

The Palestinian Revolt (1936–1939)¹



Background

- The revolt began after an April 1936 highway killing by Palestinian militants, reflecting deep tensions under the British Mandate.
- Core grievances: Jewish immigration surge (from 10% in 1922 to ~30% by 1935) and land dispossession of Arab people.

¹ This note was constructed using CoPilot to create a synopsis of 2025 *Empire Podcast Episode #298 (Gaza: The Palestinian Revolt, The Black and Tans, & Bomber Harris, Part 9)*. Hosts: William Dalrymple & Anita Anand, with Professor Caroline Elkins. Created Nov 2025

- British policies (e.g., Balfour Declaration) maintained open immigration despite recognizing risks.

What was the **Balfour Declaration** and why is it significant to our learning?

What was the **British Mandate for Palestine** and why is it significant to our learning?

What was the **Grand Mufti of Jerusalem** and why was it created by the British military government?

Phases of the Revolt

- Phase 1 (1936): Arab Higher Committee formed; declared a general strike. Grassroots actions included boycotts, sabotage, and attacks on infrastructure.
- Phase 2 (1937–1939): Intensified violence after assassination of an Australian colonial officer, Lewis Yelland Andrews; insurgency became more organized.

British Counterinsurgency

The British Government declared the revolt a direct challenge to their authority; imposed emergency regulations (more permissive than martial law).

- Sir Charles Tegart is brought in to command the colonial police force in Mandatory Palestine.
- Mass arrests and deportations of 200 leading Palestinian nationalist leaders (to Seychelles, Cyprus).
- Concentration/detention camps: ~10,000 Palestinians held; torture and executions common.
- Aerial bombing: RAF under Bomber Harris used heavy bombs and machine-gun strafing on villages.
- Peace gangs: Armed Arab collaborators enforced loyalty, fueling civil strife.
- Widespread destruction of villages and property to instill 'moral effect.'

What is the significance of **Sir Arthur Harris** ("Bomber Harris") in Mandatory Palestine, including the connection between his actions in Palestine and the Second World War?



What is the history of **concentration camps** in Mandatory Palestine?

What is the significance of **Major-General Orde Wingate**, especially his use of the **“Special Night Squads”** in Mandatory Palestine?

Impact

- Largest British overseas deployment since WWI (25,000 troops).
- Thousands killed; villages devastated; Palestinian leadership crippled.
- Deepened Arab-Jewish divide, shaping future conflict.

Aftermath

- Revolt ended by 1939 due to exhaustion and harsh repression.
- Orde Wingate: Evangelical Zionist; created Special Night Squads with Jewish fighters—precursor to IDF tactics.
- 1939 White Paper: Capped Jewish immigration (15,000/year for 5 years) to appease Arabs before the Second World War—outraging Zionist leaders.
- Set stage for continued instability and eventual partition debates.

When **Britain declares war on Nazi Germany in 1939**, summarize the situation in Mandatory Palestine:

Also, what is the legacy of the British Empire in Palestine?

To complete your notes, please consult the Empire Podcast #298, *Gaza: The Palestinian Revolt, The Black and Tans, & Bomber Harris (Part 9)*