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Monty Noam Penkower. *Palestine to Israel: Mandate to State, 1945-1948: Vol. 1: Rebellion Launched, 1945-1946; Vol. 2: Into the International Arena, 1947-1948.* Vallejo, CA: Touro University Press, 2019. 2 volumes. xvii + 804 pp. $35.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-61811-877-6.

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With the publication of *Palestine to Israel: Mandate to State, 1945-1948*, Monty N. Penkower completes his magisterial trilogy on the rise of the modern State of Israel. This is a scholarly achievement many years in the making, as the depth of the author's research and keen analysis clearly demonstrate. The expanse of Penkower's historical landscape testifies to his broad scholarly vision. He persuasively argues that the story of the establishment of Israel cannot be told merely by chronicling the settling of the land, or the armed revolt against the British, or the international diplomacy in which the struggle was enveloped prior to Israel's declaration of independence. All those developments ultimately are rooted in the events of the previous decades, beginning with the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany in 1933, the Arab-Jewish turmoil in Palestine in the 1930s, and the crisis of prewar European Jewry.

In careful, lucid prose, ***Palestine to Israel: Mandate to State*** picks up the story where his earlier volumes left off, in the waning days of World War II.[1] "The stench of death hung heavy in the air that spring of 1945," Penkower grimly begins (p. 1). The jarring newsreel footage of the newly liberated death camps, viewed by millions of Americans in their neighborhood movie houses, did not automatically translate into changes in the political or diplomatic arenas. On the one hand, images of mounds of corpses and skeletal survivors generated substantial public sympathy for establishing a homeland in Palestine for the hundreds of thousands of Displaced Persons in Europe. But, as Penkower shows, public opinion did not always translate into government policy. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had never done more than pay lip-service to the vague idea of a Jewish homeland, promised Arab leaders shortly before his death in April 1945 that the United States would make no decisions regarding Palestine without their consent.

His successor, Harry Truman, entered office with no clear convictions or even inclinations regarding Zionism. He made antisemitic comments in private—even sometimes in cabinet meetings—yet he counted Jews among his closest personal friends and advisers. He shared the State Department's extreme aversion to taking sides in the Arab-Jewish conflict, yet he also resented the imperious ways of the "striped-pants boys" at Foggy Bottom. Truman valued the Anglo-American alliance, yet was exasperated that British policy in Palestine kept causing him so many political and public relations headaches.

There followed a series of investigative missions and committees that constituted a kind of political Rorschach test. Truman saw them as a way to demonstrate to jittery Jewish voters that he was genuinely concerned about Palestine and the DPs. The British saw them as a way to rope in the Americans to share responsibility for the problem. For Jewish leaders in America and Palestine, the investigatory commissions held out the hope that if impartial outsiders took an objective look at the situation, surely they would conclude that the Zionists were in the right.

Penkower explains that it was Chaim Weizmann's right-hand man in New York, Meyer Weisgal, who conceived the idea of what would become the Harrison Mission of 1945. Weisgal's first choice actually was James McDonald, the former League of Nations high commissioner for refugees. It was Treasury secretary Henry Morgenthau who shifted the focus to Penn Law School dean Earl Harrison, knowing the State Department would have shot down the candidacy of McDonald, an outspoken Zionist. Weizmann then sent Weisgal to win over Harrison to the idea—all before Morgenthau sent the idea up the chain of command to the president.

Navigating back and forth between a wide array of archival sources, Penkower chronicles the pivotal role that Harrison's report ultimately played. His key recommendation, that the US should support the immigration of 100,000 Holocaust survivors to Palestine, actually would have barely scratched the surface of the enormous DP problem. But as Penkower shows, the significance of Harrison's number was the part it played in the ensuing conflict. It was low enough for Truman to consider reasonable—and for American Jews to latch on to—but so high that the British would never accept it, thus setting in motion an irreversible clash between London and Washington.

The 100,000 figure soon took on a life of its own. It was included in the subsequent report by the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine and, indeed, was the only part of the report that President Truman endorsed. Likewise, Harrison's number made it into the report of the 1946 Morrison-Grady commission, another failed Anglo-American initiative, and there, too, it was the only component of the recommendations that Truman would embrace.

Against this backdrop of the United States and Great Britain on a diplomatic collision course, Penkower presents a fine overview of the Jewish armed revolt against British forces in Palestine. In the autumn of 1945, the mainstream Haganah joined forces with Menachem Begin's Irgun Zvai Leumi and the much smaller Lehi, or Stern Group, in what was called the United Hebrew Resistance. Armed assaults on British army camps and police stations, bombings of Mandate government offices, and midnight landings of unauthorized Jewish immigrants posed a serious threat to British control of the country. The Mandate authorities' overreactions to the revolt, including draconian curfews and mass arrests, galvanized widespread public sympathy for the rebels, creating what Penkower calls "a seemingly hopeless stalemate between the mandatory and the yishuv" (p. 285).

Penkower traces the "growing loss of British control" in Palestine (p. 374)—evident from British cabinet minutes that he mined—that, combined with the rising clamor of American and international criticism, prodded the British to deposit the whole mess squarely in the lap of the recently established United Nations in early 1947. But the struggle would not be resolved through diplomacy alone. The Jewish underground in Palestine, not convinced that the UN would side with the Zionists—or that London would abide by the UN's recommendations if it didn't—intensified its war. That spring and summer saw a grim tit-for-tat of British whippings and Irgun counter-whippings, British hangings of Irgun members and Irgun hangings of kidnapped British officers,

as well as the spectacular Acre Prison breakout and the heart-rending voyage of the SS *Exodus*.

What of the Palestinian Arabs? The decision of their leadership to actively collaborate with the Nazis during the war severely undermined their moral credibility, especially in Washington. That helped relegate them to the sidelines of the post-war political struggle. At the same time, the surprising military capabilities of the heretofore-secreted Jewish underground demonstrated to Palestine's Arabs that this was not the time to join the fray—especially since the British were so vigorously combatting the Jewish militant groups and turning back Jewish refugee ships. The Arabs opted to stockpile their weapons and await a more opportune moment. It would not be long in coming.

Penkower's comprehensive, sweeping narrative convincingly shows that it was not any one element of the struggle that led to Jewish statehood, but rather a combination of factors that influenced and played off one another. His list begins with the Zionist pioneers who "transformed the country from a primitive and corrupt Ottoman backwater into what they rightly called HaMedina BaDerekh (the state-in-the making)" (p. 709). "At least as significant," Penkower continues, was the rise of "a native-born generation of Palestinian Jews [who were prepared] to use force for realizing the idea of sovereignty on the land of their ancestors" (p. 709). Holocaust survivors "contributed in great measure to the unfolding drama," too; not just because they were objects of international sympathy but because tens of thousands of them risked life and limb to reach Palestine (p. 712). To this list of factors, Penkower adds the Arab rejectionists who could have had a Palestinian Arab state but insisted on preventing the rise of even a tiny Jewish state; "egocentric and insensitive" British leaders who overreacted to the Jewish underground, thereby galvanizing popular Jewish support for the rebels; and Soviet and American leaders who, each for their own reasons, found it politically convenient to support Jewish statehood (p. 718). Alone, none of these factors would have been decisive; together, they created an unstoppable historical force.

Note

[1]. *Palestine in Turmoil: The Struggle for Sovereignty 1933-1939* (Vallejo, CA: Touro University Press, 2014), and *Decision on Palestine Deferred: America, Britain and Wartime Diplomacy, 1939-1945* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

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