

## The British Mandate *Step Ashore* Lesson Plan

### Central Historical Question: Why did the British lose to the Zionists after World War II?

#### Materials:

- Step Ashore PowerPoint
- *Step Ashore* Video
- Copies of *Documents A-G*.

#### Plan of Instruction:

*The PowerPoint, video and supporting documents reinforce lesson content through purposeful repetition and the gradual addition of new material.*

1. Pass out Documents A-G.
2. Mini-lecture with PowerPoint:
  - Slide: Post-War Zionist Strategy: *At the end of the war, the official Zionist leadership no longer feels its hands are tied by the need to help Britain defeat Hitler. It now turns its attention to defeating the 1939 British White Paper, whose purpose is to put an end to the possibility of a Jewish state by sharply limiting Jewish immigration. The main thrust of Zionist strategy is to illegally bring in the survivors of the Holocaust. The resulting clash with the British authorities, the Jewish leaders hope, will win over world sympathy.*
  - Slide: Jewish Brigade's Role: *The Jewish Brigade, a force of about 5,000 Palestinian Jews stationed in Italy at the end of World War II, is in a perfect position to help gather the remnants of Europe's Jews and transport them to the coast, where the Mossad for Aliyah Bet can put them on ships and set sail for Palestine.*
  - Slide: Tilhas Tizig Geshefte: *In order to get the necessary supplies for such an undertaking, Jewish Brigade member Israel Carmi creates a fake army brigade, and names it TTG. It's an acronym for tilhas tizig geshefte, a combination of Yiddish and Arabic that loosely means "Up your rear end." Using forged paperwork and pretending to be transferring prisoners of war, TTG trucks gather up thousands of refugees across Europe and transport them to southern ports, first in Italy, then in France.*
  - Slide: 100,000 Certificates: *On June 18, 1945, a month after Germany's unconditional surrender, the Jewish Agency applies to the Mandatory government for 100,000 immigration permits for survivors.*

- Slide: British Labour Disappoints: *The Jewish Agency is at first hopeful when, five weeks later on July 26, 1945, Britain elects a Labour Government led by Prime Minister Clement Attlee. In opposition, the Labour Government has issued many pro-Zionist statements, some even going further than those the Zionists have issued. But once in power, the Labor government reverses its position and adopts the same policy as the previous government led by Winston Churchill. Churchill, too, had opposed the severe immigration restrictions imposed on Jews by the 1939 White Paper when he was not in power, but once in power did not alter its harsh decrees.*

*Clement Attlee biographer John Bew writes, "Attlee and [Foreign Minister Ernest] Bevin said they had no intention of budging from a 1939 government White Paper that only made provision for 1,500 Jews to be granted certificates to arrive in Palestine each year."*

*The underlying motivation for British policy is the prevailing belief in the Foreign Office and Colonial office that Britain must curry favor with the Arabs. As a Foreign Office Memorandum of April 10, 1945 states, "British policy has in the past recognized the fact that British interest can best be secured by winning Arab goodwill. It has not been easy, in the face of the strong feelings of the Arabs regarding Palestine, to win their goodwill."*

- Slide: *Bevin's War Against the Jews: In his first statement on refugee policy, Labor Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin says: "If the Jews, who have suffered so much, try to push to the head of the queue, there is a danger of a renewed anti-Semitic reaction throughout Europe."*

*Ze'ev Venia Hadari, the author of "Second Exodus: The Full Story of Jewish Illegal Immigration to Palestine, 1945-1948" writes that, "When [Bevin] adopted a policy which spelled all-out war against illegal immigration, he was able to harness the support of the whole British Government machine. The Foreign Office initiated a long series of consultations and officials from different branches of the Civil Service, the Army and the intelligence services helped to formulate ways of countering Jewish immigration."*

*According to historian Walter Laqueur: "Bevin, like his chief Attlee, was neither pro- nor anti-Jewish. He simply believed that the Jews, unlike the Arabs, were not a nation and did not therefore need a state of their own. The Jews, as he and Attlee saw it – and as the Foreign Office had told him – were ungrateful, devious and cantankerous. The Arabs on the other hand, were a simple, straightforward people with a deep liking for Britain."*

- Slide: Jewish Agency Joins Revolt: *In the face of the Labour Government's war against Jewish immigration, the Jewish Agency is left with no alternative but to allow the Haganah to join the two underground organizations, Irgun and Lechi, in their war against the British in Palestine. Golda Meir says: "We kept hearing the argument, 'The Arabs can create so much trouble, therefore you have to give in.' So in the end we decided, very well, we'll create trouble."*

*The combined force is called the United Hebrew Resistance. The three groups coordinate to blow up installations, railroads and oil refineries between October 1945 and August 1946. The cooperation ends in less than 10 months because a bombing by the Irgun of British headquarters in the King David Hotel goes awry, killing 91. From this point on, the official Zionist leadership focuses on illegal immigration.*

- Slide: Mossad Le'Aliyah Bet: *The Mossad le'Aliyah Bet (not to be confused with today's Mossad), is a group formed out of the Haganah in 1939, which had arranged some illegal immigration until World War II made further activity impossible. It now renews its operations. The organization places its headquarters in the attic of the Davar newspaper offices in Tel Aviv, a way of hiding in plain sight from the British authorities. Its chief is Shaul Avigur. Ultimately, the Mossad Le'Aliyah Bet answers to the Jewish Agency, but according to Ze'ev Venia Hadari, who served as Avigur's right hand man, "Shaul Avigur's personal authority enabled him to operate according to his own judgment."*

*Hadari writes: "There was a wealth of talent and expertise in the ranks of the Mossad. For several years, it had run training courses for ships' escorts, engineers and seamen ... Bound together by a common outlook, group spirit, love of adventure and foreign travel, and by secrecy, the Mossad workers acquired a special aura of romance and dedication."*

- Slide: SS Fede: *One of the Mossad's efforts is to purchase the SS Fede, a 650-ton ship, which sits at the Italian port of La Spezia. It is renamed the Eliyahu Golumb, after the late leader of the Haganah. Mossad member Yehuda Arazi is put in charge. In May 1946, the Jewish Brigade brings 1,014 Jewish survivors in some 38 trucks from different parts of Europe. But the ship is closely watched by Italian police and when the British figure out what's happening, they seize the SS Fede.*

*Arazi, determined that the ship will make it to Palestine, boards the boat pretending to be a refugee. He organizes the immigrants, declares that the ship is booby-trapped and that he will blow it up if the British soldiers lay a hand on anyone. He also calls a hunger strike and sends out a message: "We are 1,014 Jewish refugees remaining after the German massacre and we are headed for Eretz Yisrael, our natural homeland ... Put an end to our suffering!"*

*The British understand that the refugees are survivors, some of whom fought as partisans and ghetto fighters. They can't risk provoking such people to desperate action. They capitulate and allow the immigrants aboard the SS Fede to go to Palestine.*

*Encouraged, in 1946, the Mossad increases its activities. In that year 22 ships sail from Europe; 11 sail from Italy and the remainder from Yugoslavia, France, Greece, Romania and Belgium.*

- *Slide: British Assign Major Resources: But the SS Fede incident also increases British determination. They throw enormous resources at the war against illegal immigration and pressure countries to stop illegal immigration from their ports. British intelligence agents operate across Europe. Thirty-nine ships of the Royal Navy and police are sent to stop the refugee boats between 1945 and 1948, a task force larger than the Mediterranean fleet when World War II began. A new headquarters to fight immigration is set up within the Imperial General Staff and the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, made up of 10,000 men, is sent to reinforce units already in Palestine.*

*Ze'ev Venia Hadari notes, "Great Britain was fighting a combined war, using politics, diplomacy, intelligence, the police and the armed forces, and decisions affecting it were taken at the highest level.. ... Great Britain employed all its strength and devoted vastly more resources to this war than to the development of the country with which it had been entrusted."*

*British efforts to stop immigrants from leaving Displaced Persons camps to European ports and from disembarking from those ports are unsuccessful. But its efforts to block immigrant ships on the high seas are more effective. Of the 44 vessels carrying Jewish immigrants that sail for Palestine to the end of 1947, only four arrive undetected. The British first intern the captured passengers in camps in Palestine, then starting in August 1946, send them to detention camps in Cyprus.*

- Slide: Propaganda Disaster: *Britain may have been successful in stopping illegals but they suffer a defeat on the public relations front. Given what the Jews have just been through, the world turns against Great Britain.*
- Slide Britain Calls UN: *In February 1947, Foreign Minister Bevin announces his intention to refer the whole problem of Palestine to the UN, though Britain has not yet come to grips with the idea of abandoning Palestine.*

*In April 1947, Britain makes its formal request to the UN. Historian Nicholas Bethell writes, "The first priority now was to rid herself of the burdens imposed by the Mandate. If the United Nations would help her to do this and to remain in Palestine also, she would accept. Otherwise she would withdraw and concentrate on salvaging what she could of her treaties and interests elsewhere, in other parts of the Middle East. On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1947 she asks the UN Acting Secretary General to summon a special session of the General Assembly, in order to appoint a special committee, which would prepare a report in time for consideration at the regular session in the autumn."*

- Slide: The Exodus: *Britain continues to suffer propaganda blows even after it turns over the problem to the UN. July 1947 marks the low point for England when the ship the Exodus, formerly the President Warfield, leaves Marseilles with 4,500 Jews from Displaced Persons camps.*

*When it reaches Palestine's coastal waters, two British destroyers ram the boat. A boarding party enters the wheelhouse where they club to death Second Officer Bill Bernstein. A US Naval officer in World War II, Bernstein volunteered for the mission. After the Exodus survivors disembark in Haifa, the British send the survivors back aboard other ships to France. When France will only accept survivors that disembark voluntarily, the British send the ship to Hamburg, Germany where they expel them by force. England suffers an enormous wave of international criticism for taking Holocaust survivors back to the country that sought to exterminate them.*

- Slide: Britain Gives In: *Britain not only continues to suffer in the world press, but the British Government loses support at home. The British people don't want to fight Europe's surviving Jews. The combination of the Irgun and Lechi's revolt in Palestine, which has driven up the costs of occupation, and the moral outrage against Britain because of its war on survivors is too much. On September 26, 1947 Britain's colonial Secretary Arthur Creech Jones, announces Britain's intention to leave Palestine. The UN votes for partition on November 29, 1947.*

- Slide: Britain Fails to Maintain Order: *In the five months before the British depart on May 14, 1948, they make no attempt to maintain public order in Palestine. Historian Howard Sachar writes, “‘Law and order’ plainly were the opposite of the mandatory’s intention. In the ensuing chaos the inhabitants of Palestine experienced an almost total stoppage of public services: of law courts, post offices, telephone exchanges, rail transportation.” The British give the Arabs advance notice of their withdrawal so that they can occupy key police stations and army camps. They disarm Haganah soldiers when they find them with weapons, but don’t do the same with Arab guerrillas. In some cases, British soldiers stand by as Jews are attacked as in the case of the Hadassah medical convoy massacre on April 13, 1948.*
- Slide: England Maintains Blockade: *It is only in its approach to Jewish immigration that Britain remains determined to uphold the letter of the law. When the United Nations urges Britain to turn over the port of Haifa to the Jews, it refuses, seizing ships with a total of over 20,000 passengers in that five-month period and sending them to Cyprus.*
- Slide: Israeli Independence: *On May 15, 1948, the day David Ben-Gurion proclaims the state of Israel, two immigrant ships are at sea. The immigrants receive this message: “You are the last of the illegal immigrants and first to arrive freely. We are waiting to welcome you ashore as free citizens of your homeland which is fighting for her independence.” Jewish sovereignty has replaced British sovereignty. From now on, Jews are free to come to the new State of Israel.*

### 3. Play video: Step Ashore

Introduce inquiry question: Why did the British lose to the Zionists after World War II?

### 4. Whole class discussion:

- What factors explain British determination to stop Jewish immigration to Palestine even after the war was over?
- Given that almost all the ships were captured by the British, illegal immigration was essentially a battle for public opinion. What evidence is there that the British underestimated its impact?
- British strategy was based on the idea that Britain needed Arab goodwill and that the Arabs were pro-Western. Do you think those assumptions were correct?

### 5. Hand out Review Questions (may be used as end of class Quiz).

**Document A: “The Brigade,” Howard Blum (2001)**

[Israel] Carmi returned from Paris wondering if perhaps he had promised too much. He needed the resources of a full-time military unit: trucks, food, blankets, petrol, even border passes. The Brigade could covertly provide the men, but Brigadier Benjamin and his English adjuncts would never sign off on the necessary requisitions. The more Carmi thought about it, the more he realized that it would require an army to move the refugees to the sea. So he invented one. And he did it with just three letters: TTG.

TTG had the short, crisp punch of a military acronym. It sounded like the name of an army unit. But Carmi had chosen the letters from a phrase in a contrived, nonsensical portmanteau language, part Yiddish, part Arabic. The words were “*tilhas tizig gesheften*.” Roughly – and it was meant to be rough – translated, it sneered, “Up your ass.” But only the Jews from Palestine knew that.

Once Carmi had the name for his new unit, he started quickly issuing orders. Boxes of blank British Army of the Rhine requisition forms, work tickets, and transport authorizations were stolen with surprising ease from the Brigade storerooms. [Johanan] Peltz simply told a clerk, “I want you to pretend I’m not here.” And when he walked out of the storeroom with dozens of boxes, he realized he could not reprimand the private for failing to salute. The soldier was, after all, only obeying orders.”

At the same time, the call went out for men who had been artists in their former lives, and three reported for duty. Carmi led the volunteers into a room and handed each of them a document with the brigadier’s signature. “I want you to be able to sign the old man’s name in your sleep,” he instructed.

Carmi returned several hours later to see how they were progressing. The three documents were returned to him. He was immediately annoyed. “What is this?” he thundered. “I told you to study them.”

One of the men stepped forward. “These are not the old papers,” he explained with a smile. “And Benjamin did not sign them.”

After that demonstration, the forgers went to work. Dozens of work forms and transport orders were “signed” by Brig. E. F. Benjamin. With the authority of these counterfeit documents, the TTG unit was rapidly outfitted.

British transport units across Europe accepted the paperwork without question and transferred trucks to TTG. Busy quartermasters glanced quickly at the papers and returned with cans of petrol, boxes of fresh food, dozens of uniforms for the men of TTG. Work orders were issued transferring soldiers from the Brigade to special assignment as drivers for TTG. Literally overnight, the farmhouse in Camperosso, once the base of operations for a conspiracy of killers, became the headquarters of a phantom army.

Now that they were mobilized, the TTG units swiftly went off to war. The priority was always the children, and they rushed across Europe to gather them up.

*Source: The Brigade: An Epic Story of Vengeance, Salvation, and WWII, Howard Blum, HarperCollins, 2001, p. 229-230.*

**Document B: “*Second Exodus*,” Ze’ev Venia Hadari  
(1991)**

Ernest Bevin was in control of British foreign policy. When he adopted a policy which spelled all-out war against illegal immigration, he was able to harness the support of the whole British Government machine. The Foreign Office initiated a long series of consultations and officials from different branches of the Civil Service, the Army and the intelligence services helped to formulate ways of countering Jewish immigration. The quantities of documents to be found in various archives attest to thorough staff work. ...

In September 1945, Sir Alan Brooke, the Chief of General Staff, sent a telegram with instructions for dealing with illegal immigration to the Foreign Office, the War Office and the First Lord of the Admiralty. The Labour Government had already begun its attempt to block the immigration movement at the source in Europe.

1. When the war is over, illegal immigration to Palestine can be expected to increase; almost certainly it will be carried out at sea.
2. First and foremost ships must be stopped from sailing from various ports. At the same time the coast of Palestine must be guarded more vigilantly.
3. For this purpose it is desirable to use a small craft (instead of the big ships of the fleet.)

*Source: Second Exodus: The Full Story of Jewish Illegal Immigration to Palestine, 1945-1948, Ze’ev Venia Hadari, Valentine Mitchell, England, 1991, p. 73.*

**Document C: “*The Palestine Triangle*,” Nicholas Bethell (1979)**

It was around this time, mid-September 1945, that the Jewish leaders realized that their hopes in the new government had been misplaced. Since July 26<sup>th</sup> they had bombarded the new ministers with memoranda and requests for interviews, only to be told again and again that the matter was being urgently considered, that they would be informed as soon as any decision was reached. But the weeks passed and the silence seemed to them more and more ominous. Perhaps Weizmann and Shertok, who were in London, learnt what was in store from certain close friends with access to Cabinet decisions. Perhaps the gist of Attlee’s two letters to Truman reached their ears from some American source. Anyway, it became clear at this point that their euphoria had been in vain, that they would have to fight Britain after all. Golda Meir says: ‘We kept hearing the argument, “The Arabs can create so much trouble, therefore you have to give in.” So in the end we decided, very well, *we’ll* create trouble.’”

*Source: The Palestine Triangle, Nicholas Bethell, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 1979, p. 207-208.*

**Document D: “Letter from the Jewish Community of Palestine to the High Commissioner,” (Jan. 15, 1946)**

...our strongest protest against the stoppage of immigration and the negotiations now being conducted with the Arabs for the concession of a small number of immigration certificates. ... The right of the Jewish people to return to their country, to rebuild it and redeem it from its desolation is an eternal right that cannot be taken away ... The Jewish community which came into being in this land through hard pioneering and determined self-defence will not acquiesce in the undermining of its future and in its surrender to the mercy of others. We are convinced that our cause is just. We have served loyally the world's fight for freedom. ... We have far-reaching plans for increasing the absorptive capacity of the country, plans which hold unlimited blessings for the benefit of others, as well as ourselves. ... We, the representatives of the Yishuv, ask you to transmit this Note, whose restrained words convey but little of our sadness, to His Majesty's Government. We request that: the gates of the country be opened for the immediate rescue of our survivors; the land laws which strangle our settlement work be revoked; the Jewish Agency be vested with the authority required for the development of our immigration and settlement plans to the fullest possible extent; the sacred promises given to the Jewish people be fulfilled and that they be encouraged on their one and only path toward redemption.

*Source: Under the White Paper, Daphne Trevor, Jerusalem Press, Jerusalem, 1948, p. 177-178.*

**Document E: “Under the White Paper,” Daphne Trevor (1948)**

The Labour Government had already begun its attempt to block the immigration movement at the source in Europe. In April 1946, the Italian authorities held two ships in La Spezia harbor, shortly before they were to sail for Palestine, the *Fede* and *Fenice*, with about 1,000 people on board. The ships had been re-named *Dov Hos* and *Eliahu Golomb*, in honour of two Palestinian Trade Union leaders. The news of the arrest reached Palestine on the eve of the Passover, together with the report that the refugees had gone on a protest hunger-strike and were threatening to blow up their ships and go down with them. No resentment was felt against the Italian Government – the source of the order was perfectly clear. This concrete example of the lengths to which the Labour Government was going in order to stop immigration roused the population to an emotional pitch unparalleled since the *Struma* affair. The Vaad Leumi called for a general strike and a nation-wide fast for the 14<sup>th</sup> April, and announced that, from the 12<sup>th</sup> on, a group of national leaders would fast in sympathy with the La Spezia refugees until they were released. ... Throughout the fast the courtyard of the building was thronged with subdued crowds that broke into cheers when one or other of the fasters was seen. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, it was estimated that some 30,000 people had been present during the day. That evening, when the fast had lasted 101 hours, it was learnt that the High Commissioner had agreed to the Jewish Agency’s allotting the La Spezia refugees the certificates available under the quota commencing on 15<sup>th</sup> April, or any other unallocated permits. It was felt that a moral victory had been achieved, and the fast was ended. ... It was a very slender gain – the British government did not stop attempting to prevent Jews from leaving Europe for Palestine – but to the Jews in Palestine in their angry frustration it was encouraging to have achieved even that much...

*Source: Under the White Paper, Daphne Trevor, Jerusalem Press, Jerusalem, 1948, p. 198-199.*

**Document F: “Second Exodus,” Ze’ev Venia Hadari  
(1991)**

*Exodus* was taken to Haifa on 17 July 1947. The refugees, who had been granted only a few minutes in the country of their dreams, continued their struggle on the quayside and the British troops had great difficulty in transferring them to the waiting ships. ...

The British continued to try to justify their actions in the media. They pointed out that the whole Palestine question was about to be debated in the UN and referred to the “inhumanity of shipping 4,500 souls ... to bring these passengers back to France we have provided three ships, each of which is larger than the *President Warfield*.” ...

This was what the immigration movement wanted to achieve; to draw the attention of the whole world to the plight of the Holocaust survivors. ...

The Exodus affair was now front page news. ...

The British Government was also losing support at home. On the same day as the article in the French newspaper, *The Manchester Guardian* wrote that the Foreign Office’s reasons for sending the refugees back to Germany were spurious. There was no place under British jurisdiction with less food and fewer houses than the zone of occupation in Germany. It added that there could be no sight more disgraceful and humiliating than British soldiers forcing Jews to disembark in Hamburg or Bremen and it was time for Attlee and Bevin to intervene and put a stop to this scandal.

*Source: Second Exodus: The Full Story of Jewish Illegal Immigration to Palestine, 1945-1948, Ze’ev Venia Hadari, Valentine Mitchell, England, 1991, p. 176-196.*

**Document G: “*The Palestine Triangle*,” Nicholas Bethell (1979)**

The evidence therefore suggests that Britain’s first priority was no longer to maintain her privileges in Palestine, let alone British rule. She *hoped* to retain something, but was prepared to risk losing everything, bases and influence as well as control. The first priority now was to rid herself of the burdens imposed by the Mandate. If the United Nations would help her to do this and to remain in Palestine also, she would accept. Otherwise she would withdraw and concentrate on salvaging what she could of her treaties and interests elsewhere, in other parts of the Middle East.

Britain therefore decided to expedite this inevitable process. On April 2<sup>nd</sup> she asked the UN Acting Secretary General to summon a special session of the General Assembly, in order to appoint a special committee, which would prepare a report in time for consideration at the regular session in the autumn. By April 13<sup>th</sup> a majority had approved Britain’s request and Secretary General Trygve Lie announced that this session would take place at Flushing Meadows, New York, on April 28<sup>th</sup>.

*Source: The Palestine Triangle, Nicholas Bethell, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 1979, p. 312.*

**Guiding Questions**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

1. What two organizations helped bring Holocaust survivors to Eretz Israel after World War II and what were their respective roles?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What was Britain's strategy to stop illegal immigration?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Why did the British turn over the Palestine issue to the UN?

In the space below answer the following: *Why did the British lose to the Zionists after World War II?*