Opposing Partition: The Zionist Predicaments After the Shoah

ABSTRACT

In 1937, the Zionist movement was equally divided over the British proposal to partition Mandatory Palestine as enunciated in the Peel Commission report. By 1945, the enormity of the ravages of the Shoah produced a new realism. Thus, the urgency of the survivors in post-war Europe induced a change of mind. Figures such as Golda Meir and Eleanor Roosevelt now supported partition. Majorities for partition emerged in Zionist parties such as Hapoel Hamizrahi, which had adamantly opposed it previously. The Soviet Union’s backing for a Jewish state, following Gromyko’s UN speech, brought the Palestine Communist Party into line and persuaded Hashomer Hatzair to abandon its embrace of a bi-national state. By the UN vote on 29 November 1947, only the Revisionists, the Irgun and Lehi, still adhered to their former positions and opposed partition. Amongst the Zionist leadership, the schism was more a tactical division than an ideological one. Nahum Goldmann’s speech in July 1946 in which he proclaimed that the three choices—trusteeship, bi-nationalism, and partition—had now been reduced to one, brought these differences to the surface. He argued that there were now simply not enough European Jews to create a Jewish majority in a non-partitioned state. Abba Hillel Silver opposed this approach, claiming that a maximalist pitch was necessary since the British would whittle down even minimalist borders. By the summer of 1947 with the UNSCOP recommendations, even Silver had accepted the inevitability of partition.
INTRODUCTION

In October 1947, two weeks before the vote on UN Resolution 181, the Revisionist Zionist headquarters in Paris approached the religious Zionist Mizrahi movement, the General Zionists, the Marxists of Hashomer Hatzair, and Ahdut Ha’avodah to form an anti-partition front.¹ This willingness by Arieh Altman’s Revisionists to cultivate their deadly enemies on the Left was not simply a sign of the movement’s desperation, but also of the deep schism in the Zionist movement over the question of partitioning Mandatory Palestine.

By this time in the partition saga, most Zionists had accepted that division of the land between Zionist Jews and Palestinian Arabs was the only realistic solution that could remedy the parlous situation of European Jewry in the aftermath of the Shoah and the only one that the Great Powers were willing to accept. In March 1945, Moshe Sharett alluded to this train of thought when he quoted Leon Gambetta on the loss of Alsace-Lorraine during the Franco-Prussian war: “We shall never forget and never speak about it.”²

THE DEBATES OF 1937

When Britain first proposed partition in 1937, the dictates of ideology prevailed. The Shoah, however, proved to be a great leveler. The post-war political reality moved many from their ideological rigidity. Prominent figures such as Abba Hillel Silver opposed partition in 1945, yet by 1947 had learned to accept it. Some who had stood firm in 1945 did so on tactical grounds in the belief that Britain would whittle down any proposal and therefore a maximalist pitch was necessary. Others were encased by their long-held religious or political stand on where the borders of a Jewish state should be and would not move an ideological inch.

Ever since 1917, the British establishment was divided about the merits of supporting the Zionist enterprise. The question of whether it would be in British interests superseded all others. On receiving Herbert Samuel’s two memoranda on Palestine in early 1915,³ Herbert Asquith ridiculed the idea of Jews immigrating to Palestine in less than philosemitic terms. He accused his rival, David Lloyd George, of supporting the Jews solely for the purpose of keeping the French out of the Holy Land. Whatever Lloyd George’s motivation for promoting a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, during the following two decades, the British discovered that the
implementation of the Balfour Declaration was far more difficult than its issuing. Moreover, British interests had changed in peacetime.

The Solomonic determination of the Peel Commission to recommend partition in July 1937, following the outbreak of the Arab Revolt, was greeted with disdain by a large part of the Zionist movement. Only 20% of Palestine would become the Jewish state with a further 10% including Jerusalem and the Christian holy places to be administered by Britain. The Jewish state would comprise the Galilee, the Jezreel Valley, and part of the coastal plain. In addition, Britain would have responsibility for four cities in the Jewish area, Haifa, Tiberias, Safed, and Acre, which had substantial Arab populations.

Cracks in the Zionist movement in accepting such a proposal were papered over through a vote on a diversionary compromise at the 20th Zionist Congress in August 1937, but there was no disguising the fact that the participants had been equally divided as to the merits of partition proposed by the Peel Commission report. Sir Herbert Samuel described the geographical depiction of the two states as “entwined in an inimical embrace like two fighting serpents”.4 While General Zionists such as Menachem Ussishkin, and Marxists such as Yitzhak Tabenkin in Palestine, vehemently opposed any hint of partition so did the leadership of American Zionism, Stephen Wise, Abba Hillel Silver, Robert Szold, Julian Mack, and Louis Brandeis.

Opposition to partition was based on a plethora of reasons.5 Some argued that since Britain made no genuine attempt to enforce the Mandate, it was unreasonable to now claim that it was unworkable. Others pointed out that Eretz-Israel—the Land of Israel—was a single unit, historically and geographically, and that the Jordan did not divide its parts but joined them. Given the proposed dimensions of the state, it was argued that the state would not be economically viable, water sources would be lost, it would effectively ghettoize the Jews, and a large army would be required to defend its borders. Its small size would detract from further Jewish immigration. If this hypothesis proved incorrect and 100,000 a year did come, then the population would be three times as dense as in England—the densest in Europe.

The non-Zionists in the Jewish Agency were also unhappy. They had joined in 1929 on the basis that the building up of the Jewish presence in Palestine would be limited to its definition as a cultural center and a place of refuge—they never expected to be confronted with the prospect of a Jewish state in their lifetime. They worried that the Peel Report had cast aspersions on their allegiance to their country of domicile, since it hinted that Palestine
was only offered to the Jews to secure their loyalty to the Allied cause. There was also the fear of exacerbating anti-Semitism.⁶

The Zionist Left rejected the Report’s contention that Jews and Arabs could not live together. It believed that it was only the scourge of ultranationalism on the part of both Jews and Arabs that was responsible for the difficulties. Moreover, any form of partition would be bitterly resisted by the Arabs. It would have to be imposed upon them. Why then initiate conflict?

Some proponents of partition argued that socialism would ultimately eliminate cheap Arab labor; others on the Zionist Left argued that it would be impossible to build a socialist society in such a small area. In contrast, right wing opponents of partition feared that the Jewish Agency wanted to hastily build a Jewish socialist state and they were all too ready to jettison parts of Eretz-Israel for it.

Others argued that a state in 1937 was crucial to save those in the lands of distress in Eastern Europe, yet they opposed partition. Immigration to such a narrow area would be based on “a deluxe Zionism”, which would be selective and discriminate between those who possessed influence, wealth, and standing and the masses which did not. Avraham Ravusky reflected many socialist Zionists’ thoughts:

The main aim of Zionism is not the creation of a Jewish state, however, small or large. Its main aim is to redeem the greatest possible number of Jews from Galut and create a large and economically sound Jewish community in the whole of Palestine. After we have attained a Jewish majority in Palestine or even become half its population, the creation of a Jewish state may become a practical ambition capable of peaceful and sound fulfilment. To concentrate our efforts on a prematurely born state at the present time would mean the sacrifice of the essence of Zionism to the alluring brilliance of Jewish statehood.⁷

Although religious Zionists were more united in their approach, there was dissension and confusion. Some held that the establishment of a state was the beginning of redemption, others that partition was a political question rather than a halachic one. Rabbis could express their own opinions, but not as halachic judges. There was also no agreement on borders.

Following the Peel Report, Vladimir Jabotinsky compared the proposed Jewish state to a new “Pale of Settlement”. He modeled his Zionism on the Risorgimento and admired Garibaldi, Mazzini, and Cavour, disparaged the pro-partitionists, and ridiculed the notion that a small state would later permit expansion.
This will be a Jewish Piedmont, they dream, after that will come in turn Tuscany, Lombardy and so on... today no nation allows successful penetration into their states, especially not to Jews. Arab irredentism will covet the capture of the Pale. The Jews would not emulate the citizens of Piedmont but would suffer the fate of the Armenians (at the hands of the Turks) and the Assyrians (at the hands of the Iraqis).^8

Jabotinsky pressed the Revisionist case for a state on both of sides of the Jordan. It would be a territory surrounded by the Arab world, but at least it would be a large area of over 100,000 sq km. In contrast, a state situated in the lowlands would allow the Arabs to occupy the highlands and position their guns on the hills, 15 miles from Tel-Aviv and 20 miles from Haifa. Developing his “evacuatia” plan, he noted that if the Jews were allowed to settle in TransJordan, they would transform the country within 10 years “with a solid majority of some 2m Jews and 1.3m Arabs”.^9

AFTER THE SHOAH

By 1945, opposition was swept away by the enormity of the Shoah. The Allies won the war, but the Jews lost it. The darkness had lifted, but there was a new Jewish reality in Europe. In 1937, figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Golda Meir opposed partition, but in 1947 they supported it. The urgency of the times created sharp divisions in the Zionist movement and antagonism toward those who favored partition.

In the US, the emergence of the partition issue accentuated the differences within its leadership, between Silver, Wise, and Nahum Goldmann. Silver and Goldmann conducted their own political campaigns with little coordination, but with much internecine rivalry and bitterness.

The standard Zionist position had been formulated in the 1942 Biltmore Program, which saw Palestine as “a Jewish commonwealth”, yet mentioned neither partition nor borders. It was a compromise between immediacy and gradualism, designed to unite the opponents and supporters of a Jewish state in the debate in 1937. Goldmann formally broke this Zionist taboo over partition in a speech to Hadassah on 17 July 1946. He argued that three possibilities presented themselves: trusteeship, bi-nationalism, partition. There simply were now not enough European Jews that could create a Jewish majority in a non-partitioned state. He argued that the 600,000 Arabs in the central plateau should be tied to TransJordan. This
would be embellished through economic cooperation with other Arab states in the context of a Middle East federation.\textsuperscript{10} This was a major departure from the Biltmore Program to which all the Zionist parties had agreed. Goldmann further suggested that the issue of partition should be brought to the UN.

Silver opposed Goldmann, arguing that partition would become the new maximalist position. Goldmann predicted to Dean Acheson, acting Secretary of State, on 7 August 1946, that partition would be welcomed by the Jewish Agency, Britain, and Trans-Jordan. If this proved not to be the case, the Irgun would eventually triumph and Weizmann would resign.\textsuperscript{11}

Weizmann wrote to Secretary of State for the Colonies George Hall on 16 August 1946, formally stating that the Jewish Agency was ready to discuss a scheme for the establishment of a Jewish state “in an adequate area of Palestine”. Britain opposed any idea of partition and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin continued to press his favored plan of federation within a unitary state.

Bevin did not want the Jews to leave Europe. The British case was that the Shoah had been “a solitary historical phenomenon” that would not be repeated. British policy was therefore directed at separating the aftermath of the Shoah from the Palestine question. Despite the advocacy of the Foreign Office, the cabinet was divided—Creech-Jones, Dalton, and Bevan supported partition, Atlee and Morrison wavered, and Bevin and Alexander were against.

At a time of belt-tightening and imperial regrouping, Britain decreased army concentrations in India, Egypt, Greece, and Germany, but not in Palestine. Instead, more troops were being transported. The left-leaning daily, the \textit{Guardian}, supported the Zionists while the conservative \textit{Daily Telegraph} opposed them. In Parliament Aneurin Bevan, the leader of the Labour Left, advocated partition and a Jewish state, the right-wing former trade union leader Ernest Bevin strongly opposed it because the Jewish problem began with the Nazis and ended with it.

British wanted the plan of 31 July 1946 for a federation discussed first of all. Goldmann favored discussing the plan if there was assurance that it would be followed by partition three or four years later. Weizmann rejected this stance.\textsuperscript{12}

The government responded that it would consider the idea of partition if the Jewish Agency would assist in suppressing underground organizations and terminate illegal immigration. It would renew monthly immigration and the Cyprus deportees would be transferred to Atlit.\textsuperscript{13}
THE DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP

In early 1945, Weizmann told the American press that it would take 5–10 years to achieve the “eventual establishment” of a state. In contrast, Ben-Gurion attacked those Zionists who thought in terms of a ten-year immigration policy at a Histadrut conference. Even though he clearly wished to proceed at a faster pace, in this political climate, he was far more reticent in public than Weizmann.

An increasing number of Zionists felt that Weizmann’s approach had had its day. This came to a head at the 22nd Zionist Congress in December 1946. Weizmann told his audience:

Zionism is a modern expression of the liberal ideal. Divorced from that ideal, it loses all purpose, all hope. When we invoke the Jewish tradition as support for our national claim, we are not free to shake off the restraints of that tradition and embark on courses which Jewish morality cannot condone. Assassination, ambush, kidnapping, the murder of innocent men, are alien to the spirit of our movement. We came to Palestine to build, not to destroy; terror distorts the essence of Zionism. It insults our history; it mocks the ideals for which a Jewish society must stand; it sullies our banner; it compromises our appeal to the world’s liberal conscience.14

He said that Masada, for all its heroism, was a disaster in Jewish history. Yet his self-proclaimed liberalism was not in the spirit of the times following the defeat of Nazism. Many delegates felt that Jewish patience had been exhausted.

Ben-Gurion was more circumspect. He rejected partition, but if Britain raised the issue he would consider it. He had advocated this approach as early as October 1941 when he argued that if asked, the response should be a state in the whole of Western Palestine “Extravagant and indefinite claims based on ‘historical boundaries’ should not be proposed.”15

Silver was uncompromising. He castigated the Jewish Agency’s readiness to discuss partition without consulting the Actions Committee and for putting forward a plan without any authority. He condemned partition and the labeling of those who supported partition as extremists. At the end of the speech, US, Revisionist, and Mizrahi delegates stood up and applauded. The rest sat quietly. Significantly, Weizmann and Wise were not re-elected. Even so, while Silver had argued passionately for a Jewish homeland “undivided and undiminished”, there was no repeal of the Jewish Agency stand on partition.
Shortly afterwards, in an address to the Zionist Federation in London, Weizmann rebuked those demanding the whole of Palestine outwardly and working for partition inwardly. “Zionism is not a poker game.”

Gradually Silver moved towards an acceptance of partition. Almost alone of Zionist leaders, he had refused to testify to the Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry (hereafter: AACI). He condemned the Morrison-Grady plan for its advocacy of a trusteeship where the Jewish province would be based on 17% of Palestine. He initially opposed the majority UNSCOP report, which advocated partition and a two-state solution, because it asked the Jews to give up claims to the western Galilee and to Jerusalem.

The offers had evolved from a trusteeship with no division between Arab and Jew to Jewish and Arab autonomous areas and now finally to two states. Seven of the 11 member UNSCOP commission—Canada, Czecho-slovakia, Holland, Sweden, Guatemala, Peru, and Uruguay—voted for partition. Australia abstained. Yugoslavia, India, and Iran, with large Muslim minorities, voted against.

Immigration would be permitted at 75,000 for two years and then 60,000 a year. There would be an economic union between the two states for ten years. The minority report wanted a system of cantons. Displaced people would be allowed in for three years only and would not exceed the absorptive capacity, which would be evaluated by an international commission. Zionists generally were not enthusiastic about the majority report, but the Arabs rejected both majority and minority reports. Silver understood that this was the only possibility for a Jewish state. He noted that whereas the AACI willingly visited the DP camps in early 1946 and witnessed the shipwreck of a people, the Indian, Iranian, and Yugoslav members of UNSCOP a year later strongly opposed a visit.

Following his return from a meeting of the Zionist Actions Committee in Zurich in September 1947, Silver accepted the UNSCOP recommendations for partition as “a basis for discussion, a basis for a solution”. The realization that the Zionists might achieve a two-thirds majority at the UN persuaded him to marginalize his distaste for partition. The situation had clearly changed since the beginning of 1947, when Zionists believed that both the USSR and the Vatican would use their influence to halt the emergence of a Jewish state.
THE RELEGATION OF IDEOLOGY

If Silver had accepted partition as a realization that he had taken the tactical argument as far as it would go, others began to understand that the Jewish reality after 1945 had relegated their strongly held ideological convictions.

In 1937, the laboring Religious Zionists, Hapoel Hamizrahi, opposed partition; but in 1947, they were for it. The Lamifneh faction of Hapoel Hamizrahi accounted for 40%—many of whom were Jews of German origin—including Ephraim Urbach, Moshe Unna, and Yosef Burg. The Shoah pushed them to accepting partition.17 The biblical borders of Eretz-Israel remained in the realm of theory, an ideal and a dream.

The more conservative Mizrahi was much more opposed to partition than Hapoel Hamizrahi. Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog condemned partition in early 1945.18 Meir Berlin (Bar-Ilan) told a Mizrahi conference in April 1946 that “We shall not renounce the aims of Zionism: a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan.” Berlin criticized the testimony of Sharett to the AACI that Jews and Arabs had an equal right to Palestine. He argued that the Arabs possessed only personal rights, whereas the Jews had national rights.19 Although Mizrahi declared itself totally opposed to partition according to the AACI report, the party was increasingly split over the issue. Figures such as Chaim Moshe Shapiro, Mordechai Nurock, and Zerach Warhaftig overcame their reticence and supported partition. At an executive meeting on 6 October 1946, Berlin’s bloc against partition was out-voted by those led by Yehuda Leib Fishman (Maimon). US Mizrahi strongly supported Berlin and its chairman, Rabbi Gelman, and offered to finance them if they wanted to fight the Zionist Organization elections as a separate list. Bar-Ilan sent a telegram to Mizrahi branches in the Diaspora:

Mizrahi will never consent to the partition of Palestine because every particle of earth of this land, promised to us by the Torah and the Prophets, is holy to us. The Mizrahi National Council gives a pledge to the Mizrahi delegates to the Congress to stand firm and uncompromising with all those who are loyal to a complete and undivided Palestine, with full faith and confidence that the Almighty will help us realise our demands.20

The dilemma facing the haredim, the ultra-orthodox, was similar to that of the Religious Zionists. Their worldview was predicated on the traditional anti-Zionist view, that there should be no human intervention in God’s work. God’s hand should not be forced in bringing the Jewish people
back to Eretz-Israel. They, too, had to strike a balance between ideology and reality in the wake of the Shoah.

There was disunity at the Aguda world conference in August 1947. Many Aguda survivors wanted to go to Palestine. Moreover, such dissent emanated distinctly from Poalei Agudat Yisrael whose laboring endeavors were rooted in Palestine. The Aguda leader, Yitzhak Breuer, lambasted Religious Zionists for placing the nation rather than the Torah at the center of their deliberations. Agudat Yisrael had opposed the Biltmore Declaration in 1942 and decried calls to resettle the DPs in Palestine after the war. Breuer commented in January 1947:

Jewish tradition knows how to differentiate between nations as metaphysical entities, as bearers of cultural missions in the course of history, and nation-states as power centres, as the incarnation of sovereignty and self-idolatry.21

He told the AACI: “For us, the state is not a goal in itself.”22 Zionists were adamant that a united front with complementing testimonies should be presented to the UNSCOP committee. In 1947, Yitzhak Meir Levin of Agudat Yisrael asked Ben-Gurion for a ruling on where a future state would stand on issues such as Sabbath observance, kashrut, the jurisdiction of halachah (Jewish law) on matters of personal status, and whether parties such as Agudat Yisrael could maintain their autonomous system of schools and educational institutions. Levin’s leverage was the arrival in Palestine of the UNSCOP delegation whose recommendations could affect the future course of events. He received appropriate assurances to his questions in a letter signed by Ben-Gurion and Rabbi Maimon, the Mizrahi leader. Levin thereby testified in a measured fashion, neither criticizing Zionism nor espousing it. The price of muting vehement ultra-orthodox opposition to a Jewish state was the promise of fortifying religious traditions within its portals.

In April 1947, the UN steering committee voted down an Arab proposal to end the Mandate and declare the country’s independence. The USSR voted for the Arab proposal. In May, Andrei Gromyko told the UN that the best solution was a bi-national state and failing that, a partitioned state. Soviet support for the very idea of a Jewish state was unprecedented. It assured the votes of Belarus, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, and Rumania. Although internally the Kremlin continued to ruthlessly suppress Zionism, externally partition would ensure British departure from Palestine and prevent US presence there.23 Britain never expected that traditional Marxist-Leninist anti-Zionism would call for a Jewish state.24
The Zionist Left was profoundly affected by this Soviet volte-face. Hashomer Hatzair had been prone to expressions of strong support for the USSR over the decades. In 1945, it sent two red leather-bound copies of a Hebrew translation of Stalin’s *Problems of Leninism* to the Soviet leader with its warmest greetings. It had supported the principle of bi-nationalism on Tito’s Yugoslav model and initially believed that Gromyko’s speech had been misreported. Despite its misgivings, its organ, *Al Hamishmar*, labeled the speech “the Soviet Balfour Declaration”.

The Soviet change caught the Communists unaware. On the day of Gromyko’s speech at the UN, its organ, *Kol Ha’am*, called for a federated Arab-Jewish state—the old Soviet line, but immediately readjusted their approach. The Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist League, the Palestinian section of the Fourth International, argued that the new Jewish state would be “an excellent instrument in the hands of the imperialist states”, while the Palestinian state would be a feudal one.

Imperialism has till now successfully employed *divide et impera* methods in this country, by using Zionist immigration as a divisive factor. In this way, national tension was created, which, to a large extent, directed the anger caused by imperialism among the Arab masses in Palestine and the Middle East against the Jews.

The other major left wing Zionist group, Tabenkin’s Kibbutz Hameuhud, had vehemently opposed partition in 1937. It split from Mapai over the Biltmore Program as Ahдут Ha’avodah had in 1944 and was suspicious of any whiff of partition. Tabenkin’s socialist imagery and sense of internationalist belonging was based on an affinity with the Narodnaya Volya and the Social Revolutionaries of Tsarist times. He believed that war was often necessary to advance humankind. In this sense he had little respect for the Palestinian Arab notables and their desire for a state. At the 1946 Zionist Congress, he argued that partition would release Britain’s obligations to the Jews and create “military tension” between Arabs and Jews.

Tabenkin wanted an extension of the Mandate in order to continue building a Jewish society before any contemplation of a Jewish state. A believer in the Marxist theory of stages, statehood was the end of a process, not its beginning. He wanted the continuation of the Mandate under international jurisdiction rather than partition. Left Poale Zion, which joined Ahдут Ha’avodah and Hashomer Hatzair to form Mapam in 1948, believed that Britain had contrived to bring about this difficult situation between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. It was “part of a deliberate premeditated
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The right and rejectionism

Unlike the national religious, the ultra-orthodox, and the Left, the different factions of the Zionist Right, the Revisionists, the Irgun, and Lehi, never bowed to the reality of the political situation in 1947 or compromised their belief in a Jewish state in all of Eretz-Israel. They continued to attack the first partition of Palestine following the San Remo Conference, which gave rise to the Emirate of TransJordan. The Treaty of London in March 1946 formally endorsed the new Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. This rekindled Revisionist anger. An editorial in a Revisionist paper commented:

We may have been robbed of our territories east of the Jordan, but we will never give up our claim to them and that no power on earth will be able to carve up the territory west of the Jordan . . . the Revisionist movement has had no part in the farce of the latest commission. It refuses to recognise the inevitability of any other solution but Jewish statehood in integral Palestine as the way of the present catastrophe.33

Arieh Altman, chairman of the Revisionist New Zionist Organization declared at the end of April 1946 that “neither he nor his children nor his children’s children” would recognize the changed status of TransJordan. The Revisionists also argued that the AACI accepted the severance of TransJordan by its silence on the matter and by its formulation of a policy of equating Arab and Jewish interests in Palestine—in contradistinction to the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate.

Yitzhak Shamir and Natan Yellin-Mor of Lehi opposed partition. Following the publication of the UNSCOP recommendations, Jews who accepted partition were not representatives of the Jewish people. Their decisions would not be binding on Jews. Menachem Begin’s Irgun was the most detailed, articulate, and scathing of the right wing groups on partition. It reserved its animus in particular for the colonial power ruling Palestine. The Irgun denounced the AACI as “an English trick”. Following the UNSCOP recommendations, the Irgun regarded Jewish Agency acquiescence as following in the train of past betrayals, such as the handing over of its fighters to “the British Gestapo” during the “saison”. A broadcast from the “Voice
of Fighting Zion” entitled “Jewish Vichyites” in September 1947 predicted that in the near future “the people will put them on trial” for their past and present misdemeanors.34

In a memo, pointedly addressed only to the US members of the AACI, the Irgun argued that the American Revolution of 1776 was a prime example of how to free a nation from British tyranny. It quoted the Declaration of Independence and Jefferson, and asked the US delegates whether they still believed in these truths.35

The Irgun’s memorandum to UNSCOP argued that Britain desperately wanted to remain in the Middle East and to perpetrate its rule through a puppet, satellite government in Palestine, similar to those in Jordan and Iraq. She was solely interested in oil and wished to turn the Greater Middle East into a trade empire—including “Iran, Baku and the land of the Turkoman . . . ruled by various native potentates, advised and financed by the British, free to develop splendour and luxury in their courts and to deal with their people in the old way; but held in complete subservience in all spheres connected with the requirements of colonial exploitation (cotton, oil, minerals and other raw materials) and of ‘imperial security’”. Begin argued that Eretz-Israel was to be transformed into a strategic base for the imperialists.

The Jewish population of Eretz Israel, and Jewish industry in particular, are made to help swell the profits of the British oil companies. Though Palestine’s position at the refining and shipping end of the Iraq pipeline should result in low fuel costs—fuel prices are abnormally high. Oil is ‘costed’ here as though it was transported from the Gulf of Mexico. The British oil companies are exempted in our country from the payment of any taxes, though they exploit our communications and port services and though they make special payments to the satellite rulers in the neighbouring countries. Moreover, the rights to prospect for oil and mining rights in our country have been granted by the British rulers to British companies free of charge.36

Britain’s hand behind partition was invoked constantly. The loss of the East Bank and now the proposed division of western Palestine was anathema to the Irgun. A broadcast by the Voice of Fighting Zion in November 1947 complained:

The Arab state set up by the British enslaver east of the Jordan is now to be supplemented by a second Arab state west of the Jordan. In Eretz Israel there are to be two Arab states while the Jewish state is to be given no more than
Begin utilized examples from history to bolster his case to reverse both partitions of Palestine and to retain both banks. He recalled that in Roman times, Palestina Salutaris, Transjordan had been the granary of the east, and in ancient times, there were between 5 and 7 million people in Palestine, and that the land had been reduced to a wasteland with approximately 300,000 inhabitants. In a memo to the UN on 21 April 1947, the Irgun quoted a statement by Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov that the decision to absorb the eastern territories of Germany into the Polish state had been taken because they were “the cradle of the Polish state and of Polish culture”. Begin surmised therefore that the decisive factor was history. In an Irgun submission to UNSCOP in the summer of 1947, Begin argued:

This consciousness of historic unity is not a unique phenomenon in our days. It is the consciousness and the feeling of every people. What the field of Kosovo is to the Serb, Grunwald to the Pole, the White Mountain to the Czech, Verdun to the French, Valley Forge to the American, and Borodino—or in generations to come, Stalingrad—to the Russian—the Western Wall, Masada, Modi'in, Betar, Yodefat and the Fields of Gilead are to every one of us. These ‘imponderables’ are one of the most real factors in human history. Their power is supreme and their influence ineradicable.

Begin spoke of the historic connection to all of Eretz-Israel. Jerusalem, Masada, Betar, Gush Halav, and Yodefat were symbols of Jewish military rebellion. Moreover, he believed that the Jews constituted a clear majority of the population on both sides of the Jordan by including “those of our people, numbering millions, who strive to return to it immediately but are unable to realise their right because the British occupation regime . . . has placed itself in their path.”

Begin referred to the part of the proposed Jewish state along the coast as “the ghetto whose density approaches 300 people per sq km”. He further argued that the Negev Desert was unsuitable for the immediate absorption of any serious number of immigrants since it would take decades to develop. Invoking the demographic argument, the Arab population of the state would be between 40–50% even after the DPs had been repatriated. On the question of transfer to the Arab state, he said, “This option granted to the Arabs will most certainly remain unused. They will not leave
their homes—and rightly so. (It will be) a federal state along the lines of
the Morrison plan which means a continuation of the British occupation.”

Throughout 1947, he rejected any hint of partition and regarded the
notion as treasonous. Even the legitimacy of a future government in Irgun
eyes was conditional on retaining both sides of the Jordan. It was willing
to support the creation of “a Provisional Hebrew government, headed by
any man” as long as it was a government of the whole of Eretz-Israel—“and
not just a Jewish ghetto in Eretz-Israel”.42

Unlike other Jewish opposition to partition, which made a pragmatic
concession to ideological belief, Begin refused to recognize the 29 Novem-
ber 1947 UN partition resolution. Any agreement was illegal and would
eventually be annulled. However, with the transformation of the Irgun
into the Herut movement and later into Gahal and Likud, as a matter of
political expediency, Begin’s rhetoric was vaguer and its meaning ambigu-
ous, speaking of “the wholeness of the homeland” instead of “ever ha’yarden
Mizraha”43 (the eastward side of the Jordan). Even so, partition never
became a word in his political vocabulary.

Notes

1. The October 1946 elections for the 22nd Zionist Congress indicated that a
cohesion of parties needed to challenge the dominant Mapai with 74,000 votes;
Revisionists, 28,300; Hashomer Hatzair, 24,000; Ahdut Ha’avodah, 23,000.
estine,” March 1915; Herbert Samuel Files, GB165/0252/box 1, St Antony’s College,
Oxford.
4. Howard M. Sacher, History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time
5. Maurice J. Karpf, “Partition of Palestine and its Consequences,” Regional
Conference of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, Minneapolis,
24 October 1937 (New York, 1938).
6. Maurice J. Karpf, American Non-Zionists and Palestine Partition (New York,
1938).
7. Abraham Revusky, Partition or Zionism? The Fate of Palestine and the Jewish
National Home (New York, 1938).
8. Vladimir Jabotinsky, address in the House of Commons, 13 July 1937,
At–850, Jabotinsky Archives [hereafter: JA]; Shmuel Katz, Lone Wolf: A Biography
   *Speeches, 1927–1940, Ketavim* (Tel-Aviv, 1957) 5:197–212 [Hebrew].
11. *Idem*.
14. Chaim Weizmann, address at the 22nd Zionist Congress, 9 December 1946, 
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