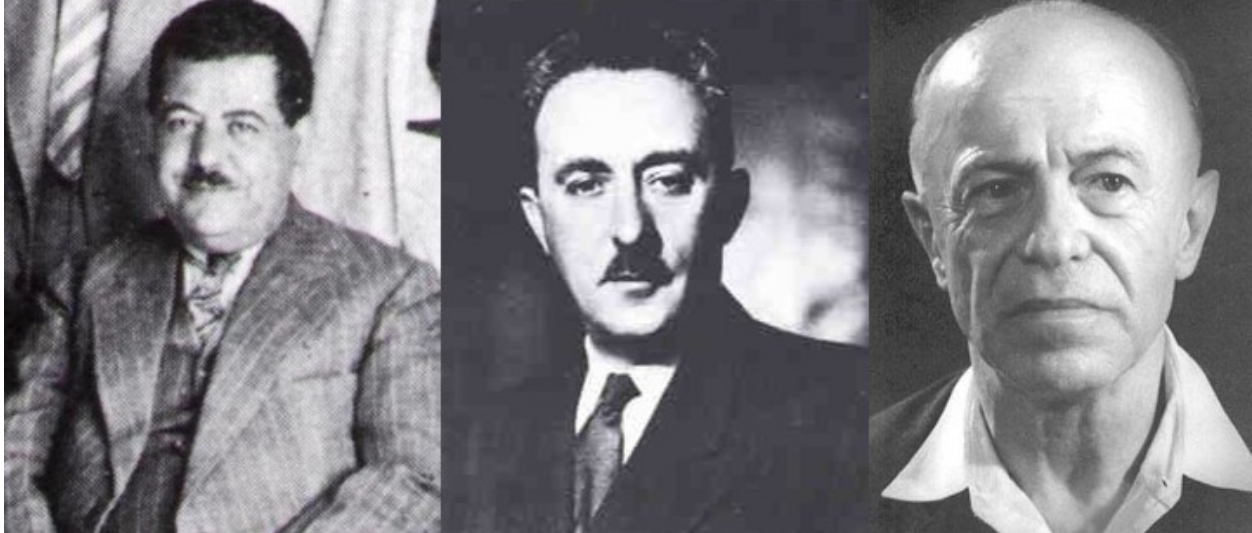


## Arab Leaders Meeting in Damascus

(30 September 1938)

Source in Hebrew: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/12864644/> Original source found in Ben-Gurion Library Archives and Central Zionist Archives, S25/10526/3



From left to right: Izzat Darwaza, Moshe Sharett, and Eliyahu Sasson. Photo: Public Domain.

*This secret intelligence report provides an extraordinarily candid Palestinian Arab calculation that the Jews in Palestine are determined to succeed in creating a state, that they are on the brink of having one, and are not going to be defeated without Arab state support for the Palestinians. Written in the waning moments of the 'Arab Revolt' against the Zionists and British, the report summarizes the presentation of Izzat Darwazzah, a Palestinian Arab politician, made to Arab notables from Syria, Lebanon, and Transjordan. The meeting takes place just days after the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain signed his pact with Hitler to permit German annexation of the Sudetenland, referenced by Darwazzah with regret because 'now' war in Europe was not likely, and therefore German support for helping the Palestinian Arabs against the Zionists was equally remote. Darwazzah recognizes that the Palestinian Arab terrorist (his term) gangs have lost their effectiveness. Darwazzah's plea for Arab states and leaders to come to the aid of the Palestinian Arabs is his clear recognition that portions of Palestine are already 'lost' to the Jews, and that the best political outcome that could occur could be a federal state in Palestine where Jews will be a third of the population. Within three months after this small meeting in Damascus, the British will offer to the Mufti of Jerusalem a federal solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict in Palestine and he will turn down that offer, opposing the will of the*

majority of Palestinian Arabs advising him. (See Izzat Tannous diary entry, **The Palestinians Eyewitness History of Palestine**. New York: Igt Co, 1988. 309-310.) The British will impose their new policy for Palestine, virtually stopping Jewish immigration and land purchase, in itself recognition that without halting its growth through enforcement, the Jewish state will grow physically and demographically. This report is remarkable because it is timely, accurate, and in the hands of Zionist decision-makers within days after this private meeting takes place; it reveals at least in this instance the quality and access of Zionist intelligence gathering. In Palestine, Jewish Agency officials saw for themselves Palestinian Arab social fragmentation and weakness generated in part as consequences from the 'Arab Revolt,' which was coming to an end. Here they had a report of a leading Palestinian official who dramatically pleaded for Arab state support to thwart Zionism's further success.

Ken Stein, December 2014

(Translated from Hebrew)

Top Secret: October 3, 1938

To: Mr. Moshe Shertok, Head, Political Department, The Jewish Agency for Palestine

From: Eliyahu Sasson, Head, Arab Affairs Section, The Jewish Agency for Palestine

On September 30, at 8pm a meeting took place in the house of Nasib al-Bakri, a member of the Syrian Parliament and the Chairman of the National Bloc Branch in Damascus. The meeting was called to order to discuss the issues that would be dealt with in a convention that would take place on October 7<sup>th</sup> in Cairo. Based on my suggestions, Nasib invited Izzat Darwazah, the most active refugee from Palestine in Syria to present a review for the participants of the demands of the Arabs in Palestine. The deliberations of this meeting in Damascus lasted for 5 hours, from 8pm-1am. The participants were: Asif al-Solah, Sabri al-Asli, Faris al-Khuri, Maser Arslan, and Sheik Muhammad Shuraki from Trans-Jordan. The undersigned sat in an adjacent room to where the deliberations were held and listened to the exchanges that were going back and forth.



For most of the time, the delegates presented questions to Izzat concerning the issues that were raised at various times in the past with regard to the Palestinian problem. Those who asked were primarily Faris al-KHuri and Nasib al-Bakri. The latter consulted more than once with the others about what would be the relevant questions for discussion.

Izzat stated: There is no boundary to the aspirations of the Zionists. If until September 1937, the Jews spoke about building a National Home in Palestine; today they are already talking about the establishment of a Jewish State in part of Palestine. Once such a state is established, the Jews most likely will start thinking about the expansion of its borders. At the beginning, the expansion will be at the expense of the second part of Palestine that is not designated for them. Later on, it will include parts of Trans-Jordan, Syria, Iraq and maybe even Saudi Arabia. The last 20 years taught the Arabs to know the Jews very well. These are people who not only say but also do.

Today, Palestine finds itself in a transitional period. Indeed, no one knows how long this period is going to last. But it is the duty of the Arabs to attempt and try so that the Jews and the British will get worn out during this period. Thus, we will have enough time to distract the Jews from their political plans.

There is much sorrow and disappointment among us due to the fact that a World War did not break out. In the case of such war, the situation of the Arabs in Palestine and the neighboring countries could have changed completely. Syria would have reached its independence and the Arabs of Palestine would have achieved their political demands - if not by ways of peace with the superpowers that are in charge of the Mandates in the region then through an intensive war against their interests in the Arab Middle East. There is no doubt, that in the event of an option of a large scale war, the Arabs would have been supported both materially and spiritually by Germany and Italy.

The disappointment of the Arabs after the achievement of the peace treaty between Chamberlin and Hitler is twofold. First, it puts away for the time being every possibility of a World War; second, from now on, Germany will have to reduce its financial support to the Arabs in order to keep good relations with England and France.

The total responsibility for our actions is now laid solely upon the Arabs. In the case that the Arab countries will continue to behave the way they have up until now towards the uprising in Palestine, the Arabs of Palestine will be totally neglected and forgotten. The current hour obligates the Arab countries to secure the Arab militias in Palestine and help them with manpower, money, weapons to make an effort to provide them with serious leadership so that they will be capable to attack the Jewish settlements and the British army in greater intensity. Such actions will prove to the British government that the spirit of the Arabs has not been broken.

As for the moment, the organized Arab gangs have enough means. Only a week ago, their umbrella organization received a very large sum from a foreign source. But this in itself will not be sufficient to satisfy the requirements and the urgent needs of the gangs for more than a couple of months. Adding to this, is the fact that our *terrorists* are tired and have already had a lot of casualties. These facts have lowered their spirit and instigated them to pressure the organization of the gangs to find solutions for their predicament at the moment and for the larger cause of Palestine as a whole.

The strength of the existing gangs alone is not sufficient. They need reinforcements. They require political and military support of greater national forces from Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Though this assistance currently exists, it is very small, and we are obligated to increase it. In the past two years, the gangs have been very successful in Palestine. They were able to establish, in most villages, armed Arab forces. This action, that was limited to villages, can be expanded so that it will also encompass large towns, such as Jaffa, Jerusalem, Haifa and Nablus. But without the help of the neighboring Arab countries, this will be impossible. If this assistance does not arrive immediately, these militias may lose the little that they have already achieved. The assassination of “traitors” [those that are assumed to cooperate with the British and or the Jews], is creating great dissatisfaction and bitterness among the moderate Arabs in Palestine and outside the country. Such sentiments may ruin all the conquests of the gangs. The Arab countries should express their moral support to the gangs and provide them with manpower, money and weapons.

There is another factor that cannot be overlooked and necessitates the urgent assistance of the Arab countries. The Jewish community in Palestine has proven in the last two years of the upris-

ing that they could defend themselves. There is no denial that the Jews had held up quite well in their confrontations with the Arab gangs on the roads, in the orchards, and in the agricultural settlements. Of course, they could not prevent having casualties but they were able to strengthen their standing and prove to the British and the world as a whole that, if given full opportunity to protect themselves, they had the power to stand up against the Arab gangs regardless of their sizes. Therefore, our main task should now be to reassure those who want to support our cause and to maintain the activities that would enhance the Arab control of Palestine. In order to achieve that goal, it is necessary to increase the strength of the gangs in such a way that they will be able to control the major roads in both Jewish and Arab regions, to inflict harm on the Jewish forces, and to overcome them in battles and break their deployment along the battle fronts.

At this point, Izzat began to speak of various political advantages and began to relate to other issues as well:

The announcement of the establishment of a Jewish State has put an immense pressure on all those who are concerned with the political fate of Palestine and pushed them to create, in England, the impression that it is possible to have a Jewish-Arab agreement for the partition of Palestine based on the assumption that it will not be possible to have peace between Jews and Arabs otherwise. Dr. Shahbandar, Nuri al-Said, Dr. Izzat Tannous and other Arab activists attempted during the past year in their visits to Geneva and London to shatter this basis of supposed understanding and tried to cancel the plan to establish the Jewish State.

The Jews understood the purpose of this tactic and they undermined it. They did not receive the demands of the three Arab mediators and presented them with a long list of questions to clarify their [British] proposals. But the mediators did not give up. They looked for and found, among the leaders of the Jewish communities in England, Paris and New York, people who were willing to enter negotiations with the Arabs based on the postponement of the establishment of the Jewish State, and creating an independent Palestine that would guarantee the Arabs a majority forever.

The mufti [Hajj Amin al-Husseini] was very happy with this achievement and asked the mediators to continue their efforts but the mediators had crossed the boundaries of their authority and entered into their proposals some issues that the Palestinian Arabs could not agree upon, especially in regards to Jewish immigration. They spoke about the possibility of increasing the Jewish population to 49% during a certain period, while the Arabs demand that the Jewish population remain as it stands today at 30%. The headlines in the British press said that in October or November [1938], the Partition Committee would present its report. This prospect renewed the pressure on the Mufti and his people, who were apprehensive about the content of this report. They recognized the existence of low-spirit among the terrorists and tried to stimulate them to regroup, make new efforts and create the impression among the British people that it would be possible to have a Jewish-Arab agreement [federal plan] and such an agreement is something which was wished more by the Jews, the British, and the Arabs rather than the partition [into two states with an economic union] of the country.

The Arab statesmen (Tawfik al-Sareri, Nuri al-Said, Jamaal Mardam, Fuad Hamsah, Dr. Izzat Tannous, Musa al-Alami and Abu al-Fattah) traveled in the summer to Europe and were asked to act in such a fashion in order to enhance the impression against the partition idea. Nuri al-Said went exclusively to London to renew his talks with his English and Jewish friends in order to convince them to adopt this course of action. Nuri had received the backing and the support of the Mufti, the Emir Abdullah of Transjordan, Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia and the British authorities in Palestine for his renewed efforts. His plan consisted of the following elements:

- The establishment of an independent Palestinian state that will join the League of Nations
- All the citizens of the country will have equal civil and political rights, with no distinction of political affiliations and race
- All the ethnic groups in the country will receive complete autonomy
- A municipal autonomy will be granted to cities, towns, villages, regions that are either totally Jewish or completely Arab
- The border given to the Jewish people will be maximum 34% of the total area of Palestine
- Until the establishment of the State, England will remain responsible for the rule of the country

England will keep in its hand, even after the establishment of the Palestinian state, certain rights in Haifa and other strategic locations

-Trans-Jordan will be annexed to Palestine and both will constitute the independent Palestinian state

-England will declare total amnesty to all those who participated in the uprising, political prisoners will be released, and those in exile will be permitted to return.

-England will agree to the renewal of the composition of the Arab Higher Committee until the establishment of the independent state

-An option will be given to Syria and Iraq to unite with this state, if they find it necessary. In such an instance, limited Jewish immigration will be permitted to these two countries as well.

-The independent Palestinian state will be established on a certain date that will be agreed upon by the Arabs, after the beginning of serious negotiations.

-In a case that Syria would wish to unite with this state, the government of this state will agree to grant France certain rights to France that are inside Syria.

The decision regarding whether the new state will be a monarchy or republic will be decided after the British accept all of the above mentioned clauses.

According to Izzat, Nuri Said believes the realization of this plan is dependent on some prominent people in England, among them Lord Lloyd, Colonel Newcomb, Lord Samuel, Sir Arthur Wouchope, Lord Winterton and others.

Izzat began to speak about the demands of the Palestinian Arabs that should be presented by the delegates in the inter-Parliamentary conference [in Cairo]:

-To receive all the decisions in the spirit of the Lausanne Conference and the memorandum that was presented by the Supreme Arab Committee to the Royal Commission



- To send the blessings of the Mufti to the exiles in Seychelles Islands, to the participants in the uprising, and to the Defense Committees in Syria, Iraq and Egypt
- To demonstrate the solidarity of the Arab countries with Palestine
- To encourage the Arab Kings to expedite their financial, military and political support to the Arabs of Palestine
- To demand the total cessation of Jewish immigration to Palestine.

At the end of his presentation Izzat gave the participants of this meeting additional material to study about the problems in Palestine.

### **Glossary:**

**Moshe Shertok** - (1894-1965). Later changed surname to Sharett. He was the head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency in Palestine from 1933 to 1948. After Israel's independence he became the country first Foreign Minister and later became the second Prime Minister of Israel in 1954-1955.

**Eliyahu Sasson** - (1902-1978). At the time, he was the head of the Arab Affairs Section of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. After the establishment of Israel he served in the Foreign office and was an ambassador to Turkey, Italy and Switzerland. He was also a Minister in the Israeli government.

**Neville Chamberlain** - British prime minister, 1937-1940. In September 29, 1938, he met with Hitler for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time and signed a peace treaty between England and Nazi Germany





**Nuri al-Said** - (1888-1958). He was an Iraqi politician during the British Mandate. He later became his country's Prime Minister. He supported many of the British policies and objectives in the Middle East and specifically in Iraq.

**Izzat Darwazah** - (1888-1984). He was born in Nablus, Palestine and was a prominent Palestinian politician, author and educator. He opposed the British Mandate and Zionism. He promoted Arab unity and the creation of a Palestinian state.

**Istiqlal (Independence) Party** – This party was established in Palestine in the mid-1930s by Izzat Darwaza to promote the independence of the Arabs from the British Mandate. Izzat was exiled by the British in 1937 to Damascus where he supported the Palestinians revolt against the British and the attacks against Jewish targets in Eretz Israel.

**National Bloc** – This was a Nablus based Palestinian Party that was established in 1935 to promote the Arabs' interests in Palestine.

**League of Nations** - Was established in 1920 after WWI and oversaw the mandates of the former Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire.

**Arab Revolt (1936-1939)** - Arabs attacks against both British and Jewish targets in Palestine during which 400 Jews and 200 British were killed and many Jewish settlements were attacked as part of the offensive against the settlement enterprise of Jews in Palestine. The purposes of this uprising were:

Act against the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine

To convince the British of the justified demands of the Arabs in Palestine



To hurt the Jewish economy in Palestine

To achieve a geographical advantage in Palestine

To promote the idea of the establishment of an Arab state in Palestine

The British Royal Commission Inquiry that was sent to Palestine from London to study the causes of the Arab revolt that broke out in 1936 and propose solution to the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine. In July 1937 it produces its report that called in principle to abolish the British Mandate and to partition the country and allow the Arabs and the Jews to create their own respective territories. The British Government accepted the recommendations with regards to the partition proposal and the British Parliament endorsed it. The Jews took opposing views with regards to the viability of the Partition Plan that granted the Jewish community in the country a carved and small territory. The Arab took a united stand in rejecting the Plan.

**Source in Hebrew:** [http://www.scribd.com/doc/12864644/-](http://www.scribd.com/doc/12864644/)