

TERROR IN

Palestine

BY FRANK GERVASI

In the Holy Land are two organizations—the Stern Gang and the NMO—the members of which employ kidnaping, extortion and murder to gain their ends: civil war and independence for Palestine. Here Collier's correspondent reports who and what they are

WALTER EDWARD GUINNESS, first Baron Moyne of Bury St. Edmunds, was a slim, pallid man who looked like a retired character actor—urbane, handsome and restrained. Had Lord Moyne devoted himself to making the stout for which his Dublin family became famous, instead of entering politics and diplomacy, he would almost certainly be alive today. For he would not have been in listless, fragrant Cairo last November.

But Lord Moyne wasn't an actor and he didn't pay much attention to the brewery industry. He was the British Resident Minister in the Middle East, the instrument of British imperial policy in those trouble-charged lands.

Lord Moyne was, therefore, a man marked for death. His assassination was a predictably probable act of Palestine terrorism, not because he was Moyne, but because he was the symbol of British policy in the Middle East.

On the afternoon of November 6, 1944, while Cairo lay in its customary midday torpor, Lord Moyne was shot and killed by two assassins hiding in the shrubbery of his modern Mediterranean villa. The shots mortally wounded Moyne, killed his soldier-chauffeur outright and almost literally echoed around the world. They were intended to. They were fired by Jewish terrorists.

The killers were Elihahu Hakim and Elihahu Bet-Tsouri, 20 and 23 years old respectively, members of the so-called Stern Gang, the smaller but more virulent of two terrorist organizations operating in Palestine. They were captured by an Arab policeman. Egyptians tried, prosecuted, defended, judged and subsequently sentenced the pair of young killers to death by hanging. They received, according to the law, what they deserved.

Their fate won't, however, solve the problem of terrorism in Palestine. Much less will it solve the greater problem of Palestine itself (a territory about one fifth again as large as Massachusetts) which the League of Nations mandated to Great Britain after the last war.

Hakim's and Bet-Tsouri's confessed motive for the murder of Moyne was to arouse world opinion about Palestine. From the witness stand in the noisy, hot, Cairo courtroom, Hakim and Bet-Tsouri, carefully briefed by their terrorist leaders in what to say and even how to say it, told why they killed Moyne. The correspondents covering the trial for the world press were not permitted to report what Hakim and Bet-Tsouri said. They weren't even allowed to make notes.

The killers sought to put Great Britain's imperial and colonial policy in Palestine on trial at a critical moment in world history. Because of censorship, the young terrorists failed in their propagandist mission and so wasted the lives of Moyne, his driver and

themselves. In the end they were tried—and not Britain.

In one sense, however, Hakim and Bet-Tsouri succeeded. They indirectly but effectively brought Palestine to public notice. The problem of Palestine or, as it's sometimes called, "the Jewish question," had been shoved into the background by the war. Statements by British and Jewish officials condemning terrorism and deploring politics by murder couldn't alter the issues involved any more than they could restore Moyne to life. These issues have challenged the political ingenuity and patience of British and Jewish officials ever since the Balfour Declaration—as ambiguous a document as ever was written—half promised the Jews a national home in Palestine.

The trouble began on November 2, 1917, when Arthur James Balfour wrote Lord Rothschild:

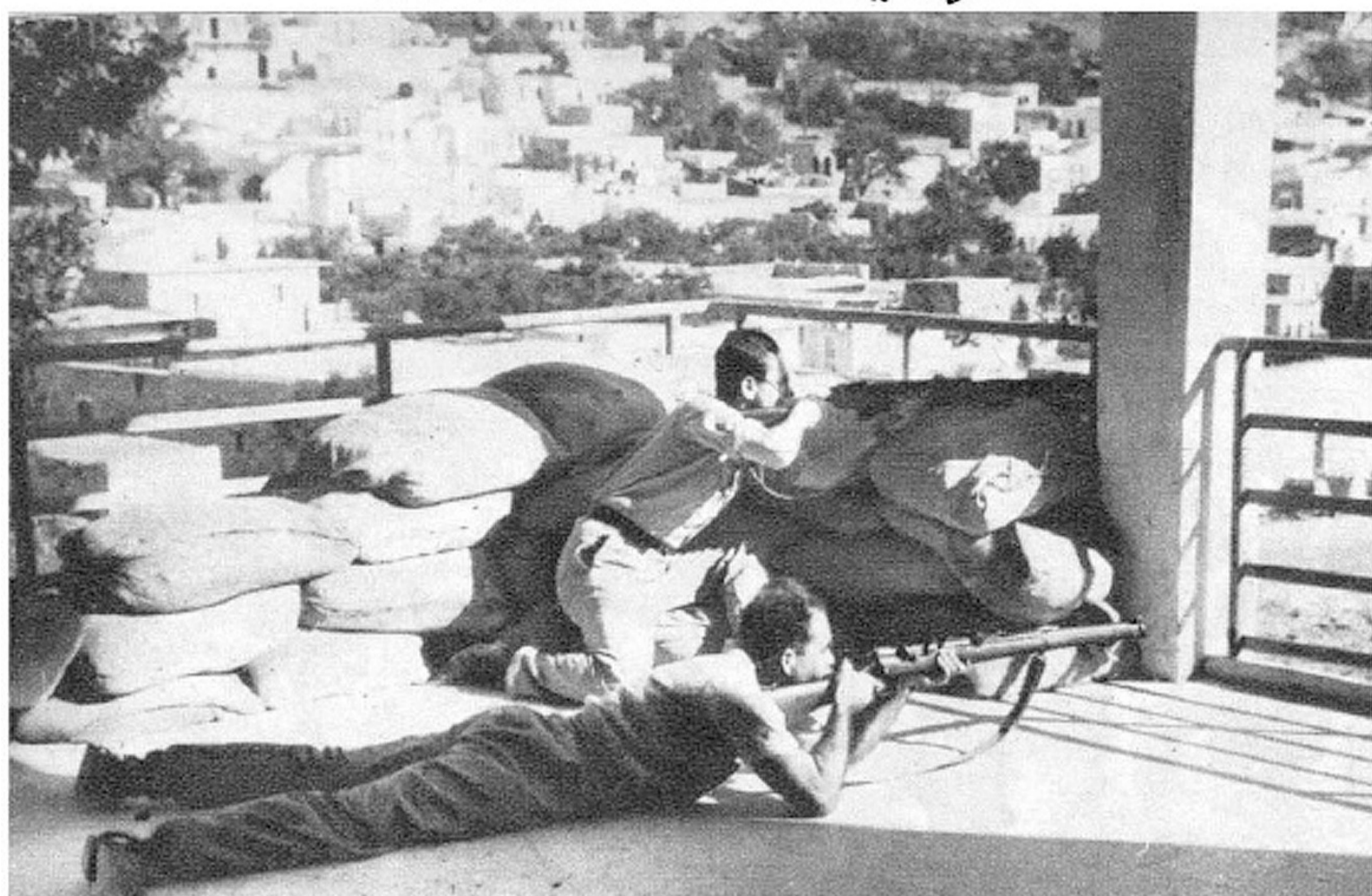
"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights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

A Desert Begins to Blossom

This statement was issued in the name of the British War Cabinet. It was confirmed by a joint resolution of the Sixty-seventh Congress of the United States, approved by President Woodrow Wilson and incorporated in the League mandate. The World Zionist Organization, charged with the development of Jewish interests in the Holy Land, went to work. Jews were brought in from the ghettos of central, eastern and southeastern Europe. They built cities like Tel Aviv, towns like Ramat Hakovesh. They made deserts blossom into farms, banana plantations and citrus orchards. They built factories, and Palestine, Arab and Jewish, prospered.

The population of Palestine in 1922 totaled 589,177 Arabs and 83,790 Jews. By the spring of 1939, the Arab population had doubled to about one million, while the Jews had increased sixfold to about 550,000.

London, rightly or wrongly, felt it had to appease the Arabs who opposed the influx of Jews to Palestine. The government of the champ appeaser of our time, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, issued in May, 1939, the White Paper closing Palestine to Jewish immigration. At the moment, some six million European Jews stood in the path of Hitler's armies. Ever since, Palestine's Jews and their Zionist supporters everywhere have been fighting to have the White Paper revoked and the country reopened to immigration.



Palestine is the scene of almost constant clashes between Arabs and Jews. Here Jews answer Arab rifle fire in the town of Safad, one of the country's hottest spots

Whether or not the Balfour Declaration legally permits unlimited Jewish immigration is another matter. Any good Zionist lawyer can find words in Balfour's historic paragraph to mean yes, and his Arab counterpart can find some to mean no. Until some legal genius comes along with a solution, the problem remains and the conflict continues.

The conflict actually is nearing a climactic explosion as dangerous to peace in the Middle East and to United Nations unity as the one which flared in Syria and Lebanon a few weeks ago. Behind the Jewish agitation is a desire for creation of an independent Palestine. Denied representation at the San Francisco Conference, Jewish hopes of achieving

independence through political and diplomatic means have nearly expired.

David Ben Gurion, chief of the executive body of the Jewish Agency, has warned Prime Minister Winston Churchill that Jewish patience is at an end and that the Jews may resort to "direct means" at any moment. If current last-minute efforts to obtain a pacific solution in Palestine fail then a general strike, violence and revolution can be expected.

Of the world's 17,000,000 Jews some 5,000,000 have been slaughtered in Europe by the Nazis. The Jews count their dead, measure their war effort in the soldiers they've given to the common cause, the money and

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Dr. Chaim Weizmann, head of the Jewish Agency, is admired by British and Jews alike. He is sure that extremist acts of terrorists postpone settlement of Jewish question



Terror in Palestine

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work they've contributed and feel that they have an unquestionable claim to nationhood. They seem, from all reports and indications, to be ready to fight for what they believe. This is true of even the most moderate Jews. The Terrorists have preached "direct action" for years.

Both the Stern Gang and its bigger brother, the Irgun Zevai Leumi, or National Military Organization, seek to foment civil war and eventually revolt against Britain. That's the terrorist "solution" for the Palestine problem. Ultimately the objective of the Zionists and of the terrorists is the same: Jewish nationhood. But whereas the Zionists hope to accomplish it through legal, democratic, political and diplomatic means, the terrorists demand a short cut. They want to throw the British out by force and to establish a Jewish Free State. They're the Sinn Feiners of Judaism in revolt. Friedman-Yellin, the present leader of the Stern Gang, is a square-faced, blue-eyed fanatic who has transplanted to Palestine the gangster technique of the Capones and the O'Bannions of our terrible twenties.

Yet neither Friedman-Yellin nor Menachim Begin, the skinny, pasty-faced former law student who heads the other terrorist organization, the NMO, can be written off as a pair of bloodthirsty thugs. Maybe they are personally, and so are a good many of their followers. For the most part, however, the terrorists are misguided, fanatic patriots, and their methods must be seen against the background of Palestine, where some half million Jews were forced to sit on their hands while their relatives in Europe were slaughtered or left to wander among the ruins in search of shelter and food, with people less willing to help them now than ever. Much of Hitler's mud has stuck to the Jews, and anti-Semitism, they know in Palestine, didn't die with the defeat of the Nazis.

The Stern Gang was organized some years ago—nobody seems to know just when—by a Polish Jew named Abraham Ben Mordechai Stern. The gang grew out of a secret society which called itself the Fighters for Freedom of Israel, a small group of desperadoes and jailbirds specializing in individual terrorism. This gang was responsible for the attempt on former High Commissioner MacMichael last summer, and for killing Assistant Superintendent of Police Wilkin. The gang's business is murder. Its leader learned the trade in tough schools—prewar Poland and Fascist Italy.

An Admirer of Il Duce

A Zionist who knew Stern described him to me as an able, single-minded and singularly stubborn man. He arrived in Palestine from Russia as a boy of fifteen, attended secondary schools and the university in Jerusalem and then went to Poland and later to Italy where he became an admirer of Benito Mussolini.

"The British are our enemy as much as the Germans," he often said. "The Germans kill Jews, and the British don't do anything to save them." He lived by this credo, made it the battle cry of his small, mobile band.

On the softer side, Stern wrote creditable poetry and was married to a professional pianist, who bore him one child, didn't agree with him politically but loved him devotedly. He allowed himself a salary of only six pounds sterling (about \$24) a month.

The Stern Gang is organized with the emphasis on secrecy. No member is supposed to know more than a handful of the others. Less than 10 per cent of the members are Palestinian born, many of them being Polish Jews. The links between Palestine terrorist activity and prewar anti-Semitism in Poland are many and curious. Stern had organized a revolutionary secret society in Poland. When war came, these men entered the Polish army. Captured by the Russians on the Eastern front, they were released and made their way to Palestine. There the former Stern Gang members deserted the Polish army and rejoined the terrorists.

Stern was killed in 1942, when he was about 35 years old, while he was hiding in a house in Tel Aviv. To the terrorists he is a martyr who must be avenged. Stern left to Friedman-Yellin a gang numbering some 40 to 50 so-called "front men" or trigger men, and 150 "helpers"—informers, stooges and assistants of one kind and another, including expert pamphleteers.

The more serious and the stronger of the two terrorist groups is the National Military Organization. The NMO recently split with the Revisionist Party, to train youths in the art of guerrilla warfare, sabotage and terrorism. How many have been graduated from the NMO's school few know, but persons able to estimate the organization's strength with some accuracy told me in Cairo that it can count at the moment on some 300 to 400 trigger men and at least 2,000 "helpers."

While the Sternists single out key men for their victims, the NMO's technique is to strike directly at the British administration machinery in Palestine. One organization supplements the work of the other, but whereas the Stern hoodlums seem to be satisfied with martyrdom, the NMO boys are far more ambitious. They don't want to die fighting. They want to live victoriously. They want to rule Palestine.

Terrorism with Limitations

Less extreme than the Sternists, the members of NMO try to avoid committing any act of terrorism which would impede the war effort. In their pamphlets and propaganda, for instance, they urged Jews to join the British army. Here, actually, there's an ulterior motive. A returned soldier able to handle weapons is a useful revolutionary.

The pattern of NMO terrorism is to blow up the offices of the Palestine government's Immigration Department as a protest against the restriction of Jewish immigration under the White Paper; to plant bombs in the headquarters of the Palestine police, enforcers of the White Paper policy, but not to touch the British military police. Whenever actual British troops or British police might become involved in a terrorist project, the NMO "helpers" tip them off by telephone.

A source of power for the NMO is the Poles—not the Polish government-in-exile, but that section of the Polish army known as the Dwoika, or secret service. The links between the NMO and the Poles are more numerous, more easily identifiable than those between the Sternists and the Poles. There existed until just before the war a sort of unholy alliance between Polish anti-Semitic elements and extreme Jewish nationalists directly or indirectly linked to the NMO. Polish pressure against Jews created candidates for admission to Palestine, a state of affairs which enabled the extremists to bring pressure to bear, in turn, on the British for permission to allow the persecuted Polish Jews to enter the Promised Land.

This entente was rudely violated by the Poles when they instituted actual pogroms against the Jews. Not even Palestine's extremists could take this, although the mass murders served their propaganda purposes and intensified the clamor to allow free immigration of Jews to Palestine. Like Stern, the leader of the NMO, Menachim Begin, was "formed" in Poland. A squinty, unprepossessing fellow, he was born there, studied law at Warsaw University and served in the Polish army.

When Polish troops were evacuated from Russia to the Middle East by way of Palestine in 1941-1942, connections between the Palestinian Revisionist Party, the NMO and their Polish confreres of the old days were re-established. They had new reasons, now, to resume business.

The right-wing Poles fear and hate Russia and Communism. Their Dwoika, or secret service, enlisted the help of the NMO and the Revisionists in identifying pro-Russian elements in the Polish army. They also asked the Revisionists to help them disseminate anti-Russian and anti-Communist propaganda through their well-established channels in Britain and the United States. In return, the Poles promised and gave invaluable help to the NMO terrorists.

According to one important source the

Poles furnished the NMO: (1) instructors to teach terrorists how to use firearms and explosives; (2) transportation of weapons and explosives in Polish military staff cars; (3) refuge in their military camps for NMO members sought by the police. It was a simple matter for the Poles to detach officers "for special duty," and an undeterminable number were released to the NMO to drill and lead the terrorists. British Palestine police, searching for weapons and dynamite, couldn't question the presence of such equipment in regular Polish army vehicles; and they didn't even think of looking for escaped terrorists in British battle dress in Polish army camps.

The British eventually realized what was going on. The Poles made it plain that they were cross with the British, feeling that they were being "betrayed" on the altar of Allied unity with Russia. When the British dug into the causes of Polish rancor, they uncovered, among other things, the links between the Poles and the NMO, but by this time the harm had been done.

Between the arrival of the first refugee Poles in 1941-1942 and June of 1944, the rhythm of NMO and Sternist terrorism increased. On May 18, 1944, three truckloads of armed terrorists invaded the Palestine Broadcasting System's station at Ramallah, near Jerusalem. Police cars found the roads leading to the station blocked by land mines. On another morning a Jewish policeman was found dead on his doorstep. Nearly every morning Palestinians found walls covered with posters calling for riot and rebellion. Extortions to finance the NMO were traced to the terrorists. The police arrested hundreds of suspects. Zionist organizations and the Jewish Agency instituted an independent land-wide manhunt, but terrorism continued, practically unchecked.

By the end of October, less than a month before Hakim and Bet-Tsouri fired their fatal slugs at Moyne, terrorism and repressive measures had reached a fearful climax. Raids on settlements where terrorists might be harbored were an everyday occurrence. On October 26th, for instance, the village of Nathanya was raided by police and military authorities, 650 Jewish settlers were interrogated, 50 were detained. Another 900 were questioned the next day and 22 arrested. About 300 arrested suspects were shipped to concentration camps in distant Eritrea and Khartoum.

The deportations aroused the New Zionist Party's anger. The New Zionists (not to be confused with the Zionists) are an offshoot of the old Revisionist Party founded in 1929 by the late Messianic, Russian-born Vladimir Jabotinsky. It advocates "class warfare and a struggle for social improvement," and comes close to being Fascist. Its new leader, Doctor Nathan Altman, warned that civil war threatened Palestine if the Jewish Agency co-operated with the British in wiping out terrorism. He called on the Palestine government to revoke deportation of actual or suspected terrorists and aroused Jews to a countrywide protest against their arrest.

In view of the situation, it was surprising that Lord Moyne was not better guarded than he was. In Cairo, in those days, I talked with the Jewish Agency executives about what might happen in Palestine. They were worried and depressed. One of them said, sadly, "The present state of affairs cannot endure. Organized elements of the Zionist Movement have reached the point where they will need to act against the terrorists—and soon."

To "act against the terrorists" means that decent Jews must turn informers against their own people. Informers in any such situation are doomed men, and no matter how much they may deplore the violence of the terrorists, the Jews feel that the Sternists and the members of the NMO are fighting, ultimately, their fight. They are reluctant to turn them in.

Police in Name Only

The Jews obtain little help from the highly touted Palestine Police, composed largely of Palestinian Jews but with some Arab members. In spite of handsome publicity to the contrary, they are about as inefficient a police organization as it's possible to find anywhere. The Zionists blame much of the terrorism on their laxity. They allowed some 20 known terrorists, for example, to escape from the well-guarded Latrun prison and others to break out of the Aaca prison. They never seem to be able to keep terrorists behind bars, and law-abiding Jews in Palestine ask themselves whether the Palestine Police really want to stamp out terrorism.

Following Moyne's murder, the drive to crush terrorism in Palestine intensified. The Jewish Agency's leaders—Moshe Shertok, David Ben-Gurion and others on up to Doctor Chaim Weizmann, head of the Zionist Movement—declared open warfare on the terrorists, many of whom, notwithstanding their laws of secrecy and their juvenile blood-brotherhood stuff, are known to everyday citizens. Even if the inner antagonisms within Palestine don't reach the terrorist "ideal" of mass rebellion against the British, there is certain to be bloodshed. Some 2,000 or 3,000 well-armed, desperate men can easily precipitate civil war.

The possibility of an armed uprising of Jews to obtain a national home in Palestine is no longer remote. It will happen if and when all other means, political and diplomatic, fail. Palestine raised 40,000 Jewish volunteers, men and women, for the British army. All received expert military training.

It is foreseeable that the activist view of the terrorists rather than the passive attitude of the Zionists may prevail. The appointment of Lord Gort, an able general, as High Commissioner of Palestine in the place of Sir Harold MacMichael, indicates the British are aware of the dangers to peace that Palestine presents. Their experience in Greece was a bad one; a similar occurrence in Palestine would be much worse.

THE END

