



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series II: Harold P. Manson File (Zionism Files), 1940-1949, undated.

Sub-series A: Main Manson File, 1940-1949.

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Irgun, 1948.



April 19, 1948

Memorandum to: Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, Jewish Agency for Palestine

From: Maurice Kesner, Executive Director of New England Zionist  
Emergency Council, 17 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, Mass.

This matter requires urgent and immediate attention. The New England leaders of the UJA, Zionist groups and other authorized and official Jewish bodies throughout New England await an immediate interpretation of the following problem so that they will be able to proceed in the planning of the combined Jewish Appeal and UJA campaigns, involving approximately 20 million dollars.

We understand, after <sup>a</sup>the conference with Mr. Harry Shapiro, Executive Director of the American Zionist Emergency Council, that in the agreement arrived at in Tel-Aviv, the Zionist Actions Committee sanctioned the raising of separate funds by organizations in America for Irgun <sup>ZVEI</sup> Vaad Leumi in Palestine.

In New England an organization called the Palestine Emergency Fund has established its headquarters in Boston and has launched a campaign to raise "as much money as possible" for Irgun, claiming that they are the official fund-raising non-political body established for that particular purpose. The Executive Director of that organization is Mr. Philip Schneiderman, former director of the American League for Free Palestine.

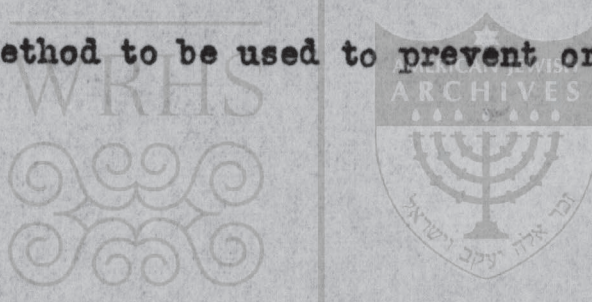
Mr. Shapiro declared that the Palestine Emergency Fund, the main office of which is located in New York City, is not the official Irgun fund-raising organization. He further stated that the money raised by the Palestine Emergency Fund during the past two years has not gone to Palestine but has been used for publicity purposes in America.

Mr. Shapiro believes that the Palestine Resistance Committee with headquarters in New York City is the legitimate fund-raising organization for Irgun.



There are four major problems on which the New England leaders require clarification:

- (1) Has an understanding been reached in Tel-Aviv permitting and authorizing the separate raising of funds in the United States for Irgun?
- (2) If this agreement has been made, what is the name of the authorized Irgun fund-raising organization?
- (3) How do the UJA campaigns tackle the problem assuming that an agreement has been reached and a separate Irgun fund-raising organization is competing in the field? What methods, techniques and actions should these UJA campaigns assume in that direction?
- (4) If no agreement has been made as to separate fund-raising activities, what is the best method to be used to prevent organizations from raising money for Irgun?





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FOLLOWING TELEGRAM FOR YOU FROM LEON GELLMAN QUOTE  
IN LIGHT RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ISRAEL SPLIT BETWEEN  
HAGANAH IRGUN IT IS IMPERATIVE YOU CALL MEETING MEMBERS  
ACTIONS COMMITTEE EITHER MONDAY OR WEDNESDAY CONSIDER  
PRESENT SITUATION MANY THANKS YOUR PROMPTNESS UNQUOTE=

HERMAN=



הסוכנות היהודית לארץ ישראל

## The Jewish Agency in Palestine

### MEMORANDUM

To: Harry Shapiro

June 28, 1948

FROM: I. L. Kenen

I am attaching the statement that Ben Gurion made about the Irgun in his address to the Council of State on June 23rd. My thought is that it might be well to have this distributed since it will do much to clear the air in Zionist ranks throughout the country. I also think that a reprint of the Herald Tribune's editorial on the Irgun could well be sent to your mailing list.

If you think well of these suggestions, please let me know.



enclosure



16 East 66th Street  
New York 21, N.Y.

ADDRESS OF MR. DAVID BEN GURION, PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL  
TO THE COUNCIL OF STATE, JUNE 23, 1948

Upon the establishment of the Jewish State it was resolved to let bygones be bygones and every citizen, without exception, was to enter a new chapter of equal partnership and equal rights and responsibilities in the building and defense of the State of Israel. On May 26 a law was promulgated for the formation of the Defense Army of Israel. This wasn't merely a routine measure as in other states but a matter of life and death for the existence of the State and for the hope of the people of Israel. For even before our State came into being we were already under attack by desperate gangs; and with the establishment of the State we were faced with invasion by the armed forces of the Arab states. To defend ourselves and our country against this invasion was and still is our foremost task and aim.

Agreement Signed by Irgun

The fourth clause in the Defense Army ordinance prohibits the formation or maintenance of any other armed force outside the framework of the Army. In our case this was a particularly necessary and decisive factor for our defense. The enemy without can only be repelled by a united military force subject to the authority of a single Government and a single command. Under the law we could have and perhaps should have disbanded the separate military organizations; but we preferred to make it easier for them and create a better atmosphere by enabling them to join the Defense Army of Israel voluntarily. One of the dissident organizations, the so-called Stern group, dissolved of its own accord and its members were inducted into the Army. The other, the Irgun, attached several conditions to their incorporation and the Government, intent on achieving the desired result with the least friction arrived at the following agreement with the head of this organization:

"Members of the Irgun will join the Army and swear an oath of allegiance to the State. All their equipment and war material will be handed over to the High Command of the Army. They will cease to exist and operate as a military group in the State of Israel. They will no longer purchase or acquire arms or war material as a separate group."

How Irgun Violated Agreement

These undertakings by the Irgun were only partially fulfilled. Over a thousand of their members joined the Army as special units. They handed over, however, only a small part of their arms. They failed altogether to fulfill the other two principal pledges. The Irgun continued to carry out separate operations. They continued to effect separate arms purchases. Against the background of these gross breaches of their promises and while our State is still in the throes of its struggle for survival, there occurred in the past three days the unhappy events at Kfar Vitkin and Tel Aviv. In defiance of the laws of the State of Israel and in repudiation of their freely offered pledge, the Irgun brought to Israel a ship with an arms cargo. Even if there weren't a truce under the auspices of the United Nations this would be a very grave matter for no state can tolerate individual persons or organizations bringing into the country, without permission, even the smallest quantity of arms, let alone large quantities of rifles and guns as the Irgun has done. It is all the more dangerous since this constitutes a breach of our undertakings to the United Nations.



When we learned of the approach of the ship, instructions were issued ordering the Irgun to place the vessel at the disposal of the Government. The Irgun refused and submitted conditions to the Government. Again the Government acted leniently, perhaps too leniently. We did not insist on unimportant formalities but demanded simply that the ship be placed at the disposal of the Government unconditionally and that the Irgun men be prevented from unloading the arms. The Irgun refused and my duty was clear.

#### Govt. Consulted Prior to Action

After consulting with the Government it was decided to concentrate the required military forces on the spot in order forcibly to prevent the Irgun from unloading the arms.

I regret to say that a number of Irgun soldiers serving in the Army deserted from the ranks and fled to Kfar Vitkin to fight against the security forces of the state. The Irgun forces at Kfar Vitkin were overcome and surrendered, handing over their arms and equipment, and undertook in writing to obey the commands of the Government. This operation was completed with the maximum efficiency and the minimum loss of life. It was agreed that Irgun officers and soldiers, after giving their names and signing the undertaking, could return to their bases and the vehicles they used were returned to their owners. Prisoners taken by both sides were released.

This brought to an end the Irgun incident at Kfar Vitkin. At the same time, however, the ship slipped away from Kfar Vitkin and approached Tel Aviv. It disobeyed the Israeli Navy's order to leave Tel Aviv and place itself at the disposal of the State. Again a special meeting of the Government was called at which it was decided that the ship and the cargo must be handed over. The ship refused the order and a salvo fired on it by the army hit the vessel and set it afire. The Irgun then asked the Army to help them take the wounded off the ship. Our soldiers helped rescue their men. The ship is still burning off the shore of Tel Aviv.

After our terrible test of battle in the war against the Arab armies who attacked the Yishuv before it became a state and then attacked the State itself, this is the bitterest blow our State has yet faced. The danger is no less because it comes from within.

Unless this danger is fully realized by the citizens of the State as well as Jews abroad, our entire war effort is threatened with failure and the survival of our State is menaced.

It would be a mistake to depend upon the Army alone. The entire people of Israel are called upon to overcome the danger.