

# Broadcasting and the forging of History

## A case-study

Dr. Jacob Baal-Schem, IEEE SLM

Tel-Aviv University, Israel

**Abstract** - The marathon event, in which the Greek soldier Pheidippides run 42.195 kilometers (26 miles and 385 yards), to announce to the people of Athens the victory of its army at the Battle of Marathon, shows how important the transfer of information is to History. Throughout modern-time history, radio has been the conveyor of important information at critical moments. As mentioned by Boyd [1] "It was an intriguing idea to some governments, pressure groups, political enthusiasts, and revolutionary organizations in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that well crafted radio broadcasts directed to supporters and opposers alike might play a major role in successfully promoting a particular cause to achieve a specific goal".

In the case of the struggle of the Jewish people for a homeland during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Broadcasting served as an important tool, both to provide information on worldwide developments and to spread the news about activities of different clandestine militant groups. The high percentage of ownership of short-wave receivers in Palestine during WWII enabled the Jewish non-official organizations to prepare the residents towards the Declaration of Independence.

This paper will discuss in general, the impact of Broadcasting on Historical developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a specific case-study of Broadcasting stations in Palestine, towards the establishment of the State of Israel and its Broadcasting Authorities.

**Index Terms** - Broadcasting, Clandestine radio, Communication systems, History, Israel, Radio, Transmitters.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Nine notes of the (then) non-official hymn, whistled by a young technician of the clandestine broadcasting station, electrified every evening the whole Israeli Nation-in-making, during the winter of 1947. The station was the "Voice of the Jewish Defender" (The Haganah station) and the technician was Mr. Yeshayahu Lavie, who later became Chief Signal Officer of the Israeli Army and Director General of the Ministry of Communication and was recognized as "Mr. IEEE" of Israel.

Clandestine radio stations begun operating as early as the 1930s [1], but "flourished" after World War II, when transmitting equipment became easily available. In many cases it served psychological warfare and deception of propaganda. It also played a key role in the resistance [2] by informing citizens and create a sense of solidarity and hope.

In several cases, Clandestine Radio – and later Clandestine Television – served as pre-independence tools. The India Congress Radio was a mainline Congress activity whose first broadcast was made on 27 August 1942, a few days after Gandhiji and main Congress leaders were arrested (on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> August in Bombay) and revealed the arrest [3]. The transmitter – originally of 10 watt and later boosted to 100 watts, operated until 12 November 1942 when the location was revealed and the announcers were arrested.

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Similarly, the Russians had a hard time closing down all the television stations in Czechoslovakia during the Soviet invasion in 1968, because the broadcasting facilities were dispersed throughout Prague. Clandestine TV broadcasts were also done from factories and other buildings, using mobile and remote transmitters. Mobile radio transmitters were moved every few hours to avoid detection.

This paper studies the case of Jewish Clandestine Radio stations in Palestine, during the years 1945 and 1948 and their role in preparing the population towards the declaration of Independence of the State of Israel on May 15, 1948, by David Ben-Gurion.

## II. PRE-INDEPENDENCE

The aspiration of returning to their homeland was first held by Jews exiled to Babylon some 2,500 years ago - a hope which subsequently became a reality. ("By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion." Psalms 137:1). Political Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, coalesced in the 19th century, appropriated an ancient idea and an ongoing active movement, and adapted them to meet the needs and spirit of the times, within the context of the liberal nationalism then sweeping through Europe.

Political Zionism took form at the first Zionist Congress called by the Viennese journalist Theodor Herzl as a symbolic Parliament for those in sympathy with the implementation of Zionist goals. The Congress took place in the concert hall of the Basel Municipal Casino on August 29, 1897, with about 200 participants from seventeen countries and declared that: "Zionism seeks to establish a home for the Jewish people in Eretz Israel secured under public law". The term Eretz Israel ("The land of Israel") refers to Palestine, a region of the eastern Mediterranean coast from the sea to the Jordan valley and from the southern Negev desert to the Galilee lake region in the north. In 1902, Herzl wrote the Zionist novel, *Altneuland* (Old New Land), in which he depicted the future Jewish state.

At the time of the Zionist Congress, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire. By World War I, migration to Palestine had resulted in the settling of some 80,000 European Jews. During the war, both the Central Powers and the Allies courted Jewish support. On November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1917, British Foreign Secretary, Lord Arthur James Balfour declared that the government of Great Britain was in support of creating a national home for the Jews in Palestine. When after WWI the League of Nations gave Great Britain political control of Palestine, the "Balfour declaration" was incorporated word by word into the Mandatory document.

During the years 1936-47, the struggle over the Land of Israel grew more intense. Arab opposition became more extreme with the increased growth and development of the Jewish community. At the same time, the Zionist movement felt it necessary to increase immigration and develop the country's economic infrastructure, in order to save as many Jews as possible from the Nazi inferno in Europe.

During the Mandate, the Yishuv or Jewish community in Palestine, grew from one-sixth to almost one-third of the population. According to official records, 367,845 Jews and 33,304 non-Jews immigrated legally between 1920 and 1945. It was estimated that another 50-60,000 Jews and a small number of non-Jews immigrated illegally during this period. Immigration accounts for most of the increase of Jewish population, while the non-Jewish population increase was largely natural.

Between 1945-48, *Aliya Bet* (Haganah branch for immigration) organized 65 clandestine voyages that carried about 70,000 displaced persons and refugees from European and North African ports to Palestine. According to an official census, the Jewish population of Palestine in 1947 reached 608,000 persons.

On May 14, 1948, in accordance with the UN resolution of November 1947, the State of Israel was established.

### III. PUBLIC BROADCASTING IN PALESTINE

Throughout the history of the country, radio has been the conveyor of important information at critical moments [4]. About 1930, radio antennas could be seen on homes in Palestine and sets went on sale in city stores. At first, the only stations to be heard were distant ones, by short-waves from Europe, as Radio Paris and BBC Empire Service.

On April 7, 1932 at the Levant Fair in Tel-Aviv the very first radio station goes on air under a special license from the British Mandatory Government. The station came to be known as "Radio Tel-Aviv" operated until April 1935.

On March 30, 1936 the Palestine Broadcasting Service (PBS) is inaugurated by British Mandatory Authority with Studios in Ramallah and one transmitter at 668 KHz (449 meters) with a power of 20 kW.

July 1939 – Opening of the New Broadcasting Building in Jerusalem for the PBS, which bourns the Hebrew name of "Kol Yerushalayim" (The Voice of Jerusalem). In August 1939 the building is sabotaged by Jewish underground, but broadcasting quickly resumes.

In 1942 the PBS opens a second channel on 574 kHz (522 meters) at 20 kW and in 1943 the British Army opens a Palestine section of the Forces Broadcasting services (FBS), operating from different sites.

In 1947 the PBS prepares to close as the date for British withdrawal nears, and on May 14, 1948 "Kol Israel" (The Voice of Israel) starts, using the staff and facilities of PBS. Ramallah, where the PBS transmitting station is located becomes part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and broadcasts the Jordanian radio service until 1967.

Also based in Jerusalem is Sharq al Adna, an Arabic language station, who ceases transmission at the end of the British Mandate and moves to Cyprus until closure in 1956.

### IV. CLANDESTINE BROADCASTS

Three Jewish underground military organizations operated in Palestine during the Pre-independence period. The major one was the Haganah, which was subordinated to the official leadership of the Zionist Organization. The two others were "Irgun", later headed by Menachem Begin and the "Lechi" or "Stern group", based on the name of its leader.

Irgun was the first to use clandestine radio by transmitting in March, 1939 [5]. The broadcast dealt with the activities of the group as well as an attempt to recruit members. The Irgun did not devote as much time and effort to its broadcasts as did "Lechi" – who's broadcasts as "Fighters for the Freedom of Israel" opened with a whistle of its anthem.

Haganah Radio was the most extensive and well organized of the Jewish clandestine radio services. It started transmissions from Tel-Aviv on March 13, 1940 under the name of "Kol Israel" (Voice of Israel), but stopped the broadcasts on June 11, 1940, when the Zionist Organization decided to cooperate with the British Government in fighting the Nazis. Unlike Haganah and Irgun, Stern did not completely stop broadcasting during WWII. Its most celebrated underground broadcaster, Geula Cohen – who later became member of the Israel Parliament – was arrested by the British on January 18, 1946. She escaped and returned to clandestine radio broadcasting.

Haganah station returned to broadcast on October 4, 1945, under the name of "Kol Hahaganah" ("The voice of the Defense forces") and in 1947 a Jerusalem station begun operating and was especially active during the months before May 1948, on the eve of Independence. From March 1948 it used the name of "Voice of the Jewish Defender".

Between 1945 and 1948 the Haganah added Arabic broadcasts and on March 11, 1948 an Arabic-language station, believed to be Haganah-operated, "Free Jewish Station", was monitored in Cairo, Egypt.

On May 12, 1948, Haganah Radio announced that it would soon become the Voice of Israel and on May 14, 1948 it broadcasted the Declaration of Independence by the Jewish National Assembly from Tel-Aviv.

## V. IMPACT OF CLANDESTINE RADIO

Palestine appears to have been the first case of using underground broadcasting successfully to help achieve a goal – the creation of a new state [5]

The basic aim of all transmitting stations was to serve as a regular reminder to listeners that the resistance groups operating them were alive, and were struggling for both an identity, and support among the Jewish population in Palestine. In the environment of tightly British-controlled Palestine, radio – the most powerful medium of the day - was the only way of reaching a large number of people.

Haganah broadcasts were almost always less strident than those of the other two groups as they saw themselves at the legal broadcasting organization of the Jewish state-in-birth.

Clandestine broadcasts were accurate and discussed seriously the events of the day – each according to its point of view. They were apparently well heard by Palestine residents. It is clear that the British were concerned about their effect, as they devoted a great deal of effort to stopping them.

The impact of the Haganah daily broadcasts in Arabic was amazing. The news bulletins in Arabic included "information" about individual Arab leaders, their "corruption" and "facts about their embezzlement of public funds". The station would broadcast warnings to individual Arabs and gave information on the situation "behind the Arab lines" [6].

## VI. CONCLUSION

Clandestine broadcasting served many political organizations worldwide, to bring their information to the population. In the case of Israel the three major clandestine movements made good use of the media – mainly Radio – to provide information to the citizens and also as a tool for gaining larger support among local population.

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