A Rocky Beginning to a Critical Relationship

Project SYMPHONY: US Intelligence and the Jewish *Brichah* in Post-war Austria (U)

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> **The project was an early chapter in the history of one of CIA's oldest liaison relationships.**

Almost lost in the haze surrounding the birth of Israel and the period between the end of OSS in 1945 and the creation of CIA in 1947, Project SYMPHONY provides a glimpse of how American intelligence tried to get its bearings at the start of the Cold War. By utilizing the Brichah, *the Jewish underground in Europe, the Strategic Services Unit (SSU), OSS's immediate successor, sought to uncover perceived Soviet efforts to penetrate the flow of Jewish refugees to Palestine. Yet, the project didn't produce what was expected. It lasted only a few months, but it was an early chapter in the history of one of CIA's oldest and most important liaison relationships in a troubled region of the world. (S)*

The SYMPHONY story also opens a window on the challenges intelligence officers faced in post-war Europe, when national strategic concerns were shifting, intelligence priorities were unclear, and operational tradecraft was tested and shaped in a maelstrom of refugees and ambiguous characters desperate to find sustenance and safety through any means, legal and otherwise. (S)

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The fate of the Jewish people in Europe at the end of World War II was tied directly to their struggle to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. "Europe," Tom Segev wrote, "became a huge traffic jam. Some 14 million displaced persons were trying to get home. They traveled in trains and cars, horse-drawn wagons and oxcarts. They rode bicycles and animals. Millions went by foot, crossing border after border in endless caravans. It was a period of twilight and chaos."[1] (U)

The estimated one million European Jews who had survived the Holocaust posed, among many logistical and health issues, a resettlement problem. Many had lost their entire families and few wanted to return to their homes, even if they still existed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Outbreaks of anti-Semitism in Poland and elsewhere pushed thousands of

[1] Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust.* Trans. by Haim Watzman (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 123. (U)

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the author. Nothing in the article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations.

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remaining Jews from Eastern Europe into Allied occupation zones in western Germany and Austria.[2] The Zionist movement, which had its origins decades before the war, also acted as a siren-call to Jews to leave Europe for the British Mandate territory in Palestine.[3] (U)
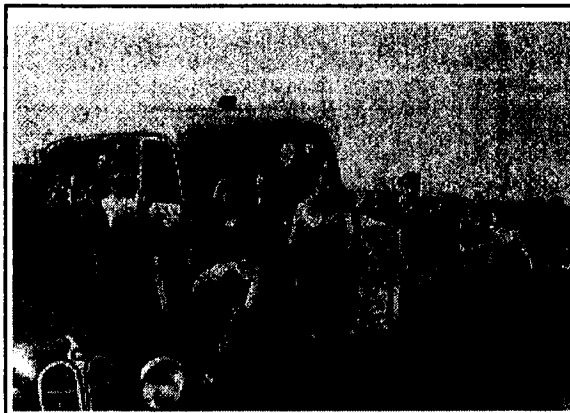
British policy, however, called for the restriction of Jewish immigration into Palestine. Thus, the movement of these refugees from Europe became an important weapon in the Jewish resistance against the British in Palestine. Ultimately, the Jewish struggle to achieve an independent state marked a major step in Great Britain's retreat as an imperial power. (U)

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[2] Jan T. Gross, *Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006). (U)

[3] For related readings on these subjects, see *Further Readings* at the end of this essay. (U)

The *Palmach*, the strike force of the *Haganah*, the military arm of the Jewish Agency in Palestine, and two terrorist organizations, the *Irgun Zvai Leumi* and the *Lochmei Heruth Israel* (respectively called the Irgun and the Stern Gang), caused heavy losses among British military and security forces between 1944 and 1948. As Winston Churchill commented, the conflict in Palestine proved to be a "squalid little war" and an intractable moral and political dilemma for His Majesty's Government. (U)

International pressure, particularly from the United States, coupled with the United Nations calling for the partition of Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs led to the British withdrawal in May 1948. The new state of Israel immediately found itself embroiled in a fight for survival with the Arabs around them and, nearly 60 years later, there is still no end to the bloodshed and violence. (U)

Displaced Jews in Germany, like those shown here in 1948 leaving for a transport ship, volunteered in large numbers to fight the British in Palestine. (U) (Photo © Bettman/CORBIS)

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The Jewish Migration and Emerging Soviet Threat (U)

In late 1945 and early 1946, the SSU received reports from stations in Europe about a Jewish underground movement there.[4] Known collectively as the Brichah, or the Escape, couriers of the Jewish Agency in Palestine, including members of the Jewish Brigade serving with the British army, were escorting Jews from Eastern Europe to safety in the West, with the eventual goal of bringing them to Palestine. (U)

Alarmingly, US intelligence learned that the Soviets were purportedly trying to infiltrate these migration channels to smuggle Russian agents into the Middle East. According to an SSU/X-2 (counterintelligence), report from Paris in February 1946, the Soviets were dispatching agents into the British and American occupation zones in Germany and Austria. (S)

Posing as Jewish victims of Nazi concentration camps, these agents were being processed through Allied displaced persons (DP) channels and the secret Jewish smuggling rings. The Soviet agents planned to spread rumors throughout Europe and in Palestine that the British hated the Jews and supported the Arabs for control of the Holy

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[4] Primary material on Project SYMPHONY can be found in Records of the National Clandestine Service (NCS). ⊏ ⊐ CIA Agency and Records Center (CIA ARC). The author has a fully sourced copy of this article. (U)

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understanding the modus operandi of the Soviets.

Land. Ultimately, according to an intelligence report given to the Americans by the French, the Soviets wanted to draw the Jews closer to communism and incite them to revolt against the British in Palestine. In addition, the report listed the addresses of meeting places and the names of Jews in Austria involved in smuggling refugees. (S)

Other reports discussed Soviet efforts to exploit Jewish resettlement. A summary of a Bern report, for example, highlighted the Soviet penetration of Jewish organizations in Austria by using the black market to raise funds. Capt. James J. Angleton, the head of X-2 in Italy who would become CIA's chief of counterintelligence, reported on Jewish escape efforts in January 1946. He cited sources that claimed the Russians were actively helping Jews flee Poland. (S)

Angleton also relayed information that the Russians had provoked Poles to attack Jewish civilians to discredit the Polish government, force the British to deal with the question of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and justify Soviet repression in Poland. In other dispatches during the first half of 1946, Angleton submitted Italian intelligence reporting on Jews transiting that country on the way to Palestine, including the names of ships carrying them from Italian ports. (S)

As concern mounted in Washington about these reported Soviet efforts to infiltrate the Brichah, X-2 in early March 1946 pro-
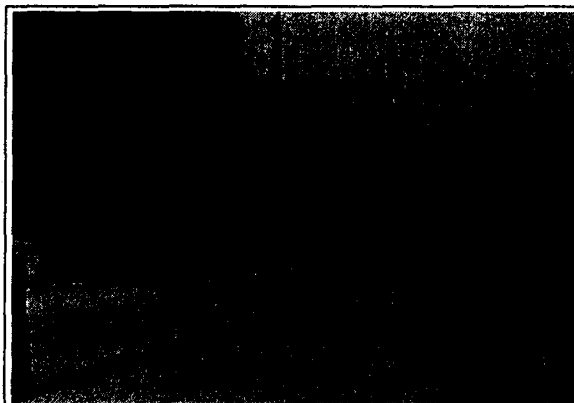
posed a penetration of the Jewish underground. A non-communist Jewish refugee willing to go to Palestine would be an ideal candidate. Once recruited, the agent should be "advised to participate fully in communist activities in Austria, Germany, or Italy short of violence." More essential than how the Soviets planned to spread propaganda in Palestine, SSU wanted to discover routes, identities of agents, contacts, hideouts, finances, and falsification of documents. Washington felt that this project could prove critical in understanding the modus operandi of the Soviets and it encouraged field stations to submit projects for review in Washington. (S)

Project SYMPHONY Is Born (C)

Even before Washington sent its message, X-2 in Austria had come to consider the Brichah a target. Maj. Edward P. Barry, the chief of SCI/A (as X-2 was for-

mally known in Austria), later recalled:

This office began laying plans for a project which was to use the present extensive Jewish emigration for a source of CI information. Preliminary investigations on the subject plainly showed that no one in the American Forces in Austria had a clear picture of either the procedure or the agencies involved. (S)

By early April 1946, Capt. Jules Koenig, a member of X-2's small base in Vienna (the main office was in Salzburg), had submitted a proposal to Headquarters "to use the influx of Jewish refugees into Austria from Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and

The specter of the Soviet Union hung over much of Europe, and especially in Vienna, which the Soviets occupied in 1945. Here, Stalin's image reminds Viennese a year later of the presence of the Russians (U) (Photo © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS)

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Poland for sources of CI information, for exact data on the intelligence service of the Jewish Agency in Austria, for all intelligence activities run by any persons or organizations who use this influx into Austria for such purpose." (S)

Project SYMPHONY's Case Officer (U)

Jules Koenig: born in Ostend, Belgium, in 1912...the son of Polish immigrants...served in the Belgian army at the outbreak of the war... evacuated to United Kingdom...worked for the Belgian Red Cross and other jobs before moving to the United States in 1942 and becoming a diamond cutter ... inducted into the Army in 1943, commissioned as a Signal Corps officer and joined OSS. (U)

Koenig, born in Belgium of Polish-Jewish parentage, had served with OSS as an Army officer in the Middle East and in Italy. At the end of the war, he transferred to Austria and joined X-2 in Vienna. In his new assignment, Koenig observed firsthand the immigration networks flowing through the Austrian capital. Koenig emphasized that the Jewish underground flight was not a new phenomenon:

> The exodus of Jews from Russian-occupied countries is an exact replica of the vast legal or illegal emigration movement which began at the ascension of the Nazi Party in Germany around 1932. Hundreds of thousands of Jews fled Germany with the aid of Jewish communities of countries neighboring Germany, (Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, etc.), to find their way to any country in Europe or into Palestine. (S)

After the Nazis ended the legal movement of Jews from Germany and Austria, underground organizations helped the Jews escape the Nazis. Funded by outside groups, including the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (commonly called the "Joint" or the JDC), the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the Political Section of the Jewish Agency, and the *Aliyah Bet*, Jewish agents penetrated the Third Reich to rescue the Jewish and to collect intelligence during the war. These personnel later formed the basis for the Brichah in numerous European countries immediately after the war. (S)

According to Koenig, during the war "the various British Intelligence Services freely used the emissaries of this section [i.e. the Jewish Agency] for penetration, intelligence and DA [double agent] purposes. The representatives of the AJDC acted as a liaison with the Allied intelligence services and eventually financed this courier-cum-intelligence service." Some 240 Palestinian Jews volunteered to parachute into the Balkans in 1943, and the British established training camps in Cairo and Haifa. The following year, 32 men and women were dispatched in joint British-Aliyah Bet missions into Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy, Slovakia, Austria, and Yugoslavia. The Nazis captured 12 of the Jewish agents and executed seven.[5] (S)

In effect, Koenig saw Project SYMPHONY as a continuation of the earlier wartime collaboration between the Allies and the Jews, this time facing a new threat—the Soviet Union. In his April 1946 proposal to Headquarters, Koenig visualized the project, which he dubbed SYMPHONY, as having several immediate and long-terms goals, overt and covert:

- *Immediate Aims (overt).* To extract information of CI value from refugees escaping from Russian-occupied countries: composition, trends and activities of the communist parties in those countries; location and identification of concentration camps in Russia and Russian-dominated countries; identification of NKVD deserters or NKGB deserters; identification of NKVD agents or communist agents sent among the refugees; identification and elimination of Nazi elements, infiltrating amongst the refugees to escape punishment from the authorities of their respective countries.

- *Immediate Aims (covert).* To ascertain and locate the agents of the Jewish Agency in Austria who run both the emigration of Jews from Russian-dominated countries and a highly-efficient intelligence service into those countries; to ascertain and spot those persons who smuggle Jews out of those countries for high sums of money and who, being in contact with NKVD officials, also

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[5] The most successful of the Palestinian agents, Yesheyahu Trachtenberg, better known as Shaike Dan, had a remarkable wartime and post-war intelligence career and is remembered as the savior of thousands of Romanian Jews. (U)

[Pier] runs an efficient net into Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland . . . and another net which tracks down Germans suspected or proven to have committed atrocities.

smuggle war criminals and agents into the Allied-occupied zones, to work either in Austria or in Palestine.

• *Immediate Aims (covert).* To locate those persons within official organizations, such as the Hungarian Red Cross, the Austrian Red Cross, the Italian Red Cross, some so-called repatriation committees with official and semi-official status, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency and the (Lublin) Polish repatriation committees, who provide false papers and identification cards to those smugglers and to the smuggled for the furtherance of this traffic; to take all measures of security safeguard to eliminate or neutralize such traffic when it becomes a danger to the security of the Allied-occupied zones or to its establishments and units.

• *Long-Range Aims.* To penetrate those organizations of whatever kind they are—Jewish, political or of intelligence nature of any country—which send Russian-trained or Russian-inspired agents through this flow of Jewish refugees to further propaganda or intelligence aims either in Allied-occupied zones of Austria or Germany, in Allied countries such as France, Italy, the United States and/or Palestine. (S)

A CONDUCTOR Is Found (C)

Capt. Koenig also outlined the structure of the Jewish refugee

groups in Austria and the various international organizations that supported the immigrants as they passed through the country. In particular, Koenig commented on the role of a young Austrian-born Jew, Arthur Pier, who represented the Jewish Agency in Vienna but actually served as the head of the Brichah in Austria. (S)

According to Koenig, Pier claimed to represent several Jewish newspapers, including the Palestinian Telegraphic Agency. "Officially Pier is here to collect items of Jewish interest for his newspaper employer, principally items on atrocities against Jews during the war and after," the American intelligence officer wrote. "Actually he runs a highly efficient intelligence net, through couriers into Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. He is also running another net," Koenig reported, "which tracks down Germans either free or in captivity in Allied-occupied zones of Germany or Austria, who are suspected or proven to have been committing atrocities against Jews during the war." Pier then turned these war criminals over to the Allies, while he also collected evidence for the Jewish Agency. (S)

Pier's operational activities in Eastern Europe were of more immediate interest to Koenig than his Nazi-hunting skills. Koenig told Headquarters that Pier was the key link in facilitat-

ing the movement of Jews from the Russian-dominated countries, and he gave him the operational codename of CONDUCTOR. After organizing the Jews into small groups, Pier's agents led them surreptitiously across the border into Austria. The groups made their way to Vienna, where the Joint initially placed them in the city's Rothschild Hospital. (S)

Pier screened the refugees for information desired by the Jewish Agency and then prepared to move them to other DP camps in the American zone. Those refugees who were to go to Palestine were placed in a camp near Salzburg, while those who could not or did not want to go to the Middle East were sent to other camps in Germany. Koenig calculated that Pier was responsible for smuggling hundreds, if not thousands, of Jews on a monthly basis into Austria and eventually towards Italy and Palestine.[6] (S)

At first, Koenig posed as a journalist seeking information about the Brichah. As his questions became more of an intelligence nature, Koenig admitted to Pier that he was an US intelligence officer. (S)

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[6] In addition to Pier's covert smuggling mission, Koenig discovered numerous illegal rackets in Austria, including smuggling of goods and people and black-market activity. He also described smuggling of Hungarian non-Jews, many with Nazi collaborationist backgrounds, from Budapest to Vienna. (S)

> *Headquarters reluctantly agreed to Wender's use . . . as to black-market activity, Koening told Washington that an honest businessman in Vienna is "as rare as snow in a very hot place."*

In the meantime, Koenig also wanted to place American personnel in the Jewish camps in Vienna, principally the Rothschild Hospital and the Jewish Agency's interrogation center on Alserbacherstrasse. These agents, also posing as American journalists, would collect intelligence on Soviet order of battle as well as economic and political information behind the Iron Curtain. (S)

American contact with the Jewish Agency, Koenig believed, would expand SSU's understanding of the personalities involved in the illicit smuggling of refugees. This aspect of the project, however, proved the most difficult because few Americans available to him in Vienna could speak Yiddish or Hebrew. Lastly, Koenig hoped to infiltrate a Jewish agent into the refugee pipeline to assess the extent of the Soviet penetration of this movement. (S)

LILAC (C)

When he wrote his proposal in April 1946, Koenig already had selected a man to serve as his agent to infiltrate the Jewish smuggling network. According to Koenig's notes, Erich Wender had an extensive background in intelligence as an agent for both the Germans and the British during the war. Born in 1907 in Austria-Hungary, Wender was a machine construction engineer who had immigrated to South America in 1928 but returned two years later to establish his own company in Austria. (S)

Arrested by the Gestapo in 1939 as a Jew, Wender was not sent to a concentration camp. Instead, the German Abwehr used Wender (with the name Carol Popescu) as an agent in the Middle East. He was dispatched to Istanbul to travel to Syria, where he was to collect military information for the Nazis. Wender, however, turned himself over to the British in Turkey and was doubled. He also became an agent of the Joint and established a courier network in Eastern Europe. Wender, along with several other Jews, smuggled letters from the JDC in Istanbul into Hungary while also providing British feed material to the Germans. (S)

In all, Wender made some 12 trips from Budapest to Istanbul between 1941 and 1943, when the Germans arrested him for communicating with the enemy. Wender was held in captivity until early 1944 but was transferred to an insane asylum after he was declared mentally incompetent following a suicide attempt. When he learned that the Gestapo planned to interrogate him again, Wender tried to escape from Budapest, but he was betrayed to the Germans. He admitted all of his activities on behalf of the Joint to the Gestapo. (S)

Wender was held in Vienna as a prisoner until the Soviets entered the city in April 1945. The Russians then used him as an interpreter for an intelligence unit until his release after the German collapse. Wender accepted a position with the Joint in Vienna, but was later arrested as a black marketer by the US military in Vienna. (S)

On 19 April 1946, X-2 in Austria sent a cable to Washington requesting that Wender be vetted as an agent for Project SYMPHONY. Koenig, in fact, had already commented on Wender's potential usefulness to the new project and the need to get him out of confinement. "Inasmuch as he is a fervent Zionist," Koenig wrote, "and has a very extensive knowledge of the Joint and Brichard [sic] organizations he may later be 'sprung' and used in project SYMPHONY." (S)

Through Koenig's intervention, the US Army conducted a "mock trial" of Wender. He was sentenced to 90 days in jail for his participation in the black market, but he wasn't remanded to prison. Instead, Koenig took custody of Wender and informed him that he would be working for American intelligence. In his new task, Wender, now designated as LILAC, would be Project SYMPHONY's conduit for clandestine collection on the Jewish Agency and penetrations by the Soviets as well as the British. Koenig agreed to pay Wender 750 shillings a month and to provide him rations. (S)

Koenig discovered that the Soviets were particularly active in penetrating Jewish groups in Austria.

Headquarters only reluctantly agreed to Wender's employment. "Previous information on subject from British sources," Washington reported, "appears to corroborate points in subject's story." Aspects of Wender's background raised questions about his honesty and his willingness to play all sides. "There seems little doubt that subject is a typical professional agent, and no more reliable than most of that stamp. There seems little reason to assume that he could be trusted any further than his own immediate interests lie, or that he would maintain a confidence any longer than it is to his immediate profit to do so," Headquarters noted. "Contact and use of subject should be predicated on this basis." (S)

Upon receiving the memorandum from Headquarters, Capt. Koenig met with Wender and went over some of the points of confusion regarding his relationships during the war. In responding to Washington, Koenig commented, "it is our opinion that Wender basically told the truth." Looking at the whole man, Koenig observed, "Wender certainly is not the snow-white angel he occasionally pictures himself to be, but his Zionist activities are thought to be honest." (S)

Regarding Wender's black-market activities, Koenig explained, "this is so current right here in Vienna that an honest businessman is as rare as snow in a very hot place." Koenig felt that he had suitable control over Wender and that he could provide Ameri-

can intelligence with information that it sought.[7] Koenig exerted considerable efforts to glean as many details from Wender about his contacts during the war and how the Joint operated in Eastern Europe. (S)

The SYMPHONY Begins (C)

As he worked on getting clearance to use Wender, Koenig feverishly collected information about Pier's associates and transmitted information about the Austrian Jew to other stations. Koenig was also interested in the efforts of the other Allied powers in Austria to collect information on the Jewish Agency.[8] (S)

Through various means (including telephone taps and mail intercepts), Koenig discovered that the Hungarians and the Soviets were particularly active in penetrating Jewish groups in Austria.[9] On 22 April, for example, SCI in Vienna sent a report to Washington noting that Russian officers had visited Jewish

camps in both the American and British zones. While inspecting the Bindermichl camp near Linz, one of Pier's agents, Simon Wiesenthal—the famed Nazihunter of later years—recognized a Soviet NKVD official.[10] Furthermore, Koenig's report noted that during a Soviet visit to a Jewish DP camp in the British zone, Pier brought with him a copy of a telegram from the British headquarters in Austria, leading Koenig to suspect that Pier had penetrated the British military itself.[11] (S)

On 25 April 1946, US military police in Vienna conducted a "surprise" raid on Jewish DP camps, looking for evidence of black-market dealings, foreign currency, and unauthorized US Army material. The Army also searched Pier's apartment, where it found a box of microfilmed OSS records and forged border-crossing permits. The fact that Pier had the OSS records raised eyebrows in Vienna and Washing-

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[7] Wender's background and activities also attracted the interest of the Russians. At the end of June 1946, Koenig learned that a communist agent had offered Wender a job to inform on the Americans. (S)

[8] The British in Austria were especially interested in Pier's activities and sought to arrest those involved in the clandestine Jewish immigration. (S)

[9] Transcripts of telephone taps and letter intercepts done by the Civil Censorship Group Austria (US) were given to the head of X-2 in Vienna and are found in the files. (S)

[10] For more on Wiesenthal's work after the war and his connections with Pier, see Alan Levy, *The Wiesenthal File* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994) and Hella Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal: A Life in Search of Justice* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996). (U)

[11] Koenig later reported that Pier had access to all of the British intercept files on his activities and those of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. In mid-June 1946, Koenig reported to Washington that he had learned from Pier that the Jewish Agency had a source in the British headquarters. (S)

Ruffer sought to establish formal ties between the Jewish Agency and US intelligence. Koenig rebuffed him, saying he could deal only in local issues.

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ton, but fears were laid to rest when the documents were found to pertain to war crimes. OSS had apparently borrowed the documents from the Jewish Agency during the war and microfilmed them. The Americans then provided a copy of the microfilm to the Jewish Agency. (S)

During the raid, the military police also arrested a man who turned out to be the long-awaited Soviet that Pier had offered the Americans in April. At that time, Koenig told Washington, "information of high intelligence value is being promised by the Jewish Agency people. For instance," Koenig wrote, "the Jewish Agency people are arranging the desertion of a Jewish NKVD major in Vienna around the middle of May 1946." (S)

According to Koenig, Pier would allow American intelligence "to hold this Russian officer...until such time that his detention will not be necessary any more." As it turned out, Pier did not tell Koenig that he already had the man, Michael Pines, until the US Army arrested Pines for possession of an illegal firearm. (S)

Pines, a Polish Jew who was also known as Stefan Janeczak, had served in the Polish army and the Soviet NKVD during the war. At the time of his desertion in December 1945, he was the head of the Polish Security Police in Danzig. He barely escaped and moved to Munich, where he worked as a doctor in a Jewish

DP camp. Koenig managed to have Pines sprung from US confinement and then interrogated him. (S)

Contacts with the Jewish Agency (U)

By early May 1946, Koenig had already provided US authorities a good deal of information about the Brichah at a time when the US military governments in both Austria and Germany were just beginning to recognize the existence of the Jewish underground and the sensitivity with which the United States had to handle Jewish refugees. Koenig tried to help Washington better understand the underground by sending to Headquarters among other reports a list of the organizations involved and special designations. (S)

A pivotal moment might have come and gone in May when Koenig met with a man then known only as Ruffer, the roving representative of the Jewish Agency's Political Department in Europe. Ruffer was Gideon Rafael, a German Jew who had worked since 1934 in efforts to relocate Jews out of Europe and, after the war, to recover lost property. In meeting Koenig, Ruffer sought to establish formal ties between the Jewish Agency and US intelligence. Koenig, however, rebuffed him, saying he could only discuss local issues. He would, however, pass on information from the Jewish

Agency to his superiors. According to Koenig's account of the meeting, Ruffer then presented his version of the history of the Jewish Agency's relations with the OSS and British intelligence during the war. (S)

Ruffer offered the Americans the use of Jewish couriers in Eastern Europe, with the stipulation that any intelligence obtained would be credited to the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. Ruffer had noted that both the British and the Americans had exploited the Jewish Agency during the war for information, but gave it no credit. (S)

When Ruffer asked Koenig what sort of intelligence he wanted, the American replied that he actually sought counterintelligence information. Specifically, Koenig told Ruffer that he wanted to know if foreign powers were targeting the United States either through military or political means or by subverting the Jewish immigration channels. Koenig also mentioned that he was interested in "any intelligence about war criminals which would be uncovered by the Jewish Agency representatives and would benefit either the War Crimes Board or the State Department." (S)

Tensions Surface (U)

In Austria . . .
In May Koenig complained about the US government's lack of support for the Jewish refugees. After a discussion with the SSU section responsible for intelli-

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gence on Hungary, Koenig described the problems the Joint faced in helping Jews in that country. Because the Russians refused to allow American citizens to staff the JDC or any of the other relief organizations in Hungary for fear that these individuals were American intelligence officers, the Jewish organizations in that country had no oversight from their main offices. (S)

Instead of supporting all Jews, the Joint in Budapest dissolved into a racket in which only the favored few obtained supplies, Koenig argued. As a result, money, food, and supplies were squandered, giving the organization a poor name. Koenig told Headquarters that the American element of the Allied Control Commission in Hungary was compounding the problems, writing that "[the commission] has taken a completely biased attitude towards Jewish emigration. They are influenced by the completely wrong connections they have made among Hungarian circles and now are cooperating actively with the Russians in their program to stop any emigration towards the US Zone of Austria." (S)

. . . and at Headquarters

At about the same time, Headquarters began questioning aspects of Vienna's reporting. In one example, SSU questioned information Pier had given Koenig about a US Army officer assigned to the Allied Control Commission in Hungary who Pier alleged was "on more than friendly terms with NKVD offic-

ers in Budapest." SSU wanted to know the identity of the officer and the validity of the information. Headquarters went on to chide Koenig:

> *This is an example, again, of odds and ends of information which come to us with no indication as to what development will be made, or what information or corrective action may result from the information. If any service to US organizations can be rendered through information which we obtain, it is important that this be done.[12]* (S)

Koenig's close ties with the Brichah in Austria also worried Washington because of the poten-

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[12] In response, Security Control (the successor to X-2) in Austria stated that it had contacted the G-2 of the US Forces in Austria and the American military mission in Budapest, informing both of the allegations against the officer. (S)
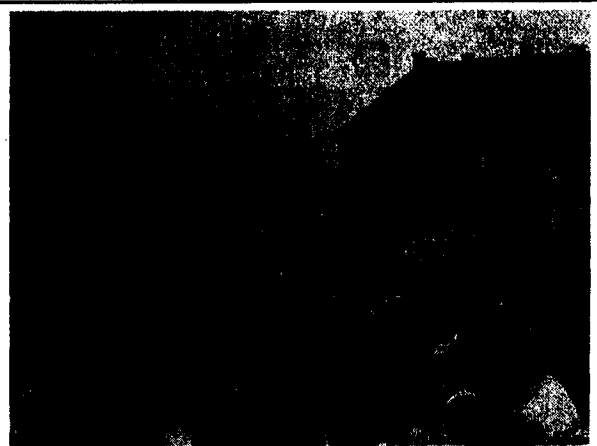
tial ramifications of the British crackdown on the Jewish uprising in Palestine in June 1946, which included a raid on the Jewish Agency's headquarters. This led Washington to advise X-2 in Austria, "things of this nature may explain to you why we have felt that caution should be exercised in our activities in a certain project." (S)

It also became more apparent to Washington officials that Koenig actually worked with a clandestine organization that countermanded official US military government policies designed to staunch the flow of refugees from Eastern Europe into the American zones of Germany and Austria. (S)

Coupled with the growing anxiety that American intelligence might be supporting a subversive element, SSU had nagging doubts about Arthur Pier.

British attempts to restrict Jewish emigration to Palestine led to demonstrations of thousands of refugees in Germany and elsewhere. The policy also led to tension within US policymaking circles. (U) (Photo © Bettman/CORBIS)

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"It is our feeling that this case should be neither continued nor reinstated under circumstances attendant in the past."

Responding to Vienna's trace request, the SSU station in Cairo replied that it could find no information on the man. In fact, Cairo confirmed that Pier never worked for the British Security Intelligence Middle East (SIME) and that his press card was false. Cairo Station advised Vienna to proceed with caution. (S)

Closing the Project (U)

On 12 July 1946, Richard Helms, who had just been named the acting chief of Foreign Branch M—the section in Headquarters responsible for operations in Central Europe—sent a cable to Vienna stating that while Washington had no objection to continuing the project, Headquarters needed more information about SYMPHONY's value and its overall potential. By this time, Capt. Koenig had already returned to the United States for demobilization, leaving the project without any US control. In late August, John G. Heyn, the acting head of Security Control in Austria, offered this update:

The project continues to lie idle for lack of a case officer. In the meantime, additional thousands of emigrants are pouring out of Poland into Austria. The original plan for operating the project, by planting six Yiddish speaking interrogators in the Rothschild Institute in Vienna, is as impossible to carry out today as it was in the beginning. Reason: There are no American Yiddish speaking interrogators to be had. CON-

DUCTOR is as anxious as ever to cooperate in removing non-bona fide Jewish elements from the stream of immigration. The control feature of the project remains as it was; fear to in any way offend US authorities lest the entire emigration be closed down. CONDUCTOR has made every effort in the past to fulfill our requirements. However, direction is needed and having received no replacement for Konig [sic], Vienna is over-taxed. The Chief of Mission has expressed an interest in the positive information available through CONDUCTOR. We shall try to maintain the contact in order to keep the avenue open to the wealth of fresh CE and positive information that these emigrants are bringing out with them.[13] (S)

By the time Headquarters received Heyn's report, it had already lost interest in Project

John G. Heyn, head of SC/Austria. (U) (Photo courtesy of Margaret W. Heyn)

SYMPHONY. On 19 September, Helms and the Austrian desk officer, Evelyn M. Williams, sent a lengthy review of the project to Austria for comment.

It is our feeling that this case should be neither continued nor reinstated under circumstances attendant in the past. If [original emphasis] the case is developed at all, it should be on the basis of the most secure covert penetration of the agency concerned (by covert penetration we mean without the knowledge of any of its officials or personnel) instead of the open collaboration of the past. (S)

The 16-page review was scathing in its criticism of the project. Headquarters felt that the two main agents had significant black marks in their past, especially Wender who had made a fortune as a courier between Turkey and Eastern Europe during the war. After questioning Koenig upon his return to Washington, Headquarters learned that Koenig's description of Pier had been misleading. It turned out that Koenig and Pier had met each other during the war and not, as Koenig had suggested, in Vienna. Headquarters also learned to its dismay that Capt. Koenig had himself been affiliated with the Jewish Agency before joining the Army. (S)

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[13] When Heyn sent the report, Security Control in Vienna had only one officer assigned, while the main base in Salzburg counted only seven personnel, including secretaries and a guard. (S)

Even more troubling, it was argued, Koenig's work had, no doubt, come to the attention of the British.

For his part, Pier operated in a conspiratorial manner while the Brichah "has been more and more associated with, if not actually sponsoring, certain terroristic groups in a desperate effort to attain its aims." Pier's own methods, as seen by Washington, were "strong-arm and unethical." Those who opposed him were simply "taken care of" or "liquidated." Koenig's own sympathies for the plight of the Jewish refugees and his growing reliance on Pier for intelligence appeared to give sanction to the illicit activities being committed by the Jewish underground in Austria. (S)

Moreover, Michael Pine, the NKVD major that Piers had promised and who instead had been picked up on weapons charges, proved a disappointment. The information he provided did not justify Koenig's obtaining Pine's release from jail and his removal to Munich. (S)

Two other incidents raised security questions. In mid-May, Koenig had met a man who claimed to be a Russian scientist employed by the Soviet military in Austria. This man, known as Donsky, wanted to leave Austria as quickly as possible with his wife to travel to Palestine. While Donsky stated that he would not reveal all of his information about his work for fear of being branded a traitor, he offered to supply general details about life in the Soviet Union. (S)

Koenig agreed to this proposal and began to make arrangements to have Donsky flown to Italy. When Headquarters finally

learned about Koenig's steps on behalf of the Russian, it ordered its Vienna representative to drop all contact with him. SSU feared that Donsky's supposed defection was a ruse, a provocation orchestrated by the Soviets to catch the United States in an unfriendly act. Likewise, Koenig's withholding of Pier's alleged source in the British headquarters in Austria became a matter of contention between SSU officials in London, Vienna, and Washington. (S)

In sum, Helms and Williams felt that the intelligence coming out of Project SYMPHONY had been low grade and could be procured through the open press. The Brichah had been the main beneficiary of the exchange, and it appeared that Koenig had fallen under Pier's sway. The balance sheet of Pier's gains from X-2 in Vienna far outweighed any benefit to the United States. (S)

Even more troubling, it was argued, Koenig's work had, no doubt, come to the attention of the British in Austria and Palestine.[14] The diplomatic ramifications of British exposure of the American operation would simply be too great. The review advised the abandonment of

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[14] The concern was justified. A CIA overview of the project in May 1950 indicated that Pier closed his project down immediately after Koenig left Austria in the summer of 1946 because the British had obtained copies of all of Pier's reports to Koenig. (S)

Project SYMPHONY. While Headquarters did not rule out a new covert project to penetrate the Jewish immigration, it seemed impossible under the circumstances. (S)

The Aftermath (U)

Chastened, the Vienna base acknowledged in early October that Project SYMPHONY and the use of Pier had come to an end. Despite promises to Army officials to continue to exploit the Jewish Brichah, the lack of case officers effectively closed off that approach. The G-2 of the United States Forces in Austria, supported by the 430th Counter Intelligence Corps Detachment, thereafter furnished the bulk of the reporting on the Jewish underground. The Central Intelligence Group, which assumed SSU's foreign operations in the fall of 1946, dropped contact with Erich Wender after a final report in October 1946. (S)

Arthur Pier, however, did not drop out of sight. In late January 1947, Pier met with a CIG officer in Vienna and complained that the United States had "cooled off toward him." Pier, in turn, was told that he had not been forthright in providing information to the United States and that there was no way that the large numbers of Jews coming from Eastern Europe could escape without some type of cooperation on the part of the Soviets. (S)

SYMPHONY had a dampening effect on the establishment of intelligence liaison relations between the United States and Israel.

The US representative informed Pier that the US Army's Counter Intelligence Corps was now responsible for collection from refugees. If Pier were to continue to work for the Americans, he had to agree not to impose any demands on the Army. Pier again stated that he wanted to cooperate with the Americans, but "was not in a position to engage in straight intelligence." After this point, Pier was turned over to Harris Greene, the deputy chief of the CIC office in Salzburg ⊏

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(S)

Pier's performance as a source for the Army was equally disappointing. Pier reported only once to the CIC, in February 1947, and failed to tell his handlers that he had picked up a Soviet lieutenant colonel and his wife who had defected through Jewish channels. Pier's departure from Austria to Palestine in the summer of 1947 ended the short-lived relationship between US intelligence and the Brichah. (S)

James J. Angleton (U) (File photo)

SYMPHONY's Significance (C)

As an intelligence-gathering operation, Project SYMPHONY was a bust, but it had a broader, dampening effect on the establishment of intelligence liaison relations between the United States and Israel. It would not be until 1951, five years later, that the CIA and the then-new Mossad could agree to cooperate. In part, this was the result of the lingering US concern that the Soviets had penetrated the infrastructure of the Israeli intelligence and security services.[15] Consequently, exchanges between the two services remained mostly of a counterintelligence nature ⊏

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[15] According to one history, "since its birth in 1948, little Israel was a big target for Soviet intelligence and a massive sieve when it came to leaks." Over the years, Israel suffered several high-profile spy cases dating to recruitments by the Soviets before the establishment of the country. See Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, *Every Prince a Spy: The Complete History of Israel's Intelligence Community* (Boston: Houghton Miflin, 1990), 30–31, 49–50, and 98–100. (U)

Afterword: What Became of the Players in Austria?(U)

SYMPHONY's case officer, **Capt. Jules Koenig**, would return to civilian life as a diamond cutter. He remained in contact with some of those involved in SYMPHONY, among them Gideon Rafael (Ruffer) and Edward P. Barry, the head of X-2 in Austria when the project was conceived. At one point, the records show, Koening made a vain attempt through Barry to return to intelligence and join the CIA. He died in 1989. (S)

After the war, **Edward P. Barry** briefly returned to civilian life ⊏

⊐ Barry died in Italy in the 1990s. (S)

John G. Heyn, the officer responsible for SYMPHONY after Koenig left Vienna, ironically, had studied music in the 1920s in Germany to become a conductor. Early in the war he enlisted in the Army and rose to

become a captain. Released from the military in January 1946, he joined SSU ⊏ ⊐ He died in 1996. (S)

Erich Wender disappeared. (U)

Gideon Rafael (aka Ruffer), worked with the Jewish Agency in Europe to recover lost Jewish property and then served at the United Nations as the agency's representative during the partition talks in 1947. Rafael held senior positions in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, including Director-General and served five years as Israeli ambassador to the United Kingdom. He died in 1999.[16] (U)

The longest and brightest burning star of the episode was *Arthur Pier*, who remained active in intelligence circles long after the formation of the State of Israel in 1948. He took the name *Asher Ben-Nathan* and served as chief of the Operations Branch of the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry (*HaMahlaka HaMedinet*), the intelligence wing of the Israeli Foreign Service, under Boris Guriel. (U)

Competition among the intelligence services (including the Political Department, the *Shin Bet* or the General Security Service, and Israeli military intelligence) after Israel's formation, led to the centralization of intelligence under the head of *HaMossad LeTeum*, better known as the Mossad or the Institute for Coordination. The Mossad assumed the collection of foreign intelligence and disbanded the Foreign Ministry's Political Department, precipitating the "spies' revolt" in March 1951, when Ben-Nathan and other members of the Political Department resigned en masse and destroyed their records rather than turn them over to the new Mossad. (U)

By 1953, Ben-Nathan was back in intelligence and played a key role in the transfer of French nuclear technology to Israel, thus allowing it to become the first nuclear power in the Middle East. He went on to hold positions of power in the Israeli government, including service as Director General of the Ministry of Defense (1959–65), Israel's first ambassador to West Germany (1965–69), and ambassador to France (1970–75). He worked many more years in advisory roles at the center of Israeli government and has won numerous public service awards.[17] In 2005, Ben-Nathan published a memoir in Germany in which he mentions Koenig in a section describing US interest in the Brichah. (U)

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[16] See Bernard Reich and David H. Goldberg, *Political Dictionary of Israel* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2000), 320, and Gideon Rafael, *Destination Peace: Three Decades of Israeli Foreign Policy, A Personal Memoir* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981).

[17] For more on Asher Ben-Nathan, see Itzhak Ben, ed., *Who's Who in Israel and Jewish Personalities All Over the World* (Tel Aviv: Who's Who in Israel Publishers, 1999); Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars: The Untold History of Israeli Intelligence* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991); Haggai Eshed, *Reuven Shiloah: The Man Behind the Mossad Secret Diplomacy in the Creation of Israel*, trans. by David and Leah Zinder (London: Frank Cass, 1997), Samuel M. Katz, *Soldier Spies: Israeli Military Intelligence* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1992); and Raviv and Melman, *Every Prince a Spy*. (U)

Further Reading (U)

On Zionism in general:
Hershel Edelheit and Abraham J. Edelheit, *History of Zionism: A Handbook and Dictionary* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000);

Bernard Reich, *Historical Encyclopedia of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992);

Bernard Reich and David H. Goldberg, *Political Dictionary of Israel* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2000). (U)

Post-WWII and the fate of Jewish survivors in Europe:
Thomas Albrich, *Exodus durch Osterreich: Die judischen Fluchlinge 1945-1948* (Innsbruck, AU: Haymon-Verlag, 1987);

Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939-1945* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1981);

Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York: Random House, 1970);

Yehuda Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance: A History of Jewish Palestine 1939–1945* (New York: Atheneum, 1970, rep. ed. 1973);

Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jews on Post-Holocaust European Jewry* (Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press, 1989);

Asher Ben-Natan and Susanne Urban, *Die Bricha: Aus dem Terror nach Eretz Israel, Ein Fluchthelfer errinnert sich* (Dusseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2005);

Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Beck, eds., *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998);

Ted Szulc, *The Secret Alliance: The Extraordinary Story of the Rescue of the Jews since World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991). (U)

British military and intelligence operations in Palestine:

Menachem Begin, *The Revolt* (New York: Nash Publishing, 1977, rev. ed.);

J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror Out of Zion: Irgun, Lehi, and the Palestine Underground 1929-1949* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977);

Gregory Blaxand, *The Regiments Depart: A History of the British Army, 1945-1970* (London: William Kimber, 1971);

David A. Charters, *The British Army and the Jewish Insurgency in Palestine 1945-47* (London: MacMillan, 1989);

David A. Charters, "British Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1945-47," *Intelligence and National Security* 6 (January 1991): 115–40;

A.J. Sherman, *Mandate Days: British Lives in Palestine 1918–1948* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997);

Saul Zadka, *Blood in Zion: How the Jewish Guerrillas Drove the British Out of Palestine* (London: Brassey's, 1995). (U)

The formation of Israel and its first war with the Arabs:
The literature on this subject is extensive. One example is Bernard Postal and Henry W. Levy, *And the Hills Shouted for Joy: The Day Israel Was Born* (New York: David McKay Company, 1973). (U)

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