

The Zionist Movement in Search of Grand Strategy

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Intro¹

This article is an attempt to survey Zionist grand strategy using micro-biographies of three key strategic thinkers of the pre-state era. It examines three Zionist strategists, Chaim Weizmann, Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabontinsky, and David Ben-Gurion, focusing on their contributions towards Israeli statehood by 1948. There are certainly other figures deserving of attention on this issue, but these three have been chosen because of their consequence in both local and international affairs and, most importantly, for the *grand* strategic direction which they provided for the Zionist movement. Unlike other significant figures, these three men influenced strategy which touched on all significant fields of grand strategy. They are examined here together because they impacted all the economic, social, philosophical, political, diplomatic, and military components of strategy. When looked at together, theirs is a story about how a non-government organization (NGO) became a state, but also about the origins and nature of Israel and its politics. This story is important because it is an assessment of how the Zionist movement, which could not even agree that independent statehood was its goal, achieved that aim with the leadership of these individuals.

¹ I would like to thank John Ferris for giving me the opportunity to present this in September 2014 at the University of Calgary's Grand Strategy workshop.

Weizmann, who became the first President of Israel in 1949, can be credited for providing the Zionist movement with a long-term strategy for development at a time when ideological, political and geographic divisions made progress towards a Jewish state seem unlikely. From the first World Zionist Congress at Basel in 1897 until the Second World War, Zionist policy never took a firm stance on its ultimate objective. The best it could agree on at the first congress was that a Jewish homeland be secured in Palestine. The founder of the congress and the political Zionist movement, Theodore Herzl, prophetical recorded in his diary,

Were I to sum up the Basel Congress in a word – which I shall guard against pronouncing publicly – it would be this: At Basle I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. Perhaps in five years, certainly in fifty, everyone will know it.²

In 1947, Britain quit Palestine. The next year, David Ben Gurion declared Israeli independence and became its first Prime Minister. The next year, Chaim Weizmann was named Israel's first president. Despite his remarkably accurate prediction, in 1897 Herzl led a movement could not agree whether its objective was Jewish state. This is the main difficulty in studying Zionist strategy – Zionists almost never found consensus on their aims or objectives. Their policies were often vaguely worded for the sake of inclusion, unity, and flexibility. Thus, micro-biographies of Weizmann, Jabotinsky and Ben Gurion are helpful. This article simultaneously examines the landscapes in which they worked and their collective contributions on the road to Israeli statehood.

Weizmann's political and diplomatic notoriety was first proven when, at the eighth World Zionist Congress in 1907, he introduced and led a doctrine of "synthetic Zionism" – a compromise between the political Zionists who wanted a state and the practical Zionists who sought to build up a homeland through immigration, settlement, and institution-building. During the First World War, he tied the Zionist movement to British policy. He was instrumental in the attainment of the Balfour Declaration, in which Britain promised a Jewish National Home in Palestine to the Zionist movement. He also helped to secure Britain's guarantee that this policy would become part of Britain's constitutional and international legal obligation in Palestine.

² Walter Laqueur, *The History of Zionism* (Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2003), p. 108. My emphasis.

Vladimir Jabotinsky became Weizmann's rival, although their relationship began as a partnership. Jabotinsky helped to forge the Anglo-Zionist connection by founding the Jewish Legion of the British army in 1917. He was the first to demonstrate the value which Zionists could provide Britain in terms of military and security. He was also the first to openly demand statehood. He helped in 1920 to found the *Haganah*, meaning defence, which was a territorial militia for the protection of the *Yishuv*, or Jewish community of Palestine. He disagreed with Weizmann's synthetic and constructive policies, and insisted that Palestine should become a Jewish state or even a seventh dominion of the British Empire. He founded the Revisionist party in 1923 on the assumption that Arabs would never accept a Jewish majority in Palestine, and that British power was the Zionists' best chance for a guaranteed Jewish state. By the 1930s, he had lost faith in Britain, but also lost control of his party as extremists came to dominate the Revisionist youth movement and paramilitary. In 1939, he was the first Zionist leader to call for armed revolt against Britain.

Ben Gurion is by far the most significant strategist under examination, yet he never fully articulated his vision for the country. His vision became increasingly practicable after the 1942 Biltmore conference, where he called for a Jewish "commonwealth". Ambiguous as the term was, it was still the first time that the mainstream of Zionist policy stepped beyond the terms of the 1917 Balfour Declaration and Weizmann's policy, both of which sought the gradual building of a Jewish National Home. Ben Gurion oversaw the growth and maturity of a number of Yishuv institutions which enabled statehood. The dominance of the Zionist-left was instrumental to that process. From 1935, he increasingly centralized power and, to some extent control. He also strove to uphold the unity of the Yishuv in the face of bitter and increasingly bloody internal divisions. Ben Gurion's control also revolved around matters of security and intelligence. He oversaw the growth of the Yishuv's military capabilities and its transformation from a defensive territorial militia in 1920, to a well-organized one with offensive capability during the late 1930s, to a massive and secret underground army by the end of the Second World War. His intelligence services had penetrated key branches of the Palestine government, as well as Arab political circles, communists, revisionists and other threats. This growth in hard power was made possible by a policy of military and intelligence cooperation with Britain from 1936 to 1945. By October 1945, he took

the step of authorizing armed resistance against British immigration restrictions, which led to the unravelling of British control.

Despite the vision and strategy of these three men, they had to contend with a divided Zionist movement.³ Due to his control over a broadly dominating party, Ben Gurion was the strategist who could defy internal divisions about the objective of the Zionist movement. He asserted his own policy as head of the Jewish Agency, which was the semi-autonomous governing body of the Yishuv. His intelligence and security agencies fostered Britain's dependence on his cooperation. In late 1945, he pursued a policy of secret resistance and unleashed political violence against Britain – Zionism's vulnerable erstwhile partner.⁴ As this process concentrated the tools of hard power in Ben Gurion's hands, his strategy to pressure British policy led to the collapse of their Mandate over Palestine and shaped the birth of Israel.

Weizmann⁵

It is safe to say that without Chaim Weizmann, there would be no Jewish state – at least as we know it today. Born 1874 near Pinsk, Weizmann trained as a chemist in Germany and Switzerland. He lectured at Geneva for three years before taking a senior lectureship at Manchester in 1904. His passion was not chemistry, although it made him wealthy. Rather, it was Zionism. He became involved in the Zionist movement as a student in Germany and Switzerland, and attended each congress but the first. He found his feet as a leader beginning in 1907. That year, he first visited Jerusalem and

³ The best survey of this issue is found in: Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover: Brandeis, 1995), pp. 85–126 “The Variegation of Zionist Ideology.”

⁴ This has been the subject of my past research. See Steven Wagner, “British Intelligence and the Jewish Resistance Movement in the Palestine Mandate, 1945–46,” *Intelligence and National Security* 23, no. 5 (2008): pp. 629–57; Steven Wagner, “Whispers from Below: Zionist Secret Diplomacy, Terrorism and British Security Inside and Out of Palestine, 1944–47,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 3 (March 14, 2014): pp. 440–63, doi:10.1080/03086534.2014.895136.

⁵ Much credit for this section goes to Motti Golani, whose forthcoming biography of Weizmann is much-anticipated.

then founded the Palestine Land Development Company, which purchased land, trained Jews in agriculture, and established Jewish agricultural colonies in Palestine.⁶

Nineteen Seven was Weizmann's first articulation of a Zionist strategy. Until that time, the World Zionist Congress was divided between "political" and "practical" Zionists. The former sought to achieve the support of great powers for the establishment of a Jewish homeland or state. The latter sought to build the Jewish homeland or future state from the ground up through immigration and settlement, with or without official support from the British, German, Ottoman or other governments. At the 8th Zionist congress, Political Zionists would not support practical endeavours in Palestine without an official charter from the Ottoman government, or more likely, a foreign power with extraterritorial rights such as Britain or Germany. Weizmann and other leaders found compromise as he argued that the two were not mutually exclusive, but co-dependent. This was "Synthetic" Zionism, which agreed with the need for official support for establishing a Jewish homeland, but also that this support would be easier to obtain with a significant territorial establishment in the country. Conversely, expansion of Zionist colonies would be facilitated by official sanction.⁷

The achievement was significant, although it is often dismissed as a terribly congressional, legalistic way of pathfinding the Jewish National Home. It was important because the congress's inability to define its objectives. Weizmann's synthetic approach meant that this question did not have to be answered in a body politic where consensus was unlikely to be achieved. Synthetic Zionism remained central to the strategic policy of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) until after the Second World War. The strategy was growth: demographic, economic, territorial and more. It was also growth in terms of influence or partnership with a great power. It was the very foundation of the conditions which enabled Israeli independence.

⁶ Jehuda Reinharz, *Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Zionist Leader* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁷ The following sources provide useful surveys of congressional Zionist politics as well as Weizmann's role: Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology*, pp. 108–118; Derek Jonathan Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy: The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1870-1918* (Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 41–79 throughout; Ben Halpern, *A Clash of Heroes: Brandeis, Weizmann, and American Zionism: Brandeis, Weizmann, and American Zionism* (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 50–53.

By the time of the First World War, Weizmann had been living in Britain for a decade and was an active member in the British Zionist movement. For reasons which will soon become obvious, in 1917 he became president of the British Zionist federation. Through a combination of luck and political skill, Weizmann persuaded the British government to champion the Zionist cause and include the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine as a part of its own war strategy.⁸ By doing so, the largely German-speaking Zionist movement was hijacked by Britain, which believed that world Jewish influence was vital to the war effort, especially in the United States. Weizmann's ability to persuade British policymakers remained a key asset of the Zionist movement until at least 1931, when he interfered in British domestic politics in order to reverse a government White Paper which sought to limit Jewish immigration.⁹

In the midst of the 1915 shell crisis, Weizmann offered the British government his patented synthetic process for creating acetone – vital for the reduction of smoke produced by artillery batteries and therefore the security of their positions. The patent made Weizmann wealthy. His cooperation with the cabinet and contribution to the war effort gave him influence. He became a member of Britain's elite ruling class where he began to field the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine along with other prominent Zionists, both Jewish and not. His aggressive yet masterful approach to woo British policymakers ultimately resulted in the infamous Balfour Declaration, issued by the Foreign Secretary, with cabinet approval, to Baron Rothschild on 2 November 1917 (before Palestine had even been conquered):

His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.¹⁰

⁸ Jehuda Reinharz, *Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Statesman* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), chap. 6.

⁹ Joseph Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism, 1917-1948* (Routledge, 2013), pp. 88–104; Michael J. Cohen, *Britain's Moment in Palestine: Retrospect and Perspectives, 1917-1948* (Routledge, 2014), p. 230.

¹⁰ Jonathan Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration : The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Random House, 2010), p. 341.

Historians have given many explanations for this dramatic policy. The latest research agrees that British policymakers believed it would help them win the war.¹¹

In effect, this was a hijacking. The WZO had moved to Copenhagen during the war for the sake of neutrality, which happened also to become the hub for Zionist spies who were supporting the Palestine campaign. Germany had been a promising champion for world Jewry as the enemy of the Czar and since it promoted emancipation in the east. Paralyzed by the fractures of the war, the WZO was compelled into the British camp by the Balfour Declaration and subsequent British victory. By tying Britain to the Zionist movement, Weizmann fulfilled a number of strategic objectives at once. His synthetic strategy for the future of the movement was given new energy and a clear set of objectives on what was expected to be a long path to statehood. The Political Zionists finally had the sponsorship of a great power, vague as it was, which they had sought since Herzl convened the first congress in 1897. Practical Zionists finally had the means to deploy even more resources and expand the Yishuv quicker than any time since Zionist settlement began in 1882. The concept of a Jewish National Home neither precluded nor excluded the possibility of statehood. It did however lay out a set of expectations which satisfied the broad majority of the Zionist movement: The support and protection of a great power, the promise of immigration and settlement of an unprecedented scale, and some degree of self-government for the Yishuv.

This moment created a significant dependency of the Zionists on Britain. Weizmann's next major contribution to Zionist grand strategy was to frame this as a co-dependency rather than a one-sided balance of power. Simultaneously, he ensured that Britain would keep its promise by making it part of their legal claim to rule in Palestine. As James Renton discussed, the Balfour Declaration was not meant to be the constitutional basis for the Mandate, but for other reasons, it became so.¹² By 1922, Britain's promise to the Zionists for a Jewish National Home became its international

¹¹ James Renton, *The Zionist Masquerade: The Birth of the Anglo-Zionist Alliance, 1914-18* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), chap. 4; Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration*, pp. 9, 12, 14.

¹² James Renton, "Flawed Foundations: The Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate," in *Britain, Palestine and Empire the Mandate Years*, ed. Rory Miller (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 27-30, 34, 37.

legal obligation under the League of Nations Mandate system. As a leader, manager and politician, Weizmann was instrumental to that end.

Through his diplomacy and work in favour of British aims at the Paris peace conference, Weizmann continued his wartime pattern of assistance to the British Empire in the hopes for political reward. In the process, he and others realized they had fostered a co-dependency between Britain and the Yishuv. This relationship would be exploited for the remainder of British rule. There were three aspects to Weizmann's support for British aims. First, his diplomacy with British officers in Egypt helped to cement the idea that Zionism would work in favour of British war aims and postwar interests. Second, he fostered close intelligence and security cooperation with the military government, an extension of activities which began during the war. Britain's possession of Palestine depended on the agreement of the peace conference. The maintenance of security during 1919 prevented any doubt in the minds of the Paris delegates about the viability of British rule. Likewise, the conference needed to be convinced that Arab and Zionist interests would not collide. So, with British encouragement, Weizmann came to terms with the Hashemite Arab leader, Feisal in 1918. The pair met again on the eve of the Paris peace conference, demonstrating that British guardianship over the region was in the best interests of the local people. By August 1919, consensus at the new League of Nations was that Britain should have a mandate over Palestine. Weizmann's contributions to British interests helped persuade decision makers during 1921-22 to include the Balfour Declaration in the constitution of the Palestine Mandate, making Jewish immigration and settlement a matter of international and colonial law.¹³

Britain had appointed a Zionist Commission, headed by Weizmann, to investigate and advise about how to implement the Balfour declaration. It focused on humanitarian work such as refugee relief and the repatriation of Jews expelled by the Turks, but also continued intelligence work which began in 1915 with the NILI spy ring, which had supported the British war effort until it was discovered and broken up. Thereafter, some of NILI's surviving members continued to work for the Egyptian Expeditionary Force as pathfinders and intelligence officers. In April 1918, Weizmann

¹³ Steven Wagner, "British Intelligence and Policy in the Palestine Mandate, 1919-1939" (DPhil, University of Oxford, 2014), chap. 2.

arrived in Egypt and began to meet with intelligence officers and generals, including Allenby and the head of his Arab Bureau, Gilbert Clayton. They were impressed by Weizmann's intelligence and openness.¹⁴ Clayton, originally skeptical about the Balfour Declaration, was persuaded that reconciliation was possible.¹⁵ Weizmann, for his part, reported that he intended to tell Feisal he could depend on Jews to help him build his Arab kingdom. 'We shall be his neighbours and we do not represent any danger to him, as we are not and never shall be a great power. We are the natural intermediaries between Great Britain and the Hedjaz.'¹⁶ Clayton thought the Feisal and Weizmann a great success, and told Gertrude Bell, then Oriental Secretary in Baghdad, that their accord far exceeded his expectations. He thought Zionism would make Palestine a "strong outpost to Egypt."¹⁷ Weizmann and the Zionist Commission emphasized that they did not aim to create a state in the immediate future. Arabs could be reassured by British control. Yet Clayton emphasized that 'local feeling has to be studied and conciliated... as it might re-act on the more important Arab elements on whom our Arab policy is based and who are a great military and political asset.'¹⁸ Reconciling local feeling became all the more important with the opening of the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919. Anglo-French designs for a mandate system under the League of Nations, wherein great powers had to guide local populations towards self-sufficiency and independence, made the appearance of Arab-Zionist cooperation all the more important.

In order to support Britain's case to the conference, Feisal and Weizmann met again just before it convened in 1919. In Palestine, Arab nationalist societies began to emerge in November 1918. These groups posed varying threats to Britain's claim to Palestine. Pro-French societies preferred French control over a Syrian mandate. Some liberals preferred an American mandate while still others preferred Britain. The Arab Club, which formed the backbone of Feisal's popular support in Damascus, was dominated by those who demanded independence.¹⁹ At Clayton's instigation, Feisal

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–39.

¹⁵ Sudan Archive, Durham University. (SAD) 693/13/47. *Clayton to Sykes*. 4.4.1918.

¹⁶ SAD, 693/13/40, *Clayton to 'my dear general' (perhaps Wilson or Allenby)*. 4.2.1918

¹⁷ SAD 693/13/55. *Clayton to Bell*. 17.6.1918

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Wagner, "British Intelligence and Policy in the Palestine Mandate, 1919-1939," pp. 31, 41–43.

and Weizmann met again before the conference. They helped to persuade the conference, in the face of French suspicion, that British control in Palestine would be best for Zionists and Arabs.²⁰ By August 1919, after investigating local conditions on the ground, which actually had been stage-managed by British intelligence officers, the conference had in principle approved of a British Mandate over Palestine.²¹

The Feisal-Weizmann charade achieved its purpose; the prospect of achieving reconciliation between Zionists and Arab nationalists created a window through which British interests in the Middle East could be secured during the Paris peace negotiations. However, other issues could have torpedoed British control. Revolutionary violence threatened to convince the peace conference that the locals resisted British rule, and perhaps might lead them to reconsider the mandatory system. Anglo-Zionist intelligence cooperation prevented this from occurring.

British cooperation with Zionist intelligence groups had been ongoing since 1915. The NILI spy ring, run by the Aaronsohn family of Zichron Ya'akov, is an important part of Zionist history and mythology.²² With the conquest of southern Palestine complete, and the NILI ring having been discovered by Ottoman security, its surviving members served the British through the Jewish Bureau, established in cooperation with the military governor of Jaffa. Weizmann mobilized the Aaronsohns and their partners for the Zionist cause. They shared pro-British views, and Weizmann connected the Aaronsohns' accomplishments to the general Zionist contribution. Alex Aaronsohn and some of his colleagues had been monitoring Arab nationalist societies since they had emerged in 1918. By early 1919, it became clear that they were planning to cause disturbances which would coincide with the Nabi Musa (Prophet Moses) festival in Jerusalem, and thus embarrass Britain's claim to have popular support. They already had sent petitions to the Paris Peace Conference which rejected the Balfour Declaration and demanded Arab independence.²³

²⁰ The National Archives at Kew (TNA) FO 608/98/9. Feisal-Weizmann agreement. 16.1.1919. FO 608/98/8. Zionism in Palestine. 17.1.1919.

²¹ Wagner, "British Intelligence and Policy in the Palestine Mandate, 1919-1939," pp. 46-49.

²² The story of Sarah Aaronsohn's spy work, capture and execution has been read by Israeli schoolchildren for decades-Billie Melman, "The Legend of Sarah: Gender Memory and National Identities," *Journal of Israeli History* 21, no. 1-2 (2002): pp. 55-92.

²³ Wagner, "British Intelligence and Policy in the Palestine Mandate, 1919-1939," p. 31.

Zionist intelligence, shared with Britain, prevented organized nationalist violence during 1919, even as it exploded in Egypt and Syria. Clayton warned the FO of the danger of anti-Zionist propaganda, prevalent among Muslims and Christians, who feared that Jews would receive political and economic advantage at the peace conference. He warned, 'There are considerable grounds for belief that anti-Jewish riots are being prepared in Jerusalem, Jaffa and elsewhere. Precautions are being taken but an announcement that Jews will be given any special privileges might precipitate outbreak...'²⁴ Violence might embarrass Britain at the peace conference, and jeopardize its claim to a Mandate over Palestine, which rested on the Feisal-Weizmann agreement and the premise that Arabs and Jews needed Britain for development.

The warning originated with Angelo Levi-Bianchini, an Italian naval commander, attaché to the military government in Palestine, and also member of Weizmann's staff at the ZC. With Alex Aaronsohn, he built an intelligence network to monitor nationalists in Jerusalem. Their intelligence was shared with the Zionists and the British government.²⁵ Robert Szold, an American member of the ZC, forwarded Bianchini's report about impending disturbances to Weizmann so that he could deliver it to the FO. 'Some Arabs are very well organised, weapons, signals, leaders are ready, they wait for action against Jews only a signal.' This was expected to emerge after the peace conference. British administrators including Clayton feared a massacre. Szold added that all the reports 'confirm an increasingly alarming situation with bloodshed threatened.'²⁶

The warning led to the deployment of a battalion in Jerusalem and warning to Arab leaders against any violence. By preventing revolution, Britain suppressed what would have been an obvious sign of local opposition to foreign government. A side effect of intelligence-sharing was an increase in British sympathy for Zionism, despite growing signs that it would be hard to enforce. It was also well-timed since, in Paris, staff intelligence officers began to negotiate borders and administration of mandates with France.

²⁴ TNA, FO 608/99. ff 230. *Clayton to FO*, 26.3.1919.

²⁵ His connection to Aaronsohn is established in Italian documents described in Yitzhak Minerbi, "Angelo Levi Bianchini U-Fe'iluto BaMizrach (1918-1920)," *HaTzionut* 1 (1970): pp. 296-356.

²⁶ TNA, FO 608/99. ff. 297. *Bianchini to Weizmann*. n.d. ca. spring 1919.

By keeping to a strategy which precluded the establishment of a Jewish state and which supported British interests, Weizmann's Zionist policy gained more traction than could have been imagined between 1897 and 1917. His synthetic strategy found fulfilment as Weizmann convinced British officers of the value of their partnership with Zionism. The Feisal-Weizmann accord, although it may have not been worth much to Arabs or Jews at the time or thereafter, meant a lot to Britain as it made its case in Paris. Moreover, Weizmann adopted former NILI agents and thus became the main intermediary between them and the British, turning their accomplishments into Zionist ones. Thereby, his diplomacy emphasized Zionism's security contribution to Britain's hold over Palestine. This helps to explain how the Balfour Declaration became part of the constitution of the mandate. It was reward for a fruitful Anglo-Zionist partnership. This must be considered one of the most significant parts of Weizmann's legacy: He left a long lasting pattern of cooperation with the aim of fostering the development of a future Jewish state. No doubt that statehood was made possible through British support for Jewish immigration until 1939 alongside the high degree of autonomy it gave the Yishuv. The roots of this support can be found in Weizmann's strategy.

Jabotinsky

Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky was an unlikely Zionist leader, let alone strategist. He was born into a middle class, Russian-speaking family in Odessa. He was raised in a Jewish and Zionist environment, although he had little connection to the religion and only later developed his Zionist views. One recent biography by novelist Hillel Halkin points out that unlike Ben-Gurion or Weizmann, Jabotinsky was not a product of the Shtetl. His family spoke Russian, not Yiddish. He went to a secular *gymnasium* instead of *Heder*, or religious school. Jabotinsky was not afraid of Gentiles, which made him seem "not at all Jewish" to the likes of Weizmann. Halkin argues that only in the cosmopolitan, mixed environment of Odessa of the late 19th century could "an Eastern European Jew feel both deeply Jewish and totally at ease with non-Jews."²⁷ Jabotinsky's career began as a journalist, writing for a Russian newspaper from Italy and Switzerland. He graduated from law school in Rome where he enjoyed a bohemian

²⁷ Hillel Halkin, *Jabotinsky: A Life* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 13–14.

student lifestyle and became very fond of his host country. Significantly, his degree dissertation was on the problem of minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On his first trip to Palestine in 1908 where he covered the Young Turk revolution, he concluded that neither power nor landholder would give Palestine to the Jews – it would have to be taken.²⁸

It is important to understand these issues in order to appreciate how he came to lead the Zionist right, but also how he came to be so alienated from Zionist left, which began to portray him as a villain as early as 1920. When it came to grand strategy, Jabotinsky was ahead of his time. He was a visionary and a man of many firsts: He was the first to attach the concept of Anglo-Zionist security cooperation to their shared political aims. He helped to found the Haganah and organized the defence of Jerusalem's Jews during the 1920 riots. He understood early on that military power was a key ingredient to statehood. He was the first to demand statehood in an environment where Zionist politics could not entertain the notion. He was the first to understand the power of youth mobilization, the first to organize an attempt to defy British restrictions on Jewish immigration, and was the first to call for armed rebellion in 1939 when those restrictions became crushing. Despite all this, he lacked tactics. If his aim was to found an independent Jewish state, he never implemented practical steps to that end. His movement struggled with other Zionists over philosophy and the means to a Jewish state. He lost control over it to extremists, some of whom had fascist sympathies, and with whom he had to compromise until Italian race laws in 1938 made allegiances a simpler matter. Nonetheless, while his practical contribution is difficult to trace, his overall impact on Zionist strategy was substantial. It is fair to say that he shortened the path to Israeli statehood, especially since he was one of very few Zionist leaders willing to say that this should be the movement's aim. This was his main demand from Britain, and his main point of contention with Weizmann.

Before he was in conflict with Weizmann, Jabotinsky was counted among his partners. Arriving in Egypt in December 1914, Jabotinsky was instrumental in founding the Zion Mule Corps – a British unit of 650 Jews, mainly exiles from Palestine of Russian

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 66–67.

origin, which served at Gallipoli.²⁹ Jabotinsky aimed to influence British policy through military cooperation in the war effort. Later in 1915, knowing that he would have to make his case in London, Jabotinsky shared rented rooms in London with Weizmann. By early 1917, Jabotinsky began to make his case using Weizmann's connections as well as the partnership of the Mule Corps commander, John Henry Patterson. With the passage of the Military Service Act, it became possible to recruit non-citizens into the British army, and London's east end Jews were amongst the largest untapped human resource. Previously they were looked upon suspiciously – they were anti-Czar and were thought to have Bolshevik sympathy. Jabotinsky responded to social strife in the east end of London by circulating a petition arguing that these Jews only wished to serve on the Palestine front. Changes in political leadership as well as a general increase in sympathy for Zionism made this possible, and the Jewish Legion was formed. Jabotinsky joined as an officer of the Royal Fusiliers, which saw action towards the end of the Palestine campaign. Veterans of the legion who remained in Palestine eventually became the backbone of the Haganah, which Jabotinsky would help to establish in 1920.³⁰

All these activities were designed to increase British sympathy for Zionism while simultaneously preparing the movement for its own self-sufficiency and perhaps a future assertive policy. Since the 1903 Kishinev pogrom, Jabotinsky held that Jewish self-defence organizations were the only reliable safeguard against violence whether in Russia, London, Leeds or Palestine.³¹ In early 1920, with communal violence on the horizon, Jabotinsky and other ex-legionnaires organized a self-defence organization called *Haganah* (defence). They undertook drills and exercises, had a tiny armoury, and took on Jabotinsky's concept of Jewish self-defence that it should not be "a clandestine affair" – as the Haganah later became. Their open activities were an attempt to show force and capability to increasingly hostile Arab nationalists.³² By the April Nabi Musa festival of 1920, Arab nationalist violence broke out in Jerusalem and, at the behest of the Zionist Organization, Jabotinsky organized the defence of the city's Jews. The military government arrested him and his small group for illegal possession of arms,

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 99–104.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 101–107; Joseph B. Schechtman, *The Life and Times of Vladimir Jabotinsky: Rebel and Statesman* (Silver Spring, MD: Eshel Books, 1956), pp. 223–237.

³¹ He even supported Jewish militias in Russia and Ukraine.

³² Schechtman, *The Life and Times of Vladimir Jabotinsky*, pp. 79–83; Halkin, *Jabotinsky*, pp. 51–52.

both embarrassed about the loss of control in Jerusalem but also responding to a complaint by a Jerusalem notable who was assaulted by a group of Jews believed to be led by Jabotinsky. In the following months, British officials and Weizmann and his followers repaired Anglo-Zionist relations. The League of Nations approved of a British Mandate over Palestine within weeks of the riot, and Britain rushed to replace the military government with a civilian one. The Haganah remained a disorganized band of militants until it was given new life, funding and purpose by the Jewish Labour Federation, the Histadrut. Jabotinsky was released later in 1920 having been abandoned by leading Zionists and scapegoated by the British. Even the organizers of the April riots were granted amnesty before him.³³

Alienated, Jabotinsky began to point out what he saw as flaws in Weizmann's policy. His criticism was especially intense when Churchill, as colonial secretary, partitioned Palestine and Transjordan into separate entities where the Balfour Declaration only applied to the former. In 1923 he founded Revisionist Zionism and published *The Iron Wall* – a Russian-language essay which outlined his main criticisms of Weizmann's policy and Anglo-Zionist relations. While Zionist institutions in Palestine invested a fortune in fostering good relations with Arabs, Jabotinsky argued that there was no point. Palestinian Arabs would never agree to a Jewish majority or state in Palestine. He still believed in the need for the support of a great power, but insisted that the partnership with Britain should be based on an honest understanding of what Arabs would and would not accept.³⁴ Jabotinsky later worked with British MP Josiah Wedgwood to promote the idea of turning Palestine into the seventh dominion of the British Empire.³⁵

What was left of Jabotinsky's faith in Britain was lost in 1929 when violence revisited the country, leaving scores killed across the country. Like the rest of the Yishuv, Jabotinsky was appalled at Britain's failure to protect the population. Seeing him as an agitator, a threat to public security and even to Weizmann's authority, the

³³ Wagner, "British Intelligence and Policy in the Palestine Mandate, 1919-1939," pp. 66–68, 74–75.

³⁴ Schechtman, *The Life and Times of Vladimir Jabotinsky*, 434; Halkin, *Jabotinsky*, p. 138; Uriel Abulof, "National Ethics in Ethnic Conflicts: The Zionist 'Iron Wall' and the 'Arab Question,'" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 14 (December 6, 2014): pp. 2653–69, doi:10.1080/01419870.2013.854921.

³⁵ Colin Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism: Nationalism and the Origins of the Israeli Right* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2006), pp. 86–92.

Colonial Office informed him in 1930 that he would not be permitted to re-enter Palestine after visiting South Africa. Jabotinsky called for the establishment of a Jewish state rather than a “national home”, and he began on the path towards uncompromising political and defensive stances, modeled partly after the IRA.³⁶ His influence could still be felt through his followers, yet some of these were drawn to Maximalist Revisionists an extremist branch of the Revisionist movement led by Abba Ahimeir. Some maximalists were sympathetic with Mussolini’s fascism, and used their youth group *Brit HaBiryonim* (Ruffians’ Alliance), which took a more extreme and militant stance than Jabotinsky’s youth movement, Betar. They engaged in street battles with Arab scout groups and even with the left wing Zionist youth movements.³⁷

Civil strife within the Yishuv between left and right became especially intense after the 1933 murder of Zionist leader Haim Arlosoroff. Arlosoroff was head of the Jewish Agency’s political department and had, with Ben-Gurion, founded the *Mapai* labour party. He clashed with Ben-Gurion over the Yishuv’s isolationism from British policy, which he felt was slowing progress to a Jewish national home. He was also fiercely critical of the Revisionists, whom he had accused of provoking Arab animosity in the lead-up to the 1929 riots. The Revisionists’ hatred for Arlosoroff boiled-over after the signing of the 1933 *Ha’avara* (transfer) agreement with Nazi Germany. The deal allowed the emigration of German Jews to Palestine with most of their property, but helped Germany avoid a growing boycott movement. Jews consigned deposits to the Nazi state in order to finance German exports to Palestine and elsewhere.³⁸ Arlosoroff negotiated the agreement, aiming to rescue German Jews from persecution and to accelerate Jewish immigration to Palestine. After returning from negotiations, Arlosoroff was murdered while walking on the beach in Tel Aviv. The outrage of the Zionist left was unprecedented, and some 70-100,000 attended his funeral. Two accused assassins were acquitted after months of court proceedings. Ahimeir was cleared of the charge of ordering the murder before the trial began. Colin Shindler argued that the

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 110–115, 143–147.

³⁷ Halkin, *Jabotinsky*, pp. 176–182; Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism*, pp. 154–162; Wagner, “British Intelligence and Policy in the Palestine Mandate, 1919-1939,” pp. 210, 216–17.

³⁸ Yfaat Weiss, “The Transfer Agreement and the Boycott Movement: A Jewish Dilemma on the Eve of the Holocaust,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): pp. 129–72. Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism*, pp. 175–180.

arrest of the two accused alongside Ahimeir was Britain's attempt to rescue Jabotinsky from the maximalists and that the trials effectively separated the two rightist factions.³⁹

As court proceedings ensued, violent tensions grew in the streets of Tel Aviv. Betar and the Biryonim regularly confronted left-wing groups, including a newly founded antifa (anti-fascist) vigilante group. Street clashes became the regular subject of police reports. The Criminal Investigation Department believed civil war was likely. In late 1934, Ben Gurion and Jabotinsky met to discuss the problem and reached terms.⁴⁰ This was no easy task for two bitter opponents. Years earlier, Ben Gurion had compared Jabotinsky to Hitler and Symon Petliura, the latter having been believed to have Jewish blood on his hands from the pogroms of 1917-22.⁴¹ Both Jabotinsky and Ben Gurion struggled to persuade their parties to accept the peace, and paid a political price for the compromise. Despite the rejection of the negotiated deal, extreme actions were curbed by spring 1935.⁴² According to Yosef Gorny, no radical political change occurred within this system, thanks to the power wielded by the Histadrut and a paradoxical phenomenon within the Yishuv, where rival ideologies curbed action against each other and shaped a common political-social framework. The voluntary nature of Zionist politics tended to curb extreme reactions.⁴³

Jabotinsky maintained considerable influence over the Zionist right throughout this period, but from 1930 until 1938 was constantly contending with the maximalist/fascist section. Revisionist militants were not originally maximalists, but splintered from the Haganah and later became known as Irgun Zvai Leumi, or National Military Organization (henceforth Irgun). Irgun was founded by officers who opposed socialism within Haganah and demanded their own arms stocks. During the Arab rebellion of 1936-39, they opposed the Haganah's policy of restraint. In 1937, the Irgun

³⁹ Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism*, pp. 175–180.

⁴⁰ Wagner, "British Intelligence and Policy in the Palestine Mandate, 1919-1939," pp. 216–217, 224.

⁴¹ Petliura's guilt has been disputed. What is important is that in 1932 he was believed to have had spilled more Jewish blood than anyone in living memory. India Office Records (IOR) L/PS/10/1315. *CID summary* 50/32. 23.12.1932.

⁴² IOR L/PS/12/3343. *CID Summary* 15/34.12.11.1934.; *summary* 17/34. 6.12.1934.; *summary* 6/35. 27.2.1935.; *summary* 6/35. 27.2.1935. Central Zionist Archive (CZA) S25/22735. *Air Staff Intelligence*. 2.5.1935.;

⁴³ Yossef Gorney, "The Voluntaristic Zionist System in Trial (Hebrew)," in *Toldot Ha-Yishuv Ha-Yehudi Be-'Eres-Yisra'el: Me-'az Ha-'aliyah Ha-Ri'shonah. Tekufat Ha-Mandaq Ha-Briqi*, ed. Moshe Lissak, Anita Shapira, and Gavriel Cohen (Jerusalem: "Daf-Noy" press, 1994), p. 554.

split again, with about half its membership returning to the Haganah. The remainder tended to be maximalist members of Betar, who renewed a violent policy of reprisals against Arab civilians.⁴⁴ Jewish-Arab bloodletting reached unprecedented levels during 1938 – the climax of the rebellion. It alienated British support for Zionism in some quarters of the army, but also caused the Haganah's intelligence section to found a revisionist unit to monitor their activities.

Mussolini's 1938 race laws facilitated the revisionists' retreat from fascism, although not completely. By 1940 Irgun splintered a second time, and the new group led by Abraham (Yair) Stern uncompromisingly opposed Irgun's cease fire with Britain during the Second World War. They even approached the German and Italian governments for alliances, naively believing in the maxim, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."⁴⁵ Later that year, Jabotinsky died of a heart attack in New York State. Regardless of what became of Revisionist Zionism in subsequent years, there is no doubt that Jabotinsky's criticisms of the left and its strategy alongside his demands for independent statehood were his lasting legacies. Jabotinsky was a visionary ahead of his time, but lacked a workable strategy to achieve his aims. He spoke of population transfer before the rest of the Zionists considered it, he was the first to demand statehood, and the first to understand the role of security cooperation in Anglo-Zionist relations. Weizmann's main retort to Jabotinsky since their rivalry began was that "A state cannot be created by decree."⁴⁶ This issue remained salient in Jabotinsky's inability to articulate how a Jewish state would come into being without outlining the steps in between. His limited ability to sway the revisionist movement was a serious obstacle to his objectives. He exerted enough control to achieve some peace within Zionism's left-right divide, but in the end, his legacy was carried on by the maximalist faction – especially once Menachem Begin took charge of Irgun in late 1943.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror out of Zion: The Fight for Israeli Independence* (Transaction Publishers, 1996), pp. 23–24, 33–46.

⁴⁵ Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics, and Terror, 1940-1949* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 6, 30–95 This also covers matters relating to Jabotinsky and Ahimeir.

⁴⁶ Chaim Weizmann, *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann: August 1898-July 1931* (Transaction Publishers, 1983), p. 301.

⁴⁷ Begin had been critical of Jabotinsky's peace with Ben Gurion, and was considered by Jabotinsky to be more aligned with Ahimeir than himself.

David Ben Gurion

David Ben Gurion was a master strategist. As a policymaker he gave direction to his movement. As a decision maker, he was an improviser during dynamic circumstances. He invented little, but made full use of the institutional and human resources at hand. He gave strength, energy and momentum to the Zionist movement via its complex set of institutions. This in turn fueled the engine of statehood. Ben Gurion's strategy never was fully articulated. The sum of his speeches and letters indicate that independent statehood was his strategic objective for both the fulfillment of Zionist aims and also the solution to the Jewish question. The mess of Zionist institutions and parties which he would come to dominate prevented him making official policy out of his personal vision. Rather, he constantly negotiated Zionist party politics within the Yishuv and at the WZO, as well as the interests of Britain. In retrospect it is easy to say that Ben Gurion planned statehood all along. Here it is argued that he led preparations for statehood, but did not plan on it in the long term.

Ben Gurion's contributions to Zionist strategy were political, philosophical, and organizational. He played a leading role in the unity of the various Zionist left wing parties. His leadership in the labour movement, his achievement of unity within the Zionist left, and his domination of Zionist institutions were key ingredients for statehood. Ben Gurion can also be credited for his share in finding peace with the revisionists in late 1934, despite violent opposition to it from within his own ranks. Ben Gurion's domination also enabled the growth of the Yishuv's assets in hard security and intelligence. Most significantly, David Ben Gurion was the first mainstream Zionist leader to depart from the Balfour Declaration policy maintained by Weizmann when, in 1942, he called for the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. While still an ambiguous objective, this was his way of openly aiming for independence without alienating the bulk of Zionists who feared such a policy. Ben Gurion was a combination of a strategist and tactician in a theatre of accidents. Nonetheless, his leadership led to the foundation of the State of Israel.

Under Ben Gurion's leadership, the labour movement saw itself as a key ingredient for statehood. An example illustrating the connection between his philosophy and strategy can be found in his belief that Jews immigrating to Palestine

needed to go through a transformative process. Before the First World War, he wrote to his father regarding his uncle's plan to bring a lottery to Palestine. Deprecating it, he said, "Eretz Yisrael [Palestine] must be a process of repairing and purifying our lives, changing our values in the loftiest sense of the term. If we merely bring the life of the ghetto into Eretz Yisrael, then what's the difference if we live that life here or live it there?"⁴⁸ He did not invent the concept of personal or spiritual transformation, which had existed since the first Zionist settlers arrived in the 19th century. Ben Gurion included this transformation into his policy. Ben Gurion's labour party held that the creation of a Jewish proletariat would extend the process of transformation to a mass movement whose members would feel personally and collectively responsible for building up the homeland.⁴⁹

Ben Gurion's attachment to and leadership within the labour movement is significant. It became one of the main vehicles for statehood. His tendency towards realpolitik, but also his mixed liberal-socialist-Zionist ideology, helps to explain why, during 1928-36, the labour movement oscillated between the encouragement of cooperation with Arabs at times, and the exclusion of them in favour of "Hebrew Labour" at others.⁵⁰ Cooperation was seen as the basis for security and also as a means to demonstrate to Arabs the positive effect of Zionism on the country. Exclusion of Arabs was a response to both economic recession and communal violence. It also was a way to absorb a massive wave of immigration which began in 1931 in response to the persecution of Jews in central Europe.

Ben Gurion's labour movement began with a number of challenges. Immigration to Palestine was slow during the 1920 and the economy was thus far slow to transform. The 1920 foundation of the Histadrut provided a new venue for debate amongst Zionist parties, but also became a vehicle for the ideologically motivated to go about transforming the Yishuv's economy. The labour federation was not Ben Gurion's achievement alone, although his party dominated it and his leadership was therefore significant. Its near monopolization of the Yishuv's labour market became an important source of power for Ben Gurion personally, but also the Yishuv as a community. Its

⁴⁸ Shim'on Peres, *Ben-Gurion: A Political Life* (Nextbook/Schocken, 2011), pp. 24–25.

⁴⁹ Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 50–33.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 202–207.

achievements in the development of the country impressed British officials and proved to them that the Zionist policy had been constructive. By the 1930s, its power was a force to be reckoned with.

By uniting most of the leftist parties in 1930 and founding Mapai, a greater than ever source of authority was able to emerge. By 1935, Ben Gurion was chair of the Jewish Agency, which represented the Yishuv and all of world Jewry in Palestine and was delegated by the WZO to undertake the building of a national home. Simultaneously, he was chair of his party, Mapai, which dominated the Jewish Agency executive, the WZO, the Histadrut, and the Va'ad Leumi (National Council). These separate but overlapping institutions became the vehicles for the growth of Ben Gurion's personal influence and power. These agencies wielded the power of high diplomacy with great powers, connections with Zionist federations around the world, the labour force in Palestine, and the various self-governing institutions of the Yishuv. Mapai dominated Zionism's people power, as well as its economic, military, financial and diplomatic resources.

In the summer of 1937, while visiting London, Ben-Gurion was summoned to a meeting with the local Zionist Federation. Rumours had leaked to the press about the findings of the Royal Commission, headed by Lord Peel, to investigate a solution to the Palestine problem. Palestine had been rocked by general strike and rebellion during 1936 as Arabs, fearing for their homeland, sought to bring an immediate end to British support for Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine and to gain autonomy or even independence. The Peel Commission had concluded that the best solution was partition of the country into a Jewish state, a much-reduced British Mandate covering the Jerusalem-Jaffa corridor, and an independent Arab state merged with Transjordan.⁵¹ The partition proposal divided the Zionist movement along and across party lines. Summoned by the British Zionist Federation, Ben Gurion responded to press rumours anticipating partition:

- a) I haven't seen the report... My impression from the unofficial pieces and extracts is that... it creates for us a good strategic basis for our

⁵¹ United Kingdom Government, "Palestine Royal Commission Report," November 30, 1937, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Histroy/peel1.html>.

- political war and increases British public opinion for recognizing our rights in Palestine and the importance of our enterprise.
- b) Until the [next World Zionist] Congress there is no Zionist body, neither the administration nor executive board, which is authorized to take final decisions or to commit to any position...
 - c) Until the congress, we must recruit all of our political and intellectual assets in order to destroy the central assumption of the report, which is "the unworkability of the Mandate."⁵²

Ben Gurion insisted upon fighting the commission's assumption that the Mandate was "unworkable". Partnership with Britain remained fundamental to the whole Zionist enterprise, in his view. By no means did he desire an end to British power in the region, rather he wanted more of it.

The partition proposals were hated by Jews and Arabs alike, yet parts of the Zionist movement saw in it an opportunity to achieve something now and mitigate the risk of receiving nothing in the future. The partition proposal rocked the unity of the Yishuv, as well as Mapai. Ben Gurion rightly feared the consequences of any commitment from any Zionist body or party without some kind of debate. Therefore, he insisted that no statement should be issued by any Zionist agency, anywhere. He aimed to exert his own plan at the forthcoming congress. His openness towards partition hurt his popularity.⁵³

This lack of clear policy from any official Zionist body was normal. They could not even agree about the objectives of the Zionist enterprise beyond Jewish immigration and settlement. Despite Ben Gurion's increasing domination over Zionist institutions, he still had to work within them. By 1942, that had changed, and Ben Gurion could work around erstwhile opposition to a change in to the aim of a "Jewish National Home", shared by both WZO and British policy. Circumstances of the war provoked an extraordinary Zionist conference, since a normal WZO session could not be held. With increasing news of the plight of European Jews, and in the devastating wake of Britain's 1939 White Paper which had limited Jewish immigration and settlement, Ben Gurion

⁵² Ben Gurion Archive (BGA), Sde Boker. Ben Gurion Diary. 5.7.1937. item no. 223590.

⁵³ Israel Kolatt, "Ben Gurion: Image and Reality," in *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel*, ed. Ronald W. Zweig (Routledge, 2013), pp. 28–29.

and Weizmann convened a special conference at the Biltmore Hotel in New York. As head of Mapai and the Jewish Agency, Ben Gurion called for the immediate establishment of a “Jewish Commonwealth” in Palestine and the abrogation of the 1939 White Paper which had limited Jewish immigration and settlement. In fact, Ben Gurion aimed to absorb 2,000,000 new immigrants, an ambition later reduced by half. This was also the moment when Weizmann, in practical terms, lost influence over the Yishuv’s policy towards Britain.⁵⁴ Ben Gurion succeeded at persuading North American Jews about the merits of the Biltmore programme, but as usual, he faced opposition from his own party in Palestine, which fractured somewhat. Weakened but still dominating, Ben Gurion now had the confidence of the labour movement, world Jewry, and the Yishuv.⁵⁵

This aggressive approach paralleled the development in growth of the stately tools available to Ben Gurion. From 1935 to 1945, Ben Gurion oversaw the transformation of the Haganah. With his policy guidance, it became an institution driven by knowledge and technology – still characteristic of the Israel Defense Forces. Yishuv intelligence underwent a similar process. By 1945, this slow and complex process resulted in a sizeable paramilitary, and skilled intelligence and diplomatic services. As Britain chose in 1945 to maintain immigration restrictions in Palestine, Ben Gurion used these tools against that policy. What resulted was the collapse of British rule altogether.

During the 1930s, the Haganah expanded significantly and became a sophisticated underground army with an offensive capability, a countrywide wireless service that included a cryptographic section, and secret arms stockpiles throughout Jewish colonies.⁵⁶ The Haganah’s intelligence service as well as that of the Jewish Agency’s political department grew during this time. From 1936 through the Second

⁵⁴ Dan Kurzman, *Ben Gurion: Prophet of Fire* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), pp. 235–239; Yosef Gorny, “Ben-Gurion and Weizmann during WWII,” in *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel*, ed. Ronald W. Zweig (Routledge, 2013), pp. 92–98; Dina Porat, “Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust,” in *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel*, ed. Ronald W. Zweig (Routledge, 2013), pp. 148–156.

⁵⁵ Avraham Avi-Hai, *Ben Gurion, State Builder: Principles and Pragmatism, 1948-1963* (Transaction Publishers, 1974), pp. 34–35.

⁵⁶ Wagner, “British Intelligence and Policy in the Palestine Mandate, 1919-1939”; Yoav Gelber, “Ben-Gurion and the Formation of the Israel Defence Forces, 1947-1948,” in *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel*, ed. Ronald W. Zweig (Routledge, 2013), pp. 193–215.

World War, their coverage of Arab nationalists, neighbouring Arab states, the British government, Revisionists, communists, and other threats became expert. Haganah and Jewish Agency intelligence were built on the principle that it was “not just for supplying information on current problems of the hour, rather as an auxiliary aid for the expected political and military struggle in the near future.”⁵⁷ Some have credited these services for shaping David Ben-Gurion’s “prophetic” view of events.⁵⁸ This argument is hard to ignore; Ben-Gurion’s personal involvement in the direction of intelligence work and his acute security-consciousness seem to have kept him a step ahead of MI5 when the open struggle with Britain emerged during 1945-46.

Beyond matters of relative competency, the shift in the balance of power between Britain and the Yishuv took place because of the very co-dependent nature of their relationship. This co-dependency, originally nurtured by Weizmann as discussed above, became weighted heavily in favour of the Yishuv because of Ben Gurion’s leadership. From 1915 until 1945, Zionist intelligence worked varyingly for and alongside its British counterparts. British intelligence taught their craft to Zionists during the First World War and also during the Arab revolt of 1936-39. At other times, Zionist intelligence proved vital to British power, such as the events of 1919, described above. Anglo-Zionist cooperation in covert action with Britain from 1938 until 1945 was absorbed by the Haganah’s institutional knowledge. Anyone trained by a British officer became a Haganah instructor in the same subject. This allowed for the expansion of Haganah’s signal service, which began as an auxiliary to the police during the mid-1930s.⁵⁹ Likewise, Haganah participation in Orde Wingate’s special night squads in 1938-39 improved the whole organization’s ability to take offensive action. This became even more sophisticated with the 1941 establishment of the Haganah’s strike force, *Palmach*, in response to the threat of German invasion, as well as experience gained by Haganah volunteers in the Special Operations Executive. Haganah’s improvements in tactics, technology and other practises were made possible by Ben Gurion’s dedication of funding resources to the Yishuv’s paramilitary and intelligence agencies, but also by

⁵⁷ Yoav Gelber, *Shorshe ha-havatsalet : ha-modi ‘in ba-yishuv, 1918-1947* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence Publications, 1992), pp. 498–50.

⁵⁸ Hezi Salomon, “Influence of the Intelligence Organizations of the Yishuv on BenGurion’s Appreciation of the Situation: 1946-1947,” *Ma’arechet* 309, no. July-Aug (1987): pp. 28–36.

⁵⁹ Monya Adam and Gershon Rivlin, *Kesher Amits: Me-‘Alilot Sherut Ha-Kesher Shel Ha-“Haganah”* (Ministry of Defence, 1986).

his trust in his staff and officers. He used that trust in 1947 to force uncomfortable change to the Haganah's general staff.⁶⁰ Ben Gurion enabled officers who were talented and earned their loyalty. Anglo-Zionist intelligence cooperation became a long term pattern where Zionists expected political reward for their support of Britain. By the 1939 White Paper, Zionists sensed betrayal of that pattern, but there was a world war to fight. By 1945 when the White Paper restrictions were maintained, the Zionist movement was, for the first time, able to do something about it.

As a strategist, Ben Gurion must be credited for seeing that opportunity. His support for cooperation with Britain before and during the Second World War tipped the balance of power in the Yishuv's favour after the war, although this was not an intentional process. In October 1945 when he ordered the Haganah to cooperate in an anti-British insurgency with its erstwhile enemies, the terrorist groups Irgun and Stern Gang, he did so knowing that Britain could never prove his connection to the violence or do much to stem it without negotiating. It was his intelligence services which suppressed terrorists during 1944-45, but moreover, Ben Gurion and his staff recognized Britain's dependency on Haganah and Jewish Agency intelligence for its own security.⁶¹ After two years of security cooperation against the terrorists, the Haganah was Britain's only reliable counter-terrorist source. Compounding that effect, secret British documents regularly found their way into the hands of Haganah and Jewish Agency intelligence and even sympathetic British officials in London leaked sensitive policy intelligence to Ben Gurion. Security was not as significant a problem for the Jewish Agency as it was for Britain – a problem recognized only by Ben Gurion and his staff.

This secret campaign became intense by the summer of 1946, culminating in the closure of the Jewish Agency during a major operation by the British army. Documents uncovered during those raids could not incriminate Ben Gurion, although it did not look good for him. Anyway, Ben Gurion was abroad and spared from arrest. Then

⁶⁰ Salomon, "Influence of the Intelligence Organizations of the Yishuv on BenGurion's Appreciation of the Situation: 1946-1947"; Gelber, "Ben-Gurion and the Formation of the Israel Defence Forces, 1947-1948," pp. 197-203.

⁶¹ Wagner, "British Intelligence and the Jewish Resistance Movement in the Palestine Mandate, 1945-46"; Wagner, "Whispers from Below."

Britain overplayed its hand by publishing intercepted Jewish Agency signals which suggested its role in leading the insurgency. By then this was an open secret anyway, and the evidence failed to indict Ben Gurion personally. It also led the Jewish Agency to change its codes, leaving Britain without a vital intelligence source for nearly one year – a period of fateful negotiation.⁶² The destruction of the King David Hotel in July led to the end of cooperation between Haganah and the terrorists. Anglo-Zionist relations remained icy, but were founded on the pattern originally sought by Ben Gurion where Britain pursued negotiations on the future of Palestine. In those negotiations, Ben Gurion gave very little in the way of concessions. In Palestine, the army was again restrained from acting against the Jewish Agency so as not to prejudice conferences in autumn 1946, and then January 1947. It was after this final conference that Britain referred the Palestine question to the United Nations, which recommended an end to Britain's Mandate and the partition of the country.⁶³

With Ben Gurion's encouragement and guidance, the Haganah controlled the flow of violence against Britain – increasing it when policy required more pressure, and decreasing it when cooperation was sought. He exploited Britain's dependency on the Yishuv in order to protest immigration restrictions. Yet there are signs he had more in mind. Asked in 1964 whether he was conscious in 1948 that he was the architect of a new state, Ben Gurion replied saying that unlike other states, Israel had to be built from the drawing board.

We had to start almost from scratch – I say almost because we had useful experience at the Jewish Agency administering the Jewish section of the country during the Mandatory period, and we also started planning the services of statehood more than a year earlier. But we now had to bring the drawing-board to life. We had to create a government administration, a parliament, and army. And we had to do all this under the violent pressure of battle.⁶⁴

His acknowledgement of the preparations for statehood before 1948 are significant. It was possible as a consequence of Britain's international legal role in

⁶² Wagner, "Whispers from Below," p. 445.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 446.

⁶⁴ David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Pearlman, *Ben Gurion Looks Back in Talks with Moshe Pearlman* (Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 120.

Palestine as a Mandatory power, but also because of its normal colonial practices with regards reliance on local forces for defence or security. The significance of the Haganah, its intelligence service and that of the Jewish Agency cannot be understated when describing how, after 30 years of partnership, the balance of power began to favour the Zionists over Britain. Ben Gurion's role was to recognize these opportunities, and to exploit them. He did so masterfully. This was possible because, by 1945, he was in a political position to defy British restrictions and assert his own policy. His domination of Zionist politics through Mapai made him the most significant strategist – no one before him maintained this level of influence.

Conclusion

This examination of Zionist grand strategy has taken into account the policy aims of Weizmann, Jabotinsky and Ben Gurion as a means of measuring their achievements. Since it is impossible to assess this question over the Zionist movement more generally, these three micro-biographies have helped to illustrate how the Zionist movement functioned, but also the agency of these subjects from within complex systems. What results is an improved understanding about how a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) became a state.

Weizmann remained opposed to anything anti-British. He was from an older generation of Zionists who believed that the support of a great power was vital to the establishment of a Jewish home, and that a state would be possible with that support alongside the building of the homeland from the ground-up. Living in hotels, appearing on Kibbutz farming collectives in a top hat and coattails, Weizmann was vital in the process towards statehood but could never have mobilized the Yishuv's people-power. Weizmann was visionary, and his strategies enabled statehood in a distant future. This was all he ever aimed for, and in the end, it is fair to say that this end was achieved. It was achieved quicker than he could have expected in 1917 because of Jabotinsky and Ben Gurion.

Jabotinsky was honest enough state explicitly his aims. His vision was significance, but tactics hindered his ability to have sweeping influence. When he did

not find acceptance in the Zionist mainstream, he founded his own party, a parallel “New” Zionist Organization, labour federation and paramilitary. He pursued his own diplomacy with Britain, aiming to hasten the path to independence within the framework of empire. He contributed the fewest material contributions to the objective of statehood, but is still worth considering for many other reasons. Jabotinsky helped to found the Haganah, although it was quickly taken from him. He was the founder of the Yishuv’s offensive fighting spirit – an ineffable but important quality, especially when one considers the thousands of fighters which broke off from Haganah to form Irgun in the early 1930s, and the thousands who returned to the fold in 1937. Jabotinsky held more influence over the street than many Zionist leaders, although this led him into confrontation with Britain and the rest of the Yishuv. His violent followers were inclined to support Britain’s enemies and resorted to terrorism against Jews, Arabs and British officials to achieve their aims. Jabotinsky always had to contend with maximalists whom he could not control, and it was that current which washed over the revisionists after his death.

Nonetheless, Jabotinsky’s movement can take credit for beginning illegal immigration operations first during the early 1930s.⁶⁵ Although unsuccessful, they spurred a much bigger movement led by the left. While the revisionists never achieved much in that field, they provoked the Zionist left to get involved. During 1945-47, this movement caused Britain to contend with tens of thousands of Jewish refugees at a time when its Palestine policy was in constant crisis. Yet Jabotinsky never achieved his aim of independence. He sought to make Palestine the seventh British dominion, and ended up alienating the government and Weizmann. He tried to pressure British policy using his youth movements, and lost control over them to extremists. Nonetheless, he had a strategic impact which undoubtedly hastened the path to independent statehood. He certainly helped to guarantee that an independent state, not some other limited entity, would be at the end of that road.

Ben Gurion’s control of his movement and mastery of military and intelligence matters was the key ingredient in the recipe for statehood. As a strategist, attention

⁶⁵ Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 7-11; Wagner, “British Intelligence and Policy in the Palestine Mandate, 1919-1939,” pp. 214-216.

must first be paid to his power within Mapai. Without this vehicle, he would have achieved very little. The nature and structure of Zionist party politics enabled one party to dominate many institutions. As an historical figure, his agency is remarkable. Between 1935 and 1948 he took advantage of institutions, relationships and patterns which had already existed and gave them new energy and purpose. He was a centralizing figure, and therefore whatever strategy he had in mind could be played out through various channels. When he described the Jewish state it was always in lofty, heady, idealistic terms. Nonetheless, he drove towards that goal in very practical ways.

His work towards the defence of the Yishuv turned the Haganah from a territorial static militia into a sophisticated underground army. Yishuv intelligence services penetrated Arab, British, communist and revisionist politics, stealing secrets while protecting their own. By giving them resources, encouraging cooperation with Britain, and through his particular leadership style, Ben Gurion nurtured these essential tools for statehood. He mastered Yishuv politics and mobilized them for the road to statehood beginning in 1942, before the threat of the war to Palestine had begun to dissipate. He also recognized the advantages of cooperation with Britain during this time, despite the bitter dispute over Jewish immigration restrictions. This cooperation improved the Haganah's military capabilities, but it also created partnerships which gave its intelligence services a considerable edge during subsequent years. Ben Gurion and his intelligence and political staff took advantage of these new facts by 1945 once it was clear to them that Britain was dependent on them for its security more than the reverse. The ensuing series of mistakes aside, Ben Gurion made the British Empire talk to him about the country's future despite his un-provable responsibility for previous violence. In those talks it became clear Britain could not satisfy the demands of both Jews and Arabs, and so their rule came to a voluntary end.