

Title: The military involvement of Britons in the Arab-Israeli War of 1948-49

Closing date: 16 April 2012

Interview date: 8 May 2012

Supervisors

Director of Studies: Dr Nir Arielli, Institute of Humanities & Creative Arts, University of Worcester, UK

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Context

The Arab-Israeli War of 1948-49 is arguably one of the most important military confrontations in the modern history of the Middle East. Erupting at the end of the British Mandate in Palestine, the war brought about the establishment of the state of Israel and the birth of the Palestinian refugee crisis. The war's consequences have had an enormous influence over Middle Eastern politics to the present.

While Britain's official policy towards the fate of Palestine has received plenty of historiographic attention, the military involvement of Britons in the war of 1948-49 has not been explored at all. In fact, several hundred Britons took an active part in the fighting on both the Arab and Jewish side. These included British officers who were seconded to the Arab Legion of Transjordan, and British soldiers and policemen who were stationed in Palestine and had deserted to join the fighting either on the Arab or the Jewish side. A third group of Britons who took part in the war were approximately 600 Jewish men and women (and a very small number of non-Jews) who lived in the UK and, when the war broke out, travelled to the Middle East and volunteered to join the Israeli military.

The wealth of readily-available source material provides a number of possible themes of investigation. It is anticipated, however, that the successful candidate will focus on **one or more** of the following topics:

1. A comparative social history of Britons who fought in the Arab-Israeli War of 1948-49. The first question to be examined in this context is what prompted individuals to take part in the conflict. For the volunteers who joined the Jewish side the role of pre-existing Zionist activity, personal experiences of antisemitism and the impact of the Holocaust will be evaluated. For those who joined paramilitary Arab units in Palestine the impact of Jewish terrorist attacks against British targets in Palestine will be assessed. A further question to be addressed is to what extent adventurism and financial incentives played a part in influencing the decision to fight. These questions will inevitably lead to an exploration of the national identity and loyalty of these men and women. The successful candidate should also reflect on the reception of British volunteers by the respective host societies. A candidate who wishes to explore this theme may want to broaden the examination to include British volunteers who took part in the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 1950s and 1960s.

2. An analysis of the policy of the British government towards British citizens who sought to join the Arab Legion, the Israeli military and paramilitary Arab forces in Palestine. The government was very selective in its application of the Foreign Enlistment Act (1870) which in theory bans enlisting or engaging British subjects to serve in a foreign country. While the Foreign Office sought to stop Britons from joining Jewish forces in order to prevent difficulties in relations with Arab countries, the War Office thought it advisable to allow private persons to join the Arab Legion in view of retaining good relations with Transjordan. The 1948 case study will make an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the evolution of the British government's approach towards the enlistment of British nationals for military service abroad, a subject that is very pertinent in light of the alleged participation of Britons in the current insurgency in Afghanistan.

3. An analysis of the approach of Jewish communities and organizations in the UK to the 1948-49 war in general and to the military participation of British Jews in particular. Within the context of minority studies, this strand will examine the transnational connections of British Jewry following the crucial shift that occurred as a result of World War II and the Holocaust. As there were different views among British Jewry regarding the establishment of the state of Israel, the successful candidate should compare the approach of different communities, taking into account differences in class, political inclination and levels of religiosity. A candidate who wishes to explore this theme may want to broaden the examination to include the approach of Jewish communities to military volunteering in the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 1950s and 1960s.

Initial reading

Adrian, Natan, *Britain, Israel and Anglo-Jewry 1949-1957* (London: Routledge, 2004).

Bercuson, David J., *The Secret Army* (Toronto: Letser & Orpen Dennys, 1983).

Cull, Brian, Aloni, Shlomo and Nicolle, David, *Spitfires over Israel* (London: Grubb Street, 1994).

Levett, Gordon, *Flying under Two Flags: An Ex-RAF Pilot in Israel's War of Independence* (London: Frank Cass, 1994)

Levey, Zach and Podeh, Elie (eds), *Britain and the Middle East: From Imperial Power to Junior Partner* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008).

Miller, Rory, *Divided Against Zion: Anti-Zionist Opposition in Britain to a Jewish State in Palestine, 1945-1948* (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

Morris, Benny, *The Road to Jerusalem: Glubb Pasha, Palestine and the Jews* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

Pappé, Ilan, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-51* (New York: St Martin's, 1988).

Shlaim, Avi, *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

<http://www.machal.org.il/>

Qualifications needed

Essential:

- Applicants should have (or expect to receive) a First or Upper Second Honours Degree in history or a closely related and relevant discipline;
- Proficiency in oral and written English;
- Computer literacy;
- Ability to organise and meet deadlines;
- Good interpersonal skills;
- Ability to work independently and contribute to a team;
- Commitment and an enthusiastic approach to completing a higher research degree
- Experience in conducting historical research
- Interest in transnational history

Desirable:

- An MA in history or a closely related discipline;
- A working knowledge of Hebrew or Arabic

Facilities: This research studentship is fully funded by the University of Worcester (UK). During your time at Worcester, you will be provided with your own computer and an office space, which you will normally share with other full-time research students. Your office will normally be located in the Graduate Research School or your Institute.

Candidates will be expected to have suitable academic qualifications but additional specialised training will be available as required.

You will be an integral member of the University of Worcester's Transnational Studies Research Group. Whilst fully acknowledging the likely need for periods of research away from the University, it is an expectation that the successful candidate will generally be based on campus for the duration of the studentship, participate fully in the activities of the Institute of Humanities & Creative Arts and benefit from opportunities associated with such participation (including opportunities to gain experience of teaching).

Bursary: You will receive a tax free bursary of £12,300 for a period of 3 years plus an expenses budget. Fees will be paid in full at the UK/EU rate for home and EU citizens. Applicants from outside the EU are welcome but will need to pay the balance of registration fees for non-EU students. If you are applying and not eligible as an EU student you should make a statement on your application form to confirm you will fund the additional fees (approx £6000 per year).

Application process:

All applicants are asked to complete the application form (<http://www.worcester.ac.uk/discover/phd-studentships.html>) and a short written proposal (up to 1,000 words) outlining how you intend to approach this research project. We are also asking all applicants to provide the selection panel with one academic reference. We would ask that this is not sent with the application form but that a letter is sent to us directly from your chosen referee by the closing date. You will be asked to provide us with the details of two referees on the application form. Please therefore highlight in bold the contact details of the referee who will be sending a reference on your behalf prior to interview. The second referee will only be contacted (by us) if you are successful at interview.

Interview:

All successful applicants will be interviewed. **The interview will provisionally be held on 8th May 2012.** The interview normally lasts around 3 hours in total and includes a meeting with the project supervisors, a chance to talk to some of our full-time students and an opportunity to view the campus and Institutional facilities. At interview you will be asked to make a short presentation on a piece of research you have previously undertaken. Further details will be provided in the invitation to interview. As we receive a large number of applications for our research studentships we will only be able to contact applicants who are selected for interview.

Widening Participation: As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

Application forms are available at: <http://www.worcester.ac.uk/discover/phd-studentships.html>

For further information or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr Nir Arielli: n.arielli@worc.ac.uk

If you have any questions regarding the application process, please contact Mrs Helen Tabinor, Graduate Research School Manager (tel: 01905 855012, email: h.tabinor@worc.ac.uk).

Completed application forms should be sent by email to: research@worc.ac.uk or sent to: Graduate Research School, University of Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester, WR2 6AJ, UK