

1950–1951 Baghdad bombings

Jewish targets were bombed in Baghdad, Iraq, between April 1950 and June 1951.

Two activists in the Iraqi Zionist underground were found guilty by an Iraqi court for a number of the bombings, and were sentenced to death. Another was sentenced to life imprisonment and seventeen more were given long prison sentences.^[2] The allegations against Israeli agents had "wide consensus" amongst Iraqi Jews in Israel.^{[3][4][5]} Many of the Iraqi Jews in Israel who lived in poor conditions blamed their ills and misfortunes on the Israeli Zionist emissaries or Iraqi Zionist underground movement.^[6] The theory that "certain Jews" carried out the attacks "in order to focus the attention of the Israel Government on the plight of the Jews" was viewed as "more plausible than most" by the British Foreign Office.^{[7][8][9][4]} Telegrams between the Mossad agents in Baghdad and their superiors in Tel Aviv give the impression that neither group knew who was responsible for the attack.^[10]

Israeli involvement has been consistently denied by the Israeli government, including by a Mossad-led internal inquiry,^[11] even following the 2005 admission of the Lavon affair.^{[12][13][14][15]}

Those who assign responsibility for the bombings to an Israeli or Iraqi Zionist underground movement suggest the motive was to encourage Iraqi Jews to immigrate to Israel,^{[16][17][18]} as part of the ongoing Operation Ezra and Nehemiah. Those historians who have raised questions regarding the guilt of the convicted Iraqi Zionist agents with respect to the bombings note that by 13 January 1951, nearly 86,000 Jews had already registered to immigrate, and 23,000 had already left for Israel,^[9] that the British who were closely monitoring the Jewish street did not even mention the bombs of April and June 1950, nor were they mentioned in the Iraqi trials, meaning these were minor events.^[9] They have raised other possible culprits such as a nationalist Iraqi Christian army officer,^[19] and those who have raised doubt regarding Israeli involvement claimed that it is highly unlikely the Israelis would have taken such measures to accelerate the Jewish evacuation given that they were already struggling to cope with the existing level of Jewish immigration.^[20]

1950–1951 Baghdad bombings

Location	<u>Baghdad</u> , <u>Kingdom of Iraq</u>
Date	April 1950 – June 1951
Target	<u>Iraqi Jews</u>
Attack type	<u>Bombings</u>
Deaths	3–4 Iraqi Jews killed
Injured	dozens wounded
Perpetrators	Alleged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Iraqi Zionist agents, or ▪ Israeli <u>Mossad</u> agents, or ▪ <u>Iraqi Istiqlal Party</u> agents ▪ 28 Jews and 9 Arabs were brought to trial;^[1] 2 Jews were executed.^[2]

Background

Before the exodus of Jews to Israel, there were about 140,000 Iraqi Jews. Most lived in Baghdad, of which Jews made up a sixth of the city's population. High Jewish populations also existed in the towns of Basra and Mosul.^[21]

Iraqi Jews constitute one of the world's oldest and most historically significant Jewish communities. By 1936 there was an increased sense of insecurity among the Jews of Iraq. In 1941 after the government of pro-Nazi Rashid Ali was defeated, his soldiers and policemen, aided by the Arab mob, started the Farhud ("violent dispossession").^[22] A government commission later reported that at least 180 Jews had been killed and 240 wounded, 586 Jewish businesses pillaged, and 99 Jewish homes burned. Jewish sources claimed much higher casualties.

In the summer of 1948, following the declaration of the State of Israel, the Iraqi government declared Zionism a capital offense and fired Jews in government positions.^[23] In his autobiography, Sasson Somekh, a Baghdadi Jew, wrote:

Emigration until 1946 or 1947 was infrequent, despite the growing feeling among Iraqi Jews that their days in the Land of the Two Rivers were numbered. By the time war broke out in Palestine in 1948, many civil servants had been dismissed from their governmental jobs. Commerce had declined considerably, and the memory of the Farhud, which had meanwhile faded, returned.^[24]

At this time, he writes, "hundreds of Jews... were sentenced by military courts to long prison sentences for Zionist and Communist activity, both real and imagined. Some of the Baghdadi Jews who supported the Zionist movement began to steal across the border to Iran, from where they were flown to Israel."^[25]

Elie Kedourie writes that after the 1948 show trial of Shafiq Ades, a respected Jewish businessman, who was publicly hanged in Basra,^[25] Iraq Jews realized they were no longer under the protection of the law and there was little difference between the mob and Iraqi court justice.^[22]

Emigration from Iraq to Israel was banned in 1948^[26] and by 1949 the Iraqi Zionist underground was smuggling Iraqi Jews out of the country at the rate of 1,000 a month.^[27] In March 1950, Iraq passed a law which temporarily allowed emigration to Israel, limited to one year only, and stripping Jews who emigrated of their Iraqi citizenship.^{[28][29]} The law was motivated by economic considerations (the property of departing Jews would be seized by the state treasury) and a sense that Jews were a potentially troublesome minority that the country would be better off without.^[30] At first, few registered, as the Zionist movement suggested they not do so until property issues had been clarified. After mounting pressure from both Jews and the Iraqi government, the movement relented and agreed to registrations.^[31] Israel was initially reluctant to absorb so many immigrants, (Hillel, 1987) but in March 1950, organized Operation Ezra and Nehemiah, an airlift to Israel, and sent in emissaries to encourage Jews to leave.

In April 1950, an activist of Mossad L'Aliyah Bet, Shlomo Hillel, using the alias Richard Armstrong, flew from Amsterdam to Baghdad as a representative of the American charter company Near East Air Transport, to organize an airlift of Iraqi Jews to Israel via Cyprus. Earlier, Hillel had trained Zionist militants in Baghdad under the alias Fuad Salah.^[32] Near East Air Transport was owned by

the Jewish Agency.^[23] The first flight of "Near East Airlines" with immigrating Iraqi Jews arrived in Israel on 20 May 1950. At that time, 46,000 Iraqi Jews had registered under the De-naturalization law.^[33]

Israel could not cope with so many immigrants and limited the rate of the flights from Iraq. By early January 1951, the number of Jews who registered to leave was about 86,000, but only 23,000 had departed.^{[34][35]}

According to Adam Shatz, the Mossad had been promoting Jewish emigration since 1941.^[23] Nuri al-Said had warned the Jewish community of Baghdad to accelerate their flights out of the country, otherwise, he would take the Jews to the borders himself.^[36] Nuri al-Said's threats encouraged Iraqi officials to abuse the departing Jews before they boarded the planes and to destroy their baggage.^[37]

Bombing incidents

According to the Baghdad police who gave evidence at the trial, the weapon used was a British-made World War II hand grenade "No. 36".^[38] Between April 1950 and June 1951, several explosions had occurred in Baghdad:^{[39][40]}

- In April 1950, a bomb was thrown into El-Dar El-Bayda Coffee shop in Baghdad. Four Jews were injured in the blast.^[41]
- On 10 May 1950, a grenade was thrown at Beit-Lawi Automobile company building, a company with Jewish ownership.
- On 3 June 1950, a grenade exploded in El-Batawin, then a Jewish area of Baghdad, with no casualties.
- On 14 January 1951, a grenade damaged a high-voltage cable outside Masuda Shem-Tov Synagogue. Three,^[41] or four^[10] Jews were killed, including a 12-year-old boy, and ten were wounded.^[10]
- On 14 March 1951, a bomb went off in the American Cultural Center and Library wounding some of the Jews using the facilities.^[42]
- On 5 June 1951, a bomb went off next to the Jewish Stanley Sashua car dealership on El Rasjid Street.^[42] Nobody was injured.
- On 19 March 1951, the US legation's information office was attacked.^{[41][43]}
- In May 1951, a Jewish home was attacked.^[41]

Trial

The pro-Western Iraqi government of Faisal II and Nuri al-Said prosecuted the alleged Jewish perpetrators in court, in a trial which began in October 1951. Two confirmed activists in the Zionist underground, Shalom Salah Shalom, a 19-year-old weapons expert, and Yosef Ibrahim Basri, a lawyer active in collecting intelligence material, were executed after being convicted of the bombings. Whilst their involvement in the underground movement and holdings of weapons caches were not disputed, both denied involvement in the bombings.^[44] Salah's testimony under torture indirectly allowed the Iraqi police to find large weapons caches of the Zionist underground in three synagogues (Masuda Shemtov, Hakham Haskal and Meir Tuweik) and in private homes, including 436 hand-grenades, 33 machine-guns, 97 machine-gun cartridges, 186 pistols.^[45] Shlomo Hillel, also once a member of the Iraqi Zionist underground, noted that the last words of

the executed defendants were "Long live the State of Israel".^[46] The British Foreign Office noted in a file note "Trial of Jews at Baghdad, 20 December 1951" that they had "no reason to suppose that the trials were conducted in anything but a normal manner".^[47]

Baghdad police officers who gave evidence at the trial appear to have been convinced that the crimes were committed by Jewish agents, claiming that "anyone studying the affair closely will see that the perpetrator did not intend to cause loss of life among the Jews" and that each grenade was "thrown in non-central locations and there was no intention to kill or injure a certain person".^{[48][49]}

Historian Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, in her book, *Zionism in an Arab Country: Jews in Iraq in the 1940s* states that the charges in the Iraqi trial were "groundless for several reasons", because many thousands of Iraqi Jews had already registered to leave by the time of the later bombings, and the charges related only to these later bombings.^{[50][34]}

Responsibility for the bombings

There has been debate over whether the bombs were in fact planted by the Mossad or the Iraqi Zionist underground in order to encourage Iraqi Jews to immigrate to the newly created state of Israel or whether they were the work of Arab anti-Jewish extremists in Iraq. The issue has been the subject of lawsuits and inquiries in Israel.^[51]

The true identity and objective of the culprits behind the bombings has been the subject of controversy. A secret Israeli inquiry in 1960 found no evidence that they were ordered by Israel or any motive that would have explained the attack, though it did find out that most of the witnesses believed that Jews had been responsible for the bombings.^[52] The issue remains unresolved: Iraqi activists still regularly charge that Israel used violence to engineer the exodus, while Israeli officials of the time vehemently deny it.^[53] Historian Moshe Gat reports that "the belief that the bombs had been thrown by Zionist agents was shared by those Iraqi Jews who had just reached Israel".^[54] Sociologist Phillip Mendes backs Gat's claims, and further attributes the allegations to have been influenced and distorted by feelings of discrimination.^[20]

Claims for Israeli or Iraqi Zionist involvement

In 1949, Zionist emissary Yudka Rabinowitz complained that the complacency of the Iraqi Jews was "hampering our existence" and proposed to the Mossad "throwing several hand-grenades for intimidation into cafes with a largely Jewish clientele, as well as leaflets threatening the Jews and demanding their expulsion from Berman", using the code name for Iraq.^[55] The Mossad forbade him to conduct negotiations about or carry out any acts of terror, an order which he reported that he had "confirmed and accepted".^[55]

According to Moshe Gat, as well as Meir-Glitzenstein,^[56] Samuel Klausner,^[3] Rayyan Al-Shawaf^[57] and Yehouda Shenhav, there is "wide consensus among Iraqi Jews that the emissaries threw the bombs in order to hasten the Jews' departure from Iraq".^{[58][59]} Shenhav noted an Israeli Foreign Ministry memo which stated that Iraqi Jews reacted to the hangings of Salah and Basri with the attitude: "That is God's revenge on the movement that brought us to such depths."^[60]

The British Embassy in Baghdad assessed that the bombings were carried out by Zionist activists trying to highlight the danger to Iraqi Jews, in order influence the State of Israel to accelerate the pace of Jewish emigration. Another possible explanation offered by the embassy was that bombs were meant to change the minds of well-off Jews who wished to stay in Iraq.^{[7][10]}

In a 1954 operation by Israeli military intelligence, known as the Lavon Affair after the defence minister Pinchas Lavon, a group of Zionist Egyptian Jews attempted to plant bombs in a U.S. Information Service library, and in a number of American targets in Cairo and Alexandria. According to Teveth, they were hoping that the Muslim Brotherhood, the Communists, 'unspecified malcontents' or 'local nationalists' would be blamed for their actions^[61] and this would undermine Western confidence in the existing Egyptian regime by generating public insecurity and actions to bring about arrests, demonstrations, and acts of revenge, while totally concealing the Israeli factor. The operation failed, the perpetrators were arrested by Egyptian police and brought to justice, two were sentenced to death, several to long term imprisonment.

The Iraqi Jewish anti-Zionist^[62] author Naeim Giladi maintains that the bombings were "perpetrated by Zionist agents in order to cause fear amongst the Jews, and so promote their exodus to Israel."^[63] Giladi claims that he is supported by Wilbur Crane Eveland, a former senior officer in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), in his book *Ropes of Sand*.^[18] According to Eveland, whose information was presumably based on the Iraqi official investigation, which was shared with the US embassy,^[41] "In an attempt to portray the Iraqis as anti-American and to terrorize the Jews, the Zionists planted bombs in the U.S. Information Service library and in the synagogues. Soon leaflets began to appear urging Jews to flee to Israel... most of the world believed reports that Arab terrorism had motivated the flight of the Iraqi Jews whom the Zionists had 'rescued' really just in order to increase Israel's Jewish population."^[18] This theory is shared by Marion Wolfsohn and Uri Avnery,^[64] who wrote in *My Friend, The Enemy* that "After the disclosure of the Lavon Affair... the Baghdad affair became more plausible".^[16]

Palestinian historian Abbas Shibliak believes that the attacks were committed by Zionist activists and that the attacks were the pre-eminent reason for the subsequent exodus of Iraqi Jews to Israel.^[17] Shibliak also argues that the attacks were an attempt to sour Iraq-American relations, saying "The March 1951 attack on the US Information Centre was probably an attempt to portray the Iraqis as anti-American and to gain more support for the Zionist cause in the United States".^[21]

Moshe Gat asserts that Avnery wrote "without checking facts", Wolfsohn "distort(ed) the dates of the explosions", and that their works "served as the basis for the arguments of the Palestinian author Abbas Shibliak".^[64]

Yehuda Tajar, who spent ten years in Iraqi prison for his alleged involvement in the bombings, was interviewed in Arthur Neslen's 2006 book "Occupied Minds". According to Tajar, the widow of one of the Jewish activists implied he had organized attacks after his colleagues were arrested for the Masuda Shemtov synagogue bombing, to prove that those on trial were not the perpetrators.^[10]

In 2023 Avi Shlaim, an historian of Jewish-Iraqi background, concluded on the basis of an Iraqi police report and recollections of one of the original participants in the Iraqi Zionist underground confided to him in 2017, that Zionists had indeed been responsible for at least three of the five bombings.^{[65][66]}

Claims of no Israeli involvement

Jewish Telegraph Agency analysis

The Jewish Telegraph Agency notice from the time states that the bombers were charged with both the January 14, 1951 synagogue bombing and the 19th March grenade attack.^[67]

Moshe Gat's analysis

According to historian Moshe Gat, "*not only did Israeli emissaries not place the bombs at the locations cited in the Iraqi statement, but also that there was in fact no need to take such drastic action in order to urge the Jews to leave Iraq for Israel*".^[68]

- Gat relates to the alleged Israeli motivation to accelerate the Jewish registration to leave Iraq: "just over 105,000 Jews had registered by 8 March, of whom almost 40,000 had left the country. Some 15,000 more left illegally before and after the law was passed. Since the number of Jews living in Iraq before emigration began has been estimated at 125,000 this means that about 5,000 Jews were left, who had preferred to remain in Iraq. Why, then, would anyone in Israel have wanted to throw bombs? Whom would they have wanted to intimidate?"^[69]
- Gat wrote that frantic Jewish registration for denaturalisation and departure was driven by knowledge that the denaturalisation law was due to expire in March 1951. He also noted the influence of further pressures including the property-freezing law and continued anti-Jewish disturbances, which raised the fear of large-scale pogroms.^[70] According to Mendes, it was highly unlikely that the Israelis would have taken such measures to accelerate the Jewish evacuation given that they were already struggling to cope with the existing level of Jewish immigration.^[20]
- Gat also raised a number of questions about the trial and guilt of the alleged Jewish bomb throwers:
 - A nationalist Iraqi army officer known for his anti-Jewish views was originally arrested for the offenses, but never charged, after explosive devices similar to those used in the attack on the Jewish synagogue were found in his home.^[71]
 - The 1950–1951 bombings followed a long history of anti-Jewish incidents in Iraq (such as the Farhad) and the prosecution was not able to produce a single eyewitness.
 - Shalom Salah told the court that he had confessed after being severely tortured.^[72] There were no other evidence which directly related the accused to the bombing, but only circumstantial evidence concerning the discovery of explosive devices and weapons.^[73]
 - The 8 April 1950 bomb incident, in which 4 Jews were injured, was omitted from the charge sheet against the members of the underground, although it appeared in the government statement.^[74] The prosecutor "*claimed that the perpetrators had planned to cause injury but not loss of life. The grenade, however, had claimed five lives at the synagogue (or four, according to the charges) and injured more than 20 people. This did not prevent the prosecutor, in his concluding address, from including this incident in the list of charges against the underground, although this contradicted the evidence of the two witnesses.*"^[73] Nevertheless, they were not accused for the synagogue bombing.

Gat suggests the perpetrators could have been members of the anti-Jewish Istiqlal Party.^{[20][21][75]} Yehuda Tajar, one of the alleged bombers, said the bombing were carried out by the Muslim Brotherhood.^[10]

According to Gat, *"The British Foreign Office, which could hardly be suspected of pro-Zionist tendencies, never stated explicitly that it was the defendants who had thrown the bombs" and "US Embassy reports also cast considerable doubt as to whether the two men convicted were in fact guilty of throwing the bombs."*^[76]

Other claims of no Israeli involvement

Mordechai Ben Porat, founder and chair of the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, who was coordinating Jewish emigration at the time, was accused of orchestrating a bombing campaign to speed up the Jewish exodus from Iraq by Israeli journalist Baruch Nadel in 1977. Ben Porat sued the journalist for libel, ending in an out-of-court compromise, where Nadel retracted all the accusations against the Israeli emissaries, and apologized^{[77][51]}

In his 1996 book "To Baghdad and Back," Ben-Porat published the full report of a 1960 investigation committee appointed by David Ben-Gurion, which "did not find any factual proof that the bombs were hurled by any Jewish organization or individual" and was "convinced that no entity in Israel gave an order to perpetrate such acts of sabotage."^[11]

Effects on Iraqi Jewish emigration



Displaced Iraqi Jews arrive in Israel, 1951

In March 1950 the government of Iraq passed the Denaturalisation Act that allowed Jews to emigrate if they renounced their Iraqi citizenship.^[78] Iraqi prime minister Tawfiq al-Suwaidi expected that 7,000–10,000 Jews out of the Iraqi Jewish population of 125,000 would leave.^[23] A few thousand Jews registered for the offer before the first bombing occurred.^[21] The first bombing occurred on the last day of Passover, 8 April 1950. Panic in the Jewish community ensued and many more Jews registered to leave Iraq. The law expired in March 1951 but was extended after the Iraqi government froze the assets of departing Jews, including those who had already left.

Between the first and last bombing almost the entire Jewish community other than a few thousand had registered to leave the country.^{[21][23]} The emigration of Jews was also due to the deteriorating status of Jews in Iraq since the 1948 Arab-Israeli war as they were suspected of being disloyal to Iraq. They were treated with threats, suspicion and physical assaults and were portrayed by the media as a fifth column.^[23] By 1953, nearly all Jews had left the country.^[23] In his memoir of Jewish life in Baghdad, Sasson Somekh writes: "The pace of registration for the citizenship waiver was slow in the beginning, but it increased as tensions rose between Jews and their neighbors and after acts of terror were perpetrated against Jewish businesses and institutions – especially the Mas'uda Shem-Tov Synagogue...This was the place to which emigrating citizens were required to report with their luggage before leaving for Israel."^[79]

Historian Esther Meir-Glitzenstein disputed the claim that the bombings were the primary motive for the emigration of Iraqi Jews, noting that most accounts by these Jews did not mention the bombings as a cause for immigration.^[80]

See also

- [Farhud](#)
- [Shafiq Ades](#)
- [Lavon Affair](#)
- [Jewish exodus from Arab and Muslim countries](#)

References

1. Gat, 2013, p. 174
2. Morris & Black, 1992, pages 91-92 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=FkyMsycbemEC>)
3. Klausner, Samuel (1998), "The Jewish Exodus from Iraq 1948–1951", *Contemporary Jewry*, **19** (1): 180–185, doi:10.1007/BF02963432 (<https://doi.org/10.1007%2FBF02963432>), JSTOR 23455343 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23455343>), "Most of the 120,000 Iraqi Jews, transported to Israel through Operations Ezra and Nehemiah in 1950-1, believed they had been stampeded into fleeing by the Israeli Mossad. Many still believe that when registration for emigration slowed, members of the Zionist underground tossed hand grenades into Jewish institutions."
4. Al-Shawaf 2006, p. 72a.
5. Shenhav 1999, p. 605a.
6. Ian Black (1991). *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=FkyMsycbemEC&pg=PA92>). Grove Press. p. 92. ISBN 978-0-8021-3286-4. "As for Salah and Basri, many of the Iraqi Jewish immigrants in Israel, who lived for long periods in shabby tent camps with poor services, expressed either indifference or pleasure at their fate. This is God's revenge on the movement that brought us here,' some said. Many continued to believe that Salah and Basri had thrown the bombs 'in order to encourage the emigration from Iraq"
7. British Embassy in Baghdad, FO371, EQ1571, Baghdad to FO, 27 June 1951, "one theory which is more plausible than most is that certain Jews have endeavoured, by throwing bombs at certain buildings, to focus the attention of the Israel Government on the plight of the Jews in Iraq so that they would keep the airlift moving quickly, and, possibly as a second object, to induce those well-to-do Jews who had decided to remain in Iraq to change their mind and emigrate to Israel."
8. Shiblak 1986, p. 153.
9. Meir-Glitzstein 2004, p. 257.
10. Segev, Tom (4 June 2006). "Now it can be told" (<https://www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=703367>). Haaretz. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20080504154232/http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=703367>) from the original on 4 May 2008. Retrieved 5 April 2010.
11. To Baghdad and Back (<http://www.babylonjewry.org.il/new/english/whats.htm>) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20090314053000/http://www.babylonjewry.org.il/new/english/whats.htm>) 14 March 2009 at the [Wayback Machine](#)
12. Gat 1997, p. 186: "At the height of the public debate in Israel about the so-called 'Mishap' (Esek Bish) – the throwing of bombs by Jews in Egypt in 1954 – the question of the 1950–51 bombing incidents in Baghdad was also raised."
13. Al-Shawaf 2006, p. 73.
14. Shiblak 1986, p. 159.
15. Cohen, p111

16. Avnery, Uri (1986), *My Friend the Enemy*, L. Hill, pp. 135–6, ISBN 9780882082127, "Then something mysterious happened. Bombs started exploding in synagogues and elsewhere at places frequented by Jews. Panic occurred, and the number of those seeking to leave grew overnight... After the disclosure of the Lavon Affair... the Baghdad affair became more plausible."
17. Shiblak, Abbas (July 1986). *The Lure of Zion: The Case of the Iraqi Jews* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=WqJtAAAAMAAJ>). Al Saqi. pp. 123–4 and 196. ISBN 978-0-86356-033-0. Retrieved 5 April 2010. "It is clear that the explosions came at a critical time, when other factors seem insufficient to ensure mass emigration . . . Whenever the fears abated, a new explosion shattered the sense of security, and the chances of remaining in Iraq appeared bleaker."
18. Eveland, Wilbur Crane (1980). *Ropes of Sand, America's Failure in the Middle East*. W W Norton & Co Inc. p. 48.
19. Gat 1997, p. 180: "It should be pointed out in this context that the Hebrew daily Davar wrote on 28 January two weeks after the incident, that Major Jamil Mamo, a Christian officer in the Iraqi army, had been arrested on suspicion of perpetrating the crime in the Mas'uda Shemtov synagogue. A search of his home revealed three explosive devices of the kind thrown into the synagogue. The officer, according to rumours spread in the Iraqi community in Israel at the time, was a member of the Istiqlal party..."
20. Mendes, Philip. *The Forgotten Refugees: the causes of the post-1948 Jewish Exodus from Arab Countries* (<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Articles/General/Story2127.html>) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20121022225124/http://www.palestineremembered.com/Articles/General/Story2127.html>) 22 October 2012 at the Wayback Machine, Presented at the 14th Jewish Studies Conference Melbourne March 2002. "Historian Moshe Gat argues that there was little direct connection between the bombings and exodus. He demonstrates that the frantic and massive Jewish registration for denaturalisation and departure was driven by knowledge that the denaturalisation law was due to expire in March 1951. He also notes the influence of further pressures including the property-freezing law, and continued anti-Jewish disturbances which raised the fear of large-scale pogroms. In addition, it is highly unlikely the Israelis would have taken such measures to accelerate the Jewish evacuation given that they were already struggling to cope with the existing level of Jewish immigration. Gat also raises serious doubts about the guilt of the alleged Jewish bomb throwers. Firstly, a Christian officer in the Iraqi army known for his anti-Jewish views was arrested, but apparently not charged, with the offenses. A number of explosive devices similar to those used in the attack on the Jewish synagogue were found in his home. In addition, there was a long history of anti-Jewish bomb-throwing incidents in Iraq. Secondly, the prosecution was not able to produce even one eyewitness who had seen the bombs thrown. Thirdly, the Jewish defendant Shalom Salah indicated in court that he had been severely tortured in order to procure a confession. It therefore remains an open question as to who was responsible for the bombings, although Gat suggests that the most likely perpetrators were members of the anti-Jewish Istiqlal Party."
21. Al-Shawaf 2006.
22. The terror behind Iraq's Jewish exodus (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/1427687/The-terror-behind-Iraqs-Jewish-exodus.html>) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20180809060716/https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/1427687/The-terror-behind-Iraqs-Jewish-exodus.html>) 9 August 2018 at the Wayback Machine Julia Magnet (*The Telegraph*, 16 April 2003)

23. Shatz, Adam (6 November 2008). "Leaving Paradise" (<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n21/adam-shatz/leaving-paradise>). *London Review of Books*. **30** (21). Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20190729123451/https://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n21/adam-shatz/leaving-paradise>) from the original on 29 July 2019. Retrieved 5 April 2010. "On 15 May 1948, three months after the Wathba, the state of Israel was proclaimed, the Arab armies invaded, and al-Said imposed martial law. A week later, newspapers in Iraq were calling for a boycott of Jewish shops, to 'liberate' Iraqis from the 'economic slavery and domination imposed by the Jewish minority'. This suspicion of Jews was encouraged by a weak and reviled government for whom Arab nationalism was a crude but effective weapon, distracting attention from its colonial docility, and from its poor military performance in Palestine. The freezing of Palestinian assets by the Israeli government and the arrival in Iraq of eight thousand Palestinian refugees in the summer of 1948 did nothing to calm things. Responding to a wave of popular anger, the Iraqi government declared Zionism a capital offence, fired Jews in government positions and, invoking Stalin's support of partition, found another pretext to round up Communists of all sects."
24. Baghdad, Yesterday: The Making of an Arab Jew, Sasson Somekh, Ibis, 2003, p. 150
25. Baghdad, Yesterday: The Making of an Arab Jew, Sasson Somekh, Ibis, 2003, p. 152
26. Gat 2013 , p. 55
27. R. S. Simon, S. Reguer, M. Laskier, *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times* (Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 365
28. Gat, 2013, p. 183
29. Matthew Elliot (15 August 1996). *Independent Iraq: British Influence from 1941–1958* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=TPH53xE6MF4C&pg=PA81>). I.B.Tauris. p. 81. ISBN 978-1-85043-729-1. "Iraqi Jews. These had been prevented from leaving the country during the period of martial law, which made it difficult for other Iraqis to distinguish (should they have wanted to) between loyal Jews and those sympathetic to Israel. By means of the bill Iraq could answer international criticism of its restrictions on Jewish emigration and at the same time give those who chose to remain an opportunity of demonstrating their loyalty"
30. Ian Black (1991). *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=FkyMsycbemEC>). Grove Press. p. 89. ISBN 978-0-8021-3286-4. "the Iraqi government was motivated by "economic considerations, chief of which was that almost all the property of departing Jews reverted to the state treasury", and also that "Jews were seen as a restive and potentially troublesome minority that the country was best rid of." "
31. Meir-Glitzstein 2004, p. 204: "Israel refused to instruct its emissaries in Baghdad to limit registration for emigration and instead expressed willingness to take in all Iraqi Jews who wished to leave. But immigrants were also flooding into Israel at the time from Poland and especially from Romania, where the exit gates had unexpectedly been re-opened, and Israel was unwilling to limit aliyah from there either. Israel could not afford the initial absorption of such large numbers of immigrants and therefore set quotas based on priorities. And Poland and Romania were given priority over Iraq... The reason... was concern that the communist regimes there would close their gates and put an end to the exodus... Ben-Gurion maintained that the Iraqi leaders were determined to get rid of the Jews who had signed up to emigrate and assumed that delaying their departure would not put an end to the process. In contrast... aliyah from Poland was expected to stop at the beginning of 1951."
32. Shlomo Hillel (20 October 1987). *Operation Babylon* (<https://archive.org/details/operationbabylon00hill/page/16>). Doubleday. pp. 16 (<https://archive.org/details/operationbabylon00hill/page/16>)–17. ISBN 978-0-385-23597-6.
33. "IRAQ JEWS MAKE THEIR EXODUS BY 'FLYING CARPET'" (<https://archives.chicagotribune.com/1950/05/22/page/21/article/iraq-jews-make-their-exodus-by-flying-carpet>). The Chicago Tribune. 22 May 1950. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20151219014807/http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1950/05/22/page/21/article/iraq-jews-make-their-exodus-by-flying-carpet/>) from the original on 19 December 2015. Retrieved 16 October 2014. "This time Iraq's Jews Are traveling in four engine Skymasters C-54sl of the Near East Airlines..."

34. Meir-Glitzstein 2004, p. 203: "The change began as a result of the immigration policy of the Israeli government: the pace of aliyah lagged far behind registration and revocation of the registrants' citizenship. By September 1950, only 10,000 Jews had left; 60,000 of the 70,000 registrants were still in Iraq. The problem grew worse. By mid-November only 18,000 of 83,000 registrants had left. Matters had not improved by early January 1951: the number of registrants was up to 86,000, only about 23,000 of whom had left. More than 60,000 Jews were still waiting to leave! According to the law, Jews who had lost their citizenship had to leave Iraq within 15 days. Although in theory, only 12,000 Jews still in Iraq had completed the registration process and had their citizenship revoked, the position of the others was not very different: the Iraqi government was in no hurry to revoke their citizenship only because the rate of departure was already lagging behind the revocation of citizenship, and it did not want to exacerbate the problem. Meanwhile, thousands of Jews had been fired from their jobs, had sold their property, and were waiting for Israeli aircraft, using up their meagre funds in the meantime. The thousands of poor Jews who had left or been expelled from the peripheral cities, and who had gone to Baghdad to wait for their opportunity to emigrate, were in an especially bad state. They were housed in public buildings and were being supported by the Jewish community. The situation was intolerable."
35. Esther Meir-Glitzstein (2 August 2004). *Zionism in an Arab Country: Jews in Iraq in the 1940s* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=ZU2QAgAAQBAJ>). Routledge. p. 205. ISBN 978-1-135-76862-1. "in mid September 1950, Nuri al-Said replaced...as prime minister. Nuri was determined to drive the Jews out of his country as quickly as..."
36. Devorah Hakohen (2003). *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and Its Repercussions in the 1950s and After* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=fYOiPrm-6PsC&pg=PA124>). Syracuse University Press. p. 124. ISBN 978-0-8156-2990-0. "Said had warned the Jewish community of Baghdad to make haste; otherwise, he would take the Jews to the Borders himself."
37. Glitzstein, 2004, p. 206
38. Quoted in Gat, 1997, "it was clear that in each case a hand-grenade of high-explosive type No. 36 was used: these are available in Iraq only to the armed forces."
39. Gat, 2013, p. 172
40. Ian Black, 1991, p. 91
41. Black and Morris, 1992, p. 91 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=FkyMsycbemEC&pg=PA91>)
42. Meir-Glitzstein 2004, p. 212:referencing Shiblak, *The Lure of Zion*, pp 119–120
43. Gat, 2013, p. 179
44. One of the defendants admitted responsibility under torture, although he rescinded this admission in court.
45. Gat 1997, p. 172: "Basri, a lawyer, was active in collecting intelligence material... Shalom Salah was a cobbler and a weapons expert. He was busy preparing arms caches... As a result [of Salah giving away details of the cache in Habaza's home], caches were uncovered in three synagogues – Masuda Shemtov, Hakham Haskal and Meir Tuweik and in several homes. The weapons found, according to police sources, included 436 hand-grenades, 33 machine-guns, 97 machine-gun cartridges, 186 pistols, and so on."
46. Shenhav 1999"According to the account of Shlomo Hillel, a former Israeli cabinet minister and Zionist activist in Iraq, their last words, as they stood on the gallows, were "Long live the State of Israel.""
47. Bejtullah Destani, ed. (2005), *Minorities in the Middle East, Jewish Communities in Arab Countries 1841–1974*, Cambridge University Press, p. 563

48. Abdul Rahman al-Samrai, Baghdad police, evidence at the trial, quoted in "Gat, The Exodus from Iraq": "It was clear to me that these crimes had been perpetrated against Jews, but anyone studying the affair closely will see that the perpetrator did not intend to cause loss of life among the Jews; we did not gain the impression that the perpetrator felt any resentment or hatred of the Jews. There were also signs that the crimes were to the advantage of the Jews or of their institutions in Palestine. Each incident sparked off rumours and a wave of propaganda, originated by the Jews, with the aim of demonstrating that the Iraqi government and people were persecuting the Jews and that the bombings were manifestations of hatred of the Jews. Rumours and propaganda were also spread, outside Iraq as well. In order to show that the Jews were being persecuted in Iraq . . ."
49. Salem Jasem al-Kiryati, Baghdad police, evidence at the trial, quoted in "Gat, The Exodus from Iraq": "It was made clear to us from the outset in principle that the three explosions were carried out in places and times where Jews were present. Secondly, it was clear that in each case a hand-grenade of high-explosive type No. 36 was used: these are available in Iraq only to the armed forces. Thirdly, the crimes were perpetrated by similar methods the material was thrown in non-central locations and there was no intention to kill or injure a certain person. Fourthly, each incident caused commotion and panic among the Jews and a wave of propaganda conceding their persecution by the government and the Iraqi people. Fifthly, the events recurred after the enactment of the Denaturalization Law. From all this, we concluded that the crimes were committed by the same people and for the same purpose . . ."
50. Meir-Glitzstein 2004, p. 208-209: "As the aliyah operation, officially named Operation Ezra and Nehemiah – drew to a close, several Hehalutz and Haganah activists, Israeli emissaries and Muslim Iraqis were put on trial in Iraq. The affair began in mid-May 1951, when the Iraqis managed to capture two Israeli emissaries – the aliyah emissary Mordechai Ben-Porat and the intelligence emissary Yehuda Tajer. Soon afterwards, dozens of Hehalutz and Haganah members and intelligence personnel were arrested. In a series of trials held in late 1951, two of the detainees, Yosef Basri, an attorney who headed an Israeli intelligence network in Iraq, and Saleh Shalom, who had been in charge of an arms cache for the Haganah, were charged with throwing the grenade at the Mas'uda Shemtov synagogue in January 1951 and several subsequent bombs at Jewish and other centres in order to sow panic and spur Jews to move to Israel. Basri and Shalom were executed in January 1952, Tajer was sentenced to life imprisonment, others were sentenced to various jail terms, but Ben-Porat managed to escape from jail. The charges were groundless for several reasons.
51. Fischbach, Michael R. (Fall 2008). "Claiming Jewish Communal Property in Iraq" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100620061703/http://merip.org/mer/mer248/fischbach.html>). Middle East Report. Archived from the original (<http://www.merip.org/mer/mer248/fischbach.html>) on 20 June 2010. Retrieved 5 April 2010.
52. Morris and Black, p. 93; Gat, p. 186–187.
53. Morris and Black; Gat; *passim*
54. Gat, p. 177
55. Gat 1997, p. 64, quoting from correspondence in the Haganah Archives (https://www.archives.mod.gov.il/default_h.asp) Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20190519182652/http://www.archives.mod.gov.il/default_h.asp) 19 May 2019 at the [Wayback Machine](#)
56. Meir-Glitzstein 2004, p. 257-8: "Many Iraqi Jews, bitterly disappointed with the conditions that awaited them in Israel, found in the affair of the bombs an explanation for their aliyah and placed the responsibility, and perhaps even the blame, on the Israeli government and the Zionist activists."
57. Al-Shawaf 2006, p. 72: "As mentioned, most Iraqi Jews believed that Zionist emissaries were behind the bombs."
58. Gat 1997, p. 177: "The belief that the bombs had been thrown by Zionist agents was shared by those Iraqi Jews who had just reached Israel. These Jews were convinced that the bombs had been thrown in order to expedite their departure."
59. Meir-Glitzstein 2004, p. 207.

60. Shenhav 1999, p. 605 "It would have been only natural for Iraqi Jews in Israel to have reacted with outrage to news of the hanging. But on the contrary, the mourning assemblies organized by leaders of the community in various Israeli cities failed to arouse widespread solidarity with the two Iraqi Zionists. Just the opposite: a classified document from Moshe Sasson, of the Foreign Ministry's Middle East Division, to Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett maintained that many Iraqi immigrants, residents of the transit camps, greeted the hanging with the attitude: "That is God's revenge on the movement that brought us to such depths."
61. S. Teveth, *Ben-Gurion's spy: the story of the political scandal that shaped modern Israel*. Columbia University Press, 1996, ISBN 0-231-10464-2, p. 81.
62. "Anti-Zionist writer Naeim Giladi dies" *Queens Chronicle*. 11 March 2010. [Zwire.com \(http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=20415625&BRD=2731&PAG=461&dept_id=574902&rfi=%27\)](http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=20415625&BRD=2731&PAG=461&dept_id=574902&rfi=%27), Retrieved 2010-10-20.
63. Giladi, Naeim (April–May 1998), *The Jews of Iraq* (https://web.archive.org/web/20061210085816/http://www.ameu.org/uploads/vol31_issue2_1998.pdf) (PDF), Americans for Middle East Understanding, archived from the original (http://www.ameu.org/uploads/vol31_issue2_1998.pdf) (PDF) on 10 December 2006, retrieved 5 April 2010
64. Gat 1997, p. 178
65. Avi Shlaim, *Three Worlds: Memoirs of an Arab-Jew*, (<https://books.google.com/books?id=XTWUEAAAQBAJ>) Oneworld Publications ISBN 978-0-861-54464-6 2023 ch. 7.
66. Marozzi, Justin (14 June 2023). "A shocking claim about the Baghdad bombings of 1950 and 1951" (<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-shocking-truth-behind-the-baghdad-bombings-of-1950-and-1951/>). *The Spectator*. Retrieved 23 February 2025.
67. "Daily News Bulletin- November 8th 1951" (https://pdfs.jta.org/1951/1951-11-08_216.pdf) (PDF). Jewish Telegraph Agency. Retrieved 17 April 2024.
68. Moshe Gat, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Jul., 1988, pp. 312–329, The Connection between the bombing in Baghdad and the emigration of the Jews from Iraq: 1950–51,[1] (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283249>) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20181006114505/http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283249>) 6 October 2018 at the Wayback Machine: ...in light of documents which have been made available by the National Archives in Washington, the British Public Record Office, the Haganah Archive, the Israel State Archive, and documents from the private records of Mordechai Ben-Porat, who was in charge of Jewish emigration in Iraq, we shall see that not only did Israeli emissaries not place the bombs at the locations cited in the Iraqi statement, but also that there was in fact no need to take such drastic action in order to urge the Jews to leave Iraq for Israel."
69. Gat 1997, p. 185: "62,000 Jews were still waiting in Iraq and it was not clear how long it would take to rescue them. The Mossad emissaries in Iraq were under heavy pressure from these prospective immigrants, and in the months before the bomb-throwing incident, their reports stressed their frustration at their inability to ease their plight. As Ben-Porat wrote: 'The emissaries never imagined that so large a number of Jews would decide to renounce their nationality and leave the country... neither the Israeli authorities nor the emissaries were interested in registration on this scale. The stampede to register stemmed mainly from awareness of the Jews themselves that it was important to do so before the law expired. As noted above, just over 105,000 Jews had registered by 8 March, of whom almost 40,000 had left the country. Some 15,000 more left illegally before and after the law was passed. Since the number of Jews living in Iraq before emigration began has been estimated at 125,000 this means that about 5,000 Jews were left, who had preferred to remain in Iraq. Why, then, would anyone in Israel have wanted to throw bombs? Whom would they have wanted to intimidate?'"
70. Gat 2013, p. 186
71. Gat 1997, p. 180
72. Emil Murad (1998). *The Quagmire* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=HalmYGA2NFAC&pg=PA183>). Freund Publishing House Ltd. pp. 182–183. ISBN 978-965-294-132-9. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20200806123319/https://books.google.com/books?id=HalmYGA2NFAC&pg=PA183>) from the original on 6 August 2020. Retrieved 21 September 2016.
73. Gat 2013, p. 180

74. Gat, 2013, p.183
75. Gat 1997, p. 224
76. Gat, 2013, p. 181
77. Gat 1997, p. 187: "In April 1977 an interview with Baruch Nadel was published in the periodical Bama'arakha (a journal of the Sephardic community). In the interview, Nadel accused the Israeli emissaries of placing the bombs in order to hasten the departure of the Jews from Iraq. He was sued for libel by Ben-Porat. In the settlement between the parties, Nadel retracted all his accusations against the Israeli emissaries, and apologized for the injustice of the publication. Civilian file 8/63, 3.11.81, Magistrates' court, Herzlia."
78. Howard Adelman; Elazar Barkan (13 August 2013). *No Return, No Refuge: Rites and Rights in Minority Repatriation* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=WRpHAAAAQBAJ&pg=PT237>). Columbia University Press. p. 237. ISBN 978-0-231-52690-6.
79. Baghdad, Yesterday: The Making of an Arab Jew, Sasson Somekh, Ibis, 2003, p. 153
80. Meir-Glitzstein, Esther (2 January 2022). "Terrorism and migration: on the mass emigration of Iraqi Jews, 1950–1951" (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00263206.2021.1934453>). *Middle Eastern Studies*. **58** (1): 136–152. doi:10.1080/00263206.2021.1934453 (<https://doi.org/10.1080%2F00263206.2021.1934453>). ISSN 0026-3206 (<https://search.worldcat.org/issn/0026-3206>).

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External links

- Video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggiSkyxcJdo>) of Benny Morris on the 1950 synagogue bombing in Baghdad