PERSPECTIVE

Of all the Sephardic, or oriental, Jews who migrated to the new state of Israel in the years immediately following the creation of the Zionist nation, none has evoked more emotion and controversy regarding the circumstances of their aliya (return to Zion) than the Iraqi Jews.

Did these Jews, who were largely affluent professionals and merchants, leave the land their ancestors had inhabited for so long—in some cases, for almost 2,500 years—because of an overwhelming desire to fulfill the prophecy of Zion? Or were they forced to leave their homeland because of heightened Arab hostility resulting from the bloody emergence of Israel in the land of the Palestinians?

The debate has raged for nearly 40 years between Zionists and non-Zionists—and even among the Iraqi Jews themselves. Moreover, there has always been an undercurrent of conspiracy and intrigue running through the official explanation of this particular exodus, centering on the role played by the Mossad, Israel's dreaded clandestine service. All agree the Mossad was indeed deeply involved. The question is: Did it perform the humanitarian function of aiding the escape of the Iraqi Jews, or did it in fact create the desperate circumstances that forced them to flee?

In a book recently published by Doubleday in New York, Shlomo Hillel gives his (i.e., the official) version of the story. He claims the once thriving community of 125,000 Iraqi Jews, which dated its origins to the period of the Babylonian exile, was spirited to safety by the Mossad. Hillel, who was born in Baghdad, is today the speaker of the Israeli Knesset.

According to Hillel, the exodus from Iraq began even before the state of Israel was created. As an operative of the Mossad Aliya Bet, forerunner of today's Mossad, he helped to organize underground Zionist groups in Iraq and to fly Iraqi Jews directly to Israel, right under the noses of the British authorities in Palestine. The clandestine activity was code-named Operation Babylon, which Hillel adopted as the title of his book.

Hillel's version of the Iraqi migration to Israel is at odds with that expressed by many other Iraqi Jews, such as the well known anti-Zionist Naim Giladi, and the ultra-Orthodox Neturei Karta. Both cite convincing evidence that the Mossad, with the aid of a fanatical Zionist underground, caused the Iraqi Jewish community to disintegrate by carrying out bombings of synagogues in Baghdad, thereby frightening the indigenous Jews into giving up their homes and businesses and fleeing to Israel.

STILL WHINING: From the St. Louis Jewish Light.

In addition, they also note that the Zionists in Israel proposed "transfer schemes" to the Iraqi government in which Iraqi Jews would be traded for Palestinians then being forced from their lands. When these proposals were rejected, the Zionists resorted to terror tactics in order to prove to the world that the Iraqi Jews, supposedly like Jews the world over, were desperate to immigrate to Israel for religious and patriotic reasons. Maintenance of this myth was critical to the early existence of the new Zionist state.

Intelligence insiders who are aware of the events of those years tend to side with Giladi and the Neturei Karta. One such knowledgeable source is former CIA agent Wilbur Crane Eveland, who wrote in his book *Ropes of Sand*:

> **Just after I arrived in Baghdad, an Israeli citizen had been recognized . . . His interrogation led to the discovery of fifteen arms caches brought into Iraq by the underground Zionist movement.**
>
> **. . . In an attempt to portray the Iraqis as anti-American and to terrorize the Jews, the Zionists planted bombs in the U.S. Information Service Library and synagogues, and soon leaflets began to appear urging Jews to flee to Israel. Embarrassed, the Iraqi government launched a full-scale investigation, and shared its findings with our Embassy.**
>
> **Iraqi Chief Rabbi Sassoon Khedouri frequently came to see us at the Embassy. He was urging his people to be calm and remain, remembering that they were native Iraqis first and that Judaism was only their religion, which they could practice freely as always. In spite of our constant reports that the situation in Iraq was exaggerated and artificially inflamed from without, the State Department urged us to intervene with the government to facilitate an airlift that the Zionists were organizing to "rescue" Iraqi Jews.**
>
> **Although the Iraqi police later provided our Embassy with evidence to show that the synagogue and the library bombing, as well as the anti-Jewish and anti-American leaflet campaign, had been the work of an underground Zionist organization, most of the world believed reports that Arab terrorism had motivated the flight of Iraqi Jews, whom the Zionists had "rescued" really just in order to increase the Israeli Jewish population.** □

LESS AMERICAN MONEY

A group of large American contributors to Jewish and Israeli causes is calling for U.S. Jews to give less money to Israel and keep more of their "philanthropic" dollars in their own communities.

The group, comprising 10 major supporters of the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) and Israel Bonds in New York, commissioned a report on Israeli-Diaspora relations and are now circulating it among American Jewish leaders. The report was written by Martin Seiden, a former American who works in Israel as an economist.

The report states that the hundreds of millions of dollars channeled each year into the UJA and the World Zionist Organization by American Jews provide "little real benefit" to either Israel or the Diaspora. It recommends that American Jews use most of the money they now raise for Israel to fight assimilation and strengthen Jewish education in America.

The billions of dollars raised over the years, the report says, have enabled the Israeli political establishment to keep itself in power and to strangle free enterprise. This in turn has made Israel unattractive to Western Jews.

The report recommends that instead of continuing to support this system, American Jews should pressure the Israeli government to scrap state control of the economy and adopt private enterprise. Seiden concludes his appraisal by saying: "The time has passed when the old relationship of donor and recipient defined the respective roles" of the Diaspora and Israel.

COMMENTARY

During February, 1971, 24 Soviet Jews led the first political demonstration in Soviet history at the Supreme Soviet Reception Hall, as a protest against the emigration policies of the USSR. It resulted in a flood of Jewish emigration to Israel.

One of the leaders of the strike was Ephraim Sevela, then a famous filmmaker and screen writer in his native land. As Sevela left the Soviet Union for a new life in Israel he was condemned as a "traitor," a "renegade" and an "agent of Zionist and U.S. imperialism." He shrugged off the attacks as he eagerly anticipated a new life in his own Jewish state. Sevela had dreamed of Israel. Before long he had worked for the enrichment of his adopted country and fought a war to advance her interests.

Several years later Sevela turned his writing talents to the question of the moral and legal values prevalent in Israel. His insight into Israeli racism, practiced not against Palestinians solely but also against Jews from Arab countries who were citizens of Israel; the public and private corruption he encountered at all levels of business and government and the stifling power of an anarchic bureaucracy led him to bid farewell to a dream and to detail his analysis of the failed state in a book—*Farewell Israel!*

After setting forth the facts Sevela concludes, "The creation of Israel, instead of strengthening the Jewish nation, became the destructive factor that for many years now has been laying low one Jewish community after another, thrusting them toward self-destruction, dissipating with unforeseen speed that which had been stubbornly and agonizingly preserved for thousands of years."

As American Jews and others prepare to jubilantly celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel with U.S. government-assisted programs during spring of 1988, an examination of the Sevela thesis seems timely. Sevela's observations that the state of Israel does not work adequately for European Jews who settle there, is a disaster for Jews from the Arab countries who comprise the vast majority of the Jewish population of Israel, together with the knowledge that Israel is little better than a concentration camp for Palestinians who live there, compels the

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