

⁴ Shohet letter to Elisha Epstein, March 24, 1939, Central Zionist Archives S25/3586.

⁵ Central Zionist Archives S25/9029, p. 62.

⁶ For Britain's effort to maintain a façade of rational objectivity while decolonizing South Asia as quickly as possible, see Lucy P. Chester, *Borders and Conflict in South Asia: The Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Partition of Punjab* (Manchester University Press, 2009).


Mandate were very different. Although it might seem that they were bound by the fact that the British Empire controlled each of them, in fact different institutions within the imperial superstructure were responsible for their day-to-day administration; the India Office ruled India and the Colonial Office governed Palestine. Other differences included the fact that Britain's colonial presence in the subcontinent was longstanding, in contrast to its relatively short-lived control of Palestine. Not only was Palestine a more recent acquisition, it was also a mere mandate, not (technically) an actual colony.

And yet, both Palestine and India faced serious questions about the political position of minority groups. Zionist leaders sought a Jewish state to harbor Palestine's Jewish population, which had grown steadily since the beginning of the mandate period. In India, Muslim leaders fearful of their position in a Hindu-majority state were calling for Pakistan, a home for South Asia's Muslims.

But one of the most important connections between India and Palestine was Indian Muslim sympathy for Palestinian Arabs. British officials monitored Indian opinion and worried that their policies in the mandate would be regarded by the Indian Muslims as pro-Zionist. Muslim leaders such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah, head of India's Muslim League, celebrated "Palestine Day" and issued statements supporting their Arab brethren.

Another connection between the two territories was a consequence of Mahatma Gandhi's global influence. The Jewish Agency, the Zionist authority in Palestine, commissioned representatives (for example, A.E. Shohet, a Baghdadi

Jew and the former editor of *The Jewish Advocate*, a Bombay newspaper) to win Indian support and counter British fears. Despite their efforts to persuade Gandhi, who by the early 1930s had won international recognition for his successful use of nonviolent resistance against the British Raj, he consistently backed the Palestinian cause.⁴ Gandhi repeatedly expressed sympathy for the dilemma of persecuted Jews but never supported a Jewish state.

In the end, British leaders decided not to partition Palestine, but to hand it over to the United Nations. Due to this effort to maintain good relations with their increasingly important Arab allies, British rule in Palestine ended in a very different manner than it did in India. Although bloodshed followed Britain's withdrawal in both cases, different factors drove this violence. The more significant similarity lies in Britain's desire to escape from each entanglement with its interests as intact as possible. As Jacob Robinson, legal adviser to the Jewish Agency, wrote in a June 1947 report titled "Partition of India: Implications for Palestine," the South Asian partition "only demonstrates once more the tremendous ingenuity of Britain's political thinking, its elasticity in detail as compared with its rigidity in the main objectives."⁵ Robinson recognized that although the particulars of Britain's withdrawal would change from case to case, its focus on safeguarding British interests, whether they were preserving alliances with Arab states or swiftly shedding costly burdens in South Asia, remained the same.⁶ The suddenness of Britain's departure marks a final similarity between British India and the Palestine Mandate. 

The Marshal's Myth and the Scout's Observations

GIDEON REMEZ

About ten years ago, I was asked to make a short presentation at our Jerusalem congregation's Independence Day celebration. Together with my partner in both family and research, Isabella Ginor, I had become immersed in investigating the Soviet involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. We had just arrived at some unconventional conclusions in respect to the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition (1968-1970), and the 30th anniversary of its end was approaching. So I spoke about it at about the same length as I'm writing here — that is, at risk of oversimplification.

Israeli literature, at that time, described the ceasefire of August 1970 as an Israeli victory not only over Egyptian forces but also over the military might of the USSR. Our research indicated that the ceasefire was imposed on Israel by an unsustainable loss rate of aircraft and pilots to Soviet-manned SAMs west of the Suez Canal — to such a degree that when the Soviets immediately violated the ceasefire terms by advancing the missile batteries up to the canal bank, Israel could do nothing about it and Moscow literally laughed off American objections. The resulting no-fly zone east of the canal

Gideon Remez, formerly head of foreign news at Israel Radio, is a research fellow at the Hebrew University's Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace. He is co-author, with Isabella Ginor, of *Foxbats Over Dimona: The Soviets' Nuclear Gamble in the Six-Day War* (Yale University Press, 2007). The volume demonstrates Soviet instigation of the 1967 Six-Day War, negating the long-recurring, and immensely damaging, canard that Israel initiated the war for expansionist purposes.


enabled the Egyptian, Soviet-supported cross-canal offensive on Yom Kippur in 1973.

Shortly after my presentation, I received a letter from a member of the congregation who had a doctorate in history; he politely protested my debunking a myth of the kind that is essential for maintaining national pride and morale. Never mind that I had pointed out this myth's pernicious effect: It became a central component of the notorious "concept" that led to Israel's disastrous unpreparedness three years later. It was only last fall, in a pamphlet issued by the Air Force Association to mark the ceasefire's 40th anniversary, that I first saw an explicit admission that Israel had actually lost the War of Attrition.

Historical processes — especially wars — are composites of countless discrete events. Tracing their causality and evaluating their results — assigning responsibility, adjudicating victory or defeat — is therefore debatable. But unlike quantum physics particles, factual accounts of these elemental building blocks cannot be true and false at the same time. At this level, there can be no competing but equally valid narratives; the event in question occurred in only one way, no matter how difficult or perhaps impossible it may be to establish it.

The field marshal among historians must be sorely frustrated that demolishing such a laboriously assembled general theory can be so much easier than its construction. Even foot

soldiers like us — who limit ourselves to the certainty of forensic dissection — can return from a patrol with a single observation that simply cannot be reconciled with the marshal's grand scheme of things. Faced with a multiplicity of such clues, a great marshal will painfully admit that his cherished theory was, in whole or in part, myth. He then will go on to adapt his outlook. Lesser minds will reject the new evidence as logically fallacious because it contradicts what for them, after years of study and thought, has become axiomatic. They proceed at their own risk.

It is at this point — drawing overarching conclusions from the elemental facts and shaping an interpretation that takes on moral value as part of a collective heritage — that legitimate myths are created, along with competing narratives. Such myths may exaggerate our side's performance and motivation into heroism and sainthood, but so long as they can be reconciled with the facts as they are discovered, the myths will not become dangerous or offensive, and they will eventually coexist with rival mythologies if both are built on solid ground. However, overzealousness in fostering or perpetuating a myth may lead to a reverse process: inventing fictitious versions of events to conform to cherished but unsubstantiated legends. This is where danger lurks, and where conflict with the adversary's myth becomes inexorable. 

Rereading *Zachor*: Three Essays on History and Memory

The late Columbia University historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's book Zachor is among the most influential recent books on the intersection between history and memory, the often uneasy relationship between what happened in the past and what is recalled. As a recurring theme of this issue of Sh'ma, we've invited three writers to reflect on Yerushalmi's book and its continued relevance.

Remembering It All

MARC J. MARGOLIUS

In his classic work *Zachor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, historian Yosef Yerushalmi posits and laments a dichotomy between what he describes as collective Jewish memory (which he describes as selective, mythological, ahistorical, and decaying), and secular, modern Jewish historiography (which never found mass appeal among modern and post-modern Jews).

"[M]odern historiography...is really neither collective memory nor recollection in any of their prior senses, but basically a new venture,"

he writes in a postscript. "The past it constantly recreates is often barely recognizable to what remains of collective memory; the past it retrieves is indeed a lost past, but it is not the one we *feel* we have lost" (my emphasis).

In our amnesiac world, irrefutable historical reality is denied or distorted beyond recognition; dangerous national myths are embraced with disregard for their disastrous legacies (the "Masada complex," for example). More than ever, a steadfast commitment to historiography is beyond cavil and consonant with the Torah's

Marc J. Margolius is rabbi of the West End Synagogue, a Reconstructionist congregation in New York City, and director of alumni programs for the Institute for Jewish Spirituality.