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Moscow's Surprise: The Soviet-Israeli Alliance of 1947-1949

By Laurent Rucker



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Moscow's Surprise: The Soviet-Israeli Alliance of 1947-1949

By Laurent Rucker

As the Cold War emerged in the wake of World War II, few political observers would have predicted that the Soviet Union would support the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine. Long-rooted communist hostility towards the Zionist project, the end of the Grand Alliance, and the strong tradition of anti-Semitism in Russia all suggested that Moscow would strongly oppose the plan to partition Palestine into Jewish and Palestinian states. And yet, from 1947 to 1949, the Soviet Union provided political, military, and demographic support for the Zionist movement. Newly uncovered documents from Russian archives illuminate when, why, and how Moscow's foreign policy took this surprising turn.

First Steps

Zionist leaders first made contact with the Soviet government after the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939, when the Soviet annexation of Eastern Poland, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and the Baltic States brought almost two million Jews into the Soviet Union. The number of Jews living under Soviet rule thereby increased from 3,020,000 in 1939 to 4,800,000 in 1940, in addition to almost 300,000 refugees from German-occupied Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. Concern about the fate of these Jews led the Zionist leadership to open a dialogue with Soviet diplomats, especially Ivan Maisky, Moscow's ambassador to London.

The first discussions concerned Jewish refugees and immigration. In February 1940 the chief rabbi of Palestine, Isaac Halevi Herzog, met with Maisky to ask for transit visas for students in religious schools who had fled from Poland to Lithuania and wanted to emigrate to Palestine.¹ Nine months later, Zionist leaders decided to contact Soviet diplomats in both London and Washington in hopes of sending a delegation to Moscow to discuss the problem of Jewish refugees from Poland.² Chaim Weizmann,

¹ Jacob Hen-Tov, "Contacts between Soviet Ambassador Maisky and Zionist leaders during World War II," *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 8: 1 (1978): 49. See also the memorandum sent by Nahum Goldmann to Edvard Benes published in *Documents on Israeli-Soviet Relations 1941-1953 (DISR)*, Part I: 1941-May 1949 (London: Frank Cass, 2000): 65.

² *DISR*, Part I, p. 1.

president of the World Zionist Organization, accordingly met with Ivan Maisky in January 1941. After making the remarkable suggestion that the Soviet Union could purchase oranges from Palestine and pay for them with furs delivered to New York, Weizmann brought up the future of Palestine. Maisky stated that there would have to be an exchange of populations in Palestine in order to settle Jews from Europe. Weizmann replied that if half a million Arabs could be transferred, two million Jews could be put in their place. Maisky did not appear to be shocked by this idea.³

The catastrophic change in the position of the Soviet Union following the German invasion of the USSR just five months later offered the Zionists an opportunity to expand on their early contacts. They began to pursue more forcefully two major goals: (1) to reach an agreement with Moscow that would allow Polish Jews in the Soviet Union to emigrate to Palestine, and (2) to convince the anti-Zionist Bolshevik leaders that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine would not be contrary to their interests.

On 9 October 1941 David Ben Gurion, president of the Jewish Agency, met Maisky in London. He explained the achievements of the *Yishuv*, the Jewish settlement in Palestine, highlighting its socialist aims. He proposed sending a delegation to Moscow to discuss the future of Palestine and the contribution the Zionist movement could make to the Soviet war effort. Ben Gurion emphasized the future role of the Soviet Union as a leading great power in the postwar era. Maisky asked Ben Gurion to send a memorandum on the issue.⁴ From Moscow's viewpoint, the purpose of these contacts with Zionist representatives was to facilitate an American contribution to the Soviet war effort. Maisky stated to Ben Gurion, "You are going to America. You will render us a great service if you will impress upon people there the urgency of helping us; we need tanks, guns, planes—as many as possible, and above all, as soon as possible."⁵

On 2 March 1942 Chaim Weizmann sent a memorandum to Maisky pointing out the "massacres and sufferings inflicted by the Nazis" on European Jewry. After the war, wrote Weizmann, most of the Jews surviving in Eastern Europe would have no choice

³ *Sovetsko-Izrail'skie otnoshenia. Sbornik Dokumentov 1941-1953 (SIO)* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye Otnoshenia, 2000), vol. 1, pp. 15-17.

⁴ 9 October 1941. *DISR*, Part I, p. 11.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 13.

but to emigrate to Palestine. He tried to convince the Soviets that "past misunderstandings should not rule out a new orientation of the USSR towards Zionism" and called on Moscow to "take an interest in the Zionist solution to the Jewish question."⁶

At the same time, the Zionist movement explored other channels, particularly through the Soviet embassy in Ankara. Thanks to intercession by the British ambassador, in January 1942 Eliahu Epstein, the representative of the Jewish Agency in Cairo, met with the Soviet ambassador to Turkey, Sergei Vinogradov. Epstein offered to send a field hospital, medicines, and doctors to the front, and asked for one or two permanent representatives in Moscow to deal with immigration permits for Jewish refugees in the USSR. He also mentioned the problem of Zionist prisoners in the Soviet Union. In his report to Moshe Shertok, head of the political department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, Epstein decried the ignorance of Vinogradov, "which is the result of arrogance and communist propaganda." According to Epstein, direct contacts were useful in explaining the goals of Zionism, even if the conversations with Soviet diplomats "did not advance our interests towards their resolution."⁷

The strategy of the Zionist movement proved fruitful. In August 1942, two diplomats from the Soviet embassy in Ankara, Sergei Mikhailov and Nikolai Petrenko, went to Palestine for the first time to attend the founding convention of the V-League, an organization established to support the Soviet war effort. The V-League collected money and held various public events that met with immediate success. One year after its founding, the League had 20,000 members and one hundred sections in Palestine.

The V-League was not simply a pro-Soviet organization. It included representatives of all Zionist-Socialist parties, the Communist Party, and intellectuals. Because it was not under Soviet control, the Soviet foreign ministry was suspicious of the League, but nevertheless considered its activity "useful."⁸ Petrenko and Mikhailov met with leaders of the *Yishuv*, the British high commissioner, and Arab representatives in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Zionist leaders regarded the visit of the two diplomats as, on balance, positive. Mikhailov had declared that the "Jews' achievements were beyond

⁶ 2 March 1942. *DISR*, Part I, p. 28.

⁷ 25 January 1942. *DISR*, Part I, p. 21.

⁸ 3 September 1942. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii (Russian State Archive of Social-Political History, RGASPI), f. 17, o. 125, d. 86, l. 27.

anyone's dreams," even though the Soviet representatives said nothing about the position Moscow would take regarding the partition of Palestine.⁹ Nonetheless, as Yitzhak Ben-Zvi stated, this visit "should be seen as a sort of beginning of new contacts with Soviet Russia. For the first time in modern history, representatives of Russia saw ten of thousands of Jews working and fighting."¹⁰

Maisky in Palestine

From 1943 onwards, contact between Soviet and Zionist representatives intensified as plans for the postwar order were formulated. The Jewish Agency used every channel it could think of to send the message to Moscow that there were no longer any grounds for antagonism between the Soviet Union and Zionism. The moment had now come to establish relations of mutual understanding. This was the substance of a memorandum Nahum Goldmann, founder of the World Jewish Congress in New York, sent to Moscow in May 1943 via the Czechoslovak president-in-exile, Eduard Benes.¹¹

Once more Ivan Maisky played a central role in Soviet-Zionist rapprochement. A few days before his departure for Moscow, where he was transferred in order to prepare the future peace conferences, Maisky met with Chaim Weizmann and told him that the Soviet government understood the Zionist aims and would "certainly stand by them." As he had during his first conversation with Weizmann two years earlier, however, Maisky still worried about the area's capacity to absorb the *Yishuv* because of the "small size of Palestine."¹²

In route from London to Moscow, the Soviet diplomat stopped in Egypt and then in Palestine in order to form his own opinion of Zionist achievements. He stayed less than two days in the Holy Land, where he met with U.N. High Commissioner Harold McMichael. He also had a brief but important visit with the president of the Jewish Agency, Ben Gurion. Maisky, accompanied by his wife and escorted by British army and intelligence officials, visited two *kibbutzim* near Jerusalem together with Ben Gurion. During their conversation, Maisky raised the issue of the postwar settlement:

⁹ 31 August 1942. *DISR*, Part I, p. 41.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 42.

¹¹ 27 May 1943. *DISR*, Part I, p. 65.

¹² 14 September 1943. *DISR*, Part I, p. 68.

"After the war there will be a serious Jewish problem and it will be resolved; we have to express an opinion, so we must know. We are told that there is no room here in Palestine, we want to know the truth, what is the capacity of Palestine?"¹³ After visiting the *kibbutzim*, the delegation decided to go the Jewish district of Jerusalem, creating panic among British security officers. Maisky's interest in the *Yishuv* surprised Ben Gurion. "I could hardly believe it," he enthused. "It obligates us to act — here is another country that is taking an interest in this question."¹⁴

The Zionist movement thus achieved its first goal—involving the USSR in the question of the fate of Palestine. But it had no guarantee regarding Moscow's future position. On the eve of the German surrender, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and his foreign minister, V. M. Molotov, were faced with a choice in the Middle East between the Arab option and the Jewish option.

A New World Order

As early as December 1941, after the Wehrmacht had failed to conquer Moscow, Soviet leaders began planning for the postwar order. The primary goal of Stalin and Molotov was to preserve the territorial gains in Eastern Europe they had obtained during the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. They expressed this aim clearly to British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden during his visit to Moscow in late December. The formula was then repeated in numerous memoranda produced by commissions and working groups established to plan for the postwar order.

In January 1944 Ivan Maisky, the author of one of these planning memoranda, sent Molotov a long synthesis of his thinking about the postwar order, centered on the strategic objective of preserving Soviet gains in Eastern Europe.¹⁵ According to Maisky, the postwar order had to create a "long peace" in Europe and Asia lasting between 30 and 50 years so that the USSR would have time to become sufficiently strong that it need not fear any aggression and would be able to deter any power or any combination of powers in Europe and Asia from even considering such aggression. This long peace was also necessary for Europe to become socialist, since Maisky did not expect proletarian revolutions to occur in Europe after the war.

¹³ 4 October 1943. *DISR*, Part I, p. 71.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 72.

¹⁵ Document published in *Istochnik*, No. 4 (Moscow) 1995, pp. 124-152.

In such a scenario, according to Leninist principles, Moscow's strategy should be to exploit the contradictions between the imperialist powers (Great Britain and United States) in pursuit of Soviet interests. In classical balance of power thinking, Maisky suggested keeping Great Britain strong so as to counterbalance the United States' imperialist expansion. On this point Maisky differed from Maxim Litvinov, Soviet deputy commissar of foreign affairs. Maisky argued that British power would remain dominant in Western Europe and that the United States would retreat into isolationism. He suggested that it was possible to reconcile the interests of the Soviet Union and Great Britain. Litvinov, on the other hand, was in favor of a Soviet-American rapprochement against Great Britain since he expected the contradictions between London and Moscow to become more acute after the war. Following the defeat of Germany, and with France and Italy weakened, the USSR would remain the sole continental great power.¹⁶

Maisky thought the colonial question would provide extremely fertile ground for Anglo-American contradictions. The United States would practice a new type of "dynamic imperialism" that would challenge Great Britain's "weakening conservative imperialism." Maisky emphasized that the Soviet Union had not paid careful attention to this question, which would be one of the most important issues after the war. So it was necessary to be prepared. Furthermore, it was highly likely that the development of conflicts between London and Washington in the colonial world would depend on the Soviet Union's position. Maisky did not make precise proposals about the Middle East, but he did underline that this area was favorable ground on which to strengthen Soviet influence. In his mind, this goal should be a priority of Soviet diplomacy after the war.

The Options

¹⁶ On these different Soviet conceptions of the postwar order see Silvio Pons, "In the Aftermath of the Age of Wars: the Impact of World War II on Soviet Security Policy," in Silvio Pons, Andrea Romano, eds., *Russia in the Age of Wars, 1914-1945* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2000); Aleksei M. Filitov, "Problems of Post-War Construction in Soviet Foreign Policy Conceptions during World War II," *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-1953* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996); Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity. The Stalin Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Geoffrey Roberts, "Litvinov's Lost Peace, 1941-1956," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 4, No.2 (Spring 2002): 23-54; Vladimir O. Pechatnov, "The Big Three after World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post-War Relations with the United States and Great Britain," Working Paper No. 13, Cold War International History Project (Washington D. C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1995).

Maisky's reflections should be seen as the background to Moscow's efforts to formulate a policy towards the Arab world and Palestine. In the Middle East, which was traditionally dominated by Great Britain, Moscow could support either the Arab national movement or the Zionist project of a Jewish State in Palestine. However, since it had been absent from the Middle East since 1917, the Soviet Union could not play a significant role unless it first created a diplomatic network. Therefore, Moscow opened an embassy in Cairo in 1943, a move Maisky orchestrated. The following year Moscow opened embassies in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. The hope was that Soviet representatives would meet local political figures, obtain first hand information, and exert influence.

If the Soviets chose the Arab option, that would mean support for the project of creating a pan-Arab federation. But Soviet diplomats were very suspicious of this idea. In 1943 the first secretary of the Soviet embassy in Ankara sent a report to Moscow stating that the pan-Arab federation was more the result of the will of British than of Arab political circles. London promoted this project to strengthen its domination of the Middle East, but the United States opposed this federation.¹⁷ Several weeks later, another diplomat argued that the Soviet attitude toward the creation of a pan-Arab federation should be negative: "It will strike a blow to our interests."¹⁸

Soviet diplomats viewed the development of a pan-Arab movement not only as a product of Anglo-American rivalry but also as a tool to prevent Moscow from developing any influence in the Middle East. However, after the creation of the Arab League in 1945, the Soviet ambassador in Baghdad suggested that criticism of the League be softened, since it was popular among the public. It would be more fruitful, he argued, to try to turn the League toward supporting Soviet interests. However, Moscow remained suspicious of this British inspired organization. Thus, in 1945, the Soviet Union in effect had no "Arab policy." In the Palestinian case what could constitute a pro-Arab policy? The question was instead whether or not Moscow would support the creation of a Jewish state.

Despite its hostility towards the Arab League, the Soviet Union did not immediately join the Zionist side, as it believed that the costs of such a choice would

¹⁷ 8 October 1943. Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, AVPRF), f. 087, o. 7, p. 5, d. 12, ll. 153-154.

¹⁸ 2 March 1944. AVPRF, f. 087, o. 7, p. 5, d. 12, l. 7.

outweigh the benefits. In 1943, a Soviet diplomatic report concluded that the USSR should not support the Zionist project because such a move could be interpreted as an attack against the British Empire. However, it expressed doubts about Jewish-Arab coexistence in a state dominated by the Arabs.¹⁹

"Wait and See"

In November 1944 the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Middle East Department sent a memorandum to the deputy commissar of foreign affairs, V. Dekanozov, about the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine that noted:

Zionist organizations in Palestine are making every effort to establish links with our missions in the Middle East, reckoning that they will gain the support of the USSR for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. However rendering such support will undoubtedly evoke an unfavorable reaction from the Arab population, not only in Palestine but also in all other Arab countries. Moreover, the British, in view of the recent assassination of Lord Moyne²⁰ in Cairo, are at present disinclined to promise anything that would alter the existing status of Palestine as a mandated territory. We have considerable property interests in Palestine, namely that of the former Russian government, the Ecclesiastical Mission, and the Palestine Society, which ought to be returned to the Soviet state. A successful resolution of this question can be reached only if the British attitude is favorable, since they are in charge of this property at present. Taking account of this, it would not be to our advantage at present to make any promises of support for the Jews, which the British would take as a move against them.²¹

The Soviets clearly did not want to strike a blow at the British Empire before the end of war. The Foreign Ministry did not express any ideological opposition to Zionism; its position was more tactical than principled. Yet contacts between Soviet diplomats and Zionist representatives continued. During a meeting with Nahum Goldmann in August 1944, Soviet Ambassador to Mexico K. Umanski declared that personally as a "Russian and a Jew," not as ambassador, he believed that his country would support a Jewish state in Palestine.²² Eliahu Epstein, who during the summer 1944 met several times with Soviet Counselor Daniil Solod, had the impression that Moscow "wanted to know more about us than they did in the past." He recommended

¹⁹ 8 October 1943. AVPRF, f. 087, o. 7, p. 5, d. 12, l 143, 152.

²⁰ Lord Moyne was the British Minister in the Middle East from January 1944 to November 1944.

²¹ 25 November 1944. AVPRF, f. 087, o. 7, p. 5, d. 12, ll. 88-91.

²² 15 August 1944. *DISR*, Part I, pp. 79-80.

that Ben Gurion pursue relations with the USSR "even if these ties have so far produced meager concrete results."²³

At the Yalta Conference of February 1945 the Palestinian issue was not officially on the agenda. According to various sources, Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill discussed the issue, but the available versions of what occurred are contradictory.²⁴ The Soviet vote in favor of a resolution passed at the Conference of the World Federation of Trade Unions in London in February 1945 did support Moscow's growing interest in the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine. This resolution claimed that the United Nations had a responsibility to protect Jews the world over against oppression, discrimination, and displacement, and that the Jewish people must be allowed to continue to construct a national homeland in Palestine.²⁵ However, the Soviet vote in favor of this resolution did not signal definitively that Moscow supported the creation of a Jewish State. As the Soviet consul in Beirut stated to a Zionist delegation, "the Soviet government is not becoming pro-Zionist, it will clarify its position when the Palestine question eventually comes up at the United Nations."²⁶

A Trusteeship for Palestine

By the end of World War II Moscow had not yet taken an official position on the future of Palestine. However, a report on the issue by Litvinov's postwar planning commission indicated that the Soviets had opted for a change in policy. Instead of the British mandate system, the commission proposed establishing a temporary Soviet trusteeship—justified because the USSR was free of both Arab and Jewish influence—until a more permanent solution of the problem could be found. "If the Soviet claim is rejected, then the question inevitably arises of the transfer of Palestine to the collective trusteeship of the three states—the USSR, the US, and Great Britain."²⁷ But this proposal had no chance of being accepted by London and Washington. Neither Western power would countenance Soviet interference in the Palestine issue. During the

²³ 3 September 1944. *DISR*, Part I, p. 84.

²⁴ Michel Bar-Zohar, *Ben Gourion* (Paris: Fayard, 1986):196; Joseph Heller, "Roosevelt Stalin and the Palestine Problem at Yalta," *The Wiener Library Bulletin*, No. 41-42, 1977, p. 35.

²⁵ Aharon Cohen, *Israel and the Arab World* (London: W. H. Allen, 1970): 363; 25 February 1945, *DISR*, Part I, p. 92.

²⁶ Yaacov Ro'i, *Soviet Decision-Making in Practice. The USSR and Israel, 1947-1954* (New Brunswick/ London: Transaction Books, 1980): 18.

²⁷ 13 March-28 July 1945. AVPRF, f. 013, o. 7b, p. 9, d. 17, l. 115.

conference of foreign ministers held in London from 11 September to 2 October, Molotov suggested to British Foreign Secretary Ernst Bevin that Soviet troops in Northern Iran withdraw in exchange for the withdrawal of British forces in Egypt and Palestine—a proposal Bevin rejected.²⁸

London wanted to prevent the internationalization of the Palestine issue, as that would mean the end of its hegemony in the Middle East and an opening of the gates to Soviet influence. But Great Britain could not avoid involving the United States, which had significant domestic interest in the problem of Jewish displaced persons in Europe. Moreover, the problem of displaced persons was a significant challenge for Allied armies in Germany and Austria. After receiving a report on the issue, US President Harry Truman contacted British Prime Minister Clement Attlee to request that the British government lift the strict limitations it had imposed on immigration since the publication of the White Paper in 1939, and instead permit the immigration to Palestine of 100,000 Jewish displaced persons. In response, the British prime minister proposed the establishment of an Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on the Fate of European Jews. The Committee was created in January 1946, and under American pressure extended its activity to the Palestine issue.

The work of the Committee signaled the failure of the Kremlin's "wait and see" strategy: since the Middle East would remain closed to Moscow. In the following years, the goal of Soviet diplomacy was, therefore, to put an end to the British mandate and to internationalize the Palestine issue. The year 1946 was thus a turning point for Soviet policy toward the Palestine problem. Even though the United States and Great Britain prevented the USSR from playing a significant role on the issue, the Soviets were determined to get back into the game by other means. The new tactic they adopted was based on the well-known Soviet policy of attempting to destabilize the Western powers and "exploit imperialist contradictions."

Exploiting the imperialist contradictions

Molotov believed that Palestine was an issue that divided London and Washington. In 1946 Soviet ambassador to Washington N. Novikov (who had opened the Soviet mission in Cairo in 1943) dispatched to Moscow a "long telegram"—

²⁸ Yaacov Ro'i, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

reminiscent of George F. Kennan's in the opposite direction a few months before—about US foreign policy. In actuality, Motolov was the real inspiration for this hard line text that described US foreign policy as "reflecting the imperialist tendencies of American monopolistic capital...characterized in the postwar period by a striving for world supremacy."²⁹

According to the Novikov cable, Great Britain "faces enormous economic and political difficulties" due to the war. "The foundations of the British Empire were appreciably shaken and crises arose, for example in India, Palestine, and Egypt."³⁰ While the United States and Great Britain had reached an agreement on the Far East, Novikov emphasized, they failed to do so in the Near East where "the United States is not interested in providing assistance and support to the British Empire in this vulnerable point but rather in its own more thorough penetration of the Mediterranean basin and the Near East, to which the United States is attracted by the area's natural resources, primarily oil."³¹

In this context, Novikov considered Palestine "an example of the very acute contradictions in the policy of the United States and England in the Near East." The US demand that the UK permit the immigration of 100,000 Jewish displaced persons was not, he stated, the result of sympathy for the Zionist cause. Rather, it "signifies that American capital wishes to interfere in Palestinian affairs and thus penetrate the economy. The selection of a port in Palestine as one of the terminal points of the American oil pipeline explains a great deal regarding the foreign policy of the United States on the Palestine question."³² The Soviet diplomat concluded, "The Near East will become a center of Anglo-American contradictions that will explode the agreements now reached between the United States and England."³³ But he pointed out that the strengthening of US positions in the Near East signified the emergence of a new threat to the security of the southern regions of the Soviet Union. Despite this danger, however, these Anglo-American "contradictions" created an opportunity for Moscow to re-enter the Middle East game. The Kremlin decided to put the Jewish displaced persons issue to its own use since this question was a major source of tension

²⁹ For the text of the Novikov telegram, see *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1991, p. 525.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 528.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 532.

³² *Ibid*, p. 533.

between Truman and Attlee, and between London and the Zionist leaders. Ultimately the Soviets hoped that Western public opinion would undermine the British position.

Jewish Displaced Persons

From 1945 to 1948, the number of Jewish displaced persons in Allied refugee camps in Germany and Austria increased from 70,00 to 250,000. Officially, most of these people came from Poland, but in actuality they had been recently repatriated to Poland from the USSR. In July 1945, according to an agreement between the Soviet Union and Poland, all Poles (Jews and non-Jews) living in the USSR who had been Polish citizens before 19 September 1939 were permitted to return to their homeland. More than 150,000 Polish Jews living in Soviet Central Asia could benefit from this agreement.³⁴ According to Yaacov Ro'i, before repatriation began, there were approximately 50,000 Jews left in Poland.³⁵ From 6 July to the 31 December 1945, 22,058 Polish Jews left the Soviet Union³⁶ for Poland and 173,420 more left from 1 January to 1 August 1946, when repatriation ended.³⁷ Altogether, almost 200,000 Polish Jews left the Soviet Union in 1946, and 150,000 Jews left Poland for the Western occupation zones in Germany and Austria.³⁸

Originally, Moscow organized the repatriation of Polish Jews so that they could participate in the reconstruction of Poland. This was done despite the opposition of the general secretary of the Polish Communist Party, Wladislaw Gomulka, who was aware of the hostile feelings of the Polish population towards the Jews.³⁹ If the reconstruction of Poland had been the sole goal of the Kremlin, however, the repatriation would have been stopped because of the massive departure to the DP camps. But nothing like that happened. On the contrary, following the pogrom at Kielce in July 1946 and other anti-

³³ *Ibid*, p. 535.

³⁴ Raul Hilberg, *La destruction des Juifs d'Europe* (Paris: Fayard, 1988): 986.

³⁵ Yaacov Ro'i, *Soviet Decision, op. cit.*, p. 28.

³⁶ Yosef Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union at the End of the Second World War," in Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Jews in Eastern Poland and in the USSR, 1939-1946* (London: Macmillan): 232.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 235.

³⁸ Raul Hilberg, *op. cit.*, p. 995.

³⁹ Yosef Litvak, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

Semitic incidents, there was a new wave of westward emigration; between June and September 1946, 63,000 Jews left Poland.⁴⁰

Such mass emigration from areas under the Soviet Army's control was not possible without explicit or tacit Soviet agreement. A report to the Soviet Foreign Ministry from Lt.-General Golubev confirms that these movements were carefully monitored by Moscow. The report indicated that the Soviets were aware that Polish Jews wanted to travel to Palestine through Czechoslovakia, the Soviet zone of Austria, and the American occupation zone in Germany.⁴¹ Foreign Ministry officials sent this information to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs V. Dekanozov, recommending that no Soviet diplomat "become involved in any matters involving the departure of Jews to Palestine."⁴²

The growing number of displaced persons in Allied camps required that a solution be found. Since the doors of the United States were closed to mass emigration, these survivors of the Holocaust had no choice but to go to Palestine. While Washington thus favored this solution, London was against it because it threatened to alienate the Arab world. This difference of opinion was highly desirable for the Kremlin, as it enabled it to play its favorite game: dividing the "imperialist powers."

Officially, the USSR remained hostile to mass Jewish emigration to Palestine.⁴³ In actuality, however, Moscow contributed to increasing the number of Jewish displaced persons by supporting the position of the Polish government on the issue. From Warsaw's perspective, helping these Jews to emigrate to a Jewish state would eliminate the need to deal with property claims from Jews who were returning to Poland only to find their property now in the hands of Poles. Moreover, Polish communist authorities were searching for international legitimacy and support, particularly for Poland's post-war boundaries, and hoped that the Jewish Agency and the future Israel would lobby the United States on behalf of the Polish government.⁴⁴

In 1948, 220,000 of 250,000 Jewish displaced persons in Europe came from the Soviet sphere of influence: Poland (150,000), Czechoslovakia (5,000), Romania

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 230.

⁴¹ *SIO*, t. 1, p. 161.

⁴² *SIO*, t. 1, pp. 164-165.

⁴³ 15 May 1946. AVPRF, f. 018, o. 8, p. 7, d. 92, l. 9.

⁴⁴ Albert Stankowski, "Poland and Israel: Bilateral Relations, 1947-1953 (based on the Archives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs)" *Jews in Eastern Europe*, 3 (37), 1998, pp. 5-7.

(40,000), and Hungary (25,000). Out of the 250,000 Jewish DP, 142,000 went to Palestine.⁴⁵ Thus, the Soviet Union played a decisive role in the Palestine issue. As David Wahl, an American Zionist leader, reported in a letter to the Rabbi Silver:

Were I to review my experience of the past year and a half with the displaced persons problem, I would have to report in all fairness that it was the cooperation of the Soviet government in repatriating many thousands of Polish Jews that made it possible to build up the Jewish DP population now in Germany from 70,000 at war's end, to almost a quarter of a million at the present time, and certainly no one will gainsay that the pressure of this large Jewish DP population is of inestimable value to the Zionist cause with respect to increasing immigration to Palestine and building towards a Jewish majority in Palestine.⁴⁶

An Independent and Democratic Palestine

On 13 April 1946 the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry published a report recommending the transfer of 100,000 Jews to Palestine and the continuation of the British mandate until the United Nations reached an agreement on a UN trusteeship. After the report was published, the Soviet Union could no longer remain silent on the issue. In a memorandum sent to Andrei Vyshinskii, Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Dekanozov, the chief of the Middle East Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, stressed the danger of Soviet silence on the Palestine issue, arguing "it could be interpreted by the US, Britain, the Arabs, and the Jews as a degree of compliance on the part of the Soviet Union with the Committee's proposals." Therefore, he proposed a position that consisted of four points: first, rejecting the conclusions of the Anglo-American committee; second, opposing Jewish immigration to Palestine "since only the complete destruction of all the roots of fascism and the democratization of the European countries can give the Jewish masses normal living conditions; third, ending the British mandate and withdrawal of foreign troops; and fourth, a UN trusteeship until the formation of an independent and democratic Palestine. However, he suggested that the Arabs, not the USSR, must raise the Palestine question at the UN.⁴⁷

The proposed Soviet solution excluded the creation of a Jewish state. It was difficult to imagine that one year later Moscow would be the most resolute advocate of the Zionist project. During the summer of 1946, the idea of partition returned to the

⁴⁵ Raul Hilberg, *op. cit.*, p. 993-995.

⁴⁶ 15 May 1947. Published in *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn'*, No.10 (Moscow)1998, pp. 84-85.

agenda. On the British side, the Morrison-Grady Plan, presented to the House of Commons on 31 July 1946, proposed a partition of Palestine into four zones: two autonomous zones, one Arab and one Jewish, with the holy places and the Negev under British rule. London would also keep control of the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs. The Zionist leadership rejected this plan, proposing instead to create a "viable Jewish state in an adequate area of Palestine." In other words, the Zionist movement did not demand the whole of Palestinian territory and accepted partition. The United States supported the Zionist version of partition but rejected the British one. The Soviet Foreign Ministry, however, considered the partition solution highly problematic, since it would give Great Britain complete control over Palestine "for an indefinite period." Suspicious that London sought long-term control, Moscow's position remained a demand for the withdrawal of British troops, the end of the mandate, and the establishment of an independent and democratic Palestine through a trusteeship under the UN umbrella.⁴⁸

At the same time, contacts between Soviet diplomats and Zionist representatives continued. In Cairo TASS correspondents emphasized to a Zionist envoy that they were "very impressed with the Zionist collective settlements," and even that "Russia must find some type of understanding with the Arabs, but knowing their backwardness and your progressiveness all our sympathy will be with your experiment."⁴⁹ Other meetings took place in the East European countries. Between May and June 1946, Vladimir Yakovlev, counselor at the Soviet embassy in Warsaw, received several Zionist delegations.⁵⁰

In a memorandum sent to Vyshinskii, Ambassador to Poland Viktor Lebedev summed up his first meeting with representatives of two Zionist parties, Poale Zion and Hashomer Hatsair: the Zionist delegates hoped to arrange a visit to the USSR to inform Soviet leaders about the situation in Palestine and to gain the Soviet government's support for the creation of a Jewish State.⁵¹ However, even though Poale Zion and

⁴⁷ 15 May 1946. AVPRF, f. 018, o. 8, p. 7, d. 92, ll. 7-10.

⁴⁸ AVPRF, f. 0118, o. 2, p. 2, d. 7, ll. 9-11. 6 September 1946, *SIO*, t. 1, p. 164.

⁴⁹ CZA S25/486, 1 January 1946 and 1 February 1946, *DISR*, Part I, p. 118, p. 24.

⁵⁰ See Iurii Strizhov, "The Soviet Position on the Establishment of the State of Israel," in Yaacov Ro'i, ed., *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union* (London: Frank Cass, 1995): 306-307.

⁵¹ AVPRF, f. 07, o. 12a, p. 42, d. 6, ll. 42-43, 12 July 1946, secret, *SIO*, t. 1, pp. 156-157.

Hashomer Hatsair were the Zionist parties most favorable to the Soviet Union, Moscow remained suspicious. On 7 July 1946, Yakovlev asked Levite of Poale Zion for a memorandum on Palestine, explaining that the Soviet leadership would examine the issue in a new light.⁵² Later, the Soviet diplomat expressed his doubts about the viability of a bi-national state, the solution most favored by the Hashomer Hatsair.

At the beginning of 1947, the Soviet Union finally took a clear stand on the future of Palestine. Moscow was a step closer to its objective when in February 1947 Ernst Bevin announced the transfer of the Palestine issue to the United Nations. The USSR would have room to maneuver and a forum in which to express its voice. Yet, Soviet diplomacy also interpreted this decision as a "very adroit diplomatic maneuver" by Great Britain to maintain "its presence and its troops in Palestine."⁵³ The Near East Department of the Soviet UN delegation accordingly stated in March 1947 that the Soviet Union did not envision the creation of a Jewish State but rather a "single independent democratic Palestine that ensures that the peoples living there will enjoy equal national and democratic rights."⁵⁴

In other words, the USSR supported the bi-national solution, which was rejected by all within the Zionist camp except the Jewish Palestinian communists, the Hashomer Hatsair, and certain other individuals. The Arab Palestinian communists favored coexistence with the Jews in a single state, but they refused to share power in a bi-national framework. Moscow finally gave up on the UN trusteeship solution as "neither the Arabs nor the Jews will agree" to it. In the days prior to Gromyko's speech at the UN on 14 May, the Soviet position did not change, even on the immigration issue. Moscow maintained that the Jewish question in Europe could not be resolved by emigration to Palestine but "only [by] the complete eradication of all the roots of fascism and full democratization of [the] Western European countries."⁵⁵

The Surprise

On 28 April 1947 a Special Session of the UN General Assembly opened in New York. The USSR's deputy minister of foreign affairs, Andrei Gromyko, received

⁵² Yaacov Ro'i, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁵³ AVPRF, f. 07, o. 12a, p. 42, d. 6, ll. 134-141, 6 March 1947, *SIO*, t. 1, p. 189.

⁵⁴ 14 March 1947. AVPRF, f. 018, o. 9, p. 17, d. 77, l. 1.

⁵⁵ AVPRF, f. 118, o. 5, p. 3, d. 1, ll. 1-14.

instructions from Moscow to prepare a speech that would present a completely new line on the Palestine question. On the grounds that during World War II "the Jewish people experienced unparalleled disaster and suffering," Gromyko was told to propose two different solutions: the creation of a bi-national state, or the partition of Palestine should the first solution proved impracticable because of the deterioration in Jewish-Arab relations.⁵⁶ Soviet diplomats in Washington and New York also asked for information and material from American Jewish and Zionist organizations.⁵⁷

Gromyko's speech on 14 May was one of the most stunning pronouncements in the history of Soviet diplomacy. The representative of a resolutely anti-Zionist country delivered an address that could have been made by an ardent advocate of the Zionist cause:

During the last war, the Jewish people experienced exceptional sorrow and suffering. Without any exaggeration, [one can say] this sorrow and suffering are indescribable. It is difficult to express them in dry statistics on the Jewish victims of the fascist aggressors. The Jews in territories where the Hitlerites held sway were subjected to almost complete physical annihilation. [...] Large numbers of the surviving Jews of Europe were deprived of their countries, their homes, and their livelihood. Hundred of thousands of Jews are wandering about in various countries of Europe in search of livelihood and in search of shelter. A large number of them are in camps for displaced persons and are still suffering great privations.

Gromyko then explained why the Jewish people had the right to establish their own state:

Past experience, particularly during World War II, shows that no Western European state was able to provide adequate assistance for the Jewish people in defending its rights and its very existence from the violence of the Hitlerites and their allies. This is an unpleasant fact, but unfortunately, like all other facts, it must be admitted. [This fact] ...explains the aspirations of the Jews to establish their own state. It would be unjust not to take this into consideration and to deny the right of the Jewish people to realize this aspiration."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ 23 October 1947. AVPRF, f.018, o. 9, p. 17, d. 77, l. 27.

⁵⁷ *DISR*, Part I, pp. 187-188.

⁵⁸ United Nations, *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly*, Vol. I, 28 April-15 May 1947, pp. 127-135.

Gromyko thus revealed the Soviet position on Palestine: either the establishment of a democratic Arab-Jewish state or the partition of Palestine into two independent states.

Gromyko's speech was an unexpectedly radical move. The deputy minister of foreign affairs used concepts such as "the Jewish people" that had been repudiated by Lenin and Stalin since the early days of the Bolshevik party. Zionist leaders such as Abba Eban naturally welcomed the new Soviet orientation: "Such a position was an incredible opportunity; in a moment all of our plans on the discussion at the UN were completely changed."⁵⁹ But they did not have any guarantee with regard to whether the USSR would actually stand in favor of partition. The growing Cold War tension potentially could change everything. Even American diplomats believed that in the end Moscow would support the Arab side.⁶⁰

However, during the summer of 1947 Soviet diplomats sent a number of positive signs to the Zionist representatives. The first secretary of the Soviet embassy in Washington, M. Vavilov, stated to E. Epstein that the Soviet government was well aware of the *Yishuv* capitalist social structure but believed that the Jews were building a peaceful, democratic, and progressive community in Palestine.⁶¹ He also emphasized that the Soviet government was satisfied with the reaction of Jews all over the world to Gromyko's speech. As it had during World War II, Moscow clearly expected to gain influence among Jews, particularly in America, at a moment when growing tension between the East and West was leading to the division of the world into two blocks.

In September, Epstein asked a member of Soviet UN delegation, S. Tsarapkin, if Moscow would vote for the bi-national solution supported by the minority of UNSCOP (India, Iran, and particularly Yugoslavia).⁶² "Not necessarily," replied Tsarapkin.⁶³ Actually, the decision had been made as early as April. As Molotov explained to Vyshinskii on 30 September 1947, he had instructed his deputy minister "not to raise any objection to the opinion of the majority of the committee on the partition of

⁵⁹ Abba Eban, *Autobiography* (Paris: Buchet / Chastel, 1979): 62.

⁶⁰ Yaacov Ro'i, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁶¹ *DISR*, Part I, p. 217.

⁶² United Nations Special Committee on Palestine. This committee was created on 15 May 1947 in order to study the situation in Palestine and present its conclusions to the General Assembly in September. The Soviet Union proposed that all Great Powers would be represented in the Committee but this proposal was defeated. The eleven UNSCOP members were Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, India, Iran, The Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay and Yugoslavia.

⁶³ *DISR*, Part I, p. 222.

Palestine" and "not to object to recommendations passed unanimously by the committee about the mandate, the granting of independence to Palestine."⁶⁴ The same day Molotov sent further instructions in a ciphered telegram: Vyshinskii should "support the majority opinion [of UNSCOP], which corresponds to our basic opinion on this issue," and should keep in mind that Gromyko had suggested the creation of a bi-national state only for "tactical considerations, since we did not want to take the initiative on the creation of a Jewish state."⁶⁵

Molotov's telegram suggests that the Soviet decision to support the creation of a Jewish state had been taken by the end of April 1947. However, it is not possible to know whether Stalin and Molotov had made this decision even earlier. The Foreign Ministry apparatus had been informed of the decision only a few days before Gromyko's speech, and was thus obliged to reconsider almost completely its previous line.

In Favor of Partition

On 13 October 1947 Tsarapkin delivered a speech at the UN explaining the Soviet choice in favor of partition. Two days later Molotov instructed Vyshinskii to consult the Jews on "all important questions concerning Palestine, in particular on Jerusalem" and to "try to reduce the transition period, during which Britain must not be left in charge. It would be better to aim at transferring authority to the UN Security Council." Furthermore, Molotov directed the Soviet delegation to support the Uruguayan proposal to allow the emigration to Palestine of 30,000 Jewish children as well as a quota for their parents in DP camps,⁶⁶ and the Colombian proposal allowing the immigration of 150,000 Jews.⁶⁷ The delegation was also instructed to support the Yugoslav proposal that all Jewish refugees now in camps on the island of Cyprus be admitted to Palestine immediately, regardless of quotas.⁶⁸ The USSR was becoming an ardent supporter of the Zionist cause.

On 26 October 1947 Molotov sent Stalin a 10-point memorandum, drafted by Vyshinskii, regarding the transition period between the end of the British mandate and

⁶⁴ 23 October 1947. AVPRF, f. 018, o. 9, p. 17, d. 77, l. 27.

⁶⁵ *SIO*, t. 1, pp. 251-252.

⁶⁶ 23 October 1947. AVPRF, f. 018, o. 9, p. 17, d. 77, l. 27.

⁶⁷ *SIO*, t. 1, pp. 253.

the partition of Palestine. Vyshinskii favored a speedy British withdrawal from Palestine. He proposed ending the mandate as of 1 January 1948 and replacing it with a Special Commission of the UN Security Council that would be responsible for setting the borders of the future Arab and Jewish states and for establishing provisional governments. This proposal was probably designed for tactical reasons. Since the United States would never have agreed to share responsibility for Palestine with the Soviet Union, Moscow was instead looking for a way to be directly involved in the Palestinian issue. According to Vyshinskii, all of these proposals were in accord with those of the Jewish Agency.⁶⁹

On 29 November 1947 the USSR voted in favor of the plan to partition Palestine and create both a Jewish State and an Arab State. Resolution 181 of the UN General Assembly passed with 33 in favor, 13 against, and 10 abstentions, including, notably, Yugoslavia. The USSR ensured "yes" votes by Byelorussia, Ukraine, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, which were necessary since a two-thirds majority was required to pass the resolution. The creation of Jewish State in Palestine required that the United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its satellites, vote the same way despite the escalating Cold War. In the emerging bipolar confrontation, the Zionist project could only succeed because the interests of the two superpowers temporarily coincided on this issue.

During World War II, the USSR had been reluctant to undermine the empire of its British ally, but the post-war division of the powers into two antagonistic blocs was creating a new situation. In this environment, Moscow's goal became to weaken Great Britain and "exploit the contradictions between London and Washington." It should be pointed out that Soviet diplomacy endorsed this new line on the Palestinian issue at the end of April 1947, immediately after Truman's speech in March setting forth containment policy, and after the failure of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Moscow in April. The Palestine issue thus provided Moscow with an opportunity to strike a blow at a place of strategic importance to the British Empire, and to exacerbate the Anglo/American divide over the Jewish DP issue.

American Fears

⁶⁸ 23 October 1947. AVPRF, f. 018, o. 9, p. 17, d. 77, l. 28.

The partition plan was immediately threatened by Arab opposition, American hesitations, and above all by the outburst of violence in Palestine. This "war before the war" strengthened the opponents of the partition plan, but Moscow did not consider any other policy. The reason, apparently, was that the Soviets benefited from American reluctance and from the tension between the Zionist movement and Washington.

The United States did not want to intervene to maintain order in Palestine. But above all, Washington feared that the implementation of the partition plan would provide Moscow an avenue to become a strategic player in the Middle East, which was a greater concern than the hypothetical threat from the oil-producing Arab countries. US diplomat George Kennan argued in a long memorandum in January 1948, the United States should change its policy on the Palestine issue because the partition plan would provide the Soviet Union an opportunity to send troops into Palestine. Soviet troops would be used to maintain order, but their presence would enable Moscow to infiltrate its agents for subversive activities, spread propaganda, and attempt to overthrow Arab governments and replace them with "people's republics." By stationing troops in Palestine, the Soviets would outflank the American positions in Greece, Iran, and Turkey, and potentially threaten the stability of the entire Eastern Mediterranean.⁷⁰

According to Kennan, the Soviet Union had secretly delivered arms to both Jews and Arabs in order to intensify the conflict. He noted insightfully that the UN partition plan favored Soviet goals, which were to divide and destabilize the non-communist countries. These fears, together with the outburst of violence in Palestine, led to a remarkable turnabout in American diplomacy. On 19 March 1948 US Ambassador to the UN Warren Austin declared that the partition plan could not be implemented peacefully and proposed instead a provisional trusteeship.⁷¹ The American and Soviet positions had thus reversed. In 1945 the USSR had been in favor of a UN trusteeship while the US opposed it, and now, on the eve of the creation of a Jewish state, Washington apparently adopted the trusteeship solution while Moscow stood firmly against it. On 30 March Gromyko declared to the Security Council:

⁶⁹ 26 October 1947. AVPRF, f. 06, o. 9, p. 22, d. 267, ll. 12-13.

⁷⁰ *Report by the Policy Planning Staff on Position of the United States with Respect to Palestine, FRUS*, 19 January 1948, Vol. 5, Part 2 (Washington: United States Printing Office): 546-554.

⁷¹ On this issue see Michael J. Cohen, *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 188-197.

the only way to reduce bloodshed is the prompt and effective creation of two states in Palestine. If the United States and some other states block the implementation of the partition and regard Palestine as an element in their economic and military-strategic considerations, then any decision on the future of Palestine, including the establishment of a trusteeship regime, will mean the transformation of Palestine into a field of strife and dissension between the Arabs and the Jews and will only increase the number of victims.⁷²

Despite Soviet opposition, the Security Council adopted a resolution on 1 April calling for the convening of a special session of the UN General Assembly on the issue of Palestine's future government. On 9 April Molotov sent Stalin a draft of the latest instructions for the Soviet UN delegation. The two main goals were to defend the partition plan and to oppose the American trusteeship proposal.⁷³ Throughout this period, the Soviet Union stood firm rejecting all other proposals. In fact, in the period following Gromyko's speech, the Soviet Union became the best and most constant ally of the Zionist movement.

Arab Reaction

Several days before the vote on the partition plan, the Soviet chargé d'affaires in Iraq, A. Sultanov, analyzed for Moscow the position in the Arab world on the Palestine issue. According to Sultanov, Arab political circles were convinced that the Soviet Union would not agree to the creation of a Jewish State. The Soviet decision was therefore unexpected in the Arab world. Listing the positive and negative consequences of Soviet support for partition, Sultanov emphasized that one positive consequence was that the Soviet position in favor of partition "had aroused sympathy towards the USSR from Jewry throughout the world, particularly in America." Moreover, the creation of a Jewish State could be "a factor for revolutionizing the Arab East."⁷⁴

The revolutionizing potential of the creation of a Jewish state had rarely been expressed by Soviet officials, but the idea could, in part, explain Moscow's support for the Zionist cause. The modern political and social structures of the future Jewish state could destabilize the backward social order of the Arab world. As Soviet representative to the UN Yakob Malik told Abba Eban after weeks of war between Israel and the Arab

⁷² Yaacov Ro'i, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁷³ *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'*, No. 10, 1998, p. 89.

⁷⁴ *SIO*, t. 1, p. 265.

states: "An event so drastic as losing the Palestine war could not pass the Arab world by without leading to profound consequences and questioning of the popular character of the regimes. We might therefore look forward to a period of increasing upheaval. [...] The economic and social effects of Israel's development would have a profound influence on the Middle East as a whole."⁷⁵

However, according to A. Sultanov, the potential negative consequences of Soviet support for the Jewish state outweighed the positive ones. He listed the risk of alienating the Arab world, the reinforcement of the alliance between the Anglo-Saxons and the reactionary leaders of the Arab League, the consolidation of an anti-Soviet Muslim bloc made up of the Arab League, Turkey, and Pakistan, the repression of the "democratic and revolutionary movement"—in other words, the Communist parties. Furthermore, he pointed out that the "Zionist state could become a base for American expansion" in the Middle East. The Arab states, "having lost faith in the support of the Soviet Union, and being encouraged by the Anglo-Saxons, would use this circumstance as a reason to enter directly into an openly anti-Soviet agreement with them on opening more bases and strategic resources in case of war against us."⁷⁶

In Moscow, however, Soviet leaders had taken into account these pessimistic predictions, and calculated that the benefit of support to the Jewish state would be higher than its cost. Thus, as Soviet diplomats received complaints from Arab leaders, they did nothing to calm their anger. Instead, they reminded them of Moscow's prior support for Arab states against Great Britain and France. In December 1947, during a meeting with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs F. Gusev, the Egyptian ambassador to Moscow declared that the Soviet Union should remain neutral on the Palestine issue.⁷⁷ In May 1948, on the eve of the creation of Israel, the Egyptian ambassador asked Moscow to revert to its previous stand in favor of a united and democratic state.⁷⁸ Soviet Ambassador to Beirut Daniil Solod underlined that the United States was the main enemy of the Arabs even if the Soviet position provoked a high degree of confusion.⁷⁹ The Soviet press published attacks against "Arab reactionaries associated

⁷⁵ *DISR*, Part I, pp. 317-318.

⁷⁶ *SIO*, t. 1, p. 265.

⁷⁷ 17 December 1947. AVPRF, f. 087, o. 10, p. 13, d. 2, l. 22.

⁷⁸ 5 May 1948. AVPRF, f. 0106, o. 7, p. 8, d. 7, ll. 91-92.

⁷⁹ 10 May 1948. AVPRF, f. 0106, o. 7, p. 8, d. 7, l. 58.

with the imperialists," claiming they had had close ties with Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy during the war.⁸⁰

Arab Communist Parties

Arab communist parties suffered the most serious consequences of Soviet support for the Jewish state. After the dissolution of the Communist International in May 1943, the Palestinian Communist Party was divided into Arab and Jewish groups. The Arab group, named the League for National Liberation (LNL), had opposed any partition of Palestine or a bi-national solution. The LNL was in favor of granting Palestinian citizenship to all Jews who had immigrated to the country but not giving any collective rights to the Jewish community, which was a coherent Marxist and anti-Zionist position.

A leader of the LNL, Emil Tuma, sent a long handwritten letter to Moscow criticizing Gromyko's UN speech.⁸¹ The letter reached the International Department of the CPSU(b) through the Ministry of State Security (MGB).⁸² Tuma made three main points. First, "the speech aroused suspicion and distrust in the Arab world among the wide Arab masses, and Arab reactionaries managed to throw doubt on the attitude of the Soviet Union towards the Palestine problem, which is regarded as an integral part of the Arab problem in the Middle East. [...] Gromyko's statement has aroused great speculation among communists. It has been badly received by the Arab masses and a clarification would give hope not only to communists but to all Arab people in the Middle East. The revolutionary potential in the Arab countries cannot be ignored in the present international situation."⁸³

Second, Tuma blamed Gromyko for having explained at length the Zionist aspirations, while having "ignored completely the Arab people in Palestine, their aspirations, their anti-imperialist national movement and their traditional associations and bonds with the Arab people in the Middle East."⁸⁴ Third, Tuma's main criticism of Gromyko's speech concerned its support for the Zionist cause:

⁸⁰ Yaacov Ro'i, *op. cit.*, p. 114-115.

⁸¹ RGASPI, f. 17, o. 128, d. 388, ll. 12-30.

⁸² Pochetov to Suslov, 6 November 1947. RGASPI, f. 17, o. 128, d. 1114, l. 31.

⁸³ *Ibid*, l. 30.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, l. 18.

We have always fought against the Zionist conception and have viewed Zionism as an imperialist venture directed by British imperialism in order to create a Trojan horse in the Middle East. Consequently we have always discredited the historical claims of Zionism as reactionary and did not accept the historical roots of the Jews as realistic. [...] Comrade Gromyko by his statement has strengthened Zionist ideology and the Zionist grip over the Jewish masses. Such strengthening will help imperialism to continue to use the Jewish masses as instruments in its opposition to the liberation movements in the Arab Middle East.⁸⁵

Tuma also criticized the Soviet diplomat for linking the Jewish refugee problem with the future of Palestine. "We could not understand [this]. This is strange in view of the fact that communists everywhere have disclaimed any connection [between the two]. Communists have always put forward the democratic solution to this problem and we have failed to see any reason why Comrade Gromyko should not refer to it when the question of refugees is under discussion."⁸⁶

Soviet support for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine thus created an acutely difficult situation for the Arab communist movement, similar to what the Communist parties in Europe suffered as a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact in 1939. Moscow's new position created serious conflict between loyalty to Moscow and loyalty to their own country and society. However, because of communist political culture and the nature of relations between the communist parties and the center in Moscow, open opposition was inconceivable.

Arab communists consequently endorsed the Soviet position even though they had to face very negative consequences, including losing many of their members. From August 1947 to June 1949, the roster of the Lebanese Communist Party fell from 12,000 to 3,500,⁸⁷ while the Syrian party declined from 8,400 members to 4,500⁸⁸—a loss of between two-thirds and one half of their members.⁸⁹ This decline in membership stemmed not only from the parties' position on Palestine, but also because their clandestine activities prompted the Syrian and Lebanese governments to disband them in reaction to the Soviet vote on Palestine. The price was even higher in Iraq;

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 23.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 24.

⁸⁷ 2 August 1947. RGASPI, f. 17, o. 128, d. 387, l. 44.

⁸⁸ 2 August 1947. RGASPI f. 17, o. 128, d. 389, l. 65.

⁸⁹ 8 June 1949. RGASPI, f. 17, o. 137, d. 154, l. 55.

leaders of the Iraqi Communist Party were arrested, condemned to death, and executed in February 1949.⁹⁰

Military Support

"They saved the country; I have no doubt of that. The Czech arms deal was the greatest help we then had, it saved us and without it I very much doubt if we could have survived the first month."⁹¹ This retrospective statement by David Ben Gurion in 1968 shows the importance of Czech arms to the young Jewish state. After the UN session on the Palestine issue in the spring of 1947, Ben Gurion regarded the acquisition of arms as the highest priority and dispatched Jewish paramilitary forces—Haganah agents—throughout the world to buy military equipment in order to prepare Jewish forces for war.

Haganah's mission became quite difficult when, in November 1947, the United States imposed an arms embargo on Palestine and its neighboring states. American doors thus being closed, the chief of the Jewish Agency looked to Eastern European countries, in particular to Czechoslovakia. According to recently released Soviet and Israeli documents, Prague initially refused to sell arms to the Zionist movement because it was engaged in parallel negotiations with Egypt and Syria, which were also looking to buy arms.⁹² Czech motives for selling arms were more economic than political; the arms deal would provide much needed income. The Soviet Union opposed these negotiations by Czechoslovakia. In a letter to Molotov, Deputy Foreign Minister V. Zorin suggested that "given the position we have adopted on the Palestine question, it would be possible to authorize Comrade Bodrov, when an opportunity arises, to draw [Czech party leader Klement] Gottwald's attention to the fact that the sale of weapons by the Czechoslovak government to the Arabs under present conditions, when the situation in Palestine is becoming more aggravated every day, could be used by the

⁹⁰ Mohieddine Hadhri, "Essai sur l'histoire du parti communiste irakien : lutte nationales et stratégie internationaliste," in René Gallissot, *Mouvement ouvrier, communisme et nationalismes dans le monde arabe* (Paris : Les éditions ouvrières, 1978): 217; M. S. Agwani, *Communism in the Arab East* (London : Asia Publishing House, 1969): 66-67.

⁹¹ Uri Bialer, *Between East and West: Israel's Foreign Policy Orientation, 1948-1956* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁹² *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'*, No. 10, 1998, p. 87. On this issue see Rami Ginat, *The Soviet Union and Egypt 1945-1955* (London : Frank Cass, 1993).

Anglo-Americans against the Soviet Union and the new democracies.”⁹³ Zionist leaders thus succeeded in their request that Moscow intervene to stop the delivery of Czech arms to the Arabs.⁹⁴

The communist coup in Prague in February 1948 had no negative effects on the negotiations with the Jewish Agency. The new government delivered arms only to the Zionist movement. Indeed, it organized an airlift under the code name Balak to transport the military equipment to Palestine in the spring of 1948. A DC-3 took off from the Zatec air base, then stopped over at Podgorica in Yugoslavia or in Corsica, and landed in Ekron in Palestine. The Czechoslovak ministry of defense assigned a group of technicians to accompany the airplane to repair it if needed. Since these operations were conducted in violation of the UN Security Council Resolution declaring an arms embargo of Palestine, Moscow feared their discovery. Thus, in a memorandum to Deputy Foreign Minister Zorin, the chief of the Ministry’s Middle East Department, I. Bakulin, advised a confidential intervention in Prague and Belgrade to "let the Czechs and Yugoslavs know about the desirability of extending aid to the representatives of the State of Israel in the purchase and dispatch to Palestine of artillery and airplanes" and to conduct negotiations with the Israeli legation in Moscow after its establishment. Zorin replied, however, that the Soviet Union could not "operate with such lack of caution. After all, we voted for a truce in Palestine. We must refrain from moves which could be used against us."⁹⁵

From December 1947 to 15 May 1948, the Jewish Agency purchased about \$13 million of heavy and light arms from Czechoslovakia. For the second half of 1948, Prague granted Israel \$12 million in credit to pay for the arms, of which Israel used only \$9 million. In all, the Jewish Agency and the Israeli government purchased about \$22 million worth of military supplies from Czechoslovakia, which also organized the training of Israeli pilots and paratroopers. This military cooperation continued until 1951.

No Soviet Arms

⁹³ *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'*, No. 10, 1998, p. 87.

⁹⁴ *DISR*, Part I, p. 264.

⁹⁵ 5 June 1948. AVPRF, f. 089, o. 1, p. 1, d. 1, l. 3.

As soon as they arrived in Moscow in September 1948, Israeli diplomats opened talks with Soviet authorities about providing direct military aid. On 5 October 1948 Israeli military attaché Yohanan Ratner discussed training questions with General Seraev, asking about Soviet military textbooks and possibilities for Israeli officers to take advanced courses in the Soviet Union.⁹⁶ A few days later, during a conversation with Red Army General Aleksei Antonov, Ratner suggested officer-training courses and the supply of German equipment that had fallen into Soviet hands. Antonov replied by asking for a detailed list of the Israeli needs.⁹⁷

On 7 November Ben Gurion sent such a list to Ratner, who submitted it on 11 November to Ivan Bakulin. The Jewish state wanted to purchase 45 T-34 tanks, 50 fighter planes, and anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns.⁹⁸ Bakulin stated that he would transmit the Israeli requests but emphasized the difficulties due to the UN embargo: "True, others are violating this resolution," he stated. "But if arms supplies from us are discovered, there will be an uproar."⁹⁹ After this meeting, Bakulin sent a memorandum to Zorin suggesting that they officially reject the request because of the UN embargo.¹⁰⁰ Golda Meyerson, the Israeli ambassador, asked Vyshinskii about this issue before his departure to Jerusalem in April 1949. He answered that it was "a tricky and complex problem, which could lead to a number of difficulties."¹⁰¹ According to Meyerson, the Soviet foreign minister explained: "Suffice it for us to give a small pistol and it will be said that we gave you an atom bomb. Moreover, there will be no end of interpretations about the special dimension of this arrangement: an alliance between the Soviets and the State of Israel, which has one thing in common — Karl Marx, the socialist and the Jew; an alliance to attack and destroy the world."¹⁰²

The Israeli request was in fact not sent to Stalin. As Bakulin explained to Gromyko, the requests "had been raised by the Jews during the war in Palestine. At present, since the end of the war and the stabilization of the situation in Palestine, the Jews have not renewed them. Reckoning that the Jews did not make these military

⁹⁶ *DISR*, Part I, p. 343.

⁹⁷ Yaacov Ro'i, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁹⁸ *DISR*, Part I, p. 400.

⁹⁹ Yaacov Ro'i, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

¹⁰⁰ November 1948. AVPRF, f. 089, o. 1, p. 1, d. 2, l. 24.

¹⁰¹ 14 April 1949. AVPRF, f. 089, o. 2, p. 3, d. 4, l. 19.

¹⁰² *DISR*, Part I, p. 463.

requests seriously, we think it advisable to delay replying to them, and to raise with the higher authorities [Stalin] only the matter of credit."¹⁰³ In actuality, however, the Soviet Union did not want to be involved in direct military cooperation with Israel.

Demographic Support

Israeli leaders believed that the future of their state depended on their acquiring the traditional attributes of power: territory and population. Thanks to the Czech military support, they could expand their territory, and thanks to the mass immigration from Eastern Europe they could win the demographic war.

However, a distinction must be made between the periods before and after the creation of Israel. Prior to 14 May 1948, Jewish immigration to Palestine was largely illegal. From 1946 to mid-1948, 31,566 of the 61,023 new arrivals immigrated illegally. After May 1948, Israel was free to conduct its own immigration policy. Prior to 1948, the Soviet Union allowed the governments of Eastern Europe to negotiate with emissaries of the Jewish Agency, and two-thirds of the immigrants came from Poland and Romania.¹⁰⁴ In 1945, even before the end of the war, Nahum Goldmann sent a letter to Andrei Gromyko in Washington requesting exit visas for Romanian, Bulgarian, and Hungarian citizens who had certificates to emigrate from the British administration in Palestine.¹⁰⁵ In mid-1946, the agents of the Mossad opened negotiations with the Romanian authorities, in particular with Ana Pauker, unofficial leader of the Romanian Communist Party, in order to gain consent for large-scale Jewish emigration. Bucharest agreed to allow 50,000 Jews to leave, on the condition that the emigrants give up their property and their money. Moreover, the Mossad had to pay a "poll tax" for each Jew leaving Romania.¹⁰⁶

In May 1946 the first ship, the *Max Nordau*, left Constanza for Palestine carrying 1,700 Jewish immigrants. At the end of 1947, the Mossad tried to organize the illegal immigration of 15,000 Jews aboard the *Pan York* and *Pan Crescent*. Because of pressure by the United States, the two ships could not leave from Constanza, but instead

¹⁰³ 30 September 1949. AVPRF, f. 089, o. 2, p. 3, d. 14, l. 16.

¹⁰⁴ These numbers must be interpreted cautiously since it is not possible to distinguish between the immigrants who came directly from Poland and Romania and those who came from DP camps.

¹⁰⁵ *DISR*, Part I, p. 98.

¹⁰⁶ Uri Bialer, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

left from Burgas in Bulgaria.¹⁰⁷ The Mossad negotiated also with Bulgaria, Hungary, and Poland. Out of 60,000 immigrants who arrived in Palestine between 1946 and 1948, 80% came from Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.

After 15 May 1948 there were no more restrictions on immigration to Israel. Therefore, demographic support meant in essence contributing to the Israeli war effort against the neighboring Arab states. During a UN Security Council session, a Soviet representative spoke out against the continuing limitations on Jewish emigration, stating "The question of immigration into the State of Israel is the domestic affair of the State of Israel [...] Some delegates at the Council have argued that this immigration threatens the security of Arab States. I want to point out that first of all that we do not know of a single instance of incursion into the territory of another state by the armed forces of Israel except out of self-defense, when they were compelled to repulse attacks on Israeli territory by the armed forces of other states. This was self-defense in the full sense of the word."¹⁰⁸ From mid-1948 to the end of 1951, more than 300,000 Jews from Eastern European countries arrived in Israel. This total represented half of all immigration to Israel:

Romania	117,950
Poland	106,414
Bulgaria	37,260
Czechoslovakia	18,788
Hungary	14,324
Yugoslavia	7,661 ¹⁰⁹

The negotiations with Romania proved to be a difficult issue. The agreement reached between Ana Pauker and the Zionist representative Mordechai Namir in July 1948 specified that 5,000 Romanian Jews would be permitted to emigrate each month. But Ana Pauker did not mention to Namir that restrictive criteria had been established. A secret and unpublished criterion had been issued in March 1948 prohibiting emigration to Jews who were skilled workers, doctors and engineers. Even though Ana Pauker opposed such restrictions, this decision was taken because of the deterioration

¹⁰⁷ On this issue see Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), chapter III.

¹⁰⁸ Yaacov Ro'i, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

¹⁰⁹ Marie-Pierre Rey, "Juifs et émigration juive dans la politique extérieure soviétique: handicap ou atout ?, 1917-1991," *Historiens et Géographes*, No. 322 (1991): 254.

of the Romanian economy. While the emigration was initially limited to unassimilated, impoverished small traders, in 1947 all social groups began opting for emigration to an unprecedented degree. The faction of the general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, Gheorghui Dej, stood against the emigration of Jews who were practicing vitally needed professions within the Romanian economy.¹¹⁰

Romanian emigration ceased at the end of 1948, prompting Moshe Shertok to raise the issue with Vyshinskii during a UN meeting in Paris in December. The Israeli minister tried to convince him of the importance of this immigration: "This is our largest reservoir of pioneering potential."¹¹¹ Shertok asked Vyshinskii to act in accordance with Soviet policy: "I do not want to make things easier for myself by hiding the difficulties from you. The question is whether this issue is reconcilable with the regime, but we assume that if there is a basic [Soviet] position that favors Israel, then this permission to emigrate should be accepted." Vyshinskii replied, "I understand your position and consider it to be justified from your point of view." But he also added, "You say that you need these people and Romania can also say the same thing, that they need these people."¹¹²

Vyshinskii nonetheless informed Shertok that his demand might be transmitted to Stalin: "You mentioned at the outset of your remarks that you are not sure, or that you would like to be sure, that when we took this stand, we did so bearing in mind all the conclusions it entails. I cannot comment officially in this regard in the name of the government, but I will say frankly in my own name, that as far as I am concerned, I cannot say that I have drawn all the conclusions. What you say requires study, consideration and decision. Your remarks will be conveyed to the government, to Molotov, and perhaps even higher."¹¹³

"Even higher" could only mean Stalin, and Shertok thus wondered whether the Soviet minister "went too far." Nonetheless, Israeli diplomats continued to refer to Vyshinskii's promise during their conversations with their Soviet counterparts. In April 1949, before returning to Israel, Golda Meyerson again raised the Romanian issue with

¹¹⁰ This account is based upon Robert Levy, "Ana Pauker and the Mass Emigration of Romanian Jewry, 1950-1952," *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1998, pp. 69-86. This article is based on documents from the Romanian archives.

¹¹¹ *DISR*, Part I, p. 415.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 418.

Vyshinskii. The Soviet diplomat replied that Romania and Hungary were young countries and needed the Jews because they "outdo all others in their loyalty to the new regimes." Vyshinskii emphasized to Meyerson that "half a million loyal citizens is no small thing,"¹¹⁴ but he did not report these words to Stalin.¹¹⁵

Israeli diplomats in Bucharest continued the negotiations in 1949, but without success. However, the emigration of Jews from Romania resumed at the end of 1949, more due to internal factors than to Soviet pressure. Because of the open agitation of Romanian Jewry regarding restrictions on emigration, Bucharest decided to open the gates. In 1950, 47,041 Romanian Jews emigrated to Israel in 1950, followed by 40,625 in 1951. The Stalinist minister of foreign affairs, Ana Pauker, was the most fervent advocate of unrestricted Jewish emigration from Romania. In 1952, however, the mass emigration again halted as a result of a new purge of the top leadership. Ana Pauker was arrested in February 1953 and accused of serving as an agent of international Zionism.¹¹⁶

In Hungary Israeli diplomats failed to negotiate the mass departure of Jews. From mid-1948 to the end of 1949, only about 10,000 Jews emigrated illegally to Israel. Moscow thus had no centralized policy regarding Jewish mass emigration from Eastern European countries. The policy and the chronology were not the same in Bucharest as in Warsaw, Sofia, or Budapest. The Soviet Union allowed the people's democracies to conduct their own policy. The emigration issue was highly sensitive for the new Soviet-oriented regimes, since it could be problematic to admit Jewish emigration while refusing permission to other citizens who were reluctant to participate in the "construction of socialism." Such a policy might inflame anti-Semitism and weaken the fragile legitimacy of these regimes. There is no doubt that the anti-Semitic character of the purges during Stalin's last years are partly explained by the need to reinforce the national legitimacy of the popular democracies. By instigating and exploiting latent anti-Semitism, Soviet leaders tried to divert popular discontent onto Jews — such as Ana Pauker or Rudolf Slansky, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia — who occupied positions in the top leadership of the Party and the State.

¹¹⁴ *DISR*, Part I, p. 465.

¹¹⁵ 14 April 1949. AVPRF, f. 089, o. 2, p. 3, d. 4, ll. 8-11.

¹¹⁶ Robert Levy, *op. cit.*

No Soviet Jews

The emigration of Soviet Jews was strictly prohibited from the very beginning. According to Soviet data, 500 people were permitted to emigrate to Israel between 1945 and 1955.¹¹⁷ Israeli data indicates that 131 Jews left the Soviet Union for the Jewish state between 1948 and 1955, with only nine of those leaving before Stalin's death in 1953.¹¹⁸ According to a memorandum sent to Molotov and Vyshinskii in April 1952, out of 65 applications received by the Militia between 1948 and 1951, only ten were granted.¹¹⁹ When Israeli diplomats arrived in Moscow in September 1948, Soviet leaders made it clear that Soviet Jews were not interested in emigration to Israel. During her first meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister V. Zorin, Golda Meyerson stated that "the Jewish problem could be resolved only by a large Jewish immigration to Israel." Zorin disagreed, arguing that most Jews would not emigrate to Israel but would remain in their countries. In the USSR, a socialist country, Jews would never suffer persecution and discrimination, and in the other countries the Jewish problem would be solved only by struggling for democratization.

The same day, during another conversation with Golda Meyerson, the chief of the Near East Department, I. Bakulin said that emigration would concern only Jews of the "non-democratic countries," i. e. of the capitalist world.¹²⁰ Israeli leaders avoided raising directly the problem of mass emigration of Soviet Jews until 1951, cautiously tackling initially only the question of family reunification.¹²¹ They preferred to focus instead on the issue of the East European Jewry as long as it was possible to negotiate, and they also feared losing Soviet support.¹²²

Another aspect of the Soviet Union's demographic contribution to the Israeli war effort was its noticeable support of the Jewish state's position on the fate of the 700,000 Arab Palestinians expelled or exiled from the territories gained by the Jewish forces. The mass forced departure of the Palestinians allowed Israel to expand and homogenize

¹¹⁷ *Istochnik*, No.1, 1996, pp. 154-155.

¹¹⁸ Uri Bialer, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

¹¹⁹ *SIO*, t. 2, p. 343.

¹²⁰ 15 September 1948. AVPRF, f. 089, o. 1, p. 1, d. 2, l. 8.

¹²¹ 21 October 1948. AVPRF, f. 089, o. 1, p. 1, d. 2, ll. 17-19; 20 January 1949. AVPRF, f. 089, o. 2, p. 3, d. 4, l. 2.

¹²² Uri Bialer, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

its territory. The Soviet press ignored the massacre of the Arab village of Deir Yassin committed by Irgun and Lehi groups on 9 April 1948. During the UN debate, the Soviet delegates denied that Israel had any responsibility for the fate of the Palestinian peoples and deflected it instead to Great Britain and the Arab countries. They also supported the Israeli position rejecting the plan of Count Bernadotte, the appointed mediator in the Arab/Jewish conflict, which proposed a Palestinian right to financial compensation. Israel requested that this question be raised in the course of peace negotiations. Vyshinskii and Molotov agreed with this position.¹²³ In a letter to Golda Meyerson, M. Shertok underlined that "all my talks with the Russians" indicated "the absence of any interest in, or concern about, the fate of the Arab refugees, utter contempt for the progressive forces in the Arab states, and so forth."¹²⁴ In December 1948 the Soviet Union voted against UN General Assembly resolution 194-III, which would allow Arab refugees wishing to return to their homes to do so or be compensated for loss or damage to property.

The Cold War and the Great Game

Since Moscow provided political, military, and demographic support to Israel, the Soviet alliance with the Zionist movement was large and multidimensional. It could be characterized as a strategic alliance. Why did the anti-Zionist Soviet leaders make this unexpected alliance? This decision can be explained only by geopolitical and ideological factors. In the emerging bipolar Cold War order, there were no peripheries for Great Powers, as Kenneth Waltz has noted.¹²⁵ The Mediterranean basin and the Near East constituted a weak point for the USSR, as Russia had been almost absent from these areas since 1917. In 1943 Soviet leaders tried to return, and they believed that support for the Zionist cause would assist them in accomplishing this goal.

Britain's loss of Palestine, following that of India, would change the balance of power, as noted in a draft memorandum on the creation of the Cominform written in the summer of 1947.¹²⁶ Supporting the Zionist movement would also enable Moscow to play its favorite game of dividing the capitalist powers. In addition, it would enhance

¹²³ 16 October 1948. AVPRF, f. 07, o. 21b, p. 49, d. 39, l. 86.

¹²⁴ *DISR*, t. 1, p. 399.

¹²⁵ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1979): 171.

the status of the Soviet Union among Jews around the world. This strategy had been successful during the war, thanks to the Jewish Antifascist Committee led by S. Mikhoels, and would similarly, Moscow reasoned, weaken the post-war anti-Soviet offensive in the United States and Great Britain. Support for the Jewish state, moreover, would further inflame the tension between the Zionist movement and its British and American protectors already exacerbated by the terrorist attacks against the British forces and by the situation of Jewish DP's in camps in Germany and in Cyprus.

Thus, Moscow concluded that if the Soviet Union were to succeed in weakening Great Britain in the Middle East, the Zionist movement was the only means of doing so. Zionist leaders were determined to get their own state and not to miss the opportunity provided by thousands of candidates to emigrate waiting in refugees camps in Europe and in Cyprus. Moreover, Moscow suspected most Arab leaders of being British agents. Despite the existence of Arab communist parties, the Soviet Union exerted only very limited influence in Arab countries.

This Cold War dynamic was rooted in a longstanding geopolitical dynamic. As in Tsarist times, Great Britain remained the main enemy in the Middle East. As Silvio Pons has pointed out, "Soviet political culture had a tendency to conceive of the future as a repetition of the past."¹²⁷ After 1945 the Soviet Union renewed the earlier "Great Game." By 1944 Moscow tried to launch an offensive in Iran¹²⁸ and then in Turkey, but these failed to destabilize the Western powers. After the independence of India in 1947, the center of gravity of the "Great Game" moved to the Near East.

The old geopolitical dynamic was strengthened by the ideological factors that structured the Stalinist perception of the world. The Stalinist leaders considered Great Britain both an ideological enemy and a geopolitical rival, a capitalist and imperialist power. As Stalin noted to Bulgarian party leader Dimitrov even before the end of war in January 1945:

The crisis of capitalism found expression in a division of the capitalists into two factions — one fascist, the other democratic. An alliance came about between us and the democratic faction of the

¹²⁶ RGASPI, f. 575, o. 1, d. 3, ll. 62-63.

¹²⁷ Silvio Pons, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

¹²⁸ On the Iranian issue see Natalia Egorova, "The Iran Crisis of 1946: A View from the Russian Archives," Working Paper No.15, Cold War International History Project (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1997; Jamil Hasanli, "New Evidence on the Iran Crisis 1945-1946," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 12-13 (2001): 309-314.

capitalists because they were concerned about tolerating Hitler's rule, since its harshness would have driven the working class to extremes, and so to the overthrow of capitalism itself. We are now with one faction against the other, but in the future we shall be against that capitalist faction too."¹²⁹

The Soviet perception of international relations was based on profound hostility to the capitalist world, grounded in the dualistic friend/enemy categories of the Soviet leaders' conflict-based political culture. Soviet foreign policy was thus based on a desire to compete with the enemy camp for global hegemony on all levels. Because of all of these factors, during the first years of the Cold War, the Zionist movement appeared to be Moscow's best possible ally in the Middle East. The Soviet-Israeli alliance thus continued until 1949, after which it began to slowly deteriorate until a deep crisis in 1952 led to the severing of diplomatic relations in the very last days of Stalin's life. However, the end of the alliance was a consequence of Soviet internal factors more than a new strategy of alliance in the Middle East, which would be formed only in 1955 through rapprochement between Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev and Egyptian president Abdul Nasser.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Mikhail M. Narinski, "The Soviet Union and the Berlin Crisis," Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons, eds., *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-1953* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996): 58.

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