Allegiances up in the air: British and Commonwealth pilots serving in the Israeli Air Force and British sociopolitical discourse, 1948-1950

By

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I investigate evidence available regarding the formation and negotiation of senses of national allegiance among British, Imperial and Commonwealth pilots who served in the newly-founded Israeli Air Force (IAF) during the 1948 Palestine War, and the impact these pilots and their roles had on how British Jews and British non-Jews approached the discourse over Zionism and the question of whether British Jews were British, Zionist/Israeli, or could be both equally. The image of the Israeli military pilot has become central to Israeli nationalism throughout its history as a symbol of combat effectiveness and technological prowess on the battlefield, and so I use this study to help better understand how early cohorts of IAF Machalnik - or foreign volunteer pilots who had served in the Royal Air Force or came from the air forces of its former Imperial holdings understood their own national and ideological affiliations in the face of a British government which in policy and practice outright opposed the Israeli project's establishment, going so far as to assist and reinforce Arab militaries at that time with British equipment and troops, and actively take measures to stem the flow of British military equipment and personnel to Israel.

By focusing on memoirs and personal accounts of these pilots, this thesis will detail how these pilots navigated and rationalised parallel senses of duty to Israel and political Zionist ideals, the consequences of wartime restrictions on Jews in military service, and the debates which were spurned by their service regarding the loyalty of British Jews to the Crown, and whether Jews could be both loyal British subjects and Zionists simultaneously. The thesis identifies a variety of frameworks of allegiance and self and group identification as it changes in the course of the wars evolving outcomes, which can be grounded in political Zionism, non-Zionist interpretations of muscular Judaism, humanitarian duty and the opportunity to put aerial

combat skills to use after post-war demobilisation. It further examines how these individual experiences contributed to the mythologisation of the Israeli pilot and set a precedent for the perception of the Israeli military by the country and the world alike.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Ethan Olinga Danesh, candidate for the MA degree in Nationalism Studies declare herewith that the present thesis titled "Allegiances up in the air: British and Commonwealth pilots serving in the Israeli Air Force and British sociopolitical discourse, 1948-1950", is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 30th May, 2025

Ethan Olinga Danesh

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my family who have passed on, namely my grandparents, Michele Lynn Bernstein, Hossain Banadaki Danesh, Ferenc Kalman and my cousin Darwyn Reza Danesh.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the hope of a lasting peace being achieved in the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict.

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Introduction

The establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948 changed the landscape of the Middle East, and the world, forever. In the struggle for independence against their Arab competitors, Jewish residents of Palestine, later referred to as Israelis, complemented by former military servicemen and women from around the world's Jewish diasporas found themselves drawn to invoke their recently disused military experience to support Israel's existence - whether or not they were Zionist, or even of any Jewish background. One notable diaspora group which encompassed an unending variety of national and social groups the world around were British volunteers and those form the Commonwealth and British Dominions, who had to reckon with British policies and sanctions that made military procurement difficult for the Israelis, and discouraged non-Israelis from joining the Israeli cause, as well as and their own internal questions of why and whether to fight for the Israeli cause. This diaspora relationship from 1948 onwards saw British Jews and non-Jews grow increasingly wary of each other in private, military and public discourse, opening up uncomfortable questions of loyalty, moral righteousness and belonging, while many demobilised Jewish members of British and Commonwealth armed forces found themselves compelled to go put their wartime skills to use fighting for the nascent state. Their motivations were vast and varied, and were notably most visible in the aerial war due to the relatively new and technically advanced nature of military aviation (rendering pilots a highly specialised form of soldier) and the criticality of military aviation for securing aerial dominance as a major advantage for land and naval strategy, meaning that the abandoned British military infrastructure in new Israeli territories created a unique need for British-trained pilots, mechanics and servicemen. Servicemen versed in using British military equipment were critical in order to put a viable military aerial force in flight with haste, especially given that British

aircraft were more accessible and logistically viable for immediate wartime service compared to demobilised American aircraft, which were physically farther from reach. Between American, British, and Czechoslovak aircraft, the British pilots and their efforts to acquire British aircraft were the only contingent who had the unique position of reckoning their position as subjects of a country who was actively assisting Arab nations such as Egypt, Transjordan, and Iraq in their effort to extinguish the Israeli state. This support left Britain in the position of the 'perfidious albion' of centuries of colonialism past not only to the Israelis, but to Jewish and non-Jewish Britons alike navigating the murky waters of Britain's involvement in a conflict in a region that the Government had withdrawn from on the basis that it no longer had any place managing a mandate in said region[1].

With scepticism from the British Government towards Jews due to the insinuation that potential Zionists were rife in the community due to Zionism's focus on a homeland for the Jews, this question of loyalty among these pilots and it's extension to the British Jewish diaspora illuminates a significant, albeit underexplored, facet of post-war British sociopolitical discourse in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and the decline of the British Empire. As such, this thesis will investigate how these pilots perceived their own allegiances in the context of Britain's official support for Arab militaries actively engaged in hostilities aimed at regional domination and assesses the broader impact of their decisions on British-Jewish and non-Jewish perceptions of Israel, Zionism, and the Jewish community's place in Britain - a community which was stuck in an uncomfortable debate around what it meant to be Zionist, and whether Zionism and British patriotism were compatible with each other, both from the Jewish and non-Jewish point of view

[1] Zeev Tzahor, "The 1949 Air Clash between the Israeli Air Force and the RAF," Journal of Contemporary History 28, no. 1 (1993): 75–101, https://doi.org/10.2307/260802, 75.

Much of the existing literature on the 1948 Palestine war which includes or focusses on the aerial war does so in a few contexts and methods. In cases of literature discussing the role of foreign volunteers, such as publications from Nir Arielli or descriptions of some events in the memoirs of pilots such as Jeffrey Weiss, the literature does not discern between the origins of pilots, disregarding the dynamic between Sabras and immigrants of different generations and origins, ranging from Holocaust survivors to former Allied servicemen-turned-Machalniks which was a pronounced factor in the integration of foreign volunteer pilots into Israeli life. Some literature, such as Derek Penslar's book *Jews and the Military*, does touch upon the subject, wherein Penslar discusses the ideals of the Jewish soldierly image approaching 1948 as being significantly contingent on either the state of being or proximity to being a Sabra. In his words, 'The ideal type of Israeli soldier in 1948 is the native-born (or close to it) Palestinian Jew'[2]. This was equally, if not more critical for the emergence of a structure for the Israeli military, which had only been formally founded and institutionalised alongside the state of Israel itself in May 1948 out of the organisations that had been the Irgun, Lehi and Haganah, which were a group of paramilitaries that sought to engage in activities defending Jewish communities in the Mandate from British harassment and violent engagements with Arab communities. Alongside this, none have addressed directly and specifically the issue of British policy towards Israel at this immediate moment in time being opposed to Israeli efforts to arm their air force with British aircraft, which logistically were some of the most convenient for Israel to achieve, given the remnants of British aircraft in the area and the willingness of the Czechoslovak government to clandestinely sell British Supermarine Spitfire parts and airframes. As a result, by the time the 1948 war was in full swing, Israel's fighter fleet that was initially put into action were composed

[2] Derek J Penslar, Jews and the Military (Princeton University Press, 2013), 226.

mostly of ex-Czechoslovak and 'Frankenstein' Supermarine Spitfires, the first of which to be put into Israeli service had been made with remnants of RAF Spitfires abandoned during Britain's withdrawal and, in the case of the first-ever Israeli Spitfire, dubbed 'Israel 1', parts salvaged from a Spitfire of the Egyptian Air Force that had crashed in Israeli territory[3].

With a lack of literature on this specific topic around aerial battle, the need for fighter aircraft and how procurement of it influenced the course of Israel's early interactions with servicemen and governments in the international realm and especially the former Mandate power of Britain, there is a unique area in the literature that could benefit from a better understanding of the unique dynamic between aircraft procurement, the history of the Machalniks and Jewish diaspora relations with host communities abroad. To achieve a better understanding of this dynamic, this thesis aims to explore several central research questions. The questions I hope to illuminate on are:

1. What were the motivations of British and Commonwealth pilots in defying British policy and joining the Israeli Air Force?
2. How did these pilots perceive their opposition to the British state and the actions of the Royal Air Force in the context of supporting its Arab partners?
3. How were British and Commonwealth pilots, their use of former British military equipment, and engagements with Arab forces and British counterparts perceived and contextualised by British and British Jewish media outlets in the UK?

[3] Nadav Berger, " השחור החדש," Israeli Defence Forces, 2015, https://www.iaf.org.il/8491-45219-he/IAF.aspx.

These questions are relevant and would benefit from answering for several reasons. Understanding the motivations of these Machalniks is a stepping stone both to understanding how demobilised British servicemen saw their reintegration into British civilian life as a cultural change, and, in the case of Jewish ex-servicemen, how civilian life was weighed against the opportunity to fight for a potential Jewish homeland. This assists in answering the following two questions, which in themselves are important because of the potential to offer insight into the importance of singular events and aerial engagements in the war as turning points for the initially-hostile British-Israeli relationship, and whether these events acted as catalysts for a change of appetite regarding Britain's support of Arab states among the British population at large.

To provide an answer to these questions, I break down the thesis into relevant sections discussing sources which can help us understand the contexts and narratives which would potentially provide an answer. Before anything else, I will provide a brief background section providing a necessary context of the outbreak of the 1948 Palestine War, and particularly of the events surrounding the withdrawal of British forces and Governance from Mandate Palestine. Following this, I will immediately move to a section discussing the pivotal role that international arms procurement played in guiding the infrastructural direction of the new Israeli Air Force, in particular with regard to its aerial combat capabilities as guided by the involvement of British and Commonwealth pilots in procurement, be it with procured British retired military aircraft, or through clandestine arms deals with the newly-communist Czechoslovakia, who provided Israel's only newly-built fighters, the Avia S-199 Mezek ('mule' in Czech), or Sakeen ('knife', in Hebrew, which itself is a wordplay on the German word for knife, 'Messer', which is part of the original aircraft's manufacturer name, Messerschmitt). Examination of this section is

important to understanding British policy towards Israel not only in theory, but in practice, and how this influenced Israel's aerial arms procurement - and by extension the rationale of former members of the Royal Air Force and its Commonwealth sister forces who were considering whether to join the Israeli Air Force. In the subsequent section, I will use a host of primary sources, including the memoirs of Israeli Air Force pilots of British, Commonwealth, Sabra and American backgrounds to understand their framing of intercultural relations and motivations and they perceived them among their comrades-in-arms, and how engagement with the idea of a new Israeli identity and affinity for adopting it was perceived by pilots of different backgrounds, and just as much by their ideological approaches to service.

The last section will then examine how the existence of British Machalnik pilots fighting aginst British and British-aligned Arab forces influenced negative perceptions of Jews within Britain, and their characterisation as collective Zionists given the perception of Jews and Israel and integral by many. By exploring how these individual servicemen approached and put into action their service in the aerial battles in the skies of Israel/Palestine so soon after the largest aerial war in history's conclusion only 3 years prior, I this thesis hopes to contribute more to our understanding of transnational military service, loyalty, and identity in the unique context of the Israel/Palestine crisis, and better establish our foundation for British-Jewish intercommunal relations upon Israel's birth.

These volunteers, known as Machalniks, are especially critical to the story of British Jewish and non-Jewish servicemen in the new Israeli military forces, as they are part of a distinct volunteer contingent in the wider Israeli military and paramilitary environment. The name Machalnik comes from the Hebrew abbreviation for *Mitnadvei Hutz La'Aretz*, or 'volunteers from outside the country', which often, but not always, described western volunteers of Jewish,

and sometimes non-Jewish origin, many of whom had military experience in the respective countries they originated from. Their involvement is a clear illustration of a complex interplay of transnational identities and commitments among those fighting for the Zionist cause, which becomes particularly notable among volunteers from Britain and the Commonwealth given the symbiosis of being subject to the British Crown as individuals while also actively opposing its foreign policy objectives in the region.

Israeli historian Nir Arielli, whose research is focussed on transnational fighters in the 1948 Palestine war, among other spaces, describes the Machalniks not necessarily as a ragtag group of purely ideological Zionists, but as a semi-organised system of individuals actively courted and recruited by the Haganah's foreign representatives and shell organisations if they were could bring useful military knowledge to the Israeli Defence Forces, noting that despite the paramilitary nature of the IDF's precursor organisations, 'the recruitment of experienced servicemen from abroad began as a state-sponsored project', with potential Machalniks being promised some degree of material compensation, and being subject to efforts to commit to the cause on an moral basis, lest the IDF raise a contingent of materially-motivated mercenaries[4].

Arielli's work also supports the idea that Machalnik identities were far from monolithic, as evidenced by variations in motivations and experiences across individuals, with identities being formed either at the individual or very interpersonal sub-unit levels. The recruitment messages that brought Machalniks to Israel heavily emphasised the defensive aspect of the conflict for Israelis, an idea of collective survival in the wake of the Holocaust, and service being a form of solidarity, rather than an exercise in personal gain[5]. Indeed, this sentiment is echoed

[4] Nir Arielli, "When Are Foreign Volunteers Useful? Israel's Transnational Soldiers in the War of 1948 Re-Examined ," Whiterose.ac.uk 78, no. 2 (April 2014), https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/79021/7/arielli1.pdf, 706.
[5] David Samuel Malet, "Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts" (Thesis, 2009), https://www.proquest.com/openview/3e1c06164fa3b276f7cef9d4f818b392/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750, 5.

among some of the Machalniks who memoirs are studied as part of this work, with Gordon Levett, one of the only British non-Jews to serve in the Israeli military as a Machalnik describing his qualm with staying in Israeli Air Force after the war's end as being potentially 'seen as a reward… As a Gentile my contribution in moral terms was significant. I did not want to sully that significance by accepting tribute. I wanted no anti-semite to be able to say: 'This man helped Israel's cause in order to build a career.''[6] The tensions of how one's motives and actions were perceived in the vein that Levett has described underscores a uniquely pressing tension over the question of loyalty. Arielli identifies and discusses this tension, stating that Machalniks were constantly having 'to confront skepticism regarding their national loyalties and the profound socio-political challenges arising from Britain's contradictory policies in Palestine'[7].

[6] Gordon Levett, Flying under Two Flags : An Ex-RAF Pilot in Israel's War of Independence (London ; Portland, Or: Frank Cass, 1994), 215.

[7] Nir Arielli, "When Are Foreign Volunteers Useful? Israel's Transnational Soldiers in the War of 1948 Re-Examined ," Whiterose.ac.uk 78, no. 2 (April 2014), https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/79021/7/arielli1.pdf, 710.

British withdrawal and the 1948 war

Britain's withdrawal from Mandate Palestine was, according to some narratives presented in the literature on this topic, an almost inevitable conflict of interpretations. The ongoing violence, recognised through a variety of terms stretching from community defence, resistance, to terrorism, was increasingly an unstoppable force for a rapidly military and police presence whose administration quickly felt unable to handle the rigour of Jewish-Arab tensions. For my purposes, the literature dealing with the affairs of aerial warfare range from the memoirs of British and Commonwealth pilots including Gordon Levett, Boris Senior and Ezer Weizman to the memoirs of non-British and Commonwealth pilots such as Jeffrey Weiss, to articles published by members of the British Establishment, such as Sir Alan Cunningham, a British Army Officer who served as the final British High Commissioner for Palestine, and Richard Crossman, a Labour party Member of Parliament who supported the Zionist project. Beyond this, primary sources such as news articles from Jewish and non-Jewish British news sources alike are available and reveal the details of how tensions between communities were felt, and how events were characterised by different actors.

In the example of Cunningham's article, for example, he doubles down on official policies of the Mandate's objectives, stating that his administration had hoped to foster industrialisation and economic prosperity in the region, and to negotiate the continue immigration of Jews under the Balfour declaration while appearing Arab demands for a halt to immigration and an Arab state in place of the Mandate. What is a critical takeaway from Cunningham's narrative of the British role in the later stages of Mandate Palestine from 1945 to 1948 was precisely the distance he asserts by using terms such as 'negotiate' - for him, the problem was that 'neither Jew nor Arab in their approach to the problem during my interviews

with them would ever refer to the other, and it would seem as if they ignored each other's very existence'[8]. For Cunningham, the British were simply a mediator between two sides which were effectively destined to be pitted against each other so long as they were both present in the region at all. This was further complicated since Britain had to repeatedly weigh the demands of the international community, and especially major partners such as the United States, with their own postwar issues which were heavily dependent on the success of a new international order under an international body for mediation, namely the United Nations, which both Cunningham and British-Israeli Historian Avi Shlaim emphasise as a major complicating consideration for British attempts to police the demands of the Jewish and Arab communities in relation to each other[9].

Israeli Historian Motti Golani argued that once Britain announced its intention to leave Palestine in February 1947, it effectively surrendered its role as an active policymaker, assuming instead a position of damage control for its own sake[10]. By this point, with the UN Partition Plan of November 1947 advocating separate Jewish and Arab states, a dramatic shift had taken force which arguably cemented what Cunningham later described as the inevitability of a Jewish-Arab conflict in the region - a narrative which effectively absolves the British state of responsibility for their participation as the colonial power[11]. Britain's announcement that it would not enforce this plan but rather would withdraw, without facilitating a structured transition, created nothing less than a chaotic power vacuum that can be described as anarchical, despite their repeated

[8] Alan Cunningham, "Palestine — the Last Days of the Mandate," International Affairs 24, no. 4 (October 1948): 481–90, https://doi.org/10.2307/3017607, 481.
[9] Avi Shlaim, "Britain and the Arab-Israeli War of 1948," Journal of Palestine Studies 16, no. 4 (July 1987): 50–76, 53.
[10] Motti Golani, "The 'Haifa Turning Point': The British Administration and the Civil War in Palestine, December 1947-May 1948," Middle Eastern Studies 37, no. 2 (2001): 93–130, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4284157, 95.
[11] Alan Cunningham, "Palestine — the Last Days of the Mandate," International Affairs 24, no. 4 (October 1948): 481–90, https://doi.org/10.2307/3017607, 485.

attempts to halt Jewish 'anarchy' as perpetrated by the Irgun, Lehi and Haganah[12]. The prominent Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi, whose works focus on Mandatory Palestine, the history of Israel's paramilitaries and the 1948 Palestine war harshly critiqued this British approach by arguing that it effectively played into the strategic advantage of Israeli paramilitaries, stating it was effectively an 'invitation' for Zionist military dominance due to the clear Jewish superiority in organisational and military terms within Palestine, while blocking Arab military buildup and organisation in the Mandate[13]. And yet, as British-Israeli historian Avi Shlaim points out, Zionist narratives have often highlighted the British as effectively betraying the Jews of the region by withdrawing with the full knowledge that the Arab armies were poised to attack and leaving the Jews no way to defend themselves through the Mandate's continued military and police operations against Zionist paramilitary groups. Given the clandestine and guerilla nature of Jewish paramilitary operations, and the repeated flouting of British naval blockades by these organisations that sought to stem the flow of Jews, both migrants and displaced Holocaust survivors alike, into Mandate Palestine, British occupational forces engaged in a continuing conflict with Jewish residents of Palestine, regularly raiding Jewish settlements and neighbourhoods as a measure to stem what was sometimes characterised as 'anarchy'. In his words, for both the Arabs and the Jews, 'What they have in common is the assumption that the manner in which Britain chose to terminate the mandate inevitably led to an armed clash between the local parties.'[14] The ongoing guerilla warfare against both Arab groups and the British Government, which sought to supress violence of any origin in the Mandate in order to

[12] Motti Golani, "The 'Haifa Turning Point': The British Administration and the Civil War in Palestine, December 1947-May 1948," Middle Eastern Studies 37, no. 2 (2001): 93–130, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4284157, 94.
[13] Avi Shlaim, "Britain and the Arab-Israeli War of 1948," Journal of Palestine Studies 16, no. 4 (July 1987): 50–76, 51.
[14] Ibid, 62.

maintain some semblance of peace under their Administration, reinforcing the British position as one of a mediator, as previously described by Cunningham, was intensive enough that British economic interests quickly took precedence over the pragmatic benefits of recognising Israel and establishing productive diplomatic and economic ties. For the Foreign Office of Bevin, Jewish resistance to the British mandate was evidence that support for the Arab states where Britain had existing economic interests needed to take precedence. In the words of Miriam Haron, a historian of Israel, 'the state of Israel stood as a monument to the defeat of London's Palestine policy.'[15]

Golani's analysis challenges traditional historiographies of the British withdrawal promoted by Israeli or Palestinian leaders to date, corroborating what we can glean from Shlaim by stating that the critical turning point was not solely the strategic initiative of Jewish forces in carrying out Plan Dalet, whereby the paramilitary forces that would make up the IDF shifted from a clandestine mode of operations to a more conventional form of offensive warfare intended to quickly consolidate territory for the establishment of the Israeli state in early 1948. Rather, Britain's visible collapse of administrative authority in key cities such as Haifa in April 1948, where British passivity or tacit complicity allowed Jewish forces to consolidate critical gains and more quickly develop a military logistical infrastructure of sorts - even if only a rudimentary one, while Palestinian Arab groups were not yet organised[16]. Yet, official British accounts cited in Shlaim's research, alongside narratives published by those involved such as Cunningham reveal that Britain's primary concern was, above all else, neither specifically pro-Arab nor pro-Zionist - over all else, it was explicitly pro-British. Avi Shlaim argues that Britain's withdrawal strategy was primarily driven by the need to protect broader imperial interests rather

[15] Miriam Haron, "Britain and Israel, 1948-1950," Modern Judaism 3, no. 2 (1983): 217–23, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1396081, 218.
[16] Motti Golani, "The 'Haifa Turning Point': The British Administration and the Civil War in Palestine, December 1947-May 1948," Middle Eastern Studies 37, no. 2 (2001): 93–130, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4284157, 94.

than an explicit agenda to empower one side or another[17]. Britain sought above all to minimise the reputational and geopolitical damage that would result from their withdrawal from Palestine, with Cunningham's reflections supporting this interpretation, as he emphasis that Britain's attempts towards negotiation ultimately morphed into managing an orderly withdrawal as much as possible amidst the increased violence and intercommunal distrust, rather than policing it more proactively up to the withdrawal date[18].

The broader implications of Britain's withdrawal resonated not only with those Britons at home reckoning with the downsizing of their Empire, but deeply within the British armed forces, in particular among recently demobilised servicemen. Matthew Hughes explores the significant roles played by demobilised British soldiers who, especially among combat veterans, were struggling to reintegrate into civilian life post-WWII, often finding themselves employed in paramilitary policing roles within colonial contexts, including in Palestine[19]. This militarisation of colonial policing, which Hughes points out was deeply influenced by prior British experiences in Ireland, shaped the manner in which Britain maintained its authority in Mandate Palestine until 1948, with harsh actions that often did not consider intercommunal dynamics, meaning British actions were seldom interpreted as reconciliatory and continually exacerbated tensions rather than alleviating them[20]. Moreover, the demobilisation process within Britain itself, which was relatively orderly and planned, yet still rife with economic and political difficulties, shaped the perceptions and attitudes of the British public towards Imperial commitments overseas -

[17] Avi Shlaim, "Britain and the Arab-Israeli War of 1948," Journal of Palestine Studies 16, no. 4 (July 1987): 50–76, 52.
[18] Alan Cunningham, "Palestine — the Last Days of the Mandate," International Affairs 24, no. 4 (October 1948): 481–90, https://doi.org/10.2307/3017607, 484-485.
[19] Matthew Hughes, "Demobilised Soldiers and Colonial Control: The British Police in Mandate Palestine and After," Journal of Modern European History / Zeitschrift Für Moderne Europäische Geschichte / Revue d'Histoire Européenne Contemporaine 13, no. 2 (2015): 268–84, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26266182, 268-269.
[20] Ibid, 269.

including the Mandate of Palestine, and notably major economic holdings like India, which themselves were undergoing intercommunal turmoil and independence in the aftermath of the war exacerbated by harsh methods of local British colonial policing[21]. Rex Pope argues that demobilisation policy post-World War II prioritised military, political and economic stability in the home islands, often overlooking critical economic factors abroad and creating significant social and economic pressures that influenced public opinion and political decision-making regarding overseas military engagements, including the decision to withdraw from Palestine[22]. And yet, the Foreign Office, under the leadership of Ernest Bevin, was intent on their military and economic footholds in other nearby former colonial territories, such as Transjordan and Egypt, both of whom were also highly integrated with the British military and its infrastructure[23]. Notably, both Transjordan and Egypt had at different points in the early 20th century achieved independence from the United Kingdom after being British protectorates, and whose military forces, especially air forces, were nominally separate, but throughout the second world war had served as integrated into the wider Imperial Air Forces within the RAF's purview, with pilots and equipment belonging to Egypt and Transjordan, but the airfields and training being provided and maintained by the British. The resulting withdrawal, in the words of a Manchester Guardian article announcing their withdrawal of the British from their Mandate, was an 'ignoble' end to this period of history[24].

[21] Matthew Hughes, "Demobilised Soldiers and Colonial Control: The British Police in Mandate Palestine and After," Journal of Modern European History / Zeitschrift Für Moderne Europäische Geschichte / Revue d'Histoire Européenne Contemporaine 13, no. 2 (2015): 268–84, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26266182,, 272.

[22] Rex Pope, "British Demobilization after the Second World War," Journal of Contemporary History 30, no. 1 (1995): 65–81, https://doi.org/10.2307/260922, 66-67.

[23] Alan Cunningham, "Palestine — the Last Days of the Mandate," International Affairs 24, no. 4 (October 1948): 481–90, https://doi.org/10.2307/3017607, 482-483.

[24] Richard Nelsson, "From the Archive: The Establishment of Israel - May 1948," The Guardian, May 14, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/world/from-the-archive-blog/2012/may/14/archive-1948-establishment-israel-jewish-state.

Sale of equipment and efforts to arm the Israeli Air Force

The establishment and subsequent survival of the Israeli Air Force (IAF) in the crucial years of 1948-1949 hinged critically on its ability to procure aircraft that were capable of aerial defence and combat air patrols amidst a series of truces declared by the United Nations that nominally prevented both Israeli and Arab forces from organising or procuring arms[25]. Compounded by Britain's continued military and diplomatic support of Arab states due to their mutual support of the Arab peoples in Mandate Palestine as the successors to British custody of the land, which severely limited Israel's options for equipping its newly-institutionalised military, the new Air Force was forced to consider clandestine options in violation of the truces, which primarily included Czechoslovak-assisted arms sales and smuggling operations, ferrying Czech-sold and British-bought aircraft organised by Haganah agents through the Czech Republic and Yugoslavia as refuelling station. Czechoslovakia's eventual decision to assist Israel in clandestine aircraft and arms smuggling operations was driven significantly by its precarious economic and geopolitical situation following its transformation into a Soviet satellite state with a Communist coup d'etat in early 1948, and the industrial capability that remained there after the war. The Czech government's desperate need for hard currency and a readiness to flout international embargoes at the whim of Soviet officials in Moscow looking to test the political waters in Israel for a potential Mediterranean and Levantine ally, facilitated the secret arms sales to the emerging Israeli state, which quickly became a significant source of national revenue[26]. On the Israeli side, this clandestine relationship represented a much-needed lifeline, strategically

[25] Israeli Air Force, "A Short History of the Israeli Air Force," Aerospace Historian 19, no. 1 (1972): 10–17, https://doi.org/10.2307/44522590, 11.

[26] Haggai Frank, Zdeněk Klíma, and Yossi Goldstein, "The First Israeli Weapons Procurement behind the Iron Curtain: The Decisive Impact on the War of Independence," Israel Studies 22, no. 3 (2017): 125, https://doi.org/10.2979/israelstudies.22.3.06, 130.

orchestrated through Haganah operatives who leveraged both ideological sympathies within Czechoslovakia, who like many in the world were coming to the realisation of the Holocaust's full extent, and the nation's economic vulnerabilities, creating a status quo wherein both parties benefited from the clandestine procurement of surplus military aircraft left over from the Czechoslovak Air Force's days in exile in Great Britain[27].

When the British Mandate officially ended in May 1948, the air service available to the new Israeli state, the Sherut Avir of the Haganah (lit. 'Air Service'), was capable of handling aerial transport logistics at best, given its fleet of specifically light civilian aircraft. These aircraft would be repurposed for basic reconnaissance, transport, and improvised bombing roles with manually-dropped local made explosives. These aircraft, including Taylorcraft Austers and American Piper Cubs, provided an essential initial offensive capability, but were clearly insufficient for a protracted conflict with well-equipped Arab states[28]. Consequently, the need for military-grade aircraft became paramount, motivating Israeli leaders to pursue acquisition strategies no matter the international implications. Aside from the UN's resolutions declaring truces between the Israelis and the Arabs, countries including the United States and the United Kingdom further declared arms embargoes on Israel, making the procurement of parts and aircraft a logistically-tenuous question. Given the existence of British military infrastructure and sabras trained in the Royal Air Force in both combat and non-combat roles. Critically, this infrastructural overlap with one of the only countries interested in trading with Israel due to the Soviet Union, now influencing Czechoslovakia, being interested in potentially gaining a communist foothold in the middle east, would prove to be critical in facilitating trade between

[27] Haggai Frank, Zdeněk Klíma, and Yossi Goldstein, "The First Israeli Weapons Procurement behind the Iron Curtain: The Decisive Impact on the War of Independence," Israel Studies 22, no. 3 (2017): 125, https://doi.org/10.2979/israelstudies.22.3.06, 130-132.
[28] Ibid, 126-128.

the two states, since Czechoslovakia similarly had pilots who served in Czechoslovak contingents of the Royal Air Force. Furthermore, Czechoslovakia's pre-communist postwar government had successfully procured surplus Spitfires for themselves, 60 of which they soon after sold to Israel alongside the Avia S-199 fighter aircraft; a Czechoslovak variant of the Messerschmitt 109 fighter originally designed and produced by the Third Reich.

Despite the logistical complexities of procuring and maintaining them, these largely British-made aircraft offered critical advantages that made them preferable to other procurement options available to Israel at the time. Firstly, the willingness of a country that similarly had experience among their air forces with British aircraft such as Czechoslovakia to sell airframes clandestinely was a major diplomatic step that would have been much more difficult to broker without the financial incentive of aircraft sales, which paid a lot more than most conventional land-based weapons, allowing Israel to circumvent the arms embargoes imposed by Western nations from which British-made aircraft familiar to many Israeli pilots could be sourced directly. Secondly, the geographic proximity of Czechoslovakia to Israel, relative to potential suppliers such as private actors sympathetic to the Zionist cause willing to clandestinely move aircraft to Israel in the United Kingdom itself, let alone the United States, greatly reduced the logistical complexities and transportation times, with fewer stops for ferried aircraft and smaller shipping times needed for disassembled airframes. These clandestine airlift operations, which were risky, resource-intensive, and diplomatically dangerous given the need for cover stories to obscure the aircraft and pilot's final destination from local authorities in refuelling stops and the potential for British diplomats to invoke the assistance of authorities if they were suspicious of

former RAF aircraft's movements, were far more feasible and expedient than transatlantic procurement[29].

A further key advantage of the Czechoslovak trade option was that the Avia S-199, despite its setbacks as a fighter choice, such as the need for more in-depth training for Israeli British-trained pilots and the reputation for limited combat performance, was that choosing this airframe provided the most immediate combat capability[30]. The urgency of Israel's existential struggle outweighed the aircraft's numerous technical shortcomings, which included limited in-flight instability, limited power compared to the German variants it was based on, and a propensity for mechanical failures. As Borukhovich notes, the Israeli pilots accepted these shortcomings simply due to sheer necessity, and they adapted their operational tactics accordingly, rather than insisting on only procuring British aircraft first for their British-trained pilots, which would have prolonged Israel's lack of ability to protect its ground forces from Arab air forces[31]. This narrative is corroborated by Pappé, who argues that Britain's role in the region shifted from the role of the regional power to the role of primarily a military resource controller and denier in the region[32]. In short, the flow of equipment and use cases of them became Britain's primary concern.

Similarly, maintenance facilities were makeshift, and mechanics often had limited training or experience, relying heavily on trial, error, and creative engineering to keep aircraft

[29] Haggai Frank, Zdeněk Klíma, and Yossi Goldstein, "The First Israeli Weapons Procurement behind the Iron Curtain: The Decisive Impact on the War of Independence," Israel Studies 22, no. 3 (2017): 125, https://doi.org/10.2979/israelstudies.22.3.06, 130-131.

[30] Murray Rubenstein and Richard Martin Goldman, Shield of David: An Illustrated History of the Israeli Air Force (Prentice Hall, 1978), 41-43.

[31] Kelly Borukhovich, "The Strategic Development of the Israeli Air Force," July 2019, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/AD1107512.pdf, 13.

[32] Ilan Pappé, "Overt Conflict to Tacit Alliance: Anglo-Israeli Relations 1948-51," Middle Eastern Studies 26, no. 4 (1990): 561–81, https://doi.org/10.2307/4283399l, 563.

operational. Meanwhile, additional aircraft acquisitions from diverse sources supplemented the core fleet obtained from Czechoslovakia. This included parts for former RAF aircraft abandoned during Britain's withdrawal, specifically Supermarine Spitfires. Given the emphasis on British military equipment familiarity, Israeli forces actively salvaged these aircraft while procuring Spitfires and S-199s from abroad, resulting in the aforementioned Israel 1 Frankenstein Spitfire - and attracting the attention of British authorities, former RAF pilots, the British public - Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Since aircraft were frequently delivered covertly through third-party countries and under false manifests, The IAF also benefited significantly from diaspora Jewish communities abroad, notably in the United States and Canada, whose Zionist communities donated and financed procurement operations alongside the Haganah, and later Israeli government agents, and in the case of Machalnik pilots hoping to offer their services, actively participated in smuggling aircraft and aviation parts into Israel[33]. Some organisations engaging in fundraising and advocacy efforts for Jewish immigration to the Mandate, such as the American League for a Free Palestine (ALFP) were not just committed to the Zionist cause ideologically but were ostensibly the overseas political wings of organisations such as the Irgun, in the ALFP's case. In such cases these groups acted clandestinely as recruitment agencies for those including former pilots and veterans looking to either facilitate or join the transfer of Machalniks, supplies and equipment to Jewish guerilla groups in Palestine[34]. Some pilots, such as Boris Senior, even established shell airline companies in countries that were less involved in the international dispute over the former Mandate of Palestine, such as Panama, through which demobilised military aircraft, especially cargo aircraft, were purchased and flown as charter aircraft to Israel

[33] Murray Rubenstein and Richard Martin Goldman, Shield of David: An Illustrated History of the Israeli Air Force (Prentice Hall, 1978), 28.
[34] Jeffrey Weiss and Craig Weiss, I Am My Brother's Keeper (Schiffer Publishing, 1998).

under false pretences - actions that could not be easily undertaken by those with more explicit ties to Palestine[35].

The issue of finding willing partners in the diaspora and the world for the arming of the Israeli Air Force had incredibly deep political implications for Ben Gurion's new administration, as the context of the Cold War significantly shaped international involvement in the Middle East, with Britain and the United States wary of Israel's potential to align itself with the Communist bloc. Notably, Israel's early arms procurements from Czechoslovakia raised significant concern among the former wartime allies in the West, as the involvement of the Soviet bloc in Israel's founding was perceived as a potential indicator of Israel moving closer to communist alignment. Indeed, Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary at the time, and other Western officials were deeply concerned that Israel was becoming influenced by Eastern Bloc powers, in large part because of the influx of Eastern European immigrants displaced by the holocaust during the ultimate stages of Aliyah Bet and the procurement of new and used arms from newly-communist Czechoslovakia and the USSR. While Eastern European Jewish immigration was of growing concerns for the stability of Mandate Palestine as the British withdrew, in Pappé's view 'They feared that Communist agents, in particular from Romania, were infiltrating through immigration'[36].

As a result, the groundwork was set for the increase in what Pappé describes as the 'anti-Israel actions' of Ernest Bevin, who used the guise of communism spreading to the Middle East through Israel as a justification for anti-Israeli policy under the wider guise of the cold war. This notably reared its head at one of the hottest points in the air war where British and Israeli

[35] Boris Senior, New Heavens: My Life as a Fighter Pilot and a Founder of the Israel Air Force (Potomac Books, Inc., 2005).
[36] Ilan Pappé, "Overt Conflict to Tacit Alliance: Anglo-Israeli Relations 1948-51," Middle Eastern Studies 26, no. 4 (1990): 561–81, https://doi.org/10.2307/4283399, 563.

combatants came into some of their most direct encounters, such as in one case when an RAF pilot admitted to the British cabinet's inquiries that he had been shot down over Israeli territory after an air clash between the RAF and IAF saw 5 RAF aircraft lost, all to Israeli aircraft in a single day[37]. The inquest found that Bevin had made orders to the RAF to conduct aerial reconnaissance of disputed Israeli-Egyptian territory without the knowledge of cabinet, infuriating the British establishment and weakening Western efforts to stem Israeli procurement of aircraft from the eastern bloc - and painting the British foreign secretary as blinded by his hatred of Israel, and more indirectly, of Jews[3839].

[37] Zeev Tzahor, "The 1949 Air Clash between the Israeli Air Force and the RAF," Journal of Contemporary History 28, no. 1 (1993): 75–101, https://doi.org/10.2307/260802, 77.
[38] Ibid, 75
[39] Ilan Pappé, "Overt Conflict to Tacit Alliance: Anglo-Israeli Relations 1948-51," Middle Eastern Studies 26, no. 4 (1990): 561–81, https://doi.org/10.2307/4283399, 574.

British and Commonwealth Pilots: Demobilisation and Motivations

When considering the motivations of Machalniks, it is important to understand the aftermath of the second world war at a micro level as laying the groundworks for a situation where many ex-servicemen looked beyond Britain at ongoing world affairs for ways to apply their military skills - including looking at the unrest in Mandate Palestine. Jewish personnel faced a societal landscape marked by uncertainty of how their loyalty would be understood as Zionist voices became more outspoken in the British Mandate, exacerbated by a British economy strained by war debts, housing shortages, and employment crises. According to Rex Pope[40], the economic pressures of demobilisation were substantial enough to create fierce competition for limited jobs which often prioritised ethnically English, Scottish and Welsh applicants. Jewish servicemen, already part of a minority ethnoreligious group, in many ways would have found the challenge of reintegration into a national society that viewed them with skepticism on top of the bleak outlook for former servicemen gargantuan.

Jewish servicemembers also had to grapple with the unique socio-political considerations influenced by Britain's policies in Palestine. The British government's withdrawal from Palestine had ushered in a profound identity conflict for British Jews as a whole due to Britain's support for Arab nations opposed to Israel's independence, and also because of historically split community discourse that debated whether British Jews were a national group unto themselves, following the lines of political Zionist thought or rather Britons of the Jewish faith, for lack of a better term, and therefore ultimately loyal to Britain without exception. The experiences of

[40] Rex Pope, "British Demobilization after the Second World War," Journal of Contemporary History 30, no. 1 (1995): 65–81, https://doi.org/10.2307/260922, 67.

Jewish veterans who joined the IAF exemplify a broader phenomenon of Jewish servicemen reconsidering their allegiances post-demobilisation. Nir Arielli notes that those who volunteered from the UK, which made up a large proportion of the Air Force's Machalniks, were split into two main camps: those of Jewish background who had been longstanding or recent converts to the Zionist school of thought, often exacerbated by crude British policy towards Jews in Palestine and the wider conflict in Palestine in general, and those who were not politically Zionist but felt compelled to aid Jews due to the horrors of the Holocaust and the potential for further Jewish death resulting from British ignorance[41]. Furthermore, volunteers didn't only include only male and Jewish pilots. Female Jewish veterans played a critical role in establishing foundational systems within the IAF given their knowledge of high-level military planning, intelligence and communications practices that women often participated in as part of the WAAF, or Women's Auxiliary Air Force, during the Second World War. For example, Anita Koifman, a British Jewish veteran, notably utilised her experience from RAF Fighter Command headquarters during World War II to help design the operational systems of the IAF for aerial defence, allowing scattered air bases such as Tel Aviv and Ramat David airbase to quickly scramble fighters in different sectors where they could most quickly intercept aerial targets[42]

While the Israeli Air Force began to slowly take shape in the form of aerial logistics and reconnaissance wings of Jewish paramilitary organisations, the slow buildup of hierarchies reflected itself in the dynamics of demobilised life. Regardless of the lack of combat aircraft Israel had by the outbreak of the Palestine war in 1948, such questions of those who would fly them couldn't come before the question of sourcing, organising and managing such an inventory

[41] Nir Arielli, "When Are Foreign Volunteers Useful? Israel's Transnational Soldiers in the War of 1948 Re-Examined ," Whiterose.ac.uk 78, no. 2 (April 2014), https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/79021/7/arielli1.pdf, 713.
[42] Ibid, 721.

and its support staff. In other words, after demobilisation, it was those peripheral to pilots, and those whose warfare applications weren't dependent on operating complex machinery, that were in more demand. After spending years in Rhodesia and Egypt qualifying for his RAF pilot's wings, only to never see combat by the war's end, Ezer Weizman, a staunch Zionist and Irgun operative who would be instrumental in advocating for an Israeli aerial military force, and later become Israel's seventh President, would characterise his transition from military life as a newly-minted RAF pilot to civilian life in the crumbling mandate as being 'plunged into dull routine'[43].

This was further exacerbated by the lack of need for fighter pilots by the Jewish paramilitaries by his reading of postwar Mandate Palestine, remarking that if he had been a grenade expert (or some other form of land-based weapons expert) the Irgun and Haganah would have taken interest in him, whereas he 'was a pilot, one of the twenty or twenty-five Palestinians who had got their wings in the RAF. So what? May his wings bring him joy!'[44] In such a case, we can understand hints of the first kind of founding IAF pilot in Weizman's words: he is a staunch Zionist, yearning for a way to contribute to Mandate Palestine's downfall and the establishment of a Jewish state - but is frustrated by the lack of participation he could find in a paramilitary that was not yet fighting a war in the air. While demobilisation and the frustration with it is mentioned less in terms of the experience of demobilising itself, other pilots such as the South African Air Force pilot Boris Senior, of a Lithuanian-background Zionist family (who would meet Weizman in London before both serving in the IAF, becoming close friends) focus more on the frustration of life in non-military environments. In Senior's case, this frustration is

[43] Ezer Weizman, On Eagles' Wings : The Personal Story of the Leading Commander of the Israeli Air Force (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 46.
[44] Ibid, 47.

with the London School of Economics and universities at large, which he described as 'a center of socialist intellectualism in Europe', and the Zionist society he found for students as 'marginal'[45]. While Senior's divorce from air force service had much less of an impact and impression on him, his frustrations with being unable to put his skills to work towards the Zionist goal was just as frustrating, underscoring a certain universal tension for Jews, and particularly Jewish Zionist pilots leaving RAF service - in Senior's case, fighting in the airspace over Italy and Yugoslavia in Curtis P-40 Kittyhawk fighter aircraft.

On the other side of the fence, Gordon Levett's departure from the Royal Air Force tells the narrative of those like him in the second category - non-Jewish pilots whose underlying motivation was to fly the cutting-edge machines of military aviation, with service to their country's defence being a convenient bonus. Levett, a non-Jewish Briton who joined the RAF to find a career and adventure, ended up becoming a man fiercely devoted to his branch of the military, flying transport aircraft in Burma and eventually being promoted to Squadron Leader. Upon being stripped of his rank and demoted to Flight Lieutenant, soon after being dishonourably discharged for going absent without leave for a month from the RAF in August 1946, Levett remarked of the moment he was ordered to remove his rank and wings as being the removal of the 'apparel proclaiming the man'[46]. While Levett's life story was yet to move into the domain of the Palestine conflict, it is worth noting that his description of his thoughts after being dismissed can be succinctly summed up as revolving around one theme: 'It was only then that I fully realised that I would never fly a Royal Air Force aeroplane again… I had joined as a

[45] Boris Senior, New Heavens: My Life as a Fighter Pilot and a Founder of the Israel Air Force (Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 77.
[46] Gordon Levett, Flying under Two Flags : An Ex-RAF Pilot in Israel's War of Independence (London ; Portland, Or: Frank Cass, 1994), 112-113.

boy, I was now a broken man of twenty-five.'[47] For Levett, the end of the thrill of flying RAF aircraft was the vector for his new mental anguish, rather than being deprived of the ability to serve a national cause, or to build one's career in an established institution such as the RAF - let alone an institution just coming into its own as the newest branch of the armed forces, and which was achieving recognition for saving Britain from Nazi invasion and fending off the complete annihilation of British cities and industrial capacity at the hands of the Luftwaffe.

His sense of institutional detachment was deepened when, despite having an impressive logbook in transport aircraft that were also used commercially, he was unable to compete in the commercial aviation job market without references from his former commanders in the RAF, deepening a sense of despair in the civilian world. Levett's introduction to the Palestine war was in 1947, when he got a job working for Lionel Silver, a Jewish optometrist-turned-laundry business owner, he learned of the conflict between Jews and Arabs in Mandate Palestine. Most notoriously, of his writings about Lionel was that besides describing his physical appearance as 'classically semitic looking', the only other description of Lionel and his wife is that she was 'pretty', and that 'Like most Jewish married couples, they were happy together.'[48] This would be of little note if it hadn't been for another descriptor of Levett's demobilisation experience; notably that when trying to adjust to civilian life, he states that 'it did not help that I did not have a girl'. For Levett, and many veterans returning to the UK, success in the post-demobilisation madness is fundamentally tied to the idea of financial and social success: being able to have, or even return to a preexisting romantic relationship, to find work and find financial success, and to fit the civilian archetype, down to ensuring the correct language was used, and not to rise when a

[47] Gordon Levett, Flying under Two Flags : An Ex-RAF Pilot in Israel's War of Independence (London ; Portland, Or: Frank Cass, 1994), 113.
[48] Ibid, 121.

figure of authority (in his example his mother) entered the room - in other words to shun all military habits.

Beyond the question of Jewish and non-Jewish, Zionist or unaligned former servicemen, Weizman and Levett both capture and embody significant facets of British postwar demobilisation and its consequences, which are critical foundations for understanding how former pilots, especially those who don't fit the stereotypical background of a Palestinian Jewish/Israeli sabra paramilitary fighter found themselves attracted to the prospect of fighting in the Palestine air war. The core issue of demobilisation as an exercise was that the inability of the British military to safely release the majority of their servicemen back into the civilian world was dictated by their need to ensure the military's structures didn't collapse and its capabilities beyond manpower weren't diminished. The result was that the ostensibly fair demobilisation scheme, which was split into class A and class B demobilisations based on criteria such as length of service and age and voluntary re-entry into the civilian war assuming no requirement for retention by the service, respectively, inadvertently overlooked the complex future questions looming over minority groups, and more critically, of specialist personnel. Pope even goes so far as to explicitly state that the Navy and RAF, being branches where service revolved around highly technical machines unfairly affected those within it seeking to move smoothly to civilian life, as 'in the case of the RAF, for instance, there were large numbers of technical specialists who would be required regardless of demob grouping.'[49] While we can observe the common struggle of translating the technical speciality of flying military aircraft to limited civilian flying jobs, or in Weizman's case, participating immediately in the Palestinian Jewish paramilitary effort, the psychological impact of demobilisation's extreme changes in environment and

[49] Rex Pope, "British Demobilization after the Second World War," Journal of Contemporary History 30, no. 1 (1995): 65–81, https://doi.org/10.2307/260922, 67.

prospects is perhaps the most pronounced aspect of moving away from the RAF, in both Weizman and Levett's accounts. Pope further criticised the Class B demobilisation scheme designed to prioritise personnel essential for reconstruction, pointing out its unpopularity due to less favourable terms and conditions for leaving the service[50]. This scheme's lack of attractiveness was especially problematic for Jewish servicemen, who often were in technical specialist roles, already navigating a complicated social landscape where their national loyalties were continually scrutinised. As a result, many Jewish servicemen, and regardless of origin, pilots, often had to face some reluctance in accepting what was perceived as an inferior form of demobilisation, compounded their already precarious reintegration into British society. Furthermore, being technical specialist war fighters in the aftermath of the Second World War was troubling beyond the issues of demobilisation. Even in the best cases, where a former pilot got the rare opportunity to put their military aviation skills back to work, in Weizman's words, 'The pilot is the loneliest man in a war.'[51]

[50] Rex Pope, "British Demobilization after the Second World War," Journal of Contemporary History 30, no. 1 (1995): 65–81, https://doi.org/10.2307/260922, 77.
[51] Ezer Weizman, On Eagles' Wings : The Personal Story of the Leading Commander of the Israeli Air Force (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 93.

Identity clashes in the Israeli Air Force and the question of local integration

As a military force that had come into existence alongside the state it was an arm of, the Israeli Air Force and its members faced similar cultural turmoil in the course of existential war and the birth of new national identities. Consequently for those Machalniks and local volunteers like Weizman, Senior and Levett, Jewish diasporic tensions and questions of integrations were ongoing issues that stretched far beyond the semantics and romantic notions of fighting for the righteous cause of a Jewish state in the shadow of the holocaust - but a systematic and pragmatic issue which permeated between the personal cultural domain and the organisational cultural and operational domain of the IAF as an effective and efficient fighting force. These tensions emerged predominantly between native-born Jewish Palestinians/Israelis, known as 'sabras', and the Machalnik volunteer foreign servicemen who, despite being of Jewish origin in many cases, didn't necessarily speak Hebrew, and regardless were not accustomed to cultural norms among the Jewish community of Mandate Palestine.

The sabras not only had the benefit of being 'local' from a cultural perspective, but in many cases were shaped by experiences within local Palestinian Jewish resistance groups like the Haganah, Irgun, and Lehi, which meant spending their time fighting the British and local Arabs in the years leading up to the 1948 war operating within informal hierarchies and conducting irregular, guerilla warfare, creating a new norm for military operations which departed from the discipline of life within British military hierarchies very quickly[52]. By contrast, British-trained Machalniks had similar British military backgrounds to refer to that many in paramilitaries had from stints in the British Army and/or local Mandate police forces but

[52] Derek J Penslar, Jews and the Military (Princeton University Press, 2013), 234.

had shed as part of their paramilitary activity. The resultant tension was palpable, with 55% of surveyed serving Machalniks having formed a negative opinion of how disorganised Israeli society was in March 1949[53]. Not only were they seeking to relive and put into use their warfighting knowledge and experience, but they had to operate within a relatively disorganised, culturally fractured system which highly valued their controbutions, but ultimately was built around the narrative of nativeness – a connection to the land that permeated Zionist thought in Britain as much as it did in Israel. In the Jewish Echo, young sabras were proclaimed as 'belong(ing) to the strongest, healthiest and smartest youth manking has ever produced.[54]'

What this highlighted to the IDF's psychological research unit, which had conducted the test was part of a foundational link between the perception of Israeli society and the sabra-Machalnik dynamic which was battling out for dominance in how the IAF was to be run as a hierarchical military force, and to what degree informality could be allowed to permeate it before detriment became too steep. These tensions were compounded by linguistic, organisational, and national cultural barriers. The majority of foreign volunteers, especially from Britain and Commonwealth countries who had limited or no proficiency in Hebrew, consistently found combat and airfield operations difficult throughout the world, making the job of being what Arielli argues were aerial 'mercenaries' even more precarious.[55] Since many British pilots were accustomed to RAF radio procedures with standardised terminology, Israeli air operations early on were chaotic and disorganised in comparison, further complicated by the lack of standardised

[53] Nir Arielli, "When Are Foreign Volunteers Useful? Israel's Transnational Soldiers in the War of 1948 Re-Examined ," Whiterose.ac.uk 78, no. 2 (April 2014), https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/79021/7/arielli1.pdf, 714.
[54] The Jewish Echo Reporter, "Drop This Inferiority Complex," The Jewish Echo, December 31, 1948.
[55] Nir Arielli, "When Are Foreign Volunteers Useful? Israel's Transnational Soldiers in the War of 1948 Re-Examined ," Whiterose.ac.uk 78, no. 2 (April 2014), https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/79021/7/arielli1.pdf, 708

procedure over language use, since not all sabras spoke English, and recruits only being able to learn 'rudimentary' Hebrew as part of their initial training[56].

Arielli's point of the language barrier is a strong point made among several firsthand accounts of life in the Israeli Air Force, and informs a platform from which pilots characterise their sense of belonging to their audiences. Interestingly, language seems to be a focal point not just for intercultural compatibility issues and operational frustration, but for marking exceptionalism simultaneously. In a previous section it was discussed how Weizman described the dilemma for many British and Commonwealth pilots in the years between the Second World War's end and the outbreak of the 1948 Palestine war - stuck wanting to assist the Zionist cause or find a way to put one's military aviation skills to use in a grim job market with few civil aviation jobs available, and the defence sector rife with postwar demobilisation, depending on one's political inclination. Weizman characterises pilots as being unnecessary for the Israeli state building project given the lack of military aviation operations and capability leading up to 1948, exacerbating the perceived divide between the more traditional war fighters of the land and the more technically-inclined war fighters of the air and sea, whose vocations were operating machines of war. Once combat-ready aircraft had been hastily assembled as the Palestine war broke out, there was no time for aircrews to learn Hebrew, and for ground personnel to learn English - forcing pilots to assert their use of English, given it was the international civil aviation language, in order to advocate for English-speaking support personnel in the Israeli air force - making it a culturally distinct force. In the words of former USAAF Machalnik pilot Jeremy Weiss, 'Hebrew was the country's official language and the language of its army. There was one notable exception. Air force operations were conducted in English, the language of nearly all of

[56] Ibid, 709.

the pilots and air crews.'[57] For Machalnik pilots, the necessity of English as the aviation language was a marker of their exceptional and pioneering profession, and it's exceptionalism in the Israeli warfighting landscape was not an extension of the culture of global aviation practices that were becoming more and more nestled in the English-speaking world, but of the pilot's need to operate the way they knew - as RAF pilots.

Furthermore, while some highlight the Hebrew-English binary in their discussions, some, such as Boris Senior, emphasise a more multicultural Israel. Boris Senior, for example, states that 'there must have been a dozen languages spoken in the Yishuv', arguing that it posed a problem for the integration of English-speaking pilots into Israeli society and military operations, since 'the support people, such as tower operators, spoke Hebrew exclusively.'[58] The multilinguistic makeup of Jewish life in Israel at its founding also proved to be crucial for those who could not speak Hebrew to simply identify themselves in combat conditions. Though he did not speak Hebrew and could have been mistaken for a British pilot supporting the Egyptians on Jordanians, Weizman describes a case where an American Jewish pilot by the name of Rubenfeld was shot down, and upon being discovered by Israeli ground forces after bailing out only managed to avoid being lynched as an enemy by yelling recognisably Yiddish terminology, shouting 'shabbes shabbes, gefilte fish, gefilte fish' to convey to the two Israelis who found him that he was a Jew - all without speaking a word of Hebrew[59].

Integration into Israeli society, interestingly, is not discussed all that often in firsthand accounts of IAF service, but when it is, it is often spoken of in a negative way, sometimes with

[57] Jeffrey Weiss and Craig Weiss, I Am My Brother's Keeper (Schiffer Publishing, 1998).
[58] Boris Senior, New Heavens: My Life as a Fighter Pilot and a Founder of the Israel Air Force (Potomac Books, Inc., 2005).
[59] Ezer Weizman, On Eagles' Wings : The Personal Story of the Leading Commander of the Israeli Air Force (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 69.

implications of futility, or in the words of Weiss, 'the greatest frustration'[60]. More notably, perhaps, was that while these pilots did not functionally operate independently on a day-to-day basis in Israel outside of their group of aviators who were similarly foreign, their sabra counterparts were keen to integrate them to at least a superficial level. Levett, for instance, was asked to swear an oath to Zionism, and despite refusing to, was accepted as a pilot nevertheless[61]. Similarly, upon his arrival to the crumbling British Mandate of Palestine, had his name hebraised to Gideon Levavi for the duration of his service by his superiors[62].

[60] Jeffrey Weiss and Craig Weiss, I Am My Brother's Keeper (Schiffer Publishing, 1998).
[61] Gordon Levett, Flying under Two Flags : An Ex-RAF Pilot in Israel's War of Independence (London ; Portland, Or: Frank Cass, 1994), 128.
[62] Ibid,156.

RAF-IAF air clashes as turning points in British policy

With former allied pilots leaving behind the uncertainty of postwar civilian life at home for the thrill of taking to the air once more on behalf of a new state fighting for its existence, the eyes of the world became increasingly fixed on instances of battle where those who were flaunting western sanctions by personally joining or otherwise supporting the Israeli military's efforts were active participants. The British government in particular had to become increasingly cognisant of the fact that their own former aircrew, mechanics, air traffic controllers and soldiers were beginning to set their boots on Palestinian soil in defiance of British efforts to train and organise Arab efforts to support Palestinian Arab combat efforts against Israel. While not lending their combat squadrons directly to their allies' cause, the British extensively organised their Arab allies' air forces in Transjordan and Egypt, and from their Egyptian bases around the Suez canal, engaged in extensive intelligence-gathering efforts to feed the Egyptian war machine. One of the most direct intelligence-gathering efforts that the British engaged in on the decision of Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin and War Secretary Emanuel Shinwell was the use of Suez-based De Havilland Mosquito squadrons to conduct regular aerial reconnaissance flights over Israel.

The Mosquito, a twin-engine multirole aircraft that in the second world war had been employed in various fighter/interceptor, bomber and reconnaissance roles had been nicknamed the 'wooden wonder' by it's crews due to its largely-wooden construction in contrast to the more common metals that were used to construct aircraft by the late 1930s and 1940s. Given its relatively lightweight airframe and high-power output of its engines, the aircraft was capable of conducting aerial reconnaissance missions with powerful cameras at altitudes between 20 to 30 thousand feet, which are altitudes often used for cruise by many of today's commercial airliners. By the standard of military hardware at the time, not many anti-aircraft guns were capable of

effectively securing the airspace from aircraft at such a height, posing a challenge for the low-level anti-aircraft and flak units that Israel had at their disposal, serving primarily to defend airfields and cities from medium to low-altitude aircraft strikes. As a result, preventing high-altitude reconnaissance runs being conducted by RAF Mosquitoes required using the only method at Israel's disposal - fighter intercept. On the 20th of November, 1948, this reality came to pass when Wayne Pick, a non-Jewish American Machalnik, successfully shot down an RAF Mosquito in Israeli airspace at high altitude in an Israeli P-51 Mustang - also an American fighter aircraft - with the RAF airmen onboard perishing either due to Pick's gunfire, or upon impact with the Mediterranean sea[63].

Though this event was one single day in the course of a war that took almost a year to end, it set the stage for discourse in Britain about the Palestine war and the British government's policy surrounding that would have implications even beyond the end of the war with Israel's military victory. Zeev Tazhor, an Israeli historian and former secretary to David Ben-Gurion, discussed Pick's Mosquito shootdown and subsequent RAF-IAF aerial battles that resulted in British aircraft shot down and pilots killed or captured as an interconnected series of engagements which developed into an 'affair with international repercussions.'[64] While these events are certainly connected in the sense that they are RAF-IAF air clashes taking place as a result of intentional British efforts to supply the Arab militaries, in particular Egypt's, with intelligence that would bolster their efforts to claim the South of Palestine, it should be noted that Pick's aerial engagement takes place on its own in the timeline of the war, separated by months from the next two aerial engagements which inflame tensions internationally at the war's height

[63] Zeev Tzahor, "The 1949 Air Clash between the Israeli Air Force and the RAF," Journal of Contemporary History 28, no. 1 (1993): 75–101, https://doi.org/10.2307/260802, 77.
[64] Ibid, 80.

in January 1949, in Tzahor's analysis. As a result, the period following Pick's engagement is rife with consideration for contextualising how British and Israeli leaders perceive and respond to aerial engagements, influencing subsequent decision making about the continuation of aerial reconnaissance itself and the way in which the British public would perceive competing narratives surrounding the two later January 1949 engagements.

The tension of British aerial assistance of the Egyptian military was a palpable point for both Israeli and British politicians and publics alike to measure the concern of combat between the two countries. The prevailing concern was that British RAF presences in Egypt, and (for the public) the unknown degree to which the RAF actively participated in and enabled Egyptian combat against Israeli forces was, in a sense, a form of British interventionism in a land wherein the British had made immense efforts to withdraw due to the deteriorating situation for all, and the constant combat the British faced from Jews and Arabs alike. MP Richard Crossman, a non-Jewish British Labour party member who initially towed the Labour party's line of supporting Arab stewardship, but quickly became a staunch Zionist observing the Palestine war, remarked in a speech to the Professional Sub-committee of Youth Aliyah in England that was quoted and published by the Jewish Chronicle that 'If you were in Tel-Aviv and went down to the Jewish radar station, you would be able to listen to the directions being given to Egyptian pilots, and you would hear that those directions were being given by English voices telling them where and what to bomb'[65]. The reporting journalist, remarking on Mr Crossman's speech, asserted that British Jews were in the unique place of choosing their destiny for themselves, rather than being subject to the whims of the British Government or inter-communal pressures. In their words, 'They (British Jews), in this country, were being asked to do a subversive action—to give money to a

[65] Jewish Chronicle Reporter, "'Non-Intervention in Palestine' - Mr. Richard Crossman, M.P., on British Methods," The Jewish Chronicle, June 11, 1948.

people fighting for their lives against Bevin, and what was more, he (David Crossman), a Gentile, was asking them to do it. The issue for British Jews was whether they had the courage of their conviction. They were asked to believe in one of the greatest experiments that had ever taken place.'[66]

Only 6 months later, with the aforementioned engagement of Pick's P-51 Mustang and the RAF reconnaissance Mosquito, Crossman's rhetoric surrounding the characterisation of British involvement in Arab military operations as the prelude to or an outright form of intervention in the Palestine War would become emboldened. Bevin supporting Arab governments in their fight against Israel was one thing, but now a new conflict had emerged for the British public - one where British servicemen, only 3 years after the end of the Second World War, were fighting and dying in a war they had not officially entered. Worse still, the circumstances of the engagement squarely fell on British shoulders, even to the point that British newspapers which had traditionally followed British foreign policy rhetoric against Israel, couldn't deflect the reality of the situation. On the 17th of December, 1948, only 27 days after the Pick engagement took place, the Times' Tel-Aviv correspondent wrote in a column that 'It is widely believed here (in Israel) that this Mosquito was the aircraft reported missing by the Air Ministry last night and is taken as evidence of British intervention in the Palestine conflict… The identity of the Mosquito aircraft shot down on November 20 will probably never be officially disclosed, but the incident proves that Israel has not been guiltless with regards to the arms embargo enforced by the United Nations.'[67] Israeli Defence officials mimicked the uncertainty, not seeking to inflame the British Government more, with the Northern Whig reporting the very

[66] Jewish Chronicle Reporter, "'Non-Intervention in Palestine' - Mr. Richard Crossman, M.P., on British Methods," The Jewish Chronicle, June 11, 1948.
[67] The Times Tel-Aviv correspondent, "Shooting down a Mosquito - Israeli Explanation - Pilot's Log," The Times, December 17, 1948.

same day that an Israeli government spokesman stated that 'the Israel pilot did not see the plane's markings'[68]. Despite continuing to not take any stance explicitly endorsing the state of Israel or its military actions, the British press had acknowledge the reality of the situation, and thus informed the British public of a new status quo in the relationship between Britain and the Palestine war: Britain had been caught hiding information from the public, showing it was plainly ignorant of the international order it had continuously accused Israel of flaunting and positioned itself as a firm defender of. The end of the article encapsulates the bewilderment of the situation which could not be pushed aside, when the reporter describes leader of the opposition Winston Churchill asking the Secretary of State for Air why, should such a flight been an unarmed training flight, as the Government had claimed, it was being undertaken over an active warzone - with the Government unable to provide an answer[69].

[68] The Northern Whig reporter, "Mediator Asked about Plane Shot down by Jews," The Northern Whig, December 17, 1948.R.A.F

[69] The Times Tel-Aviv correspondent, "Shooting down a Mosquito - Israeli Explanation - Pilot's Log," The Times, December 17, 1948.

Aerial battles and British-Jewish loyalty discourse

In the aftermath of such perplexing agendas being exposed to public discourse, with the government unable to sufficiently justify their actions in support of the Egyptians, the Government may have lost credibility in the eyes of some of the public - but others took away a concerning message of an emboldened and determined Government which was guided by Bevin's staunch anti-Israel ideas. In the wake of such debates, Aridan argued that many within the British-Jewish community were anxious that their support for Israel in the face of such an unwavering Government response to opposition criticism could paint them as blindly loyal to Zionism, which could be a further blow to their perceived loyalty to Britain among non-Jewish members of their communities, and lead to Zionist ideology being a platform on which British Jews could risk their entire social standings[70]. Aridan presents this increasingly unnerving tension as an incredibly dividing force within the Jewish community by citing inflammatory public jousts between Leonard Stein of the Anglo-Jewish Association and Levi Bakstansky of the Zionist Federation, through pieces in newspapers. Aridan quotes Stein, who summed up the basis of British Jewish aversion to Zionist principles of dual belonging by declaring in no uncertain terms that 'There can be no room for any dual allegiance or dual loyalty. The Jewish State will not possess... any jurisdiction of any kind over Jews other than those who lawfully become its citizens. The allegiance and loyalty of British Jews is and will remain an undivided allegiance and loyalty to Britain.'[71] In other words, those serving the Israeli state's efforts to win the war against Arab neighbours, including those British and Commonwealth-origin Machalniks

[70] Natan Aridan, "Anglo Jewry and the State of Israel: Defining the Relationship, 19481956," Israel Studies 10, no. 1 (2005): 124–56, https://doi.org/10.2307/30245756, 127.
[71] Ibid, 129.

were in effect abandoning their allegiance to the British Crown by fighting for Israel. They could no longer be considered loyal subjects, and by taking up the arms that they chose to take up, were also no longer a part of the British Jewish community by placing themselves under the 'jurisdiction' of Israel.

Moreover, the involvement of British military volunteers in particular became a focal point for discussion about what dual loyalties actually looked like in practice. Some argued that the nature of the Machalniks' engagement with the country they were serving was highly influential on where their loyalties lied. Some, like Stein, argued that by opposing the Crown they opposed the British Jewish principle of sole and exclusive loyalty to Britain and no other national movement, while others, such as Attorney General for the British Mandate of Palestine Norman Bentwich understood the Zionist struggle not as a national struggle at all, but more of an ideological and altruistic endeavour akin to the Britons who fought in the Spanish Civil War, 'who, he noted, had not been accused of dual loyalty.'[72]

Furthermore, Tzahor notes that despite being challenged heavily in parliament by the conservative opposition, Prime Minister Clement Attlee received a letter from Foreign Secretary Bevin in the months after the Pick engagement advocating for the continuation of RAF reconnaissance operations over Israel. Such thought was not unique to Bevin, despite narratives of Britain's involvement in the 1948 war from that time and today tending to paint him as one of the most, if not the ultimate British opponent of Israel in the United Kingdom. We can see that his influence in the region was not marginalised since Tazhor's article explains that the British ambassador in Egypt not only corroborated Bevin's assessment to Attlee, but even went so far as to recommend the British hastily rearm the Egyptian military at the request of Egyptian King

[72] Natan Aridan, "Anglo Jewry and the State of Israel: Defining the Relationship, 19481956," Israel Studies 10, no. 1 (2005): 124–56, https://doi.org/10.2307/30245756, 129.

Farouk, and if not actively intervene in the war militarily on the Arab's behalf[73]. Bevin's role as a proponent of RAF actions against Israel in the air war quickly cemented him not only as a prominent anti-Israeli, but began to frame him in the eyes of many as the cause of the air war with the RAF. According to Boris Senior, within the Israeli Air Force, RAF fighters that 101 squadron pilots were scrambled to intercept were referred to less often as enemy fighters and increasingly as 'Bevin's lemons', since the prevailing perception among IAF personnel was that the RAF was only participating in the war, especially after British discourse after the Pick engagement due to Bevin's persistent efforts to keep the RAF engaged in supporting the Egyptians in their southern war effort[74].

For many, the RAF-IAF aerial engagements of 1949 brought up a complex set of feelings and concerns. Tzahor and Senior agree that there was, in Tzahor's words, 'no sense of triumph on the Israeli side'[75]. Furthermore, both state to varying degrees that the IAF's 101 squadron's success in defending against RAF incursions and shooting down several British aircraft, leading to the death of some RAF pilots led to a reimagining of the air war in that time, given 'Squadron 101 had been facing a superior force from the renowned RAF and had shot down five planes without suffering losses', with Senior even speculating that 'On their side there was bitterness and loss of face for the way they had been trounced by what was for them an upstart air force. There were even fears that we were about to be embroiled in an Israeli-British war.[76]' Former brothers-in-arms had taken up arms directly against each other with death, rather than only the

[73] Zeev Tzahor, "The 1949 Air Clash between the Israeli Air Force and the RAF," Journal of Contemporary History 28, no. 1 (1993): 75–101, https://doi.org/10.2307/260802, 77-79.
[74] Boris Senior, New Heavens: My Life as a Fighter Pilot and a Founder of the Israel Air Force (Potomac Books, Inc., 2005).
[75] Zeev Tzahor, "The 1949 Air Clash between the Israeli Air Force and the RAF," Journal of Contemporary History 28, no. 1 (1993): 75–101, https://doi.org/10.2307/260802, 91.
[76] Ibid, 91.

loss of equipment as a consequence, and the shock of the event left a sour taste in the mouths of IAF pilots, who felt uncomfortable with the idea of needing to kill their former fellow pilots in Israel's defence, and RAF pilots being demoralised from the affair and hoping that they wouldn't be ordered to face the small underdog air force that had killed some of them already anymore. the malaise and embarrassment the RAF felt from the IAF's victory brought nobody any morale, and set the stage for RAF personnel, similar to their IAF foes to reflect a debate that was beginning to stew in the minds of the British public and the Houses of Parliament alike: regardless of who should and will win the Palestine war, there was no need for another 'black afternoon' for the RAF's squadrons in the Middle East[77].

Weizman, Levett, and Senior all emphasise that the tension felt in the aftermath of the several aerial engagements of late 1948 to early 1949 led to tensions in 101 squadron about the possibility of a war with Britain. Describing hearing from recently-landed Machalniks that two British Spitfires had been shot down by them on the 7th of January, 1949, Weizman stated that 'It took two or three minutes before we could get our breath back' as the reaction of their fellow pilots[78]. Levett explicitly discusses the tension of a possible all-out war with Britain as a conundrum of his character as an individual, and not of allegiance owed, stating 'I was still not sure as I sat in the Spitfire's cockpit waiting for dawn, what I would do if the Royal Air Force attacked and we were scrambled. Could I fire at an RAF aeroplane? I remembered E.M. Forster's apophthegm that if he ever had to choose between cause and country, he hoped he would have the guts to choose the cause.'[79] Furthermore, it is worth noting that in Levett's mind, the

[77] Zeev Tzahor, "The 1949 Air Clash between the Israeli Air Force and the RAF," Journal of Contemporary History 28, no. 1 (1993): 75–101, https://doi.org/10.2307/260802, 91.
[78] Ezer Weizman, On Eagles' Wings : The Personal Story of the Leading Commander of the Israeli Air Force (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 79.
[79] Gordon Levett, Flying under Two Flags : An Ex-RAF Pilot in Israel's War of Independence (London ; Portland, Or: Frank Cass, 1994), 204.

dilemma was about shooting at an 'RAF aeroplane', and not at a British aircraft. For him, the pride he had felt in becoming an RAF officer was what made him who he was and allowed him to be sitting in an Israeli Spitfire cockpit that morning. It was the thought of facing the organisation which he felt he could not do, and not his country, even if the organisation was the arm of his country's policies. He was not fighting the UK, and really was fighting the military arm of its government, while fighting for a country. The causes on each side, in his interpretation, seem to be uneven simply because the country he was fighting for was not yet at the same level of the UK on the international stage, and since, in his words, 'Israel still did not exist in British eyes.'[80] For a British non-Jew like Levett, he understood that should war have arisen between the United Kingdom and Israel, he would be nothing more than an indisputable traitor, and 'would probably end my days in the Tower of London', even though he felt he had earned Israel as his home; 'I had qualified as an Israeli as much as anybody… It was reward enough that I had participated in perhaps the greatest humanitarian cause in all history.'[81][82]

British eyes did also widen in the aftermath of the 7th of January shootdown, especially as tensions in Parliament rose, especially with Bevin refusing to directly answer questions from those attempting to learn more from him, as he continued to attempt to quell any criticism with the promise of a report from UN representatives in the area soon to be received[83]. Continuously throughout the past months, British press and Government publications continued to refer to the Israeli Air Force's aircraft as 'Jewish' aircraft, and Jewish press outlets such as the Jewish Chronicle referred to the aircraft as 'Israeli'. While the choices may seem in line with the

[80] Gordon Levett, Flying under Two Flags : An Ex-RAF Pilot in Israel's War of Independence (London ; Portland, Or: Frank Cass, 1994), 205.
[81] Ibid, 207.
[82] Ibid, 214-215.
[83] House of Commons, "Israel (Attacked British Aircraft)," Hansard Millbank Systems, 1949, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1949/may/11/israel-attacked-british-aircraft.

expected ideological affiliations, the insistence of members of the Houses of parliament on referring to the IAF's aircraft as 'Jewish' and not Israeli or Zionist aircraft helped to create an environment where many British Jews felt more pressure to consider their national allegiance as under scrutiny. The scrutiny of the Government's conduct regarding the disastrous reconnaissance missions was quite notable from those in the Jewish community in Britain, whose gentile allies, such as Crossman, considered to be evidence of British interventionism against the Israelis, and many in the British Jewish community feeling betrayed. The war had taken its toll on British-Jewish relations over the year prior to January 7th, 1949, but in the words of a Jewish Chronicle columnist, the specific act of sending RAF aircraft on reconnaissance missions over Israel was a 'criminal act… which sent them to their deaths.'[84] The columnist continues in describing what can be interpreted as above all else the detailing of a breaking point for intercommunal relations and the emboldening of open Zionism in the British Jewish community, stating 'Whenever rumour came against the Jews, the British Government believed it and spread it. Had the Government said a word about the arming of Egyptians with Spitfires? It was a pretence to say that this country had been acting throughout as the honest broker. It was sheer hypocrisy to say that they desired to hold the scales evenly.'[85] Meanwhile, the Times held a stance which suited the political aims of Bevin and his foreign policy, treating the January 7th shootdown as a frustrating but implicitly innocent anomaly in the application of Britain's foreign policy. The Times' Tel-Aviv correspondent reported 10 days after Spitfire pilots McElhaw and Close of the RAF were shot down and captured by Israeli forces in the January 7th engagements that 'They were service men of a Power which was not at war with Israel, and it was better to

[84] Jewish Chronicle Reporter, "Liberal Leader's Criticism," The Jewish Chronicle, January 28, 1949.
[85] Ibid.

close an unhappy incident.'[86] The Israelis, and in practice namely the Jews, and not the 'Power' flying reconnaissance sorties laden with fighter escorts into the territory of a country at war, were presented to the British public as those to blame.

The anxiety surrounding British-Israeli aerial confrontations as an absolving of British interventionism in the region therefore became a root cause of the regularly evolving stances of mainstream Jewish institutions, for example the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association, which according to Aridan initially feared Zionism would undermine perceived Jewish integration in British public life[87].

While the knowledge that Israel and Britain were indirectly competing with each other through Egypt as a proxy, the publicisation of these events as major wartime issues in British media and political discourse disproportionately amplified these brief flashpoints of British-Israeli direct combat into the implicit public reconsideration of Jewish loyalty. Anglo-Jewish community leaders therefore quickly and repeatedly sought to reassure the broader British society of their steadfast allegiance to Britain through media opinion pieces and publicly directed publications from their organisations, even as the commitment to Israel among those they represented remained, if not grew.

While these incidents were presented to the British public as an affront to the Empire by a haughty regional actor, and to British Jews as a catalyst for rethinking Britain's social stance towards the Jews as a portion of the population, just over a year later the atmosphere would shift notably when aviation would serve once again as a site for testing British-Israeli interactions and it's reception in British-Jewish discourse. In June of 1950, a Royal Air Force Short Sunderland

[86] The Times Tel-Aviv correspondent, "R.A.F. Pilots to Be Released," The Times, January 18, 1949.
[87] Natan Aridan, "Anglo Jewry and the State of Israel: Defining the Relationship, 19481956," Israel Studies 10, no. 1 (2005): 124–56, https://doi.org/10.2307/30245756, 125.

flying boat bomber/transport aircraft overflew Israel, being intercepted and ordered to land on the water next to Tel-Aviv, which it complied with. Both the Times and the Jewish Chronicle, unlike in the case of the January 7th incident, agreed with each other plainly on the fundamental series of events which took place. Namely, what they both report was that the aircraft had interred Israeli territory improperly, with the Times saying it had entered without permission and the Jewish Chronicle stating it had deviated from designated overflight corridors, that the Air attaché of the British legation, Wing Commander A. O'Neill was informed immediately and present for the interrogation of the crew, which was conducted in a 'friendly atmosphere', and that the aircraft and its crew were released and given permission to continue their flight before sundown the very same day[8889]. Adding a bit more context than the Time's statement, the Jewish Chronicle concludes that 'The incident is now closed and the Israel Government does not attach any importance to it.'[90]

[88] The Times Tel-Aviv correspondent, "Off Course over Israel," The Times, May 18, 1950.
[89] Jewish Chronicle Reporter, "R.A.F. Aircraft Forced down in Israel," The Jewish Chronicle, May 26, 1950.
[90] Ibid.

Conclusion

With this thesis, I hope to have expanded the existing literature on Machalnik's participation in the aerial component of the 1948 Palestine war and the impact this participation had on British and Commonwealth pilots' personal and collective identities, and their perception of allegiance within the context of the establishment of the Israeli Air Force and on British-Jewish relations. The research underscores that the motivations behind British and Commonwealth pilots' participation in the IAF were varied, multifaceted, and often framed within the issue of postwar demobilisation adversely affecting those with specialist military roles, such as pilots facing a restrictive civil aviation job market. For Jewish pilots, whether Zionist or non-Zionist, participation in the Israeli Air Force's birth was a reactionary measure in the context of Aliyah Bet and the lingering horror of attempted Jewish extermination only three years earlier, as well as an opportunity to put their aviation skills to use counteracting what many understood as near-interventionist and morally unfounded British policy against Israel. Many Jewish veterans who had experiences of combat in the Second World War, whether through direct combat, exposure to anti-Semitism in the ranks or deliberate sidelining of Jewish troops to prevent their gaining of military expertise that could be used to support Jewish paramilitaries against the British in Palestine saw the establishment of the Israeli Air Force as a chance to prove Jews could combat in international military arenas as a peer, and not as a weaker force that could be easily taken advantage of. Since the British Government concealed the extent of their efforts to assist Arab militaries in their attempt to prevent a Jewish state from arising, the air war, as a focal point for direct British-Israeli combat, and the only site where British servicemen and equipment were being employed in a conventional and direct capacity against Israel in the form of reconnaissance flights, alienation and feelings of betrayal among British Jews motivated many

to participate actively in the Zionist cause, and was directly tied to the news of the air war specifically, making it a distinct site for discourse analysis relative to the land or sea war.

Non-Jewish pilots, by contrast, found themselves attracted to Israel because of professional disillusionment, a lack of agreement with the anti-Israel interventionism of Atlee's administration, and because of the unique prospect the IAF offered as a way to get back into a cockpit, fight for a state for a people battered by the Holocaust, and to do so in a setting where their experience as part of the RAF was explicitly and specifically useful to the context of the nascent IAF's limited, largely British equipment. Pilots like Gordon Levett illustrate this clearly, demonstrating a sense of ideological affiliation often emboldened as a result of their service and their combat against the RAF, rather than stemming from subscribing to Zionism before joining the IAF. Yet even these motivations were nuanced, revealing an underlying sense of not only adventurism, but of contrarianism given the conscious internal questioning of what it meant to be an Israeli pilot and for the Israeli cause to be just in the face of potentially committing treason.

As has been discussed by many historians, the British government's withdrawal from the Mandate of Palestine significantly complicated this landscape, since Britain's abrupt departure created a vacuum that arguably necessitated the rapid militarisation of the emerging Israeli state, and therefore setting into motion a need to secure Israeli airspace by military means from the British-equipped and complemented Transjordanian and Egyptian air forces. The clandestine nature of Israel's arms procurement from countries like Czechoslovakia alongside the active role of British-trained personnel in establishing a viable air force, arguably reflects the idea that British society, despite engaged actively in united reconstruction efforts after the war, was deeply fragmented and disillusioned with itself, given the willingness of former pilots, who arguably represented part of the pinnacle of British wartime heroism being dissatisfied enough

with postwar British life to devote themselves to a cause their government did not support. Pilots trained in British combat methods, familiar with RAF operational procedures and aircraft, were invaluable in developing a functional Israeli air strategy, since Israeli reliance on these pilots to develop the limited leftover British military capability of their paramilitary forces demonstrating a profound paradox: the British military establishment, actively opposing Israel's strategic aims, simultaneously and inadvertently provided the training, equipment, and experience necessary for the Israeli military's initial successes - making the 1948 Palestine air war a quintessentially British postcolonial affair in many respects.

The aerial engagements between the RAF and IAF served as the most extreme demonstrations of this complex identity and allegiance crisis, where the British media and public's reaction to these confrontations stoked broader anxieties surrounding Britain's role in post-colonial conflicts especially given the Empire at the same time seeing the end of colonial rule in India and intercommunal instability, while the British Jewish community experienced intensified scrutiny and internal insecurity about whether their loyalty to Britain was even accepted as fact by their compatriots anymore. The downing of RAF reconnaissance and fighter aircraft by the IAF was not merely an operational setback for Britain - these events served as viscerally sentimental flashpoints for different ideological camps in the British public as well as the symbolic defeat and embarrassment of an actively-crumbling Empire, and whose Government had now been exposed as being driven purely by personal agendas and an inability to confront the reality of their position in the new International order which was attempting to prevent the new cold war from becoming very quickly hot, both in the Middle East and in Europe.

This thesis, if nothing else, serves to demonstrate that British pilots' involvement in the IAF's birth and the 1948 Palestine war significantly impacted British-Jewish communal dynamics in the sense that they legitimised Zionism as a force to be reckoned with, and served as the litmus test for post-British Jewish relations to understand that Jews could be treated as compatriots still dispelling the wider public's view that Zionism meant loyalty to the Jewish state exclusively and without exception. Within the British Jewish community, the British and Commonwealth's pilots' actions and diversity represented an affirmation of Zionist aspirations as not simply a Jewish one, but a moral one that the world needed to respond to with firm action.

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