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## "The Palestine War, 1948-49", an Article in the Spectator, July 1960

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### The Palestine War, 1948-49

By ERSKINE B. CHILDERS

THE SPECTATOR, JULY 22, 1960

WHEN did the Israel-Arab war of 1948 really begin? Few Arab versions have been published; and though there have been several from the Zionist side, none tells the real story. The Kimche brothers' latest book\* contains some isolated flashes of frankness that are of great interest, but there are all the usual suppressions. It is time some of these were aired along with the frankness. Most countries have some less creditable actions in their past; there is no good reason why the Western world must remain permanently ignorant of Zionism's skeletons.

The Kimches, opening their narrative, write that it was the Hitlerite catastrophe that gave post-war Zionism 'a moral argument to which the gentle world could have no answer'; and that when the Royal Navy turned DP ships away from the Palestine coast, it gave 'the Jews a great moral weapon.' After these rapid references, they move on to the conventional triangular approach to the war—the British, the Arab, the Jewish sides of the hill. What they thus suppress is one of the most massively important features of the entire Palestine struggle—namely that Zionism deliberately arranged that the plight of the wretched survivors of Hitlerism should be 'a Mission': 'The Zionists are terrific . . . their moral argument' which the West had to accept. This was done by seeing to it that Western countries did not open their doors, widely and immediately, to the inmates of the DP camps. It is incredible that so grave and grim a campaign has received so little attention in accounts of the Palestine struggle—it was a campaign that literally shaped all subsequent history.

It was done by sabotaging specific Western schemes to admit Jewish DPs (i.e., Roosevelt's, and the Australians' Kimberley project). With the West's doors thus closed, the salvation of the DPs was presented to the world solely, desperately and morally as lying in and through a Jewish State in Palestine. Creaking ships were loaded with DPs and sent to Palestine in the certain knowledge that they would be turned back; but that, as the Kimches obliquely admit, the very turning-back would add a 'moral weapon' to the already prepared 'moral argument.'

\* *Born Stars or Not Hill.* By Jon and David Kimche. (Ocker and Warburg, 254)

In short, the very basis of the post-war Palestine struggle was an appeal to the world's humanitarianism over a situation deliberately designed to canalise that humane instinct into one premise: Jewish Statehood in Palestine. None of us who remember the emotional atmosphere of the time can dispute the role this Zionist campaign played in all that followed. The evidence of the campaign, though suppressed by Zionists and conveniently forgotten by Western liberals who knew about it, is overwhelming. It is detailed down to White House conversations. It was publicly acknowledged, for example, by Sulzberger of the *New York Times*, in God's name why should every possible allowance—that one constantly hesitates lest anti-Semitism may seize on it in conjunction with the Zionist claim to speak and act for 'all Jews.' It is a ghastly moral dilemma that appealed to the US Congress to liberalise the immigration laws; in the fact that Congress-against what was being done in their name have max Straton, sponsor of the hopelessly belated DP Bill (1947) publicly expressed his surprise afraid to endanger their fellow-Jews, many of that Zionists had shown so little interest in the whom were also persuaded that Palestine was Washington hearings. It is there in Richard Crossman's 1946 Washington diary (*Palestine*) that Zionists died, and no one now recalls his earlier warning: 'The Zionists are terrific . . . their *'My God!'* is this the end? that we come now main preoccupation is not to save Jews alive or to Zion to stain its soil with innocent blood?'

There was a ruthless fanaticism behind this on among some Israelis. Albert Einstein is now campaign, as the Kimches acknowledge quite openly—in another context, of course. In doing Einstein, who rejected an exclusivist Jewish so, they also rush over yet another important Statehood in 1946, and who said of Magnes and development. Their book is more or less dedicated to the ascendancy and brilliance of David Ben-Gurion in the post-war Zionist movement.

Only Ben-Gurion's imagination visualised a national army and a full-scale war . . . his Martin Buber, Reb Binyomin? It is now com- objective was quite different from that of anyone else in this Palestine turmoil. He needed not only victory; he needed not only an army. It was the battle and the army that was to be the ideological foundation of the new Israel, any choice. . . . It was inevitable that in the process a good deal of the intellectual luggage and tradition of war struggle can honestly be left out of the total world Jewry should be lost and changed. . . . story; nor why the Kimches' brutal relegation

The phrase 'intellectual luggage' is a brutal dismissal of all those Jews, inarticulate and distinguished, who reached the spiritual and intellectual greatness—there is no other word—of accuracy. In the bitter stream of Arab hostility refusing to allow the Nazi horror to corrode; and rancorous suspicion, one theme recurs: their disgust that Western humanitarianism, so

cynically used over the DPs, is even now cynically invoked in support of any and every action by Mr. Ben-Gurion in the memory of the post-war plight of Europe's Jews. In the same way, and for the sake of Jews now in Israel, it behoves the Western liberal to try to remind Arabs that there still exists, however silent now, a huge reservoir of humane and genuinely liberal Jewish thought that does not blindly accept the militaristic Zionism the Kimches have so frankly defined.

Like a field of concealed mines, so their book is pocketed with other important little franknesses and revelations; and it is a book given a fulsome publicity endorsement by Mr. Ben-Gurion himself. Perhaps the most frightening revelation concerns 'Operation Shin-Tav-Shin.' The Kimches relate how, just before the 1949 Amistice talks, Ben-Gurion and his aides made ready the complete plans for one last drive to take the rest of Palestine, up to the River Jordan. This Operation Shin-Tav-Shin was shelved because of 'second thoughts'—one in a fatal Kimche slip about the origins of the Arab exodus being because it 'would greatly intensify the Arab refugee problem' (Israel has always claimed that despite her military operations, the Arabs could have stayed but for their own leaders' 'evacuation policy').

What is frightening about the Shin-Tav-Shin story—though people familiar with current Palestine affairs have long known it, without any concrete substantiating material—is the Kimches' summary remark: 'This unfinished battle has haunted the Palestine situation ever since. . . . Shin-Tav-Shin' was the last element in the first round, it remained the unsolved element of the second round. It had not been removed by Israel's Sinai operation. Jon Kimche, blessed with Ben-Gurion's public endorsement of this book containing this statement, is editor of the weekly official Zionist journal *Jewish Observer*. Of Israel's policy he knows what there is to know. The only thing he decided not to tell us is exactly when the world ought to expect Operation Shin-Tav-Shin to be 'finished' in a 'third round.' And what sort of peace either he or Mr. Ben-Gurion expects from Arabs, in face of this kind of sinister battle-warning, it is difficult to understand.