 Aug. 1954. Ya'akov Herzog – Haim Herzog's brother – was the head of the North American Department in the Foreign Ministry – while Sharett served as both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Ben-Gurion had resigned from public office by then and was living in the Negev kibbutz of Sdeh Boker. The letter to Herzog was sent on 2 Sept. 1954. Ibid
6. Reuven Shiloah to Memi De Shalit, 22 June 1954. Ibid.
7. David HaCohen, *A Time to Tell*, pp.254–6, as well as an interview with him.

The Circle of Friends

The Israeli Ambassador to Washington in those years, both before Reuven Shiloah's arrival on the scene and after he left, was Abba Eban. He was 'Mister America' to Israelis and 'The Voice of Israel' for Americans. He served a dual function: Israel's ambassador to the United States and also Israel's ambassador and head of its mission to the United Nations. He had a 'Number Two' in New York, deputy of the mission at the UN, and Shiloah was Eban's Minister and 'Number Two' at the Embassy in Washington.

This arrangement left Shiloah a great deal of room for independent initiatives designed to promote Israel's case, both in the capital and elsewhere in the country. Abba Eban was a speaker of rare quality, with a rich command of the English language, far exceeding that of his peers and his American audiences, Jews and non-Jews alike, who were enchanted by the wealth of his language and the precision and sharpness of his rhetoric.

Reuven Shiloah had none of this external brilliance. His natural habitat was not the well-lit stage nor the speaker's podium in large meeting halls. His greatest strength lay in his ability to handle private, unpublicized, even secret meetings, and to cultivate personal, behind-the-scenes contacts. His was a talent for penetrating analysis and the ability to turn strangers to Israel's cause into trusted friends, who soon regarded themselves as partners in the young country's problems and in the search for their solution. He would win people over to 'the idea' and then make them feel as though that vision had always been a part of their own long-term aspirations. Shiloah traveled widely and met with people all over the United States, people who were well-placed in the Administration and were close to the sources of power, close to President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles. These were the people whom Shiloah – following his tried and tested *modus operandi* – tried to befriend: people who were totally loyal to the United States, but who believed in the common interests of the two countries, and who regarded strengthening Israel and responding favorably to its needs as vital to American national interests.

'It was Reuven Shiloah's belief that if the Jews of America were ever forced to make a choice between their support for Israel and their support for the American national interest, they would not choose Israel. One of the aims of Israeli diplomacy was to prevent such a conflict from arising and to present Israel's national interests as dovetailing with American national interests', relates Ambassador Shamai Cahana, who was Abba Eban's personal assistant during the Sinai Campaign of 1956 and was very well acquainted with the internal affairs of the embassy. It was during that period, particularly following the American demand for an Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, when just such a conflict arose and the embassy staff did its best to head

it off.¹

Reuven Shiloah's personal relationship with Abba Eban was rather complex. After spending so many years in close contact with David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett, it was not an easy task for Shiloah to be Eban's 'Number Two', despite his great admiration for Eban's brilliance. Eban, for his part, also suffered from the sheer force of Shiloah's personality, and complained to Sharett and others in Jerusalem that what he needed was an advisor, not a minister. There were also some complaints that Shiloah tended to concentrate too much of the embassy's activities in his own hands. In Sharett's diaries there is evidence that during 1954–55 suggestions were made to move Shiloah from Washington and appoint him minister in Rangoon or Ankara, and later, possibly, ambassador to Canada. But after an initial period of adjustment, these tensions abated and were replaced with a feeling that the two men actually complemented each other.

Although it was not accepted practice in the diplomatic service, Shiloah accompanied Eban to practically every diplomatic meeting. It would seem that for all his sense of intellectual and rhetorical superiority, and his great self-confidence, Eban had a soft spot for Shiloah who was his first 'mentor in the ways of the country', and the man who plucked him in from his post as an intelligence officer in the British Army and brought him to Palestine to serve as liaison between the British SOE and the Political Department of the Jewish Agency in the early 1940s. Eban also greatly admired Shiloah's special qualifications and the part he played in setting up a wide network of contacts that proved to be of great benefit to the embassy in Washington.

'As a deputy, he was a great asset to his superior', Abba Eban says. 'He crammed us with precise and detailed Middle Eastern information that we would not have been able to acquire on our own. He dealt with everything to do with tactical moves – going to see a senator, meeting with an important figure from the Jewish community. These were tasks he took upon himself. At the same time he scrutinized our entire system looking for flaws. He was always looking for new areas of activity, working hard and getting others to do the same. More than anyone else he developed the idea of side-stepping Arab hostility and looking toward the periphery of Ankara, Teheran, and Addis Ababa. Another idea that he began working on but never brought to fruition was Israel's integration into NATO. He was convinced that we could stake a claim there and be invited to join. This, he felt, would be very beneficial in the development of contacts with the individual NATO member states.'

'Some people could not abide his inclination towards secrecy and mystery, while others could become very attached to him. He had an uncanny ability to make friends', Eban adds. 'He radiated a feeling of reliability, strength and knowledge. A fund of information. When the Eisenhower administration came to power, the Zionist establishment was virtually defunct ... Shiloah sought out people with access to the White House, some of them unknown even to active members of the Zionist movements in the US, met with them and made every effort to draw them in to support Israel's cause. Eventually, there were some 15 people – among those most closely associated with the Republican White House – that we could rely on to come through for us even though they didn't always know why they felt obliged to do so.'

'The new Republican administration quite seriously undermined the network of contacts and influence that benefited Israel in the past', wrote journalist and author Amos Elon, who served as the American correspondent for the prestigious Israeli daily *Ha-aretz* during the latter part of Shiloah's term of office in the capital. 'The new people who began working in the White House were unfamiliar with the problems of Israel and Zionism, unlike the liberal politicians with their humanitarian interests and international orientation who were an integral part of the Truman and Roosevelt administrations. It was on these new people that Shiloah concentrated his efforts.'²

In the article Elon goes on to describe Shiloah as ‘a mixture between a sociologist and a master of persuasion in private conversation. From his early days in Washington he tried to understand the true nature of influence and power in Eisenhower’s America... He tried and succeeded to win over people from among the power elite to the Israeli cause ... who largely shaped internal and foreign policies of the United States.’ Shiloah referred frequently to *The Power Elite*, a book by C. Wright Mills which described the activities and personalities of key people in all walks of life in the US. Shiloah told Elon with a smile, This is my guide book for contacting people who could be worthwhile talking to.’

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One of the first personal contacts Reuven Shiloah made when he took up his post as Minister in Washington was an old friend of Israel – Assistant Secretary of State Walter Bedell-Smith. He had been head of the CIA when the agreement for cooperation between the CIA and the Mossad, headed by Shiloah, was worked out. Now they met in their new capacities, renewing the friendship they shared, based on a deep mutual trust. The friendship between these two men was well known among the Washington elite, and was to play a crucial role in healing the rift between President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion at the height of the crisis in their relationship in the wake of the Sinai Campaign, when the administration forced Israel to pull its troops out of Sinai under conditions that were very unfavorable – if not humiliating – to Israel.

Walter Bedell-Smith had been close to Eisenhower since the Second World War, when he served as his Chief of Staff – from September 1942 until ‘Ike’ retired as Supreme Commander of all Allied Forces in Europe. In the course of his duties at Eisenhower’s headquarters, Bedell-Smith was the American officer who received the instruments of surrender from Italy and Germany, and witnessed first hand the anguish of the DPs and the Holocaust survivors of the concentration camps of Europe. He accompanied Eisenhower in his meeting with the Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, Ben-Gurion, during a visit to Displaced Persons camps after the war, and shared his chief’s support for the refugees’ suffering and their desire to emigrate to Palestine to put an end to their anguish. Bedell-Smith also met with Ben-Gurion in May 1951, when the agreement for intelligence cooperation was signed between the two countries.

In January 1953, with the creation of Eisenhower’s administration, and after completing three years as head of the CIA, Bedell-Smith was appointed Assistant Secretary of State. He remained in this position only until October 1954, when he retired from public office for health reasons.³ His resignation may also have been hastened by the prevailing pro-Arab tendencies in the State Department and its consequent antagonism toward Israel. He had very little patience for people he did not respect, but had endless patience and interest for those he admired. Reuven Shiloah was one of the latter.

Shiloah would meet Bedell-Smith in the afternoons, usually at his home, and occasionally at the home of a mutual friend, Abe Wexler, who had an enormous farm in upstate New York. The farm had lakes stocked with fine trout, and since trout-fishing was Bedell-Smith’s hobby, it was not too difficult to tempt him up to the Wexler farm for a weekend.

Wexler and Bedell-Smith had another, more serious, passion: Russian history and developments in the USSR after the Revolution. Bedell-Smith served as American Ambassador to Russia from 1946 to 1949, and in Wexler’s home he found an extensive collection of books dealing with Russian history before and after 1917. It was not surprising, therefore, that Bedell-Smith spent so much time with Wexler, fishing, reading and discussing their favorite topic. It was while he was staying at the Wexler farm that Bedell-Smith received the phone call from

President Truman notifying him of his appointment as head of the CIA.

Bedell-Smith met with Reuven Shiloah whenever he was asked to do so, even at short notice. Shiloah's widow, Betty, recalls long trips through the night for marathon meetings with Bedell-Smith. Wexler remembers one occasion when Shiloah kissed Bedell-Smith on both cheeks 'in appreciation for what he had done for the State of Israel'. It was Bedell-Smith who told Wexler that while most Israeli officials tended to emphasize the moral aspect of attitudes towards Israel, Shiloah concentrated on *realpolitik*, and placed more attention on the diplomatic and strategic benefits the US could gain from its connection with Israel. Shiloah, Bedell-Smith said, always referred to Israel as the United States' most stable and faithful ally in its fight against Soviet expansionism and its accompanying radical subversion.

In fact the moral and the functional claims complemented each other, both in respect to Israel itself and to the Cold War. And indeed, Bedell-Smith greatly appreciated Israel both as a prime source of information on eastern Europe, and as a bastion of defense against the spread of Soviet influence throughout the Middle East. He was convinced, according to Wexler, that supporting a strong Israel, able to stand on its own against the Arab countries, and even inflict damage upon them should they resort to any kind of military option, was a vital American interest. Bedell-Smith was certain, Wexler says, that the Arabs would not stand with the US against the Soviets, either militarily or diplomatically, and that should the day come, the US would be able to count only on Israel. The only problem was that this analysis of the Middle East question was not very popular among officials in Washington at that time.

Shiloah and Bedell-Smith shared a common view of the USSR and Israel's key role in the fight against Soviet influence. At Shiloah's request, Bedell-Smith tried to persuade State Department officials and even President Eisenhower of the justice of his claims, but clearly, he was not very successful. Most of the people at the State Department regarded cultivating good relations with the Arabs – as opposed to strengthening Israel's military capabilities – as a prime policy objective. Eisenhower's attitude toward Israel remained primarily humanitarian and moral, stemming from the memory of the Holocaust and his encounters with survivors after the victory in Europe.

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As a matter of fact, Eisenhower and Dulles found themselves embroiled in a rash of contradictions, both morally and diplomatically. On the moral plane, the US felt that Israel had not done enough, as they saw it, to appease the Arabs on the issues of borders, refugees and the internationalization of Jerusalem. The Americans felt that the Israeli retaliatory raids in response to terrorist infiltration were excessive and humiliating to the Arabs, who had already lost face in the War of Independence. Instead of reducing tension in the area, this generated a growing cycle of violence, or so the Americans thought. This same moral context within the United States also produced the condemnation of America's two 'colonialist' allies, England and France, for not having done enough to support the burgeoning Arab nationalism, as well as the 'crusader-messianic' denunciation of the USSR, 'home of oppression and negation of human dignity', which presented a military and subversive threat to the free world and the values it held dear.

On the other hand, the steps taken to create a common front against the USSR based on military treaties were often cynically pragmatic and calculated, and literally anyone was welcome. Even the most oppressive regimes were accepted into the 'free world' brotherhood of nations simply on the basis of their willingness to join the anti-Soviet bloc. The Eisenhower administration never managed to extricate itself from these profound contradictions in its

policies, and it was Israel that paid the highest price, although Britain and France were not too far behind.⁴

Shiloah was apprised of these contradictions primarily through his talks with Assistant Secretary of State Walter Bedell-Smith, but also from other State Department sources. He reported on all of this at length to Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett, in his first communication from Washington, shortly after taking up his post there.⁵ In this letter he describes Dulles's attitude toward Israel just as the Secretary of State himself did in talks he held with top-level State Department personnel.

The people of Israel and the people of the United States of America have a common moral and cultural tradition... Israel in the Middle East is a center of strength for the free world. Israel's neighbors, out of a desire for revenge or fear of its influence as an example of a modern democratic state, etc. – want to destroy it. The government of the United States is not willing under any circumstances to stand idly by while attempts are made to undermine the State of Israel.

On the other hand:

The government of the United States needs and is seeking stability in the region. One condition for this stability is the improvement of Israel-Arab relations and this is what the State Department and its representatives in the region must strive for. The former Administration occasionally expressed itself in ways that could have been interpreted by Arab leaders as though the government of the United States scorned or disdained them, and that all it was interested in was its friendship with Israel. For Israel's own good, and for the good of the United States, this impression must be rooted out, but at the same time, under no circumstances should the Arabs get the impression that Israel has been abandoned and that it is no longer a desirable ally.

Both Israeli and American interests, Dulles went on to say, demanded acceptance – for the time being – of an American policy which temporarily gave preference to the Arabs and made efforts to appease them.

Shiloah spelled out the complex of American policy considerations that was bound to work against Israel's best interests.

The military men think of the region in terms of oil and transportation. The policy makers are seeking to guarantee stability in the region and support for the West. Any internal complication in one of the countries in the area opens the door for Soviet intervention, and therefore these conflicts must be prevented at all costs... In practical diplomatic terms, this means getting to know the governments in the region, gaining their friendship and assisting them in maintaining internal stability, even if it entails far-reaching concessions on political and moral principles, or even on traditional American military considerations. Hence the pressure brought to bear on Britain to give in to Egypt on the Suez Canal and hence the American stand during this past year in relation to our conflict with the Arab nations, even when US officials are convinced that morally or legally we have a better case.

And there is more:

There are people in the State Department who believe that if they persevere in their policy of appeasement, they will eventually gain the friendship of [the Arab nations] and American influence in the region will rise. Then the time will come when they will place the entire weight of the friendship of the United States government in the balance, and persuade them that it is in their best interests to reach an agreement with Israel. Then, too, the time will come to discuss a military build-up of the region as a whole, including Israel's part in its defense... The initiative for military support for the Arab countries comes from the Middle East wing of the State Department, and not from security or military circles ... as a form of diplomatic bribery aimed at enhancing the rulers' stand in the eyes of their countrymen.

Indeed, in the summer of 1954, Francis Russell⁶ told the Director-General of Israel's Foreign Ministry, Walter Eytan, of US intentions to supply military equipment to Egypt after the signing of the Suez Agreement. On 2 August 1954 Henry Byroad, Assistant to the Secretary of State on Middle Eastern affairs, notified the Egyptian Ambassador to the United States that the Administration had decided to offer Egypt military and economic aid with no diplomatic strings attached, and that their decision would not be swayed by any possible Israeli opposition.⁷

It was only at the end of that year that it became clear that the negotiations concerning arms supplies to Egypt had broken down over Egypt's refusal to accept the United States' terms for their delivery. These conditions were in accordance with US laws relating to foreign military aid and included placing an American military delegation in Egypt to oversee the proper use of the American arms. Israel was told a different story altogether by the State Department. On 6 November 1954, Israel was notified that the American government had decided not to send military aid to Egypt – even before the Egyptian rejection of the offer. Among the reasons cited by the State Department for the cancellation of the deal was Egypt's political instability.

Based on the contents of this announcement, as well as on things he had heard from other State Department officials, Shiloah wrote the following: There were others in the State Department who strongly opposed [military aid to Nasser] and claimed ... that his regime had not proven its stability yet, nor revealed its true intentions ... His attachment to the Arab League was also one of the reasons quoted ... It was decided to forgo, for now, sending any military aid; and to begin contributing to the country's stability through economic aid.⁸

Time and again Reuven Shiloah found himself caught in the middle of the inherent contradictions of American Mid-East policy, vacillating between dire foreboding and hope and drawing up operational plans that were for the most part overly optimistic. What he was seeking throughout all of this were ways to get to the sources of decision-making in Washington, along the lines of his relationship with Walter Bedell-Smith.

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This is how what became known as the 'Circle of Friends' was established, turning into something of a legend. It became a paradigm of Israeli diplomatic activities in the years that followed, and has had a direct and indirect influence on the nature of the relations between Israel and American Jewry to this day. This Circle was the counterweight to the preponderance of 'Arabists' in the State Department, and to the entire system of pressures brought to bear by the Arab oil-producing countries and American ambassadors in the Arab countries – the most dominant element in the shaping of American foreign policy in the Middle East. Through the 'Circle of Friends', in whose establishment he played a major role, Shiloah tried to influence

decisions made by the top echelons of the State Department through affirmative action. In coordination with the Israeli Foreign Minister in Jerusalem, he persuaded Ambassador Eban to submit an Israeli plan for the solution of regional problems which, he thought, could tip the scales somewhat in Israel's favor in the plans being drawn up by the Middle East desk of the State Department. Added to this was the fact that during 1954–56, American officials involved in foreign policy were influenced in some measure by British Foreign Ministry officials, who were even more hostile toward Israel than their American counterparts.

It is difficult to assess the success of this 'quiet lobby'. To a certain extent it may have arrested and balanced – or even turned around – some of the British-American plans, which were most unfavorable as far as Israel was concerned. In the event, Arab opposition to these plans caused them to be shelved, but Israel could not afford to depend on the Arab countries to pull its chestnuts out of the fire. Reuven Shiloah worked tirelessly with the 'Circle of Friends' to forestall the dangers and perhaps even turn them to Israel's advantage to some extent. It was an unrewarding task which Shiloah nevertheless pursued with his usual tenacity.

The 'Circle' was established in March 1954 with the help of Philip Ehrlich, a wealthy and influential San Francisco lawyer. He was a member of the 'Council for American Jewry', an anti-Zionist organization which denied the existence of any Jewish national or political identity and regarded the main objective of Judaism as being solely religious, moral and cultural. In its early years the organization even turned its back on the existence of the State of Israel. Gradually this anti-Israel bias underwent modifications and its members eventually gave their support to the state – though not without reservations. Referring to Ehrlich's personal contribution to the state, Abba Eban once said, 'This man arranged loans for us through the Bank of America when we were almost bankrupt.'

Ehrlich, like all the other members of the 'Circle of Friends', was willing to take Israel's case to his acquaintances in the administration only on clearly defined terms: 'I agreed to meet with the government of Israel regarding the security policy of the western powers in the Middle East, on the basis of a clear understanding that I retain the right to criticize and examine the Israeli government's behavior, and the right to pull out at any time, if I feel that Israel's policies are not in the best interests of the United States of America. And as an American citizen, I am sending you our letters of correspondence.'⁹

The correspondence referred to in the letter was a series of letters between Ehrlich and Shiloah, and included a refutation of State Department assertions that Israel had supposedly been involved in the elections to the Congress and the Senate in 1954. A little more than a year later, in a letter to a non-Jewish friend, Ehrlich re-emphasized very strongly that all his actions on Israel's behalf stemmed from his profound belief that they would be beneficial to American national interests: 'I have never subscribed to the position that because of my religious beliefs I can try and influence the policies of the government of the United States... without paying attention to America's best interests. On the contrary, I felt, as an American citizen of the Jewish faith, that I was obliged, because of my religious background, to be totally objective and to refrain, with all my strength, from taking a stand on this issue, except for a completely objective stand based on the best interests of the United States of America.'¹⁰

David Zellerbach was another key figure in the 'Circle of Friends' which Shiloah set up. He also accepted Shiloah's approach, which allowed him to work as a Jew on behalf of Israel and America at one and the same time. He was the son of a German-Jewish family that immigrated to the United States at the end of the 1870s, and was one of the leaders and most active members of the Council for American Jewry. He too underwent a change of heart in his approach to Israel, to

the point where he was willing to come to the country's aid. Shiloah wrote to Sharett:

Zellerbach was regarded as the symbol of Jewish moderation, a man who placed American affairs ahead of any other sectarian, religious or partisan interests. He was at the same time a very wealthy man, the owner of a major industrial company (qualities that are very highly regarded by the current president), and knowledgeable in issues of security and foreign affairs. It was Zellerbach who was chosen by the president to handle one of the most important public and political tasks – he appointed him Chairman of the President's Advisory Council on Manpower.¹¹

The director of the Advisory Council on Manpower was Professor Eli Ginzberg of Columbia University, an internationally recognized expert on manpower policy, and an advisor to the governments of many countries, including Israel. He was in fairly close personal contact with President Eisenhower from the time Eisenhower was President of Columbia prior to his nomination for the presidency. Ginzberg was also destined to play an important part in the 'Circle of Friends' during the Sinai Campaign and thereafter, and became one of Reuven Shiloah's closest friends. By the very nature of his appointment Ginzberg had some influence on Zellerbach, even though they moved in different social circles.

Further testimony to Zellerbach's preferred standing in Eisenhower's inner circle was the fact that shortly afterward, in 1956, he was appointed as America's ambassador to Italy. It was through Zellerbach and Ginzberg that the close contact with the non-Jew in this group – Arthur Dean – was established. A man of considerable influence. Dean was a senior partner in a New York law firm headed by John Foster Dulles prior to his appointment as Secretary of State, and, apart from this professional relationship, he was also one of Dulles's closest personal advisors. He was one of the leaders of the Council for Foreign Affairs in New York, legal advisor to a number of large oil companies and representative of the United States at the armistice talks at the end of the Korean War. Shiloah, while singing Dean's praises in his letter to Sharett, added that

bringing Dean over to our side was an achievement we didn't dare dream of... He has three main motives: his friendship with Zellerbach (with whom he is connected in multi-million dollar business deals), his understanding of the justice of our claims, and his belief that from an internal political point of view, it is very important for Dulles to have an historical achievement to his credit – such as smoothing out American-Israeli relations.

The 'Circle of Friends' was often referred to in internal correspondence as the 'Ehrlich-Zellerbach-Dean Circle', but in fact it included many other personalities who were not connected to these three in any way. It served, in effect, as an indirect communications link between Israel and Secretary of State Dulles and even directly to the White House in times of serious crisis. Reuven Shiloah was the man who set up and operated this channel throughout those difficult years of Israeli diplomacy in Washington, as part of a kind of 'battle of containment' which did not actually achieve its stated objectives – either defensive weapons for the IDF, American security guarantees or a defense treaty with the US. Nevertheless, it is not too farfetched to suggest that, without this circle of influence, Israel's standing in the United States might have been much worse than it actually was at that time. In the final analysis, this kind of specialized diplomatic activity created a model for one of the major conduits of contacts and influence for Israeli diplomacy in the United States to this day.

1. Cahana wrote a detailed, well-documented historical chronicle of the diplomatic struggle surrounding the campaign and the eventual withdrawal. He too emphasized Shiloah's contribution through his widespread contacts among highly-placed American officials – among them the two Dulles brothers, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and head of the CIA, Allen Dulles.
2. *Ha-aretz*, 18 Aug. 1957.
3. He suffered from a serious bleeding ulcer. At the ceremony marking Germany's surrender, his mouth filled with blood, which he spat out only when the event was over.
4. It is well known that the 'Containment Policy' based on these treaties, championed by John Foster Dulles, took on the nature of a Christian Crusade against 'the forces of evil', replete with sermonizing and moral denunciation. At the same time, this policy – which ultimately backfired – involved a Machiavellian sacrifice of friends and common values on purely pragmatic grounds. This was particularly true of the futile attempts to gain Nasser's support, which ended in a resounding slap in the Americans' face, when the Egyptian leader adamantly refused to join any of the mutual defense pacts proposed to him.
5. Shiloah to Sharett, 9 March 1954. State Archives 4374/17.
6. 'Number Two' at the American Embassy in Tel Aviv at that time, and later special assistant to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles on the Arab-Israeli conflict.
7. State Archives 2456/16.
8. Shiloah in a letter to Ya'akov Herzog, who figured prominently in the development of Israel's foreign policy, and was close to both Sharett and Ben-Gurion, 13 Dec. 1954. State Archives 4374/17.
9. Philip Ehrlich to Arthur Dean, 9 Nov. 1954. State Archives 2456/16.
10. *Ibid.*, 24 Jan. 1954.
11. Shiloah to Sharett, 25 Feb. 1954. State Archives 4374/22.

Neither Security nor Peace

Dulles's 'containment policy' placed the decision-makers in Israel and their representatives in Washington, Ambassador Abba Eban and Minister Reuven Shiloah, in an agonizing dilemma. The centerpiece of this policy involved the attempt to enlist the Arab countries in regional defense pacts with the West – without Israel, of course. This enlistment was supposed to be sweetened by military aid to these countries – arms, military training and improving their logistical and operational capabilities. This emphasis on military aid was designed to prevent the expansion of Soviet influence in the region, but actual implementation of this policy decision might very well have brought about the destruction of the State of Israel. Arab slogans concerning a 'Second Round' were still being bandied about and Israel found itself facing this threat and the American 'pacts policy' empty-handed, lacking the required balance of arms, as it was called then, and filled with deep concern.

The explanations given by the Eisenhower-Dulles administration for its opposition to arms sales to Israel, as opposed to its willingness to supply the Arab countries with arms, assumed various forms. First, they totally rejected the concept of a 'balance of arms' between the tiny state of Israel and the Arab countries. As they saw it, Israel would never be able to absorb the sheer quantity of arms required to achieve such a balance, therefore no such balance could practically be achieved. The concept of a 'qualitative balance' had not entered American foreign policy parlance at that time, not at any rate in relation to Israel. US officials claimed then that arms supplies to Israel would serve only to increase tension in the area and bring about an all-out arms race, which the US had always totally opposed, and stated so unequivocally in the Tripartite Statement of the western powers issued in May 1950 by the United States, England and France. Military aid to Israel, they claimed, would harm America's efforts to woo the Arabs, who were the main force in the area and the primary objective of America's Mid-East diplomacy. What is more, officials in the American administration also claimed that they were not at all convinced of Israel's military inferiority or of its need for additional arms. The fact was that the War of Independence ended in an Israeli victory over the combined armies of its Arab neighbors, and in the final stages of the war the western powers actually had to intervene to prevent any further Israeli expansion of its borders, which had in any case spread – in the Galilee, the Negev and Jerusalem – beyond the borders stipulated in the UN Partition Plan.

All in all, the American administration felt at that time that Israel was strong enough compared with the Arab countries, who were undergoing severe internal upheavals in the wake of their humiliating defeat on the battlefield. What the Americans did not know, or did not take

into account, was that the IDF of the early 1950s was only a pale shadow of the IDF of the end of the War of Independence. Not only had the elite Palmach units been disbanded,¹ but the 1948 version of the IDF had simply ceased to exist. The acts of terrorism – infiltration and murder – carried out by the *fedayeen* evoked fear and anger in Israel, and brought in their wake retaliatory raids which, at first, were dismal failures, but later became increasingly effective military operations. The more efficient and numerous these raids were, the more friction they caused between Israel and the United Nations Observer Force, which in any case was tainted by a pro-Arab bias, and with the American administration, which gave its wholehearted support to the international body.

From an American viewpoint, these actions merely proved that Israel was very strong militarily and too independent minded. What is more, the raids gave the Americans the excuse they needed to exploit Israeli fears and pressure its government for concessions that would assist US overtures toward the Arab countries. Once a regional defense pact was in place – and not a moment before – the Americans reasoned, the US would be able to persuade its Arab allies to make peace with Israel on terms that would satisfy all those involved in the conflict. This was the view from Washington between 1954 and 1956.

In the summer of 1954, Israel's concern over its defense posture grew significantly, following the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the evacuation of British forces from the Canal Zone, leaving Egypt a rich inheritance of airfields, army bases, radar installations and massive military stores. The fear of additional American military aid to Egypt made matters even worse from Israel's point of view. At the same time, among a few other developments detrimental to Israel's cause, America continued its arms sales to Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Israel had to design a policy for responding – on the diplomatic and the public relations level – to America's policy toward the state and its position in the Middle East.

In August 1954, Ambassador Eban and some of the heads of Israel's American lobby were called to Jerusalem for a major consultation. In the course of this meeting, the participants rejected Shiloah's 'affirmative approach' which called for a balanced policy of 'them and us': accepting arms supplies to the Arabs if they were balanced by arms supplies to Israel as part of an 'overall affirmative plan' for the Middle East. This plan, Shiloah believed, should take into account regional defense and other needs of the countries of the area, including a contribution toward a solution of the refugee problem. Shiloah was of the opinion that Israel should not make demands that were contrary to American national interests, as determined by the administration. Instead of fighting American policy head on, it was preferable, as he saw it, to find ways of being integrated into it, and to propose amendments and additions that would benefit both Israel and American Middle Eastern policies.

The argument on this issue was conducted in an exchange of letters between Shiloah and Ya'akov Herzog, who was the principal representative and spokesman for the policy line embraced by Sharett. Reuven was opposed to this concept and proposed combining the two approaches, an idea which was, in fact, adopted later on. Following the consultations in Jerusalem, a note was sent out signed by Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sharett, briefing Israeli representatives on the policy line they were to adopt in their diplomatic efforts to oppose the sale of US arms to the Arab countries. 'In public meetings and public relations campaigns we must adopt negative slogans', the memorandum stated.² 'In this campaign ... no mention must be made for now of positive demands such as arms for Israel, non-belligerency guarantees, defense pacts, or anything of that sort – in order not to negate or weaken the brunt of our attack by a hasty proposal of compensation, which implies acceptance of official American policy.' The

brief did not rule out the possibility of negotiations on these issues in two voices by other people, friendly to Israel's cause, but not directly in Israel's name. 'If there are groups who refuse as a matter of principle to object to the plans for arming [the Arabs], but are willing to try and reverse the discrimination against Israel, then they should not be prevented from voicing their criticism in any way they choose.' In this last passage there was, perhaps, an echo of the basic approach defined by members of Shiloah's 'Circle of Friends'.

The following explanation was given for this official policy line: There is no reason to despair *a priori* of the hope that this PR campaign can achieve at least partial results such as the postponement of arms supplies, a limitation of their scope, appending conditions for their use, and bringing pressure to bear on the Arab countries to change their attitude toward Israel, and so on.' And the principal claim: 'Our security must be based on overall parity between us and our enemy neighbors... The promise that arms supplies to Israel will be considered ... cannot be accepted in any way... The absolute principle of a balance of arms as long as there is no peace in the region, must be emphasized as strongly as possible... Will we indeed be assured of a supply of arms in quantities that will match anything that is given to all the Arab countries combined, and which is far beyond our ability to absorb? Military aid to Israel can perhaps be regarded as compensation, as opposed to the diplomatic advantages accruing to the Arabs from these military supplies. However, Israel's concern for its security cannot be assuaged except by a crystal-clear commitment that there will be no change in the balance of power in the region.'

Jerusalem thus confronted the United States with the demand that it recognize the principle of a 'balance of power' between Israel and its neighbors, albeit from a negative standpoint: not supplying arms either to the Arabs or to Israel – in total opposition to former General Eisenhower's military-strategic claim that such a 'balance of power' was an impossible objective, and that Israel must base its security not on arms but on the good will and the very generalized promises of its friends, and on the gradual reduction of hostility on the part of its Arab neighbors.

Ya'akov Herzog added tactical explanations to the line decided upon in Jerusalem:³ 'The minute we abandon our opposition in principle to arming the Arabs ... it will be very difficult later on to claim that the Arabs should not be armed in quantities that exceed Israel's capacity to absorb. On the other hand, if we follow the policy line outlined by the Minister, there is a chance that in order to placate us, the Administration will commit itself to certain quantities of arms for the Arabs and will be willing to supply us as well.' In other words, Israel was to base its demands concerning arms supplies on a concept of 'neither for them nor for us' in order to arrive at an American policy of 'them and us together' or even 'less for them and a little bit for us'. It was all a question of tactics.

Shiloah had already suggested a combination of these two policies.⁴ However, the convoluted distinctions between them evaporated for the most part during the hard and bitter struggle that developed between the United States and Israel in American public opinion. It broke out in the latter part of 1954, after the signing of the Suez agreements. Clearly deviating from its usual form, and contrary to accepted diplomatic practice, the Israeli Embassy openly embarked on a collision course with the administration. The Embassy issued a statement to the press stressing Israel's opposition to the supply of arms to Egypt, which, it claimed, would only serve to enlarge the arms differential between the two countries in Egypt's favor, and increase Arab hostility and the threat of war. This was a Congressional election year, and Israel sharply criticized the Republican administration's one-sided position on Middle Eastern issues.⁵

Apart from this public statement, a lobbying campaign was set in motion through meetings

with prominent public figures and media personalities, and intensive contacts in person or in writing with the 'Circle of Friends'. Israel's spokesmen mounted their campaign from a number of angles. They said that the administration's policy placed the very existence of the Jewish state in jeopardy, and that Israel had lost its confidence in the present administration, and must therefore rely only on itself. This was a veiled threat referring to the possibility that Israel might be forced to take desperate action – to initiate a war. America, the Israeli diplomats and lobbyists claimed, could not rely on the Arabs to fight the USSR, as opposed to Israel, which could be relied on implicitly in this matter. Moreover, supplying the Arab armies with weapons would undermine the social and economic stability of these countries, and bowing to Arab demands and abandoning Israel was in itself an immoral act.

All of this was preceded by an anti-Israeli ideological onslaught led by Henry Byroad, Assistant Secretary of State for Middle Eastern Affairs, who attacked both Zionism and the State of Israel in various ways. In a series of public appearances, he declared that the mass immigration of Jews into Israel was the source of deep-seated fear in the Arab countries, and that this was the reason for their continuing struggle against the Jewish state. Based on this concept, he called for restrictions on Jewish immigration into Israel. Byroad went even further and suggested that Israel cease to regard itself as 'the center for groups of people of a particular religious persuasion among the nations of the world, who have special rights in Israel and a special commitment to it'. Pronouncements such as this only served to increase Israel's apprehension and loss of confidence in the United States. The Knesset (Israel's Parliament) devoted an entire session on 10 May 1954 to Byroad's anti-Zionist speeches, which, by calling for a limitation of immigration, constituted an attack 'on the State of Israel's special relationship with the Jewish Diaspora'.

In August of that year, John Foster Dulles took the initiative to try to defuse the tension and clear the clouded atmosphere that prevailed between the two countries. He met with Ambassador Eban and Minister Shiloah, and proposed that the two governments exchange letters of friendship. Eban made his agreement conditional on a promise of military aid to Israel, similar to that extended to Iraq and Egypt. Dulles promised to consider an appeal to Congress to facilitate an aid package for Israel. By the end of the month, however, America's representative approached the Prime Minister with a request that Israel restrain itself and exercise patience in its demands from the United States. Moshe Sharett was told that the United States placed great emphasis on the proper timing of all its initiatives in the region. Any unilateral Israeli move contrary to American policies in this respect would be regarded by the United States as damaging to ongoing American efforts to maintain security in the area in the face of a serious Soviet threat.

These fluctuations of American policy between empty promises and diplomatic threats repeated themselves in the relationship between the two countries during the months that followed. The Americans refused to comply with Israel's basic demands: to maintain a balance of power until peace was achieved; to supply Israel with military aid so that it could be able to defend itself – particularly in face of the impending British evacuation of the Canal Zone; and to refrain from co-opting Arab countries into a regional defense plan without making corresponding arrangements with Israel.

In the final analysis, it was not Israeli protest but rather Egypt's refusal to join a regional defense pact and receive American military aid, that put paid to American policies in the region. Not for the first nor for the last time in its history, Israel's work – at least in its negative aspects – was done by Egypt. Ultimately, neither the Egyptians nor the Israelis received American

weapons.

Israel was not only thwarted in its efforts to get hold of American arms, but it also lost out on its hope of American guarantees for its security. Reuven Shiloah was active in these futile efforts through the 'Circle of Friends'. He had great hopes and used all his considerable powers of behind-the-scenes persuasion to achieve his objective. Ambassador Abba Eban was the author of a number of draft proposals for security guarantees and a defense pact, which were all scrutinized by Shiloah, Arthur Dean and others from the 'Circle', before being sent back and forth between the two capitals – to no avail.

The first American draft proposal for a treaty was drawn up in October 1954, possibly under pressure of the upcoming congressional elections in November. The draft document of agreement between the two countries was produced by the State Department and fell short of promising Israel either arms or real security guarantees. On the contrary, the terms of the draft proposal showed clearly that its authors believed that the strengthening of the nations in the region must not be postponed until peace was achieved between Israel and the Arabs. All it promised, in effect, was a reiteration of the Tripartite Declaration of May 1950, which did nothing to change any of the basic parameters of the Middle East scene. Faced with Israel's open disappointment and negative response, Dulles shelved the memorandum and promised to draw up a new one.

Another attempt to draft a document that could be construed as providing 'security guarantees for Israel' was made at the beginning of 1955. Secretary of State Dulles was personally involved in this attempt along with Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett on the Israeli side. Arthur Dean played a major role in this episode, through an intensive exchange of letters with Ehrlich and Zellerbach, and many discussions with Shiloah. Shiloah was of the opinion that Dean should draw up his own 'Israeli' version as a basis for negotiation, instead of waiting for the State Department people to propose their 'Arabist' version which Israel would have to oppose tooth and nail.

Following Shiloah's advice, and based on his 'affirmative approach', Sharett drew up a brief statement of principles which was sent to Dean, to be submitted to the State Department as a proposal that would be acceptable in Israel. The assumption was that if these principles could be agreed upon by Israel and the US, they could then be translated into a detailed version of an actual 'security pact'. Once again, Israeli hopes were dashed. And once again it is not at all clear if this was the result of deliberate deception on the part of the Americans, or confusion and indecision, or perhaps even a desire to seize the opportunity to pressure Egypt by suggesting that it soften its attitude towards the US in order to prevent the administration from giving Israel any kind of security guarantees.

This is all no more than conjecture. Everything points to the fact that there was a deep chasm between Israel's expectations and the United States's willingness to fulfill them. In the document of principles submitted by Israel, the following requests were made: that the United States take action – in accordance with its constitutional procedures – to pre-empt or prevent an armed attack on the State of Israel; that it embark on an armament policy that would ensure a balance of power between Israel and the Arab countries; and that it declare its willingness to negotiate arms sales to Israel, in accordance with the conditions stipulated by the Mutual Aid Act. Israel would commit itself in return to seeking a peaceful settlement of all regional conflicts and refraining from any military actions against the Arab countries, and to declaring its willingness to sign a non-belligerency pact with its neighbors.

This Israeli draft proposal was so far-reaching by American standards that it was never even

discussed. It was filed together with all the rest of the proposals and ideas that the State Department continued to formulate and develop – without consulting Israel on any of them. The State Department’s aim was to find a propitious moment to announce a comprehensive American plan for peace and security in the Middle East.

Sharett pressed on in his own way. In April 1955 he sent a personal note to Dulles, officially suggesting that a defense agreement be drawn up between Israel and the United States. Dulles rejected the proposal first and foremost on constitutional grounds, but added that even if it were possible, it could only happen if stability was achieved in the Middle East along with progress toward an accommodation between Israel and the Arabs – the starting point for stability in the first place. Dulles was referring obliquely to the American position of the time – that stability and security could be achieved through Israeli acquiescence to major concessions on the outstanding issues.

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While the Americans continued to toy with ideas of wooing Egypt’s leader, Gamal Abdul Nasser, with offers of economic and military aid, and particularly with pressure on Israel to make concessions, the Egyptian leader was moving in a different direction altogether. Israel and the United States were both caught totally off guard by the Egyptian leader’s moves. In April 1955, Nasser was given a royal reception at the Conference of Third World Nations that was held in Bandung, Indonesia.

The ‘Bandung Conference’, as it became known, was a milestone in international affairs, marking the opening of a new chapter in world history. Nasser was received there with undreamed of honors: he was hailed as one of the three great leaders of the Third World, together with India’s Pandit Nehru and Yugoslavia’s Marshal Tito. The Chinese Prime Minister, Chou En Lai, praised him at length and immediately offered to mediate between Egypt and the USSR on mutual relations, a move that led within a short time to the Czech-Egyptian arms deal that overturned every previously held conception of the future of the Middle East.

This deal was in fact only fronted by Czechoslovakia. It was actually a direct supply of arms from the USSR to Egypt, and ensured the Soviets an open door into the Middle East arena, which had been, up until then, a strictly western area of influence. Following this and other developments, the Middle East would soon become a major diplomatic battlefield for the two superpowers. In retrospect, one cannot help asking what the Americans had to offer Nasser in response to the Soviet largesse, or how it was possible that they did not understand what was happening – either prior to this or afterwards – right before their eyes. They continued to entertain the illusion that they could turn the wheels back or at least stop them from moving any further forward.

The assiduous courting of Nasser by the Americans was based on an essential misunderstanding. As far as the Arab countries (primarily Egypt) were concerned, the West, including the United States and Europe in equal measures, was a symbol of the degradation ensuing from colonialist superiority. The USSR, on the other hand, appeared to the Arabs to be the only country that could help them extricate themselves from western influence and escape the sufferings of the past. This unbridgeable psychological abyss was perceptible in what President Nasser (or ‘Colonel Nasser’ as he was derogatively called in the western press) said to former British MP Richard Crossman, who at the time had no official status, and related this conversation to Israeli friends.⁶

Crossman told his Israeli friends that he was in Cairo during January 1955 when the

'Baghdad Treaty' – the first step in the American initiative for a regional defense organization – was about to be signed. Crossman met with Nasser the day the news about Iraq's intention of joining the pact was leaked to the press. Nasser was furious with what he regarded as British treachery, despite the fact that the British had agreed with him that formal military treaties between the West and the Arab countries would be more damaging than helpful. Nasser went on to say to Crossman: 'There are two fronts in the battle with Communism – the external, military front, and the internal one, and the situation of this front is seriously threatened by the Baghdad Treaty...' Nasser went on to deliver the key element in his understanding of the situation: 'If a joint Middle Eastern Command were to be established, and I – Nasser – were to be put at its head, and if there were even a single British lieutenant serving there, everyone would believe that the British lieutenant was in control of the Command, not me.' Thus Nasser to Crossman in a friendly chat.⁷

This psychological barrier was clearly described by former head of the IDF's Intelligence Branch, Yehoshafat Harkaby, in a conversation held a few years later in the framework of the 'Peripheral Alliance': 'the Arabs' hatred for the West is what causes them instinctively to seek contacts with the USSR. Nasser turned to the USSR not because he didn't get arms from the West, but because of their joint opposition to the imperialist West. This is the source of his strength... The West did not understand the nature of Arab hatred [towards it], and therefore continually tried to appease them ... and there is really no reason to do that... Nasser's true strength is exaggerated and mysticized... His main strength lies in the fact that he symbolizes Arab hatred of the West and their ability to kick them in the backside.'

This profound psychological motivation for Nasser's lashing out at the 'British lieutenant who controls him' extended to American diplomats or officers as well, who, as far as Nasser was concerned, were but another version of the same colonial 'boss'. All this precipitated the failure of the American Middle Eastern initiative aimed at bringing Egypt into a regional defense organization under their control. What is more, in their haste to reach concrete results, the Americans foolishly poured salt on the existing wounds by negotiating with Iraq and Turkey, in January 1955, on the proposed defense organization without waiting for Egypt and its leader, Nasser.⁸

The retaliatory raids carried out by Israel – particularly the one in Gaza in February 1955, which Nasser frequently cited as one of the main reasons for his request for Soviet arms – no doubt strengthened and hastened this process, but they were not the main or most crucial reason. Nasser could have easily purchased all the military hardware he needed to defend Egypt from any Israeli military threat from the western powers, which had withheld from Israel much-needed defensive weapons and would have agreed to step up their anti-Israeli policies had Nasser agreed to join the western-oriented defense organization. The Gaza operation possibly accelerated the process, but was certainly not the overriding reason for Nasser's choice between East and West. Nasser's road to glory as a leader of the Third World at the Bandung Conference was already paved for him, and he had not the slightest desire to turn back. And in any case, did the Americans really have anything that could match all that?

Indeed, after the Soviets offered military aid to Syria in March 1955, they made Egypt a similar offer at the beginning of June 1955. It was a very generous offer: the USSR committed itself to industrializing Egypt and giving its army all the weapons it needed. At the same time, the Egyptians submitted to the US a request for American arms, and in June were notified by the American ambassador to Egypt of the US's agreement in principle to sell arms to the Egyptian Army. Despite this agreement, and after the Egyptians sent in a long and detailed list of weapons

they were interested in buying, the deal never materialized. Israeli officials were told that the reason the American-Egyptian deal fell through was because of insurmountable payment problems. It is possible that the Egyptians were already at an advanced stage in their negotiations on the 'Czech arms deal', and consequently were in no hurry to close a deal with the Americans. Be that as it may, the Egyptians' preference for doing business with the Soviet Union was quite clear.

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Initially, Reuven Shiloah was actively involved in the attempts to establish a 'security pact' with the US. Doubts about its actual feasibility began creeping in by the middle of 1955, but he kept raising the same concept whenever he could. His repeated efforts to pursue this issue may have stemmed from a glimmer of hope that he still entertained that somehow it could work out. It is also possible that he might have been simply doing his job, and, as a civil servant, toeing the government line, as were all the other Israeli officials involved in this Quixotic campaign – all of whom were no less given to these swings between hope and frustration. The Americans believed that 'basically, Nasser is angling for closer relations with the United States, for economic and for military reasons', so Shiloah wrote to Ya'akov Herzog.⁹

The State Department believes that regardless of his initial anger over the Iraqi-Turkish agreement, Nasser will come around as soon as he is offered a direct bilateral security pact with the United States of America, and – with that as a sweetener – will even accept good relations between the US and Israel.

Shiloah felt that this American evaluation was misguided. He explained that Nasser was not at all interested in renewing his relations with the United States, and that, contrary to American belief, he was actually hardening his positions on regional and international issues. All of this, Shiloah explained, was a direct outcome of the deep anti-colonialist and anti-western sentiments of the acknowledged leader of Arab nationalism, who was unwilling to forgive the US for the Iraqi-Turkish agreement and the attempt to undermine Egypt's role as the leader of the Arab world.

Shiloah went on in his letter to explain that the Bandung Conference, Nasser's meetings with Nehru and the immense prestige he had gained had turned his head and he now regarded himself as one of Asia's three principal political leaders. His non-alignment was neither a pose nor a tactic designed to score points for him, as the Americans hoped, but rather a clear-cut, carefully weighed policy that the Americans were having a hard time coming to terms with. The Americans are finding it very difficult to come to grips with the fact that they who – more than any other player in the field – helped Egypt achieve the dream of a generation – British evacuation of the Canal Zone – have now become the prime target for Egypt's diplomatic slings and arrows.'

Despite this, the Americans simply refused to give up. After a difficult period of gestation. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles made a speech on 26 August 1955, in which he announced his plan for an overall settlement in the Middle East. It was an attempt to find some sort of synthesis between Israeli demands for security guarantees and Arab demands for territorial concessions in the Negev region. The speech was deliberately vague, but it was not long before the American plan spelled out by Dulles revealed its anti-Israeli bias.

The United States proposed a treaty that would guarantee the borders between Israel and its neighbors on condition that the two sides first reach an agreement on border demarcations; using

large-scale regional economic plans as a basis, the United States would support the resettlement of the refugees in the Arab countries, and the repatriation of some of them to Israel; after agreeing on the borders, in order to achieve peace the two sides would have to reach an agreement on Jerusalem, which would then be re-examined by the UN, and would have to solve other economic problems as well. Referring to the need for agreement on the borders, Dulles spoke of 'desolate areas that have only sentimental importance' – hinting at the need for Israeli concessions in the Negev.

Dulles's speech caused great disappointment in Israel because of the linkage it stipulated between a defense treaty and extensive territorial concessions in the Negev. The Egyptians rejected the American proposal as well, claiming that the concessions demanded from Israel were 'too little, too late'. In September 1955, shortly after Dulles's speech, the massive Czech-Egyptian arms deal was officially made public, signalling a fundamental change in the Middle East. Israel was left with nothing – no US defensive weapons and no American-Israeli defense treaty. Despite Israel's unflagging diplomatic efforts in Washington from the early 1950s onward, the State of Israel faced the end of 1955 without viable security arrangements and without any foreseeable chances for achieving peace with its neighbors. On the contrary, the failure of the American Middle Eastern policies and the great Soviet penetration into the region totally overturned the balance of power that had existed between Egypt and Israel up to that time, and clouds of war began forming over the skies of the Middle East.

NOTES

1. Ben-Gurion's decision to merge all military frameworks into one national army – the IDF – was designed to disband the troublesome right-wing underground militias as well as the mainstream Palmach, but it was the disbandment of this elite unit, which had played so crucial a part in Israel's victory in the war, that caused the greatest controversy.
2. Briefing of Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sharett, 5 Sept. 1954. State Archives 4373/17.
3. Ya'akov Herzog to Shiloah, 14 Sept. 1954. Ibid., File 17.
4. Shiloah to Teddy Kollek, 26 Aug. 1954, and to Ya'akov Herzog, 2 Sept. 1954. Ibid.
5. The description of this struggle and other aspects of American-Israeli relations is based on a document from the State Archives, aided by various publications of the Davis Institute of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and particularly: No.3, Meir Avidan, *Principal Aspects of American-Israeli Relations in the 'Fifties*, and No.8, Mordechai Gazit, *Israel's Arms Procurements from the United States of America*.
6. Grossman's report on a conversation with Nasser, 27 Dec. 1955. State Archives 2456/3.
7. Ibid.
8. On 2 Jan. 1955 an announcement was made in Baghdad of the decision reached by Iraq and Turkey to sign a treaty between the two countries. In response to this, Nasser called a meeting of all the Arab heads of states and launched a propaganda campaign against Iraq and the West. State Archives 3456/7.
9. Shiloah to Ya'akov Herzog, 17 Aug. 1955. State Archives 4374/22.

The First Two Shots

The true date of the beginning of the Sinai Campaign is 27 September 1955 – the day the Russian-Egyptian arms deal was announced (under the guise of a ‘Czech’-Egyptian deal). This, in a way, was the first shot of the war. It could be said that the second shot was fired the following day when it became clear, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the US was going to continue turning a blind eye to Israel’s security needs; the Eisenhower administration was not about to supply Israel with arms for its self-defense; American ‘appeasement policy’ toward Egypt was still going strong, despite the massive arms deal with the Russians; and the Americans were entrenched in their demand for Israel to cut out large parts of the Negev and hand them to Jordan and Egypt. From this point on an inexorable chain of events began leading ultimately to the outbreak of hostilities a year and one month later, on 29 October 1956.

This account of the events leading up to the Sinai Campaign is not a matter of hindsight or historical perspective. Rather it was the professional opinion of Ambassador Eban and Minister Shiloah, as they expressed it in October 1955, immediately following the announcement of the Russian-Egyptian arms deal. Their response to this assessment of regional developments was a written proposal, signed by Eban, calling for Israel to initiate military operations in order

to destroy the Nasser regime, either on our own or with the cooperation of the western Powers... [because]... the Russian-Czech-Egyptian agreement is a revolutionary event in East-West relations, and in relation to the future of the State of Israel. This agreement marks the weakening of Western influence in the region and presents a danger to the very existence of the State of Israel.

The Eban-Shiloah proposal for a pre-emptive Israeli strike in response to the Czech-Egyptian arms deal and the continuing US policy of appeasement was submitted to Moshe Sharett, who was then nearing the end of his term of office as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, and to David Ben-Gurion, who was still Minister of Defense. This was shortly before Ben-Gurion was asked, in November 1955, to become Israel’s Prime Minister and to form a government once again, in which he held the premiership and the Defense portfolio, and Sharett served, once again and only for a short while, as Foreign Minister.

The call by Eban and Shiloah for a pre-emptive Israeli strike against Egypt was hand-delivered to Sharett by Israel’s military attaché to Washington, Colonel Katriel Salmon, who helped formulate the message. Gideon Raphael, Eban’s deputy at the United Nations, was also part of the team that labored over numerous drafts of the proposal until it was finally shaped to

their satisfaction. This proposal actually preceded another one composed independently and submitted by Chief of Staff of the IDF, Major-General Moshe Dayan, calling for a military operation code-named 'Operation Omer', aimed at taking control of the Eilat Straits.¹ Thus, the Eban-Shiloah proposal has pride of place as the first such proposal to be submitted at that critical time immediately following the fateful Czech-Egyptian arms deal.²

After describing the deal as 'a danger to the very existence of the State of Israel' and analyzing western responses ('fear', 'panic', 'total helplessness' and a 'continuation of the appeasement policy'), Eban and Shiloah recommended that 'a decision be reached in the government for an operational plan aimed at destroying the Nasser regime either on our own or in cooperation with the western powers'. They suggested:

To begin on the one hand preparing everything necessary for an independent operation, and on the other hand embarking on a campaign in the United States and among the other western powers to acquire defensive weapons, and achieve a security treaty as well as a secret agreement for closely-coordinated action that would redress the situation in the Middle East.

This part of their proposal was a fairly precise description of what actually transpired for a short while in the relations between France and Israel. Eban's and Shiloah's reading of the probability of creating a shift in American policy in this context was, however, incorrect. They suggested embarking on the operation as soon as possible because by spring 1956 the American presidential campaign would be in full swing, and the administration would be wary of becoming involved in risky operations of any kind. But, they concluded, by spring 1956, 'We can call up very large forces'.

In another version of their proposal, from 11 October 1955, there is a much more detailed and reasoned analysis of their intentions. They state that

The solution must be sought in three ways; (a) recreating the balance of power; (b) securing western guarantees to offset Russian support for Egypt; (c) bringing our full military potential to bear in the diplomatic and, possibly, the military struggle.

After recommending quick action on the first two clauses, Eban stated

If the arming of the enemy's forces is not arrested, and most importantly – there is no assurance that the West will rush into taking strong action unless it feels forced to do so – I am of the opinion, as are my colleagues ... that there is no recourse but to plan a military operation to go hand-in-hand with diplomatic efforts. We must employ our military strength on two levels. First of all – as a threat that will hang over the present situation, and secondly – on the battlefield itself, unless we achieve what we want in the abovementioned points (a) and (b) very soon.

And again:

We must make all the western and the Arab parties understand that there is no chance that we will sit idly by and watch as the aggressive Arab-Communist strength grows. Most importantly the West must understand that in the absence of any action on its part to ensure our security, there is no recourse for us but a military confrontation with the

objective of destroying the Egyptian regime which now serves as an instrument for Soviet penetration... It is highly recommended that this three-point plan should be put in place now, all at once. The logic of the plans requires that our military arm be strengthened significantly in the coming months, but that it be used only in relation to the success or failure of the two non-military operations, with the exception of localized reprisals, which should be limited as far as possible until the entire plan is in place... These recommendations arise out of a need to seize a crucial moment, since our successful stand to date against Arab strength does not guarantee our ability to face up to a major world power.³

Reuven Shiloah spelled out his intentions and proposals on how 'to change the face of the region' in letters to Abba Eban and Teddy Kollek⁴ In these letters Shiloah proposed that in addition to Israeli requests for defensive weapons and security guarantees, Israel should suggest to the Americans that Israel would be willing to 'contribute to and cooperate in an overall effort in the region that would also provide an answer to the Soviet danger'. This 'comprehensive plan', he suggested, should include proposals for alternate regimes in Egypt and Syria, and should point out ways of strengthening parties hostile to Nasser in other countries. Shiloah suggested a list of people and groups in western countries who, he felt, could be interested in such a plan (in other words, reshaping the map of the region through subversive operations aimed at overthrowing the hostile regimes and supporting opposition groups operating inside radical and pro-Soviet Arab countries).

In this letter, Shiloah noted that if Israel does not propose its own 'comprehensive plan', 'a western plan will be created ... by the English and some of the American planners who are looking for a solution that would encourage Iraq to annex Syria as compensation for western support [for Israel]'. The truth is that ever since the end of the War of Independence, defense ministries and foreign ministries in the West and in this region have continually dealt with various plans for restructuring the map of the Middle East and 'correcting errors' in the border demarcations between the countries of the region. This was the case in the 'Dulles Plan' which proposed taking the Negev away from Israel and creating a corridor between Jordan and Egypt; it was the case in King Abdullah's plan for 'the unification of Syria' under his rule, as a first stage in the reunification under Hashemite rule of the entire area from the Hijaz in the Arab (Saudi) peninsula to Jordan and Syria; and such was the case in the plan for the 'unification of Iraq and Syria' into one country – to be known as 'Greater Syria' which would include Lebanon, Jordan and Falasteen (the Arab name for 'Palestine') – and be ruled by either Syria or Iraq.⁵ Shiloah ended his letter as follows: 'Of course we must not put all our faith in plans like this. The first and most important thing we must do is to prepare for war.'

The extent to which the idea of a pre-emptive war caught on at that time is demonstrated clearly in a letter written by Philip Ehrlich, of the 'Circle of Friends'. In a letter to Arthur Dean, in which he stressed that his support for Israel was the act of a loyal American patriot looking out solely for American interests,⁶ he explained why he supported the demand to supply Israel with defensive weapons and sign a security and peace agreement: 'It is possible that it was a mistake to create the State of Israel and perhaps it is pursuing an erroneous policy, as was the case in the Kinneret operation,⁷ but it exists, and its destruction will be a terrible blow to the United States and a victory for the Soviets in the eyes of all the non-aligned countries in the Near and Far East, which will rely on the USSR and not on the United States for their defense.' He continued, and this is the main point: 'If Israel is not given arms and a security treaty, it will be forced to go to

war very soon in order to prevent its defeat later with Soviet help, as long as it is not too late, and there is still a chance to destroy the Arab countries before they destroy Israel.' And, indeed, this analysis of the situation was shared at the time by many moderates, including some who were very far from Zionism, such as the wealthy lawyer from San Francisco.

It is safe to assume that Shiloah's plans for 'changing the face of the region' were not even shown to Sharett. His joint proposal, together with Eban, 'to destroy the Nasser regime on our own or in cooperation with the western powers' was quite enough. Sharett was furious when he received the proposal (which was also sent to him by cable), particularly because it was delivered to him by the military attaché Colonel Katriel Salmon – which meant that Ben-Gurion and Chief of Staff Dayan had been included in the discussions on a proposal for a preemptive war. Sharett knew that Ben-Gurion was considering far-reaching operational plans, and this was precisely what Sharett was afraid of. In an angry and somewhat confused cable to 'his people' Eban and Shiloah, Sharett wrote that if Salmon was not already on his way to deliver their proposal, they must immediately cancel his trip, since his coming 'will light a fire in the Army... The craving for a preemptive war has been burning in their hearts for a long time and has now seized upon the arming of Egypt as yet another excuse and draws enormous encouragement from the support of the embassy in Washington. Had I known that this was the mission, I would have called off Katriel's trip right from the start... The turmoil of decision-making should be left solely in the hands of policy-makers.'⁸

In his diary, Sharett wrote that he never thought 'that even Abba Eban would be in favor of desperate proposals such as these. I was not convinced that these were his true feelings – I knew how easily he could be influenced.' And after his meeting with Salmon, Sharett was even more convinced that it was Salmon himself who was 'the source and the prime mover in this concept of pre-emptive war.'⁹

Minister of Defense Ben-Gurion did not respond to the two diplomats' saber rattling proposal, but he did order Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan, on 23 October 1955, 'to prepare operational plans for three possible actions: conquest of the Gaza Strip; an offensive in Northern Sinai; conquest of the Eilat Straits (Sharm e-Sheikh, Ras Nasrani and the islands Tiran and Snapir), in order to ensure free shipping lanes in the Red Sea. Emphasis was placed on the last of these three options.'¹⁰

It is not inconceivable that the Eban-Shiloah proposal gave Ben-Gurion's decision a boost, though Ben-Gurion and Dayan had already discussed plans on 8 August 1955 to sail a ship through the Straits of Tiran and, following the virtually certain Egyptian attack on the vessel, the IDF would launch a military operation to conquer the straits and its two islands, Tiran and Snapir. Contrary to Dayan, who felt that Israel should remain in control of the straits after their conquest, Ben-Gurion made it clear, after approving the plan once again on 8 November, that 'if we receive guarantees for free shipping – we will leave'. On 10 November Dayan sent Ben-Gurion a memorandum in which he stated that the Gaza Strip and the Eilat Straits could be taken immediately – when technical arrangements would be completed in about two months.¹¹

A few days later, Ben-Gurion's sense of urgency abated somewhat. On 13 November he decided to postpone Operation Omer until the end of January 1956: 'We may be getting American arms', he claimed. On 7 November Ben-Gurion spoke to Dayan once again on the issue: 'In the coming weeks we will know what the Americans decide about defensive weapons. We will see if they are going to give them or not. At this point, taking action [the reference is, apparently to the above operation] – could be suicide. Eden will then appear as the savior of the Arab world, and that's just what he needs.' Earlier in this conversation, Ben-Gurion expressed

his concern over possible 'English intervention' should the IDF attack El-Arish. When Dayan asked him what he thought they would do, Ben-Gurion replied: 'They'll bomb the airfields.' And Ben-Gurion went on: 'We must try and get arms from any possible source. The most critical problem is airplanes.'

Ben-Gurion's change of heart on this issue, and his decision to postpone military action to the end of January, may have been prompted by a statement made by President Eisenhower on 9 November 1955: 'Although the United States has no intention of contributing to the arms race, it is willing to consider requests for arms needed for defensive purposes.' For Ben-Gurion this was a spark of hope, however faint, that it was still possible to get American arms.

This was but one among many vague and contradictory statements made by President Eisenhower and particularly by Secretary of State Dulles on this critical issue, and Ben-Gurion's hopes soon proved to be groundless. During the months that followed Eisenhower's statement, Dayan repeatedly told Ben-Gurion that nothing would come of it, but Ben-Gurion was anxious to avoid embarking on Operation Omer prematurely and endangering possible American arms supplies – particularly since, at that time, there were no viable alternate sources of arms on the horizon.

The other considerations were fear of a British thrust into the Negev in the event of a large-scale Israeli pre-emptive strike and the risk of British bombing runs on Israeli airfields in case of limited Israeli conquests. Official British documents pertaining to this period that have recently been released, which reveal a number of British Army plans for bombing major Israeli cities, bear out Ben-Gurion's fears of British intervention against Israel. In time, this danger was to be one of Ben-Gurion's major considerations for insisting on a joint action with the British in Sinai and the Canal Zone – in order to tie their hands and force them to fight alongside Israel against Egypt instead of fighting with Jordan against Israel.

In a meeting with Dayan on 16 November 1955, Ben-Gurion said, 'I am very concerned that England might come to Egypt's aid... England has always coveted the Negev. If the IDF fails and if the Egyptian Army enters the southern part of Israel, then England will have its hour and retake the Negev – one way or another ... it will be taken away from us and annexed to Transjordan and to Egypt, and in fact what we will have there is a British army base.' He added, 'Even a war that ends in our complete victory – what it will mean is terrible damage to settlements, to the economy, and a loss of five to seven years of progress... The first thing we must do is acquire arms ...and not take the risk of an aggressive war, a war that might end in a military defeat through the intervention of a major foreign power against whom we will not be able to hold out, one that will certainly be regarded internationally as a moral defeat, leaving us in total isolation. Therefore ... the stance taken by the government is the right one – that we should not initiate a war.'¹²

In the event, Ben-Gurion's arguments came after the fact. Ten days earlier, on 5 November, Ben-Gurion had put the proposal to embark on Operation Omer to the Cabinet, and had been voted down nine to four. It can be safely assumed that Ben-Gurion had accurately predicted the outcome – which suited his position perfectly. He was not keen on securing government approval for his proposal at that time and, rather than voting against the proposal, preferred being in the minority to give himself an alibi should Israel be attacked and suffer massive destruction. Conversely – and this is the most plausible explanation – this tactical move gave him a free hand to react to possible future developments which would force Israel to go to war despite it all. Be that as it may, at that point, Operation Omer was canceled, the special forces prepared for it were disbanded and other units put on alert in anticipation of the operation were stood down and

returned to their regular tasks. The war, which was in the air, was postponed for a year, while its shadow continued to haunt the region, and the opportunities to forestall the seemingly inevitable hostilities were lost one by one.

Ben-Gurion was not alone in his vacillation between war and waiting. The dizzying merry-go-round of conflicting considerations for and against going to war, when and against whom, was brought about, principally, by the Americans, who played a key role in Israel's situation and its diplomatic considerations. All the signs seem to point to the fact that the Americans were caught up in a web of contradictory policies. Basically, however, they remained faithful to the Dulles Plan of August 1955 and to the attempts to implement it, despite the crushing blow dealt to their diplomatic efforts by the arms deal of September 1955. Contrary to all the indications, there were officials in the American administration who maintained the hope that there was time yet before the Egyptians could actually digest the enormous quantities of arms that were soon to begin flowing into the country, and that this afforded a time-frame for pressuring Israel into making territorial concessions, and convincing the Egyptians to agree, from a position of strength, to display the kind of flexibility they were incapable of showing previously when they were much weaker militarily.

NOTE

1. Also known as the Tiran Straits, and divided by two small islands – Tiran and Snapir – which belong to Egypt. This is the entrance from the Red Sea into the long gulf bordered by Egypt to the northwest, Saudi Arabia to the southeast, and reaching northward up to the port cities of Eilat in Israel and Aqaba in Jordan. The location of the islands in the middle of the Straits enabled any military force that occupied them to effectively block any shipping from reaching Eilat – as indeed the Egyptians did just prior to the outbreak of the 1956 war.
2. As part of a review of the diplomatic battles in Washington, Abba Eban writes, on 5 July 1957, that ‘in the beginning of October 1955, after the Czech-Egyptian arms deal, I pointed out that a military operation against Egypt was unavoidable unless some way were found to reestablish a balance of security. I summed up proposals suggested by Reuven Shiloah and myself in a message that was brought to Israel by Col. Katriel Salmon (Israel's military attache in Washington), and handed to Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett and to Defense Minister David Ben-Gurion.’ This summary contains the complete text of the proposal for a pre-emptive strike and the reasoning behind it. Private archive.
3. The Eban-Shiloah Proposal, 11 Oct. 1955. State Archives 2456/3.
4. The letter to Eban, Herzog, Salmon, ‘strictly confidential’, 24 Oct. 1955, and to Kollek, 1 Nov. 1955. Ibid., File 22.
5. Ideas raised by Ben-Gurion before the Sinai Campaign concerning changes in the border demarcations in the region – particularly in southern Lebanon, the annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel and the resettlement of refugees from Israel in Iraq – were among the various plans for reshaping the map of the region every time there was a threat of war in the area. However, it repeatedly transpired that the status quo was stronger than any of the attempts made to change its so-called ‘deviations’. And, as would be seen, it was the Sinai Campaign, more than anything else, that shored up the status quo in the Negev and put a damper – for a number of decades at least – on Arab desires to take the Negev away from Israel in order to create territorial continuity between the two parts of the Muslim Arab world which the Negev split down the middle. Even in the 1980s similar plans were floated in the media in case the Iranians won the war against Iraq.
6. Philip Ehrlich to Arthur Dean, 24 Jan. 1956. State Archives 2456/16.
7. The reference is to a retaliatory raid carried out by Israel against Syrian positions near Lake Kinneret on 12 Dec. 1955. See [Chapter Five](#).
8. Moshe Sharett to Shiloah and Eban, date unclear. Ibid.
9. Sharett's personal diary, Vol.4, p.1127, 12 Oct. 1955, and pp.1128–9, 16 Oct. 1955.
10. Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion*, Vol.3, p.1154.
11. Moshe Dayan, *Milestones*, pp.162–3. These ideas preceded the Egyptian-Russian arms deal, and were prompted by the feeling of siege resulting from the blockade on Israeli shipping in the Straits, the increase in infiltration and murderous terrorist attacks, and the feeling of the need for a military action against the Egyptians army in order to gain a few years' respite. The arms deal merely intensified many times over the urge that was there all along to break the siege.
12. Ibid., pp.174–5.

The American Failure

On 6 December 1955 American intentions became clearer. On that day US Secretary of State Dulles submitted the main points of a State Department plan for a comprehensive Israeli-Arab settlement to the Israeli Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharett. It was a hard blow for Israel, since it was totally unacceptable even as a basis for negotiations, and was rejected out of hand. The fully detailed plan was submitted a few days later in a meeting between Francis Russell, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State on the Israeli-Arab conflict, and Reuven Shiloah. The meeting was a bitter disappointment for Shiloah, both personally and diplomatically. Russell began by describing the stages of the plan's development throughout 1955. He told Shiloah that it was finalized in July, prior to Dulles's speech of 26 August. According to Russell, the purpose of the speech, which was deliberately vague, was to prepare public opinion in the US, Egypt and Israel, and to provide time to secure the economic aid necessary for its implementation.

Russell stressed that no changes had been made in the plan as a result of the Egyptian-Czech arms deal. Previously, Dulles had thought there would be time to work cautiously and in stages to bring the two sides to an agreement. However 'events in the region in the past few months make it necessary to make supreme efforts to bring the conflict to an end rapidly and without any delay.'¹

The emphasis on the part Russell played in preparing the plan is borne out in a book written by his British opposite number, Evelyn Shuckburgh, who was in charge of Middle Eastern affairs in the British Foreign Ministry.² Shuckburgh tells about the creation of the 'Alpha Team' which comprised himself and Russell, as far back as 21 January 1955, and recalls that some of the elements that appeared in the final plan were discussed at the very outset. Already on 7 March 1955, Shuckburgh relates, the finishing touches were put to the plan during a conversation with Russell, after which it was submitted to Prime Minister Anthony Eden, who approved it. The plan, which was discussed in great detail throughout the year and completed by the end of July, included from the outset territorial changes in the Negev, reparations and repatriation for the refugees, and more. Its main points were a creation of two 'triangles' in the Negev – a Jordanian triangle and an Egyptian triangle, that would meet in the center of the Negev, allowing Egypt and Jordan territorial contiguity, while at the same time maintaining a land link for Israel to Eilat. Shuckburgh suggested sweetening the proposal for Nasser by enlarging the triangles, while Russell believed they should be reduced in size.³

Reuven Shiloah was, quite probably, surprised and embittered. It suddenly transpired that 1955 was the year in which the US pulled the wool over Israeli eyes. Shiloah had frequently

referred to the ‘cunning foxes’ in the State Department, but he now learned that the Secretary of State himself and his Special Assistant for Middle East Affairs headed the pack. For two whole years the Israelis had entertained the belief that in the end the Americans would relent and give them the defensive weapons they needed as well as a security guarantee, and now it became agonizingly clear that throughout the year the Americans and British had cooked up a different dish altogether. Conceivably, the painstaking diplomatic legwork and the nurturing of the ‘Circle of Friends’ were not altogether wasted, and did in fact help postpone the official proposal of the plan from January to August 1955, and perhaps also softened some of its points. Be that as it may, at that meeting on 8 December, Russell put all the American cards on the table. For Reuven Shiloah it was a deeply frustrating moment.

Francis Russell described in detail the eight clauses of the American peace agreement, the main points of which were, of course, those referring to the annexation of parts of the Negev to Jordan and Egypt and the absorption of a large number of Arab refugees:⁴

- A. Israel will have to absorb 75,000 refugees over a period of five years, will pay compensation for Arab property and forgo compensation from the Arab countries. The United States will assist in this but ‘Israel will have to raise a large part of the required amount on its own, and with the help of world Jewry’.
- B. The United States will recognize the division of Jerusalem into areas of separate Israeli and Jordanian sovereignty. Jerusalem will be recognized as the capital of Israel and access to, and control of, the holy sites will be ensured, in accordance with Israel’s views on these issues.
- C. The Arab boycott, including the secondary boycott, will be lifted and all limitations on Israeli shipping in the Suez and the Gulf of Eilat⁵ will be ended.
- D. Jordan will have a Free Area in Haifa harbor (according to another version, in the port of Eilat), Arab civilian aircraft will once again be allowed to fly over Israeli airspace and Arab travel inside Israel will be permitted on roads stipulated by Israel for that purpose.
- E. Water resources in the area will be divided in accordance with the Johnstone Plan.
- F. Territorial issues: the present armistice lines will become international boundaries; No-Man’s Land areas to be divided between the countries; and Jordan will have to give up its demands for control of parts of the Latrun region.
- G. In the Negev an Arab area must be created to connect Egypt to the rest of the Arab world, without cutting Eilat and its approaches off from Israel.
- H. Both sides will be given security guarantees in accordance with the Dulles Plan of 8 August 1955.

This detailed plan came as an addition to Dulles’s announcement of 21 November 1955 in which he demanded that Israel accept the call for territorial concessions, respond with restraint to any provocation and refrain from any use of force in order to implement its right to free passage in the Eilat Straits. In his meeting with Dulles, Sharett compared the American conditions to the infamous appeasement of Hitler at Munich before the war, and rejected outright any demands for concessions in the Negev.

The government of Israel not only rejected the American plan, but responded with a plan of its own which: (a) called for a full peace accord – rather than a non-belligerency pact; (b) expressed agreement to negotiate mutual border modifications, without changing the territorial

status quo or infringing on Israel's territorial integrity; (c) expressed Israel's agreement in principle for free road links between Egypt and Jordan without giving up any territory whatsoever in the Negev; and (d) included an agreement to provide port services in Haifa. Israel also expressed its agreement in principle to pay reparations to the refugees and cooperate on the exploitation of the water resources of the Jordan and the Yarmuk rivers, and demanded free passage through Egypt and Lebanon. All of these clauses more or less echoed similar clauses in the American plan but were, of course, very different. The Israeli plan also reiterated its need for arms shipments and rejected the demand that it refrain altogether from any further retaliatory raids.

A chasm had opened up between the two countries that was not easy to bridge. At this point the countdown to the outbreak of warfare was nearing its end, even before anyone had actually made the decision to go to war. No one did more to try to prevent warfare – before the rift in relations and afterward – than Sharett, the tragic figure of Israeli politics in the 1950s. The Foreign Minister began his desperate efforts to head off war as far back as 25 October 1955, on a trip to Europe to meet the foreign ministers of the four major powers at their Geneva summit. He tried to enlist their support for wide-ranging military aid for Israel and to persuade the Soviet Foreign Minister to refrain from supplying arms to Egypt.

It was in this context that a confrontation developed between Sharett and Secretary of State Dulles in a series of meetings they held during the months of November and December of that year. In their first meeting, in Paris on 26 October,⁶ Sharett proposed that all western aid to Egypt be suspended unless Egypt canceled the Soviet arms deal. He claimed that Nasser should not be allowed to enjoy the best of both worlds and that all efforts must be made to avoid setting this kind of precedent for the other Arab countries. Dulles replied that western aid to Egypt was not substantial enough for Nasser to give up the deal with the Soviets. Sharett stressed the severe danger to Israel arising from Egypt's arms superiority, which would increase as a result of the deal. Dulles responded that Israel was not militarily inferior to Egypt, even though the arms deal did give cause for concern. He added that should the USSR indeed pour a large quantity of arms into Egypt, it would be impossible to create a true balance of power because, given the great demographic differences between Egypt and Israel, Egypt was much more capable of absorbing these large quantities of arms. The United States would consider Israel's request for arms favorably, but not in order to achieve a balance of power between Israel and Egypt, Dulles told Sharett at that meeting. This was a firmly held American view that Dulles and Eisenhower reiterated on numerous occasions and clouded over occasionally with vague and contradictory promises.⁷

Sharett warned that should the military imbalance between Israel and its neighbors not be corrected, Israel might embark on a pre-emptive military move. Thus Sharett too joined those who cautioned against the 'no alternative'⁸ situation that could lead to an Israeli military initiative – throwing in his lot on this issue with the Prime Minister and the Chief of Staff, and with his loyal representatives in Washington, Shiloah and Eban. What is more, Sharett stressed that even if Israel did restrain itself and refrained from taking any military action, the threat of war would still be very real because of the great temptation for Nasser to take advantage of his Russian-backed military superiority, and initiate hostilities. Dulles's response to Sharett's warnings of a pre-emptive strike was a counter-warning that the United States would not come to the aid of any country that contravened the principle of non-belligerency. All of which – as we now know – transpired exactly as he said it would.

During the course of his meeting with Dulles, Sharett reiterated Israel's proposal to sign a

security pact, to which Dulles replied that the time was not ripe for the establishment of formal security relations between the two countries and suggested that Israel continue 'to live according to the present policy'. 'It is inconceivable that an attempt would be made to destroy Israel without an American response, but I doubt if the American people, through their representatives in the Senate would be willing to get involved in a crisis situation', Dulles added. At their second meeting, in Geneva, things were made even clearer. Dulles repeated his promise to consider favorably Israel's request for arms, but indirectly tied it to an agreement with the Arabs which would involve a 'significant contribution' on Israel's part. It was only in December 1955, in meetings Sharett held with Dulles in Washington in order to take him up on his promise to 'consider favorably Israel's request for arms', that it was made absolutely clear to him that any such move was entirely dependent on Israel's willingness to accept territorial concessions.

What also became clear was Nasser's ability to lead the Americans astray most of the time. In conversations with American diplomats he repeatedly promised that he would limit the number of Soviet experts allowed into Egypt. He also threatened that should the British and the Americans sign a mutual defense pact with Israel, the Arabs would, on the very next day, sign a similar agreement with the Soviet Union. In his meeting with Sharett in Washington, Dulles said once again that there was a chance that Nasser might change his mind about the connection to the Soviet Union and that Egypt was prepared to make its severing of relations with the USSR conditional on Israeli territorial concessions in the Negev.

On 17 November 1955, on the strength of the administration's promises to look into the possibility of supplying Israel with American arms, the Israeli Ambassador to Washington submitted an official request to that effect. But once again, Dulles informed Sharett that Israel must consider border adjustments in the Negev that would ensure territorial continuity between Egypt and the other Arab countries, and that stubborn adherence to the Armistice lines would not facilitate progress toward peace. Dulles added a clear threat too: if Israel would not cooperate in the search for a solution, the United States would find itself facing a very serious choice – between its loyalty to Israel and all its other interests that were concentrated in the Arab world. With this ominous statement, Dulles in fact put an end to Sharett's career in the decision-making circles of the State of Israel. The line of moderation that he had represented and championed in Israeli politics for so long had clearly reached an end.

Relations between the two countries were now in a state of open crisis. Israel ultimately provided the Americans with the excuse they needed to refuse to supply Israel with the much sought-after arms: the IDF carried out a large-scale retaliatory raid against the Syrians near Lake Kinneret on 12 December, at the same time when the vulnerable Sharett was in Washington ostensibly negotiating the sale of American arms to Israel. Sharett later claimed that the raid totally ruined any chances of a positive American response to Israel's request for arms. And so it was that Dulles wrote to Sharett at the end of December, that primarily because of the Kinneret operation, the United States could not at that time arrive at a decision to supply American arms to Israel. However, the Americans' behavior in this entire affair, both prior to and after the Kinneret operation, does not give much credence to this excuse.

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At that point, America in fact had lost out on both fronts: both Israel and Egypt rejected the American plan. Following this series of American diplomatic failures in the Middle East, reaching all the way back to the beginning of the Republican administration in 1953, President Eisenhower decided to put Israel and Egypt to a tough test of their true intentions – for war or for

peace. For this purpose he initiated a secret mission to both sides and enlisted the aid of his personal friend, Robert Anderson, who had been Secretary of the Navy and Assistant Secretary of Defense, and was about to be appointed Secretary of the Treasury.

Anderson, who was a private citizen at the time, was chosen by his close friend Eisenhower to embark on a peace mission – the outcome of which would determine whether Eisenhower would agree to Israel's requests for arms and how to deal with Nasser. Anderson's mission, entailing a number of trips between Washington, Cairo and Jerusalem, took place under a cloak of secrecy during the months of January-February 1956. What emerged was that Nasser remained adamant in his position that all of the Arabs' most extreme demands be met – giving the refugees freedom of choice between reparations and repatriation in Israel, creating territorial continuity between Egypt and Jordan by taking away parts of the Negev and returning to the Partition Plan borders. Nasser rejected Ben-Gurion's offer of a face-to-face meeting – even in Cairo – and in his final meeting with Anderson, came out strongly against any kind of direct contact with Israelis, including a non-official representative whom Anderson suggested bringing to Cairo.⁹

Despite the failure of Anderson's mission, President Eisenhower persisted in his refusal to provide Israel with defensive weapons. This was one of the main topics of discussion between Anderson, Sharett and Ben-Gurion. Both Israeli leaders stressed the fact that the Russian arms shipments to Egypt placed Israel in real military jeopardy. At that point, Ben-Gurion literally begged the Americans for help:¹⁰ 'We are facing a life or death issue... We do not have the means to stop the bombers that can reach us and attack us within ten minutes... We have no weapons at all against the Egyptians airplanes... We will be in grave danger if the United States continues its embargo on arms shipments to Israel while Egypt receives arms from Britain and the Soviet Union... Within six months we may very well be annihilated... we can be attacked in five minutes.'

These rather extreme expressions of fear can perhaps be explained by Ben-Gurion's recollections of the time he spent in London during the Blitz and the devastation inflicted by the massive German bombing raids. His memoirs from this period indicate that this was a traumatic event in his life, and it guided his decisions prior to the Sinai Campaign. It was, as we have noted, one of the reasons, though not the only one, for his stubborn insistence on cooperating with the British in the Suez campaign. Only the RAF had the power to bomb Egyptian cities and in so doing, deter the Egyptians from bombing inside Israel. His agreement to the pre-emptive action stemmed from the need, as he saw it, to attack the Egyptians before they had time to integrate the enormous quantities of weapons they had been given, including MIG 15 fighter planes and Ilyushin bombers, and learn to use them effectively.

At a meeting of the IDF General Staff in January 1956, the officers were informed that the scale of the Czech deal was far greater than anything they had imagined: 200 MIG 15s, not 100 as they had previously believed.¹¹ The Egyptians also received 50 Ilyushin medium-range bombers, as well as 275 T-34 tanks and hundreds of artillery pieces and 'Katyusha' rocket launchers, and many other types of weapons for land, sea and air warfare. Initially it was thought that the equipment would arrive in Egypt by the middle of 1957, but later intelligence reports indicated that the fighter planes and various other types of weapons would be arriving in Egypt as early as January 1956. Speaking to his staff officers at that meeting, Chief of Staff Dayan said: 'Now that Omer has been canceled, we must expect a confrontation that will be initiated by the other side.'¹²

On 1 February, following a visit by the Prime Minister of Britain to Washington, a joint

British-American communiqué was issued stating that ‘the security of the nations of the region cannot be based solely on arms, but primarily on the rule of international law and on good neighborly relations’. They mentioned once again the Tripartite announcement of May 1950, which by then was, in fact, a dead letter. On 6 February Dulles wrote to one of Israel’s friends in Congress that Israel must rely on the United Nations and on the Tripartite announcement, and that he did not believe the imbalance in arms supplies between Egypt and Israel could be corrected, first of all because of the enormous differences between the populations of the two countries, and second because of the sheer quantity of arms the Soviets were offering to the Arabs. Dulles repeated this statement on 24 February in his appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Foreign Minister Sharett responded to Dulles in an address to the Knesset on 1 March, in which he said: ‘If this is the final shape of United States’ policy ... then the very simple and terrible fact is that the United States is perfectly willing to abandon Israel to its fate.’ Sharett stressed the importance of the qualitative edge in arms supplies, which would obviate the need for Israel to achieve complete arms parity with the Arab countries in order to deter them from attacking.

On 14 February 1956, Ben-Gurion sent a letter to Eisenhower in which he said that the Soviet arms shipments to Egypt gave them clear military superiority, while ‘Israel does not have the means to defend itself. He pleaded with President Eisenhower to take steps to correct this imbalance. Eisenhower’s reply was non-committal: ‘Your request is being carefully reviewed in the light of two basic imperatives: ensuring Israel’s existence and creating a situation that will promote peace in the area.’

At a press conference on 7 March, Eisenhower said: ‘We are trying to prevent an arms race. After all 1.7 million inhabitants cannot absorb the same amount of weapons as 40 million.’ It seems that this arithmetical equation helped President Eisenhower to decide not to supply any weapons at all to Israel, while in fact what Israel was seeking was a qualitative balance – not a quantitative one. On 3 April Ben-Gurion received a reply from the United States in which his last request for arms was turned down. It was at that point that Ben-Gurion made up his mind not to wait any longer for American answers to Israel’s requests for arms.

The American rejection of the arms requests, and Nasser’s repudiation of Anderson’s peace-making efforts, exacerbated Ben-Gurion’s bitterness and anger at the Americans, and his feeling of ‘no alternative’ regarding the rapidly approaching pre-emptive strike. It now depended almost entirely on if and when Israel would be able to acquire fighter planes and tanks from some source other than the United States.

From Washington things looked quite different. The failure of Anderson’s mission caused Eisenhower grave personal disappointment, and, according to some accounts, he was sick and tired of Nasser. The upshot was the final formulation of an American decision to allow Israel to purchase defensive weapons, particularly jet fighters, through Canada and France. Canada would sell Israel – with US approval – 24 Sabre fighter planes, and the French would sell 12 Mystère IVs that had been manufactured especially for the Americans. This presidential decision was yet another case of too little too late.

This arrangement suited the Americans, who were interested in having Canada and France, and other European countries, do the dirty work of annoying the Arab countries by selling arms to Israel, and releasing the United States from the need to do so. The Canadians ultimately managed to sidestep their commitment to the bargain, while the French agreed to supply Israel with arms openly, for their own reasons, which had little to do with the American request. At that

time the rift between the Americans and the Egyptians began to deepen more and more.

This, then, is how Israel's 'Trench Connection' began – a connection that facilitated the pre-emptive strike that was in fact undertaken seven months later. The first four of the 12 *Mystère IV*'s sold to Israel in the first agreement landed in the country on 11 April 1956. This was the first step toward breaking the American embargo on defensive weapons and correcting the balance of power. During April, security tensions mounted inside Israel's borders, and the hidden, perhaps unconscious countdown toward war began in earnest.

During that same month, tensions escalated along Israel's border with Egypt as the *fedayeen* stepped up their murderous attacks inside Israel, and Egyptian artillery inside the Gaza Strip shelled Israeli settlements. On 5 April, a hundred rounds of 120mm mortar shells landed in Kibbutz Nahal Oz. When IDF artillery returned the Egyptian fire, Nasser sent in scores of *fedayeen* from the Gaza Strip into the southern parts of the country. There were clashes everywhere. Water conduits were blown up, hand grenades were thrown into houses and vehicles were attacked. The police, the Border Police and the IDF initiated a large-scale search for terrorist gangs, some of which were still roaming the area. Tension in the country ran very high. Emergency measures were adopted and a curfew was imposed on some roads. Following this artillery duel, angry letters were exchanged between David Ben-Gurion and UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld. 'While all this was going on, President Eisenhower wrote to Ben-Gurion advising him and requesting him to refrain from retaliatory action and thus to prevent the outbreak of war. At the same time a cable arrived from Dulles in which he announced that the United States had notified all the countries involved in the issue that it had no objection to their selling arms to Israel.'¹³

This 'permission' came very late in the game. It may perhaps have made it easier for France to make its initial decision on the arms supply, but at this point events had their own momentum, irrespective of the American announcement. In June 1956, a major arms agreement was signed with France, ensuring Israel military parity with Egypt. France concluded this deal without any prior coordination with the United States, and even against its wishes. Changes in the Israeli government that took place at that time made it possible to proceed with preparations for the military operation. At the express request of David Ben-Gurion, Sharett was forced to resign as Foreign Minister and was replaced by Golda Meir. Shortly afterwards a delegation was dispatched to France for talks on the developments expected over the next few months.

Moshe Sharett's resignation sent shock waves throughout the Israeli political establishment, particularly shaking his own party – Mapai. Among senior Foreign Ministry officials there was deep concern over the departure of the man who had been their mentor since the days of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. Reuven Shiloah belonged to a small group of people who had worked very closely with Moshe Sharett and David Ben-Gurion, and now found themselves torn between their loyalties to the two men – an inner conflict which sharpened as the break between the two men intensified.

Shiloah gave voice to this dilemma in a letter to Teddy Kollek, who belonged to that same select group.

For many years, in fact ever since 1930 when I went out to Baghdad for the first time on behalf of the movement (and perhaps even earlier when as a young member of the 'Socialist Youth' in Jerusalem I heard M.S. lecture), I have been connected by deep ties of work, admiration and affection to M.S... Under his tutelage and with his help I took my first steps in diplomacy, Arab affairs, security and international affairs. I always found him a true friend who gave advice, encouraged and supported me on every idea or initiative

that I proposed. Nevertheless, I was always fully aware of his weaknesses... For years I have watched with great trepidation as his relations with the Prime Minister [Ben-Gurion] and the security forces deteriorated, and for a number of years now I have held the belief that it would be in his own best interests and in the best interests of the State for him to remove himself from foreign affairs for a while... These deteriorating relations with the Prime Minister are increasingly undermining the government's ability to act ... they are dangerous for the government and for the country... I am convinced that there was no alternative to this tragic amputation, but it hurts me deeply that it is attended by so many complications, so much bitterness and personal animosity on the part of all those involved.¹⁴

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At the same time, significant changes were occurring in American Middle East policies as Ambassador Eban and Minister Shiloah discerned them. In conversations with Eban, Secretary of State Dulles expressed his deep disappointment over Nasser's behavior. Consequently, Eban's reports to Jerusalem on these talks and on developments in Washington, throughout March and April 1956, had a slightly more optimistic tone.

By July, a true crisis seemed to loom in American-Egyptian relations as the US demonstratively withdrew its promise of financial aid for the massive Aswan Dam project. Eban reported on this to Foreign Minister Golda Meir after the decision was made and after the American ambassador to Egypt, Henry Byroad, was recalled and sent to South Africa: 'The government of the United States has reached the conclusion that the time has come for a new western policy for the Middle East, based on trimming Nasser's wings (and in the end causing his overthrow), and on strengthening independent elements in the Arab world, in the Middle East, and in Africa who will be willing to cooperate with the West (it is no accident that in the announcement about the cancellation of the grant for the Aswan plan Sudan and Ethiopia were mentioned by name).'¹⁵

During those dramatic months of 1956, Shiloah and Eban found themselves in a grindingly frustrating situation: they were not party to the main event that was taking place in the area of French-Israeli relations. Both of them moved back and forth during those months, trying to follow the confused shifts and internal bickering that characterized American policy toward Nasser. This uncertainty in American policy spawned tactics of deception and reassurance aimed at Israel, accompanied by veiled threats to ensure that Israel limit its retaliatory operations in order to prevent the outbreak of war in the region. From July on, Shiloah too was caught up by this sense of 'seizing the moment' now that America's deep disappointment with Nasser was bringing about a shift of its diplomatic posture in Israel's favor.

Removing Henry Byroad from Cairo at that time seemed to be symptomatic. Byroad was Israel's greatest enemy in the State Department, and one of Nasser's staunchest supporters. He was convinced that the Egyptian leader had nothing but good intentions toward the United States, and, with malicious fervor, lobbied for accepting Nasser's demands at Israel's expense. It was after all of this that Shiloah heard accounts about developments within the Republican administration that were music to Israeli ears. His source was General (Ret.) Julius Klein,¹⁶ head of the Organization of Jewish Veterans in the United States, a Republican Party functionary, a friend of Israel, and noted for his tendency to exaggerate, who had some measure of political influence in the White House. He told Reuven about his conversations with government officials

who ‘had come to far-reaching conclusions... Who realized that the Arab countries are false footing and the only true ally that the West and the United States have is the State of Israel... In his meeting with members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff it was made clear to him’, Shiloah wrote, reporting on his conversation with Klein, ‘that there is a detailed plan of how to come to our aid (should we be attacked). The units and their *modus operandi* have already been selected, and the required operational orders have already been drawn up... Practical responsibility for all this has been handed over to the commanders of the Sixth Fleet, who will send in Marines and airplanes from aircraft carriers. Fleet commanders, Redford and Burke, have already approved the operational plans.’ In the report Shiloah noted: ‘The decision to appoint a Naval Attache to Israel is the direct result of Navy HQ’s growing interest in Israel and the responsibility for this mission given to Sixth Fleet HQ.’

‘There is a resemblance’, Shiloah continued, ‘[between Klein’s story] and information received a few weeks ago by Katriel Salmon from a separate and independent source in the Pentagon... There is no connection between these sources... This change in the attitude of the Navy to Israel has been corroborated by other sources... We met with the ‘Messenger’ [Robert Anderson] ... and he too concurred that it is the intention of the United States to destroy Nasser by any means possible, short of warfare. Nasser’s popularity among the Asian nations must be taken into account, and he must not be turned into a martyr.’

It is hard to tell if these reports on a shift in America’s attitude toward Israel represented a true state of affairs or wishful thinking.¹⁷ At any rate, events ultimately played out according to a different scenario altogether. Once again Nasser caught America – and possibly Israel too – off guard. After the United States reneged on its promise of funding for the Aswan Dam, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal with much fanfare and immediately received Soviet promises of alternate funding for the dam in place of the American aid. This was a challenge to the West that aroused a vast wave of support throughout the Muslim Arab world and totally dumbfounded the United States and the rest of the western powers.

From this point on cracks appeared in relations between France and Britain – inclined to respond to the nationalization of the Canal with military action – and the United States, which had reached a complete dead end in its relations with Nasser. The only thing that Washington could do was to try to gain time by employing delaying tactics aimed at reducing tensions, without, at the same time, suggesting practical ways of dealing with the acute problem at hand, which provoked such a storm and aroused growing fears for the future of the region. The United States refrained from reaching any decision and resorted instead to long-range diplomatic maneuvering such as the creation of the ‘Canal Users union’, which in effect was a *de facto* recognition of the nationalization and an acceptance of Nasser’s regime and policies. In this context, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden was reminded of the traumatic Munich appeasement policy prior to the Second World War. The French, fearing that Nasser’s influence would inflame the already serious uprising in Algeria, took steps to strengthen their treaty with the government of Israel – which was bent on taking military action against Nasser.

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The British could not bear the thought of military cooperation with Israel – they had other ‘clients’ in the region. First of all they reiterated their traditional policies for the region, and tried to install Iraq and Jordan as a counterweight to Nasser’s rising power and his pro-Soviet policy of non-alignment. One year earlier Shiloah had written,¹⁸ ‘What the British propose is to strengthen Iraq and the northern alliance by increasing the supply of arms, aiding in the conquest

of Syria, and having the United States join the Baghdad Treaty... Nuri Sa'id's position is precarious ... and Nuri must be allowed to claim that it was he who contacted the West and wrested concessions from Israel.' That was the main thrust of British policy in those years: to 'wrest concessions at Israel's expense' for the West's Arab 'clients' rather than for the clients of the Soviet Union and the Third World.

And thus, when it was least expected, the British-Hashemite orientation reawoke to threaten Israel's security on its eastern border. Once again Israel faced the possibility of war on two fronts. Once again Ben-Gurion's fears concerning the entrance of British-backed Iraqi troops into Jordan were revived. Once again he suspected, as he had ever since the War of Independence, that Britain intended to support efforts by Iraq and Jordan to change the Armistice lines to Israel's detriment.

This was in fact more than mere suspicion. Iraqi Army units were about to enter the area of the East Bank of the Jordan River. A misunderstanding had occurred in a conversation between Ben-Gurion and the American Ambassador to Israel. It seemed as though Israel had given limited agreement to a request submitted by the Americans: to allow the Iraqi units to remain in place as long as they did not cross the Jordan, and their size and equipment would be limited. As soon as the misunderstanding was discovered (if it was not a misunderstanding then it may have been a quick about-face on a tactical error committed during a momentary lapse of attention), Israel strenuously rejected the request and asked the Americans to ensure that no Iraqi units enter Jordan. Israel's wariness concerning British and Iraqi intentions increased, and not without cause. A statement made by the Iraqi leader Nuri Sa'id, in which he claimed Israel must be forced to accept the borders delineated in the 1947 UN Partition Plan, received the blessing of the spokesman of Britain's Foreign Ministry.

On 13 October 1956 a representative of the British Embassy in Israel requested a meeting with Foreign Minister Golda Meir, in the course of which he handed her a message which was tantamount to a British threat. It was, of course, a great historical irony that only two weeks later the British would send a similar threat, but in the opposite direction – to Nasser. The British communiqué read as follows:¹⁹ 'The government of Great Britain cannot justify any use of force by Israel against the entrance of Iraqi soldiers into Jordan... There is no doubt that Her Majesty's government will have to honour its commitments to Jordan as stipulated in the Anglo-Jordanian agreement.' Golda Meir responded: 'This is an announcement, totally disregarding us, of the entrance of the Iraqi Army into Jordan, to which a threat of the use of force has been added.'

Two days later, on 15 October, the same British representative clarified the point, saying that 'Iraqi forces will enter Jordan at the request of the Jordanian government. The duration of their stay depends entirely on Jordan's needs and these, in turn, depend on Israel's attitude toward Jordan.' Israel made it quite clear that 'England is threatening war against Israel to camouflage Iraqi schemes for expanding its borders and wresting territorial concessions from Israel'. Israel also made it clear that the entrance of Iraqi troops into Jordan would be regarded as 'a violation of the status quo in the region that presents a real danger to Israel's security and territorial integrity'.

The following day a meeting was held in Amman, the capital of Jordan, attended by the Chiefs of Staff of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. After six days of deliberations, they signed an agreement on the creation of a joint command in case of an outbreak of armed conflict with Israel. It was agreed that an Egyptian officer would be commander-in-chief of the joint unit. On 21 October elections were held for the Jordanian Parliament. The anti-western factions, which also supported the extremist policy toward Israel, won a clear majority. The build-up of Iraqi

troop concentrations near Israel's border with Jordan continued, and tensions mounted from moment to moment. On 28 October the Israeli government approved a call-up of IDF reserve units.

Israel's concern over a possible Anglo-Iraqi plot grew. Even those who already knew about the tripartite agreement between England, France and Israel to attack Egypt, primarily Ben-Gurion, suspected Britain's intentions up to the last minute, and even as the operation was in progress. The Anglo-Jordanian mutual defense pact was still a valid document, stipulating that Britain must come to Jordan's aid should it be attacked by Israel. What is more, during this time Israeli troops carried out numerous retaliatory raids in the Jordanian-controlled West Bank. The tension reached its peak on 10 October, during an IDF retaliatory raid on a police fortress near the city of Kalkilya. Difficulties that arose during the raid resulted in numerous Israeli casualties, and IDF commanders considered bringing in the Air Force to help extricate one of the attacking units which was surrounded. At that point, the danger of British military intervention on Jordan's behalf was very real. British publications that revealed the detailed operational plans prepared for that eventuality later corroborated this view.

On the night of the Kalkilya action, the British Consul-General in West Jerusalem called up the Israeli military commander of Jerusalem, Colonel Haim Herzog, at 2 a.m., and requested that he transmit an official message to the Israeli government, expressing the British government's deep concern over the operation and stating that, should hostilities ensue between Jordan and Israel, the British would be forced to activate the Anglo-Jordanian mutual defense treaty.

For the first time since the War of Independence, Israel faced the threat of a war on two fronts simultaneously – on its eastern border with Jordan and Iraq, and on its southwestern border with Egypt – a classic Israeli military dilemma. It was not only a problem of two geographical fronts, but two superpower fronts as well – the radical Arab front which threatened Israel with Soviet intervention, as became clear during the Sinai Campaign, and a pro-western, 'moderate' Arab front which threatened possible British military intervention.

Israel's primary challenge at that juncture was to drive a wedge between those two fronts in order to prevent them from cooperating diplomatically or coordinating militarily against Israel. On the eve of the Sinai Campaign, all eyes were focused on the eastern front and the expected British intervention against Israel. What actually transpired was a total surprise – the launching of the Sinai Campaign against Egypt in the southwest. The armies of Jordan and Iraq stayed put, and Britain joined the battle with Israel and France against Egypt. This tripartite cooperation was the result of Ben-Gurion's successful insistence on including Britain in the campaign, and refusing to go to war only with French support. This aspect of the Israeli Sinai Campaign and the Franco-British Suez War²⁰ has hardly been addressed in the history books, and in retrospect it can be regarded as a brilliant piece of Israeli strategic maneuvering – one of the best.

All these momentous events took place without involving or informing the United States in any way, and, indeed, against its wishes. This was the consequence of the total failure of US Middle Eastern policies in the years preceding this joint campaign. It was, in fact, US policy that pushed Israel into its 'no alternative' posture that led, ultimately, to the use of military force. As far as Israel was concerned, its push into Sinai was an absolutely vital pre-emptive strike, in defiance of American opposition and the direct result of the US failure to provide Israel with a reasonable measure of security by supplying it with arms and providing some form of defense guarantees. The Sinai and Suez campaigns, however they may be evaluated – either in isolation or together – gave a clear indication of the erosion of America's position as the leader of the western world, and of the West's sense of solidarity. France and Britain can possibly be faulted

for embarking on their ill-fated Suez Campaign, and its blundering operational aspects, but the United States cannot be absolved of responsibility for pushing them into it. Nor can one justify the needless humiliation suffered by Britain and France following their unconditional capitulation to Nasser's demands – forced upon them by the United States itself – to the advantage, above all, of the Soviet Union.

NOTES

1. Reuven Shiloah to the office in Jerusalem, 11 Dec. 1955. State Archives 2456/3.
2. Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicholson 1966).
3. *Ibid.*, pp.245, 252, 256–8. In his book Shuckburgh praises Shiloah whom he met in Washington with Gideon Raphael: 'Shiloah is very intelligent and manages to turn every argument in his favor ... all in an effort to show that the West's interests are identical to Israeli interests and require that Egypt be stopped.' p.286.
4. Shiloah to the office in Jerusalem, 11 Dec. 1955. State Archives 2456/3.
5. The body of water lying between Saudi Arabia and the Sinai Peninsula, and leading up to both Eilat in Israel and Aqaba in Jordan, is known variously as the 'Gulf of Eilat' or the 'Gulf of Aqaba' – depending whether it is an Israeli or an Arab who is talking about it. In this book use will be made exclusively of 'the Gulf of Eilat'.
6. State Archives 2456/8.
7. Eisenhower gave a very clear expression of this viewpoint at a press conference held on 7 March 1956 when he repeated America's intention of preventing an arms race in the region. He explained this by saying Israel's 1.7 million inhabitants could not possibly absorb the same amount of arms as Egypt's 40 million inhabitants. As mentioned earlier, the concept of 'qualitative superiority', which was attainable, as well as a deterrent based on this kind of balance, as opposed to 'a quantitative balance' between Israel and the Arab countries, which is totally unattainable, was not part of Dulles's or Eisenhower's thinking at that time. It was only after the Sinai Campaign that this conceptual shift began to appear in American foreign policy toward Israel.
8. This was a catch-phrase deeply rooted in Israeli consciousness, and as such possessed a powerful resonance: it was often referred to as Israel's 'secret weapon' in its stunning victory over the combined armies of the Arab nations during the War of Independence.
9. This description of Anderson's mission is based on Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion*, Vol.3, and on Ben-Gurion's own recollections. See below.
10. In 1972 Ben-Gurion privately printed a monograph in English with reports of his talks with Anderson called *Negotiations with Nasser*. Quotes from this source were used by Mordechai Gazit in an article published by the Davis Institute entitled 'Israel's Military Arms Procurement', May 1983, p.20.
11. See Moshe Dayan, *Milestones*, p.176.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, pp.185–8.
14. Reuven Shiloah to Teddy Kollek, 6 July 1956. State Archives 4374/23.
15. 20 July 1956, State Archives 4374/23.
16. *Ibid.*, 12 Sept. 1956. State Archives 4374/25.
17. At the same time Assistant Secretary of State George Allen said, 'Israel is not defenseless, since it can rely on the Sixth Fleet which alone has more firepower than all the Allied armies combined during the Second World War.' Statements of this kind were always made in the context of yet another rejection of Israel's requests for arms and a security treaty. This was the motive for the arguments surrounding the need for legally approved security guarantees or a security treaty which would give the President the authority to employ military force should Israel be attacked.
18. Shiloah to Teddy Kollek, 1 Nov. 1955. State Archives File 22.
19. State Archives 4374/22.
20. The Israeli action in Sinai became known as the 'Sinai Campaign', or Operation Kadesh, while the Franco-British action in the Canal Zone became known as the 'Suez War'. References in the text to these two areas of military action follow this same distinction.

A Crisis of ‘Deception’

For the Americans this was an experience that at first reminded them of the Japanese deception that preceded the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The first news of the IDF’s penetration into Sinai reached Washington at noon on Thursday, 29 October, just as Reuven Shiloah and Abba Eban were in a meeting at the State Department trying to reassure officials there that there would be no war. ‘At that moment, I was with Reuven Shiloah in the office of William (Bill) Rountree, the Assistant to the Secretary of State. We explained that the government of Israel would do everything in its power to avoid being drawn into an armed conflict’, Eban recalls.¹ Their conversation followed President Eisenhower’s call to the Prime Minister after word had reached Washington of the call-up of Israeli reserve units and mounting tension on the Jordanian-Israeli border. ‘I explained’, Eban continued,

as the Prime Minister had in a conversation with the American Ambassador to Israel Edward Lawson on that same day, that the call-up was required only as a precaution, and that we would do everything in our power, as I stressed, not to be drawn into war. Suddenly our conversation was interrupted by a note handed to Rountree and by an urgent telephone call for Reuven Shiloah from the Embassy. Shiloah was told that a very urgent cable had arrived from Jerusalem containing two sentences, quoting the announcement of the IDF Army spokesman about the deep penetration into Sinai. When Shiloah came back to the room, Rountree concluded the conversation in great confusion: ‘You must have been told what I have just been told. You will agree with me that our conversation now is totally academic’ We rose and returned to the Embassy. In White House circles, this meeting was likened to a similar meeting that was arranged at the request of the Japanese representative to the US on the day his country’s air force carried out the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.

Thus ends Eban’s dramatic description of the so-called ‘deception meeting’. Viewed in retrospect, it is not difficult to see not only the serious crisis in the relationship between the two countries caused by the IDF attack in Sinai, but also the abyss into which, all at once, the personal relations of mutual respect and trust between the representatives of the two countries were thrown. There had been painful question marks in these relationships prior to this, mostly on Israel’s part, but now the tables were turned. It was President Eisenhower who felt he had been deceived and personally betrayed by this ‘plot’ hatched behind his back between Israel, Britain and France, America’s traditional allies. In the days before the campaign began, the

President had spoken to David Ben-Gurion, who had stood by his stated opposition to any kind of military initiative. The President was bitterly disappointed, too, by the fact that, as he saw it, Israel was doing the Soviet Union a good turn by shifting world public interest away from the uprisings against Soviet repression in Poland and Hungary.

The two senior Israeli representatives in Washington – Eban and Shiloah – had to immediately begin rebuilding the now severely damaged relationship between the two countries and reestablishing the personal contacts that had been cut off most embarrassingly following the ‘deception meeting’. They were not responsible for the way that meeting had ended, but they were there as official representatives of the government of Israel, and played a role – albeit unwittingly – in the deception. In the first few days after the outbreak of the war, they refrained as much as possible from contacts with representatives of the administration. All contacts with the State Department were suspended and even lower-level officials refused to meet with their Israeli counterparts from the Embassy. This initial situation changed only with the passage of weeks and months. The Sinai Campaign created a major diplomatic rift between the United States and Israel and a loss of personal trust on all levels.

Faced with this blackout in the relations between Israel and the American administration, the ‘Circle of Friends’ was approached by both sides to try to create a channel for reciprocal contact and communication, bypassing the severed official channels, and to help absorb the initial diplomatic fireworks, and later even to try to calm the stormy waters as much as possible. In the shock that followed the initial surprise of the Israeli penetration into Sinai, Abba Hillel Silver, the veteran Zionist leader, and Professor Eli Ginzberg were the first to make contact with the administration on Israel’s behalf.

Eisenhower’s assistant, Sherman Adams, approached Silver, bypassing Eban and Shiloah, in order to ask Ben-Gurion to clarify his intentions. Professor Ginzberg, on the other hand, was received at the White House by President Eisenhower in an effort to clarify Israeli positions. On 31 October, two days after the beginning of the Campaign, President Eisenhower received Ben-Gurion’s first reply concerning Israel’s conditions for pulling back its troops from the areas it had taken. The letter was handed to Adams by Silver, not through the Embassy – a full-scale diplomatic snub that lasted for two or three days. ‘We saw to it that someone close to the President, Professor Eli Ginzberg, came to Washington on that day to find a way to the ‘broadcaster’. This was Eban’s reference to President Eisenhower, who was busy preparing his radio talk to the nation, and was awaiting Ben-Gurion’s answer – or anything else that might diminish his fury against Israel before the actual broadcast.

Following Shiloah’s instructions, Ginzberg later carried out other missions aimed at mediating between the government of Israel and President Eisenhower in this crisis. The President greatly admired Ginzberg’s research, and made a habit of meeting with him at least once a week. During the moments of severe crisis ensuing from the Sinai Campaign and, later, from Israel’s retreat from Sinai, Ginzberg brought written and verbal messages to and from Eisenhower, sometimes directly and at other times with the help of General Howard Snyder, Eisenhower’s personal physician and close advisor. Ginzberg and Snyder had served together in the Second World War and had remained friendly over the years. Snyder was able to keep Ginzberg informed about the fluctuations in Eisenhower’s moods toward Israel.

‘Eisenhower was fond of Ben-Gurion, and assisted him on the issue of Jewish DPs in Europe after the war’, Ginzberg relates. Nevertheless, as he once said to Ginzburg in the course of a conversation, he regarded Ben-Gurion as a ‘fanatic’. The ‘plot’ between Israel, Britain and France in this campaign served only to prove, as far as Eisenhower was concerned, that he was

right in his reservations about the man. He claimed that Ben-Gurion could have brought about a Third World War because of 'matters of purely local interest', and that the Israeli Prime Minister had in fact helped the Soviets shift public opinion away from their brutal suppression of the Hungarian revolution. 'I passed on a message from Reuven Shiloah to Eisenhower through Snyder, aimed at cooling his anger and explaining Israel's reasons, and the President then explained to me the reasons why he was so angry with Ben-Gurion', Ginzberg recalls.

Similar accounts of Eisenhower's rapidly shifting moods and reactions in those days can be found in other sources from the 'Circle of Friends' around Eisenhower and Dulles. One of these was Arthur Burns, a noted economist who had served in key positions in various Republican administrations, and as Ambassador to West Germany under President Reagan. During the Sinai Campaign, Burns was Chairman of Eisenhower's Economic Advisory Committee.

After the initiation of the military action in the Suez Canal, the British bombed the area and its environs day after day. Eisenhower said to Burns at the time, 'I don't understand this British and French military campaign. They are going at it as though they were fighting the German Army. They could have taken the Suez in a few hours.' (These sentiments were in sharp contrast to the great respect Eisenhower had for the IDF's fighting ability, as he expressed it years later). As Burns relates it from the perspective of his talks with Eisenhower in those days, the American President was at first convinced that the Suez Canal and Cairo would be conquered almost immediately, Nasser would be finished before the UN managed to mount an effective response, and even the United States would only be able to intervene at a later stage. But the campaign went on so much longer than he expected that the United States was forced to take a tough stand from which it could not back down. This disturbed Eisenhower a great deal.

Eisenhower regarded Nasser as a demagogue who 'should be destroyed'. He wanted him out of the way, but 'this stupid operation ruined his plans'. Burns relates that, after some time, Eisenhower told him that he was informed that Prime Minister Eden had given an order to the British Army units involved in the fighting that civilians were not to be hurt. This caused delays in the operation, causing it to last several days instead of a few hours, and making it difficult for the troops to establish a *fait accompli* on the ground fast enough.

This account is corroborated by a conversation held on 21 January 1958 by Field Marshal Montgomery, second-in-command of all NATO forces, with Moshe Dayan, while the latter was still Chief of Staff of the IDF.² Dayan told Ben-Gurion of his conversation with Montgomery, particularly concerning other issues. Among other things,

He told me that he went to see Ike and told him that a thing like this [the Suez War] should be over in two days, that the British Chief of Staff had not done well. Why didn't he get it done in a couple of days? He was of the opinion that the problem was not operational instructions, but rather limiting political instructions that called on the Army not to kill Egyptians and not to kill Englishmen. I said to him, 'if that's the case then what's your problem with your Chief of Staff?' Montgomery replied: 'He should have gone to the Cabinet and told them that it couldn't be done. If one is going to war – one has to go in to win'.

According to Burns, President Eisenhower was furious that Israel and Britain, as he saw it, had betrayed the United States and had apparently tried to exploit the fact that it was an election year and that Eisenhower's hands would be tied. And, most importantly, he expressed this position publicly, because he was convinced that the United States must support the continued search for peace, pursue the prevention of war and dash any attempts to achieve diplomatic ends

by force of arms. Added to that was the fear of Israeli expansionist tendencies and the need to force Israel to go back to behind the Armistice lines.

‘The first impression in American public opinion was that Israel had launched a rolling war that might spread to other areas’, Eban relates in his report. ‘The official explanation that this was merely a limited defensive action, arrived only hours later, but in the meantime Israel came under heavy criticism for supposedly playing with fire.’ The Jewish community in America was as confused as everyone else. The ‘Presidents’ Club’³ met the day after the war broke out, on 30 October, and spoke to Shiloah, who stood in for Eban who was attending the Security Council at that time. What surfaced in this meeting was a reticence about supporting Israel’s action, particularly in open opposition to United States’ policies. Eban writes that, ‘this derived partly from the fear of placing a large Jewish community in opposition to its own government. There were those who opposed the operation on its own merits... There was some concern that the hope of unifying the response of the Jewish community would not be fulfilled’.

The Jewish community was to become one of Israel’s most important arenas in its diplomatic efforts in the United States. President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles were at considerable pains to split the Jewish community on this issue, to side-step the ‘Presidents’ Club’ and to ensure Jewish support for the American administration’s stand as opposed to that expressed by the government of Israel throughout the protracted negotiations on conditions for an Israeli withdrawal. Israel won the first round in this confrontation. Abba Eban, who was not known for the largesse of his praise of others, writes

Reuven Shiloah’s enormous PR efforts in the Jewish community, with the help of Philip Klutznik, President of B’nai Brith ... finally produced a joint announcement: calling on the United States government to restore security to Israel and peace to the Middle East.

Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion managed to soften Washington’s initial anger against Israel. He agreed to President Eisenhower’s call to relinquish the territories conquered in the campaign. But Ben-Gurion appended a long list of conditions for his acceptance of the American call. This, then, became the starting points for protracted bargaining on the conditions for the troop withdrawal that eventually took place months later. Israel’s opening position was that ‘Nasser must sign a peace treaty with us that will include clear promises to refrain from hostile activities against Israel; disbanding the *fedayeen* gangs; lifting the Arab economic boycott; opening up shipping lanes in the Red Sea and the Suez Canal; and refraining from signing military treaties against Israel.’

The Americans’ opening gambit was economic pressure: the cancellation of a visit to Israel by a team from the Export-Import Bank, which was supposed to recommend giving Israel a development loan of \$75 million (a very large sum of money in those days), and cutting off all negotiations on using the remainder of a grant and surplus foodstuffs and technical aid to Israel. During the months that followed, contributions raised through Israel Bonds were virtually the country’s only viable source of foreign income, and Eban himself and everyone who came to the UN mission at that time, including Foreign Minister Golda Meir, was forced to travel the country making speeches for the Bonds.

Secretary of State Dulles met with Eban only after receiving Ben-Gurion’s reply to the initial US demands. He listened to Eban’s explanations and agreed to include in the draft resolution he intended to submit to the UN General Assembly a clause calling for assurances of free shipping and opposition to any armed attacks. He also promised that there would be no return to the situation that prevailed before the outbreak of hostilities. In his speech at the General Assembly

and in the resolution that was passed shortly after it, a distinction was drawn between a cease-fire that must be implemented 'immediately' and a withdrawal of forces to previous lines that was to take place 'as soon as possible'. At the same time a call was made 'to end the provocations' and for 'full implementation of the Armistice Agreements'. The UN General Assembly resolution that was passed on 2 November adopted the American proposal more or less in these terms.

This was not a bad start. It accepted Israel's demand in principle that any withdrawal of its forces would be conditional on assurances that there would be no return to the state of belligerency and provocation that existed before the war. Canada's representative at the UN, Lester Pearson, who abstained in the vote, recommended during that discussion that a UN force be set up to ensure quiet along the borders. These were the opening positions of both America and Israel the day after the initial shock, before the Anglo-French invasion of the Canal Zone that began only on 5 November, when Israel was poised to complete its conquest of Sinai by taking Sharm e-Sheikh.

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The Soviets added their own dimension to these developments. Immediately following the Anglo-French landings in the Suez, the Russians demanded an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, and called for US and Soviet military aid to Egypt. On the same day, Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin sent sharply-worded warnings to the prime ministers of Israel, England and France, and recalled Russia's ambassador to Israel. These dire warnings caused some panic, arousing fears in some people of the imminent outbreak of World War Three. There were others who seriously believed that the Russians intended to deliver a crushing military blow to Israel.

The Russian threats produced further American pressure on Israel, Britain and France. The English and the French broke completely under the pressure and succumbed to defeatism. Experts believed that if they had pursued their military campaign for only one more day they could have taken the entire Canal Zone', Eban wrote in his report. 'But they balked on 6 November, and announced a cease-fire. The British and the French soon retreated without insisting on a negotiated settlement in the Suez, as Israel did in relation to the Straits of Eilat.' Thus Israel was left alone in the battle, the only country that refused to withdraw its forces unconditionally.

At the height of all these developments. Secretary of State Dulles fell ill. In retrospect, an interesting hypothetical question presents itself: what would he have done had he not fallen ill? Would he have gone on to the very last moment in an attempt to wrest better conditions for the Anglo-French withdrawal and thus prevent their humiliation? His stand-in, Herbert Hoover Jr., made no attempt to do so and seemed totally disinclined to try. Dulles's absence from the scene from the beginning of November to the middle of December ultimately had a negative effect on Israel's standing in Washington at that time.

On 7 November the Soviets issued yet another threat to Israel. It joined a stiff demand, made at the same time, by President Eisenhower, that Israel announce its agreement to pull its forces back from Egypt. These pressures were successful, and Israel duly announced its intention to withdraw its troops, but added the proviso that the withdrawal would take place 'following an agreement on satisfactory arrangements with the UN concerning an international force'. Israel's agreement in principle to withdraw from Sinai, with its attached condition, was the opening round of the entire Israeli diplomatic campaign that followed. The Israeli government had decided to allow Ambassador Eban to make the decision about an immediate withdrawal – with

or without conditions. Eban, in consultation with Reuven Shiloah and with his deputy at the UN, Mordechai Kidron, opted for the 'conditional agreement'. The risk they took paid off, and the Russian threat never materialized.

This, however, was not the end of the 'Russian story'. Information was received from the American Ambassador to the USSR Charles Bohlen, concerning Russian plans to send jet fighters and bombers to Syria in order to use them against Israel on a 'day-run'. The same information surfaced sporadically from other sources right until the end of the Israeli withdrawal in March 1957. Threats emanating from Moscow influenced Israeli government decisions on more than one occasion, and they were high on the agenda of Israel's diplomatic activities in Washington. Israel demanded that the US deter the Soviet Union from realizing these threats, both for Israel's sake and in order to ensure America's position and reliability on the international scene. The United States was not eager to provide Israel with a protective umbrella against these threats, while at the same time it made a public statement in defense of the Baghdad Treaty countries that were not under any form of Soviet threat.

One additional element in this three-fold drama – the Russian threat, American pressure and Israel's agreement to withdrawal as a result of both of these – completed the opening picture of the 'Battle over the Withdrawal': the 6 November elections for President and Congress in the United States. President Eisenhower was re-elected for a second term, while the Democrats retained their majority in both Houses of Congress. From this point on, Eisenhower was free to act more or less as he wished, free of any fear of electoral considerations. Nevertheless, any attempt to take harsh steps against Israel still had to take into account – and ensure the support of – the Democratic majority in Congress. The campaign to win public support, particularly among the Jewish population of America, took on tremendous importance.

This was a multi-pronged diplomatic and public relations campaign that was carried out during the various stages of the Israeli troop withdrawal from Sinai until its completion. Each successive phase of the pullback served Israel as a bargaining chip at the negotiating table. Hard bargaining took place concerning the nature and authority of the international force, to ensure that it did not infringe on Israeli sovereignty in any way and on its right to defend itself from any attempt to revert to the *status quo ante*. The most important part of these negotiations dealt with the complex of agreements and guarantees that would ensure free shipping in the Tiran Straits and the Suez Canal, prevent the recurrence of *fedayeen* infiltration from Sinai and the Gaza Strip, and help promote the signing of a peace agreement to replace the Armistice Agreement of 1949. Israel maintained that Egypt's repeated infringements of this agreement had *de facto* annulled it. This was a catch, since all the agreements between the two sides, both in relation to the past and the future, used the Armistice Agreement as a basis for negotiations, and no one was willing to support Israel's position on this issue.

It was a difficult and highly complex campaign, particularly because the State Department insisted on 'punishing' Israel for having 'disobeyed' the UN, and also in order to compete with the Soviet Union for the support of the Asian countries and the rest of the 'new majority' in the UN that had replaced the traditional majority of western Europe and Latin America. This UN-oriented policy line was championed zealously by America's ambassador to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge. He was assisted in this by Herbert Hoover Jr. and Assistant Secretary of State William Rountree, who found it hard to forgive Eban and Shiloah for the humiliation of the 'deception meeting' at the beginning of the Sinai Campaign.

The most negative factor in the situation at that time, from Israel's point of view, was the UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld. He was the leader and prime spokesman of the 'new

majority' in the UN and on the international scene. In his personality and actions he personified the authority and standing of the United Nations, as he saw it, as the major force for maintaining peace in the world. 'Ensuring world peace' had been Eisenhower's election slogan in both of his campaigns for presidency and he gave the Secretary-General and his 'neutralist' maneuverings his full moral support. Most of the time the US worked through him, hoping in this way to influence Hammarskjold and bring him closer to US positions – hopes that were not always borne out.

The Secretary-General of the UN, a man of many missions and great talent, felt it his duty to punish Israel for its 'disobedience', and to provide Nasser with compensation for the blow dealt him by the attacking countries. He did whatever he could to restore Nasser's – and Egypt's – standing in the world. In so doing he weakened not only Israel's position but the position of the West as a whole, with the United States at its head, in the struggle against rising Soviet influence. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion described Hammarskjold in letters to Abba Eban as a 'fickle man of intrigue, and a dyed-in-the-wool hater of Israel'.

In administration circles, and even more so in the media and in Congress – there were serious misgivings about America's exaggerated reliance on the UN and Hammarskjold, particularly after Dulles's return to the State Department. By and large, however, the previous American policies remained intact, mixed up with a good measure of confusion, misunderstanding and hesitation. Israel, for its part, preferred negotiating directly with the United States outside the UN, while the US used the threat of returning the entire issue to the General Assembly – where anti-Israeli resolutions were virtually assured of a majority, supported by the US and coordinated with Hammarskjold – as a means of exerting pressure on Israel.

NOTES

1. In a report on the diplomatic campaign in Washington and the UN concerning the Sinai Campaign. From a private archive.
2. Moshe Dayan, *Milestones*, p.367.
3. The joint committee of the presidents of all the major Jewish organizations in the US.

The Rift Begins to Heal

The campaign to secure favorable conditions for an Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and to heal the rift between Israel and the United States was a supreme test for Reuven Shiloah and the 'Circle of Friends' he had nurtured single-handedly. Shiloah, a man known for his restlessness, now devoted himself whole-heartedly to this single issue. Some of his acquaintances claimed that in so doing he hastened his end two years later.

Professor Eli Ginzberg worked in close cooperation with Shiloah during the long months of the Sinai crisis, and was also a close personal friend. More than ten years after Shiloah's death, in 1970, in the introduction to his book *Manpower for Development*, Ginzberg wrote an emotional dedication to 'R.S.'. Ginzberg refrained from using the full name – Reuven Shiloah – because the book was to be distributed in Arab and Third World countries. It reads as follows: 'Within very few months he grew closer to me than a brother. A partnership of common heritage bound us together in a time of crisis. He burned himself up in a momentum of boundless devotion helping solve the crisis. Who says that a man's life is measured by the number of his years' He brought about changes in many people through brief contact with a man whose sense of duty led him to his death.' In a conversation with me years later, Ginzberg elaborated on this in great detail.

'I remember Reuven Shiloah building contacts with a group close to President Eisenhower during the time of the Sinai Campaign and the withdrawal that followed it.' At that time, contact with the American President on Israeli issues could only be made indirectly, through associates that he trusted. This was Shiloah's greatest challenge during that time and the task suited him perfectly. 'He was very good at making contacts with these people', Ginzberg related. 'Reuven's greatest powers of persuasion lay in making contacts with disassociated or even hostile Jews, and with indifferent *goyim*. In fact he was an expert *on goyim*. He would not preach. He was possessed of an analytical mind well-suited to the American mentality. He always did his homework, read a great deal and was always up to date on what was published about, or was of interest to, the people he spoke to. He learned everything he could about them and, like a virtuoso violinist, knew which strings to play. He was a master strategist. Knew how to find people and how to go from one person to the next and to the third, all the time sending people to talk to others who had access to the President.'

'He was a creative diplomat', Ginzberg went on to say, 'always combining elements that on the surface did not seem to go together, and he could always convince the people he spoke to that they had a vested interest in whatever it was he was offering them. He constantly sought the

possible, never underestimating his opponents or his interlocutors. He understood the importance of presenting Israel's problems not on the basis of consideration for Israel's needs or the wishes of American Jewry, but as a part of a much broader American context. That was how he managed to convince people like the Secretary of the Treasury, Robert Anderson, or John McCloy, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Chase Manhattan Bank, Hammarskjold's financial advisor during the clean-up operations in the Suez Canal, as well as High Commissioner and first ambassador to West Germany Arthur Burns, who, at that time was very close to Eisenhower and was deeply influenced by Reuven, or Arthur Dean, who was his chief contact with Secretary of State Dulles, and many many others.'

Indeed, Professor Arthur Burns was one of the people in the President's inner circle who conveyed Israel's claims to him either verbally or in writing. In a conversation years later, he recalled that Reuven was a brilliant man, with great analytical talent and a profound understanding of both international and regional problems, and internal American issues. Shiloah was Eban's number two, but Burns preferred talking to him rather than to Eban. He admired Reuven no less than he admired Eban. According to Burns, Shiloah was a man of penetrating understanding and great intellectual capabilities, although Eban was undoubtedly a man of great talent and ability.

Reuven Shiloah's typical mode of work was described by the lawyer David Ginsburg, a man of considerable experience, who was legal advisor to the Israeli Embassy in those days, and who became Henry Kissinger's personal legal advisor after leaving the American foreign service. At every one of their meetings, Reuven would express his interest in Jewish and non-Jewish leaders, journalists and politicians who occupied the corridors of power but whom he did not know yet. He became personally acquainted with everyone who had any direct or indirect influence on Israeli affairs in the administration, every important journalist in Washington, every member of the Council for Foreign Affairs in New York, and he always wanted to meet and get to know more people. He was the kind of guy who 'grows on you'. He would show up unexpectedly at all hours and start up a conversation on Israel's problems, or American political problems, international affairs, an article or a book he had just read – and he read a great deal and was up to date on any topic of conversation that was in the air – when in fact the whole object of the visit was to find out something about somebody who was important to him at that moment. He was always surrounded by an aura of mystery and secrecy, Ginsburg noted with an ironic edge, 'even if he was talking to you – from his own personal point of view – about an article in yesterday's *New York Times*. You accepted all of that with sympathy and forgiveness. You knew that he was always hard at work, always totally committed and urging others to do the same. He had a kind of quiet concentration that forced people to listen to him. He always gave you the feeling that what you were saying or what he was saying was of the utmost importance.'

Ephraim ('Eppie') Evron, who served as Ambassador to the United States at a later period, and filled various positions in Washington during Shiloah's term there, believes that Shiloah was the first person to give diplomatic activity at the Israeli Embassy true momentum. It was he who taught those who followed him to seek direct personal contacts with the power-brokers behind the scenes – to go to them and create a special personal relationship, and not wait for them to come of their own accord, or be satisfied with embassy paperwork. This was not only a professional technique, Evron claims. One must know how to arouse people's curiosity, and their desire to listen. They must be approached with interesting ideas for diplomatic initiatives, with practical suggestions for action, with personal consideration for each one of them and their individual problems, with a willingness to offer them help and counsel on matters of importance

to them, as a kind of investment in their future friendship. Evron unhesitatingly refers to Shiloah as being ‘head and shoulders above almost everyone else in the foreign service’.

Similar accounts have been given by Shamai Cahana, Eban’s secretary during the Sinai Campaign and later an ambassador in his own right, who was well-acquainted with the nature of the cooperation between Eban and Shiloah, and by Shimshon Arad, another future ambassador, whom Reuven instructed in his first steps as a young diplomat in Washington. Arad remembers Shiloah as a good teacher and a creative diplomat who knew how to weave a network of close personal relationships throughout the United States, and not only in administration circles. Reuven Shiloah gave Arad many leads in his extensive array of personal contacts, among them contacts with people who had the ear of important senators, primarily the two party whips in the Senate – Republican William Noland, and Democrat Lyndon Johnson, the future president of the United States. These two were to play an important role in blocking the threat of sanctions against Israel during the difficult negotiations on the withdrawal from Sinai when it was of the utmost importance to ensure a strong stand against the pressures brought to bear by the President and the Secretary of State. That is how Israel’s ‘Triangle of Influence’ in the United States was created: contacts with the heads of the Administration in the White House and at the State Department, with the heads of the parties in both houses of Congress and with the heads of the large Jewish organizations.

Among the leaders of Jewish organizations of that time, the most prominent of them all was Philip Klutznik, President of B’nai Brith, and chairman of the ‘Presidents’ Club’. The diplomatic campaign over the withdrawal from Sinai was the most difficult test of the ‘Presidents’ Club’ since its establishment in 1954, and of the ‘Triangle of Influence’ in which Klutznik moved. The truth is that the Jewish leaders might actually have done less than they did were it not for the encouraging support of very influential non-Jews who stood by Israel throughout the campaign – among them former CIA chief Walter Bedell-Smith, one of the only people around the President who could allow himself to tell President Eisenhower things he did not like to hear. Shiloah tried to bring him into the campaign on Israel’s side right from the beginning, in November 1956. He found the former CIA chief ‘sick and depressed, furious at the inefficient way the British and the French had handled their operation against Egypt. According to him, they could have completed the entire operation in five days at the outside, and then Nasser would have ceased to exist and the Soviet threat would have ceased to exist, and the whole world could have breathed a sigh of relief.’ So Shiloah said when he related the details of his meeting to Abba Eban. Bedell-Smith stressed that, if truth be told, he did not necessarily justify Israel’s action ‘but now that it has been embarked upon it would be a pity not to see it through to its successful conclusion’. He asked Shiloah to keep in constant touch with him, and indeed this contact was used a number of times in both directions – by David Ben-Gurion and by President Eisenhower and his advisors – in the darkest moments of the crisis.

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At the end of December 1956, Shiloah visited Israel to give a first-hand account of developments in Washington and at the UN, to gather material and to be briefed on the issues before he faced the skirmishes awaiting him at the renewed session of the UN General Assembly in January. One of the issues he looked into in his talks with the Prime Minister was the question of Gaza, which was a major point of contention between Israel, the United States and the United Nations, since Israel was seeking ways to extend the duration of its control over Gaza. This was the background for a proposal calling on Israel to rehabilitate the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip and agree to

absorb a large number of refugees.

Ben-Gurion seized the opportunity of Shiloah's visit to Israel to convey a personal message to Bedell-Smith. He wished to reply to things said by Secretary of State Dulles in a conversation with Foreign Minister Golda Meir and Ambassador Eban – a diplomatic controversy on an elevated ideological, historical and ethical plane, between the two countries. Meir had responded to Dulles's statements during their meeting, but when Ben-Gurion read the report of what Dulles had said, he insisted on responding personally. He sent this response to the American Ambassador to Israel, Edward Lawson, and asked Shiloah to deliver the written message to Bedell-Smith. Bedell-Smith was very impressed with the note and passed it on to some of his friends, among them President Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles and other highly influential people in the administration, with explanations and additions of his own, aimed at strengthening Ben-Gurion's arguments.

It all began with a meeting between Golda Meir and Dulles on 9 December, the first after many weeks of absence as a result of Dulles's illness. Golda presented a number of requests to the Secretary of State. She asked him for a commitment on behalf of his government to the effect that the US upheld the principle of free shipping in the Gulf of Eilat and that it would be willing to back this up with solid guarantees; that it supported the demand that Egypt be barred from returning to the Gaza Strip; and that it would persuade Dag Hammarskjold to delay any changes in the status of the Straits of Tiran and the Gaza Strip until a permanent arrangement could be implemented, and that the United States itself exert its influence to that end.

Dulles responded by saying that in embarking on the Sinai Campaign, Israel had tried to correct an injustice through the use of force. This in itself was unacceptable. It could have ignited a third world war and actually reduced the possibility of redressing the wrongs suffered by Israel. As for the request concerning Hammarskjold, Dulles said that he was willing to work independently of the UN and its Secretary-General. The United States supported the principle of free shipping for Israel in the Suez Canal and the status of the Gulf of Eilat as an international waterway. He said he did not know what the best solution for the Gaza Strip was, apart from the general understanding, on the one hand, that it was not Egyptian territory, and on the other, that in the Armistice Agreements signed between the two countries it was not recognized as Israeli territory. But that, he claimed, was not the main point. The question was: Where is the State of Israel headed? He and the President were confused, Dulles claimed, since they did not know how the Israeli government viewed the future of the state in the long run. Israel was located in the middle of a sea of Arab hatred, on a large, heavily-populated continent that was growing stronger from year to year. The Americans, for their part, could not discern any Israeli initiative, or even any serious spiritual or intellectual involvement in the problem, nor any desire to lessen hatred and promote friendship and reconciliation in the region (according to Abba Eban's recollection of the conversation).

Hammarskjold had, on a number of occasions, voiced his feelings to him, Dulles claimed, of Israel's responsibility for the lack of progress in the negotiations and the deterioration of the armistice agreements. Israel made demands on the United States government from time to time: once for planes and radar, at other times for a large loan, and now – the Gulf of Eilat and the Gaza Strip. The government of the United States tried its best to find solutions for these requests, but these things in themselves could not ensure security over the long term and he saw no evidence of any serious political thinking in this respect. He asked that Israel recognize the fact that its strong-arm policy of retaliation had failed completely and that its security policy actually jeopardized its security rather than enhancing it.

Golda Meir responded by expressing her regret over his reading of the situation. ‘We are striving day and night for peace. The core of the problem is the Arabs’ hatred for us ever since 1948, and their unwillingness to accept our existence in the region. The source of the problem is not the security policy Israel has adopted since 1953, but Nasser’s rise to power and his attempts to forge Arab unity with hatred for Israel as the only common denominator’, she said.

Ben-Gurion responded to Dulles’s claims the following day in a conversation with the American Ambassador to Israel, and in the message he sent to Bedell-Smith with Shiloah. Relating to the question of the future of the country in the face of Arab enmity, Ben-Gurion said that for many generations the Jewish people had lived in a sea of hatred, and they could prevail against it by virtue of their faith in their supreme goal and the profound desire for survival that courses through their veins. Israel was only eight years old. At its inception it was attacked by six Arab armies, and yet, had it not been for American intervention, it could have forced Egypt to sign a peace treaty during the War of Independence itself. Israel had faced the test of Arab hatred and sabotage while at the same time multiplying its population fourfold in the short space of four years. And what were eight brief years in a historical perspective’

Regarding the Gaza Strip, Ben-Gurion said that Israel would not accept a resumption of Egyptian rule or the presence of an international force that would serve as a cover for renewed *fedayeen* attacks from the Strip. Since Nasser’s promises were worthless, Israel intended to remain in the Gulf of Eilat until it was given American guarantees that the naval blockade would not be reinstated. ‘What is more: we do not believe’, Ben-Gurion went on, ‘in Hammarskjold’s good offices. He protects Nasser and acts as if he were Nasser’s – rather than the United Nation’s – representative’. This was a harsh exchange between the Prime Minister of Israel and the American Secretary of State, and it sowed the seeds for a renewal of the crisis in Israeli-American relations in February.

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Eisenhower was exasperated with what he referred to as Ben-Gurion’s game of postponements and conditions. He was under pressure from King Ibn Saud who was then on a visit to the US. Efforts had been initiated in Washington to gain support among the so-called moderate Arab countries for the implementation of the Eisenhower Doctrine for defending the Middle East against Soviet aggression. The Americans, who were unwilling to protect Israel from the Soviet threat, were worried by the possibility that the King would influence other Arab countries. The Arab countries, in turn, demanded that Eisenhower put increased pressure on Israel to complete its withdrawal. This was the price demanded by the Arabs, and both Eisenhower and Dulles were more than willing to bring pressure to bear on Israel to pay up.

Thus, on 3 February 1957, President Eisenhower sent a message to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, demanding that Israel implement in full the General Assembly’s resolution concerning the completion of its troop withdrawals from Sinai. Secretary of State Dulles even raised the possibility of imposing sanctions on Israel – with UN approval – should it fail to comply. This drew heavy fire from the leader of the Republican Party in the Senate, William Noland of California. He protested the heavily biased treatment Israel was being given by the UN and the United States. Senator Noland was an ‘isolationist’ and an anti-Communist, who was very critical of the UN’s supposed ‘neutrality’. His support for Israel also derived from his connections with some of the very wealthy and politically influential members of the ‘Circle of Friends’ from San Francisco. The Democratic majority leader and future president, Lyndon Johnson, also opposed the idea of sanctions. These two very powerful Senators led the

opposition to sanctions in the Senate. Most of the press in the United States tended to take this line as well.

In the Senate and in American public opinion there were signs of a split between the two issues: overwhelming support for Israel's stand on free shipping in the Straits, and reservations over Israeli refusal to withdraw from the Gaza Strip. Israel's position on the latter issue did not appear justified or legally tenable, and the entire problem – including the problem of the Arab refugees in the Gaza Strip – seemed to defy solution. American public opinion demanded, therefore, a separation of these two issues, and the administration tended to accept this distinction.

This turn of events brought about a positive change, from Israel's point of view, in America's stand on freedom of passage through the Straits. On 11 February, Dulles sent Shiloah a memorandum stating that the United States would declare the right of free passage in the Straits and would back it up by sending American ships through the Straits to Eilat. The memorandum went on to say that the US expected other maritime countries, and Israel, to take the same position on this issue – which indeed they did. In order to ensure the implementation of this understanding, UN forces would be stationed at Sharm e-Sheikh and in the Tiran Straits. However, all of this depended on a total Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and the Gaza Strip. Once that condition had been met, comprehensive negotiations would take place to determine the future of Gaza Strip, which at this point was left deliberately vague.

Israel's response to the American memorandum created yet another serious crisis between the two countries. The Israeli government was not satisfied with American assurances, and demanded bilateral negotiations between Israel and America to resolve the outstanding issues prior to its complete withdrawal from Sinai, in order to ensure that the solutions proposed would be acceptable to the United Nations (the reference was to the two main problems – effective guarantees for free shipping lanes and preventing the reinstatement of Egyptian control over the Gaza Strip). Dulles immediately rejected the Israeli position. He stated once again that the US could neither replace the UN nor force the international body to accept its decisions. The only thing the United States could do was to make firm commitments concerning its own positions, as it had indeed done.

With a crisis of major proportions looming on the horizon, it was decided that Ambassador Eban should go to Israel for consultations, and that the General Assembly session should be postponed until his return. The expectation was that the General Assembly would pass a resolution calling for the imposition of sanctions against Israel. This threat of sanctions rekindled the arguments inside the US and provoked sharp criticism in the Senate against the possibility that the United States might join the imposition of sanctions on Israel. President Eisenhower decided not to wait for the General Assembly and to appeal directly to the American people, putting the full weight of his authority as President behind the pressures being brought to bear on Israel.

With Eban's departure, the full responsibility for handling the diplomatic campaign and all the contacts in Washington fell to Reuven Shiloah. The President's broadcast was scheduled for 20 February. It was a fateful and dramatic day. The President called in 28 Congressional leaders from both parties. He composed a message to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion which Shiloah was asked to convey immediately to the Prime Minister and to request an immediate reply. The Prime Minister promised to consider the message and to make a decision immediately after hearing Eban's report. In the meanwhile, the session of the UN General Assembly was postponed for 24 hours, and the Administration held the threat of its convening over the heads of

the Israeli government as it met in Jerusalem during those hours. The danger was that the Assembly would approve a resolution calling for sanctions against Israel, and that the entire question of the withdrawal, and whatever followed, would be handed over to the United Nations. As a loyal member of the UN, the US would abide by any decision of the General Assembly, and this would put an end to any independent action on its part on the issue of the withdrawal.

Eisenhower's speech to the nation framed the issue in terms of American national security. He put the entire weight of his personal prestige and that of his country behind his words. 'It is possible that the fate of the United Nations and the fate of peace in the Middle East now hangs in the balance', the President said.

In a cable to Jerusalem summing up the responses to the speech, Reuven Shiloah informed his superiors that most of the friends he consulted felt that 'there is no more room left to maneuver in negotiations with the President, and we must decide between accepting the plan and rejecting it'. Prominent public figures began accusing Israel of abetting Soviet subversion and thus increasing the danger of war. Jewish leaders expressed their fear for the fate of American Jewry should it become involved in an open dispute with the President, whose main argument in this issue was America's national security and world peace.

Throughout all of this, the administration tried to soften Israel's position by bringing Jewish influence to bear, and splitting the united front of American Jewry. A surprising invitation was sent out by the President himself and his Secretary of the Treasury, Humphrey, at whose ranch he was staying at the time, and later also by Secretary of State Dulles, to eight influential American Jews for a meeting first with Dulles and then with the President himself. At the head of the list was Klutznik, chairman of the 'Presidents' Club'. He, in turn, sought no advice on this invitation from other members of the club, but did speak about it to Reuven Shiloah and Senator Jacob Javits. Both of them advised him to accept the invitation and attend the meeting. Upon their advice, he joined his colleagues from the Presidents' Club in a meeting with Dulles on 24 February, where they presented a strong front of Jewish self-respect and support for Israeli demands.¹

Shiloah did everything he could to mend the break with the administration, and advised Klutznik to make conciliatory gestures to Dulles, even if they might arouse criticism from other Zionist leaders. Klutznik did so and, at Shiloah's request, sent a congratulatory message to Dulles after he approved Golda Meir's 'assumptions and expectations' speech at the General Assembly concerning free shipping in the Straits. Among other such gestures, Klutznik also invited Dulles to be guest of honor at a festive dinner held by the B'nai Brith organization.

Philip Klutznik stressed that, throughout that period, he worked in close cooperation with Reuven Shiloah. In an interview with him years later, Klutznik heaped lavish praise on Shiloah, on his moderation and judicious reasoning, and on his loyalty and friendship as he stood together with Klutznik against pressure from more extreme leaders in the American Jewish community, who attacked Klutznik personally. The deep feelings of friendship Klutznik felt for Shiloah still ran strong years after Shiloah's death. Klutznik was profoundly moved by the personal gift Shiloah remembered to bring his son for his *Bar-Mitzvah*, and on many other occasions. One of Shiloah's hobbies was buying expensive ties at top fashion houses, and Klutznik recalled that when Shiloah gave him one of these ties, he said that whatever he bought for himself he also gave to his friends.

After their failure to win over Klutznik and his friends in the Presidents' Club, Eisenhower and Dulles made another extraordinary effort to persuade Ben-Gurion and the Israeli government to accept the President's stand. Maxwell Raab advised the President to get Bedell-Smith to

persuade Ben-Gurion to follow the US line on America's proposals for the total evacuation of Sinai and the Gaza Strip. Raab says that he was acquainted with Bedell-Smith's special relationship with Shiloah, and therefore advised that Shiloah be asked to cooperate in persuading Bedell-Smith to take on the task. On 21 February, Bedell-Smith was duly invited to the White House and was asked to speak to Ben-Gurion from there by telephone to try to persuade him to acquiesce to the President's plan. Bedell-Smith hesitated at first. He only agreed after he notified them of his strenuous support for the need to ensure Israel's existence and security, and after receiving assurances from both Eisenhower and Dulles that they would stand by their commitments as elaborated in the 11 February memorandum. He told them that he was putting his honor and Israel's trust in him in the balance.

Bedell-Smith's message was conveyed to Ben-Gurion by Reuven Shiloah. He asked the Prime Minister to trust the President's deep moral commitment and not to ask him for a formal commitment which he could not give at that present moment. Bedell-Smith requested that Abba Eban return to the United States equipped with flexible guidelines so as to avoid a severe crisis in the relations between the two countries. This crisis would be inevitable should the issues be handed over to the United Nations, an act which would force the United States to support the UN's decision, albeit with little joy. Ben-Gurion's response was positive in tone, expressing the hope of receiving further clarifications 'that would point a way out of the impasse'.

Abba Eban returned to the United States on the morning of 24 February and met immediately with Arthur Dean, in order, so Eban relates, to prepare Dulles for a positive meeting. Eban explained to Dean that the instructions he had brought back with him from Israel would facilitate an agreement with the United States on free shipping and a solution for Gaza, excluding the possibility of renewed Egyptian rule. Everything else would be left open to negotiation and agreement. Shiloah participated, as usual, in the meeting with Dulles that took place later that day. Dulles himself was accompanied by four of his aides, among them his future successor Christian Hoerter. Dulles accepted Israel's basic demands in principle: the government of the United States would encourage the passage of ships through the Tiran Straits and up the Gulf of Eilat; the US agreed that 'free passage in good faith' referred to the conduct of the ships involved, not their type, flag or cargo; the US agreed to allow Israel to declare its intentions of defending its ships by force; the US was willing to agree that the UN forces would not be evacuated from the Straits without discussion in the UN General Assembly and its express approval (in other words the Egyptians would have to put together a two-thirds majority in the Assembly to have them removed), but such an action would also have to be discussed with the Secretary-General; the President would reiterate his moral commitment to the fulfillment of the assurances given to Israel; the recognition of Israel's right to free shipping would be given as soon as the IDF had withdrawn from Sharm e-Sheikh and from the Gaza Strip, and been replaced by UN observers in both areas, all this prior to a final decision on the future of the Gaza Strip; the United States was unable to agree to Israel's demand for Egypt's public renunciation of its rights in the Strip, but it hoped that the Egyptians would in fact do so, even though this was a decision that must be reached at the United Nations; the United States would reiterate in the clearest possible way its recognition of Israel's right to sail its ships through the Suez Canal without discrimination of any kind.

When the details of the agreement were made public, it appeared that on the issue of the Straits, Israel was very close to a 'satisfactory solution' on condition that Hammarskjold would agree not to remove the UN forces without the express approval of the General Assembly. On the Gaza issue, the United States was willing to endorse some form of international

responsibility for security and civil administration, but this would depend on Hammarskjold's agreement and the approval of the General Assembly or of Egypt. In a meeting with Hammarskjold, it became clear that he believed that it would be sufficient if the removal of the UN forces in the Straits would be made conditional on an announcement to the Advisory Committee of the General Assembly, which would decide if there was need of further approval by the Assembly. Thus, by removing the most effective brake – approval in the General Assembly – which could have delayed or even prevented any rapid escalation – Hammarskjold left his successor, U Thant, the legacy of an ill-fated decision, which, in fact, led to the outbreak of the Six Day War in 1967.²

Hammarskjold was opposed to any restrictions on Egypt's rights in the Gaza Strip and claimed that in view of Israel's intransigence, the arrangements for the Straits should be linked to and made conditional upon an arrangement in Gaza. The Assembly convened and heard the Secretary-General's report, which placed in some doubt the understandings reached by Dulles with Israel.

These were the moves made on all sides as the final stage of the bargaining on the withdrawal from Gaza began. The negotiations on the issue were based on a French compromise proposal that was supposed to help Israel get satisfaction on its principal demands and prevent a severe crisis between Israel and the United States. The main idea of the French plan, which was submitted to Eban and Shiloah by the French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau, was that Israel should evacuate the Strip on the assumption that the UN would take over complete responsibility for its security and civil administration. Should this assumption prove false, and the situation in Gaza return to the *status quo ante*, Israel would retain the right to take action as it saw fit. According to this compromise proposal, the representatives of the United States, France and a number of other countries would confirm this assumption at the General Assembly. Thus Israel would be given *a priori* international support for its right to defend itself by force of arms 'should Gaza once again become a virulent thorn in its side', as Abba Eban phrased it in his florid way.

The French proposal was amended to say that Israel's military and civilian control of Gaza would, upon its withdrawal, be handed over to a UN force, and that the transition period of UN administration would continue until the signing of a peace agreement. The idea was that the UN would see to the safety of people and property and to the creation of a police force, an efficient civil administration, an assistance program for the refugees, and progress and development for the region and its inhabitants.

The underlying concept of the French proposal was to transfer the necessity for finding a solution from the UN to the major powers. The idea was to arrive at a solution outside the Assembly, thus providing Israel with guarantees directly from the major powers – through an announcement to the General Assembly that did not require its approval. Thus, the hurdle of the automatic Soviet-Arab-Non-aligned majority in the General Assembly – which would have voted down these announcements in the Assembly – was side-stepped.

In further negotiations, an agreement was reached with the US and France on a two-part statement to be made at the General Assembly. The first part would relate to the issue of free shipping through the Straits – based on the Israeli-American proposal, and the second would relate to UN control over Gaza – based on the Israeli-French proposal. The agreement on Gaza was reached with the participation of Abba Eban and Reuven Shiloah on the Israeli side and Secretary of State Dulles and his aides on the American side. Together they examined the agreement sentence by sentence, word by word, the Americans introducing corrections that were

then accepted by both the Israelis and the French. With this tripartite agreement in hand, the ground was laid for a significant improvement in Franco-Israeli and American-Israeli relations. With the signing of the agreement, even though it was partially violated later on, the rift between Israel and the United States caused by the surprise and the crisis of the Sinai Campaign, was finally healed.

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The partial violations of this tripartite agreement came at the very last stage of the negotiations over the withdrawal from Gaza. This was after Foreign Minister Golda Meir had delivered a speech that had been vetted and agreed upon beforehand by the foreign ministers of the US and France. As to the issue of free shipping in the Straits, Meir delivered a statement enunciating Israel's position on this issue, a declaration that was followed by a similar one by US Ambassador to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge. On the other hand, concerning the situation in the Gaza Strip, after Meir delivered her speech concerning Israel's 'assumptions and expectations' regarding the conditions of international rule in Gaza in accordance with the agreed-upon understandings, Henry Cabot Lodge rose and changed the wording and content of the 'assumptions and expectations', very nearly upsetting the entire maneuver.

Once again the American position was articulated in two voices. One was that of the President and the other of his representative in the United Nations. First they made promises, then they made good on only some of them. This may have been the only way to handle any Israeli demand that America could not and did not want to accept in the first place, or else the US simply changed its mind and reneged on some of the understandings at the last moment. Here was yet another case of an American representative at the UN playing an independent role and deviating from instructions from the President and the Secretary of State. This may have been the case, but perhaps he merely pretended to strike out on an independent course of action in coordination with his superiors. Or was it perhaps a last-minute American change of heart under heavy pressure from the Arab countries?

There were moments of trepidation and perhaps even regret in Jerusalem. Once again Shiloah and Eban went in to meet with Dulles and his aides. Yet again a soothing message was sent by the President to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, reaffirming in vague terms the 'assumptions and expectations' spelled out in the Foreign Minister's speech at the General Assembly. In order to firm up the integrity of the President's message once again, at the suggestion of Ben-Gurion's advisor throughout the negotiations on the withdrawal, Ya'akov Herzog of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Bedell-Smith was called in. Shiloah made the call.

Bedell-Smith called Eisenhower and asked him if the message he had sent Ben-Gurion in the President's name was still valid. A half hour later, Bedell-Smith called Shiloah and told him that he considered himself authorized to state on the President's behalf that there had been no last-minute change in American policy. The President and his Cabinet had taken upon themselves a moral commitment that they had every intention of fulfilling in its entirety as it stood. If Israel should retreat from Gaza and any complications should arise, America would stand faithfully by its commitments.

In the event, a few weeks later it transpired that this was not entirely the case. According to his friend, Abe Wexler, Bedell-Smith's good relations with the President and with Dulles were damaged because the promises he conveyed on their behalf to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion were not truly kept, and his word of honor was violated. Israel's French friends intervened, trying to smooth things out between Israel and the US, and they reiterated their support for their

original proposal. Ultimately, the Israeli government approved the decision on the withdrawal from Sinai on 4 March 1957, and the move was completed by 7 March.

However, all subsequent developments in the Gaza Strip, from the moment the last Israeli soldier left, were in flagrant contradiction of the promises made by France and the United States. Israel lobbied furiously after the fact, American protests were lodged with the Egyptians and with the UN leaders, Dag Hammarskjöld and Ralph Bunche, but to no avail. All the papers, announcements and declarations made at the UN General Assembly were simply ignored by the Egyptians. Nasser was revealed for what he was, and the Americans never forgave him for it. Their relations with him deteriorated, and Israel's battle over the conditions of its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip proved beneficial in the long run.

Israel suffered a complete failure on preventing the restoration of Egyptian rule over Gaza and the return of military forces to the Gaza Strip and replacing them with a UN administration. In the short term, the protracted, highly-charged diplomatic campaign on this issue came to nothing. Within days of the Israeli withdrawal, the Egyptians removed the UN administration from the area. On 11 March an Egyptian military commander was appointed for Gaza, and on 14 March he entered the city with a bevy of Egyptian officials. On 18 March, the first Egyptian military vehicle entered the city. Yet, on that same day, the Israeli ship, *Queen of Sheba*, sailed out of Eilat into the Red Sea through the Straits of Tiran, and on 25 March the Danish *Brigitte Toft* sailed into Eilat along the same route. American tankers were about to follow suit shortly afterwards. Free access to Eilat was ensured, connecting Israel with Asia, Africa and the Far East.

To do historical justice to the events, it must be pointed out that the Israeli government led by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion did everything in its power through the end of 1956 and the beginning of 1957 to retain control over the Gaza Strip. Only later was it willing to accept international administration for the area. Contrary to accepted public opinion in Israel, Ben-Gurion did not want to give up the Strip and its refugees. The desire to hold on to the Gaza Strip was the main reason for the delays in the withdrawal from Sinai and the continued struggle over its conditions, from the beginning of January 1957, and particularly from 11 February until the beginning of March. Israel demanded to be allowed to prevent the renewal of infiltration, the laying of landmines and shelling from across the border, while at the same time trying to develop the economy of the Strip and find a solution for the refugees. Israel was forced to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, and the pullback was accompanied by grave misgivings. But, as has often been the case in the past, history is wiser than politics. In time, most of the fears concerning the Gaza Strip evaporated. Ben-Gurion understood this very soon after the event, and managed to explain the benefits that accrued to Israel from giving up the burden of the Gaza Strip and its refugees. It was probably Israel's good fortune that it did not manage to achieve its goals in relation to the Strip.

Israel after the Sinai Campaign was a different country altogether. In retrospect most of the fears and disappointments over the conditions of withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from Sharm e-Sheikh proved to be groundless. On the contrary, what happened in Israel after the war was like a paraphrase from the *Book of Judges*: 'And the country was at peace for ten years'. Despite the withdrawal of the IDF from Sinai and from the Gaza Strip, many of the long- and short-term objectives were achieved. There were no more wars and terrorist activity ceased – even from the Gaza Strip. Free shipping was ensured to and from Eilat, the Eilat-Ashkelon oil pipeline was laid down – providing an alternative to the Suez Canal for moving oil from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, and there was a great spurt of diplomatic activity directed toward the

emerging African countries, as well as toward Asia and the ‘peripheral’ countries. A radically different security situation developed – a balance of power based on arms procurements from France, Italy, Germany and Britain. Military equipment was developed and produced in Israel, bringing about unprecedented advances in industry, technology and science. And there was one more long-term effect: Israel’s ‘assumptions and expectations’ concerning the conditions for its withdrawal from Sinai in March 1956 had a major impact on America’s position on the eve of the Six Day War. What was promised at the end of the Sinai Campaign was in fact achieved at the beginning of the Six Day War and later.

There were also some immediate results. The plans for tearing out large chunks of the Negev disappeared from the international agenda. Relations with the United States were elevated to a new level. Israel became a signatory in the Eisenhower Doctrine for the defense of the Middle East and was not excluded from western plans for the region – as had been the case in the past. At least not altogether. The United States regarded Israel as a regional force that could and should be relied on in the plans for halting Soviet expansion and radical Nasserite subversion. Israel did not replace the moderate Arab countries, which remained America’s prime objectives in its Middle East policies, but this support was not at Israel’s expense in any way. What more could one ask of a brief military operation that lasted no more than a few days’

A new chapter unfolded in American-Israeli relations as well as in the life of Reuven Shiloah. He still faced a number of trying months – facing the US’s return to exaggerated – and dangerous – attempts at appeasement, and the hazards inherent in the new map of the Middle East, but the fact was that when the dust had settled after the battle over the withdrawal from Sinai and all its repercussions, it was clear that the American episode in his life was nearing its end. The only thing left to do was to decide on a date for his return to Jerusalem and his new – and last – posting.

NOTES

1. This description is based on Abba Eban’s report and on interviews with Philip Klutznik and Maxwell Raab, Cabinet Secretary between 1953 and 1958, who attended that meeting and all the consultations in the White House.
2. The major *causus belli* that sparked the Six Day War was Nasser’s unilateral removal of the UN forces from the Tiran Straits and the reimposition of a blockade on Israeli or Israeli-bound shipping in the Gulf of Eilat. Not being bound by the required approval of the General Assembly, the Advisory Committee was duly notified by U Thant of Nasser’s demand, and approved the removal of the UN forces in committee.

PART FIVE
THE GOOD FIFTIES

Back Home

Reuven Shiloah returned to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem a worried man, both diplomatically and personally. Things were too quiet for him. A short time after he started working at the Foreign Ministry again, he wrote to Abba Eban:¹

I have begun organizing my office... I have set up regular contacts with people and institutions ... but to tell you the truth, up to now it seems to me as though I am working in a vacuum... The composition of the office, its structure and methods of operation do not suit the country's needs at this time... It is possible that the absence of the nation's leaders at this time makes a difference. The Prime Minister is on vacation at the Sharon Hotel (reading up on Yoga, etc.), Golda Meir is at the General Assembly, Moshe Dayan is in Africa, Pinhas Sapir² in Argentina, and all the government bureaucracies seemed to be basking in a holiday atmosphere of peace and complacency that I cannot get used to. I cannot, under any circumstances, accept a situation where all around us there are political upheavals, where the State of Israel is surrounded by evil waves of revolutions and danger, and the Foreign Ministry is completely oblivious... I hope that once the holidays are over and the heads of the state return to their offices, there will be a change in the atmosphere. Right now I am chock full of doubts if there is any point at all in the efforts I am making to be reintegrated into the office.

It was probably this complaint about vacations and trips abroad that reminded Eban of Shiloah's attitude to vacations in Washington. 'Suzy reminded me',³ Eban recounts, 'that every August I would get away from the heat of Washington for a vacation, to fish, play golf, and bathe in the sea on Martha's Vineyard at Chappaquiddick. And there, as we sat on the beach in our bathing suits, Reuven would show up from Washington in suit and tie, with a bundle of papers, and sit down with me to discuss various official matters. It was embarrassing. He would look at me as though he could not understand what I was doing there. He was simply incapable of resting, taking a vacation, taking his mind off business. He simply did not know what to do when he showed up at a vacation spot. It would never occur to him to stay for a day or two. It would never occur to anyone that it was possible to take him on board for a fishing trip.'

'The only thing that concerned him was the Jewish struggle', Eban relates. 'Concerts, theater, or the cinema did not interest him. He neglected his health, suffered from a chronic cough from cigarettes and cognac, and from a total lack of basic human concern for himself and for others.'

This may have been part of his Me'ah She'arim upbringing that he had not completely shaken off. Rest was out of the question, one always had to be doing something.⁴

On this subject, Shiloah was very critical of his good friend Haim Herzog who served as Israel's military attache to Washington some time before Shiloah's arrival there in the summer of 1954. 'Even while he was Minister, he was very angry with me for considering taking a vacation', Herzog recalls. 'He was unable to understand that a person needs time off. I told him that even in the IDF there is a regulated round of vacations for all top officers from the Chief of Staff down. He had difficulty accepting that. Lower level officials often complained about Shiloah's habit of hauling them into the office even when they were on vacation because of what he regarded as an "emergency".'

His schedule gives some indication of the breakneck pace and nonstop momentum of his work habits. Barely two weeks elapsed from the day he left the United States – 28 July 1957 – to the day he began working full-time at the Foreign Ministry on 15 August – not a month or two as was accepted practice among returning Israeli diplomats. As early as 9 September he received an official appointment from Golda Meir as political advisor and regular participant in all office meetings. He was to maintain contact with people, parties and government offices, initiate consultations between them and the heads of the Foreign Ministry, and head a permanent committee of top Foreign Ministry officials, which was to include the Director-General and his deputies, a committee for policy planning and a forum for discussing new diplomatic initiatives.

The Director-General of the Ministry, Walter Eytan, was not pleased with so sweeping an appointment and tried to fight it long before it went into effect. In an entry in his diary after his departure from the Foreign Ministry, Moshe Sharett wrote about a conversation he had with Eytan⁵ in which the Director-General of the Ministry told him that Golda Meir, the new Foreign Minister, intended to recall Reuven Shiloah to Israel to be appointed General Political Advisor. This was shortly after she took up office in the summer of 1956. Eytan told Sharett that 'public opinion' (i.e., he and his friends in the directorate of the Foreign Ministry), was against giving Reuven control over Arab affairs, for fear that he would not confine himself to that area, but branch out from there over the entire spectrum of diplomatic activities. Clearly Shiloah was not altogether paranoid about the apparent obstacles being put in his way by his colleagues and about his meager chances of being accepted into the Foreign Ministry establishment. This was true, however, only in relation to the senior bureaucrats in the Ministry and not to the Ministers, Sharett or Meir, at least not initially. In fact, Meir accorded him broad powers for diplomatic action and initiative.

As early as 1 September the committee he chaired met in his office and decided to take steps to strengthen relations with Turkey. This was the first stage of a large-scale initiative for the establishment of the 'Peripheral Alliance', which became one of the two main areas he worked on during the last two years of his life.

On 19 September, he sent a detailed memorandum to Foreign Minister Golda Meir concerning the second main area of his activity – direct or indirect involvement in American and NATO defense policies for the Middle East. 'Efforts must be made to increase the level of our involvement in western security arrangements', Shiloah wrote to Meir.⁶ On the same day he wrote to Eban that he was completely settled in at the office and had established contact with all the relevant parties outside the Foreign Ministry – the Chief of Staff, Director-General of the Ministry of Defense Shimon Peres, the head of the Mossad, the heads of the Finance Ministry and others. All this took place within a few days of his return to the Foreign Ministry. It is hard to image a more feverish schedule.

Despite it all, he was not at ease. In the midst of the maelstrom of activity that he created around himself wherever he went, he toyed with the idea of taking leave without pay. This appears to have been another way of expressing his impatience at his initial disappointment over duties he had been given and his efforts to be 'reintegrated into the office', and his difficulties in dealing with the atmosphere of bureaucratic torpor that he found there. In a private letter to his friend, Professor Eli Ginzberg,⁷ he raised the possibility of returning to the United States on unpaid leave 'to reflect and write, even if not for publication'. If this ever became a real possibility, he added, he would write to him and to Arthur [Dean, apparently]. This idea of leave without pay recurred in other letters he wrote at the time and later.

In the meantime he continued to press ahead. On 3 January 1958, he complained to Meir that his potential was being wasted and that the function of Political Advisor was superfluous. He could write memoranda to her directly, and they could discuss them in a limited forum headed by the Minister. He felt that there was much overlapping in ministry consultations and that he had no direct authority of his own. Moreover, most Ministry officials, he discovered to his dismay, preferred to discuss issues directly with the decision-makers and not with advisors. The issue of his authority, or rather lack of it, ever since his days in the Mossad – the same authority he chose not to exert when he did have it – began troubling him increasingly at this stage of his life.

On 2 February, Shiloah sent a letter to Golda Meir setting out his proposals for structural changes in the office. He explained that his suggestions were based on the structure and methods of the State Department in Washington. Work at the Foreign Ministry would be organized 'according to geographical divisions at the operational level, and according to issues and a division of responsibilities at the policymaking level'.

He suggested appointing four deputies under the Director-General: one for administration and foreign service; a second for coordination of political activities inside the office itself and for coordination with the Ministry of Defense; the third for the ministry's economic activities for coordination with the economic ministries; and the fourth for Jewish affairs around the world and their coordination with the Ministry. The heads of geographical divisions would maintain regular contact with the four directors, each in his own area of responsibility. The Director-General and his four deputies would comprise the directorate of the Foreign Ministry. 'According to the proposed structure, the authority of all heads of departments would grow significantly, as would both their responsibilities and the scope of their activities. Key officials in the ministry will be able to spend more time on planning, briefing and coordination with other government bodies.' There is no question that Shiloah tailored this concept to his own measurements, but it is also entirely possible that his proposed structure might have actually suited the needs of the ministry as a whole. The heads of the office, however, showed no interest in this proposal, preferring to retain the existing bureaucratic structure.

In a letter to his friend Elias Sasson in Rome two days later, Shiloah wrote that he did not believe that Meir would make the changes 'because of opposition to the proposal from the heads of the ministry, even though she herself supports the plan'. And then, Shiloah added, 'I will be facing a serious problem about continuing my job.'⁸

Reuven Shiloah had already begun working in the Foreign Ministry along the lines of his proposal as best he could. He set up channels for coordination with the various bodies dealing with security, economy and the Jewish people. In other words, he took on three of the four director's jobs in his proposal. The Foreign Minister herself also tried to implement some of his reforms. In the spirit of the plan that was turned down, and as compensation for its rejection, Shiloah was given another appointment (on 19 February) – he was placed in charge of all

contacts between the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Defense, the Chief of Staff, Mapai and the Histadrut [General Federation of Labour]. Nevertheless, he still lacked the much-desired formal authority for decision-making and action. Even the personal title of Ambassador was given to him only in January 1959 – a few months before his death.

This overdue appointment was a clear reflection of Shiloah's unhappy personal fate even though during the last months of his life he enjoyed one of most successful periods in his life. He wanted an ambassadorial posting. He wanted to be 'Number One' in his own field, and not just an aide or advisor whose task it was to propose new ideas to be carried out by others.

Abba Eban explained, 'Moshe Sharett told him that his greatest strength does not lie in public appearances before large crowds or on television... This caused Shiloah great disappointment and bitterness. A while later, in 1959, Golda Meir opposed his appointment as Ambassador to the United States after my term of office was over, preferring Abe Harman instead. Reuven died in great anguish when he was told that he was not a candidate for the position. There was some substance to the reservations about him... With all his great talent for contacts with intelligence people, diplomats, ministers – Foster Dulles greatly admired him – with all of that I don't think he tried to develop his ability to appear in public. I don't think he ever made a speech in front of a Jewish audience. People refuse to see their own limitations. As he approached fifty, he said: Apparently it's my fate to go on and remain an arms-bearer. But everyone wants to be his own boss. The last months of his life were filled with anguish.' At the same time, these months were the high points in the most successful diplomatic endeavors of his career.

Not everyone agreed with Sharett and Eban that the most important quality in an ambassador to Washington was his gift for public appearances. David HaCohen quoted Sharett's position on this issue very bluntly. He recalls that Sharett justified his opposition to Shiloah's appointment as ambassador to Washington on the basis of his physical appearance. 'He's too short', HaCohen quoted Sharett as saying, in relation to Shiloah's physical stature. 'I told Sharett that Shiloah was suited for the job', said HaCohen, who volunteered a psychological explanation for Sharett's stand on this issue. 'Moshe Sharett was short, and it bothered him a great deal. He wanted desperately to be tall. It annoyed him that Shiloah was short. Eliyahu Eilat was tall and good-looking and he felt that he was extremely well-suited to be an ambassador.'

Arthur Ben-Nathan, who in due course was to become Israel's ambassador to Germany and to France, and was Shiloah's harsh opponent during the disbanding 'Spies Rebellion' in the Foreign Ministry, expressed his anger at the fact that Reuven Shiloah was not appointed ambassador. He regarded it as a grave injustice. 'He was a giant', Ben-Nathan remarked, 'particularly in comparison with many other ambassadors in the past and even now.'

It is conceivable that Golda Meir had professional reasons for not appointing Reuven Shiloah as ambassador. It is not altogether out of the question that she was troubled by the fact that he was too close to the Director-General of the Defense Ministry, Shimon Peres, and championed the view that there should be close coordination and cooperation between the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Defense. Shimon Peres was not on Golda Meir's list of friends in the internal struggles in Mapai after the Sinai Campaign and before the 'Lavon affair'.⁹ To Meir's credit, she never interfered with Shiloah's work or restricted any of his initiatives in ministry affairs. Perhaps, after all, she was convinced that the place where he could be the most effective was in his present position at the Foreign Ministry.

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Reuven Shiloah's feelings of anguish and trepidation upon his return to Jerusalem were not only

personal. Developments in the region at that time were cause for grave concern, even if these fears later proved to be groundless. Israel's leadership, headed by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, had apparently not grasped the extent of the victory won in the Sinai Campaign, and its positive, albeit indirect, influence on Israel's new status in the region, and on the growing distinctions drawn by the American administration between Israel and Nasser's Egypt. Israel was regarded by the administration more and more as an ally, while Egypt was increasingly regarded as a potential enemy.

There was a contradiction, however, between the long-term results and the immediate fears. The years following the Sinai Campaign were difficult ones for the West in the Middle East arena. The humiliating defeat of the former colonial powers, Britain and France, in their attempt to regain control of the Suez Canal, was regarded by the countries of the region as the direct consequence of Soviet intervention, not of American pressure. The Americans did bring pressure to bear on the British to evacuate the Canal Zone in 1954, and on the British and the French to stop their attack on the Zone prematurely, but – as these events were perceived in those days – it was the Soviets who reaped the fruits of American pressures and the failed American foreign policies. Not long afterwards, Russian prestige skyrocketed, literally, following the stunning technological success of the launching of the first 'Sputnik' and the development of ballistic missiles and satellites. These developments made a great impression on the countries of the region and greatly enhanced the Russians' image throughout the Third World.

All this gave added impetus to the emerging wave of radicalism and nationalism sweeping through the Third World and the Arab countries. In February 1958, Egypt and Syria decided to become a single country, to be known as the United Arab Republic (UAR). Within a few months the strongly pro-western government of Iraq fell. The Hashemite house in Baghdad was wiped out, placing in jeopardy the pro-western Hashemite monarchy in Jordan. The entire concept of a pro-western Arab alliance, involving an Iraqi-Jordanian alliance, aimed at balancing the threat of the UAR, collapsed.

All of these developments did not come as a complete surprise. They were preceded by ominous and clearly discernible signals. Reuven Shiloah was one of the pessimists in the Foreign Ministry. He issued warnings and suggested pre-emptive diplomatic actions in Washington, Europe and the Middle East. The US and Israel did, in fact, stand together against the rise of Arab radicalism, and against the intensification of Soviet influence in the region, but they also functioned independently, mainly because of the United States's desire not to tarnish its prestige in the eyes of the conservative, pro-western Arab countries. The US also never relinquished the hope of improving its relations with Nasser and weakening his reliance on the Soviet Union.

Israel, for its part, could not get away from the syndrome of 'the mistress who would be a wife' – the semi-covert ally, weak and vulnerable, lacking solid guarantees for its survival or a clear declaration by the West of its commitment to its defense. Israel and the United States kept up a continuous dialogue, both openly and behind-the-scenes. There were things that were said openly, and others that only seemed to have been said, or were meant to be understood even without being spelled out.

Israel was seeking an American defensive 'umbrella' that would be clearly visible to all. The Americans claimed that such an umbrella existed and would be fully extended if ever the need arose. In the meanwhile, they said, the umbrella should not be brandished about, so that the US would not lose its standing in the Arab countries, thus pushing some of them into the arms of the Russians or destabilizing those still allied to the West. This, they claimed, would be more dangerous to Israel than the lack of a clearly visible protective umbrella. Moreover, they argued,

it would weaken Israel's deterrent and defense capabilities. The US seemed to be saying to Israel, 'don't let the Soviet threats frighten you. Both they and the Arabs know that we're here and that we will hasten to your aid against them if they decide to attack you.' In return Israel was asking: 'do the Arabs know all of that? Have you said anything about it to the Soviets?'

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Prior to Shiloah's return to work at the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem in September 1957, there were a number of significant developments in the region and in US-Israeli relations. The first was the 'Eisenhower Doctrine' for the defense of the Middle East, according to which the President of the United States was authorized to send American armed forces to the aid of any country in the Middle East threatened or attacked by 'any country controlled by international Communism'. This was an American security guarantee designed to counter Soviet threats and redress the vacuum created in the West after the humiliation of France and Britain in the Suez.

The Doctrine was approved by both houses of Congress on 9 March 1957, while Israel made its final decision to complete troop withdrawals from Sinai and the Gaza Strip. 'As far as the administration was concerned, this was one of the fruits reaped from the end of the crisis between us', Ambassador Abba Eban stated in his report on the diplomatic campaign over the Suez War. 'As long as the crisis continued, approval in the Congress was in doubt. The administration could not get the doctrine through Congress while it was entangled in an argument with leaders of both parties on the question of sanctions against Israel.'¹⁰

Israel, too, was invited to join the countries included in the Eisenhower Doctrine, a reflection of the change that had occurred in Israel's standing in the region, and the fundamental shift in America's attitude toward Israel. Until then, Israel had never been invited to participate in any regional defense plan for fear of Arab reaction, but at this point in time, its invitation appeared not to constitute an excuse for the Arab countries to boycott the American plan for regional defense.

At the same time, if there were any doubts about the need for an open military and diplomatic alliance with the United States, they vanished with the appearance of the Soviet Union on the scene as a real political and military threat to Israel, which was supplying Egypt and Syria with massive military and economic aid and taking a very hostile propaganda line toward Israel. Ever since the conclusion of the Czech-Egyptian arms deal, Israeli leaders had feared the possibility of an attack on the country not only directly by the Soviet Union, but by one or more Arab countries backed by advice and assistance from the Soviets.

Prior to 1957, Israel felt that it faced, primarily, a joint British-Arab threat to its existence, but the Sinai Campaign overturned the international balance of power in the region, with the Soviets replacing the British as the most significant potential threat to Israel. On a number of occasions the Soviets threatened to intervene militarily on Egypt's behalf against Israel and even against Britain and France. The Americans made no effort to counter these threats. On the contrary, they exploited them for psychological-cum-diplomatic purposes, using them to pressure Israel to withdraw from Sinai and the Gaza Strip. The US warned Israel of the following scenario: Israel refuses to withdraw and the Egyptians attack the IDF in Sinai or the Gaza Strip; the Soviets send troops in to help Egypt, and the United States is powerless to intervene since the Soviet troops will be operating on Egyptian soil. What is more, prior to the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, American protection against outside military intervention in the region extended only to member countries of the Baghdad Treaty – and Israel was not one of them. In the absence of any kind of formal American deterrent – even after Israel withdrew from Sinai and Gaza – the Soviet threat

against Israel remained a fiery sword above its head. The 'Eisenhower Doctrine' was in fact a belated and only partial counter to Soviet threats.

Israel's openly declared expectations were that its willingness to join the Doctrine would ensure it of American military measures in its defense, not only against a direct Soviet attack but also in the case of a Soviet-backed Arab attack.¹¹ In a statement to the Knesset on 3 June 1957, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion enunciated this in no uncertain terms: 'The main value of the decision taken by the American Congress is to deter and prevent an attack ... and if there is one country in the Middle East that is more likely than any other to be attacked – it is Israel. But Israel cannot allow itself to assume arrogantly that it is capable of standing alone even in the event of an attack by a neighboring country supported by a great power. Therefore the United States' commitment to help a country under attack must be seen as a step that enhances both peace in the Middle East and Israel's security.'

Israel regarded the Doctrine as an important tool for increasing American economic aid, and perhaps, too, as a source of additional military aid in the form of arms that the US had refused to supply until then. Under these circumstances, Israel's declared policy of non-alignment came to an official end – not, however, without apprehension and reservations. Announcing its official acceptance of the invitation to join the Eisenhower Doctrine, Israel deliberately omitted the expression 'aggression on the part of a country controlled by international Communism', nor did it make any direct or indirect reference to the Soviet Union, contrary to the statements made by other countries in the region upon joining the Doctrine.

There were a number of reasons for this. First of all, Israel had never been party – either fully or partially – to any kind of military defense treaty headed by the United States such as the Baghdad Treaty or NATO, and therefore did not enjoy the kind of military protection promised to all member countries of these pacts. For all the other countries in the region, joining the Eisenhower Doctrine was like taking out supplementary insurance; for Israel, still threatened by the Soviet Union, it barely provided basic coverage. Another, possibly more important, reason, was the increase in Jewish immigration to Israel from eastern Europe at that time, prompting Israel's leaders to tread softly and avoid a head-on confrontation with the leaders of the Eastern Bloc so as not to endanger the continuation of the immigration. This gave Israel effective diplomatic leverage to ensure American agreement to the omission of any mention of 'Communist aggression' in the Israeli declaration.

Israel's ambivalent attitude toward the Doctrine continued for a long time, stemming as it did from basic doubts about the US's attitude toward Nasser and its attempts to halt the spread of his influence. On the one hand, the Americans seemed to view Nasser as a subversive element, who had thrown in his lot with the Soviet Union, and therefore the basic tenets of the Doctrine could be applied against him. 'President Eisenhower lashed out against Nasser in unprecedented terms, accusing him of subversion and deceit', wrote Ambassador Eban in a report on the President's statements to the members of the United States Supreme Court at the White House. According to a report of the event given to Eban by one of the participants at that meeting, The president expressed his admiration for Israel's achievements on the battlefield and its courageous insistence on its positions.'¹²

But there was a disturbing rider to Eisenhower's statement at that event. He 'expressed his doubts as to whether the fundamental problems of the world could be solved through the use of force'. This doubt somewhat weakened the validity of the Doctrine bearing his name and authorizing him to use force of arms in special circumstances. Israel's main concern about these doubts related to a question which continued to trouble the country's leaders: to what extent

would Eisenhower be willing to use military force as a deterrent aimed at curbing Nasser's subversion and aggression. In retrospect, and with the benefit of hindsight, Israel's concerns at that time seem exaggerated, because the Sinai and Suez Campaigns did in fact deter Nasser from using force again against Israel, and the Americans did send marines into Lebanon. But at that time there was undoubtedly much cause for concern about the rabbleroising effect of radical pan-Arab Nasserism, which spread through the Arab countries like wildfire.

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Despite the invitation extended to Israel to join the countries included in the Eisenhower Doctrine, Reuven Shiloah remained skeptical and critical.

From conversations with our friends ... particularly with Dulles, it transpires that United States' policy today is to avoid any open conflict with Nasser and to take action against him indirectly, particularly by supporting those Arab regimes that oppose him, such as Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and particularly Saudi Arabia, whom they regard as the most important Arab element today with whose help Nasser's hegemony in the Middle East can be undermined and toppled.¹³

The main tendency is to organize a Saudi-Hashemite-Lebanese front against the Egyptian front', Shiloah continued, and explained that American circles believed that, 'if they are successful and the pro-western, anti-Nasserite and anti-Soviet front becomes a reality, it will be of benefit to the West and of great interest to Israel... On all the basic Israeli issues in the region, progress must be made very slowly and discreetly. As for shipping in the Gulf of Eilat and the Tiran Straits', the Americans claimed according to this report, 'there must be no provocation. A ship should sail through occasionally, quietly and with no fanfare. There must be no provocation about the oil pipeline ... for now, Nasser must not be put out too much, because that would give him a propaganda bonus against the West and against King Ibn Saud.'

Israel was not inclined to accept this suggestion. On the contrary: 'Our conclusion was to put American resolve to the test immediately', Shiloah continued. The idea was to hasten the arrival of ships to Eilat, to pressure the US to send ships flying the American flag through the Straits and to hasten the laying of the oil pipeline from Eilat to Beersheba and from there to Ashkelon.¹⁴ But that in itself was insufficient. Reuven Shiloah's diplomatic strategies from his days in Washington had not changed and he continued to pursue them when he returned to Jerusalem, particularly the idea of using the new conditions in the Middle East in order to turn Israel into a strategic asset for the United States and to suggest to the Americans an 'affirmative Israeli alternative' from the American point of view, and not to be satisfied with the emphasis on narrow Israeli interests. This was the idea that led Shiloah into the initiatives he took on the issue of the 'Peripheral Alliance' or the 'Belt', as it was referred to at the time in local Israeli papers. The aim was to establish a regional alliance – *with* Israel not against it – which would cooperate in 'blocking Nasserist subversion and Soviet expansion'; to create a Turkish-Iranian-Israeli treaty, instead of the Saudi-Iraqi-Jordanian one, which Shiloah warned against just prior to his departure from Washington.

Syria provided the main incentive for signing the treaty with Turkey and Iran. Beginning some time before the Sinai Campaign and gathering momentum immediately following it, pro-Soviet tendencies in that country had grown considerably, more so than in any other Arab country, including Nasser's Egypt. Concern turned into real apprehension when the Russian-

Syrian arms deal was signed on 27 October 1957 and General 'Afif Bizri was appointed Chief of Staff of the Syrian Army. This Syrian general was well known for his militant Communist leanings, and the United States was concerned lest tensions mount on the Israeli-Syrian border and increase the danger of an outbreak of hostilities in the region.

The United States sent out warnings, cautioning Syria against any aggressive actions on its borders. On 1 September 1957, using wording drawn from his Doctrine, President Eisenhower declared the following: 'International Communism should be careful not to push Syria into aggressive action against its neighbors.' Secretary of State Dulles also made indirect reference to the Eisenhower Doctrine in a speech at the United Nations, saying 'The Soviet Union is involved in direct and indirect actions aimed at endangering the freedom, independence and territorial integrity of certain Middle Eastern countries.'

For Israel, however, these declarations were simply not enough. From his new office in Jerusalem, Shiloah sent letters of warning to friends of President Eisenhower from the 'Circle of Friends': Barney Balaban and Ginzberg.¹⁵ In these letters he referred to 'the serious developments in Syria' and to the statements issued in Washington concerning threats against 'Syria's neighbors'. This might also have been a reference to Israel, but at that time the United States administration never made it clear to the Soviets and to the Arabs that the US was as concerned for Israel's security as it was for the security of Jordan or Lebanon, for example. Official American emissaries were sent for consultations with Turkey and with other friendly Arab nations, but not with Israel. There were reports in the media of arms shipments to Jordan and Iraq, while the ban on the sale of American arms to Israel was still in place. 'We know that the United States is committed to Israel's security', Shiloah wrote, 'but this must be made public and stressed before the Soviets as well as to the pro-western and pro-Soviet Arab leaders'.

At the beginning of October 1957, Israel demanded that the United States clarify to the Soviets in no uncertain terms that it would defend all the countries of the region, Israel included, in case of a Soviet-backed attack by a neighboring country. Israel's main concerns in this respect involved a potentially dangerous scenario: whereby the Syrians would provoke a flare-up on the Israeli border, which would escalate following an Israeli response to the provocation; this, in turn, would give the Soviets the excuse they needed to intervene actively against Israel – in order to protect Syria, not to attack Israel as such. It was the fear of just such a scenario that prompted the Israelis to urge the United States to issue a clear warning to the Soviet Union in advance of any provocation, not to intervene in the region in the event of a border flare-up.

The government of Israel believed that the situation in Syria was a model of a possible flash point that might require the implementation of the Eisenhower Doctrine and therefore, as Israel understood it, there was justification for an American warning as a deterrent, stating that American forces would be sent to the region if events in Syria made such a move necessary. Virulent Soviet propaganda attacks against Israel caused the Prime Minister to write to Dulles, asking him once again to take action that would deter the Soviets and serve as a warning to them.

Prime Minister Ben-Gurion wrote to Dulles that 'the vicious speech Gromyko gave at the UN and the tough conversation he held with the Israeli Foreign Minister, and the endless vilification of Israel in the Soviet press – all these point to the fact that the Soviets intend to play out the Syrian gambit to the end'. Nevertheless, Dulles refused to issue any kind of warning to the Soviets. He claimed that such a declaration would only enhance Russian prestige in the eyes of the Arabs. The Americans did not want 'to allow the Soviet Union to make political capital in the Middle East on this issue'. This hesitancy on the part of the US about preempting possible Soviet intervention by some form of verbal deterrent was a source of constant concern in Jerusalem at

that time.

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Israel and the United States had discussed the possibility of Turkish or Iraqi intervention in Syria to curtail the activities of the pro-Soviet regime, but the Americans were not favorably disposed to these ideas. They were considering their own plans for secret intervention in Syria to bring down the pro-Soviet regime, but they did not apprise Israel of these plans – which in any case were not carried out. On the other hand, they did show interest in the Israeli proposal for an indirect approach through a strengthening of relations between the West and the so-called ‘peripheral’ nations. As early as September 1957, a short time after his return to Jerusalem, Shiloah raised the issue of Israel’s relations with Turkey,¹⁶ and at the same time discussed the question of Israel’s integration into western defense plans. ‘It is possible that the dangers looming for both countries following recent developments in Syria, may bring Turkey around to doing something to improve and strengthen relations. The latest events in Syria shocked and frightened policymakers in the West, including in the United States...’

In a letter to his old friend Elias Sasson, Israel’s ambassador in Rome, Shiloah wrote:¹⁷

We must make use of this shock to shake up our relations with the West and achieve the following: (1) an unequivocal American warning to Russia and its satellites that any military action against Israel would bring about western military response; (2) arrangements for permanent consultations between us and the appropriate department at NATO HQ and at American HQ in Washington; (3) a restatement of our demand for western and American help in strengthening our armed forces... There must not be a repeat of the hysterical public campaign that followed the Czech-Egyptian arms deal. It must be accepted as a fact of life that the Americans have a complex about openly strengthening Israel’s armed forces with American weapons, which, so they say, will bring about a catastrophe in the Middle East. Therefore we recommended that they seek another solution. We should say to them, ‘See to it that your Allies – France, Canada, Italy, etc. equip us at your expense’.

In a detailed memorandum sent to Foreign Minister Golda Meir at that time, Reuven Shiloah elaborated his plan of action:¹⁸ ‘The American Doctrine requires constitutional procedures and planning that will take time. Therefore, a body for consultation and planning must be set up immediately to look into the potential dangers and decide on the nature and scope of American aid should the need arise.’ Shiloah recommended ‘making a supreme effort to increase the level of our involvement in western defense plans’. After concluding that at that point in time there was no chance of actually joining the NATO alliance, or signing a security treaty with the US, he proposed an indirect approach: ‘The government of the United States wants to consult with us and coordinate its policies in the Middle East with us. Let us create the means ... to maintain contacts and consultations at the highest level of planning and execution.’ In short, he wrote, ‘what is needed is a “machinery”’ (Shiloah used the English word in the original). Further on in his proposal Shiloah wrote: ‘We should agree on a special contact unit in Washington, in NATO Headquarters, etc., and agree on total secrecy ... As long as a tool for coordination and contact is created that will provide us with detailed information and allow us to contribute from our own experience.’

Shiloah summed up his proposal with the following points: the creation of a joint Israeli-

American body for contact and political coordination in the Middle East; a joint body for planning the defense of Israel and determining the scope of American aid to Israel in case of attack; and a strongly-worded American warning to Russia, Syria and Egypt (through diplomatic and not necessarily open channels) that any attack on Israel would bring about an immediate American military response.

In a letter to Eban in Washington, Shiloah related a conversation he had with Ben-Gurion, in which, Shiloah said, the Prime Minister 'accepted my evaluation and in fact my practical conclusions as well... He greatly appreciates Germany's strength and influence in the United States, and believes that with the help of Germany and France we can get the United States to agree to our entry into the NATO alliance... He places the utmost importance on the supply of weapons and a warning to the Russians.' Later in the same letter, Shiloah expressed his doubts about Israel's chances of joining NATO, and stated that 'We cannot be satisfied with warnings and with the promises we received in accordance with the Eisenhower Doctrine, unless suitable arrangements and plans are made to determine how the United States will come to our aid.'¹⁹

With Foreign Minister Golda Meir's approval, Shiloah's plan began to take shape. On 7 November, all Israeli diplomatic missions were briefed and instructed to work on two levels – efforts of persuasion in western capitals so as to win support for Israel's acceptance into NATO and, at the same time, an effort to arrive at a minimal interim agreement comprised of four points: a warning to the Soviets, the creation of channels of communication, consultations and joint planning of defense options between Israel and NATO or Israel and the US, and western help in financing arms procurements.

The explanations included in the briefing went as follows: The Middle East has become a focal point in the Cold War. The Soviet Union is attempting to take control of the entire region and should it succeed, there will be a revolutionary change in the status of western Europe and indeed in the international balance of power in the world.' Moreover, The Soviets are not interested in a world war ... but they will continue to exploit the Arab-Israeli conflict... There is reason to fear that the USSR might conclude that an attack on Israel by Syria and Egypt will not elicit a serious western response and will not cause a world war. It is feared too that the leaders of Syria and Egypt might decide to embark on a military adventure and drag the Soviets in with them.' And finally: 'As of now, Israel does not have any arrangement which ensures it of any real (military) aid in case of an attack on its territory.'

This briefing is an accurate reflection of Israel's fears at that time. In the eyes of Israel's leaders, the Eisenhower Doctrine alone did not constitute a sufficient deterrent against the double threat: one, a Soviet-inspired armed attack on Israel by Syria and Egypt, and second, Soviet involvement after the fact following the initiation of armed aggression against Israel by either one or both of those two countries. Israel successfully used the threat of this double-barreled danger to its existence as a means for obtaining military aid from the NATO countries. The countries of western Europe, particularly France and West Germany, sold arms to Israel, and Germany even gave them to Israel free of charge under the guise of a 'loan'. Israel wanted a formal stamp on these military ties in order to increase its deterrent value against the Soviet threat, but the arms-supplying countries were not willing to go that far. The Europeans were ready to strengthen Israel's defensive capabilities, but did not want to create what they thought might be a needless crisis in their relations with either the moderate or the extremist Arab countries. They continued to court both.

NOTES

1. Shiloah to Eban, 19 Sept. 1957. State Archives 4374/26.

2. The powerful Minister of Finance in Ben-Gurion's government.
3. The reference is to Eban's wife.
4. It is accepted practice among religious Jews to spend every free moment studying either the Torah or the Talmud, so that indeed, in those circles there is no such thing as a 'free' moment when there is nothing to do.
5. Moshe Sharett, *Personal Diary*, Vol.6, p.1680, 26 Sept. 1956.
6. Shiloah summed up his memo with the following points for action: the establishment of a joint Israeli-American body for diplomatic contact and coordination on the Middle East; a joint body for the planning of Israel's defense and the scale of American aid to Israel should it be attacked; a strongly-worded American warning to Russia, Syria and Egypt ... that any attack on Israel would prompt an American military response.
7. State Archives 4374/26.
8. An expression of this feeling can also be found in a letter to Esther Herlitz in New York, 'I have begun looking into the possibility of a grant for a year of research and study (for your eyes only).'
9. Relating to the discovery in Cairo of an Israeli intelligence ring that was ordered to sabotage American and British institutions in the city in order to cause a rift between Egypt and those countries. The members of the ring were caught, two were hanged and the others imprisoned for many years. The 'Lavon affair', which focused on the question of 'who gave the order' to put the dormant plan into action, was a major political minefield that caused a bitter rift in the country's leadership for many years, and led, among other things, to the resignation of Defense Secretary Pinhas Lavon and to Ben-Gurion's demonstrative retirement to the Negev kibbutz of Sdeh Boker.
10. The Eisenhower Doctrine's main points were: The President is authorized to help any country or group of countries in the Middle East region, and to cooperate with them if they so desire in developing its economic strength aimed at upholding its independence. The United States of America regards the independence and territorial integrity of the nations of the Middle East as vital to its own national interests and to the well-being of the world as a whole. To achieve this aim, the President is authorized to use the armed forces to help any country in the region that requests military aid against armed aggression on the part of any country controlled by international Communism, on condition that this corresponds with the United States' obligations according to signed treaties or the Constitution of the United States of America.
11. Israel's statement confirming its joining in the Doctrine spoke of 'Israel's opposition to aggression from any party against the territorial integrity and political independence of any country... Israel recognizes the importance of safeguarding the independence and territorial integrity of the countries of the Middle East.'
12. This was on 9 March 1957, during the very days when the Doctrine was in the process of being approved.
13. Reuven Shiloah to Teddy Kollek, 25 April 1957. State Archives 4374/25.
14. The 8-inch pipeline to Beersheba was operational as early as April 1957, and by August, a 16-inch pipeline was opened between Beersheba and Ashkelon.
15. State Archives 4373/28.
16. Protocol of a meeting at Shiloah's office, 11 Sept. 1957, State Archives 4374/26.
17. Reuven Shiloah to Eliyahu Sasson, 17 Sept. 1957. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 19 Sept. 1957.
19. Ibid., 2 Oct. 1957.

Integration into NATO and the Periphery

Reuven Shiloah refused to give up the idea of persuading the US to add 'bite' to the Eisenhower Doctrine. Neither was he willing to give up the fight when faced with NATO resistance to the idea of formal or even informal ties with Israel, over and above the relations that some of the NATO countries maintained with Israel separately. He continued with his unflagging efforts to balance pressure with counterpressure – Israeli pressure against Arab pressure.

His next objective was the meeting of the NATO Council scheduled to take place in Paris in December 1957, in anticipation of which a detailed and intricate plan of action was prepared. In a meeting of a small, high-level forum of Foreign Ministry officials, which took place on 11 November 1957, it was decided to 'use the Eisenhower Doctrine as a basis for demanding special ties with the NATO countries, particularly the United States'. In the minutes of the meeting, Shiloah detailed the points of the 'operational plan', which was entirely typical of his feverish way of working. In it he wrote:

Eban will write to Dulles. The operation must begin in France and Germany. Propose [sic] that, together with IDF HQ, a survey be prepared to include the military angle to justify our request. Support the idea of using military experts (Leo Cohen's suggestion: Liddell-Hart, Marshall, and others). After the appeal to Germany and France, we must appeal to the Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg) and to Scandinavia. All our activities in Europe must be carried out in complete coordination with the Ministry of Defense, in other words with the Director-General of the Ministry, Shimon Peres. Propose [sic] – that Shimon Peres go to Europe together with someone from the Foreign Ministry. In Israel talks should begin between the Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and General Alfred Greunther [former Supreme NATO commander, and a friend of Israel], and with the son of the West German Chancellor, Adenauer. [He too was a good friend of Israel, and it was thought that he was close to his father and had some influence over him.]

The minutes continue, 'The Foreign Minister proposes a conference of all our representatives in Europe in preparation for our activities on the NATO question. It was decided that the conference should take place in Brussels. Shiloah will be the representative of the Foreign Ministry, and will chair the meeting of our representatives in Europe... Simultaneously with the efforts being made in the United States, concentrated and intensive action will be initiated in European capitals... We have decided that our activities in Europe will be reviewed with our representatives in each and every capital... as well as a special effort in the defense ministries

and Army HQ's in Europe, on the assumption that defense people in the various capitals would be more amenable than their foreign ministries to our inclusion in defense systems... Shimon Peres will be asked to go on a brief tour of Europe, for consultations with our representatives and for talks in the various defense ministries, together, of course, with one of our representatives at each place. Dr. Bergmann will look into the possibility of our integration into the information banks of the Western World.'¹

The truth is that Shiloah's initiative encountered opposition not only in the US and the European capitals, but also at home. All those who were opposed to Shimon Peres's 'European orientation' tended to regard the NATO initiative as part and parcel of that orientation. In fact the two initiatives overlapped only minimally and only in certain areas. Shiloah continued to stand unwaveringly by his American orientation, and regarded the NATO initiative and the Peripheral Alliance only as a means toward deepening common interests and the spectrum of contacts with the United States. This, as far as he was concerned, was the main objective, and always had been. Most of the Israeli ambassadors in Europe opposed the initiative, even though it was fully supported by Foreign Minister Golda Meir and was similarly approved by the top echelons of Foreign Ministry personnel.

Among the chief opponents were Ambassador Ya'akov Tzur in Paris, Eliyahu Eilat in London and even Shiloah's good friend, Ambassador Elias Sasson in Rome. The latter wrote to Shiloah on 22 October 1957, that he was strongly opposed to the attempt to join NATO, which he felt would not succeed and would only cause damage. The West, Sasson said, was still courting the Arabs and there was a danger that it might make a commitment to them to exclude Israel from any access to NATO membership. On the other hand, Sasson felt that it was worthwhile to try to achieve western guarantees for the defense of the region 'on the basis of the East-West conflict, not the Arab-Israeli conflict, in which case there would be no need to negotiate with the Arabs'. According to Tsur, opposition to this initiative was voiced at the ambassadors' conference in Brussels. Reuven Shiloah attended this conference with Shimon Peres and Emil Najar. All of us, all the ambassadors in western Europe, were opposed to embarking on negotiations for Israel's inclusion in the NATO alliance. We claimed that if we joined NATO we would be giving the weakest links in the chain – Greece and Turkey, etc. – the right to decide on our affairs. We proposed discussing Israel's defense with each country separately. But Shiloah put a great deal of pressure on us to act on instructions and some of the ambassadors weakened. That was Shiloah's way', Tsur related.

Shiloah was undeterred by the opposition and, on 6 November, sent his 'operational plan' to the ambassador in Washington, Abba Eban, together with a note asking him to approach Secretary of State Dulles with a two-pronged set of Israeli demands, one relating to the United States as the leader of the NATO Alliance, and the other to the United States as the author of the Eisenhower Doctrine. These demands were submitted in accordance with his plan, whose aim was to strengthen Israel's military forces and its connections with a western defense organization.

Shiloah suggested to Eban that in his talks with Dulles and his aides he stress the differences between Israel's situation and that of other countries included in the Doctrine. Turkey was a member of NATO; Iran and Iraq were members of the Baghdad Treaty to which the US belonged as a member of its Military Committee; Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Jordan all had formal military agreements with the United States. Israel was the only country in the region that did not have any military connection, either through a formal treaty or a direct agreement with the US. Hence the need to initiate joint American-Israeli planning. The suggestion was to hold

talks immediately between the official military bodies of the two countries in order to work out the details of such a plan and the measure of American aid in the event of an attack on Israel. Faced with a massive penetration of Soviet influence into Syria and Egypt and the introduction into these countries of large quantities of modern arms, the idea was to set up an urgent meeting, with US help, to complete the arming of the IDF with appropriate defensive weapons.

On 23 November 1957, Ambassador Eban duly sent an official message to the Secretary of State in the name of the government of Israel, enumerating Israeli demands concerning NATO, and direct security contacts with the US. Israel requested access to NATO intelligence and joint planning. Since some time would pass until these ideas bore fruit, the Prime Minister suggested beginning negotiations immediately on practical defense plans; allowing Israel access to the planning and overall defense arrangements of the West; declaring that any attack on a Middle Eastern country would evince an immediate response from NATO; setting up procedures for contact and coordination with Israel parallel to those that existed with Turkey before its inclusion in NATO; and strengthening Israel's arsenal of weapons. Israel's demands from the United States included a request to set up the machinery for joint planning between the two countries to define what kind of help Israel would receive should it be attacked by countries under the control of international Communism. Eban explained in the letter that, according to the Eisenhower Doctrine, in order for military aid to be sent in, three events must occur: an attack, a request for help and the identification of the aggressor as being under the influence of international Communism. This, he claimed, was a cumbersome procedure, and therefore special arrangements had to be made.

In the event, as Israel was to discover shortly afterwards, none of these demands would be met. In a meeting of top Ministry officials in which Reuven Shiloah summed up his mission to the NATO Council, he could point to very few successes:

Our information campaign in Europe made it clear to the leaders that there is a linkage between security in western Europe and security in the Middle East... Leading western politicians are now aware of the fact that there is no security arrangement for the Middle East. The remarks made by the Prime Minister of Turkey, warning of the dire results of Soviet control over Syria, were very helpful... The ideas for appeasement at our expense were voted down, and in the NATO announcement there is no mention of the 1947 [Partition] plan and no one claims any more that the prime source of tensions in the Middle East lies in the conflict between the Israelis and the Arabs... Mention was made of the need to protect the sovereignty of the countries of the region.

Emil Najar stressed the importance of the talks held with the Prime Minister of Turkey Adnan Menderes. Foreign Minister Golda Meir concluded that Israel had succeeded in heading off difficulties that might have come its way at this conference from a number of member countries. She also stated that Israel had succeeded in paving the way for more important developments in the future.

If there were hopes about the possibility of Israel's integration into NATO, even indirectly and secretly through the operational arms of the organization, they were shelved after the meeting of December 1957. The intensive diplomatic action carried out in anticipation of the conference failed to achieve any of its direct goals. However, as it eventually transpired, all that work had not been entirely in vain. Bilateral connections between Israel and the European countries were given strong support, with the blessing of most of the NATO member countries. This in itself was an indirect but not insignificant achievement on the part of the high-powered

Israeli lobbying that preceded the opening of the session. The main – albeit indirect – result was paving the diplomatic way to Turkey.

In a letter to Meir on 1 January 1958, Shiloah noted a number of options for a follow-up to the political-security activities at the NATO conference. The main thrust of his proposals related to an effort to repair relations with Turkey. The conversation Sasson had held with Menderes, and Menderes's own initiatives to talk to Israeli officials, proved that he was interested in friendly relations with us, Shiloah wrote. He suggested that Sasson propose another meeting with Menderes to discuss practical arrangements for cooperation between the two governments and, most importantly, to discuss the situation in Syria, which was a cause for grave concern on the part of both countries.

In fact, Turkey became the principal objective of Israel's newly defined diplomatic efforts after the NATO conference. These efforts were helped to a large extent by the personal ties that Elias Sasson had established with Turkish officials during his term as Minister at the Israeli Embassy in Ankara, shortly after the establishment of Israel. Sasson's first contacts with the Turks were made at the PCC – the Palestine Conciliatory Committee – which was held under the auspices of Turkey, the United States and France. Sasson later served as Israel's ambassador to Italy, and then as a Minister in the Israeli government, but these early personal contacts in Turkey were very helpful in opening doors for Israel after the NATO conference.

Despite the setbacks, Shiloah proposed to continue, nonetheless, the information campaign in European capitals, and to maintain a broad range of contacts with officials at NATO headquarters in Paris. They understand that Europe cannot turn a blind eye to the Middle East and that the fall of the Middle East would totally undermine the West's position ... and endanger the continued free existence of Europe', Shiloah wrote at the time to Eban, summing up his reflections on the NATO conference. 'The catchword in the air in various circles was 'bilateral arrangements', he noted. The Danes and the Norwegians asked, 'Why can't an order be given to the commander of the Sixth Fleet to make contact with IDF HQ and plan your defense together?' The Secretary-General of the Mapai Party, Giora Yosephthal, learned from party sources in Europe that 'in fact, similar arrangements have been made even with a neutral country such as Sweden'. 'The key', Shiloah concluded, 'remains in the hands of the United States, and all our efforts in Europe and in Turkey can only serve as additions to our main effort in Washington.'

In a further summary of the NATO conference Shiloah wrote to Foreign Minister Meir that 'The intensive talks on the security of the Middle East, particularly the talks held by the Director-General of the Ministry of Defense, Shimon Peres ... with the defense ministers and their top officials, were an important step in enhancing ties and increasing the understanding in western Europe that there is a common security interest in strengthening us... We already find in some capitals practical expressions of this understanding.'

Throughout this period Shiloah was obsessed with the Soviet threat to Israel. Conceivably his fears in this respect were exaggerated, but they were a true expression of the positions held by Ben-Gurion and Meir at the time. 'I am very concerned about the illusions of a relaxation of tensions and an improvement in the relations between the Soviet Union and Israel', Shiloah wrote on 26 January 1956 to Ya'akov Herzog, who replaced him as Minister at the Israeli Embassy in Washington. 'The USSR's opposition to Israel is a basic tenet of its Middle East policies, and not just a passing tactical move. The problem is not only a tactical exploitation of the anti-Israeli card to win the support of the Arabs... The Soviet Union sees Israel as the main obstacle to its efforts to achieve political, military and economic hegemony in the region... Only Israel will persevere, for historical, moral, and national reasons, in its opposition to Soviet

dominance.’ And in a letter to Abba Eban of 10 February 1958 he wrote: ‘The Soviet Union’s opposition to Israel has turned from a tactic to a matter of principle. They have begun comparing our status here to the status of the French in Algeria. In other words, we are regarded as foreign invaders. They believe the local residents are perfectly within their rights to rebel against us and that it is the duty of all peace-loving people to support them.’

The next few years will be marked by extreme danger to Israel’s security and very existence’, Shiloah wrote to Elias Sasson, ‘and we must concentrate our efforts on strengthening friendships and a treaty with the West to make it absolutely clear to the Soviet Union and its Arab satellites that Israel has not been abandoned, and that any attack on Israel could ignite a world-wide conflagration... I am trying to put the fear of God into our people at home and in the western capitals... I feel it is of the utmost importance that we shake ourselves free of our routine thinking ... that we work with the speed and tension of a military command post in wartime... We forget .. that we are a country under siege and in a state of war.’

This highly charged description is more a reflection of Reuven Shiloah’s state of mind at that time than a true account of Israel’s state of affairs. Shiloah’s concern grew following a tour of Europe in 1958. He felt that the general view in western European capitals was that Nasser had proved once again that he was the universally accepted leader of the Arab world. He also proved that he was striving for true independence and that if only he extended a friendly hand out to the West, he would be able to extricate himself from a burdensome dependence on the Soviet Union. He had proved his independence in the actions he took to close down the Communist Party in Syria, and in his announcement of the union with Syria without any prior consultation with the Russians. What followed from this thinking was the idea that Europe would have to come to terms with Nasser, and that overtures must be made toward him to bring him closer. Germany, in an effort to balance its rather shaky standing among the Arab countries following its massive reparation payments to Israel, tended at that time to advocate comprehensive economic aid to the Arabs.

These overtures toward Nasser also had negative economic repercussions for Israel. Following the creation of various Arab unions, the Europeans were very wary of ‘pushing Nasser into the arms of the Soviets’. This at any rate was the excuse given to Israel for the deferral of the decision by the executive committee of the European Organization for Economic Cooperation (OEEC) to establish relations with Israel – they were loath to cross Nasser in any way.

This situation was reflected, too, at the NATO conference in Brussels. Secretary of State Dulles came to Nasser’s defense after criticism was leveled at the Egyptian leader by the Turkish Foreign Minister. The Turkish official described Soviet entrenchment in the region and pointed out, in particular, the part played by Nasser and the UAR in undermining western standing and influence in the region. He did not mince words in describing Nasser’s and the UAR’s subversion and expansionism, and demanded swift and decisive action against Nasser and a strengthening of the western forces in the region, particularly in Turkey. He described Turkey’s economic woes and claimed that the economic organizations affiliated with NATO and the West were not doing enough in this respect. He also leveled harsh criticism against the new tendency in the West to appease Nasser and cautioned against entertaining any illusions that Nasser could be brought back into the western fold. He was particularly critical of West Germany, which had refrained from making any investments or undertaking any economic activity in Turkey, while at the same time intensifying its activities in the UAR – including opening up a \$100 million line of credit.

Dulles took exception to the Turkish Minister’s speech. ‘Nasser ... is no longer a Soviet

satellite. The West must improve its relations with Nasser and the UAR particularly in the economic sphere. If the UAR continues to seek aid in the West, we can prevent it from falling into Soviet arms... Suggestions have been made that the government of the United States provide the UAR with a certain extent of economic aid, but no final decision has been made... Despite the American government's reservations about Nasser, there is some weight to the claims of those who recommend maintaining contact with him.' Dulles came out in support of the German credit line to the UAR. The French Foreign Minister backed the Turkish position, and all the rest of the member countries supported Dulles.

Indeed, if the West had given priority to investments in the Turkish economy at that time, it is possible that the military uprising that took place in Ankara in May 1960, which put an end to the Menderes government – and to Prime Minister Menderes's life – could have been avoided. Ironically, it was the increased western support for the UAR, rather than for the pro-western countries of the region, that fanned the flames of radical-revolutionary Nasserism, which had the best of both worlds, while countries like Turkey lost out on all counts.

Turkish disenchantment with the United States at that time had reached a high point. Prime Minister Menderes and Foreign Minister Zorlu complained to Israel – with which Turkey had recently established close relations – that 'Israel is not helping them in the United States regarding its economic situation... Turkey is re-evaluating its relations with the UAR ... in view of the United States' and England's reluctance ... to take far-reaching economic steps against the UAR.'

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Turkish-Israeli cooperation had indeed evolved into an advanced stage at that time, culminating in a meeting in Rome in June 1958 between a delegation from Israel headed by Reuven Shiloah and an official Turkish delegation. This meeting brought to a conclusion moves that had been initiated in September 1957. Golda Meir decided then, on Reuven Shiloah's initiative, 'to examine the possibilities of repairing the relations between Turkey and Israel, which had deteriorated with the recalling of the heads of the diplomatic missions of the two countries to their capitals in the wake of the Sinai Campaign'. Elias Sasson and Reuven Shiloah were made responsible for seeking ways to achieve this.

In December 1957 a meeting was held in Paris between the Prime Minister of Turkey, Adnan Menderes and Ambassador Sasson, together with the Turkish Foreign Minister Fatin Zorlu. Menderes and Sasson discovered that they shared similar views about the situation in the Middle East and a willingness to seek ways to strengthen cooperation between the two governments. In consultations at the Foreign Ministry it was decided that in the absence of proper diplomatic ties, ways would be sought to establish permanent arrangements for contacts with Turkey.

At the end of March 1958 Zorlu asked to meet with Sasson in Paris during a meeting of NATO foreign ministers. Zorlu had proposed to the foreign ministers that Turkey and Israel cooperate on a number of issues. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Meir decided to refrain from making any clear commitments to specific operations, but suggested that the meeting be strongly encouraged.

On 17 April 1958, Sasson and Zorlu met in Paris and agreed to set up as soon as possible a secret meeting of Turkish and Israeli experts for an in-depth study of the situation in the region. The meeting between the two delegations took place in Rome between 28 June and 2 July 1958.

Reuven Shiloah was appointed head of the Israeli delegation. During the course of the meetings an ideological argument developed between Shiloah and the head of the Turkish

delegation, Adnan Koral. Koral argued that it was a mistake to ignore the Arab nationalist movement. Reuven Shiloah said that Israel was not ignoring the Arab nationalist movement or its motives, but determined its attitude toward this movement, just as it did toward any other nationalist movement, on the basis of its actions. The Nazi movement, for example, also had deep roots in the history of the German people, Shiloah said. 'Our attitude toward Nazism was determined by the way Hitler led his movement. Was there no reason to fight this movement just because it was based on the true desires and sense of injustice suffered by that nation? Efforts should indeed be made to get to know the Arab nationalist movement and its deeper roots... But at the same time, we must recognize the dangers inherent in this movement's actions, as they are guided by Nasser.'

Ultimately arrangements were made for meetings and cooperation between the matching ministries of the two countries, and for comprehensive cooperation between the three countries of the 'Northern Level' – Israel, Turkey and Iran – as well as with the 'Southern Level' – Israel and Ethiopia.

This was, in fact, no more than a prelude to what would happen in the area after the revolution in Iraq on 4 July 1958, which brought down a regime that was one of the West's strongest traditional allies in the Arab world. This military coup brought in its wake a full-scale revolution in Iraq itself, and fundamental changes throughout the entire region, not to mention in the relationships between Israel, the United States and Great Britain.

NOTES

1. This chapter and those following are based on personal interviews and archives.

Revolution in Iraq and the Middle East

The revolution in Iraq led by General Kassem, which broke out on 14 July 1958, brought an end to the Hashemite monarchy in the country. It was a bloody revolution that had far-reaching repercussions throughout the Middle East and in Great Britain. For Great Britain, Hashemite Iraq had been a favorite son and a central link in its Middle Eastern policies. The shock produced by the revolution brought relations between Israel and the United States and Israel and Great Britain to a new, friendlier level. The revolution also put the Eisenhower Doctrine to the test, which it passed with flying colors. The swift implementation of elements of the Doctrine in response to events in Baghdad dampened the shock waves produced by the revolution and, most importantly, prevented the revolution from spreading into Jordan and Lebanon. The day after the revolution broke out in Baghdad, American Marines landed in Lebanon to ensure the safety of the pro-American regime there. They helped the government put an end to the civil war that was raging in the country between the predominantly Muslim 'Nasserites' who favored joining the UAR, and those who tried to preserve the independence and unique character of Christian Lebanon.

At the same time, the British began airlifting troops into Jordan to ensure the safety of Hussein's monarchy. Flights to Jordan across Israeli airspace began without prior Israeli consent, ignoring Ben-Gurion's stipulation that before any such use of Israeli airspace begins, American guarantees must be given against possible Soviet reactions. From the very outset the affair created tensions between Israel, America and England – tensions that mounted when Israel issued a unilateral statement that it intended to stop all further flights. The announcement came in the wake of a letter of protest handed to the Israeli government by the Soviets during the third week of the British airlift, and caused an unpleasant incident between Israel and the US. American officials claimed that Israel had panicked needlessly over the Soviet note, causing considerable damage by issuing so hasty a response. Israel argued that its reaction was directly due to the fact that it was not sufficiently protected by comprehensive security guarantees of any kind, such as were promised by treaty to all the countries in any one of the American-brokered defense pacts. The overflight crisis broke out as Reuven Shiloah was accompanying Foreign Minister Golda Meir to a meeting with the Turkish Foreign Minister concerning the Peripheral Alliance.

At about the same time, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion had communicated Israeli initiatives relating to the Peripheral Alliance to President Eisenhower and had asked for American support on this issue. Eisenhower and Dulles gave their blessing to these activities, both in an exchange of messages with Ben-Gurion and in conversations with leaders of Periphery countries, at the

same time as they were arguing with Israel over the flights to Jordan. In the course of this argument, Israel was given additional security guarantees in letters sent to Ben-Gurion by Eisenhower and Dulles.

The most tangible result of this exchange of letters was a decision to supply American arms to Israel directly, for the first time, and not through the good offices of other countries. Thus in 1958 the US, for the first time, supplied Israel with ‘firing weapons’, and not just military matériel from its surpluses. This first consignment included 100 106-mm recoilless rifles. The US also helped indirectly, enlarging its economic aid to Israel by an average of \$10 million annually in order to facilitate the purchase of Centurion main battle tanks from England – all this without changing its basic policy of not becoming Israel’s main arms supplier.¹

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The revolution in Iraq and the reactions it aroused ultimately gave Shiloah’s initiatives on the Peripheral Alliance added significance and impetus. In the meantime, however, Iraq took center stage and aroused much trepidation. Foreign Minister Meir was, as usual, very concerned. ‘It is clear that there will be no western move on Iraq... The impression is that everything has to begin over again from the beginning each time ...We are on the brink of a general appeasement of Nasser’, she stated in an office meeting. In a more practical tone, however, she added, ‘Our natural allies are all those who are afraid of Nasser. We must focus our efforts on strengthening our ties with these countries... We must begin to talk again, in a different way altogether, with Dulles... To make clear demands both directly and with the help of the peripheral countries. The United States must encourage those countries to cement their friendship with us, and must provide help for them and for us.’

This was a personal victory for Reuven Shiloah. He had been preaching the concept of the Peripheral Alliance ever since his return to Jerusalem in 1957, and in January 1958 even worked out a detailed plan on how to achieve it, long before there was any indication of a potential revolution in Iraq. His proposals, met with skepticism at the time, now became the most important issue on the agenda of the Foreign Ministry and, indeed, of the entire Israeli government. A week after the revolution, a feverish series of Israeli actions and consultations were begun dealing with the initiatives set out by Meir, both in relation to the United States and in relation to the peripheral countries. On 21 July 1958 a consultation was held with Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir and others concerning the ‘Southern Belt’.²

The first attempts to cultivate relations with these countries were made prior to the Sinai Campaign. Moshe Sharett mentioned one of these countries in his diaries on 12 June 1956, a short while before his resignation: The chances of actual cooperative action with The Nation Party in Sudan have been looked into, and one of its leaders is about to come here on a visit for extensive talks’.³ The following day, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion sent a message to President Eisenhower pointing out, first of all, the dangers hovering over the Middle East and the entire free world as a result of Nasserist-Soviet subversion in the Middle East. Further on he explained Israel’s plan for expanding its contacts with the peripheral countries, in order to build a common front to stem any further expansion of Soviet influence in the region. Still later in the letter, Ben-Gurion extolled the moral value of Israel’s policies, which lent it special status to its offers of technical assistance to the emerging African nations.⁴ Ben-Gurion wrote to President Eisenhower:

Anyone who has read Nasser’s pamphlet about his desire to take over the Arab countries,

Islam, and the African continent, and knows something about the psychology of nations, will not be surprised by what happened in Iraq, and will not have any illusions that this is the end... Nasser's conquest of the Arab Middle East, with the great power of the Soviet Union supporting him from behind, creates several very serious consequences for the West... It is not out of the question that with Soviet help, Nasser might take over all of Black Africa.⁵

Later on in the letter Ben-Gurion mentioned the contacts that Israel had made with the peripheral countries 'with the aim of building a strong dam against the Nasserist-Soviet flood'. He told the President about the first, highly successful steps that had been taken to create this treaty. As far as these things are known now through various sources, secret and very friendly contacts had already been established with the government of Persia, with the Emperor of Ethiopia and later with Turkey. The governments of Persia and Ethiopia were in desperate need of an efficient intelligence organization and military or police forces that would be able to prevent any attempts at revolution. Israel had the know-how to help them in these areas, but it required American diplomatic, moral and economic support. At the same time, Ben-Gurion once again demanded 'providing Israel with the security it required for the integrity its borders, its sovereignty and its ability to defend itself.

'The Soviet Union will have no compunction about using force anywhere it may be beneficial to its aims', Ben-Gurion went on to explain his fears to Eisenhower. 'Not in a world war, because it is not certain of its strength, and besides it has no need of that... [Instead] it will take over by means of internal subversion wherever it can be used to good effect – in other words, in almost every African and Asian country... All this talk about co-existence is nothing but lip service, designed to deceive the naive people of the neutral West... It is only by extending constructive aid for economic development to the peoples of Asia and Africa that they can be saved from either a direct or an indirect Soviet takeover.'

Ben-Gurion's appeal to the President received a positive response – though only in part. The peripheral countries were informed of America's support for their contacts with Israel, but no added security was offered for 'the integrity of [Israel's] borders, its sovereignty, and its ability to defend itself. Eisenhower and Dulles stopped short of committing themselves publicly and fully to ensuring Israel's security, in order not to endanger the stability and prestige of those Arab countries that were pro-West and anti-Israeli at one and the same time – particularly Saudi Arabia. They claimed that there was no need for this public declaration since it had been made clear to the Soviets that the United States would come to Israel's defense should it be attacked.

The question of the overflights to Jordan through Israeli airspace in the wake of the Iraqi revolution served only to deepen Israel's dilemma. In fact, it sharply underscored its status as a step-child in the family of the Eisenhower Doctrine, despite the growing affinity between the US and Israel.

This affair also put Israel's weakness in sharp focus. On the one hand the Americans demanded that Israel demonstrate its good will by allowing flights over its airspace. On the other hand, the United States was under no formal or public commitment to defend Israel in case of attack. The US had turned down every Israeli request for the establishment of channels of communication to NATO and to the US Army and Navy, and its requests to determine the order of consultations and coordination between the two countries in a time of emergency.

On 24 July 1958, Secretary of State Dulles met with Abba Eban and Ya'akov Herzog and requested permission to carry out a two-week airlift of military equipment to Jordan with giant American transport planes, to replace the more numerous British flights in smaller aircraft that

would last for a much longer time. Eban agreed on Israel's behalf, to 'look the other way', but at the same time tried to explain Israel's dilemma: 'The root of the problem is that we are approached as allies, and take risks like allies, and an atmosphere of a treaty informs the nature of our relationship. However we do not enjoy either the security or the guarantees that are accorded to allies.' Eban demanded that Dulles inform Israel of the US's willingness to enter into bilateral negotiations on clear decisions relating to his promises of American arms supplies to Israel and America's responsibility for Israel's defense.

During this same period, and sometime in those very meetings, the exchanges of messages and talks concerning support for Israel's actions in the peripheral countries went on unabated in a very positive atmosphere. In a meeting with Eban, Dulles accepted Ben-Gurion's comparison between Nasserist pan-Arabic nationalism and Hitler's pan-Germanic nationalism. 'Finding ways to accommodate Arabic nationalism does not mean allowing the conquest of moderate Arab countries, or acceptance of Arab policies toward Israel', Dulles said to Eban, and later repeated in a letter to Ben-Gurion.

On 25 July President Eisenhower sent a positive reply to Ben-Gurion's letter. The President referred to the actions he had taken to secure Lebanon's independence and territorial integrity, as a precedent. 'This response reflected the guarantees and, most importantly, the decisions made by the Congress of the United States, that the independence and territorial integrity of the peoples of the Middle East are vital to world peace and to American national interests. Since the Middle East includes Israel, you can rely on America's interest in Israel's territorial integrity and independence.' Eisenhower added that Secretary of State Dulles would respond to Ben-Gurion's letter in greater detail.

On 3 August, the American Ambassador to Israel, Edward Lawson, conveyed to Ben-Gurion Dulles's reply, in which he referred very positively to Israel's activities in the peripheral countries and expressed his willingness to support them and together to discuss ways in which the United States could be of help. But the paragraph that appeared to Eban to be the most important was the one dealing with Israel's security. 'In reference to Israeli security', Dulles wrote, 'the President has already written to you about the implications for Israel of our action in Lebanon', and added, 'It is our belief that Israel should be in a situation that will enable it to deter any attempt at aggression by local forces, and we are willing to examine the military implications of this problem with an open mind.'

These two letters, from Eisenhower and Dulles, were regarded as important additions to American security guarantee for Israel. Abba Eban referred to 'a new era in American-Israeli relations, which will be guided from now on by these two new documents'. Dulles's letter, in the name of the President, included a promise to help Israel strengthen its relations with the peripheral countries. Eban wrote that it also 'includes a penetrating analysis of Nasserism' that was in accord with Israel's views on the subject, and 'an acknowledgment that Israel must maintain a military force that will serve as a deterrent to any regional aggression [an innovative statement compared to their contrary claim of two years ago]... [and] a promise to draw appropriate military conclusions.' Eban also pointed out that the President's reference to Israel's territorial integrity and independence as a matter of American national interest was the first time such a statement had been made in any official US government document. Eban stressed all these points in order to head off the voices in Jerusalem that were calling on Ben-Gurion to stop the overflights to Jordan. 'I feel as though we are on the brink of a new era in our relations with the West, and then all of a sudden the door is slammed shut', Eban wrote to Ben-Gurion in reference to the ban on the flights that aroused Eisenhower's and Dulles's anger. Eban demanded that Ben-

Gurion immediately revoke the ban on the flights, in order to avoid giving the Americans the impression that Israel reacted in panic to Soviet pressures.

The problem began when the British airlift over Israeli airspace took much longer than initially anticipated. Three weeks after it began, Israel wanted to put an end to the more than 20 British flights a day that crossed its airspace – far in excess of what had been understood or agreed upon. What is more, these massive shipments of arms did not seem to Israel to be as vital as they were initially presented. They seemed rather to be a matter of administrative and logistical convenience to the British, who simply made no effort to look for alternate routes of supply. When information on the scale of the problem leaked to the Israeli press, opposition to the airlift grew, partly from inside the Cabinet, but mainly from the ranks of the opposition.

Added to this was a sharply-worded Soviet demand, delivered in a note on 1 August 1958, that the flights be stopped. The Israeli announcement of the cessation of the flights was a study in political bungling. It was published in Jerusalem immediately after the receipt of the Soviet admonition, without prior consultation with the Americans, and without the Israeli Cabinet being notified or indeed even approving the move. Afterwards it transpired that the initial announcement had been premature and imprecise. But the damage was done. It appeared to the Americans as a capitulation to Soviet demands. Dulles expressed his astonishment and bitter disappointment that Israel, of all countries, was not meeting the standard of conduct it demanded from others, and thus served as a dangerous example of a lack of resolve in the face of Soviet expansionism. Ambassador Abba Eban gave a cutting description of the shock and amazement in American government circles after the Israel decision, as it was viewed from Washington. In a stream of cables to the Prime Minister, Eban strongly protested the hasty announcement from Jerusalem concerning the ban on overflights, and demanded that immediate action be taken – such as a temporary agreement to the continuation of the flights – in order to diminish the terrible impression that had been made by Israel's unfortunate unilateral decision.⁶

At the same time, Eban lodged strong protests with the Americans on the false impression they had received from misleading and imprecise reports in the media concerning the non-existent Israeli decision on the cessation of the flights. Speaking in Ben-Gurion's name, Eban also said that Israel's diplomatic and defense posture compared very unfavorably with those of other countries through whose airspace the British planes passed, such as Italy, Greece and Turkey. Israel did not even have the kind of guarantees for its defense enjoyed within the NATO alliance by Iceland and Luxembourg, for example. 'We are not protected by American guarantees, and if it so desired, the Soviet Union could destroy us in five minutes', Eban claimed on Ben-Gurion's behalf.

Dulles rejected these claims outright: The President decided, on the basis of a Congressional resolution, that should Israel be attacked by the Soviet Union, the United States would come to its assistance with its armed forces.' Eban asked Dulles if he was authorized to tell the Prime Minister that if Israel were attacked by the Soviet Union, the United States would fight the Soviet Union. Dulles responded, according to Eban, 'Without a shadow of a doubt... The Soviet Union knows very well that this is the situation and therefore the talk about the potential for a Soviet attack is totally groundless, and the letter that the Soviet Union sent to Israel is meaningless... The United States has promised Israel, no less than any other country in the world, including the NATO countries, that if the country is attacked by the USSR, the United States will fight on its behalf.'

Ben-Gurion quickly replied to this extremely generous American promise. 'While we do not entertain any doubts about America's deep and abiding commitment to Israel's territorial

integrity and independence, as mentioned in the President's most recent letter, we have never been given unequivocal assurances for our safety. What is more, we do not know if what was said to the Soviet Union about us is on par with what was said to the USSR about a possible attack on Turkey. We also do not know if that is what was said to Nasser or to other Arab rulers, who openly declare the need to destroy Israel. We are surrounded by enemies who are receiving large quantities of arms from both the USSR and from the West, and we are not succumbing in to fear... At the same time we are very concerned about the fact that to this day we have not been able to get any aid from the United States in the form of arms.'

Ben-Gurion explained his considerations as Prime Minister: 'When making decisions that involve risks at critical moments, I have never had the feeling that Israel's security is ensured with the same certainty as other countries in the Free World. I have noted the strongly emphasized and categorical way you have notified us, through Ambassador Eban, that if any Soviet attack is mounted against Israel, the Armed Forces of the United States will hasten to our aid. However, I cannot but note that these important statements have not been transmitted to us in writing.' Ben-Gurion was indicating that he expected that in the talks with Ambassador Eban, Israel would be given a clear-cut American commitment in writing to its security rather than merely a verbal one. But, as far as is known, such a written commitment was never made, and Israel was left only with the previous commitments sent by President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles.

Ben-Gurion explained to Ambassador Lawson at length the reasons for the supposed mishap concerning the Israeli announcement. He stated that it stemmed from the undue extension of the flights, far beyond what had been promised or seemed necessary, and made it clear, too, that Israel had not yet responded to the Soviet note, contrary to the news that had appeared in the world media (that Israel had quickly capitulated to the Russian threat). The American Ambassador, for his part, promised that the flights would end within two days (on 6 or 8 August). Accordingly, Eban notified Dulles that Israel would allow the Americans to complete the airlift as planned. The British and the Americans were also informed that Israel would respond to the Russian note only after the completion of the operation. In the meanwhile, the British had found alternate arrangement for their flights to Jordan, and thus, within a few days, the crisis of the airlift to Jordan through Israeli airspace abated, and the issues relating to Israeli activities in the peripheral countries once again came to the fore of American-Israeli relations.²

The question remains whether Dulles and Eisenhower still harbored any reservations about Israel, and whether or not the crisis of the overflights did not dampen their appreciation of Israel as a trustworthy ally. Perhaps they understood that Israel would not be able to go as far as it had in aiding military intervention of any kind in the region without being given open guarantees for its security, and that it would no longer be satisfied with the secret US commitments of the past, however far-reaching they might have been. At any rate, on the surface, relations between the two countries were restored and the move toward closer cooperation between them continued.

During the argument over Israel's demands for security guarantees, Dulles had said that there was no need for such guarantees since the US had proven its resolve in this respect in Lebanon. Dulles had said more than once, 'At times undefined relations are preferable to official formulations, because it is often difficult to give expression in writing to all the possibilities'. This was an argument that was to resurface in the mid-1970s when Secretary of State Henry Kissinger mediated between Israel and Egypt, and negotiated a separation of forces between the two countries. Israel insisted then on receiving 'memoranda of understanding' in writing from the US government, and Kissinger claimed that if these memoranda were written down they

would contain endless restrictions and reservations. Nonetheless, Israel preferred getting written assurances. The future was to prove that Israel was justified in its demands. Unlike a verbal agreement, a signed and sealed document commits succeeding administrations, and that in itself was worth the trouble of any restrictions or reservations. This was particularly true of the terms for negotiations with the PLO, which were included in the memorandum of understanding with the US, which the PLO constantly violated.

NOTES

1. America had begun sending arms to Jordan and Lebanon a year earlier, after making a public announcement of its intentions on 24 April 1957. As a result of this decision, Lebanon received American M-47 tanks and 106-mm recoilless rifles, as well other pieces of artillery. Arms supplies to these three countries can be seen as part of the practical implementation of the Eisenhower Doctrine. As for Israel – it was only in 1960 that the Eisenhower administration, near the end of its term, agreed to sell Israel radar systems, and only on 6 Sept. 1962, during the Kennedy administration, that an announcement was made of the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles. Both these decisions were part of a series of internal deliberations in the American administration concerning arms sales to Israel, which inclined more and more toward a positive resolution after the events of 1958. It was only in 1968, in a completely different situation, that the ice was finally broken and the United States became Israel's main source of arms, instead of France or Germany.
2. Decisions were made on the establishment of committees for cooperation in every area – a committee against subversion, an economic committee, a diplomatic committee for diplomatic coordination, a military committee, a cultural committee, a committee on the establishment of a spiritual center. Talks were held on an agreement to create a bloc of Red Sea countries and Israel... the countries agree to do whatever possible to stop Nasser spreading influence and if possible to get him out of those places that he has already taken over.
3. Sharett's remarks are quoted in Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion*, Vol.3, p.1321.
4. This letter is mentioned in another letter to Dulles from 31 Dec. 1958, which was delivered in the beginning of 1959, in which Ben-Gurion repeated his request and asked for special economic aid for this purpose, mentioning in this context Eisenhower's and Dulles's support for his plan in July-Aug. 1958.
5. On 22 July 1958, Ben-Gurion sent a telegram to Eban that he requested him to translate and submit as an official letter to President Eisenhower, and that in order to do so he should ask for a meeting with him. The topic: Israel's activities in the periphery following the revolution in Iraq. Ben-Gurion noted: 'If you want to correct anything in the text, consult with me first... cable me the English text that you intend to submit to the President, so that I can sign it and give it to a messenger.' The following day the note was handed to the President in a meeting between Ambassador Abba Eban, Minister Ya'akov Herzog and Secretary of State Dulles.
6. Abba Eban believed that, at that time, Ben-Gurion was under the strong influence of Education Minister Zalman Aranne and Foreign Minister Golda Meir, who had not yet rid themselves altogether of the non-aligned concept of previous years.
7. On 6 Aug. a cable from Shiloah arrived at the Embassy in Washington for Eban: The meeting between Foreign Minister Golda Meir and the Turkish Foreign Minister went off very well. A tripartite cooperation was agreed on, in the US as well, in other words, between you and the ambassadors of Persia and Turkey.'

‘One Can Delight in the Fundamental Change’

In the weeks and months that followed the revolution in Iraq, events developed very rapidly in the Middle East, and in American-Israeli relations. The fears that the crisis surrounding the overflights would leave a bad aftertaste evaporated in the crush of events. In fact, the month of August 1958 was the ‘hottest’ month in the relations between Israel and the US, a positive heat whose glow lasted well into the months that followed. The most positive development had to do with the Peripheral Alliance, and the growing cooperation – with American blessing – between Israel and the countries involved. The entire operation was highly classified, and the contacts between all the parties involved were held in absolute secrecy. Israel had a complex interest in having the US express its support for this cooperation to the leaders of those countries. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion’s appeal to the United States on this issue in the middle of July 1958 received an affirmative response in August, and the Israeli activities in this respect developed rapidly and successfully.

The most important event in this context was a secret meeting between the Israeli Foreign Minister, Golda Meir, and the Turkish Foreign Minister, Fatin Zorlu, which took place on 2 August 1958 at a private home in Zurich. The cover story for this meeting was a ‘brief rest in Switzerland’ after Golda Meir’s trip to Paris and her meeting with the French President Charles de Gaulle. At this meeting, the two foreign ministers agreed on many issues: on their shared assessment of the evil aspects of Nasserism, on the need to take steps against the West’s attempts at appeasement, particularly on the part of Italy and Germany, on the need for a coordinated plan of action between the two countries on this issue, as well as on bilateral military and economic issues, such as economic development in industry, oil, tourism, etc. In the course of the meeting, the Turkish Foreign Minister said that ‘Israel and Turkey must work together *vis-à-vis* the West. There are many benefits to be reaped from such coordinated action because the West is beginning to understand that Israel and Turkey are the only trustworthy bulwarks of the Free World in the Middle East.’

Reuven Shiloah participated in the meeting with the Foreign Minister, after having laid the groundwork at his meeting in Rome with the Turkish delegation. After the meeting, he reported to Herzog and Eban, on 10 August, that an agreement had been reached on coordination between the representatives of the two countries in the United States on economic issues and on matters pertaining to public relations. Shiloah wrote to them that Israel’s cooperation with the Turks ‘might be more beneficial to them than it would for us’, but that ‘our own position may be enhanced if, in their contacts with the administration and with world public opinion, the Turks

refer to us in a positive way'. The benefits, he felt, could work both ways, 'The more our contacts [in Turkey and Persia] hear about the United States' positive approach to our cooperation, the stronger they will grow in their commitment to their cooperation with us.'

In due course, Ambassador Eban reported back to Shiloah on his meetings in Washington with the Turkish ambassador and his aides. Agreements were reached on joint Turkish-Israeli action to secure US support for an active policy aimed at blocking the rise of Nasserism. Israel for its part would support Turkish demands for American economic aid, and Turkey would support Israel's efforts to purchase American arms and obtain defense guarantees.

The high point of these contacts was a top secret meeting in Ankara, on 29 August, between Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. Apart from the prime ministers, the meeting was also attended by the foreign ministers of the two countries, and by Shiloah and Elias Sasson on the Israeli side, and their opposite numbers on the Turkish side. Prior to the meeting Shiloah had compiled a list of topics for proposed cooperation, which was read and approved point by point by the representatives of both sides. The agreement included cooperation in three areas – diplomatic, military and economic.¹ As was his wont, Ben-Gurion did not content himself merely with practical matters, and opened the meeting with a wide-ranging historical and ideological review of Russian expansionist tendencies before and after the October Revolution. 'Turkey and Israel are both facing two great dangers – Communism and Nasserism. I do not think the Communists are interested in war, because there are great risks involved and because they don't need a war. They believe they can achieve their goals without war', he said. They will use force only if there is no danger of the outbreak of warfare. They believe they can drive a wedge between their enemies, and are certain that time is on their side. Therefore, what do they need war for?'

Referring to the Arab nationalist movement, Ben-Gurion said that it was 'a natural and legitimate thing, but what is happening in Egypt is something else altogether. It is a military dictatorship with imperialist ambitions to dominate other countries. There are forces in the Middle East which, if they cooperate, if they are strengthened and work together, can stop the spread of Nasserism and Communism. There is no reason why Egypt should be the leader of the Arab countries', Ben-Gurion added. The Arabs are making so much noise that the entire world believes that the Middle East is made up solely of Arab countries, but that is not the case. If a bloc of five countries can be established we can ensure our existence and independence, and that will have an effect on North Africa as well', he added.

Prime Minister Menderes expressed his total agreement with Ben-Gurion, and added that every success garnered by Nasser and Communism simply whetted their appetite. The Turkish Foreign Minister stressed that Turkey was interested 'in an Israel that is as strong as possible, because this will provide us with assurances, and I am certain that you are interested in a strong Turkey and a strong Persia. Nationalism and aggression always endanger their neighbors.'

This meeting was followed by other meetings and joint activities relating to every aspect of the agreement. Shiloah hurried back to Ankara shortly afterward – on 2 September – and concluded plans for meetings on military and economic issues, which took place throughout September and October. All the meetings took place as planned, and agreements were reached concerning the bilateral relations between the two countries.²

In the section of the March 1979 CIA report dealing with Israel's security and intelligence services, released by the Iranian 'students' who invaded the American embassy in Teheran, there are fascinating details on the importance and effectiveness of this agreement.³ The Israelis tried for years to break the circle of Arab hostility surrounding them by as intensive an involvement as

possible, and the creation of contacts with non-Arab Moslem nations. A three-sided organization by the name of Trident was created by the Mossad, together with the Turkish National Security Services – TNSS – and the National Organization for Intelligence in Iran (SAVAK). Ever since the agreement was signed, bilateral relations between the Mossad and each one of these services were strengthened... The Trident organization dealt in the exchange of intelligence information, and the heads of the services of the three countries met twice a year. The general conditions of the agreement with Turkey also gave the Mossad, in addition to its legal status in relation to the local security service, the possibility of intelligence-gathering operations on Russian agents in Turkey, as well as reporting to the local authorities on Soviet intelligence operations mounted against Turkey from other countries in the Middle East. In return, the Turks agreed to supply Israel with intelligence information gathered by their agents, partially concerning the UAR's intentions toward Israel. The Israeli services also provided training and technical instruction in counterintelligence to Turkish agents.'

Turkey was not alone in all this. In that month of August 1958, much progress was made in relations with the other peripheral countries. Meetings were held with the leaders of Ethiopia in the framework of the 'Southern Belt'.

Cooperation between Israel and Ethiopia expanded gradually over an extended period of time. A high-ranking Israeli official met with Emperor Haile Selassie in July 1957.⁴ They discussed joint action against Nasser's subversion and cooperation in the areas of economy and development. The Israeli emissary met with some of the Emperor's top advisors, and procedures and plans of action were drawn up in all the areas of interest to both countries, more or less according to the overall framework established for the relations with Turkey.

At the same time, contacts with Iran moved up a step. These were contacts that would last for many years to the mutual benefit of both countries. *De facto* relations between Iran and Israel had been established as far back as 1950, but the close cooperation between them began only in 1957, based on developments that emerged from the Sinai Campaign, and the dramatic changes that became evident in Israel's military, strategic and diplomatic standing. Iran, for its part, was also interested in Israeli aid to its agriculture, development and science. These relations had a number of beginnings. In autumn 1957, a message was sent from the Iranian embassy in Paris to the Israeli embassy, requesting to set up a discreet meeting between a top Israeli diplomat and an important official from Teheran. The person who showed up at the meeting, on the personal instructions of the Shah and equipped with a brief to establish close but covert relations with Israel, was no less than the Deputy Prime Minister of Iran.

Two weeks later, the same Deputy Prime Minister met in Rome with an Israeli delegation, led by Reuven Shiloah. The two sides agreed to set up effective and safe channels of communication and to exchange undercover representatives in Teheran and Tel Aviv. After that, contacts between the two countries continued on a permanent basis. At the same time, or perhaps sometime earlier, many Israeli officials visited Teheran, and in the beginning of 1958, a letter from David Ben-Gurion was conveyed to the Shah of Iran. Ben-Gurion reminded the Shah what his ancestor, Xerxes, had done for the Jews – allowing them to return to the Land of Israel after many years of exile. The Shah replied: 'The memory of what Xerxes did for your people is dear to me and I will try to follow in this ancient tradition.'⁵

In the beginning of 1958 Israel's Minister of Industry and Commerce, Pinhas Sapir, visited Teheran and in April an Iranian delegation arrived in Israel headed by the Deputy Prime Minister. The delegation met with Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Finance Minister Levi Eshkol and other ministers. Among the ideas for mutual cooperation raised in these meetings, and actually

implemented over the years that followed, were the inauguration of regular *El Al* flights to Teheran, Israeli technical assistance for Iranian development projects, Iranian arms purchases in Israel, and more. At a later stage, the relations between the two countries became public knowledge, even though full diplomatic relations were never established. Israeli aid and exports to Iran increased over the years and, in return, Israel purchased Iranian oil. It was one of Israel's more important diplomatic agreements at that time.

On 10 August 1958, a memorandum was signed in Teheran between Eshkol and the head of Iran's national oil company, to widen the 8-inch oil pipeline between Eilat and Beersheba, which had been in operation since 1957. The memorandum suggested exchanging the original narrow pipeline with a 120-kilometre long 16-inch pipeline, at a cost of \$25 million. The task was completed by September 1960.

This was a time of great, almost unprecedented momentum in Israel's diplomatic activity, and at long last official communications from Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion bore rare traces of satisfaction. In a letter to Abba Eban reporting on his meeting with Menderes and giving an overall review of the achievements in the periphery, he wrote: 'On 6 May I wrote to you about the plan to strengthen relations with the countries of the 'outer circle' of the Middle East – Persia, Turkey, Ethiopia and Israel. I noted that Turkey was the most dubious link in this chain. Since then our doubts have diminished and relations with Turkey have grown and solidified. At first there was a "three-man" meeting (Shiloah-Sasson-Koral), then the Foreign Minister met with the Turkish Foreign Minister, and finally there was a wide-ranging and crucial meeting between the Prime Minister of Turkey and myself. This meeting was arranged in the utmost secrecy and lasted a full day in Ankara, and we reached agreements on all the issues... After this meeting, Reuven Shiloah visited Turkey and made arrangements with his opposite number for the activities in the economic, military and scientific spheres that we had agreed on... The fears I mentioned, in my letter of 6 May, that the situation in Iraq is deteriorating, proved to be true. The Iraqi revolution certainly helped Turkey's rapprochement with us. And if only our friends in the United States will keep their promises (according to the President's letter of 25/7/1958, and Dulles's of 4/8/1958), then there is hope that the outer circle will turn into a solid, powerful force in the Middle East. During the General Assembly the Foreign Minister will meet with the foreign ministers of Turkey and Iran, and it is possible that within a short time there will be a meeting between the Emperor of Ethiopia and myself, Ben-Gurion concluded.

Eban replied quickly to Ben-Gurion's letter, with a similar tone of satisfaction. 'Concerning the question of "if only our friends in the United States will keep their promises" I believe that the situation is quite encouraging. We have heard from the Turks that Dulles spoke to them twice. Now we have learned that the American ambassador in Teheran, at Dulles's request, spoke to the King of Persia and received an enthusiastic response... We also know that the American ambassador in Addis Ababa was given instructions to talk to the King of Ethiopia in favor of strengthening relations with us...'

The same optimistic note also appeared in the section on arms procurements: 'I believe that since the Foreign Ministers Dulles, Lloyd, Murville will all be in New York [at the UN General Assembly], the issue of the tanks will be resolved – either through direct British supply with financial help from the United States, or through the release of American tanks in France. One can delight in the fundamental change that is occurring in our relations with the West – particularly after the revolution in Iraq', Eban wrote.

During those euphoric days, after the long period of crisis and fear, Ambassador Eban spoke of the need to make good on the commitments made in the letters written by President

Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles two or three weeks earlier. In a letter to Shiloah from 13 August 1958, he claimed that there must be another Israeli response to these notes, in order to see to it that the promises they held out were in fact realized.

On the same day, Eban reported to Shiloah about an important talk he had with Dulles on those very issues. Eban had rested his case on Dulles's indication, in his letter to Ben-Gurion, that Israel should be able to deter any potential attack on its territory by any of the countries of the region. Concerning the procurements for the Israeli Air Force Eban wrote, 'We are depending on France, and as for submarines – on Great Britain, which has given a commitment in principle. The most urgent demand we made from the US was: an immediate release of anti-tank weapons and tanks, electronic equipment, helicopters, etc. I strongly emphasized the fact that if the anti-tank guns were released immediately this would influence the rest of our requests from the US and from the other countries. The important thing is for him to give a sign that will enable us to enter into detailed negotiations with the Pentagon... It is important too that they help us with easing the payments here and in Europe. Following our talks in Washington, together with Shimon Peres, I spoke to Dulles about possible US aid in the scientific area, and demanded that he give the Pentagon a green light.'

Indeed, in order to fully appreciate the change that had occurred during that period in Israel's relations with the West, with the knowledge and blessing of the United States, one has to compare them to the two periods that preceded it – before and after the Sinai Campaign. Most of the American reservations concerning Israel and its vital defense interests from that time had disappeared.

In fact the changes began appearing earlier, with the announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine in March-May 1957. The crisis concerning the overflights also brought home Israel's geo-strategic importance, and Israel was now accorded an official and open place in American policies.

This was also due, to a great extent, to the activities surrounding the Peripheral Alliance, which developed throughout that period as a response to the Nasserist threat and Nasser's resounding successes in Iraq and Syria. During the crisis months of July-August 1958 and afterwards, the Americans began to regard Israel as a strategic element of the highest importance in the Middle East, capable of helping to strengthen the parties in the region that the US was interested in supporting. This indeed made it clear that Israel was a Middle Eastern country with a key role in the region and beyond it – in Africa and Asia as well. Moreover, it now became clear to the Americans that the Middle East was multi-national and pluralistic – neither pan-Arab nor pan-Muslim.

This was the key element in Israel's ongoing struggle for independence and for its entrenchment in the region in the long term. This was also the cornerstone of the strategic, diplomatic and ideological fight against Nasser's Three Circles' policy – the Arab circle, the Muslim circle and the African circle – with Nasser's Egypt serving as the focal point of them all. The concept of the Peripheral Alliance was the polar opposite of Nasser's Three Circles: the reinforcement of the Outer Circle of five countries with Israel in the center – Israel-Turkey-Iran and Israel-Ethiopia-Sudan – seemed then not only an appropriate, practical, response to Nasser's Three Circles, but also an ideological and historical response.

It was Reuven Shiloah who was the harbinger of this concept, who nurtured it through all of its first steps. At least from an Israeli point of view, this was the most important demarcation line in the ideological, diplomatic and military affairs of the Middle East: the historic battle between the principle of a pluralistic region – in which there is equal room for all the different countries

and peoples, with all of their faiths and political beliefs, no matter how diverse, and the principle of a homogeneous, concentric region governed by such exclusionist concepts as 'pan-Arabism' or 'pan-Islamism' into which homogenous mass all the other elements of the Middle East would be doomed to disappear.

This was the most effective response to the penetrating and disturbing question that President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles put to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Meir at the beginning of the Sinai Campaign: where was Israel headed? The historic struggle against pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism began then, during the Sinai Campaign which proved Israel's military prowess, opened the door to treaties with western countries and to the development of relations with the 'peripheral' countries included in the Eisenhower Doctrine, in order to block the spread of the Nasserist revolution into Lebanon and Jordan and, following the revolution in Iraq and the responses it evoked from the West, into the Muslim Arab world.

This, too, is one of history's paradoxes. The revolution in Iraq was thought at the time to be one of the most stunning successes of Nasserism, which re-emerged from the ashes of the devastating military defeat in the Sinai Campaign, and was seen as one of the greatest failures of Israel, the United States and all the moderate Arab forces in the Middle East. But this ostensible Nasserist victory in fact considerably weakened Egypt since it aroused and united all the anti-Nasser factions in the Middle East. Israel was the principal beneficiary of the supposed victory in Iraq. This was not apparent at first, but in the long run, this was in fact the direction of developments in the region.

'Revolutionary' Iraq went its own independent way. In the final analysis, the events in Iraq actually undermined the Syrian-Egyptian union, which was never too strong to begin with. Syria too was rife with demands for independence, which eventually led to a renewed break with Egypt. The revolution in Iraq, which could perhaps have been construed as the most singular success of the pan-Arabism fanned and led by Nasser, turned out after only a few years to be the beginning of its downfall. The decline of Nasserist pan-Arabism has carried on to this day in waves of rising and declining popularity, and is now at its nadir. This secular, socialist-oriented idea does not stand a chance in today's Middle East, and is being swallowed up in the flood of Muslim fundamentalism that is sweeping the region. In time, this wave, too, may eventually turn out to be just one more among many others that flow and ebb in the history of the Middle East.

'Israel leaped five paces forward', says Uri Lubrani who served as Israel's ambassador to Ethiopia, Uganda and Iran, 'but twenty years later, during the 1970s, our momentum was checked, and we lost a little ground. But the achievements of this big leap forward held, particularly in East Africa and the Red Sea region, as did the covert and overt relations we had with the countries which continued then, and will continue in the future, to defend themselves against the idea of pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism in its various metamorphoses. This story is far from over even now. But then – the relations we developed with Iran were very beneficial to Israel's exports and helped establish Israel's economic infrastructure for twenty years. They raised Israel's prestige and standing in the eyes of the Third World, in the United States and in the rest of the western countries, then and later, and many details of all this have not been revealed yet.'

Haim Herzog, Head of Army Intelligence, who had taken his first steps in public life together with Reuven Shiloah in the Israeli intelligence community, closed this circle of Shiloah's achievements. 'When I was appointed Head of Intelligence Branch in the spring of 1959, our relations with Turkey and Iran had strengthened considerably and we had reached a very high level of military-intelligence discussions with them', Herzog relates. 'In Iran I was hosted by the

head of Iranian military intelligence, General Kia, a man with whom Reuven Shiloah had had very close relations. In a meeting with the Shah, an agreement was reached on military and intelligence cooperation between the two countries. The agreement was approved in its final form by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. This was immediately after Reuven died. According to this agreement, people from military intelligence would train in Israel, and I was invited for meetings with the heads of the Iranian services to discuss developments in the Arab world. I summed up the details of the draft proposal with Reuven in the hospital at our last meeting before his death. When I brought Ben-Gurion the official document of the agreement which had been approved by the Shah, he rose and embraced me with both hands.'

This was an embrace that Reuven Shiloah would have been very happy to receive before he died.

NOTES

1. In the area of diplomacy, agreements were reached on public relations campaigns in western capitals aimed at governments and public opinion. The linkage between security in the Middle East and security in the Free World as a whole was stressed, and the danger in the present tendency in the West to appease Nasser was pointed out. In the economic area, agreements were reached on cooperation particularly in relation to industrial development in Turkey and increasing trade between the two countries. The need to pump oil from Iran to the Mediterranean via Turkey and from Eilat to the Mediterranean via the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline was noted. In the field of military cooperation agreements were reached concerning arrangements for the exchange of intelligence information and joint planning for mutual aid in case of emergencies. Turkey promised to support the demand for strengthening Israel's armed forces both in the Pentagon and in NATO.
2. Military delegations from the two countries met on 15 Oct. In a meeting on 7 Oct. between Israel's Minister of Commerce and Industry, Pinhas Sapir, and the Turkish Foreign Minister, Fatin Zorlu, an agreement was reached on economic cooperation. The agreement included provisions for increased trade between the two countries, to a total of \$30 million on each side, on joint market research programs, and also on plans for cooperation in the field of water supply and irrigation, oil drilling, an oil pipeline and oil industry equipment, industrial development, exchange of information, tourism and financing.
3. Yossi Melman, *The CIA Report* (Tel Aviv: Erez Publications 1982).
4. Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion*, Vol.3, p.1322.
5. Ibid.

‘Until He Burned Himself Out’

Reuven Shiloah died suddenly, much too soon. He passed away at the Tel Hashomer Hospital near Tel Aviv, but despite his hospitalization, apparently no one – not even his doctors and least of all Shiloah himself – had the slightest suspicion that his end was so close at hand. He continued working at the hospital as though he were going back to his office in a few days. He never took his physical condition seriously, and in fact had neglected himself over many years.

‘In the last year of his life he went abroad 32 times’, recalled Herzog. ‘I told him: “You’re killing yourself”. But he wanted to be involved in everything. He told me that he was going to Iran and intended to speak to General Kia, head of Iranian Military Intelligence. I told him that Ben-Gurion had approved the idea of bringing Kia to Israel, and that there was no need for him to go. Then Reuven fell ill and was hospitalized at Tel Hashomer, and I went to visit him there. He did not look well. We talked about our proposed trip together to Iran to prepare the agreement with Iranian Military Intelligence, and we looked over the draft of the agreement. The following day – he died.’

Shiloah’s wife, Betty, recalls that he was about to go to Turkey or to Iran, and it is safe to assume that he was about to go to both, on affairs relating to the Peripheral Alliance. In his last days he was also very deeply involved in strengthening contacts with NATO, which, in April 1959, celebrated its tenth anniversary. In a small gathering of top Foreign Ministry officials, two months before his death, he once again broached his proposal

to connect us in a practical way to one of the NATO commands for purposes of joint planning... To make one or two of the NATO member countries establish special, secret relations with us... The object is to ensure [the receipt] of equipment free of charge, or for very little money. The West has done very little for us by way of easing our financial obligations, and some of the supposed reductions have been negligible or even downright illusions... The idea is to make arrangements for the strengthening of Israel’s infrastructure, to enlarge its military arsenal, and to involve it in military planning.

These were all Israel’s strategic goals from the state’s inception, and they were achieved in the space of one or two decades. Reuven Shiloah was the first person to define them in detail as practical goals, both in relation to friendly countries in western Europe and in relation to the US, and to insist that Israel must strive to achieve them at all times. He continued working on them from what was to be his deathbed.

Betty, a woman of aristocratic demeanor, followed him faithfully throughout all the changes

of fortune that befell him, and helped him to pursue his chosen way of life, in which work came before anything else and there was no distinction between night and day, weekday or holiday. She, who remained faithful to him then and to his memory in all the years since his death, had no inkling that his end was so near. Throughout his life he had neglected his body and never went to doctors for examinations or treatment. In the last few weeks of his life he was frequently very tired and suffered sharp pains in his chest and left arm –none of which caused him to change his habits. Today these signals would have been immediately recognized as indications of serious heart disease that requires emergency attention. He experienced these symptoms repeatedly but tried to ignore them, until his fatigue and pain became unbearable. At the family *seder* [Passover meal] at his father's home, Reuven felt very ill, and complained of the same symptoms: pains in the chest, pain in his left arm and terrible fatigue. He had no choice –he was taken to Tel Hashomer Hospital for tests which, for some reason, showed nothing wrong. He left the hospital and returned to work as usual. A few days later, these symptoms repeated themselves. Once again, he was taken into hospital, ostensibly only for tests, a week before his death by a good friend, the head of Tel Hashomer Hospital, Professor Haim Shiba. Since this was the second time something like this had happened, it raised hopes that the second incident would have a similar outcome and would also be nothing but a false alarm.

The second time Shiloah was hospitalized was just before a trip to Turkey or to Iran. He visited Foreign Minister Golda Meir at her house for a final briefing, and suddenly felt very ill. Golda Meir's daughter-in-law, a medical doctor by profession, decided that he must be hospitalized immediately. This time the tests showed that he had clots in his blood, and he was given blood-thinning drugs. At the hospital he was given a room to himself. They brought him a pile of papers from the office and he sat up in bed working', recalls Betty. 'He said that he was afraid he would not be able to go back to work at the same pace, and that perhaps he'll have to find another, less tiring, job. I used to visit him every day and the last Saturday was no exception. I went to see him twice, the second time was in the afternoon. The following morning, at 5 a.m. they found him dead in his bed, with his hand stretched out to the alarm buzzer.'

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'When we heard the announcement on Sunday on *The Voice of Israel*, Israel's radio station, we were shocked. We had no idea that Reuven was critically ill, and we didn't even know he was in hospital', wrote Gideon Raphael, then ambassador to Belgium, in a letter to the Director-General of the Foreign Ministry, Walter Eytan. 'Your description of his days in the hospital and his final hours raise fears that the doctors were wrong in their diagnosis of his condition. Because if he had a heart disease that ended the way it ended, they should have put him on a much stricter regimen of care and rest... I think Moshe [Sharett] expressed all our feelings, that Reuven Shiloah burned himself out in his own high tension. He was constantly in pursuit of something, and at the same time felt that he was himself being pursued. He was a very complex man. We may have conceivably not known how to appreciate his important contribution to the state – literally to the very limit of his strength...'

One of those people who did have a premonition of his death was Eytan. 'When he fell ill, Golda Meir and I went to see him. We sat at the end of his bed facing him and we could see him very well. When we left I was amazed when Golda said to me: he looks wonderful and he'll be up and about very soon. To me it was very clear that he would die in two or three days. He was a dying man and you could see on his face that his end was near, and I was amazed that Golda didn't understand what was happening. I saw right away that this man was gone. Perhaps this

says more about Golda that it does about Shiloah.’

‘He was torn from us all of a sudden, and went on his way so quickly and abruptly, just as had been his habit for many years, ever since I first met him twenty-five years ago’, wrote Ezra Danin at the end of the *shiva* [traditional seven days’ mourning], in an edition of *Ha-Po’el Ha-Tsa’ir*. ‘I always wondered: why is he running so quickly everywhere? What makes him run so tirelessly and ceaselessly? ... Was this a continuation of a generations-old tradition of rabbis and Talmudic scholars, who serve the public faithfully, and care more for the community than they do for anything else, for society, while they regard themselves as being only of secondary importance? Was he the continuation of the lifestyle of the public leaders of the First and Second Aliya...?’

• • •

Reuven Shiloah’s funeral took place on Tuesday, 3 Iyar, 11 May 1959, at the Sanhedria cemetery in Jerusalem. Last respects were paid him by the heads of the nation, the IDF High Command and the Police Force, the heads of the Foreign Ministry and its employees, members of the diplomatic corps and his friends from his days in the intelligence and security services. He was eulogized by Foreign Minister Meir and by Sharett. Golda Meir said in her eulogy:

Reuven was one of those people fated to work themselves to death. He and his friends Dov [Hos] and Eliyahu [Golomb] died in the midst of their work. He knew no rest. Before completing work on one project he was already deeply involved in other plans. I knew him for twenty-five years, from the days of his work in the Executive Committee of the Histadrut. During this fateful period, there was not a single vital operation that Reuven Shiloah was not party to... Reuven and I walked a long road together. We didn’t always see eye-to-eye on everything. Sometimes there were stormy arguments, and from time to time, anger and excitement. But there were two things that were well-known to all his friends; whatever he took upon himself he carried out without hesitation and always for the common good. Everyone appreciated his daring and original turn of mind. Many of the plans he initiated will be difficult to carry out without him.

Turning to Betty and the children, Dov and Naomi, the Foreign Minister said, ‘During those terrible years when thousands of Jewish children were in the clutches of the Nazis, Reuven was one of those who did everything he could to save those children from that hell.’

Moshe Sharett said in his eulogy:

The end has come to a such a stormy life. This is a terrible death, a death that tore a man away from the very eye of feverish activity, of daring thought. He himself was a focal point of thought and action. He lived a life of the highest tension, blazing with the fire of loyalty, a life full of shocks and trials, through periods of absolute secrecy. He was blessed with a sharp mind and penetrating intelligence. A native-born Israeli. The only one among the responsible echelons in the Political Department of the Jewish Agency and in the top level of the Foreign Ministry to be born in this land. He did not need to acquire Jewish awareness – he imbibed it with his mother’s milk, and learned it from his father, the great Torah scholar. He did not come here from one of the great centers of the world at large, but grew up here and from here began looking out at the wide horizon and reached such an extraordinary level of wide-ranging interests. He took a great deal upon himself, tried to be

at one and the same time the headquarters, a one-man reconnaissance unit and an assault battalion in the rear and on the front line – until he burned himself out. Now he is lost to the entire family that has gathered here around the grave. He was plucked away at the height of a great momentum, and took with him to the grave a treasure trove of memory, knowledge, experience and personal ties... There can be no consolation, no compensation, no substitute for the place you had in our life and work. Reuven, my dear brother, my younger brother, rest in peace.

Shiloah's many friends from abroad, Jews and non-Jews alike, who were with him at various stages of his life, were unable to attend the funeral. Many sent telegrams of condolence to his wife, but in keeping with the clandestine relationships he maintained in his lifetime, there were many others who kept their mourning for his death secret.

After Shiloah's death, his father, Rabbi Aharon Yitzhak Zaslany, published a rabbinical monograph in his memory which he named *Long Live Reuven*. It was divided into two parts. The first part was a series of complex rabbinical discussions¹ citing the views of many prominent scholars on various Torah issues, while the second part contained the eulogies of the heads of the State, the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense David Ben-Gurion, the Foreign Minister Golda Meir, and the former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharett. The two halves of the book represented, in fact, the two parts of Shiloah's soul that accompanied him throughout his life. He lived a completely non-religious life, but his roots – in a rabbinical family in Jerusalem – left a deep imprint on his character and behavior.

Prime Minister Ben-Gurion did more than just express his sorrow after his death, but eulogized him in a very practical manner and reviewed Reuven's many areas of activity. In a memorial meeting in Jerusalem on the thirtieth day after his death [the traditional Jewish *shloshim* when the gravestone is revealed], Ben-Gurion said that Shiloah was

One of the best, most original and creative people that the young State of Israel was blessed with. A man of many deeds in foreign affairs from the period of the Political Department to the new era of our independent sovereignty. Reuven was immune to two of the dangers that befall all those who toil in Israel's foreign service: obsequiousness to the world at large and to its powerful leaders, stemming from a ghetto mentality and from the sense of a tiny country surrounded by many and numerous enemies, and high-minded and dangerous arrogance based on the military victories we achieved in the War of Independence and afterwards. Reuven knew our limitations, was aware of the tiny dimensions of our country, our small numbers, the zealous hatred of our neighbors and of great powers in the world. But he was also aware of the hidden strengths and potentials of an Israel reborn, for its own benefit and for the benefit of all of humanity.

From his the very earliest childhood, Reuven was at home in Israel and in the Middle East. Not from reading, but primarily from direct contact. And he was extremely familiar with the small local world and the greater world at large that he moved in. He was not only a witness, but an active and guiding force in the Jewish Yishuv and state-in-the-making. And at every stage of this creative revolution he was a pioneer and a catalyst, but always modest in his ways. He was one of the guiding lights of the protracted struggle for independence, and one of the architects of its policies soon after its establishment. However, his horizons and fields of operation spanned the world. He understood that the nation of Israel was not a Middle Eastern, or a Mediterranean nation, but a nation of the world,² and he himself was a citizen of the world because first and foremost he was true to

himself.

He was at home in the neighboring countries as well, and was well aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and for that reason never faltered for a moment in the inevitable confrontation, but at the same time strove constantly for mutual understanding. He was as well versed in the Arab countries as he was in the non-Arab peripheral countries of the Middle East, in Persia, in Turkey, in Ethiopia and others. And in Europe and America as well. When the gates to Africa and Asia opened up to us he, more than anyone else, was fully aware of the importance of these new relations, and with his usual enthusiasm and concentration, he immersed himself in nurturing these new contacts.

Israel's foreign relations have been blessed with a group of highly talented people who would grace the foreign ministries of great nations – but I can't think of a single person who can take his place and do what he was able to do. He always foresaw potential dangers and difficulties that lay in our path, but also always found the purchase necessary to strengthen us. His greatest asset was not only his knowledge, insight and initiative – and his initiative was boundless – but he was also blessed with a deep intuitive sense, with foresight and a creative imagination, and detected, felt with his special sensitivities, factors that were hidden from ordinary sight, which might help strengthen Israel's standing, and then did not rest until he managed to capture them, use them and put them at the service of his life's goal – Israel's security and the enhancing of its prestige among the nations of the world.

In these unflagging efforts, he did not know a moment's rest, and he flew from capital to capital, day and night, from one statesman to another, generating plans and ensuring their execution – forgetting himself completely, until his heart burst, and bitter fate stole him from us. And the sorrow and the pain are great, and great is the loss, not only to his family and friends – but to the state and the nation. Reuven's absence will be felt for a very long time – but his memory will be with us forever.

Had he only heard and known in his last, troublesome years what Ben-Gurion thought of his achievements and what he would say about him after his death!

NOTES

1. *Pilpulim* in Hebrew – from the root *pilpel* meaning 'pepper' – a reference to the sharp hair-splitting nature of rabbinical discussions on matters of Torah and Jewish law.
2. Ben-Gurion used the Hebrew term *am olam* which has an additional meaning of 'an eternal nation'.

Afterword

Reuven Shiloah's Contribution to the Development of Israeli Intelligence

Aside from a few short-lived episodes following the First World War, the history of Israeli intelligence commenced in the early 1930s. In the wake of the Arab riots of August-September 1929, the Jewish community in Palestine (known as the Yishuv) was faced with a twofold task: to encounter the Arab threat to its existence and to neutralize it through a study of and penetration into the surrounding Arab countries. The disturbances underlined the importance of defending the Yishuv, whereas the interest in intelligence efforts was mainly the result of Haim Arlosoroff's statesmanship, and began upon his assuming office as head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department in summer 1931.

Arlosoroff recruited Reuven Shiloah, then Zaslany, a student at the Department of Oriental Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Zaslany's first assignment brought him to Iraq, the first Arab state to become independent after ten years of a British mandate. Under cover of a Hebrew teacher in a local Jewish school, Zaslany established connections with Jews, Arabs and Britons in Baghdad. He reported to Jerusalem on the politics of the new state, on British-Iraqi relations, on the Iraqi Jews' situation and on early Communist subversion.

Zaslany's stay in Iraq was brief. The authorities exposed his clandestine activities and he had to leave the country. In 1933 he returned to Iraq on a short errand whose purpose has remained vague.

This essay is based on my extensive study of the history of the Yishuv and the state of Israel's intelligence services in the years 1918–1953, partly published in Hebrew and partly still in work. Cf. Y. Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis: The Intelligence Services of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine, 1918–1947* (Tel Aviv: Israel Ministry of Defense Publications 1992) 2 Vols. (Hebrew) and *Israeli Intelligence in the War of Independence, 1947–1949* (Tel Aviv: Israel Ministry of Defense Publications, forthcoming) 2 Vols. (Hebrew).

Back in Palestine, he switched his attention to assessing the Palestinian threat. Under cover of a Histadrut official, he coordinated the Hagannah's first countrywide network of spy operators. These were local individuals who volunteered to utilize their connections with Arabs in their vicinity for intelligence purposes. They reported to Zaslany on moods and rumors in their surroundings and on special occurrences if and when they took place. Zaslany collated these reports, digested and edited them, and disseminated their contents in the form of intelligence bulletins to the Hagannah commanders around the country. Thus, he added a somewhat embryonic staff and research record to his field experience in Iraq. His portfolio was expanding.

The third chapter of Zaslany's intelligence career began with the outbreak of the Arab Revolt in 1936. He was transferred from the Histadrut in Tel Aviv to the Jewish Agency's Political

Department in Jerusalem. His career in the Agency's service began as an assistant to Colonel Frederick H. Kisch (Arlosoroff's predecessor as head of the Political Department, who retired in 1931 and subsequently volunteered to help in emergency situations) in liaison with the British security forces. When Kisch returned to his private business after the Arab strike was called off in October 1936, Zaslany succeeded him.

In his capacity as liaison with the army, police and secret service (SSO), Zaslany installed a significant field of intelligence work: the exchange of information with foreign services. No intelligence service can independently gather all the information it requires. Exchanging knowledge with colleagues has therefore become one of the most important means of collecting it. Although occasional contacts between the Jewish Agency and the SSO had begun before the Revolt, Zaslany expanded them to the other services and made this liaison operational, systematic and permanent.

Zaslany's contacts with British police and army officers, and particularly with Patrick Domville, the SSO's Chief, were noteworthy sources of information in themselves. Collecting intelligence information for the Jewish Agency's disposal and actually translating it into active terms were two different tasks. The Hagannah was still incapable of taking independent offensive action against rebel gangs or Arab terrorists. This was the police and army's task and the information's usefulness depended on the military's readiness to accept it and to act accordingly.

The Jewish Agency's sources were mostly Arab informers handled by the Political Department's Arab Bureau in Jerusalem or its Jewish agents across the country. The Bureau's officials, who mostly did not speak English and were unknown to the British officers, were unsuitable for convincing them that their intelligence was authentic. Zaslany had to collate the information, present it to his acquaintances in the services and persuade them of its value. This pursuit necessitated discerning between facts and rumors, verifying details and sometimes preparing the background by writing more comprehensive estimates of the situation. In other words, this was a modest beginning to his ability to digest and analyze intelligence.

Through his links with Domville, Zaslany introduced some of the Jewish Agency's regional agents to their SSO counterparts. This opened the way to some British-Jewish cooperation. Emmanuel Vilensky (later Yelan) in Haifa, or Ezra Danin in Samaria, received British funds to use Arab and Jewish spies. They reported their information simultaneously to the district SSO, to expedite the army's operational reaction, and to Zaslany in Jerusalem, who kept records of the entire picture.

Besides his liaison and research functions, in 1937–39, Zaslany set off with his colleagues Elias Sasson and Eliyahu Epstein (later Eilat), both members of the Jewish Agency's Arab Bureau, on several intelligence-gathering missions in Syria and Lebanon. These field operations were also financed by the British secret services and usually involved coordination with local British representatives such as Gilbert McKereth, the consul in Damascus.

His combined functions of liaison and coordination, as well as his experience in gathering, analyzing and disseminating information, brought Zaslany into close working relations with Shertok and eventually with Ben-Gurion, who made him their chief advisor on intelligence matters. Although both leaders were used to digesting the information on their desks themselves and to making their own estimates, they soon learned to appreciate Zaslany's services and to use them.

Cooperation with the British services dwindled after the repression of the Arab Revolt and the promulgation of the White Paper in May 1939. It was resumed, however, after the Second

World War broke out. During the war this cooperation expanded to new fields and regions. Zaslany continued to be in charge of liaison with the secret services and his contacts embraced the entire Middle East after some of his acquaintances had been transferred from Palestine to Egypt and Iraq.

The new beginning concerned mainly counterespionage and internal security measures. The British security service, MI5, asked Zaslany for the Jewish Agency's assistance in screening immigrants from Germany, fearing that the Germans had infiltrated agents through the illegal immigration movement from central Europe. Sometimes they needed help in tracing and identifying suspected German spies in adjacent countries. German and other immigrants from Europe were not only a security risk, but also an important source of basic information about the economy, transportation, industrial plants and other strategic installations in their countries of origin. The interrogations that had been initiated to screen immigrants were soon used to obtain information on all these fields.

Soon the British extended their demands to new tasks and provinces. The Jewish Agency helped the 'Friends', as the British side was code named, in almost every domain of clandestine warfare. Its Arab and local Jewish agents gathered military and political information and disseminated black propaganda in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Iran and as far as the Caucasus and Yemen. In Haifa, a special team extended the interrogation of immigrants about strategic targets, economic conditions and the political atmosphere behind enemy lines to all travelers, refugees and escaping prisoners of war who arrived from Europe. Haifa and Jerusalem were also sites of powerful radio stations that broadcasted propaganda to Syria and the Balkans.

Jewish agents from Palestine were dispatched to Romania to enlist local Jewish youth to sabotage the Ploesti oil fields. An alternative idea was to sink a vessel in the Danube's Iron Gates and stop the delivery of petrol from Romania to Germany. Another task assigned by the 'Friends' involved establishing a wireless transmission station in Salonica to facilitate wireless communication between Egypt and northern Yugoslavia. Not all of these missions were accomplished by the time the Germans occupied the Balkans. In spring 1941 the focus of 'clandestine cooperation' reverted to the Middle East.

Jewish agents posing as Arabs infiltrated into Syria and established a network for espionage and sabotage purposes. Others served as guides to the Australian 6th division on the night of the invasion of Syria. In Palestine, the SOE (Special Operations Executive) trained members of the Hagannah as a cadre of saboteurs, wireless operators, scouts and intelligence agents. They should have formed a nucleus of an underground resistance movement in case the Axis forces occupied the country. All these were but a prelude to the historically most significant operation of the 'clandestine cooperation': the mission of the parachutists to occupied Europe in the years 1943–45.

In his capacity of liaison between the Jewish Agency and the British secret services, Zaslany was involved in all these activities and initiated several of them. His duties brought him frequently to Egypt, and later to Italy, to encourage, coordinate and follow the execution of operations. He became familiar with a variety of British clandestine organizations in the Middle East and the Mediterranean theaters of war, their functions and methods. These included the office of the political officer in the Middle East GHQ, Brigadier Ilyd Clayton, and his intelligence department, the PICME (Political Intelligence Center Middle East); SIME (Security Intelligence Middle East), the regional offspring of the MI5; MI6 (the British secret service); SOE, in charge of activating resistance organizations in enemy-occupied countries; PWE (Political Warfare Executive); MI9, responsible – among other things – for rescuing allied

prisoners of war from enemy territories; and the staff branches M03 and M04 which were responsible for coordinating and conducting special operations.

Contact with all these organizations broadened Zaslany's professional experience and enriched his comprehension. He adopted a maximalist view of the concept of intelligence, comprising, besides the handling of information, subversion, sabotage, psychological warfare and propaganda, political warfare, internal and field security and the activation of fifth columns.

Zaslany was convinced that intelligence, subversion and other clandestine activities were likely to have a principal role in modern warfare and diplomacy also in the post-war period. In his opinion, the 'state-in-the-making' should have prepared the nuclei for administering them in advance.

Several times throughout the Second World War Zaslany displayed far-reaching foresight. As early as summer 1941 he pointed out the Yishuv's unique potentialities of providing suitable candidates for subversive actions in occupied Europe in cooperation with local Jewish underground movements. For the first time this idea, which would later be the basis for the parachutists missions, was put forward. Zaslany began its implementation early in 1943, in accord with Tony Simmonds of MI9 about infiltrating agents into Romania.

Zaslany was anxious to develop contacts with the American OSS (Office of Strategic Services), which appeared on the Middle Eastern scene in 1943. When the parachutists' missions ended early in 1945, he asked to be dispatched to Washington, anticipating the United States' central place in the post-war world. His purpose was to learn the American scene, to make acquaintances among intelligence chiefs and to prepare the ground for future cooperation between the Jewish Agency and the American secret services.

In the summer of 1946 Zaslany returned to Palestine to resume liaison with the British services, but this time under very different circumstances of strains between the Yishuv and the mandatory power. He managed to preserve some open channels, but cooperation was limited mainly to exposing pro-Nazi underground networks and tracing subversive communist activities in the Middle East. Nonetheless, these channels, as well as connections with the American consulate in Jerusalem, enabled Zaslany, in July 1947, to give the first warning of the Mufti's preparations for riots should the outcome of the deliberations at the UN Assembly dissatisfy the Palestinians.

At the beginning of the disturbances that opened the Israeli War of Independence in December 1947, Zaslany was summoned from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv to act as Ben-Gurion's assistant for intelligence affairs. This choice seemed natural considering his record and experience. Like many other positions that were created during the transition from the Yishuv to statehood and sovereignty, Zaslany's new status was not clearly defined. He had no formal authority over the various conspirative organizations that by that time had constituted the embryonic Israeli intelligence community: the SHAI, the Jewish Agency's Arab section, the Political Department's agents abroad, the Hagannah's nuclei of military intelligence and the Palmach's Arab platoon. Nonetheless he soon established mechanisms for the flow of their information and assessments to his desk. Yet, the chiefs of all these organizations also had direct access to Ben-Gurion. Zaslany's success in establishing himself as an intermediary between them and Ben-Gurion was only partial.

Instead of involving himself in quarrels about authority within the existing community, Zaslany chose to expand to new arena in which he encountered no competition. He forecast the eventual paralysis of the Jewish Agency's pre-war networks and agents in the Arab countries. To prepare for that contingency he established new branches in Cyprus and in Europe to serve as

bases for future penetration into the Arab world. He encouraged the recruitment of new agents for missions to the Arab states, and promoted give-and-take ties with foreign services, particularly the French, in both Europe and the Middle East.

Zaslany did not wish to become institutionalized within a semi-formal and still vague hierarchy. He avoided administrative responsibilities and preferred to function as an advisor, assistant and special emissary. In February 1948 he set on a three-week mission to London in an attempt to discover British intentions in Palestine, a question which particularly bothered Ben-Gurion. Ben-Gurion feared a possible conspiracy to frustrate the partition and to avoid the withdrawal, but was disenchanted with the SHAI and the Political Department's estimates. Their sources were mostly poor and secondary and their opinions were influenced by the prevailing anti-British bias. Without reliable information, Ben-Gurion found it difficult to shape his own appreciation in view of the apparently inconsistent British moves. Zaslany's mission, however, did not solve the riddle. Although he calmed down apprehensions of direct British action against the Yishuv, Zaslany failed to comprehend the British-Transjordanian understanding about annexing Palestine's Arab parts to Transjordan and its repercussions. His erroneous conclusions about the British plans in the region after the end of the mandate further confused the picture before Ben-Gurion.

The invasion of Palestine by the Arab armies on 15 May 1948 and the subsequent campaigns proved the inadequacy of the state-in-the-making's intelligence community under the new circumstances. It had focused on the Palestinians and had failed to deploy in time against the new enemies and to adjust itself to the different nature of the war. For several weeks, the Israeli leadership was in the dark about the Arab states and Britain's intentions, the Arab armies' capabilities and their actual movements. Their information was scanty and incorrectly interpreted. Ben-Gurion decided to facilitate the necessary reforms and on 30 May appointed Shiloah (Zaslany's code name, to which he changed his name upon statehood) in charge of a military and political intelligence wing in the Foreign Ministry but in direct subordination to himself as Minister of Defense.

This was mainly a personal gesture. There was no 'intelligence wing' in the Foreign Ministry and no Ministry of Defense. Yet, Ben-Gurion regarded this appointment as a first step toward a reorganization of the intelligence community; a reform that would enable it to function properly at war and grant the Foreign Ministry a leading position according to the pre-Second World War British model.

The next step was taken early in June 1948 when Ben-Gurion concluded the community's future structure with Shiloah and the SHAI's chief, Iser Be'eri. Three elements were about to replace the SHAI and the Jewish Agency's Political Department: (a) military intelligence of the general staff; (b) a domestic security service to guard against subversion from within; (c) political intelligence and gathering information abroad, under Shiloah who also kept his post of Ben-Gurion's advisor. After further consultations the new structure gradually replaced the old one during July.

Shiloah began organizing the new Foreign Ministry's Political Department and its operational branches in Cyprus, Europe and the United States. Simultaneously, he helped Ben-Gurion to impose the new military intelligence service on a reluctant general staff and to divide the SHAI and the Jewish Agency's inheritance – records, files, indexes, etc-among their successors. He also strove, even at this early stage, to establish a permanent committee to coordinate the new community's actions. Be'eri, who became director of military intelligence, objected and Ben-Gurion, although supportive of this idea, delayed his decision.

Owing to his close relations with Ben-Gurion and Shertok, Shiloah acted as the intermediary between the military and the diplomats. He supervised common operations, such as the establishment of the IDF's Druze unit and its use by the Political Department in irregular warfare and subversion missions. Principally, he represented the diplomatic considerations and viewpoints to the general staff and the military outlook to the Foreign Ministry's officials. However, this status made him an outsider on both ends, without an organizational power base in either of them.

Ben-Gurion assigned Shiloah to various sensitive diplomatic missions. He preferred him over Elias Sasson, whom he regarded as too lenient toward Arab demands. Shiloah played a major part in the secret negotiations that led to the cease-fire agreement with Transjordan in Jerusalem. In the beginning of 1949 he participated – together with Moshe Dayan – in talks with King Abdullah that culminated in the Shuneh Agreement and opened the way to signing the armistice treaty in Rhodes. Dayan and Shiloah also conducted most of the futile peace negotiations with Abdullah that resumed toward the end of 1949 and continued sporadically until May 1951.

Immediately after the war, Shiloah went to the United States to organize the Political Department's work and to coordinate it with other official deputations: the Embassy, the delegation to the United Nations, the military and scientific attaches, the Consulates and the Ministry of Defense's purchasing mission. But his principal aim was to establish cooperation with the American intelligence agencies. The FBI became suspicious when an official who ostensibly came to supervise the Israeli Foreign Ministry logistics in the United States asked to meet with the intelligence chiefs. Although this visit had no immediate results, it contributed to the creation of cooperative relations a few years later, when Shiloah was Minister in the Washington Embassy.

Upon Shiloah's return from America, Ben-Gurion dispatched him on another significant diplomatic mission: chairing the Israeli delegation to the Lausanne conference with the Arabs under the UN Palestine Conciliation Committee's auspices. Ben-Gurion was aware of the contradictions between Shiloah's various assignments but decided that the talks had priority over completing the organization of the intelligence community. In Ben-Gurion's eyes, Shiloah was the most trustworthy diplomat in Shertok's Foreign Ministry. He could not afford to give up his presence, reports and evaluations in the principal political front.

Throughout 1949, Shiloah was increasingly attracted to high policy. His frequent departures in his capacity as 'advisor on special affairs' interrupted the methodical building of the intelligence community. In his absence, the services competed for authority and responsibilities, which also meant status and resources. Through these quarrels they learned to cooperate with each other without appealing to higher authority.

A 'supreme coordination committee', comprising all heads of services and chaired by Shiloah, was officially appointed in May 1949. Its terms of reference, however, were not determined until the end of the year, and in Shiloah's absence it could not function efficiently. Most of its meetings were devoted to minor internal security and bureaucratic matters.

Before his departure for Lausanne, Shiloah presented Ben-Gurion with a scheme to create a central organization for intelligence and security in the Prime Minister's own office. This body would provide an overall framework to the intelligence community and supervise its actions. Herzog, director of military intelligence, and Isser Halpern (later Har'el), chief of the security service, objected vehemently. Ben-Gurion decided to delay any decision on the community's structure and terms of reference until Shiloah's return.

When Shiloah returned from Lausanne, Ben-Gurion discussed with him and with Shertok

(now Sharett) the future of the intelligence community: its structure, its methods of action, the coordination of its various components and Shiloah's own status and authority over the services. Sharett consented that for six months Shiloah would be released of any other duties and devote all his energies to shaping the community.

In November 1949 Shiloah reactivated the supreme coordination committee. The next month Ben-Gurion approved his scheme to replace it with a centralized body (Mossad) for coordinating the state's intelligence and security services. He assigned Shiloah the task of creating it in the framework of the Foreign Ministry, but in direct subordination to the Prime Minister.

In his capacity as head of the new institute, Shiloah began to reorganize the community. Early in 1950, he transferred all the Political Department's activities and three district offices in the country to the secret service. The Political Department remained in charge of political intelligence and all actions abroad. He abolished its special section (*Heker B*) that had coped with Arab arms purchases and integrated intelligence with deception and sabotage. He also established routines for handling information and rules for disseminating it among the services.

Shiloah guided the community's developing research work by issuing directives to study certain issues and determining priorities, but refrained from interfering in the day-to-day work of the services. His control of the Political Department and its activities in foreign countries was hampered by his frequent departures on political missions, especially the negotiations with Transjordan. The services' chiefs complained about delays and even interruptions to operations caused by these absences.

Shiloah soon became aware of the principal shortcoming of the community's structure as he had shaped it since 1948: that political intelligence was mixed with gathering information from abroad. This adoption of the British pre-war peacetime structure proved incompatible with Israel's conditions. The persisting state of war and the threat of 'a second round' gave higher status to the army's intelligence as the service responsible for early warning of any hostile military move. The Foreign Ministry, having a monopoly on both political intelligence and operations outside Israel, gave priority to its own needs. Its Political Department did not meet the army's requirements. The military intelligence retaliated by barring the Political Department from original sigint material (which was its monopoly). Together with the secret service they embarked on independent intelligence-gathering operations in the Arab states and in Europe to satisfy their own needs.

Throughout 1950, several attempts were made to solve the problems between military intelligence and the Political Department directly but all of them collapsed. Shiloah, too, failed to establish proper routines between the two services. Realizing the difficulty and its far-reaching implications, he suggested establishing a new central authority to take charge of all intelligence actions beyond the state's borders. This authority would be excluded from the Foreign Ministry and committed to serve equally the entire community in the political, military, security, technological, economic and scientific fields. The proposal facilitated a friction between Shiloah and the Political Department's chiefs, Boris Guriel and Asher Ben-Nathan. Subsequently, Shiloah dismissed Ben-Nathan, a measure that provoked excitement among the Political Department's emissaries abroad, an incident known as 'the spies' revolt'.

Ben-Gurion intervened and authorized Shiloah's planned reform. He approved of abolishing the Political Department and separating foreign activities from political intelligence and the Foreign Ministry. In lieu of the Political Department's networks abroad, an 'Intelligence Authority' (*harashut*) was created under Haim Waldner (later Yaari), a senior army officer, head of the community's technical and scientific unit and a former parachutist in the Second World

War. The new body belonged to the Prime Minister's office, had an exclusive responsibility for all out-of-state operations and was responsible for providing all the services' needs in its sphere of action. The rest of the Political Department became the Foreign Ministry's research organ.

The Institute [Mossad] for Coordination and Special Duties' was part of the Prime Minister's office and came under Shiloah and his deputy Izzy Dorot. The Intelligence Authority and the Research Department both came under the Mossad. The Mossad was, in fact, a new version of the 'Institute for Centralizing and Coordinating the Actions of the State's Intelligence Services' which had been established in December 1949 but had failed to develop. Shiloah's new institute coordinated the secret services in their overlapping fields of action and allocated them information-gathering and research tasks.

The new structure embodied two significant principles: unity of action abroad and stricter supervision of the services by the political echelon, namely by Ben-Gurion through Shiloah. The first principle stemmed from the Israeli community's absolute dependence in those early years on services of Jews in the Arab countries, in western and eastern Europe and in the United States. This was both one of the community's great advantages and potentially a very vulnerable point. Shiloah realized the importance and sensitivity of foreign Jews who were willing to undertake personal risks to clandestinely serve the Jewish state. He was aware of the perils to their communities and the possible impact on their status if these activities were exposed. Ben-Gurion and Shiloah were determined to avoid unnecessary adventures, such as the affair in Iraq in summer 1951, which might have resulted from lack of coordination, to say nothing of competition between the Israeli services.

The second principle was a reaction to the 'state-in-the-making' tradition of voluntarism and lack of any authority controlling the services. Learning from other states' experience, Shiloah feared the repercussions of the services' excessive autonomy and their possible alignment for undemocratic purposes. Hence he suggested, and Ben-Gurion insisted on, a centralized structure that would secure proper supervision of their actions.

This structural improvement ended the shaping of Israel's intelligence community. Besides raising the status of military intelligence from a 'G' department to an independent branch of the general staff by the end of 1953, the community's structure has remained virtually the same. This reform also saw a waning of Shiloah's importance. The time for laying the foundations – a time which had needed qualities such as creativity and imagination – was over. An era of consolidation and professionalization had begun. Leadership, team work and management talents overshadowed conceptual and organizational vision, personal charm, the ability to identify needs and to create contacts. The reform was Shiloah's last major contribution to Israeli intelligence. In the following year, 1952, he resigned from his post as the head of the Mossad and left the consolidation of this structure to his successors.

Yoav Gelber

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