

FOLKE BERNADOTTE: MYSTERY OR OBLIVION?

Why, despite his great achievements, has Folke Bernadotte been forgotten by world history?

By Charlotte Boutboul

RESUME

Folke Bernadotte, a Swedish aristocrat, is the sole non-German figure that saved thousands during World War II through direct negotiation with the Nazis. He subsequently was the first U.N security counselor appointed to negotiate peace in Palestine, and the first official victim of the Israeli terrorist group Lehi. History has failed to remember him. Why?

Mystery or oblivion:

Why, despite his great achievements, has Folke Bernadotte been largely forgotten by history?

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INTRODUCTION

World War II, the Holocaust, and creation of the state of Israel in 1948 are amongst the most important events of the 21st century, having critically outlined the world in which we live in today. The principles upon which are constructed the most prominent international institutions (NATO, the UN, the EU) and the laws under which we conduct world politics (The International Human rights, The Geneva Convention) are directly shaped by these events. A Swedish figure has played an active role in all distinctive occurrences, arguably to a comparable extent than did Eisenhower, Truman, Churchill, or Himmler. Yet, contrary to them, this person has fallen into total historical oblivion -even in his own country. Folke Bernadotte directed the Swedish International Red Cross during World War II, saving both German and Allied prisoned soldiers and defending with honor a contentious Swedish neutrality. Later, he contributed to Sweden's shift from mercantile neutrality to activism with the White Buses Operation, the most important Swedish international rescue war effort ever conducted. As Oskar Schindler had started in 1939 (saving 1200 German Jews) and Raoul Wallenberg in 1943 (saving around 100 000 Hungarian Jews according to some estimates), in 1945 Folke Bernadotte contributed to the salvation of possibly 21 000 prisoners of the Third Reich of which over 6500 were Jews escaping the 'Final Solution'.¹ He was the first-neutral official entity to set foot in a death camp, and one of the only governmental figures to directly negotiate human lives with the Nazis, circumventing the firm "unconditional surrender" policy assiduously followed by Allied forces. After these events, he was the first appointed U.N mediator sent to the former British mandated territory of Palestine to negotiate peace between Palestinians and Jews. He failed in his mission like all those who would follow him. Shot in September 1948 by the orders of Yitzhak Shamir, one of the leaders of the Israeli terrorist group Lehi, Bernadotte was the first claimed diplomatic victim of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. After his unexpected death, virtually no one ever spoke of him. His existence, with its achievements, has been swept under a rug of silence.

Perhaps the reason behind Folke Bernadotte's anonymous status in history lies in the ambiguous nature of his character and achievements. These are in fact difficult to make sense

¹ Estimated figures vary considerably but in 1988 Steven Koblik referred to a « Red Cross document » that stated that exactly 20, 937 « internees » had been transported to Sweden before the end of the war. *The Stones Cry Out : Sweden's Response to Persecution of Jews 1933-1945* by Steven Koblik (1988, Paperback)

of in retrospect. Folke Bernadotte was a royal aristocrat who saved Jews yet collaborated with Nazis, even intimately helping some of them to the very end. He achieved fame for his courageous philanthropy yet failed to acknowledge those who had helped him in his efforts (Niels Christian Ditleff, Gillel Storch, Felix Kersten). He was the first to adventure in Israel to achieve peace through the UN, but instead announced the limits of the institution as well as a never-ending series of conflict to follow. He was killed by Jews although he had saved so many of them three years earlier. Although Bernadotte always carried the best intentions it appears his actions were contradicting and that their ultimate consequences failed to grant him a heroic status in history, or even that of an anti-hero. He has received instead nothing but dull indifference. This thesis is seeking to establish whether there is a valid reason behind this unresponsiveness, or if, on the contrary, ignoring this man is a grave mistake that imperatively needs to be redeemed.

SECTION I: WHO WAS FOLKE BERNADOTTE?

Folke Bernadotte was also known as Count of Wisborg, a title granted by the monarchs of Luxembourg to men *formerly* titled as princes of Sweden. Since 1872 the Wisborg title has been bestowed on four princes of Sweden, including Folke's father, who married morganatically without the consent of the King of Sweden. In effect, being attributed the Wisborg title meant losing one's Swedish royal title. Thus, despite his royal lineage Folke did not have access to its title. Folke was the son of Ebba Munck af Fukila and Count Oscar Bernadotte of Wisborg, formerly prince Oscar of Sweden and brother to king Gustaf V of Sweden. Folke's grandfather was King Oscar II of Sweden, formerly king of Norway- until his dethronement in 1905 when the two countries separated.

Count Folke Bernadotte grew up the youngest of five children within the privileged shelter of the Swedish Royal family. Very conscious of his good fortune Folke has been recorded saying, in an attempt to warrant his commitment to highly perilous diplomatic assignments, that he would deserve to be included among "criminals and misfits" if he did not try in some way to share part of his "good fortune and happiness"². This inclination towards altruistic behavior has been largely credited to his upbringing. Indeed, Oscar Bernadotte was known to be a strict ascetic paternal figure that imposed daily regimens of prayer and charitable work

² Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 8 : « A Privileged Youth », pp 60, Pantheon Books, New York-1994

on his family. The Christian values of gravity, piety, obedience, benevolence, honesty, and punctuality resonated meritoriously in the Bernadotte household. That being said, none of the Bernadottes were known to have a particular predisposition towards academia or deep cerebral thinking; it is believed that dyslexia was a common condition in the family, although a proper understanding of the handicap was non-existent in the early 19th century. Folke passed his final school examinations with difficulty having trouble with reading and writing. He nevertheless had a gift for languages and spoke Swedish, German, French and English fluently.

Upon leaving high school, Folke enrolled in the Royal Horse Guards and became an officer. There, he rapidly gained a worthy reputation as a competent horseman and organizer. This life seemed to suit him perfectly as he greatly enjoyed outdoors, horseback riding and camaraderie. However, two significant incidents took place while he was serving. In 1916, Folke fell off his horse unconscious and internally bleeding. It was discovered he had a condition of gastric ulcer when hospitalized. Throughout the rest of his life this illness would require regular massive injections of vitamin C and periodic hospitalization. Folke entertained the conviction that this diagnose would one day lead to his death, and many have attributed his intrepid nature to his condition. Folke himself seemed to see it as a blessing: “When one doesn’t know how the future will turn out, and when one realizes that the distance between life and death is short, at that moment the importance of all difficulties disappears, although they normally bulk so large ... I am glad that I had that experience in the hospital. It was of great use to me.”³ His second incident particularly echoes to this comment. Two years later in 1918, now lieutenant in the cavalry, Folke fell through the ice of the Deer Park Bridge Creek in Stockholm, again while horseback riding. Instead of crawling to the shore for his own life, Folke plunged into the cracked dark hole after his horse, in vain. This incident perhaps testifies as to the nature of his audacious, if not reckless, character. The event carries also a heavy foreshadowing symbolic. In fact, by the early 1920s Bernadotte’s chosen career in the Royal Cavalry was what Kati Marton has referred to as a “picturesque anachronism”⁴. Horses were becoming irrelevant as the Swedish army and its artillery was taking over. The image of a young Folke pointlessly trying to save his horse carries some mordant irony. Losing his

³ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 8 : « A Privileged Youth », pp 62, Pantheon Books, New York-1994

⁴ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 8 : « A Privileged Youth », pp 62, Pantheon Books, New York-1994

career as a military man was something very painful to Folke, especially given he had been raised to be a 'useful' Christian and had no other calling to go to.

His uncle Prince Eugene had attempted to arouse a thirst of knowledge for the world through a cultural trip to the –then– avant-garde city of Paris. But when the young boy asked if the Arc-de-Triomphe had been designed by the same architect as the Church of Notre Dame, the Prince quickly gave up. His curiosity for the world would be successfully awakened by Estelle Manville instead, daughter of New York asbestos millionaire Edward Manville, whom Folke met and married in 1928. Many account that Folke fell in love immediately with this tall slender, outgoing and self-possessed American brunette who starkly contrasted with the reserved young Swedish aristocratic women to whom the count was accustomed. Estelle would have a critical impact on Folke's career.

Through his wife's American background Folke had access to leading bank and industrial circles in New York. Accordingly, he studied banking in New York and Paris from 1930 to 1931, and made two unsuccessful attempts in business from 1933 to 1935. He subsequently abandoned the idea of tackling the business world but nonetheless stayed an active member on the boards of a number of Swedish companies, including AGA, Facis, Nordiska Kompaniet, Nordisk Resbureau, and the publication *Det Bästa*. It is also around that time, in 1933 precisely, that Folke discovered the Boy Scouts as his new vocation. This newfound interest benefitted everyone: Folke, uninterested in academia or money, would find solace in an outdoor occupation that required authority and camaraderie. For King Gustav, traditional patron of scouting, having his decent nephew in this position showed great promise for a transition to greater things. Accordingly, through both his marriage and position, Folke became a key representative figure in Swedish-American relations. The many public commissions for which Folke was chosen as an official included representing the king at an exhibition in Chicago (1933 and 1934), being vice-chairman of the committee appointed to celebrate the 1638 Swedish invasion of Delaware, and acting as general commissioner at the Swedish Pavilion at the 1939 New York World Fair. Although of minor importance, these commissions prompted the count to take a more active interest in international issues.

These new interests would turn out to be greatly salutary as two consecutive tragedies hit Folke and Estelle: the loss of their infant son Frederick in 1934, followed by that of their six year old first son, Gustav, in 1936. While grieving his eldest son's loss, Folke told his wife

“We didn’t come to this world to be happy but to make others happy”⁵. In *Escape from the Third Reich*, Sune Persson makes the sound case that through these tragic events the count realized that his personality was more suitable for humanitarian work, which encouraged him to become chairman of the Swedish Scout Association in 1937 and vice-chairman of the Swedish Red Cross organization in 1943.

When Germany invaded Norway and Denmark in 1940, Sweden got indirectly involved in the war being held under direct threat of German occupation. Stockholm’s foreign policy during the early years of the war was one of conciliating German demands while remaining in so far as possible neutral, this tricky balance was achieved through humanitarian work. Folke became mobilized into the Swedish army as a major. This title entailed him to be in charge of the army’s recreational section and internment camps for refugees and soldiers coming from countries engaged in warfare. This brought him to head the important operations of exchange of prisoners, German, British and American respectively⁶. These were carried out in the port of Gothenburg from 1943 and 1944 and were highly successful. “From feeding and registering thousands of exhausted and disoriented soldiers, to engaging a brass band to play “It’s a long way to Tipperary” for the British troops and “Lily Marlene” for the German POWs, Bernadotte skillfully managed every detail of the venture.”⁷ These operations culminated in the extended media coverage of one of such successful exchanges both on NBC and CBS news where Folke was interviewed and portrayed as a hero. Bernhard Valery of CBS News introduced the count as “The man whose authority and untiring energy was largely responsible for the success of the exchange operation, the vice-president of the Swedish Red

⁵ Quoted by Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich: The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 7

⁶ Folke Bernadotte attempted to also include exchanges between Soviet and German prisoners, however because the Soviet Union didn’t ratify the Geneva Convention, the Germans didn’t consider themselves bound to the convention when it came to dealing with Soviets and exchanges weren’t negotiable. Moreover, each side had treated the other’s prisoners so savagely that they feared the world’s reaction to the release of thousands of brutalized enemy soldiers.

⁷ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 8 : « A Privileged Youth », Pantheon Books, New York :1994, pp 66

Cross, Count Folke Bernadotte, the nephew of the King of Sweden.”⁸ A proud moment for the count, who finally had found a gratifying vocation that befitted perfectly his Christian beliefs and the expectations his noble family had entertained for him. During that interview Folke told Valery how thankful he was for having had “the privilege to lead this operation and see how lights of happiness have come to the eyes of all these Americans, British, and German repatriables when they came to Sweden and knew that in a couple of days they were going to come back to their beloved countries. To have seen their happiness had been the best reward”⁹. Understandably, this success encouraged the count to pursue even more arduously new humanitarian initiatives. Soon enough he was travelling to handle negotiations, like for instance on November 22nd 1944, when he negotiated with the German Red Cross in Berlin the distribution of post-war relief to the German population while the city was being bombed by the Allies.

By late 1944, when it became clear that the war was tipping in favor of the Allied forces the Swedish Foreign Office became more eager to gain back a graceful reputation in the eyes of the British and Americans who were to dominate politically the near future. Humanitarian activism seemed to be, once more, a secure path towards that objective and Folke Bernadotte was more than ever the ideal candidate to pave the way.

SECTION II: SWEDEN’S WAVERING NEUTRALITY DURING WORLD **WAR II**

Sweden adopted an ambiguous stance throughout the Second World War. When Germany invaded Poland on September 1st 1939, unlike Great Britain or France, who immediately declared war on the Third Reich, Sweden declared complete neutrality in the conflict. The adoption of a policy of neutrality was an economical decision rather than one politically motivated. This was not surprising given that Germany had been an important trade partner to Sweden, especially when it came to the strategic exports of iron ore on which Germany was completely dependent for its armament. Effectively, a Swedish policy of neutrality meant that the government could not interfere with the trade. Germany could not have hoped for more.

⁸ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 8 : « A Privileged Youth », Pantheon Books, New York :1994, pp 67

⁹ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 8 : « A Privileged Youth », Pantheon Books, New York :1994, pp 67

Germany did produce its own iron ore, however its poor quality needed to be mixed with high-grade material from other countries. With the war and the start of the blockade, many foreign suppliers were lost to Germany, and although it retained access to 3 million tons per annum from neutral Norway and Luxembourg, the supplies from Morocco and Spain were lost so the remaining supplies from neutral Scandinavia became of crucial importance. “As early as November 1934, Hitler acknowledged the significance of Scandinavian ore by arguing that its absence would make it impossible for Germany to go to war. In other words, the delivery of iron ore constituted the ‘neuralgic point of German-Swedish relations’ or as the British press in particular liked to call it, “Hitler’s Achilles’ heel”¹⁰

In addition to this essential mercantile interest, contrary to popular beliefs at the time, Sweden was far from being adequately armed to enter war. The Swedish army had been organized into four divisions since the 1890s, with the regiments of northern Norrland and Gotland standing as separate units. This model was outdated so a military build up started and by 1942 a new military organization was adopted. By early 1940, Sweden’s military preparations had reached a level that compared favorably to imminent victims of Nazi aggression such as Netherland and Denmark.¹¹

Not long after Sweden declared in September its neutral position the geopolitical situation rapidly escalated when on November 30th the Soviet Union attacked Finland, marking the start of the Winter War. Sweden again declined to take part in the conflict, adopting a non-belligerent position rather than neutral one (unlike the rest of the overarching world war). On that non-belligerent basis 8700 Swedes volunteered to fight in Finland, and military supplies together with cash, credits, and humanitarian aid was contributed¹².

That withstanding, in December 1939 (the first month of conflict), social democrat Prime Minister, Per Albin Hansson, created a coalition government with all political parties (excluding the communists) where one of his most notable maneuvers was to replace Foreign Minister Rikard Sandler, a figure known to prone an active foreign policy towards Finland,

¹⁰ Christian Leitz, *Sympthy for the Devil : Neutral Europe in Nazi Germany during World War II*, New York University Press : 2001, pp 65

¹¹ Christian Leitz, *Sympthy for the Devil : Neutral Europe in Nazi Germany during World War II*, New York University Press : 2001, pp 50

¹² Carl-Axel Wangel et al. "Sveriges militära beredskap 1939–1945", p 136 (Köping 1982) [ISBN 91-85266-20-5](https://doi.org/10.1080/00141801.2014.941414)

with the diplomat Christian Günther. Günther was typically described as “a colourless but competent man”¹³ who wanted to stay as neutral as possible, which befitted perfectly the Prime Minister’s analogous aspirations. That same month Germany made sure of securing the favorable status quo by renewing its trade agreements on iron ore supplies with the Swedes.¹⁴

Later in February 1940, when the Finns troops were being exhausted and an armistice in favor to the Soviets appeared in sight (indeed the Moscow Peace Treaty would be signed no later than 13 March 1940, marking the end of the Winter War), the Allies prepared a series of intervention proposals involving the transit of British and French troops and equipment through Norway and Sweden to officially help the Finns and most probably gain control of Sweden’s ore officiously. The Scandinavian countries immediately declined these propositions when they were demanded in March. One of the major goals of this aid operation was also to bring the neutral Nordic countries, Norway and Sweden, to the Allied side and get access to Sweden’s iron ore as mentioned, as this would have dramatically jeopardized the Third Reich’s position. However, the Scandinavian rebuttal provoked exactly the opposite outcome as Germany, conscious of the threat on their heavy stake in Scandinavia, planned that same month *Operation Weserübung*, which launched in April and resulted in the occupation of Norway and Denmark on June 10th 1940, when Norway surrendered to Germany.

Effectively the Reich had succeeded in surrounding Sweden, making the country a buffer and securing its supply of iron ore from the Allies. However, what was greatly puzzling was that Sweden had indirectly helped Germany occupy its Norwegian sister. In his book *Blodsporet* ("The Blood Track"), Norwegian journalist Espen Eiburn detailed how, at the request of Adolf Hitler, Nazi Germany sent three trains with 30 to 40 sealed carriages through Sweden to the front lines of the determinant battle of Narvik fought from April 9th to June 8th 1940, enabling them to turn a losing battle into a decisive victory that led to the conquest and brutal occupation of the whole country. In appearance these trains transported medical personnel and food for the wounded German soldiers in Narvik. However, in reality there were 17 soldiers for every medical officer or orderly. Sweden’s government actually knew that the

¹³ Christian Leitz, *Sympathy for the Devil : Neutral Europe in Nazi Germany during World War II*, New York University Press : 2001, pp 52

¹⁴ Christian Leitz, *Sympathy for the Devil : Neutral Europe in Nazi Germany during World War II*, New York University Press : 2001, pp 65

trains were being used to transport troops because a Swedish representative in Berlin reported that he had watched them board.¹⁵

After the success of Operation Weserübung resulting in the Axis occupation of Denmark and Norway, Sweden became at the complete mercy of the Germans who could, now more easily than ever, invade. Accordingly, all subsequent German demands were granted, most notably a momentous agreement permitting the railway passage of goods, troops and armaments across Swedish territory - virtually the exact demand Per Albin Hansson's government had refused to the Allies months earlier. The terms of this railway transit agreement would burden Sweden for the next three years and continuously change in favor of Germany.

The consequences of the transit treaty became even steeper in 1941 during the Continuation War with the notable *Operation Barbarossa*. On June 22nd German envoy, Karl Schnurre demanded the transit of his troops, known as the Engelbrecht division, so it could attack Soviet forces in Southern Finland. King Gustav (Folke Bernadotte's uncle) had absurdly threatened to abdicate the throne if Sweden refused the transit, which the country ultimately allowed. This event, referred to as the *Midsummer Crisis*, has heavily tainted Sweden's international reputation, arguably to a larger extent than its earlier concessions to the Germans even though these had more significant and ongoing consequences.

Sweden upheld its support of Operation Barbarossa by supplying German troops goods in preparation of rude winter conditions in Finland.

“Not only did Sweden aid these efforts through transit arrangements for troops and materials (including the escort of German troop and war material transport ships through Swedish territorial waters), it also supplied the Wehrmacht with equipment. Apart from buying 700 lorries from Sweden and leasing a further 330 during the first months of the campaign in the east, the Wehrmacht also benefitted from the Swedish army's mobilization stocks, from

¹⁵ More information on Espen Eiburn's book can be found at:
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2154901/Neutral-Sweden-allowed-Nazis-use-railways-occupy-Norway--transfer-Jews-death-camps-new-book-claims.html#ixzz4gsryvNbr>

which it received 4000 tents (with stoves), each providing shelter for 25 men of General Dietl's army."¹⁶

The dynamics in the conduct of Sweden's so-called neutral attitude started shifting in 1942 following the USA's entry in the conflict after the attacks of Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941. Around the same period Britain declared war on Finland (December 12, 1941) a decision that had the important potential of destabilizing the buffer status of Sweden; in addition many counter-offensives were successfully led in Moscow. As a result the following year of 1942, was one of gradual transition during which the Allied forces became increasingly resolved to put pressure on Sweden, especially in regards to the railway transit allowance and the trade of iron ore.

However Sweden wasn't completely reactive to this pressure until 1943 when the country started making direct negotiations with London. That year the transit of German goods on Swedish railways started to decrease according to Zetterberg's data¹⁷. In comparison to 1942, more German soldiers were leaving Norway than returning. The Swedish government's request for railway transit traffic to cease was easily accepted by Hitler on July 29th, 1943. By then the transits were no longer of eminent relevance to the Führer as he has facing much more threatening matters, notably the Allied invasion of Italy (and deposition of Mussolini) as well as the failure of the Battle of Kursk's *Operation Citadel* on the Eastern front against the Soviets.

"The cessation of the transit traffic- for material on 15 August, troops on 20 and oil on 1 October 1943 – concluded 3 years during which the Wehrmacht had exceeded the agreed limitations on a regular basis. In fact, according to one calculation, the transit of a total of roughly 2, 140, 000 German soldiers exceeded the agreed terms by 75%."¹⁸

The dictator's decision to grant the Swedish request (that had been demanded of Sweden by the Allies) ended the central military aspect to the relations between the two countries.

¹⁶ Christian Leitz, *Sympthy for the Devil : Neutral Europe in Nazi Germany during World War II*, New York University Press : 2001, pp 58

¹⁷ Christian Leitz, *Sympthy for the Devil : Neutral Europe in Nazi Germany during World War II*, New York University Press : 2001, pp 62

¹⁸ Christian Leitz, *Sympthy for the Devil : Neutral Europe in Nazi Germany during World War II*, New York University Press : 2001, pp 63

However, oddly, Germany imports of iron ore increased in 1943, so both nations' economic relation was very much ongoing. Still, it is around that time that the US administration took an even more growing and hostile interest in Sweden's trade with Germany, the pressure mounted rapidly with the authorities. As in the case with other countries, the US used Sweden's dependence on oil imports to seriously challenge the relations between the latter and the Third Reich¹⁹. Rounds of trade negotiations debuted in London in May 1943, in which Allied demands were ultimately put into effect on September 23 that same year: For 1944, Sweden was to cut its supplies of iron ore to 7.5 million, and that of ball bearings to 30 million Swedish crowns, respectively.

Still, Germany persistently continued to enjoy "benefits of discreet Swedish commercial compliance"²⁰. For instance SFK (Svenska Kullagerfabriken) ball bearings trade with the Reich only ceased on October 12th, 1944 when yielded to Force Majeure (prior to this the export had actually increased during 1944). In September 1944, a year after the trade negotiations Winston Churchill brought the reputation of the Swedes' war attitude to a point of no return when he accused them of "calculated selfishness, which has distinguished them in both wars against Germany".

It is only in January 1945, five months before Germany's surrender on the European front, that all trade relations with Germany ended. By then it was clear that the future would be dominated by western Allied forces, it became thus vital for Sweden to rapidly gain back the semblance of a positive repute in the eyes of Great Britain and the US.

SECTION III: THE WHITE BUSES OPERATION

1) What circumstances allowed the Swedish Rescue Mission to come about

The deputy managing director of the Swedish Employer's Confederation, Bertil Kugelberg, describes in his memoirs how, on September 22 1944, he brought together at a dinner party representatives of the British and American embassies, the Norwegian legation including

¹⁹ Christian Leitz, *Sympathy for the Devil : Neutral Europe in Nazi Germany during World War II*, New York University Press : 2001, pp 72

²⁰ Christian Leitz, *Sympathy for the Devil : Neutral Europe in Nazi Germany during World War II*, New York University Press : 2001, pp 73

diplomat Niels Christian Ditleff, and the deputy chairman of the Swedish Red Cross - Folke Bernadotte:

“Ditleff suggested to Bernadotte that he put in a word with King Gustav concerning a Swedish operation in aid of the Norwegian internees. In Kugelberg’s words Bernadotte’s response was: “I’ll go out to Drottningholm Palace first thing tomorrow and have a chat with the king about the matter.” [...] Ditleff on November 30th, 1944 submitted his proposal to the Foreign Office. [...] This is generally regarded as the origin of the entire ‘White Bus Operation’ and the first time Bernadotte was brought into the picture.”²¹

However, the proposition in question was shelved by the Swedish Foreign Office. The Norwegian diplomat Ditleff persisted and sent a new memo on February 5th 1945 to his government exiled in London. The new memo proposed a Swedish Rescue Mission with or without German or Allied consent –and the dispatch of a Swedish Red Cross delegation to Berlin for talks. Once formalized and sent to the Swedish government, the petition was immediately accepted via the Foreign Minister Christian Günther, on February 10th, 1945.

“Günther reported that the Swedish government had agreed to Bernadotte engaging in talks in Berlin in order to ‘attempt to obtain the release of Norwegian and Danish internees in Germany and their transportation to Sweden or Denmark, etc.’”²²

That same evening instructions were sent to Berlin to explore the possibility of Folke Bernadotte negotiating directly with Heinrich Himmler via his right hand man, SS-Brigadeführer Walter Schellenberg. The whole enterprise would be conducted behind Hitler’s back. The rapid approval of the rescue mission with all the risks it comprised was a drastic departure from Sweden’s preceding war attitude. Why the sudden change?

Firstly, as was made clear in the second section of this thesis, Sweden had been very compliant with the demands of the Third Reich and subsequently its reputation had suffered

²¹ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich: The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 57

²² Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich: The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 67

greatly with the Allies. The jeopardy of this relationship was particularly threatening to a future now almost guaranteed to be ruled in favor of Western and Soviet forces. Thus, the rescue mission would certainly help the Scandinavian power gain back a positive standing in the eyes of those who were to have imminently the last word in the conflict. Indeed, a total German collapse was not far off.

Secondly, there was an increasing pressure from Jewish and American quarters to aid interned Jews. By the end of 1944 it was quite general knowledge in closed diplomatic circles that the Reich had been *systematically exterminating* Jews in parts of Europe under German control. However, the Allies' unconditional surrender policy prohibited direct state negotiations with Germany for Jewish lives. The goal was unconditional surrender *then* rescue. The state of Israel didn't exist yet as such, subsequently no state entity would claim responsibility for the fate of the Jewish people. As a result the role of Jewish organizations became critical, notably that of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) and the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), both American organizations were influential and were exerting increasing pressure. The fact that Folke Bernadotte was well acquainted through his wife to important American circles certainly added to his qualifications for the job.

Thirdly, Heinrich Himmler himself had expressed to the Swedish Government via his masseur Felix Kersten his willingness to comply with further Swedish requests in December, 1944²³. Secret reports dispatched in November of that same year reported to the Foreign Office how Hitler had been wounded in the attempt of his life on July 20th, 1944 and could no longer function as head of government. Himmler was emerging as the figure that would inherit the very uncertain faith of the Third Reich. Aware of the defeat laying ahead he was now seeking to gain contact with the Western powers via Stockholm to negotiate separate peace and counter the unconditional surrender terms isolating him from the Allied forces.

The opportunity of treating directly with Himmler was of great value. By the start of 1945 Himmler was head of the enormous complex of German concentration camps and Minister of the Interior, which most probably gave him the last word when it came to national prisons and labor camps. Furthermore, a more official negotiating route via Berlin was now impossible. In

²³Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich: The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 68

fact the Swedish legation present in Berlin was no longer operational as the beginning of February saw a major Soviet offensive reach the shores of Oder, only 80 km from the German capital. Evacuation was the sole priority. In a gesture of resignation Arvid Richert, the Swedish envoy in Berlin had sent a telegram on February 4th, 1945 to the effect that Felix Kersten, Himmler's personal Latvian masseur, "was now the only path along, which in my opinion, we can proceed in order to deal with actual Norwegian cases."²⁴ It is indeed Felix Kersten that introduced Bernadotte to Himmler via phone at the request of Günther according to a testimony in the Foreign's Office *White Book 1956*²⁵.

Given that the legation in Berlin was out, another representative was needed to negotiate directly with Himmler. Folke Bernadotte was undeniably the best candidate one could have hoped for. He spoke German fluently and had a long favorable network of contacts with the old German upper classes. His royal descent was also something to be exploited as it had the potential of impressing the Nazis. He had proven his dynamism and eagerness through the prisoners exchange missions carried for the Swedish Red Cross. Correspondingly, the Swedish Red Cross gave him a formal title to bear legitimate responsibility for the operation. In fact, "a cynical view of the circumstances would suggest that the Swedish Government and its Foreign Office regarded as fairly small any chances of the Germans changing their tune, and that it would therefore be better to heap the blame for any failure on the outsider Bernadotte"²⁶. The Count would be the government's scapegoat in case the negotiations failed.

2) Negotiating The White Buses Operation

It was Walter Schellenberg, Himmler's right hand man who untied the bureaucratic knots keeping Bernadotte from Himmler. Schellenberg knew well before Himmler that the war was lost and had carried out a series of upstream maneuvers to save his and his superior's skin. He certainly played an important role in convincing Himmler that opening channels to the Allies

²⁴ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich: The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 69

²⁵ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich: The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 68

²⁶ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich: The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 70

through the Swedish Recue Mission would provide a safety passage during the approaching Third Reich's collapse²⁷. Count Bernadotte on his end was sent to Berlin on February 16, 1945 without any formal written instructions from the Swedish Foreign Office. During the following five hectic days of 17-21 February he had meetings with "head of Security Office Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, Head of Intelligence Walter Schellenberg, and lastly with Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler. [...] Kaltenbrunner and Ribbenthrop were essential go-betweens for reaching the target Himmler."²⁸

When on February 19, the count finally had his first tête-à-tête with the Reich's second most powerful man, he opened the discussion with lightness on Swedish runic inscriptions. Himmler vehemently retorted with a severe attack on the Swedish press, which perhaps had been the only national organ to communicate impartially on the Reich's policymaking much to the outrage of Hitler. Bernadotte not discouraged countered the attack by referring to Germany's destruction of the North of Norway, its executions and taking of hostages. This brought him to make a first demand for Danish and Norwegian prisoners to be shipped to Sweden for internment, to which Himmler replied in the negative.

"Bernadotte was forced to rely on his second-best proposition: couldn't at least the Norwegian and Danish prisoners be placed together in a camp of their own in Germany so that the Swedish Red Cross could thus more easily serve their needs materially and spiritually?"²⁹

Himmler responded to the revised request in the positive. However the two figures disagreed on the number of prisoners to be displaced: Bernadotte's estimate came close to 13 000, while Himmler rounded them to 2000-3000. Himmler also agreed to the elderly, the sick and mothers being repatriated to Norway and Denmark. This allowed the count to rebound on the repatriation of Swedish spouses to Germans, but when Himmler saw the list with the number of children he protested on the recommendation that the fathers would rather have their

²⁷ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 8 : « A Privileged Youth », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 75

²⁸ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich: The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 78

²⁹ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich: The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 80

offspring grow up in Germany. The list was nevertheless handed to Schellenberg who later reassured Bernadotte that the matter could surely be resolved.

Later, Schellenberg also facilitated a number of practical issues including the supply of visas for the Red Cross Envoy. Overall the head of intelligence made a good impression on Bernadotte from the very start.

The outcome of this first meeting was that the Germans consented to Norwegian and Danish prisoners being reassembled in the camp of Neuengamme, on the Elbe River near the Danish boarder, where they could receive preferential aid from the Swedish Red Cross. Himmler also agreed to allow old men and women, sick and mothers, once gathered in the camp, to be separated and transported out of Germany. He also ultimately allowed Swedish spouses to German with children to travel to Sweden. Himmler insisted that all these agreements be kept unofficial of course. According to Steven Koblik, the Swedish government's success in creating the least possible publicity around the expedition contributed to a great extent to Himmler's willingness to make concessions further ahead.³⁰

Obviously the transport of prisoners would not be undertaken by the Reich and Bernadotte complied to the Swedish Red Cross taking charge for the transportation with its own fuel. He guaranteed to Schellenberg that the convoy would be in the port town of Warnemünde in ten days time, no later than March 3rd, a pledge that turned out to be rather unrealistic.

When back in Stockholm on February 22nd after this first round of negotiation Bernadotte was praised by the government whose expectations had been ridiculously outdistanced. Before setting off to Berlin again Bernadotte met Gilel Storch, an entrepreneur who had fled to Sweden in 1940 and active member of the Jewish World Congress's Swedish branch (indeed he'd become later its chairman). Storch was making efforts for the mission to include Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian Jews and although Bernadotte was warm to the idea, the Swedish government was not interested in increasing the mission at this time. In parallel, Storch was also using Felix Kersten as an intermediary to Himmler to obtain the release of Jews to Sweden. Kersten, not depending unilaterally on the Swedish government's approval,

³⁰ <http://www.redcross.se/contentassets/4b0c5a08761c417498ddb988be6dd262/the-white-buses.pdf> , pp 8

had obtained Himmler's signature on an unlikely document, "A Contract for Humanity", he had drafted himself on March 12th, which promised :

- “1. That concentration camps will not be blown up
2. A white flag would be raised over them at the Allies's approach
3. Not a single Jew would be executed from that day forward, and Jews would be treated like other prisoners.
4. Sweden could send Jew prisoners packages.”³¹

When back in Sweden on March 26th after the first White Buses dispatch earlier that month, the urging from Gillel Storch had paid off with the paving help of Kersten's successful informal negotiations with Himmler –the scope of the rescue mission had been renegotiated with the Swedish Government to include Scandinavian Jews and repatriation to Sweden. Indeed, Bernadotte had met with cabinet secretary Boheman and Counsellor Von Post at the Foreign Ministry. They agreed to try to extend the rescue action considerably. The primary objective would be to achieve Himmler's approval for the transfer of all interned Scandinavians reassembled in Neuengamme to Sweden. A secondary objective would be to extend the action to include even other nationalities.

On April 2nd Bernadotte attempted these negotiations in Germany. Any chances of extending the rescue action depended increasingly on Himmler's own interest and ambition to make a separate peace with the western powers. At these discussions Himmler was mostly interested in discussing the question of separate peace and wanted Bernadotte to act as intermediary.

“He refused Bernadotte's request to transport the Scandinavian prisoners to camps in Sweden, but he did agree to all Norwegian and Danish women, all sick Scandinavians and a number of Norwegian students to be sent to Sweden. Furthermore he agreed to allow all Danish policemen to be transferred from Neuengamme to Denmark, where, after a short time of being interned, they could be released. Some Frenchmen and Norwegians, among them professor Seip, were granted exit permits. Himmler refused to allow interned French women from Ravensbrück to be moved to Neuengamme, but a few days later he gave permission to send 15000 gift packets to them. Even though Himmler did not agree to Bernadotte's request to

³¹ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 8 : « A Privileged Youth », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 78

transfer the Norwegian and Danish prisoners to Sweden, the Swedish embassy in Berlin continued to bring pressure on the Germans, Schellenberg, amongst others, tried to reach an agreement to this effect.³²

Finally, on April 21st, Himmler informed Bernadotte over breakfast at the Hospital of Hohenlychen that he could take *all* surviving Jews. Indeed, Himmler had visited Hitler the day before and could no longer hold on to his lingering delusions. The last minute game was under way. On Himmler's last meeting with the count on April 23rd, the desperate Reichsführer simply said "Take anyone you wish"³³. The next day 4000 Jewish women, most from Ravensbrück, were on a train bound to Sweden.

The night of April 23rd in the ancient port of Lübeck, Himmler offered to surrender to the British and American via the count, which provoked a series of telegram between Churchill, Truman and Stalin. Churchill wrote in his memoirs: "In view of the importance of this German peace offer, and of our experience of Russian suspicions...I think it well to record our attitude [towards Bernadotte's message] in detail...I spoke to president Truman at 8:10pm...also told him that we were convinced the surrender should be unconditional and simultaneous to the three major Powers. Truman expressed strong agreement."³⁴

No more was heard of the Third Reich's leader till May 21st, 1945 when he was arrested at Bremevörde, he committed suicide two days later while in British custody in an interrogation camp in Lüneburg.

3) Organizing the White Buses Operation

When back in Stockholm from his first encounter with Himmler on February 22nd, Bernadotte was praised for the success of the negotiations. The task now, however, was to practically organize and finance the entire operation, something Ditleff had already been working on as early as the February 10th decision to send Bernadotte to negotiate in Berlin. There is indeed evidence of this through a letter he sent to the Swedish Red Cross on February 15th thanking

³² <http://www.redcross.se/contentassets/4b0c5a08761c417498ddb988be6dd262/the-white-buses.pdf>, pp 11

³³ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 9 : « Rescue », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 80

³⁴ Quoted in Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 9 : « Rescue », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 81

them for mediating the day before the loan of military vehicles.³⁵ On February 26th, Ditleff sent a 16-page memo on the rescuing operation along with a list of the Norwegian prisoners believed to be detained in German camps and jails based on the latest news, which was followed up by another memo dated March 2nd. In addition another Norwegian 10-page memo made together with members of the Danish and Swedish legation covering the logistics around the gathering of prisoners at the Neuengamme camp had been sent to the Swedish Red Cross. According to *The Swedish White Book 1956* the personnel consisted to high degree of volunteers from the armed forces, the equipment was transferred from defense supplies and the national treasury took care of the costs. After further negotiations the Germans finally allowed the operation to consist of 308 people and close to a hundred vehicles, according to the ‘Bernadotte Society Detachment 1945’.

“Every supply item, such as food, fuel (a petrol-alcohol mix) and repair equipment had to proceed from the Swedish side. [...] A vessel called the *Lillie Mathiessen* was also chartered to ship 350 000 liters of fuel to the port of Lübeck, plus other stores and 6000 gift parcels for prisoners at the German camps.”³⁶

This specific boat was chosen as it belonged to the revue artist Lillie Ericson, one of Bernadottes’ young love to whom he had been engaged but hadn’t married because of his parents’ disapproval. The woman married the ship-owner Carl Matthiessen instead. Hiring the *Lillie Mathiessen* was a silent gesture that besought forgiveness to the love of his youth.

Recruiting experienced military personnel proved more difficult than expected with the media black out and the secret nature of the entire operation; the first delays were thus experienced in its organization. Finally on March 7th and 8th, the detachment gathered in Hässleholm where the serious nature of the operation with its high casualty risk was revealed. Because the operation would be carried out under Allied air bombing, the Foreign Ministry ordered the buses to be painted conspicuously white. Indeed, pilots would later only recognize the buses

³⁵ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich : The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 84

³⁶ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich : The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 85

thanks to their white color and red crosses painted on the roofs.³⁷ It took the entire night to paint them.³⁸ The first section departed on March 8th, boarding the ferry in Malmö and reached its headquarters in Friedrichsruh Castle on March 12th. On March 15th a first evacuation in the north of Germany started with 2200 Danes and Norwegians being transported to the Neuengamme camp, from Sachsenhausen.

On March 19th two columns left for the south with a total of 24 buses and 134 men. The goal was the camps of Dachau, Mauthausen, Schönberg and Natzweiler. The columns were divided into three. The largest one went to Dachau, whilst the other two went to Mauthausen and Natzweiler. Five days later the buses returned to Neuengamme with 313 Danes and 143 Norwegians from Dachau, 2 Danes and 68 Norwegians from Mauthausen and 33 Norwegians from Natzweiler. They were forced to leave behind 67 prisoners suffering from contagious diseases.³⁹

By March 27th, the Swedes had collected nearly 5000 inmates. However, according to the Red Cross, Neuengamme had reached its full capacity when 3000 Scandinavians had been gathered there. It had been therefore considered necessary to move a few thousand prisoners to other camps. The German SS demanded that the Swedish detachment relocate the prisoners. On March 27th and 28th a selection of prisoners were brought by Colonel Björck to Walderstädte in Hannover. In return the buses brought back 72 Danes from Hannover-Stöcken.

“The prisoners transported from Neuengamme were French, Belgian, Dutch, Polish and Russian. They were extremely emaciated and many of them suffered from dysentery. The Gestapo men that accompanied the transports were very brutal to the prisoners and the Swedes found it difficult to hide their contempt and disgust for the Germans. The prisoners

³⁷ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 9 : « Rescue », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 78

³⁸ <http://www.redcross.se/contentassets/4b0c5a08761c417498ddb988be6dd262/the-white-buses.pdf>, pp 9

³⁹ ³⁹ <http://www.redcross.se/contentassets/4b0c5a08761c417498ddb988be6dd262/the-white-buses.pdf>, pp 10

were brought to Braunschweig, Waldenstädte and Warnstedt. What happened to them later has never been established.”⁴⁰

The Red Cross document isn't quite clear about this reallocation of prisoners but it appears that the limited capacity of Neuengamme led some prisoners to be prioritized over others. The Swedish expedition assisted the SS in transporting these non-Scandinavian prisoners who were in worse condition and therefore chosen to be redistributed to other camps where their faith would be uncertain. The German race policy had regarded Danes and Norwegians as "pure Arian" as a result they were better treated. The food packets they had received through the Red Cross had also kept the Scandinavians in relatively good condition. Most of the transports of prisoners carried for the SS took place between March 27th and 29th from Neuengamme to sub-camps in Hannover and Salzgitter and to Bergen-Belsen. During the evacuations some 50 to 100 prisoners died. On March 29th the Swedish Red Cross personnel were finally given access to Neuengamme as well as medicine, blankets, personal hygiene articles and food. Till then Swedish health personnel and the buses were not allowed to enter the camp as the Germans would not let the Swedes see the camp. Instead the prisoners had to march to the buses. In the meantime, Bernadotte was in Berlin negotiating the extension of the rescue with Himmler.

When he entered Neuengamme on March 30th, Bernadotte was with his expedition the first neutral entity - as the representative humanitarian organization - to set foot in one of the Reich's death camps. Once inside his movements were limited to the area where the Scandinavian inmates were held. These did not include Jews as Himmler was waiting for the very last moment to give a green light, undoubtedly holding on to his last 'bargaining chips'.

“It was with feelings of great emotions that I prepared to see these, the most revolting creations of the Third Reich ...When I took my departure of the Danes and Norwegians gathered along the enclosure of electronic wire that surrounded the camp, I called them 'Paa gjensyn' (Au revoir), and saw the joy in their eyes...But I thought too, of the prisoners I had caught a glimpse in a part of the camp where we had no power. There were thousands of

⁴⁰ <http://www.redcross.se/contentassets/4b0c5a08761c417498ddb988be6dd262/the-white-buses.pdf> pp 10

unhappy human beings there or rather human wrecks, wandering aimlessly around the camp, apathetic, vacant, incapable of returning to a normal existence.”⁴¹

4) Evacuation to Sweden and Danish Aid

By early April most Scandinavian prisoners had been gathered in Neuengamme. The first repatriation to take place had been the Scandinavian women married to Germans on March 26th. Publicity of the newcomers was avoided in accordance with Himmler's demands so that Hitler would not stop the rescue action.

However, the mission had been dragging. According to the Swedish Red Cross, the remaining personnel and vehicles (130 men in two platoons of 12 buses each) now under supervision of Major Sven Frykman, who had relieved Colonel Gottfrid Björck, had been diminished as many of the men were forced to return to their regular duties with the detachment's original tasks done and the expedition already running for a month. Other sources advanced that the personnel simply left and that the 130 men who stayed did so because they were promised a double daily pay. In any case, the scope of the mission was being increased and the personnel had been halved. More resources were needed and Denmark and Norway had offered its help at the initial organizational stages of the relief expedition. This help had been refused by the Swedish government at this early stage as it feared difficulties from the German side, thus the expedition would originally be Swedish for organizational purposes.⁴² Now, however the Swedish Red Cross actively needed the help, and that offered by the Danes would be greatly significant.

“The Danish vehicles and personnel were put to the expedition's disposal by the Danish Social Ministry and were to answer to the Swedish detachment. On the 1st to the 3rd of April the first Danish contribution arrived; two columns with 33 buses, 15 ambulances, six lorries and seven cars. At the evacuation of the Neuengamme camp a further 90 buses, eight to ten ambulances, ten lorries, five cars and five motorcycles were added. The Danish reinforcement consisted of a total of 450 people, amongst them 10 doctors and 16 nurses. The division of responsibilities was quite clear. The Swedish columns handled transportation between

⁴¹ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 9 : « Rescue », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 79

⁴² Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich : The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 87

German camps and Neuengamme, whilst feeding, quarantine and removal to Sweden and Denmark were handled by the Danes. Their first assignment was to repatriate the policemen from Neuengamme to Denmark. Between the 3rd and 10th of April they transferred 1717 people to the Fröslöv camp in southern Denmark.”⁴³

Now with the assistance of Denmark, the only remaining problem was the approval for collecting the Scandinavian Jews at Theresienstadt. Himmler’s liaison officer Karl Rennau managed to get authorization from the *Gestapo*, and on April 12th a joint Swedish and Danish column set out to the camp.

The reasons behind the authorization for collection at Theresienstadt at this precise date remain obscure. It is certain that the Red Cross knew about the Scandinavian Jews held at Theresienstadt already in March. On March 9th, the Jewish Community in Stockholm had delivered a list to the Foreign Office enumerating 1710 Jews at Theresienstadt.⁴⁴ It seems that Gillel Storch and Felix Kersten had also largely paved the way for Bernadotte’s meeting with Himmler on April 2nd, which would center around the issue of Norwegian and Danish Jews as Kersten had written in a letter to Storch dated March 29th.⁴⁵ However, according to most accounts the faith of Scandinavian Jews was very much left unsealed after the meeting. In fact, it isn’t even clear whether Bernadotte mentioned the issue or not. It is from this shadow zone that later rumors of Bernadotte’s alleged anti-Semitism can be traced.

“On April 2nd, Bernadotte met with Himmler and the result of their discussion was that only Scandinavian women and children would be shipped to Sweden; the French women would be allowed to receive 15 000 parcels, but their release was denied. On the way back Schellenberg asked Bernadotte in Himmler’s name to see Eisenhower and arrange an armistice if the situation regarding Hitler changed. Bernadotte replied that he would be prepared to see Eisenhower if Hitler was removed, the Nazi party dissolved, the budding movement to wage a

⁴³ <http://www.redcross.se/contentassets/4b0c5a08761c417498ddb988be6dd262/the-white-buses.pdf>, pp 12

⁴⁴ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich : The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 141

⁴⁵ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich : The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 141

gorilla war against the Allies dismantled, and the Scandinavian internees shipped to Sweden.”⁴⁶

In any case the column in question was sent out April 12th and by April 15th it had collected 423 Scandinavian Jews from the camp and could start on the perilous return journey. On the way back the column passed Dresden, which had been bombed a month before and had an overnight stop near Potsdam, which had been bombed the same night. The transport reached Padborg in Denmark on April 17th, without casualties. The next day, the rescued Jews were transported by ferry to Malmö. By April 18th a total of 1,216 sick Danish and Norwegian prisoners had been transported to Sweden.

During the evening of April 19th, the evacuation of Scandinavian prisoners from Neuengamme was discussed in a meeting with Bernadotte, Frykmann, and Richert from the Swedish side were present, and SS-Obersturmbannführer Karl Rennau for the Germans while Frants Hvass from the Danish foreign department and Dr. Johannes Holm represented Denmark. The situation was critical; the existing Swedish and Danish vehicles in Friedrichsruh did not have enough capacity to evacuate the prisoners fast enough. The Danes offered additional vehicles from *Jyllandskorpset*, and their offer was accepted. A total of 4,255 Danish and Norwegian prisoners were evacuated, by 100 Danish and 20 Swedish buses. After a few days in Denmark, the prisoners were sent by ferry to Malmö.

By April 20th, all Scandinavian prisoners in Neuengamme had been evacuated. However, a last important effort was launched to save the women of Ravensbrück, a female camp 90 km north of Berlin where 100 Scandinavian prisoners were held, including two French women. Perhaps what motivated this effort was Himmler’s permission to take all surviving Jews on April 21st. On April 22nd a column with 15 Danish ambulances under the command of Captain Arnoldson departed from Friedrichsruh to collect the women from Ravensbrück and transport them to Padborg in Denmark. Columns kept on being sent back and forward till April 25th. Within a few days around 7,000 female prisoners were evacuated from Ravensbrück to Denmark and then on to Sweden. With Himmler arrested and the German collapse, the White Buses continued its rescue mission till May 5th collecting more prisoners wherever possible,

⁴⁶ Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for Sale ? : Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933-1945*, Yale University Press, pp 246

notably from the camp Neu-Brandenburg. The final evacuations took place by train from Lübeck.

5) Reception and final numbers of those saved

The main reception station in Denmark was in the city of Padborg, on the border with Germany; the prisoners received food and medical treatment there before they were transported through Denmark to Copenhagen. Transport to Sweden was by ferry to Malmö where the prisoners were received by *Länsstyrelsen*, (the county administration) and *Civilförsvaret*, (civil defence). Everyone that arrived was placed in quarantine, due to the risk of spreading infection. In all there were 23 billeting areas, most of them in Malmöhus Län with about 11,000 beds. Ambulatory health centers, mostly manned by Norwegian and Danish doctors and nurses (themselves being refugees) took care of the prisoners. For some of the prisoners it was too late; 110 died after arriving in Sweden, most of them Polish. Bernadotte held a first press conference on May 1st. On May 5th, when the last contingent had arrived, he announced that some 19 000 people representing 27 nationalities had been “affected” by the Red Cross expedition. He stressed that these were approximate figures and by no means reliable.⁴⁷ Indeed, determining the exact number of those saved would become a complex affair.

“At the start of the Swedish rescue expedition’s work German officialdom was still working perfectly and the number of prisoners the Swedes were allowed to transport was checked assiduously. During the final weeks however, the red tape and due order broke down, and the Swedes, just like the Danes were able to squeeze into their vehicles as many prisoners as they could. There was evidently no longer time for accurate records of the exact number of prisoners rescued. [...] The total number of men and women rescued should vary from source to source, even though the difference at times appear suspiciously disparate. In 1988, [Steven] Koblik referred to a ‘Red Cross Document’ that stated that exactly 20 937 ‘internees’ had been transported to Sweden ‘before the end of the war’⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Quoted in: Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich : The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 246

⁴⁸ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich : The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 247

Sune Persson, however contested this figure advanced by Kolbrik's found Red Cross document as it contains no indication of what the figures exactly referred to. Moreover the document is dated May 11th, at that time relief work was still being carried with a thousand people from concentration camps being cared for. Persson argues that the most accurate statistics he found were Danish.

“Finn Nielsen's private archives contain a handwritten ‘transport list’ from the first Danish transport home of two hundred policemen during 5 and 10 December 1944 up until the 40th transport on 4 May (over to Sweden) bringing 1, 627 women. [...] The total number of people transported to Sweden in accordance with Nielsen's calculations, then, was 16 755, 7 630 of whom were Danes and Norwegians. We shall have to add at least eight hundred to account for those who went by ship directly from Lübeck to Sweden. My grand total of at least 17, 555 ex-prisoners rescued and brought to Sweden by 5 May is therefore a lower figure than that traditionally used. One explanation for this discrepancy may perhaps be found in the transport home of ‘German Swedes’ whose number oscillated between 400 (Bernadotte and Frykman) and up to 1400 (Agartz). If we include these 1400 the number roughly corresponds to the 19000 Bernadotte judged were ‘affected’ by his Red Cross expedition.”⁴⁹

Another Document from the Swedish Red Cross advances that the final number of those rescued is 15 345.⁵⁰ Hence, unfortunately the exact number is subject to debate. It is safe to advance that this number ranges somewhere between 15 000 and 21 000.

⁴⁹ Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich : The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 249

⁵⁰ <http://www.webcitation.org/6EpJBbV6n>

Vita bussaktionerna – transporter från läger

Neuengamme + = KZ läger

Brandenburg = Fängelser

Hamburg = Städer



6) Aftermath of the Operation and Polemic surrounding Bernadotte

In regard to the Swedish government's objective to safeguard the country's reputation in the face of Western scrutiny, the White Buses Operation was a success. As the British diplomat Peter Tennant, stationed in Stockholm during the war, wrote:

“The Swedish humanitarian efforts during and after the war did much to remove the dishonor the country had got during its acrobatic exercises in neutrality policy.”⁵¹

⁵¹ <https://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=White%20Buses>

However, in regard to the favors brought to Folke Bernadotte's individual reputation the outcome has been far less clear in the long run. The immediate aftermath of the White Buses Operation rhymed with triumph for the count. Among immediate honors and decorations granted were the French Legion d'Honneur, a citation from the World Jewish Congress, his promotion as chairman of the Swedish Red Cross in January 1946, and an instant offer from a publishing house for his memoirs. Within only 6 weeks after the end of the war the count had published *Last Days: My Humanitarian Work in Germany in the Spring of 1945 and its Political Consequences*, albeit with considerable help from a ghostwriter.

“The book was the first published anywhere in the world to give an insight into what lay behind the scenes during the final days of the German Third Reich, and was an enormous success. It was serialized in the *Daily Telegraph* and translated into 18 languages. Bernadotte became known throughout the world and tokens of respect and decorations were showered on him.”⁵²

However, in the long run these memoirs would cast a strong shadow over Bernadotte's achievements. Folke Schimanski wrote in *Svenska Dagbladet* that, Folke Bernadotte created his own legend in the book *The Fall of the Curtain* [the original title of *Last Days*] without acknowledging the work of anyone else, and over-emphasizing his own input.⁵³ This was unfortunately a quite accurate observation, the count omitted most of those who had helped, if not guided him.

Among these omissions, first there was the Norwegian diplomat Niels Christian Ditleff, who, as we have seen, had come up with the idea of the White Buses Operation and had been the one pushing for Bernadotte to do the job. He also was largely responsible for preparing the mission administratively, logistically and economically notably through the important number of memos he had drafted and sent out to the Swedish Foreign Office and Red Cross before and during the effort. When returning to Sweden from his first meeting with Himmler, it was Ditleff who was among the first person Bernadotte needed to see.

⁵² Sune Persson in *Escape from the Third Reich : The harrowing true story of the largest rescue effort inside Nazi Germany*, translated by Graham Long, Pen & Sword Books Limited: 2009, pp 250

⁵³ Bertil Bernadotte in the 2009 Forward to *Last Days of the Reich: The Diary of Count Folke Bernadotte* (Kindle Edition) by Count Folke Bernadotte

Secondly, the count failed to acknowledge Gillel Storch who was largely responsible for pushing for the inclusion of Jewish lives (whether Scandinavian or non-Scandinavian) in the rescue mission. Luckily, Storch was devoid of any bitter sentiments and kept holding Bernadotte in high esteem for his valuable help.

This was however not the case with Felix Kersten, another important figure the count didn't acknowledge. Felix Kersten, Himmler's personal Latvian masseur, was the one who had introduced Bernadotte to Himmler. In fact, when the Swedish delegation in Berlin had to flee, Kersten became the sole negotiating route to Himmler for the Rescue Mission. He had been in contact with the Swedish government prior and during the rescue mission and had paved the way in private to many of Bernadotte's meetings with the Reich's second leader. Indeed, having been Himmler's masseur since 1939, Kersten had done rescuing work well before the Swedish count stepped in, albeit in a less decorous style. His first rescue attempt was with the July 1942 Gestapo arrest of seven Swedish businessmen on charges of espionage. They would later be known as the Warsaw Swedes. The Swedish prisoners faced a trial in which Kersten had intervened to the request of the lawyer handling the case, Dr. Carl Langbehm. Kersten had ultimately succeeded in convincing Himmler to get Hitler to free all the Warsaw Swedes by 1944.

« On 1 September 1943 the sentences were commuted. Herslow and Gerge were released immediately; the others, however, were not released until December 1944. This fact is confirmed in a letter from Himmler to Kersten: ' You are returning to Sweden shortly before Christmas. May I ask you to take with you to Sweden for the Yuletide the three Swedes whom the Führer has, at my suggestion, pardoned.' »⁵⁴

Although, Kersten (like Bernadotte) drowned the validity of his own achievements in self-acclaim, some of them remain nevertheless significant, notably his persuasion of Himmler to not blow the concentration camps before the Allies arrival as we have seen earlier.

⁵⁴ Professor Raymon Palmer, *Felix Kersten and Count Bernadotte : A question of Rescue*, Journal of Contemporary History, pp 40
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/002200949402900102>

What also played an important role in regards to Kersten was that, unlike Bernadotte, he faced great difficulties after the war, being stateless. He couldn't return to Soviet occupied Finland and was actively seeking for asylum. His family had been residing in Sweden but despite his ongoing help to the Swedish government, naturalization had been refused to him on the grounds that he had not been residing long enough in Sweden (7 months in 3 years). Kersten had sought help from Bernadotte in pulling some strings to help him obtain Swedish naturalization but the count failed to help him.

“By late 1945, Kersten was desperate. Despite the foreign minister's support, his application for Swedish citizenship had been turned down. Folke Bernadotte's widely acclaimed account of the rescue of German inmates gave no credit for the role that might have shored up his dubious reputation in Stockholm. In December he twice wrote Bernadotte asking for his help in locating and rescuing members of his family caught in the Russian zone. Bernadotte, who by then had been elected chairman of the Red Cross, received hundreds of such letters, but promised to do what he could for Kersten. He stopped short of supporting the masseur's bid for Swedish citizenship.”⁵⁵

These circumstances certainly help understand Kersten's bitterness over Bernadotte's fame and success. Finally, it is in the Netherlands that Kersten found asylum where a dozen of people owed him their lives, which he had famously 'massaged out of Himmler'.

Bernadotte's indifference to Kersten's predicament, whether voluntary or accidental, certainly tarnished his repute in the long run. But what was arguably even more lethal to his image was his friendship and intimate help to SS Walter Schellenberg. Indeed, the count had offered the Nazi shelter in his own home in May 1945, during the final weeks of the war. Some accounts even contend that Bernadotte's *Last Days* were partly ghostwritten by Schellenberg himself. This was an important lapse of judgment on part of the count, at least that's what his wife Estelle Bernadotte seemed to think:

“Schellenberg was an excellent actor...[I] I was not fooled by his attitude, but Folke felt he owed Schellenberg a good deal for the success he achieved with Himmler...It was a delicate

⁵⁵ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 9 : « Rescue », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 85

situation. Being American born, Folke realized I would be against accepting Schellenberg under our roof!”⁵⁶

However, what is perhaps more disturbing is the reaction of Folke’s son Bertil Bernadotte:

“I remember the excitement of having “a real Nazi” staying with the family. I was very impressed by his dueling scars. I remember him as a very soft-spoken person, very well-educated and intelligent. In my father’s eyes he was one hundred percent pure.”⁵⁷

The lack of integrity displayed by the counts’ attitude in the mission’s reverberating limelight negated his heroism during the effort. How could a ‘hero’, which denotes someone with noble qualities, actively help a Nazi and refuse to aid a colleague, a hero like himself who had taken considerable risks in trying to save others, someone who was now, furthermore, left with no country to call home. How could Schellenberg be perceived as a noble man in the eyes of Bernadotte, and not Kersten? How did the nobleman, the aristocrat, perceive nobility altogether? This misjudgment revealed an important breach in the count’s character that inopportunely became more and more apparent, and lethal to his image with the passage of time. It seemed as though Bernadotte was admitting that he was more like Schellenberg than Kersten.

“Befriending Schellenberg because he was “his sort of man,” and alienating the desperate Kersten, who was not, proved to be a dangerous miscalculation. A half century as a privileged member of a royal house was not the best school for the rough-and-tumble of international politics to which he inspired.”⁵⁸

Perhaps the count was mistaking *the way* things are done with *what* is being done. The following article titled “Swede see flaw in war guilt trial” from *The New York Times* dated November 29th, 1945 by C. L Sulzeberger seems to confirm the count’s confusion:

“Count Folk Bernadotte, president of the Swedish Red Cross and the man who served as envoy in the final negotiations between the Allies and Heinrich Miller, said today in an

⁵⁶ Estelle Bernadotte quoted by Kati Marton in *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 9 : « Rescue », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 83

⁵⁷ Bertil Bernadotte quoted by Kati Marton in *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 9 : « Rescue », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 83

⁵⁸ Kati Marton in *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 9 : « Rescue », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 84

interview that while he agreed in principle with the theory of designating war criminals, he did not believe that high-ranking officers [...] should be tried if they were merely doing their duty and following military commands.”⁵⁹

The count was ultimately defending the attitudes that had brought the horrors of Nazism into being, namely obeying orders without questioning. Matters got worse when Kersten, once exiled in Holland started spreading rumors accusing the count of being anti-Semite out of spite. Allegedly the count had privileged non-Jewish lives during the mission and made use of anti-Semite language in (falsified) correspondence with Himmler. These claims although unsubstantiated added to the ambiguity surrounding Bernadotte’s character.

“Some accept the position that Bernadotte refused to accept Jewish prisoners and did so only after this had been forced on him, while others believe that these charges are groundless.”⁶⁰

In any case Bernadotte had achieved fame and was now a respected actor on the world stage. He had vastly exceeded the royal family’s expectations: *he* was the Swedish aristocrat Truman, Eisenhower and Churchill were familiar with not the King of Sweden, and at that moment not Kersten nor any historian could change that.

SECTION IV: ISRAEL/PALESTINE PRIOR TO BERNADOTTE’S ARRIVAL

In 1948, the General Secretary of the newly formed United Nations Organization, Trygve Lie, detained the conviction that Folke Bernadotte would be the ideal candidate to take on possibly the most challenging UN mission that ever existed: negotiating peace in Israel and Palestine, or what had just been British mandated Palestine, previously known as the Ottoman Province of Palestine (the Vilayet of Beirut and independent Sanjak of Jerusalem). This land had also been referred to by Jews throughout their history as *Eretz Yisrael*, the historical land of Israel.

When Bernadotte decided to accept this highly ambitious mission on May 20th, 1948, two unprecedented events had taken place in the area: the UN had voted a partition plan for Palestine on November 29th, 1947, advocating two states, Arab and Jewish, following which Israel had declared its independence on May 14th, 1948. The establishment of the Jewish state

⁵⁹ Article quoted in Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 9 : « Rescue », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 87

⁶⁰ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 54

would take effect that day at midnight upon termination of the British mandate. The next day Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Egypt, and Iraq declared war on the new state.

It is in this chaotic context that Bernadotte was appointed for the mission, which consisted in using his good offices “with the local and community authorities in Palestine to promote a peaceful adjustment of the future situation [...] and to assure the protection of the holy places.”⁶¹

To understand the true complexity and sensitivity of this mission, the first of its kind, one must understand how the UN partition plan and Israel’s independence came into being. Also, one must understand the Arab and Jewish perspective on these two events, respectively. To understand both perspectives, one must look at the two people’s distinct past.

1) The Arab perspective

Contrary to popular beliefs that deceptively retrace the origins of the Arab people to Islam and the prophet Mohammed, the Arab people were actually known as such long before Christ:

“The first historical mention of Arabs is in an Assyrian inscription of 853 BCE. Assyrian and Babylonian sources mention the Arabs repeatedly in following centuries, referring to nomadic tribes in the neighboring desert regions of the Northern Arabian Peninsula. Later books of the Bible also contain such references. Greek sources were the first to label the entire peninsula “Arabia”, while use of the term to describe nomads, or what today would be called *Beduin*, spread to the south.”⁶²

These tribes with their distinctive political regimes were aware of Christianity and Judaism, and spoke a common Arabic dialect possessing a strong tradition of poetry that contained the linguistic virtuosity that later shaped the Qur’an. The Arab tribes had preserved their independence from Roman, Persian and Byzantine rule through the centuries. However, it is with the prophet Muhammad and through the spread of Islam that the Arabs established themselves as both an ideological and political empire. The spread of Islam is an unmatched phenomenon in history: within the lifetime of its founder, a few decades (Mohammad started preaching at the age of forty in 610 CE), the movement would dominate, mostly peacefully,

⁶¹ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 5 : « Enter the Mediator », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 31

⁶² Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 47

over an immense realm that stretched from Spain to India. In contrast, Christianity spread *after* Jesus's death over a period of three hundred years thanks to the devoutness of major figures such as Paul the Apostle.

“Islam triumphed primarily through the force of its ideas, not the military prowess of its leaders. Areas under Islamic rule underwent a process of Islamization, most of them also adopted the Arab language, transforming a remote Semitic language into one of the world's major tongues. [...] Muhammad was clearly influenced by the messages of Christianity and Judaism, the monotheistic Abrahamic faiths. But acting as the final “messenger” of god he transmitted a revelation of these messages that achieved breathtaking simplicity, flexibility and universality.”⁶³

The Qur'an, Islam's holy book, literally meaning recital, speaks in God's voice. It was delivered by the angel Gabriel to the illiterate Muhammad, and is therefore in of itself a miracle. The Qur'an is thus considered of complete divine authorship. Its structure of 114 chapters is of great simplicity in comparison to the Torah and Bible that comprise different books and are of combined human and divine authorship. The Qur'an references the stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon and Jesus. Christ's divinity is rejected, Jesus is nevertheless acknowledged as a prophet and the son of the Virgin Mary. Jews and Christians are regarded as people of the book whose role in the process of revelation is recognized, they are called upon, however, to accept the final message brought by Mohammed.

Following Mohammed's teachings, the first Islamic centuries were regarded as a golden age that produced one of the most prospering and enduring civilizations, thriving onto the 12th century. During this period the western world, in contrast, was plunged into the Dark Ages. Using the findings of Aramaic, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Egyptian, Persian and Indian civilizations, the Islamic Golden Era produced some of the most significant advances in all fields of human study and endeavor: *Language* (from its grammatical structure Arabic is deduced to be the oldest Semitic language, philology, grammar and lexicography were all highly developed from Arabic), *Philosophy* and *Theology* (most ancient Greek texts were preserved thanks to Arabic translations, the transmissions of these texts later to the West sparked the Renaissance), *Mathematics* (Arabs invented algebra, trigonometry, analytical

⁶³ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 48-50

geometry, and adopted the decimal system and the use of zero from India), *Science* (Arabs introduced the notion of objective experiment in chemistry, and made prominent grounding work in astronomy and optics), *Medicine* (Early Arabic medical books from the 9th century were used in Europe until the 17th century), *Arts* (Arabic decorative arts produced masterpieces like the Taj Mahal and the Alhambra and inspired Western decorative arts, notably the Gothic style).⁶⁴

Ultimately, this era started ending in the 12th and 13th century after a slowing down of progress reflected in the preceding centuries. Some of the major triggering events that explain the slowing down and eventual tilt to the advantage of the West were repeated devastating invasions: the Crusades (late 11th century), the Mongols (mid-13th century), and the loss of Spain and Sicily to the Christian Reconquista (15th and 16th century) were another great tipping signal. As the West was going through the Renaissance, the Ottoman Empire had already gone into isolation. This was particularly reflected in its domestic policy: backward shifts in religious interpretation and religious law (more averse to innovation), stronger religious control of education, ineffective military feudal systems, ineffective farming taxing systems and other obscure measures came into place. Also, the rise of the Turks and the Ottoman Empire which had been a strong force in its 13th century wake, conquering Anatolia (present day Turkey), Constantinople and pushing away the last Crusaders, gradually stagnated and became weak. This weakness worsened with the later Austro Turkish wars and the Russo Turkish wars. The point of no return arguably came with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, which is "generally regarded as the date Western colonialism arrived in the Middle East."⁶⁵

The British Empire took over the port of Aden in the south western Arabian peninsula in 1839, Egypt in 1882, and the Persian gulf in the form of British protectorates, as a result of which are anachronistic sheikhdoms and emirates surviving today as independent states (Kuwait, Bahrein, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman). France conquered in various forms a large portion of northern Africa: Algiers in 1830, Tunisia in 1881 (as a protectorate), Morocco in 1911, and had gained a foothold in Lebanon as early as 1861. With colonialism came the spread of The Enlightenment and western ideas, notably that of nationalism and self-determination, which ironically gave the Arabs new discursive defining tools to fight

⁶⁴ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 52-54

⁶⁵ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 57

western control. Moreover, most European provinces of the Ottoman Empire had achieved independence by 1914 through nationalistic ideology. By the mid-19th century the Ottoman Empire had already been dubbed the sick man of Europe, its subsequent decision to support the central axis during World War I would prove utterly lethal to its future survival.

In the last decade before World War I nationalism and statehood determinism became a particularly potent concept in the province of Palestine, which had been struggling with an increasing influx of Jewish settlers. An important portion of these settlers called themselves Zionists, being themselves influenced by western ideals of nationalism that they had ironically channeled and spread further in the region. “Over time resistance to Zionism grew as Zionism itself grew.”⁶⁶

At the same time the spread of nationalism alone did not circumvent a more general pattern: “that of an indigenous population reacting to alien intruders. This did not require that this population profess a common identity as “Arabs” or “Palestinians”; it required only that they felt threatened by an influx of outsiders”⁶⁷

However in any case, if intrusion was the problem, nationalism appeared all the most the appropriate cure, as it so often happens to be the case in the face of heavy foreign immigration. Aversion to non-Muslim foreigners was deeply rooted in the holy region that had known the Crusades. For a considerable time European diplomatic presence in Jerusalem had even been forbidden altogether, but with declining international power of the Empire these exclusions were lifted in 1830s. The aversion to foreigners remained however, and Jewish immigration continued increasing , as a result in 1891 a first petition was sent to Constantinople to halt immigration and land sales to the Jews. This accepted initiative was immediately counter-pressured by European powers and ultimately revoked. The West was indirectly denying self-determinism to the region.

“In 1905 Najib Azuri, a Lebanese Christian who had served in the Ottoman bureaucracy in Jerusalem, published in Paris *Le Réveil de la Nation Arabe* (The Awakening of the Arab Nation), the first “textbook” of secular Arab nationalism. [...] Palestine received considerable attention, [...] Azuri predicted that “the fate of the entire world” would depend on the outcome of the Arab Jewish struggle, which would continue until on side had won a total

⁶⁶ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 65

⁶⁷ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 65

victory (a zero-sum view of the conflict). This was a remarkable prediction given that both national movements were in their embryonic stage. [...] In 1908 Azuri published an article proposing that the independent sanjak of Jerusalem be raised to the status of a vilayet, thus making Palestine on the highest level of the Ottoman Empire. This was necessary, he said because “the progress of the land of Palestine depends on it” (R. Khalidi 1997:28, 151-2). This may have been the first political, and not just geographical, use of the term.”⁶⁸

Palestine became heavily linked to Arabic nationalist discourse. In many respects Palestine’s struggle for self-determination became representative of the entire Arab world’s will. The region’s unique significance with its outside interest from the west, was permeated with the deep overarching desire for a strong and honorable Arab identity independent from western imperialism.

“Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal describe the first identity as “Palestinism”: “the belief that the Arab population originating in the area of the Palestine mandate is distinct from other Arab groups, with a right to its own nation state in that territory.” (Kimmerling and Migdal 1993: p. xviii).”⁶⁹

With the Allied victory of the First World War and fall of the Central powers, The Ottoman Empire was left to be partitioned mainly between France and Britain from 1918 to 1922. France took mandates for Lebanon and Syria, while Britain took on mandates for Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Palestine, which initially included present day Jordan. The area known then as Transjordan became largely autonomous under British tutelage according to an agreement of February 20, 1928, and fully independent from the Palestine mandate under a treaty with Britain of March 22, 1946, which placed it under the rule of Abdullah bin Husayn, son of former Sharif and Emir of Mecca, Hussein bin Ali.

In 1917, Britain’s Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour wrote a letter to Walter Rotschild, the IInd Baron Rotschild meant for transmission to the Zionist organization of Great Britain and Ireland. This document is known as the Balfour Declaration:

“His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of

⁶⁸ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 66

⁶⁹ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 63

this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”

The post-WWI San Remo International Conference adopted on April 25th 1920 the 1917 Balfour Declaration as a resolution for the mandated territory of Palestine. Britain had thereby committed itself to help build a Jewish national home in Palestine. During the conference Great Britain and France also agreed to recognize the provisional independence of Syria and Mesopotamia, while claiming mandates for their administration. Palestine had been composed of the Ottoman administrative districts of southern Syria. Under international law, premature recognition of its independence would be a gross affront to the government of the newly declared parent state [Syria]. It could have been construed as a belligerent act of intervention without any League of Nations sanction.⁷⁰

Thus, Britain had only recognized the Jewish right to self-determination. Palestinian self-determination would be only formerly recognized much later in 1939 with Neville Chamberlain’s White Paper: The paper called for the establishment of a “*Jewish national home in an independent Palestinian state* within 10 years, rejecting the idea of the creation of a Jewish state and the idea of partitioning Palestine. It also limited Jewish immigration to 75,000 for 5 years, and ruled that further immigration was to be determined by the Arab majority (section II). Restrictions were put on the rights of Jews to buy land from Arabs (section III). Further, it promised that only with Arab support would Britain allow a Jewish state. It was approved by the House of Commons and acted as the guiding policy for British mandated Palestine from 1939 to 1945. However, in many respects it was already too late by then. The Zionists had gained too much ground and power in the region. But mostly, Jewish persecution in Europe, the impending aftermath of the WWII with its unparalleled revelation of the Holocaust made it utterly impossible for Jews to accept the White Paper. By 1945, all Jews had agreed on the need of a state (even the Haredim⁷¹ were becoming less hostile to

⁷⁰ [International Law, Papers of Hersch Lauterpacht, edited by Elihu Lauterpacht, CUP Archive, 1970, ISBN 0-521-21207-3](#), page 116 and [Statehood and the Law of Self-determination, D. Raič, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2002, ISBN 90-411-1890-X](#), pp 95

⁷¹ Haredi Jews are traditionally opposed to Zionism because of the fear that secular nationalism replaces the Jewish faith and the observance of religion, and the view that it is forbidden for the Jews to re-constitute Jewish rule in the Land of Israel before the arrival of the Messiah.

Zionism) and they had nothing left to lose. A Jewish state was understood as a matter of survival, much to the detriment of Arabic and Palestinian will for independence.

2) The Jewish Perspective

The Torah or Bible's old testament retraces the beginning of Jewish history to the first Jew- that is to Abraham, 4000 years ago. The first *non-biblical* mention of the Jewish people is an Egyptian inscription, the Merneptah Stele, dated circa 1220 BCE. Other archeological and historical records of biblical people and events begin appearing around the reign of King David and Solomon and the building of the 1st Temple in Jerusalem in 1000 BCE, and they multiply over the following years⁷². Thus, it is safe to say that the Jews have the longest history as a people with a common religious practice, heritage, language and culture. Archaeologist Paula McNutt says: "It is probably ... during Iron Age I (1200-1000 BCE) [that] a population began to identify itself as 'Israelite'," ⁷³ differentiating itself from its neighbors via prohibitions on intermarriage, an emphasis on family history and genealogy, and religion. The Jews' everlasting survival is indeed greatly puzzling to many historians. Unlike Canaanites, Jebusites, Philistines, Babylonians, and Moabites, Jews survived till this very day. The reason explaining this miracle is often regarded to be the Hebrews' introduction of monotheism to the world, out of which came Christianity and Islam.

"The Jews were able to give us the Great Whole, a unified universe that makes sense and that, because of its evident superiority as a worldview, completely overwhelms the warring and contradictory phenomena of polytheism."⁷⁴

But unlike the other monotheistic faiths, Judaism never sought to preach its teachings and convert others. Jewish identity is embedded in particularism, not universalism. "Being

⁷² Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 23

⁷³ Paula Mc Nutt, *The Forging of Israel: Iron Technology, Symbolism and Tradition in Ancient Society*, Sheffield Academic Press: 1990, pp 35

⁷⁴ Thomas Cahill quoted in Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 24

Jewish is not a matter of professed belief, but of sharing a common heritage, one may be Jewish without being religious”⁷⁵

The notion of being Jewish as being part of God’s chosen people is viewed in Judaism as a worthy burden in which is rooted the pivotal theme of exodus and exile. Indeed the shared Jewish identity with its ancestry and heritage defines itself in relation to its attachment to a particular place, known as Eretz Yisrael.⁷⁶ The historical land is interwoven into scripture, litany, ritual and tradition. This attachment forms Jewish identity as *leaving from* and *returning to* Eretz Yisrael punctuates Jewish biblical history: Joseph=exile; Moses=exodus; Babylonian captivity=exile; return from Babylon and building of the IInd Temple= exodus; Roman invasion=exile, and so on...

“In the traditional structure of a morality tale, exile is punishment by God for the collective failings of the Jewish people, while return signifies divine mercy as the sinners are given another chance to redeem themselves.”⁷⁷

Ultimately, Judaic Messianism advances that the Messiah will lead back Jews to Eretz Yisrael and bring about the final redemption of Jews and of all mankind. This morality tale structure has endured in the region well through Antiquity and resulted in various diasporas. Even when Eretz Yisrael, nominally the independent region of Judea at the time, fell in the hands of the Romans in 63 BCE it preserved Judaic rule under the Herodian dynasty as a client kingdom to the Roman Empire. This eventually ended periodically with the First Jewish Roman-War during the year 66 to 73, with the destruction of the IInd Temple (70) onto the Third Jewish Roman-War fought circa 132-136 with the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism as a response to the Temple’s destruction

⁷⁵ Thomas Cahill quoted in Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 24

⁷⁶ Hebrew, meaning "land of Israel" : Expression used to designate the land of Israel, as it was promised by God to the Jewish people, according to Biblical tradition. Geographically this territory corresponds to the Kingdom of Solomon, which extended from Dan, north of Tiberias, to Beersheba in the south. After the creation of the State of Israel in May 1948, this notion of a "Greater Israel" became the central theme of the political program of Israeli nationalist extremist movements. To them, Eretz Yisrael stretches from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean. Eretz Yisrael as defined in [Encyclopedia.com](https://www.encyclopedia.com)

⁷⁷ Thomas Cahill quoted in Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 25

and lack of territorial autonomy, followed by gradual Christianization of the region. Although a minority remained, most Jews had left the region by the Middle Ages.

In 636-640 the Arab conquest with its immigration and conversion created an Islamic and Arab majority with Christians and Jewish minorities. From the third to tenth centuries an important fraction of Jewish life had migrated to Babylonia where the Talmud was compiled. In Islam, the Jews were a protected minority and active participants of the Islamic civilization's golden age, especially in Spain, which came to replace Babylonia as the center of Jewish life and creativity. This ended when the fanatic Muslim Almohad dynasty from northern Africa invaded Islamic Spain in the 12th century, destroying Jewish centers and forcing Jews to flee to Christian ruled northern Spain. However with the Christian Spanish Reconquista came the obligation to convert and the Inquisition, seeking to establish if those newly converted were frauds. Eventually the expulsions of the many remaining Jews in the region in 1492 was a great watershed in Jewish history that resulted in the exile of a major portion of the population into the Ottoman Empire. This segment is known as the Sephardim (Spaniards in Hebrew). Some even found their way back to Eretz Yisrael, notably in the region of the Galilee that became a center of Jewish law and mysticism.

Those who had made their way into Europe instead of the Ottoman Empire started migrating East in the 11th century with the persecution caused by the first crusade in Western Europe. In fact, eastern rulers increasingly accepted Jews for their western commercial and artisanal skills. In 1264 the Polish Duke Polesaw granted Jews rights of residence and protection.⁷⁸ Other rulers followed and eventually Eastern Europe became the new main center of Jewish life by the 15th century. Its population became known as the Ashkenazim (Hebrew word for Germans). A significant segment of Ashkenazim fled to Western Europe in the mid 17th century following anti-semitic peasant uprisings led by Cossacks. These were led by an Ukrainian noble, Bogdan Chmielnicki from 1648-9, and continued with subsequent attacks in Poland taking place in 1680, 1687, 1734, 1750 and 1768.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 27

⁷⁹ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 30

Despite these eastern persecutions, the importance of the European Jewish center came to grow with new scientific advances of the Enlightenment resulting in drops in mortality rates and demographical increases.

“The estimated world Jewish population in 1700 was about one million (...). Two centuries later, in 1900, there were an estimated 10.6 million Jews in the world, with Eastern Europe accounting for 90% of this total.⁸⁰ By this time, following the partition of Poland at the end of the 18th century, about half of the world’s Jews were living in territory annexed by Tsarist Russia, a state that had traditionally tried to forbid Jewish residence on its soil.”⁸¹

Nevertheless under Alexander IInd Jews had prospered in Russian society. Known as the ‘Tsar Liberator’, his reign had been a progressive force leading to assimilation and elevation of Jews in Russian society. These educated and open Jews were known as the *maskilim*, Hebrew for “enlightened men”. With his assassination and successor, Alexander IIIrd, came conservative advisers whom detested Western liberal ideas and Jews. The new tsar used the Jewish population as a scapegoat for popular discontent and began a wave of violent attacks on Jewish communities, the *pogroms* (Russian for devastation). During the new tsar’s first year of rule approximately 250 pogroms took place.

“Thus began a dark period in Russian Jewish history that led to the massive flight of four million refugees over the next four decades. Following the historical pattern, most moved to new places of refuge, this time in Western Europe and the Americas. But a small trickle, fewer than 2% of them, chose instead to enact a return to Zion (Zion, a hill in Jerusalem, had since biblical days served as poetic reference to the Land of Israel). [...] The return to Zion, previously a religious aspiration became a political program.”⁸²

The 20 000 to 30 000 maskilim Jews that migrated to the Ottoman province under Turkish rule, had done so with the help of the US and the Baron Edmund of Rothschild, who

⁸⁰ Barnavi 1992: xii-xiii; Ettinger 1976: 790-3

⁸¹ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 28

⁸² Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 33

supported the first agrarian settlements in the region. They formed the first Zionist aliyah⁸³. By 1903 there were around 50 000 Jews living in the region.

Although aliyahs had existed since antiquity, from 1882 onwards the function of the aliyahs shifted. They became more political, meaning that this time returning to Zion was a political motion in addition to (or instead of) a fulfilled religious aspiration. The idea of need for Jewish autonomy had gained ground as a result of the disillusion surrounding the enlightened model of secular assimilation of Jews and other minorities in European societies. Many deceived Jews started to believe that assimilation was impossible as anti-Semitism was incurable even in advanced societies, and that a Jewish state was necessary. As with the Arabs, this belief in self-determination through the formation of a state was spurred by new western ideals channeled by the Enlightenment. It was Theodor Herzl who formally invented Zionism as a political ideology. Herzl, was an assimilated Austrian Jew and journalist who had covered the French Dreyfus affair in 1894 and the municipal election of the anti-Semitic Karl Lueger in his own country in 1895. In response to these events and probably influenced by the more general pattern of persecution that had delineated Jewish existence, Herzl published *The Jewish state: an attempt at a modern solution to the issue of the Jews* in 1896. The books' relative success prompted Herzl to found the World Zionist Organization in 1897.

With the Zionist ideology formulated and in place, the continuing pogroms, and further unrest brought by the Russian Revolution of 1905, rapidly a second aliyah took place from 1904 to 1914 bringing a further 34 000 Jews to the Ottoman province. This wave of immigrating Jews was imbued with new Russian socialist agrarian ideals that formed Israel's first kibbutz and left wing leaders, which included Ben Gurion. In 1905 the Jewish city of Tel Aviv was founded. By 1914 the region counted 94 000 Jews.⁸⁴

From 1919 to 1923, a third aliyah took place caused by World War I and encouraged by the Balfour Declaration. From 1924 to 1929 eastern European rise in anti-Semitism coupled with US immigration quotas caused a fourth aliyah. The rise of Nazism in Germany led to the Fifth and biggest aliyah from 1929 to 1939 bringing 250 000 Jews to the region. From 1933 to 1948, a wave of illegal immigration, known as *Aliyah Bet* took

⁸³ Aliyah is Hebrew for "ascent", the term is used to describe diaspora Jews making their return to the historical Land of Israel.

place against British quotas and eventual immigration bans resulting from the 1939 White Paper. This wave of clandestine immigration was organized by the Haganah and the Irgun and is believed to have brought 110 000 Jews alive to mandated Palestine (another important portion failed to make it). It is estimated that 806 000 Jews lived in Israel by May 15th, 1948.⁸⁵

3) British Mandated Palestine

Folke Bernadotte was to inherit the Israel/Palestinian problem that had been dumped in the laps of the UN as a result of the British mandates' failure. The mandate had been operating as a civil administration from 1920 to 1948, and subsequently retreated from the region in May of that last year. *Après moi le déluge* resumed well the British stance. If Folke was to inherit an unresolved British problem, one may ponder over the exact impact of the British administration over the region.

The post-WWI partition of the Ottoman Empire initially advocated an international mandate for the region of Palestine, but instead it became British. Before and during the complex process of partition, the British had made many contradicting promises to different opposing parties. During the war they had promised through the *Hussayn-McMahon Correspondence* of honoring Arab independence if the Arabs revolted against the Empire. Indeed, Britain had instigated the Arab Revolt of 1916-1918 by assuring the Sharif of Mecca, head of the Hashemite dynasty (Hussayn ibn Ali), support for an Arabic state under his rule. Geographically this promise comprised Syria and Iraq and, according to Sharif Hussayn, Palestine. Thus Hussayn initiated the revolt, which accelerated the Ottoman Empire's demise to the benefit of the British Empire. After the war, however, the British had also agreed to the French getting mandates for Lebanon and Syria. This already conflicted with the previous promise made to Hussayn, and became worse when France actually expelled Hussayn's son, would be Hashemite ruler, Faysal ibn Hussayn from Syria. But more problematically in 1917 the Balfour Declaration promised support for a Jewish national home in Palestine. This was hard for the British to overlook especially now that Lord Balfour's promise had been endorsed by US president Woodrow Wilson. The declaration was also legally relevant as it had been written in the British mandate for Palestine.

⁸⁵ http://www.cbs.gov.il/statistical/statistical60_eng.pdf , pp 2

“The British government had debated the statement at length and circumscribed it carefully: it spoke of a “national home,” not a state; it was to be “in Palestine,” not “of Palestine”; and the rights of the non-Jewish population were to be respected (in the Jewish and British readings this meant the individual rights of Arabs and not Arab national rights).”⁸⁶

There were further clarifications later in 1922 with the Churchill White Paper. Despite these rectifications Zionists welcomed the declaration as it gave legitimacy to the movement, while Palestinians rejected both the declaration and the mandate altogether, viewing the whole enterprise as yet another form of Western Imperialism. Thus from its very beginning the British mandate had committed to many contradicting promises, but mainly two conflicted heavily: that of building a national Jewish home in Palestine and that of supporting the development of a Palestinian state capable of self-government. The other issues had in fact been resolved, the territorial rule of Transjordan had been finally given to Sharif Hussayn, while his son Faysal was granted the throne of Iraq. And thus, what remained was for Britain to embark on an effort to reconcile both Arab and Jewish aspirations within the newly delineated territory of Palestine.

Local Arabs, being strongly against all that was happening in the region reacted immediately towards Brits but mostly Jews through a wave of consecutive attacks in 1920, 1921, 1929, and 1936 to 1939. Finally in 1939, the British definitely rectified the misconceptions surrounding the Balfour declaration through the 1939 White Paper. The paper was clear: there was not going to be a Jewish state in Palestine, but a Jewish home in a Palestinian state, Jewish immigration would be heavily limited (75 000 in 5 years), and restrictions were put on Jews to buy land. This honest effort favoring the Arabs came far too late. In practice, prior to the White Papers’ ratification, British rule had greatly benefitted the Jews over the Palestinians. Indeed, for Jews, the British mandate granted considerably more freedom than the previous Ottoman Empire. While Arabs had been fixated on the mandate, Jews had taken the opportunity to organize their own unity. Eager for military autonomy, they build their own defense force, the Haganah following the first Arab attack in 1920. In 1931, the more radical Irgun had branched out from the Haganah, and in 1940 the Lehi or Stern group had broken out from the Irgun. These three forces despite their ideological differences did collaborate together when necessary.

⁸⁶ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 74

Territorially the Jews were more familiar to the western regulatory systems imposed by the British than the indigenous population.

“All of the elements of Mandate rule-liberal immigration, new laws on land sales, economic initiatives favoring new enterprises, measures of “divide and rule” favored the development of Jewish newcomers over indigenous population.”⁸⁷

Demographically, the third, fourth and fifth aliyah bringing consecutively 40 000, 82 000, and 250 000 Jews was completely altering the Palestinian landscape, again to the benefit of the Jewish population.

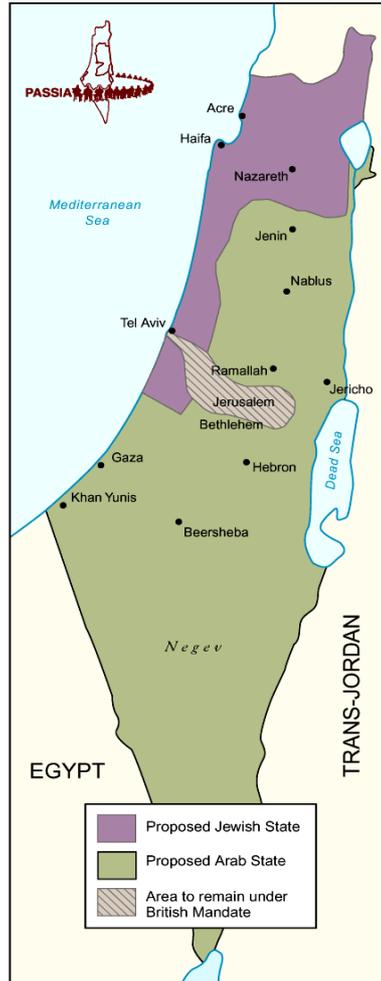
Evidently, the Arabs’ strong resentment continued to grow, ultimately resulting in the 1936-1939 uprisings. In 1937, the British appointed the Peel Commission to investigate the cause of the uprisings. The commission was the first to propose the idea of partition. It had been the most advocated solution ever since.

“Within the general framework of partition there have always been two major possibilities: partition of Palestine between a Jewish state and a new Palestinian state (the “two state” solution), or partition between a Jewish state and one or more of the existing contiguous Arab states – unusually Jordan since that state itself was initially part of the Palestinian mandate. This latter possibility, often overlooked, was in fact the solution preferred by the Peel commission and was the *de facto* situation during the 1948-1967 period.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 80

⁸⁸ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 83

Peel Commission Partition Plan, 1937



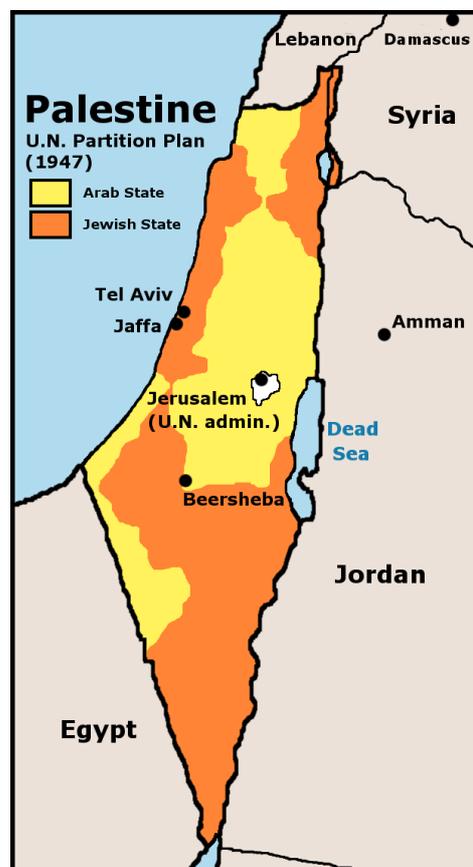
Source: Palestine Royal Commission Report (Peel) July 1937, London: HMSO

Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA)

Nevertheless, the Palestinians continued to reject the fundamental idea of a Jewish state, and the concept of partition, while most Jewish settlers greatly welcomed it (except revisionist Zionists opposed the division of Eretz Yisrael/Palestine even from the Transjordan's east bank for that matter). However, as the Second World War was unraveling, Britain had to protect its hold of the Suez Canal from the Axis power and needed the support of the Islamic Middle East in this endeavor. This interest weighed more heavily on the domestic balance than building a Jewish national home in Palestine. Thus, Britain retracted rapidly from the Peel commission's recommendations and released instead the 1939 White Paper.

As it turned out, the outcome of World War II completely vacated the White Paper's limitations of the Jewish population. The USA was now the hegemonic power, and its president Harry Truman, distressed by the horrors of the Holocaust, voiced active support

for the Jewish cause as did most western opinion worldwide. On May 1, 1946 a joint Anglo-American committee of enquiry was formed to address the problem of displaced Jews. It recommended the admittance of 100 000 Jews into Palestine and a bi-national state. With these last inferences the newly formed United Nations recuperated the Palestinian case in 1947 and formed a United Nations Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), composed of 11 nations to investigate further. They too advocated the two state partition plan, and henceforth the UN General Assembly submitted the partition plan to vote. It was adopted on November 29, 1947 by 33 to 13, with 10 abstentions (GA Resolution 181). Both the Soviet and Western blocs had supported the partition.



“The border proposed was more favorable to the Jewish state than the 1937 Peel plan had been, giving it 56 % of Palestine (including the Negev desert as room for expansion). But the UN Security Council made no move to enforce the General Assembly plan, while the British refused to implement any plan not accepted by both sides. Instead the British, proceeded simply to withdraw (...), fighting between the two sides broke out immediately after passage

of the partition plan, and grew apace as the British presence dwindled in the following months.”⁸⁹

The fighting took place mainly through guerilla warfare opposing the Arabs to the Haganah, and more radical Zionist revisionist Irgun and Lehi. By the time of British withdrawal in May 1948, Israel had managed to hold on to its allotted territory and hence declared its Independence as a state on May 14th. On May 15th, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq declared war to the new state of Israel. On May 21st, after a conversation with Secretary General Lie, Folke Bernadotte called a press conference announcing that he would travel to Palestine on May 25th. “His mission is not only to try to get a truce and then peace, but he will outline the direction for the future order in the Holy Land.”⁹⁰ Folke was to individually achieve the failed promise of the Great British Empire. Most of his knowledge of the area came from the bible.⁹¹

SECTION V: THE FIRST UN MISSIONARY IN ISRAEL

1) The UN Appointment of Folke Bernadotte

As war erupted between five great Arab countries and the newborn Jewish state, UN Secretary General Lie together with the US reacted immediately by trying to introduce a resolution declaring the situation a breach of peace within Article 39 of the UN charter. The resolution implied resort to the use of force by the Great Powers if necessary. The British, through an envoy, Sir Alexander Cardigan, hastily counteracted this resolution by replacing an amendment that “rendered toothless the American attempt”⁹². Without the possibility of armed force the UN had to resort to non-violent intervention and designed a peacekeeping mission in the Middle East for which it would appoint an international mediator, the first of its kind. In other words, the UN had to find someone willing to negotiate peace between 5 Arab countries and the infant Israeli state without the use of force.

The key functions of the Mediator were named as follows:

⁸⁹ Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 3rd edition, Polity Press : 2012, pp 89

⁹⁰ Gunnar Hägglöf quoted by Katie Marton in *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 5 : « Enter the Mediator», Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 34

⁹¹ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 5 : « Enter the Mediator », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 33

⁹² Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 5 : « Enter the Mediator », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 31

- Use of good offices with the local and community authorities in Palestine to provide the safety and well-being of the population, assure the protection of the Holy Places and other religious sites, and promote a peaceful adjustment of the situation of Palestine.
- Cooperation with the Truce Commission for Palestine appointed by the Security Council in its resolution of April 23rd, 1948
- Invitation of the assistance of appropriate specialized agencies of the United Nations and other governmental or non-governmental organizations of a humanitarian and non-political character with a view to the promotion of the welfare of the inhabitants of Palestine.⁹³

“[Secretary General] Lee claimed credit for first suggesting Count Folke Bernadotte for the position, after a German politician Paul Van Zeeland declined the offer. [...] “The discussion took place behind closed doors” Sir Brian Urquhart, then assistant to the secretary general, recalls, “and in a rush. There was simply no time for an in-depth-discussion of the man’s background or character. All five permanent members of the Secretariat agreed on Bernadotte.””⁹⁴

Founder, and president of the World Jewish Congress, Nahum Goldman, confessed later to Bernadotte that the Zionist organization had favored his candidacy as Van Zeeland had been financial advisor to the Lebanese government. However in Stockholm’s diplomatic circles the appointment of the count was met with skepticism. Swedish diplomat, Sven Grafström had repeatedly tried to convince Bernadotte to refuse the mission.

“When I got hold of Bernadotte by telephone, he said at once that this was a fascinating mission. My objections and purely personal warnings fell on deaf ears. I feel this is just awful. We’re not talking bout a scouting mission here.”⁹⁵

Grafström wrote in his diary on May 21st that veteran Swedish diplomat Gunnar Hägglöf had also sent the count heart-wrenching warnings and urged him to at least go to Lake Success

⁹³ <http://www.ijssh.org/vol6/735-S011.pdf>

⁹⁴ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 5 : « Enter the Mediator », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 32

⁹⁵ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 5 : « Enter the Mediator », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 33

and study the conflict before accepting. But, regardless of these friendly warnings, on May 26th the count boarded the plane to Paris, his first stop on his mission, where he was to meet the former secretary on the Palestine commission, Ralph Bunche, who was to accompany him as the representative of Secretary General Lie.

Ralph Bunche had great knowledge on the unraveling conflict and was also greatly skeptical. He had initially tried to keep away from Palestine, and had even been tempted to leave the UN altogether when proposed the position of secretary on Palestine in December 1947. Lie had ultimately convinced him to stay and take on the position by promising he would immediately promote him to senior status in the Secretariat and bring him back to New York by March.⁹⁶ Of course, this promise was not kept.

Bunche's first report on the Palestine Commission in February had "pointed an accusing finger at the British and the Arabs and made it plain that without effective military international intervention, the partition plan would remain a dead letter."⁹⁷ He had also done everything possible to deter Israel's declaration of independence expecting the Arabs' rapid escalation of hostilities, in vain. He knew well that till now the Arabs had continuously rejected UN's call for a cease-fire: a proposed 4 week halt had already been rejected on May 22, (a second appeal on May 29 would also be ignored).⁹⁸ Unlike Bernadotte, he felt disillusioned and it was with great reluctance that he accepted the mission.

"When he met Bernadotte in Paris, he discovered that United Nations had once again chosen someone totally ignorant about the Palestinian issue for this critical and complex mission. Bunche began by giving his new boss a comprehensive briefing on the problem. From then on, and until Bernadotte's assassination, Bunche was the count's main source of information on Palestine. Despite the marked differences between the two men's personalities and their different points of departure for this joint mission, they respected each other."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 36

⁹⁷ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 41

⁹⁸ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 54

⁹⁹ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 53

As Kati Marton puts it, when they met at The Crillon Hotel in Paris on May 26, “Bunche and Bernadotte- the black from the ghetto, the count from Stockholm- shook hands, sized each other up, and instantly became friends.”

That same day they met confidentially with World Jewish Congress president, Nahum Goldman who gave them a rather optimistic briefing on the situation to the great joy of the count. He advised that the Jewish state would be willing to enter a Middle East confederation of states on geographical (rather than racial) grounds, as a means of dissipating Arab fears of Jews being a foreign wedge in the region. He stressed that Jews must have peace with the Arabs but that the Arabs had to recognize Israel as a state. He reassured (wrongly as it would turn out) that the “Jewish State is now in a position to assure its complete responsibility for the acts of Sternists and the Irgunists.”¹⁰⁰ He more accurately advised that British foreign secretary Bevin wished King Abdullah of Transjordan to hold on to Jerusalem. “This explains the present concentration of the [Transjordan] Arab League in Jerusalem. The British,” Goldmann said, “think that if Abdullah sits in Jerusalem he will become the titular head of the Arab world, and that their deadly enemy, the Great Mufti of Jerusalem would be permanently eliminated.”¹⁰¹ On the points of immigration and the role of the unoccupied repository that represents the Negev desert (that Ben Gurion hoped to eventually cultivate), Goldman assured the missionaries there was room to negotiate. However, he did point out that the British wished to detach the desert from Israel, as a way to safeguard its interests with Egypt, currently occupying the territory, and referred to the British view that the transfer of Galilee could compensate Israel for the loss of Negev.¹⁰² Indeed, during the mission this British swap idea would gain momentum.

2) Negotiating the first Truce

The next day when preparing to leave Paris, Bernadotte decided on flying to Cairo instead of Tel Aviv. This was regarded as a great offence among Jewish officials. However as the count saw it, since the Arabs were the offenders here, the question of negotiating a truce should be addressed to them first. Egypt’s high officials would represent Syria and Lebanon as well

¹⁰⁰ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 12: « To Jerusalem », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 121

¹⁰¹ Nahum Goldmann quoted by Kati Marton in *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 12: « To Jerusalem », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 121

¹⁰² Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 63

during talks with the count. Still on that first day, surprised, the Egyptians had initially refused for the aircraft to land. The first meeting with the Egyptian's foreign ministry Ahmed Mohammed Khachaba Pasha was described as absolutely meaningless by Bunch. Finally they met with the Egyptian Prime minister Nokrashy Pasha.

“The count addressed the first man he spotted wearing a fez as “Prime Minister.” It turned out to be a doorman, who in embarrassment pointed Bernadotte toward a mustachioed, roly poly figure shambling through the reception's room's French doors.”¹⁰³

After this comical miscalculation, the count got acquainted with the real Nokrashy Pasha whom explained to him that there could not be a Jewish state, only a Jewish minority with local autonomy operating in a Palestinian state. The Prime Minister was however in favor of a cease-fire. After these first meetings the count and Bunche had dinner at the British Embassy, another bad signal to Jewish officials. As it turned out the British were also in favor of a cease-fire. Till then they had resisted the idea believing that together, five Arab states would easily push the Jews into the sea. However, as this had clearly not been the case (apart from Jerusalem, Israelis were actually in a position of force) the British decided to instead align themselves with an increasingly pro-Zionist American policy, which called for a halt to the fighting to let mediation determine the future of the region instead of violence. This new alignment ultimately meant that Britain would refrain from assisting the Arabs. In fact, that same day of May 27th, a new agreement between Washington and London would cut British military arm supplies to Transjordan and all other Arab countries.¹⁰⁴

Before leaving for Jaffa, Bernadotte met with secretary of the Arab League, Azzam Pasha. The count took an instant liking to this devout of the Arab cause for whom it was not quite understandable why the 700 000 Jews living in Palestine needed a state to call their own when there were far more Jews in other parts of the world. Azzam Pasha seemed to be quite voluntarily oblivious to the genocide caused by the holocaust as a possible reason. Indeed although the man showed great manners with foreign dignitaries his opinion of Jews were no real secret. On the eve of the war he had made a speech in Cairo reported by the BBC, in which he declared, “this will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will

¹⁰³ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 12: « To Jerusalem », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 124

¹⁰⁴ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 13: «Statemanship at its Best», Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 133

be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades.”¹⁰⁵ But the naïve count recounted leaving this interesting man firstly hoping he should soon see him again, and secondly with a feeling he had found in him a friend who would help him in every way to achieve his difficult mediating task.

Given what had been Folke’s meeting priorities prior to his first acquaintance with Ben Gurion in Tel Aviv on May 31st, it was no surprise the Prime Minister displayed cold suspicion when greeting the count. He immediately went to the sole point that was of interest and alarm to him and all Jews: Jerusalem and King Abdullah’ claim to its rule. The count retorted that UN observers would report any move from the Arab league in Jerusalem to the Security Council; to which Ben Gurion enquired back on whether the count’s team could also assure transport of supplies to Jerusalem during the truce. Bernadotte answered in the positive while at the same time threatening UN sanctions against Israel if the conditions of the truce banning arms and military men [entering the country] were broken. “You are treating both sides the same way, when it is the Arabs who are the aggressors here,” the Prime Minister retorted.¹⁰⁶

Following this first blunt meeting, Bernadotte said in his memoirs the prime minister showed “bitter spirit”, while Bunche called the meeting “unpleasant”. Ben Gurion wrote in his non-committal diary entry: “I was visited at 6 pm by Count Folke Bernadotte and Dr. Ralph Bunche. If an armistice is signed peace talks will be possible.”¹⁰⁷

The following day Bernadotte and Bunche flew to the British creation that was Transjordan, to see King Abdullah even though he had cancelled their meeting last minute. During the flight to Amman, the count had been briefed on the strategic importance of the country for Great Britain as a communication channel to the oil producing countries of Iraq and Persia and as a supply channel to Palestine and Egypt.

¹⁰⁵ David Barnett and Efraim Karsh, "Azzam's genocidal threat" in *Middle East Quarterly*. 18 (4): 85–88 (2011)

¹⁰⁶ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 13: « Statemanship at its Best », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 129

¹⁰⁷ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 13: « Statemanship at its Best », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 129

Upon arrival to Abdullah's palace, the king showed far more ceremonious decorum than Ben-Gurion had the previous day. "Like myself you are of royal blood and you must know what it means to govern a kingdom. [...] I am always at your disposal as your counselor, if you wish to talk things over with me...I will call you brother."¹⁰⁸

The decorum followed with Sir Alec Kirkbirde, Abdullah's chief British Advisor, who entertained the missionaries to lunch, after which Bernadotte received word that the Arab League had accepted the truce. The count immediately cabled Secretary-General Lie, asking for authorization to set the start date and time of the truce. While, waiting for a reply Ben Gurion had been without news, and in Israel the count was gaining the reputation of being a pro-Arab.

Bernadotte finally got the positive reply from the Secretary General, he now had to get all parties to agree to the terms of the truce, and shuttled back and forth between Tel Aviv, Amman, Cairo and Beirut, accompanied by Bunche and other aides. In the arguably more difficult task of negotiating these terms the count received no instructions from the UN. He and Bunche realized as early as the first week of June that the Security Council preferred to avoid making any decision about the terms of the cease-fire and to leave this to their entire discretion instead¹⁰⁹. The main stumbling block of the negotiations would be Jewish immigration as the Security Council's embargo forbade entrance of combatants and persons of military age in Israel. The Jewish government asked how they should proceed with immigrants banging on their door. What was military age? What if those entering had no weapons training? Bernadotte had to answer personally to these questions and came up with a camp system that would isolate immigrants of military age. They were dubbed the 'Bernadotte Camps'.

““These were British-built camps, and they put Jewish immigrants in these concentration camps,” Baruch Nadel insists. “Bernadotte told them [the Israeli government] to do it and they did it. And one of the immigrants shouted (I read this in the Labor party newspaper),

¹⁰⁸ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 13: « Statemanship at its Best », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 132

¹⁰⁹ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 57

“I’ve been freed from a Nazi concentration camp, now in my own country you put me in a camp”¹¹⁰

Despite these difficult undercurrents the first truce was put into effect on June 11, 1948, and Bernadotte could be proud of the success of his negotiations. “A great day for the UN” Secretary General Lie called it at a public event in New York. After waiting several days to be sure that the truce was actually being honored, Bunche himself could not believe it, feeling optimistic for the first time in a great while. He would continue to mention the truce as the UN’s first great accomplishment in regards to the Palestine issue. “There has never been anything like this”, he wrote to his wife referring to the Count’s whirlwind of shuttle from capital to capital. As for the cease-fire he felt that Bernadotte “was the only one who could have done it”¹¹¹

One may ask, how the count got everyone to agree so quickly. In fact, there is little doubt that Bernadotte was a good negotiator, however there were several factors that explain more pragmatically the prompt general acceptance of the cease-fire.

Firstly and most importantly, Britain had disengaged its support to the Arab nations, becoming more aligned with American international policy, notably because of the overarching Cold War. Meanwhile, the American embargo also became seamlessly embedded within the UN’s mission, without vote.

« The U.S. embargo policy would henceforth be merged in the overall framework of U.N. peacemaking efforts.⁷⁸ And in this manner the embargo question was detached from the issue and logic of recognition... »¹¹²

Accordingly, Britain’s ensuing adherence to the arm embargo made it difficult for Arab countries *not* to accept a cease-fire.

¹¹⁰ Kati Marton quoting Baruch Nadel from an interview in *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 14 : « A Phony Truce », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 140

¹¹¹ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949* , 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 58

¹¹²

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2150455.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ad2e60619f800b127d267c664b9cf3037> pp 19

In addition to not getting anymore arm supplies from the Brits, a cease-fire was much needed for an Arab's League whose unity was terribly weak. Most states had been actually seeking individual territorial gain. Syria and Lebanon wanted to take certain areas in northern Palestine. Nur as-Said of Iraq had ambitions for bringing the entire Fertile Crescent under Iraqi leadership. King Farouk of Egypt wanted to annex all of southern Palestine, and was keen on overshadowing King Abdullah, whom he saw as his main competitor for power over the Arab world. King Abdullah was motivated by a quite separate agenda of his own, he had been conducting secret negotiations with Israeli officials on the subject of his own ambitions to control Arab Palestine for some months.¹¹³ Now that he had taken Jerusalem he was ready for a ceasefire. The truce would help him in the delicate task of maintaining the good will of his "fraternal" Arab nations all the while searching for some *modus operandi* in Israel.

Israel also needed the truce as it was facing the alarming Jerusalem blockade. The Jewish quarter had been besieged by the Arab legion on May 28th, and there was fear that all of the Jewish quarter would fall. Also, Israel Defense Forces were exhausted and a cease-fire would allow for officious military recruitment and training as well as ammunition shipment. Indeed, the UN's weak monitoring apparatus didn't prevent this from happening.

Finally, the newborn state was already struggling to uphold its international recognition and was in no position to refuse a cease-fire from the very institution that had given it its legitimate basis for establishing a state. Without the UN partition vote, Israel could not have existed.

Initially Bernadotte and Bunche had to coordinate with the UN's Truce Commission in establishing the first cease-fire. However, given the inefficiency of this cooperation (the Truce Commission was trapped in Jerusalem, while Bernadotte's observers had complete mobility, which made them considerably more effective in the peacekeeping mission), the commission became placed under Bernadotte's full authority. Bunche created from scratch the cease-fire's peacekeeping rules, with its different procedures, protocols forbidding the port of arms, together with other symbols of total objectivity, and of course the mobilization of UN observers to follow and enforce these rules. The peacekeeping model Bunche created for Palestine became a reference for all subsequent UN missions in worldwide battle zones.

¹¹³ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 13: «Statemanship at its Best», Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 133

3) Breaches of the terms and conditions of the truce

Although the cease-fire was largely honored some serious breaches were recorded, especially on the Israeli side, which had from the very beginning voiced opposition to the immigration ban and the camps. Officially, there was no intention of respecting the Arms embargo either.

The state's survival was at stake and the Israeli government had no trouble rationalizing these breaches. Indeed, Ben Gurion told his cabinet on June 4th, 1948:

“The Arabs have nothing to lose by not receiving arms for four weeks, they have been receiving them for years. For us the four weeks can be decisive... We cannot be treated as the same way than the Arab states. They already have weapons of all time. We do not. There is another, very basic question involved: national sovereignty... The Arabs don't need no one from the outside. Though no one will prevent a thirty-year-old Englishman from entering Lebanon even if he happens to be a military officer who has come to teach the local people how to make dynamite. I am not concerned with the political consequences of our refusal to accept the Bernadotte Proposals. The Security Council is not a homogenous body; every member has his own policy. The military consequences may be more serious. I suggest that we reject the Bernadotte proposals. There are two elements basic to our existence: immigration and independence. We must determine what happens in our own country.”¹¹⁴

Following this realpolitik rationale, the Israel Defense Forces violated the truce by acquiring weapons from Czechoslovakia, Russia, France¹¹⁵ and even Mexico,¹¹⁶ while improving training of forces and reorganizing the army during this time. The Israel army increased its manpower from approximately 30,000 or 35,000 men to almost 65,000 during the truce. They increased their arms supply to "more than 25 000 rifles, 5 000 machine guns, and more than 15 million bullets"¹¹⁷

The Arabs also violated the truce by reinforcing their lines with fresh units (including six companies of Sudanese regulars, Saudi battalion and contingents from Yemen, Morocco), and

¹¹⁴ Quote from Ben Gurion taken in Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 14: « A phony truce », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 142

¹¹⁵ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 82

¹¹⁶ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 15: «The End of an Illusion », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 161

¹¹⁷ Benny Morris, *1948 : The First Arab-Israeli War*, 2008, pp 205-322

by preventing supplies from reaching isolated Israeli settlements; occasionally, they opened fire along the lines.¹¹⁸ On July 7th, the day before the expiration of the truce, Egyptian forces under General Muhammad Naguib renewed the war with a surprise attack on Negba.¹¹⁹

Indeed, in practice it seems evident that both sides accepted the truce because they had the intention of gaining from it. In any case, stopping the battle was only the first short-term step in Bernadotte's mission. During this standstill, the count kept faith in the possibility of establishing political parameters for long-lasting peace in the region. On June 13, together with Bunche they took quarters on the isolated Greek island of Rhodes to design a political settlement that would be accepted by the Arab legion and Israel.

4) The Bernadotte Plans

A. The First Bernadotte Plan

Prior to designing and submitting his plans proposals, both Arabs and Jews already frowned upon the whole initiative. Bernadotte, in their eyes hadn't been asked to do so.

“The Arabs were opposed because it was clear that any solution would include recognition of an independent Jewish entity in Palestine and permission for massive Jewish immigration. The Israelis, on the other hand, were furious that the mediator's starting point was not the November 29 UN partition plan, which had been achieved after a long and exhausting diplomatic campaign, but was dismissed by the Swede as irrelevant.”¹²⁰

Despite these objections, Bernadotte put all his energy in drafting these plans together with Bunche's indispensable input, which outlined every step in the process. On June 27, the count's plan was ready. Bernadotte wanted both parties to be notified at the same time so instead of delivering the proposal himself he sent economist John Reedman to hand Foreign Minister Shertok one copy, while his aides Paul Mohn and Constantine Stavropoulos handed another one to the Egyptian Prime Minister and president of the Arab League, Nokrashy Pasha. Bernadotte had warned in an attached cover letter that this proposal was only intended as a basis for further discussion, and pleaded for both sides to not dismiss it entirely before

¹¹⁸ Benny Morris, *1948 : The First Arab-Israeli War*, 2008, pp 269, 322, 205.

¹¹⁹ Alfred A. Knopf. *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*. New York. 1976. pp. 330. [ISBN 978-0-394-48564-5](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9780394485645).

¹²⁰ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 61

discussing with him. The document in question became known as the First Bernadotte plan and its suggestions were the following:

1. Palestine, as defined in the original Mandate entrusted to the United Kingdom in 1922, might form a Union comprising two members, one Arab and one Jewish. The Arab area would be the kingdom of Transjordan; the Jewish would be Israel.
2. The boundaries of the two members should be determined in the first instance by negotiations with the assistance of the Mediator, and on the basis of the suggestions to be made by him.
3. The purpose and function of this Union should be to promote common economic interests, to operate and maintain common services, including, customs and exercise, to undertake development projects and to coordinate foreign policy and measures for common defense.
4. Each member of the Union is to exercise full control over its own affairs, including foreign relations.
5. Immigration within its own borders should be within the control of each member of the Union, provided that, following a period of two years from the establishment of the Union, either member would be entitled to request the Council of the Union to review the immigration policy of the other member.
6. Holy Places, religious buildings and sites should be preserved, and existing rights to their use fully guaranteed.
7. Refugees from the Palestine conflict should have the right to return to their homes and regain possession of their property.

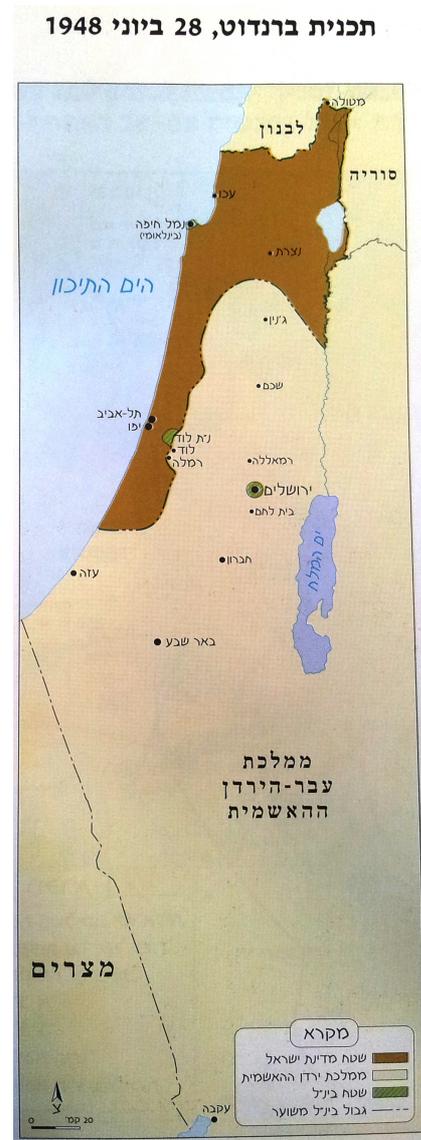
Territorial Matters:

1. The inclusion of the whole or part of the Negev in Arab territory.
2. The inclusion of the whole or part of Western Galilee in Jewish territory
3. The inclusion of the City of Jerusalem in Arab territory, with municipal autonomy for the Jewish community and special arrangements for the protection of the Holy Places.
4. Consideration of the status of Jaffa.
5. Establishment of a free port at Haifa, the area of the free port to include the refineries and terminals.

6. Establishment of a free airport at Lydda.¹²¹

Hebrew map rendering of Bernadotte's first proposal that came to be known as the 1st Bernadotte Plan.

The Beige area was to be Arabic territory annexed to Transjordan, including Jerusalem. The brown area was to be designated Jewish territory. Both territories were to be part of an economic union, with an international airport at Lydda in Arab territory and a free port at Haifa in Jewish territory.



Bernadotte's plan bears great similarity with the 1937 Peel Commission Plan's preferred option of partition between a Jewish state and one or more of the existing contiguous Arab states (till now, an overlooked option). However, it didn't mention a Jewish or Arab state but an Arab and Jewish "territory" within a union and took the British mandated territory's demarcation as its starting reference instead of the 1947 UN partition plan. It was in many regards too late for the latter possibility, and although Bernadotte and Bunche had probably

¹²¹ http://content.ecf.org.il/files/M00112_TheFirstBernadottePlan-EnglishText_0.pdf

carried the best intentions in drafting their proposed solution, in effect the settlement was a lose-lose for both parties.

Apart from King Abdullah who would be the great benefiter from the proposal, reigning as he had wished on Arab Palestine, including the Negev desert and Jerusalem, the other Arab parties would see Palestine divided between their enemy and main rival, an outcome they deeply resented. Palestine, meanwhile, was being denied the state of its own, which had been repeatedly and deceptively promised by the British and now by the UN. Finally, the Arabs would continue to unilaterally deny the legitimacy of Israeli territorial autonomy, even if the said autonomy was not termed “state” and were to be over a smaller territory than the previous.

Israel on the other hand, would lose important portions of land, especially the Negev desert for which Ben Gurion had great aspirations, but most crucially it would lose total control over Jerusalem, a loss that was considered utterly unacceptable to Jewish eyes. Furthermore, the plan completely ignored the UN’s 1947 partition plan on which Israel’s independence was based, and actually didn’t acknowledge Israel’s existence as a state. To a large extent, the count’s first plan confirmed Israeli suspicions of Bernadotte being pro-Arab.

“As time passed it turned out that Bernadotte had pro-Arabic inclinations, whereas Bunche was occasionally criticized by the Arabs for just the opposite.”¹²²

B. The Second Bernadotte Plan

In light of the voiced oppositions and after further discussions with both sides, Bernadotte and Bunch proceeded to draft a second plan. It was presented on September 16th, 1948, the day before the count’s assassination. It was almost equally unfavorable, but this time abandoned the idea of an economic union, allowed for an independent Jewish state, albeit a small one, and recommended the internationalization of Jerusalem. The main points were:

¹²² Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 55

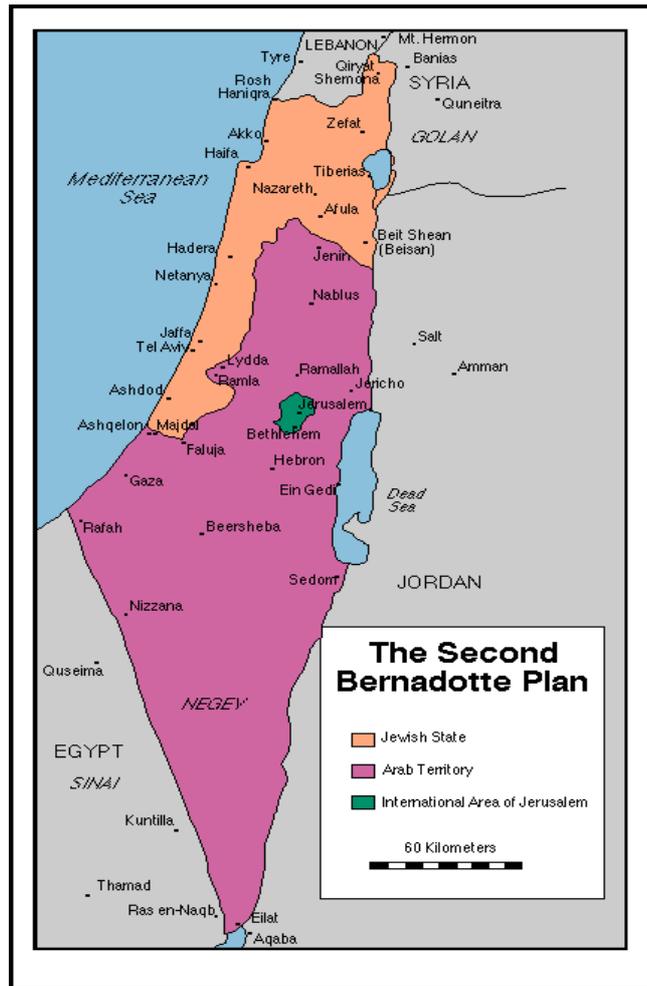
1. Peace must return to Palestine and every feasible measure should be taken to ensure that hostilities will not be resumed and that harmonious relations between Arab and Jew will ultimately be restored.
2. A Jewish State called Israel exists in Palestine and there are no sound reasons for assuming that it will not continue to do so.
3. The boundaries of this new State must finally be fixed either by formal agreement between the parties concerned or failing that, by the United Nations.
4. Adherence to the principle of geographical homogeneity and integration, which should be the major objective of the boundary arrangements, should apply equally to Arab and Jewish territories, whose frontiers should not therefore, be rigidly controlled by the territorial arrangements envisaged in the resolution of 29 November.
5. The right of innocent people, uprooted from their homes by the present terror and ravages of war, to return to their homes, should be affirmed and made effective, with assurance of adequate compensation for the property of those who may choose not to return.
6. The City of Jerusalem, because of its religious and international significance and the complexity of interests involved, should be accorded special and separate treatment.
7. International responsibility should be expressed where desirable and necessary in the form of international guarantees, as a means of allaying existing fears, and particularly with regard to boundaries and human rights.

The proposal "suggested" that:

1. The existing truce should be superseded by a formal peace, or at the minimum, an armistice.
2. The frontiers between the Arab and Jewish territories, in the absence of agreement between Arabs and Jews, should be established by the United Nations.
3. The Negev should be defined as Arab territory.
4. The border of Israel should run from Faluja north northeast to Ramleh and Lydda (both of which would be in Arab territory).
5. Galilee should be defined as Jewish territory.
6. Haifa should be declared a free port, and Lydda airport should be declared a free airport.

7. The City of Jerusalem, covering the area defined in the resolution of the General Assembly of 29 November, should be treated separately and should be placed under effective United Nations control with maximum feasible local autonomy for its Arab and Jewish communities with full safeguards for the protection of the Holy Places and sites and free access to them and for religious freedom.
8. The United Nations should establish a Palestine conciliation commission.
9. The right of the Arab refugees to return to their homes in Jewish-controlled territory at the earliest possible date should be affirmed by the United Nations, and their repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation, and payment of adequate compensation for the property of those choosing not to return, should be supervised and assisted by the United Nations conciliation commission.
10. There would be no Palestinian state apparently. Bernadotte wrote:
 1. The disposition of the territory of Palestine not included within the boundaries of the Jewish State should be left to the Governments of the Arab States in full consultation with the Arab inhabitants of Palestine, with the recommendation, however, that in view of the historical connexion and common interests of Transjordan and Palestine there would be compelling reasons for merging the Arab territory of Palestine with the territory of Transjordan, subject to such frontier rectifications regarding other Arab States as may be found practicable and desirable.¹²³

¹²³ http://content.ecf.org.il/files/M00117_TheSecondBernadottePlan-EnglishText.pdf pp 32-36



Given the failure and widespread criticism the first proposal received, it should be asked why the first plan was drafted in such a way; and why the second plan came to be so similar to the first. This question bears great relevance as all interpretations and events that followed this first attempt at peace settling in the region led to increased threats on the count's life. Indeed the period between both plans proved lethal to the count's reputation and explains to a great extent the reasons behind his sudden assassination and subsequent oblivion in history.

SECTION VI FOLKE BERNADOTTE'S DEMISE

1) Rationale behind the first plan

In retrospect it seems difficult to warrant the thinking Bernadotte and Bunche followed when drafting this first shot at peace in the Middle East. However at the time Bernadotte's first proposal wasn't completely senseless.

The peacekeeping partners had elaborated a rigorous schedule for its drafting consisting of preliminary talk sessions between UN representatives, the Arab League, and Israel's provisional government. In a first stage these talks would take place in Cairo and Tel Aviv from June 15th to June 18th, during which the missionaries and their assistants would try to collect as many details possible from both sides independently. A second stage was to take place in Rhodes between June 19th and June 25th, in which the mediation team would devise a general model of settlement that addressed the main topics and issues. Jewish and Arab representatives would be summoned for consultation individually and would not be required to sit together. With the proposal being sent out on June 28th, the third and final stage would have Jewish and Arab high officials invited to Rhodes to deliberate on the proposal from July 1st to July 9th. It was hoped by then ideal conditions would have been outlined for the truce to be extended and that an enduring peace agreement would be within reach. Indeed Bernadotte fervently believed both parties would sign an armistice by Christmas. Although this optimistic schedule had been assiduously followed by the mediators, in practice the Jewish and Arab delegation did not consistently inform the process as was hoped.

“Bernadotte described what took place in Rhodes in the last two weeks of June as a “conference,” “negotiations,” and “talks” between the UN personnel and the two delegations, but these definitions did not reflect the true situation. In essence, after Bernadotte's attempt to bring the two delegations together was rebuffed by the Arabs, the only meetings were among Bernadotte's advisors. Their consultations with the delegations were limited and insignificant, to the point that the Jewish and Arab representatives felt that their presence was completely unnecessary.”¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 66

In addition, Tygve Lie, once more, failed to provide any sort of assistance on the UN's most pressing mission by refusing to make the trip to Rhodes. He later wrote in his memoirs that his visit might have been "misinterpreted"¹²⁵. Lie's passive and distant responsiveness became a great source of irritation for Bernadotte and Bunche.

Thus it is to a great autonomous degree that Bernadotte's team submitted the new proposed frontiers, these were labeled as an 'updated' UN partition plan that reflected the current battle lines occupied by each parties. When both parties received the proposal it was largely interpreted as a definite plan in part because the document in question had been published as an official UN document of the Security Council. The Arab and Jewish press who later referred to the document as Bernadotte's 'plan' as opposed to 'proposal' exacerbated this impression of permanence, although Bernadotte had insisted in an attached cover letter that the proposal was "only intended as a basis for further discussion"¹²⁶.

Both parties' high officials didn't approve the proposal and declined the invitation to Rhodes for further discussion. However, the Israeli government didn't want to be portrayed as the party who refused to enter negotiation and hence accepted momentarily the invitation, albeit suspecting that the Arab League wouldn't. The Arab League rejected the invitation as expected, and when it did on July 5th, Foreign Minister Moshe Shertok withdrew his agreement to meet with Bernadotte in Rhodes, explaining he was concerned about how this visit would be interpreted by the Arab and Israeli Public.

If neither sides informed the content of this first proposal what did? Although Bernadotte and Bunche didn't want to look like America's and Britain's puppets, the plan did seem blatantly keen for their support and matched the countries' new position on the matter, which was described as the following:

"The Arab armies invasion of Palestine made [USA and Great Britain] apprehensive that the war would expand in a way that would force them to intervene; this fear led them to devise a common policy on Palestine. Through joint staff work, the British and American reached a

¹²⁵ Secretary General Lie quoted in Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 66

¹²⁶ Bernadotte quoted by Kati Marton in *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 15: «The End of an Illusion », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 152

series of understandings in late May. In brief, the idea was that, for the long term both the partition and the American trusteeship plan should be abandoned in favor of a new territorial division based on the battle lines, with slight modifications.”¹²⁷

Although the two powers weren't directly involved in this first diplomatic effort (they would be involved very directly in Bernadotte's second plan), it was no secret that the British had always favored the Arab occupation of the Negev desert. Also, her majesty's government had asked the mediator on June 23rd to make Haifa a free port in order for the empire to be able to continue using the tap line that brought oil from Iraq to Haifa. The count had happily granted this request. The fact that Israel occupied Western Galilee worked perfectly: the region would be the Jewish's compensation for the loss of the Negev, while Britain would have a strong base secured in the Mediterranean.

Bunche also believed that a separate deal negotiated between King Abdullah and the Israelis would gain British support and ultimately force the other Arabic states to recognize the autonomy of a Jewish territory.

Bunche had also vastly underestimated Israel's military power and its critical improvement during the truce. He probably believed that Israel was already out-powered by the Arabs and perceived the proposal in a more advantageous light for the Jews than it really was. In fact, when Bernadotte and Bunche had tried to extend the truce for just three days on July 7th it was the Arabs who refused, and Egypt's surprise attack followed a few hours later. The League's attitude was misleading. “Arabs must be either mad or assured of British supplies,”¹²⁸ Bunche noted in his diary. Worried he also wrote to Secretary General Lie “it is difficult for me to believe that Arab leaders are motivated by careless fanaticism.”¹²⁹

Although Britain and the US were in favor of an international status for Jerusalem, placing the holy city under Abdullah's rule wasn't that far stretched either... There had been talks and plans on internationalizing Jerusalem but the UN didn't seem administratively responsive and

¹²⁷ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 62

¹²⁸ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 78

¹²⁹ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 78

financially ready to carry out this endeavor. It had after all failed in organizing an international force to implement the 1947 partition, while the unraveling Berlin crisis in the background displayed only further the difficulty the institution had in holding militarily together a city divided between two superpowers. This and Bunche's individual struggles when dealing with his own deputation made him all too aware he couldn't rely on the UN. The transfer of Jerusalem to Abdullah was more practical, the city was in the middle of a region allotted to the Arabs, the Arab Legion already occupied most of it, and Abdullah was visibly willing to collaborate with Jews through a union. Pragmatically speaking it made sense.

As it turned out, the second plan would benefit entirely the US and Britain's aspirations: it was identical to the first only for the internationalization of Jerusalem and designation of Israel as a state as opposed to a 'Jewish territory'. However, Bernadotte's faith had been already sealed after his first proposal.

2) Aftermath of the first proposal

As we have already seen, both parties immediately and heatedly rejected Bernadotte's first proposal. Although it isn't the proposal that caused the sudden break of the truce and the ten days of fighting that followed, it certainly added a deepening layer to the battlefield. On the Arab side, Egypt, bitter, wanted to keep the Negev that had been given to Transjordan, (some had even argued that a better plan would have allocated the region to Egypt altogether). On the Israeli side, the plan catalyzed an already existing desire and plan to claim back the territory of the 1947 partition plan and save Jerusalem. But in truth, that was actually the least the Jewish government was expecting to achieve, Israel's extensive increase in armament and troop capacity meant for Ben-Gurion and Shertok that Israel's boundaries were now an open question to be settled at the next round of fighting rather than at the negotiating table.

When the truce was broken on July 7th by Egypt, in chock of the rapidity and intensity with which the fighting resumed, the entire UN delegation fled the region. Bernadotte and Bunche eventually flew in emergency to New York to meet with the Security Council. The missionaries landed on July 12th and reported to the Council the following day. After a joint diplomatic effort from the US and Britain, the Security Council called for a cease-fire of unlimited duration with the demilitarization of Jerusalem, and asked the mediator to implement the decision.

“For the first time in its history, the Security Council defined the situation as a “threat to peace” and based its resolution on the articles of the UN charter that authorized to threaten the sides with sanctions and even the use of force if they failed to comply with its request.”¹³⁰

Following a now routine refrain, Israel accepted the ceasefire on the condition that the Arab League accept it too, which they did, announcing they would stop the fighting on July 19 at 4pm. Years later, Bunche continued using the second truce of the Independence War as proof of the necessity of threat of sanctions from the UN to enforce peace efficiently. He had promoted this policy line well before the truce collapse, and underlined the significance of Bernadotte being able to convince the Security Council of the importance of these enforcement measures.

However, this relative success didn't take away the fact that Bernadotte's reputation had been completely shattered by his proposal, which had aroused strong reactions, especially on the - already suspicious- Israeli side. Many had suspected the count of being a British spy, the first proposal with the Negev/Western Galilee swap seemed to greatly confirm these allegations. But really, most of the animosity of Jewish criticism came from the proposal's disposition towards Jerusalem. Handing over Jerusalem to King Abdullah was a reckless diplomatic gesture; this was not only evident in Israel. Colonel Richard Henry Meinertzhagen, a retired British intelligence officer, wrote from the comfort of his house in London that Bernadotte had made “such an error” about Jerusalem; “in formulating this horrible proposal he has signed his own death warrant.”¹³¹ Walter Eytan, then director of the Israeli Foreign Ministry noted, “nobody who has the slightest understanding of history, of three thousand years of Jewish history, would make such a proposal. (...) It showed he had none of the historical knowledge or the sensitivity to gauge the extreme delicacy of the whole situation. Nobody before or after had proposed any such thing.”¹³²

These ‘confirmed’ suspicions rapidly grew into a deep fear and hostile rancor even from the moderate Jewish population and high officials of the provisional government. Instead of

¹³⁰ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 80

¹³¹ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 73

¹³² Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 15: «The End of an Illusion», Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 157

viewing the count's proposal for what it was- a first clumsy and naive diplomatic maneuver - most Israelis saw it as a veil hanging over the mysterious Swedish aristocrat being lifted, Folke's cards put on the table. His entire character now gleamed through a darker light.

“Such was the depth of Israeli resentment of Bernadotte that even his proud history of negotiating Jewish lives during the Holocaust was now viewed with suspicion by Jewish leaders. Rumors of the Swede's “friendship” with Himmler were suddenly given credence in many quarters. Chaim Weizmann wrote to Abba Eban in late July: “Although I've never met the man, I'm deeply prejudiced against him. The reason is his great friendship with Himmler.”¹³³

“Reuters Jerusalem correspondent Jon Kimche remembered those weeks [July 5th onwards]: “They had just got rid of the British who has strutted about telling them what they should do; and here, already, was another lot of superior persons [the UN] to dictate them what they might or might not do. The Jewish coffee house grapevine was also busy retailing gossip of Bernadotte's alleged Nazi sympathies, and many Israelis, who ought to have known better, confided to me that Bunche was in fact only a State Department agent, and they were certain Bernadotte was a British agent and that he had discussed his mission with the British before coming to the Middle East. The fact that all this information was unfounded did not lessen the strong current of suspicions and Israeli hostility that pervaded Israeli relations with the UN observers and with the mediator and his assistants. The Israeli press was full of it. Government officials right up to the top believed it. The army suspected the observers of spying for the Arabs. The observers themselves contributed to this mood by their own attitude to the local population; the Americans and Belgians (with a few outstanding exceptions) considered them as Bolchevik suspects or colonials who might have to be humored but could not be trusted or treated as equals.”¹³⁴

Moderates expressed their slandering opinions on the count mostly through gossip. In contrast, the more radical Zionists were much more public about their fear and hostility. On

¹³³ Kati Marton , *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 15: «The End of an Illusion » , Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 158-159

¹³⁴ Kati Marton , *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 15: «The End of an Illusion » , Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 164

July 5th, the Lehi daily journal, *Mivraq* called for “liquidating the mediation process.”¹³⁵ Its Radio station warned, “anyone who continues to hold discussion with the count is putting his life in danger.”¹³⁶

Among the Stern Gang’s three leaders, the revisionist Zionist philosopher Israel Eldad says he was the first to articulate what he saw as inevitable: Bernadotte’s assassination. In midsummer that year at the Camp Dror, where Lehi had its headquarters, Eldad repeated a theme to his would be executioners Yitzak Shamir and Nathan Yalin Mor: “In history individuals make events. Bernadotte is a British agent and he wants to give Jerusalem and the Negev to Abdullah because the British need a land bridge from the Suez to Jordan. The British will come back through their puppet Abdullah. Bernadotte has the power, he has the United Nations behind him. We are a small, weak country.”¹³⁷ The Stern Gang believed that count Bernadotte had the power to enforce his proposal and that it was only a matter of time before he shattered the Zionist dream with everything it had struggled to accomplish till now. Lehi members had never believed in mediation nor compromise. The life in the camps had taught them that no one ever survives by chance, one must make one’s chance, and the winner takes it all.

“Those who did survive [in the Reich’s camps] did as a result of some asserted act that represented either the best in a man or woman’s character, or the darkest aspect. These acts of survival were born of the realization that no one could come to their rescue: in the end they were alone. The miracle of their survival was forever toed to *not* trusting, to taking things into their own hands. [...] Compliant behavior, accommodation of any sort, had led their parents, their brothers and sisters, to march toward open graves, to be shot in groups of several hundred or more, in silence. This was the essential spirit that animated the four men who were to kill Folke Bernadotte and that defined those who ordered the assassination; most particularly it shaped the steely determination of Yitzhak Shamir.”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Joseph Heller, *Lehi: Ideology, Politics, and Terror 1940-1949* (Jerusalem: Shazar center and Keter, 1989) pp 442 (Hebrew)

¹³⁶ Joseph Heller, *Lehi: Ideology, Politics, and Terror 1940-1949* (Jerusalem: Shazar center and Keter, 1989) pp 443 (Hebrew)

¹³⁷ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 15: «The End of an Illusion», Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 165

¹³⁸ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 6: «Yitzhak», Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 36

3) Situation prior to Folke Bernadotte's assassination

Despite these prejudiced reactions against the mediator, he pursued fervently his work the following months with his precious acolyte. The most urgent task they had to carry through was the demilitarization of Jerusalem and enforcement of the second truce, after which they could proceed with drafting the second plan for the General Assembly in Paris. However, upon their return to the region the mediators realized the 'Ten day battles' (that started with the Egyptian surprise attacks on July 7th-8th and ended with the second cease-fire on July 18th) had allowed the Israeli forces to seize lower Galilee and the center of the country with the cities of Nazareth, Lydda and Ramle. These events led to a dramatic increase in the number of Arabic refugees, which were now estimated to exceed the hundred thousands. Yet, despite the Jewish state's dramatic advances, the Arab side refused to publically admit its retreat, in part because Arab propaganda had continuously reported Arab victories throughout the fights. For instance as early as June 1st, the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* had reported that the Iraqi army was already on "the outskirts of Tel Aviv," and the next day wrote that they had continued their advance¹³⁹. As a result the Arab public had been completely confused by the Arab Legion's decision to accept the second truce in mid-July. Because of this disinformation initially crafted to keep moral high, the respective Arabic governments found themselves in an embarrassing situation that led them to adopt a dichotic attitude wherein they would recognize the state of Israel as *fait accomplis* to the mediators in private but continue to deny its existence in public to their armies and people. In practice this meant mixed signals for Bernadotte and Bunche. Following a meeting with the League in Beirut on July 24th, for example, Azzam acknowledged that the Arabs had no choice but to recognize the Jewish state but that it was still too early, and agreed to the demilitarization of Jerusalem. The next day at another meeting he said he agreed to demilitarization "in principle" but was not yet willing to discuss the Legion's withdrawal from its positions in the holy city.¹⁴⁰

On the Israeli side, the secured military gains made the provisional government more inflexible and aggressive in its negotiations. On July 26, in a meeting with the mediators in Tel Aviv, Foreign Minister Shertok explained the government was against demilitarization of Jerusalem and wanted instead the Jewish part of the city to be annexed to Israel; he objected also the return of refugees to their homes while the war was still ongoing. Furthermore,

¹³⁹ Al-Ahram, June 1st and 2nd, 1948

¹⁴⁰ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 85

hostile suspicion towards Bernadotte's mediation started to translate into the states' aspirations for diplomatic policy; it now wanted to negotiate peace directly with the Arab countries, especially Egypt and Transjordan and pre-empt a new Bernadotte plan, although this would prove actually more difficult in practice:

“In early July, Eliyahu Sasson, head of the Middle East division of the Foreign Ministry, was sent to Paris to try to re-open the channel of communication with the Arab world and set up direct diplomatic contacts between Israel and the Arab countries. [...] Transjordan replied positively to the Israeli request for dialogue in early August; Egypt followed suit a few weeks later. Israel endeavored to progress towards political arrangements that would end the state of hostilities, but did not make substantive political headway. On the contrary, the dead end that emerged, and the demands voiced by the Arabs only encouraged Israel to improve its position on the battlefield. But the very fact that these contacts took place indicated that, at the time, the belligerents preferred to conduct political talks amongst themselves rather than through the UN mediator.”¹⁴¹

In fact despite this failed attempt, Israel was resolved to continue its efforts to achieve direct talks with the Arabs. On September 10, the Israeli delegation wrote in its instructions to the UN assembly that it must aspire to “have Bernadotte's mediation terminated”¹⁴². Bernadotte and Bunche aware of this effort saw it as yet another obstacle to their mediation.

To make matters worse, the second truce, unlike the first, was characterized by many breaches from both sides. This undermined greatly the UN's authority as the organization tended to fail to prevent these breaches from happening or even correct them afterwards. As a result, each side would blame the institution for favoring the other side's complaints and ignoring theirs. This vicious cycle was due to the very low manpower the organization disposed of. Observers were not coming in as many and as quickly as had been expected. In desperation Bernadotte and Bunche ultimately sought help from the US and Britain directly, having by now completely given up on UN protocol and assistance from Secretary General Lie. In early August, desperate, Bernadotte contacted Secretary Marshall whose

¹⁴¹ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 86

¹⁴² Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 91

accommodating response followed with Bunche flying to Washington to meet directly with Truman's Secretary of State on August 7th. After long and detailed discussion on the situation Marshall agreed to send observers and equipment to the region but not American troops, which Bunche had also requested for Jerusalem. Bunche convinced Marshall that only strong support for the UN would force the antagonists to accept compromise and provide the Arab leaders an honorable reason for ending the war, after which Marshall accepted the idea of consultation with the US and Britain on drafting the second plan. Marshall's lenient conceding to Bunche's demands was in part due to the CIA's report on Czechoslovakia's arm shipments to the Jewish state, and the Defense Department's warnings on the severe ramifications possible should Bernadotte lose control on the grounds. These direct meetings were of great importance as ever since the US have been propelled to take a much more active role in the Israel/Palestine conflict.

Actually, in practice the US's aid was not felt till early September when observers and equipment arrived on the grounds. August saw the situation grow to chaos in part because both mediators were largely absent from the region. Bunche stayed in Washington to assure American continued communication and assistance for the entire month, while Bernadotte spent the second half of the month in Sweden to attend a Swedish Red Cross conference of which he was still the president (indeed being able to attend these conferences had been one of his conditions for accepting the UN mission). The count was actually hoping this would be an opportunity to get the NGOs support on humanitarian aid to Arab refugees. Finally on September 3rd Bernadotte and Bunche returned to Rhodes to the region to prepare a report on the situation with a political plan and recommendations for the future. On September 9th they took their quarters in Rhodes to proceed with the drafting of the second plan, which Secretary General Lie wanted before the Paris General Assembly's opening on September 21st. Robert McClintock, an American foreign officer, together with Sir John Troutbeck, head of the British Middle East office in Cairo, arrived in Rhodes on September 13th to contribute to the second plan on behalf of their respective governments¹⁴³. On September 16th, Bernadotte signed the incomplete report to be finished by Bunche in the following days, and decided to pay a short visit to the region before flying to Paris for the assembly. He never saw the final report that carries his name.

¹⁴³ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 92

4) Folke Bernadotte's assassination

On September 17th, Bernadotte flew to Jerusalem from Beirut and Damascus where he had held meetings with the Arab League on the refugee crisis. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) created by Bunch for enforcing the second truce, advised against landing in Jerusalem as intelligence reports suspected the holy city of being under threat of attack. Bernadotte decided to land anyways¹⁴⁴, he had had numerous warnings like these before, but his intrepid nature had always kept him from following them. He accepted however the offer of one of King Abdullah's Arab Legion colonel, Abdullah El Tel, to escort him to his armed car and to British General Norman Lash at The Grand Hotel in Ramallah¹⁴⁵. After the brief meeting, Lash urged him to get an armed Arab Legion escort to accompany him to Jerusalem, the count refused, but UN chief of staff General Aage Lundström who was accompanying Folke together with his secretary Barbro Wessel, took the British General aside and told him they would still gratefully accept an armored car. Once the vehicle was off, an Arab sniper shot the car, luckily the bullet only hit the left rear fender of the Chrysler. Lundström suggested it would be safer to take a detour round Jerusalem through Latrun, but again this sound advice fell into deaf ears. The combination of the count's privileged but unjustified background with his strong Christian morals ordered him to "take the same risks as his observers,"¹⁴⁶ as he had retorted to Lundström. Besides, the count had to show them that no one could prevent him from crossing these lines. Once the convoy arrived at Mandelbaum gate, the entryway to the Jewish side of the city, it was greeted by Captain Moshe Hillman of the Israel Defense Forces.

"Noticing Hillman's service revolver tucked in its holster, Bernadotte said, "I'm afraid you'll have to leave that behind captain. None of our men are armed." Bernadotte pointed to the bullet hole in his car's fender. [...] "The UN flag is our only protection."¹⁴⁷

Bernadotte was apparently proud of the bullet hole and showed Hillman the UN flag that had saved him. At the dividing line Bernadotte was joined by another vehicle carrying a series of

¹⁴⁴ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 95-96

¹⁴⁵ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 1: «A Death in Jerusalem», Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 33

¹⁴⁶ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 1: «A Death in Jerusalem», Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 34

¹⁴⁷ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Chapter 1: «A Death in Jerusalem», Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 34

UN observers: Lieutenant Colonel William Fox, an American Marine in charge of peacekeeping in the city's Jewish sector; Belgian Major Assart in charge of the Arab sector; Frank Begley, a former FBI officer now serving as UN security officer also in charge of driving Bernadotte (he slid into the Chrysler's front seat to take the wheel); and finally French Colonel André Sérot, chief UN observer in Jerusalem. Unlike the Arab side, the Jewish side offered no military escort nor armed car for safe passage;¹⁴⁸ the presence of Captain Hillman, alone, had been provided by the provisional government.

The count had an appointment with the Israeli governor of Jerusalem, Dr. Dov Yosef, but the latter re-scheduled to 6:30pm¹⁴⁹. Begley drove the mediation team to the YMCA on King David Street, where the count would have lunch with his UN team instead. Mid-way through lunch an aide whispered to the count that Bunche had finished drafting the new plan and had just dispatched a copy to Paris, however he would not be able to join Bernadotte as his British secretary had aroused the suspicion of a military officer in the port of Haifa. Bunche planned to stay in Haifa till the woman gained entry.

Folke Bernadotte's visit was mainly intended to bolster the low morale of the UN observers and to visit the vacant Government House to which he headed after lunch. The premises were formerly occupied by the British, and were now being contemplated as new potential headquarters to replace those in Rhodes, considered too peripheral to the region. In fact, the British had advised the count to move to the holy city once it would be demilitarized to enforce the truce more effectively and be more accessible to both sides. This was ill advise as the building carried strong negative connotations in the eyes of the Jewish population who saw it as a symbol of British imperialism, furthermore the place's location on the biblical Hill of Evil Counsel would be impossible to keep supplied in times of hostility. When Bernadotte was finished with his tour, he had decided against moving there. Before leaving, the count invited a Swiss doctor to join him to the YMCA, Dr. Pierre Façel who had improvised a Red Cross hospital within the wall of the premises. The doctor, who had worked on the grounds for several months, elicited the count's curiosity for his non-partisan outlook on the conflict... Before heading to meet the governor the convoy, now consisting of three cars, stopped by an Israeli agricultural school that had been transformed into an armed fort, in direct violation of

¹⁴⁸ Kati Marton , *A Death in Jerusalem* , Chapter 1: «A Death in Jerusalem », Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 30

¹⁴⁹<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-assassination-of-count-bernadotte>

the truce¹⁵⁰. Just before taking back the road, French Colonel André Sérot, who had been sitting till now in the first car, insisted on swapping places with Captain Hillman, who had been sitting next to Bernadotte in the third car. The count had rescued Sérot's wife three years earlier from Dachau during the White Buses Rescue Mission, and the French Colonel wanted to take the time to express his gratitude in person.

Meanwhile, Stanley Goldfoot, a journalist who was a partisan of Lehi, tipped the groups' commander Yehoshua Zettler on the new expected movements of the count¹⁵¹. Lehi terrorists adapted their plans to the new meeting time with the governor and an Israeli military jeep carrying a driver named Meshulam Makover and four assassins was dispatched to Palmeh Street in the neighborhood of Old Katamon. At 5:03 p.m., right after passing an IDF checkpoint, the UN convoy drove up and found the jeep blocking its path. The terrorists, deceptively wearing IDF khaki shorts left their jeep heading towards the convoy, found Bernadotte in the third car and one man, later discovered to be Yehoshua Cohen, a veteran member who had been released from a British camp in Eritrea not so long ago, fired a Schmeisser automatic pistol into the car, spraying the interior with bullets killing first Séraut seating on the left, probably by mistake, and then Bernadotte. The other members shot the tires of the rest of the convoy and all the terrorists swiftly escaped to the religious community of Sha'arei Pina where they hid with the ultra religious Zionist revisionist Lehi sympathizers. They stayed there for a few days before fleeing to Tel Aviv in the back of a furniture truck.¹⁵²

“Rushing out of the first car, the Israeli captain, Moshe Hillman, ran back to the Chrysler. Aghast at the sight of the copiously bleeding bodies he kept repeating: "My God, oh my God," before jumping in beside the driver [Begley], and telling him to head straight for the Hadassah hospital.”¹⁵³

But it was too late, both Séraut and Bernadotte, mortally wounded, had died within minutes.

¹⁵⁰ <https://ofs-91093e5e4d9ae1ddcfccd75e688e4515.read.overdrive.com/?p=cMMIjZ1YwvA3Nebj-Tj1iQ>

¹⁵¹ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 96

¹⁵² <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-assassination-of-count-bernadotte>

¹⁵³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israels-forgotten-hero-the-assassination-of-count-bernadotte-and-the-death-of-peace-934094.html>

In the killings' immediate aftermath, Bunche oversaw the enquiry into the assassination, the arrangements to fly the bodies back to Europe, and the issuing of new orders and updates to UN observers. Dov Yosef and Dayan assured Bunche and General Lundström that the Israeli government had launched a search to arrest all the members of Lehi, but Bunche was not impressed by the Israeli efforts. In a telegram he sent to Shertok on the day of the murder, he accused the government of indirect responsibility for the act, noting that the attack had taken place in territory controlled by the Israeli government. He also pointed to the general atmosphere of incitement against the count that prevailed in the country.¹⁵⁴

The Israeli government rejected Bunche's charges yet failed to identify the exact perpetrator of the murder, although the September 19 notes of Yehoshua Cohen's diary clearly indicate that he was the assassin operating under the orders of Yitzhak Shamir. It seems likely that Ben Gurion chose not to arrest the killers or try them.¹⁵⁵

Some have even believed that the state assisted more directly the Stern group in carrying out the murders as the government had an interest in the death of the count. In mid July, Abba Eban, Israel's representative at the UN had cabled Shertok: "Our interest requires early termination [of] Bernadotte mission in order he not report [to the General] Assembly [scheduled for September 1948] raising questions [about the] future Government [of] Palestine advocating his proposals."¹⁵⁶ Although there are no records of governmental direct assistance to Lehi, these allegations are not completely unfounded. It is also interesting to note that Yitzhak Shamir instead of being tried and imprisoned later worked for the Mossad till 1965, for the government as immigration director till 1973, then was elected to the Knesset, the legislative branch of the national government, after which, "by a series of uncanny circumstances that knocked his competitors out of the running, he became speaker at the Knesset, then foreign minister. Finally, in 1983 the man who had been the country's most feared terrorist was elected prime minister."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 97

¹⁵⁵ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 97

¹⁵⁶ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 86

¹⁵⁷ Kati Marton, *A Death in Jerusalem*, Epilogue, Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 269

SECTION VII FOLKE BERNADOTTE'S IMPACT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

What have Folke Bernadotte's life achievements revealed through time? Are these achievements important? Has the count impacted history in the Middle East?

To start, the first appointed UN mediator in the Middle East announced the serious limits of the institution that chose him. Through, Bernadotte it became clear that the newly formed UN was an interventionist apparatus that needed the funds and an effective bureaucracy to enforce its diplomatically pronounced words. This lack of grounding became especially clear through figures such as General Secretary Lie who spend more energy avoiding the Palestinian problem that actually facing it. After choosing and sending Bernadotte into the lion's den and forcing Bunche to follow him, the Secretary General had been incapable of consistently assisting the missionaries in any sort of way. The missionaries were only able to enforce UN measures when assisted by the US and Britain. This demonstrated the extent of the institution's reliance on its Security Council members, most notably the US. This also announced geopolitical power relations that would operate in world politics in the Cold War decades to follow.

Second, there are certainly mysteries behind Bernadotte's assassination that have not been completely solved. It appears clear that it was in Israel's best interest to have the count forgotten as quickly as possible. Sir Brian Urquhart, who later became the head of the UN's peacekeeping operations, claimed a "conspiracy of silence" was thrown like a blanket over the assassination."¹⁵⁸ Bernadotte's assassination left a feeling of uneasiness on the Jewish state and international community. The count came to symbolize an early choice Israel made in regard to the troubled discrepancies within its public discourse. On one hand the Jewish state wanted to remain legitimate in the eyes of the international community to which it owed its existence; on the other, it had to stop those who weakened this existence. With the assassination of Bernadotte the state indicated it favored the latter over the former and showed how far it was willing to go for its survival. In this case it was turning a blind eye to (or having recourse to) illegitimate terrorism to kill a diplomat. Historian J. Bowyer Bell, said

¹⁵⁸ Sir Urquhart quoted by Kati Marton in *A Death in Jerusalem* , Epilogue, Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 260

that Bernadotte's murder "immunized Israel to international pressure and United Nations interference"¹⁵⁹

So did Bernadotte have a true impact on the Middle East? Following the first proposal Israel's government, its' press, civil society, and underground groups have greatly vilified the good-natured but tragically unqualified Folke Bernadotte. Undoubtedly Lehi overestimated greatly the actual power of the count. Ironically, the first proposal wasn't drafted by the dyslexic count and most of the ideas contained in the document, including the handing over of Jerusalem to King Abdullah, were that of the experienced and well-qualified Dr. Ralph Bunche.

"Bunche's specific contribution to the plan did Bernadotte an injustice. It contributed to his negative image and triggered the sequence that led to his assassination, and even today sharpens the criticism of his performance as a mediator."¹⁶⁰

In any case, the first and second Bernadotte plans never came into being, so it may be easy to dismiss the mediator's input, and regard his demise as wasted collateral damage in the unraveling of the Independence War. However, Bunche felt his guilt and very much understood the extent of his mistake on the status of Jerusalem, and learned from it. This realization allowed him to eventually achieve an armistice in 1949, known as the Rhodes Agreements, for which he won a Peace Nobel Prize that year. Bernadotte undoubtedly paved the way to these agreements and became unfortunately, a guinea pig, if not a scapegoat for the assistant's initial ideas, which he improved after. Bernadotte did have an impact on the conflict, albeit indirectly and tragically.

¹⁵⁹ J. Bowyer Bell quoted by Kati Marton in *A Death in Jerusalem* , Epilogue, Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 260

¹⁶⁰ Elad Ben Dror, *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949* , 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 75

CONCLUSION

Why have we failed to remember Folke Bernadotte? Some live in the shadows of others, while some occupy very well the limelight. Bernadotte undoubtedly belonged to the latter category. Ironically, this is the reason why history has failed to remember him. For better or worse, Bernadotte took credit for people's ideas when he was only their executioner. Of course, being the executioner and owning other people's ideas to translate them to reality requires a great deal of courage, which Bernadotte certainly had in abundance. But not being the originator of what he was executing, he sometimes didn't understand his actions. He probably didn't understand what it implied to refuse to support Felix Kersten in his asylum request, while hiding Walter Schellenberg in his own house. He didn't recognize what it meant in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust to tell *The New York Times* that it should be forgivable to 'obey orders without questioning'. After all, he himself had always obeyed orders: first as a cavalry officer, then as a Scout, after as a Red Cross Vice-Chairman... Ultimately, when sent to a region where the growing migrating population had survived as a result of questioning and disobeying of orders (the people of the book have indeed a religious tradition of continuous questioning; the Talmud, for example, is a series of debate) he was not equipped to understand them and their suspicion. They did not understand him either; as Kati Marton puts it, "how many aristocrats are there in Israel?". There, he relied exclusively on Bunche and accepted his suggestions, which could have been orders hadn't *he* been his superior. As a result it was Bernadotte who was held responsible for denying Jerusalem to the Jews.

In retrospect, one can say that Lehi chose the wrong target.

"Looking back, Yehoshua Cohen, the Lehi man who shot Bernadotte, concluded that "we shot the wrong man," because Bunche was the man "with the ideas"¹⁶¹. Yehoshua Zettler, the Lehi commander in Jerusalem that directed the assassination operation, was dumfounded when I made him aware of Bunche's key role. But he recovered and justified what his men had done: "Bunche hid behind Bernadotte's back," he said, "and in the end, even if Bunche

¹⁶¹ This is what Cohen, who died in 1986, told the historian Joseph Heller, in Kati Marton , *A Death in Jerusalem* , Pantheon Books, New York-1994, pp 254

planned it, it was Bernadotte who issued the plan and only he had the power and the courage to move it forward.”¹⁶²

During World War II Bernadotte executed Christain Ditleff’s plan and was the Swedish government’s scapegoat in its attempt to find back a decent international reputation. He triumphed. Three years later, he did exactly the same by executing Ralph Bunche’s plan and being the United Nations’ scapegoat in its attempt gain global legitimacy by tackling the most complex world conflict. Bernadotte perhaps thought that once more glory would eventually knock on his door and reward his patience and courage. Instead, he perished physically and was evicted from people’s memory. The paradox in Bernadotte’s heroism is that his pioneering courage and intrepid nature remained void when unguided. Ultimately, being misguided proved fatal to him and his remembrance. Still, the count always gave his bravery to others’ noble causes, and that alone deserves an honorable commemoration.

¹⁶² Yehoshua Zettler’s interview with Elad Ben Dror on May 1st 2008, in *Ralph Bunche and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN 1947-1949*, 1st edition, Routledge: 2017, pp 75

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