

**Document A: “*Ben-Gurion: Prophet of Fire*”, Dan Kurzman
(1983)**

Ben-Gurion envisaged days of catastrophe for his people – unless they could escape to *Eretz Yisrael*. On one trip home, at a meeting of the Histadrut Council, he prophesied:

Hitler’s rule places the entire Jewish people in jeopardy. ... [His] regime cannot long continue without war, a war of vengeance against France, Poland, Czechoslovakia and other countries where a German population is to be found, or against Soviet Russia with its vast expanses. ... What will be our strength and weight in [Palestine] on the awful judgment day, when the great catastrophe bursts upon the world? Who knows – perhaps only four or five years ... stand between us and that terrible day. During this period we must double our numbers, for the size of the Jewish community then may determine our fate in that decisive hour.

Source: Ben-Gurion: Prophet of Fire, Dan Kurzman, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1983, p. 189.

**Document B: “*Ben-Gurion: Prophet of Fire*”, Dan Kurzman
(1983)**

The first Arab bullets tore through the night of April 15, 1936, ripping into two Jews on the Tulkarm-Nablus road and setting off a chain reaction of violence in the dark twisting alleys of several towns. Four days later, Arab bands thundering over the cobblestones of Jaffa wantonly knifed and shot sixteen Jews to death. Were these attacks simply a spate of common Arab street crimes? Though many Jewish leaders thought they were, Ben-Gurion was doubtful. Even if the murders had been spontaneous up to now, the mufti and his men would surely exploit them to spark others. The crimes had made the Palestine Arabs look odious to the world anyway, so why not seize this opportunity to detonate a full-scale rebellion?

Ben-Gurion’s suspicion proved well-founded. The *effendis* called a general strike on April 22 and formed a Supreme Arab Committee, which voted to close down shops, factories and ports until the British stopped Jewish immigration, banned land sales to Jews, and formed an Arab-majority government. The aim of the strike was to fuel new violence, and it did. Palestine exploded into a battleground with Arabs, daggers raised, guns drawn, attacking Jews and Britons alike and even uprooting trees that Jews had planted on barren land. Had the great bloodbath begun? ...

He ordered Hagana fighters to open their hidden caches and remove the new greased rifles they had stolen from the British or smuggled in from abroad. But they must remember that their job was to defend, not to kill indiscriminately. They must be guided by one word: *havlaga*, “self-restraint.” No Jew was to let the smell of blood go to his head. The Jew was to be the purest fighter in the world, for he was defending a people destined to purify the human spirit.

“Terrorism benefits the Arabs,” he wrote. “It may lay waste the *Yishuv* and shake Zionism. But to follow in the Arabs’ footsteps and ape their deeds is to be blind to the gulf between us.”

Besides, there was now a practical side to *havlaga*. The Jews had to win the sympathy of Britain no matter how some mandate officials felt. The British, it seemed, bore gifts for everyone. With one hand they were giving the Arabs concessions, but with the other they were giving the Jews at least some arms and military training, and this aid must not be jeopardized.

The British represented a last-ditch security barrier against Arab mobs threatening to massacre the Jews, and any Jewish attacks might weaken this barrier. The Yishuv couldn't take the risk.

Vocabulary

Effendi: a man of high education or social standing in an eastern Mediterranean or Arab country.

Source: Ben-Gurion: Prophet of Fire, Dan Kurzman, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1983, p. 209-210.

Document C: “*Ben-Gurion: A Biography*”, Michael Bar-Zohar (1977)

In November 1936, one of Ben-Gurion’s growing fears was realized: a Royal Commission of Inquiry, headed by Lord Peel, appeared in Palestine. Memories of the Shaw Commission destroyed Ben-Gurion’s peace of mind. Together with Moshe Sharett, Chaim Weizmann, and their close colleagues, Ben-Gurion took part in meetings to work out the principal outlines of the Jewish case and divide the burden of testimony. The rivalry between Weizmann and Ben-Gurion found its expression here as well. The moment it was decided that Weizmann would present the Zionist political case, Ben-Gurion decided that he himself would not appear before the commission, sensing that he would be put in the shade of Weizmann’s natural authority, proud appearance, and rhetorical ability.

At first this seemed like a sensible decision. Weizmann gave his public testimony before the commission in a wonderfully brave and powerful speech, and Ben-Gurion was full of admiration. “Chaim has once more regained his position within the Jewish people,” he wrote in his journal, “and there is no doubt that his words will unite the movement as it has not been united for many years.” A few days later, however, Ben-Gurion again became fiercely critical. After his public appearance, Weizmann gave the rest of his testimony *in camera*. When the text of his statement reached Ben-Gurion, he was seized with anger. Weizmann had given dangerously vague answers to the question of immigration. At a closed consultation with a few of his colleagues, Ben-Gurion expressed the opinion that Weizmann “must not be permitted to testify *in camera*. He is very powerful when he attacks, and when he is the sole speaker. In an argument, he is helpless.”

As Weizmann continued his testimony, Ben-Gurion fumed, “This testimony is, in my opinion, a political catastrophe.” Indeed, when speaking of the dangers looming over six million European Jews, Weizmann pointed out that only two million could be rescued – one million would come to Palestine, and another million would emigrate to other countries. When asked how long it would take to bring a million Jews into Palestine and absorb them, Weizmann replied, “Twenty-five or thirty years, it’s hard to say.” He also hinted that the immigration of that million might satisfy the demands of the Zionist movement. He wanted the immigration plan to be carried out as quickly as possible, “but we must be aware that, if we go too fast, we may break our necks”.

Ben-Gurion's fury was justified. In one blow, Weizmann had disavowed all the plans for a large-scale immigration and the creation of a Jewish majority. Instead, he had depicted Zionist objectives as nothing more than the immigration and absorption of one million Jews to reach western Palestine in the course of thirty years! Ben-Gurion sent Weizmann his resignation as head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, stating, "After long and bitter reflection, it became clear to me that in questions of Zionist policy, my ideas do not coincide with yours..." The letter left a profound impact on Weizmann, and at the initiative of those close to him, a meeting was arranged with Ben-Gurion. The result was that Ben-Gurion withdrew his resignation and a week later he also testified before the Royal Commission

Source: *Ben-Gurion: A Biography*, Michael Bar-Zohar, Adama Books, New York, 1977, p. 89-90.

Document D: *“Ben-Gurion: The Burning Ground”, Shabtai Teveth (1987)*

Publication of the White Paper on May 17, 1939 came as no surprise to Ben-Gurion and his JAE [Jewish Agency Executive] colleagues. ...

The first part of the White Paper said that the British Government had lived up to its obligation to the Jewish people and the National Home, evidenced by the fact that its “population has risen to some 450,000, or approaching a third of the entire population of the country.” As soon as peace and order were restored the transitional period, during which Palestine would remain under British rule, would begin. At the end of five years, “an appropriate body representative of the people of Palestine and of His Majesty’s Government will be set up to ... consider and make recommendations regarding the Constitution of the independent Palestine State,” which would safeguard the holy places, the rights of the Jewish minority, and Britain’s foreign relations and strategic interests. His Majesty’s government would “do everything in their power to create conditions which will enable the independent Palestine State to come into being within ten years.”

The second part of the White Paper dealt with immigration during the transitional period. The Yishuv would be permitted to increase to approximately one third of the total population – 75,000 Jewish immigrants would be admitted. For each of the first five years, 10,000 would be allowed. Additionally, “as a contribution toward the solution of the Jewish refugee problem, 25,000 refugees will be admitted” above the cumulated yearly totals. However, if any Jewish immigrants entered the country “illegally” their number would be deducted from the yearly quotas. Further, the totals were subject to the criterion of economic absorptive capacity, determination of which was to be the ultimate responsibility of the high commissioner. After the period of five years, no further Jewish immigration would be permitted unless the Arabs of Palestine were prepared “to acquiesce in it.”

Finally, the third part, which dealt with land, decreed, “There is now in certain areas no room for further transfers of Arab land [to Jews].” The high commissioner was to be given “general powers to prohibit and regulate transfers of land. These powers will date from the publication of this Statement of Policy and the High Commissioner will retain them throughout the transitional period.” When, on February 22, 1940, the Land Transfer

Regulations were published, Palestine was divided into three zones. The ban on Jewish land acquisition covered all of Samaria and large parts of the Gaza and Beersheva regions. The second zone, in which sales were permitted by authorization of the high commissioner, included the Jezreel Valley and the Galilee, part of the coastal plain, and the southern Negev. Most of the coastal plain, the Haifa district, and other urban areas made up a third zone – only 5 percent of Palestine’s area – in which Jews were free to buy land from the Arabs.

Source: Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948, Shabtai Teveth, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1987, p. 711-713.

Document E: “*Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel*”, Anita Shapira (2014)

Between March and September 1939, Ben-Gurion was in a frenzy. He worked unceasingly to mobilize the Yishuv for a real physical struggle against the White Paper. He proposed mass immigration with armed defense of the immigrants as they came ashore, settlement without government approval, and significant reinforcement of Haganah units. He was prepared for armed clashes with British government forces. These activist notions were intended as an antidote to the Jews’ sense of complete helplessness, which heightened as the specter of a world war drew ever closer. However, every time he made such a proposal to the Zionist Executive or the Mapai Central Committee – even to the Haganah National Command – his colleagues headed him off, rejecting his proposals out of hand. They saw no point in making relations with the government worse at a time when the Yishuv was dependent on the British and the prospect of war was in the air. Ben-Gurion’s “fighting Zionism” was another of the man’s volcanic eruptions his colleagues managed to block.

Source: Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel, Anita Shapira, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2014, p. 114-115

**Document F: “Ben-Gurion: The Burning Ground”, Shabtai
Tevet (1987)**

Ben-Gurion again had to find a double-formula. But this time it was not easy to devise. At a Political Committee meeting on April 5 [1939], and again before the Central Committee on May 28, he reiterated. “We shall not fight England,” but otherwise kept going around in circles, not finding the redeeming epigram. At the Zionist Congress, convened in Geneva in an atmosphere of imminent war, during deliberation on the battle against the White Paper, he was still groping, although getting closer to his target. “Perhaps tomorrow or the day after the lot will fall and the decision will come in blood and fire – and with this decision we shall stand beside England. But we shall not conceal or make indistinct ... that on Palestine’s political front we have a grave and tragic quarrel ... We shall not give in or shrink a hairsbreadth.” Only when the war broke out did he find what he needed. On September 12, 1939, he fired off his most famous epigram. To Mapai’s Central Committee he said, “We must support the [British] army as though there were no White Paper, and fight the White Paper as though there were no war.” A week later, in the JAE, he broadened this formula. “[We must] offer England all possible support. To the extent that the White Paper materializes we shall fight it as though there were no war in the world.” In December Ben-Gurion explained to the Small Actions Committee,

The war forces us to double our considerations; on one hand we must consider the White Paper, on the other, the war ... This double accounting is ... a difficulty without equal, but we must accept it, since if we take only the war into consideration we shall deny the hopes of the Jewish people. If we consider only the White Paper and block out the war, we deny all, both the hopes of the Jewish people and of humanity. ... We have been confronted ... from the start of the war with a tragic situation that has no equal. While with all our hearts and our souls we sided with England and France against the most terrifying enemy ever to rise against the Jewish people ... the state which leads the war against Hitler regretfully proclaimed war against the hopes of the Jewish people. This spiritual conflict has also become a great political entanglement for us since the outbreak of this war.

Ben-Gurion's colleagues seem to have repeated and polished his formula, and in the way a folk song or proverb is created, the famous version emerged: "War against Hitler as though there were no White Paper, and war against the White Paper as though there were no Hitler." Ben-Gurion ultimately made this version his own. An official notice published by the JAE in May 1940 included the slogan "War against the Nazis as though there were no White Paper; war against the White Paper as though there were no war against the Nazis."

Source: Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948, Shabtai Teveth, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1987, p. 717-718.

Document G: “Biltmore Conference Declaration Excerpts” (1942)

The Conference calls for the fulfillment of the original purpose of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate which recognizing “the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine” was to afford them the opportunity, as stated by President Wilson, to found there a Jewish Commonwealth. The Conference affirms its unalterable rejection of the White Paper of May 1939 and denies its moral or legal validity. The White Paper seeks to limit, and in fact to nullify Jewish rights to immigration and settlement in Palestine, and, as stated by Mr. Winston Churchill in the House of Commons in May 1939, constitutes “a breach and repudiation of the Balfour Declaration”. The policy of the White Paper is cruel and indefensible in its denial of sanctuary to Jews fleeing from Nazi persecution; and at a time when Palestine has become a focal point in the war front of the United Nations, and Palestine Jewry must provide all available manpower for farm and factory and camp, it is in direct conflict with the interests of the allied war effort. ...

The Conference declares that the new world order that will follow victory cannot be established on foundations of peace, justice and equality, unless the problem of Jewish homelessness is finally solved. The Conference urges that the gates of Palestine be opened; that the Jewish Agency be vested with control of immigration into Palestine and with the necessary authority for upbuilding the country, including the development of its unoccupied and uncultivated lands; and that Palestine be established as a Jewish Commonwealth integrated in the structure of the new democratic world.

Then and only then will the age old wrong to the Jewish people be righted.

Source: Jewish Virtual Library: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-biltmore-conference-1942>.

