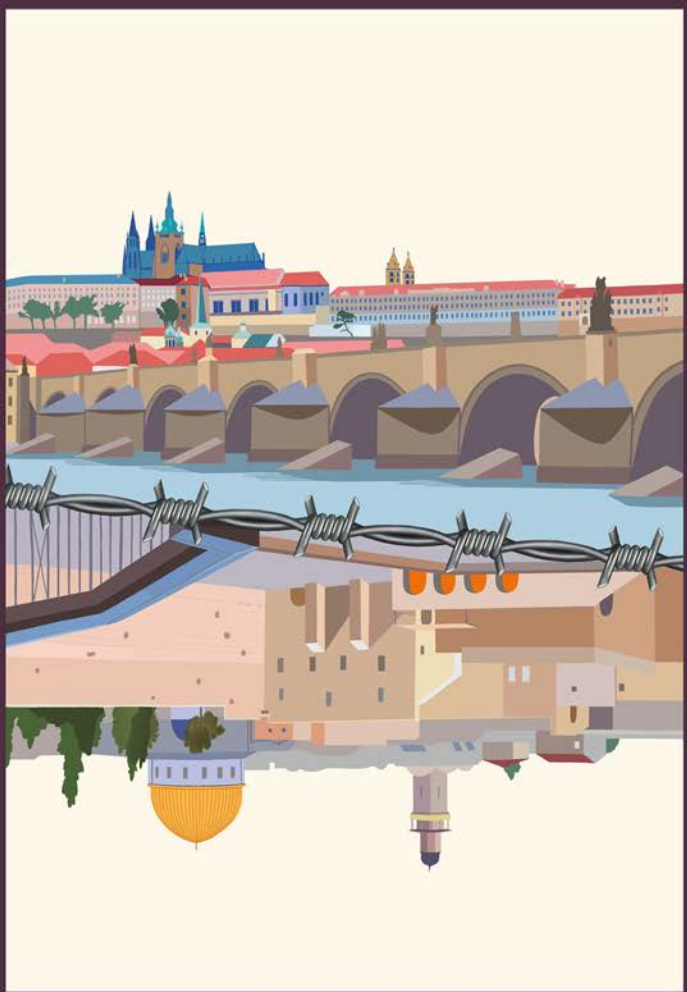
Eva Taterová

Czechoslovak Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict from 1948–1989



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Preface

The events of the Arab–Israeli conflict—which to this day remain among the most complex and polarizing issues in the Middle East—resonated widely within the politics and society of postwar Czechoslovakia. Although the conflict unfolded in a geographically distant region, Czechoslovakia emerged as one of the very active Eastern Bloc states in the Middle East during the Cold War, and in many instances the conflict exerted a direct influence on domestic political developments. These included political purges targeting Czechoslovak Jews, expressions of support for Israel as a form of resistance to the communist leadership, and among other factors the expansion of economic cooperation and cultural exchange with selected Arab countries. At the same time, Czechoslovakia's engagement in the Arab–Israeli conflict offers an important contribution to the understanding of Cold War history from the distinctive perspective of a Soviet satellite state, drawing on recently declassified Czech archival sources.

A comprehensive analysis of Czechoslovak diplomacy toward actors involved in the Arab–Israeli conflict between 1948 and 1989—the period of communist rule in Czechoslovakia, with selected references beyond this timeframe—illuminates not only the evolution and transformation of Czechoslovakia's diplomatic approaches, but also the broader diversity of its activities in the Third World within the intersecting frameworks of East–West confrontation and East–South global relations. In addition to identifying and explaining conceptual shifts in Czechoslovak diplomatic priorities in relation to the development of bilateral relations with actors directly involved in the Arab–Israeli conflict—namely Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinians—the book examines the extent to which Czechoslovakia's status as a satellite state of the Soviet Union shaped its diplomatic approaches during the Cold War. Particular attention is devoted to the character of Czechoslovak involvement, especially the interplay between communist ideology and political pragmatism, as well as to the degree of compliance with Soviet priorities in contrast to the limited semi-autonomy of certain diplomatic initiatives toward the aforementioned actors. The analysis also addresses Czechoslovakia's contributions to the political,

economic, military, cultural, and educational development of the aforementioned actors. Altogether, it makes the topic of Czechoslovak diplomacy towards the main actors of the Arab-Israeli conflict a significant part of the Cold War history that has thus far been rather downplayed.

The activities of the Eastern Bloc in Third World countries during the time of the Cold War have aroused the increasing interest of academia and the public. Due to the opening up of archives in some former Soviet satellites over the last years, researchers have had the opportunity to study the declassified documents to reconstruct the political, economic, military, cultural, scientific, and educational interactions of the Eastern Bloc in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Most of the existing publications examining the interactions between the Eastern Bloc and the Middle East predominantly focus on the Soviet Union with respect to the traditional interpretations of the Cold War as the exclusive game of the superpowers. To date, the policies of Soviet satellite states toward the Middle East have been examined only selectively, most often through studies of bilateral relations between individual satellite states and specific Middle Eastern countries—frequently Israel[1], reflecting the sustained international scholarly interest generated by its global historical significance—or through case studies focusing on particularly prominent moments in Middle Eastern history that had broader international repercussions. The attitudes of Czechoslovakia towards either the Middle East or the Arab-Israeli conflict are in these publications enlisted only briefly or not covered at all. In general, there are not many publications on foreign policy activities of Czechoslovakia in the Middle East in the Cold War either in Czech or English that could offer a comprehensive analysis of Czechoslovak interactions with the actors of the Arab-Israeli conflict—thus, the proposed book aims to fulfil the existing gap of knowledge and to provide an in-depth analysis of the topic.

Contemporary historiographical approaches to the Cold War emphasize the need to move beyond an exclusive focus on diplomatic relations between individual states and to account for the full spectrum of interactions—economic, military, cultural, educational, and otherwise—that shaped international relations during the period. Since the end of the Cold War, the study of *diplomatic history* has increasingly shifted toward the broader framework of *(new) international history*, an approach that conceptualizes the Cold War as a global process extending far beyond the bilateral confrontation between the United

1 Lorena De Vita, *Israelpolitik: German-Israeli Relations, 1949–1969* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); Jeffrey Herf, "At War with Israel: East Germany's Key Role in Soviet Policy in the Middle East," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16, no. 3 (2014): 129–163; Kata Bohus, "Not a Jewish Question? The Holocaust in Hungary in the Press and Propaganda of the Kádár Regime during the Trial of Adolf Eichmann," *The Hungarian Historical Review* 4, no. 3 (2015): 737–772.

States and the Soviet Union. Within this perspective, growing attention has been devoted to the roles of other state and non-state actors from the so-called First, Second, and—particularly following the completion of decolonization—the Third World.[2]

This book is grounded in the historiographical framework of the so-called *New Cold War History*, which has challenged earlier superpower-centered interpretations by highlighting the agency of satellite states and regional actors. Rather than treating these actors as passive recipients of superpower policies, this approach emphasizes their capacity to shape Cold War dynamics within specific regional contexts.[3] The Middle East and subsequently the Arab-Israeli conflict emerges from this perspective as a key arena of Cold War rivalry, in which both superpower blocs and their individual members pursued a wide range of political, economic, military, and cultural activities. The growing availability of newly declassified archival collections from former Eastern Bloc countries has further reinforced this shift, providing historians with access to previously unavailable sources and opening new possibilities for revising established interpretations of the Cold War.[4]

One of the ultimate ambitions of this book is to present new and, until now, in many cases unpublished findings on Czechoslovak foreign policy toward the direct actors in the Arab-Israeli conflict, drawn predominantly from archival research by using the traditional methods of historical inquiry. In reconstructing the diplomacy of communist Czechoslovakia toward actors in the Middle East, more than one hundred thousand pages of archival documents were examined for the purposes of this study, following an initial preselection process. Originally, archival findings were intended to be compared and contrasted with interviews with individuals who had taken an active role in Czechoslovak diplomacy toward the Arab–Israeli conflict, specifically diplomats and political decision-makers. In practice, however, this approach proved largely unfeasible, as the majority of actors involved in Czechoslovakia's Middle Eastern diplomacy and politics during the period under study are no longer available as living witnesses. Although a small number of individuals who were active during the final years of the regime remain alive, access to them for the purposes of interviews for the present study could not be secured. Where available, this limi-

2 Jan Koura, "První, druhý, třetí svět… Studená válka jako globální fenomén" [The First, Second, and Third Worlds… The Cold War as a Global Phenomenon], *Dějiny a současnost* 41, no. 5 (2019): 16–18.

3 Michael F. Hopkins, "Continuing Debate and New Approaches in Cold War History," *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 4 (2007): 913–934.

4 Odd Arne Westad, *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000), 5–6.

tation was partially mitigated through the use of published memoirs and autobiographical accounts.

The core of the research was conducted in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (AMZV). In the context of a totalitarian political system, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was not the ultimate locus of decision-making: crucial decisions were made primarily at the level of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), often after consultation with the Soviet leaders. Nevertheless, the MFA played an essential coordinating role and was typically responsible for preparing the analytical and background materials on which these decisions were based. As a result, the AMZV preserves thousands of documents relating to the Middle East, including reports from Czechoslovak embassies in Amman, Beirut, Cairo, Damascus, and Tel Aviv; internal assessments of current political developments; records of diplomatic meetings and official visits, together with their preparatory materials; diplomatic correspondence; minutes of meetings held at the MFA; and, where relevant, situational reports from other ministries, most notably the Ministry of Foreign Trade. These materials are drawn primarily from the fonds of the relevant Territorial Departments, Political Reports, and the records of meetings of the MFA Collegium.

These sources are further complemented by holdings from the Archive of the Office of the President of the Republic (KPR), which include materials on state visits, the conferral of state honors, presidential correspondence, and other related records. Another substantial body of sources was consulted at the National Archives of the Czech Republic (NAČR), which hold documents of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (ÚV KSČ) from the period 1945–1989. These materials include records concerning the approval of specific policy decisions and proposals for individual measures related to actors involved in the Arab–Israeli conflict. The relevant documents for this book are organized within the fonds of the First/General Secretaries of the Communist Party—Antonín Novotný and Gustáv Husák—as well as those of the Presidium and the International Department. At the time of writing this book, the fonds of Gustáv Husák remained closed for an extended period due to an ongoing process of cataloguing and digitization. This circumstance inevitably imposed certain limitations on the research. Nevertheless, as the majority of key materials are mirrored in the holdings of the AMZV, this restriction does not constitute a substantial obstacle to the present study, even though some personal insights and informal commentary of Husák may necessarily be absent.

Another important repository consulted for this research is the Military Historical Archives (VHA), reflecting the central role of military cooperation in Czechoslovakia's engagement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. At present, the catalogued and publicly accessible records of the Ministry of National Defense extend only up to 1970. Regrettably, archival collections relating to Czechoslovak–

Israeli military relations in the late 1940s were severely damaged during the Prague floods of 2002 and are therefore no longer available. This limitation is, however, partially mitigated through the use of relevant literature, most notably the documentary source edition: *Czechoslovakia and Israel 1945–1956: Documents*[5] by Marie Bulínová, Jiří Dufek, Karel Kaplan, and Vladimír Šlosar (1993), whose editors had access to these materials prior to their destruction. A complementary role was played by the Security Services Archive (ABS), which preserves records of state security and intelligence services, particularly in relation to instances of state-sponsored antisemitism. While this archive also contains extensive materials on intelligence activities involving actors connected to the Arab–Israeli conflict both within Czechoslovakia and abroad, a systematic analysis of these sources lies beyond the scope of the present book.

Given the limited accessibility of relevant Soviet and Middle Eastern archival sources, this study does not systematically integrate such materials; instead, it relies primarily on Czech archival evidence in reconstructing Czechoslovak foreign policy toward the Arab–Israeli conflict. In recent years, criticism of the Russian Federation by the international academia has been expressed for not providing full access to the archival documents from the time of the Soviet Union but just carefully chosen files that support the current regime's interpretations of Russian history.[6] The situation is even more complex in the Middle East, where much of the region remains governed by regimes that are reluctant to open sensitive issues related to their twentieth-century history. For this reason, states such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria generally grant limited—or no—access to archival collections on contemporary history for foreign researchers.[7]

Israel likewise exercises caution in granting access to archival collections dealing with sensitive areas such as foreign policy and national security. Nevertheless, the relevant fonds in the Israel State Archives (ISA) and the Central Zionist Archives (CZA),—which provided valuable insights into the affairs of communist Czechoslovakia, particularly with regard to Czechoslovak Jewry—were consulted. This research was complemented by archival work conducted at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York, whose collections address related themes. Additional perspectives on Czechoslovakia's activities in the

5 Marie Bulínová, Jiří Dufek, Karel Kaplan, and Vladimír Šlosar, ed., *Československo a Izrael 1945–1956. Dokumenty* [Czechoslovakia and Israel 1945–1956: Documents] (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1993).

6 Alexander Leonidovich, "In the Dark: Access to Key Russian Archives Is Being Restricted as the State Seeks to Tighten Its Control of Historical Memory," *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, October 8, 2025, https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2025/10/08/in-the-dark-en.

7 Kian Byrne, "A Survey of Middle East Archives: Egypt," *Wilson Center*, 2020, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/survey-middle-east-archives-egypt; Kian Byrne, "A Survey of Middle East Archives: Lebanon," *Wilson Center*, 2020, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/survey-middle-east-archives-lebanon.

Middle East were provided by archival holdings at The National Archives (TNA) in London and at the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (CADLC) in Paris. As former colonial powers in the Middle East, Great Britain and France retained significant political influence in the region and possessed extensive information on developments in Middle Eastern countries particularly in the early years of the Cold War.

Acknowledgements

This book, *Czechoslovak Diplomacy and the Arab–Israeli Conflict from 1948 to 1989*, has come into being through the support, encouragement, and the intellectual generosity shown to me by numerous individuals and academic institutions. The book is the result of more than a decade of research, initiated during my doctoral studies at the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University in Brno. That research culminated in a doctoral dissertation and was later revised for publication in my Czech-language book, *Czechoslovakia and Israel, 1948–1967: From Support of Zionism to Open Hostility*[8] (2022). This research was subsequently expanded and substantially deepened through my later and current affiliation with the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague. The immediate realization of this book was made possible by a three-year research grant, without which extended research stays in foreign archives and participation in international conferences would not have been feasible. This work was funded by the Czech Science Foundation as part of the project *Czechoslovak Diplomacy and the Arab–Israeli Conflict from 1948–1989* (Grant No. 23-05300S), carried out at the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

A significant impetus for my scholarly engagement with the topic of Czechoslovak diplomacy in the context of the Arab–Israeli conflict during the Cold War was my study stay at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Be'er Sheva in 2010–2011. This formative experience was followed by further guest lecturing and short-time research stays at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, the University of Jordan in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and Aydin University in Turkey all under the Erasmus+ Programme, as well as participation in workshops organized by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Israel and the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University in the United States, which were devoted to scholarly debates on various aspects of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

8 Eva Taterová, *Československo a Izrael v letech 1948–1967: Od podpory sionismu k otevřenému nepřátelství* [Czechoslovakia and Israel, 1948–1967: From Support of Zionism to Open Hostility] (Prague: Epocha, 2022).

These stays enabled me to consult and discuss my research with local colleagues and substantially broadened both the scope of my work and my understanding of the Middle East and its many historical, political, and social dimensions. Likewise, independent travel to other countries of the region examined in this book—Egypt, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, and Syria—and conversations with the locals inspired me to trace at least a part of the shared history of our nations. Through these encounters, I came to recognize that, despite the fact that this shared history has yet to be comprehensively examined within the existing scholarly literature, Czechoslovakia and its activities in the region remain vividly present in local historical memory.

This long-term research would not have been possible without the assistance and support of many individuals, too numerous to be named in full. I would nevertheless like to express my sincere gratitude to my student assistants, Suren Mardanian and Amar Khairi, who provided invaluable help during the three-year research project through extensive research surveys on specific aspects of the book and through their contribution to its final editing. I am also grateful to Petr Novák and Daniel Monaghan for the careful language revision of the manuscript, which helped to polish my English. My thanks further extend to my colleagues at the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences; the Department of International Relations and European Studies at Masaryk University; and the Department of History at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, whose insights, encouragement, and intellectual exchange helped me to refine my ideas, shape new directions of inquiry, and sustain me throughout my academic journey. I likewise greatly value the many inspiring discussions with scholars, students, and friends from other Czech and international academic institutions. I am particularly indebted to the staff of all the above-mentioned archives for their unfailing assistance in locating essential sources. My sincere thanks also go to V&R unipress/BRILL for making the publication of this book possible. To all of them, I express my sincere gratitude and affirm that I alone bear responsibility for any errors or shortcomings in this book.

Last but not least, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my dear ones—above all my family and friends—whose unwavering support has accompanied me throughout my academic career.

Prague, December 2025 *Eva Taterová*

Czechoslovakia in the Postwar Middle East: A Soviet Satellite on the Cold War Front

Historical Background of Czechoslovak Activities in the Middle East

Born out of the postwar reordering of Europe following the end of the First World War, the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) envisioned its role not merely within Central Europe but across a broader international landscape shaped by political, cultural, scientific, and economic aspirations. While its primary focus was evidently placed on Europe, the United States, and the other major powers —both through bilateral relations and the platforms of international organizations—the leaders of the newly established state also recognized the necessity of expanding a network to promote Czechoslovak interests in other parts of the world.[9] In this context, the Middle East was of particular significance due to its relative geographic proximity to Europe, rich natural resources, and, last but not least, its cultural and scientific importance—especially in relation to the history of the world's monotheistic religions and, more broadly, to the history of humankind.[10]

Although engagement in the Middle Eastern region was often challenging—particularly after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following First World War, which led to the region becoming a sphere of influence for European great powers such as France, Italy, and Great Britain[11]—it simultaneously presented numerous opportunities, especially in the realm of economic cooperation. The local markets were, in many respects, underdeveloped, creating economic prospects for already highly industrialized countries such as Czechoslovakia.

9 František Zbořil, *Československá a česká zahraniční politika: minulost a současnost* [Czechoslovak and Czech Foreign Policy: Past and Present] (Prague: Leges, 2010), 212–214.

10 See Petr Zídek and Karel Sieber, *Československo a Blízký východ v letech 1948–1989* [Czechoslovakia and the Middle East in 1948–1989] (Prague: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 2009), 15–16.

11 See Rory Miller, *Britain, Palestine and Empire: The Mandate Years* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016); Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013).

Over time, Czechoslovakia gradually expanded its presence in the region, with particular emphasis on countries such as Persia, Turkey, Egypt, and British Mandatory Palestine.[12] These priorities were also expressed through the founding of the Oriental Institute in Prague in 1922, which brought together prominent scholars such as the renowned Arabist Alois Musil, the Hittitologist Bedřich Hrozný, the Egyptologist František Lexa, the Iranologist and Turkologist Jan Rypka, and others.[13]

From the early years, the territory of British Mandatory Palestine was at the center of attention of Czechoslovak authorities, a territory that would later become the central arena of the Arab–Israeli conflict, which was already taking shape. In fact, compared to other countries in the region—which were rich in mineral resources such as oil and natural gas—the interwar Palestinian economy had relatively little to offer, with its primary exports limited to citrus fruits, particularly the renowned Jaffa oranges, along with a few other tropical agricultural products. However, what truly distinguished Palestine was the presence of Czechoslovak Jews, whose transnational ties constituted a natural link between their former and new homelands, emerging from successive waves of Jewish migration to the Middle East beginning in the late 19th century.[14] The Jewish community with roots either directly in Czechoslovakia or in the former territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire played a significant role in fostering bilateral relations, not only politically and culturally but also economically.[15]

Several Zionist organizations emerged in interwar Czechoslovakia, including the Makkabi sports association and the Zionist youth organizations HeHalutz and Tchelet Lavan. One of their primary objectives was to mobilize Jewish youth in Czechoslovakia, foster a stronger sense of Jewish identity, and ultimately encourage their emigration to Palestine.[16] It is also important to note that interwar Czechoslovakia was among the few countries in the region that not only

12 See Adéla Jůnová Macková, *Nerovné partnerství: Československo-íránské vztahy 1918–1938* [Unequal Partnership: Czechoslovak-Iranian Relations in 1918–1938] (Prague: Národohospodářský ústav Josefa Hlávky, 2013); and Adéla Jůnová Macková and Libor Jůn, ed., *Československo v Orientu, Orient v Československu 1918–1938* [Czechoslovakia in the Orient, the Orient in Czechoslovakia 1918–1938] (Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv ČR, 2022).

13 "Historie" [History], *Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences*, https://orient.cas.cz/cs/o-nas/historie/.

14 Tatjana Lichtenstein, *Zionists in Interwar Czechoslovakia: Minority Nationalism and the Politics of Belonging* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 271–273.

15 Tomáš Klusoň, *Československo-arabské vztahy v meziválečném období: Politické a hospodářské vztahy meziválečného Československa k arabským zemím Blízkého východu* [Czechoslovak–Arab Relations in the Interwar Period: Political and Economic Relations of Interwar Czechoslovakia with the Arab Countries of the Middle East] (thesis, Charles University, 2011), 122–123.

16 Lichtenstein, *Zionists in Interwar Czechoslovakia*, 226–231.

tolerated its Jewish minority but also granted it full civil and political rights. This inclusive environment facilitated the establishment of a Jewish political party, which, although minor in parliamentary representation, possessed the authority to propose legislation. Its efforts were primarily directed toward combating antisemitism and addressing the specific cultural, religious, and educational needs of the Jewish minority.[17] The party's role became increasingly significant as traditional forms of antisemitism began to intensify in parts of Czechoslovak society, reflecting the broader rise of far-right political ideologies across Europe, particularly the ascendancy of Nazism in Germany.[18]

Despite the rise of antisemitism, especially in 1930s Europe, the right of the Jewish people to self-determination—embodied in the aspiration for an independent state—was largely perceived positively within contemporary Czech society. For this reason, segments of the Czechoslovak political elite, as well as parts of society, viewed the Zionist project as a parallel endeavor—a sister republic pursuing comparable goals and facing, to some extent, similar historical challenges.[19] This favorable disposition is further evidenced by the fact that Czechoslovakia hosted three World Zionist Organization congresses in 1921, 1923, and 1933 in Carlsbad, underscoring the positive relationship between Czechoslovakia and the Zionist movement during the interwar period.[20] In 1937, the global congress of the Orthodox movement Agudat Yisrael—which at the time stood in opposition to the ideology of Zionism—was also held in Marienbad.[21]

Altogether, these factors contributed to the need to establish an official Czechoslovak diplomatic mission in Jerusalem in 1925 initially in the form of a consulate, which was elevated to the status of a general consulate a decade later.[22]

17 Nonetheless, the political influence of Jewish representatives remained constrained, largely due to internal divisions within the community. The most prominent divide existed between secular, urban Jews and ultra-Orthodox Jews mostly in rural eastern Slovakia and especially Subcarpathian Ruthenia, who adhered to traditional values and modes of life – see for more details Kateřina Čapková, *Czechs, Germans, Jews?: National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

18 Marie Crhová, "Politické strany a politika židovské menšiny" [Political Parties and the Policy of the Jewish Minority], in *Politické strany, 1861–1938* [Political Parties, 1861–1938], ed. Jiří Malíř and Pavel Marek (Brno: Doplněk, 2005), 965–986.

19 Moshe Yegar, *Československo, sionismus, Izrael: Historie vzájemných vztahů* [Czechoslovakia, Zionism and Israel: Shifts and Turns in Complex Relations] (Prague: Victoria Publishing, 1997), 23–29.

20 Zbořil, *Československá a česká zahraniční politika*, 277.

21 Daniel Mahla, *Orthodox Judaism and the Politics of Religion: From Prewar Europe to the State of Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 148.

22 See Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Territorial Departments–Regular (TO-O), Israel 1945–1959, f. 9, ref. no. 106143, *Generální konzulát v Jerusalemě – zastavení činnosti* [Consulate General in Jerusalem – Termination of Activities]. 27. 2. 1952, 1.

The mission was headed by Czechoslovak diplomat Vladimír Fric (1925–1932), followed by Miroslav Kadlec (1932–1939). Concurrently, two honorary consuls also operated in the region: Viktor Grünwald (1927–1939) in Haifa and Rudolf Stütz (1929–1935) in Tel Aviv, who was later succeeded by Zikmund Glasel (1936–1939). Grünwald and Glasel wielded considerable influence among Zionists in Palestine and played a pivotal role in fostering commercial and cultural relations between Czechoslovakia and Palestine, particularly through the Czechoslovak-Palestinian Chamber of Commerce.[23] This step formed part of a broader expansion of Czechoslovak diplomatic presence in the region, which also included the opening of missions in Cairo (1923) and Beirut (1926).[24] Although cooperation with the Jewish community in British Mandatory Palestine was, for the reasons outlined above, more dynamic, active, and eventful than with the Arabs—who, in most cases, lacked any significant ties to either Czechoslovakia or Central Europe—contemporary Czechoslovak diplomacy adopted a cautious approach. This strategy aimed to engage with both communities, ultimately resulting in a declared stance of neutrality amid the escalating conflict between the two groups.[25]

Czechoslovak activities in interwar Mandatory Palestine received diplomatic reinforcement through the state visit of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who, in April 1927, became the first head of state to visit the territory.[26] Although Masaryk's visit was originally conceived as unofficial, the Czechoslovak consul Fric quickly recast it as a strategic opportunity. In addition to arranging visits to major heritage sites, he facilitated meetings with leading political and religious figures in Mandatory Palestine, including David Bloch-Blumental, the mayor of Tel Aviv; Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem; Sir Herbert Samuel, the High Commissioner for Palestine; and the philosopher Hugo Bergmann.[27] The president's visit received extensive and detailed coverage in the local media, further enhancing Czechoslovakia's standing in the region. Masaryk's reputation as a staunch opponent of antisemitism, particularly due to his role in the infamous Leopold Hilsner trial[28], brought considerable prestige not only to himself

23 Klusoň, *Československo-arabské vztahy v meziválečném období*, 107–113.

24 Istanbul (1919), Cairo (1923), Jerusalem (1925), Beirut (1926), Tehran (1930), Bagdad (1933), Tel Aviv (1950), Damascus (1954), Amman (1964).

25 Zídek and Sieber, *Československo a Blízký východ*, 129–130.

26 Yegar, *Československo, sionismus, Izrael*, 41–43.

27 Miloš Pojar, *T. G. Masaryk a židovství* [T. G. Masaryk and Judaism] (Prague: Academia, 2017), 214–223.

28 The so-called *Hilsner Affair* involved a young Jewish man who was accused of murdering a Christian girl despite a lack of substantial evidence in 1899. The case provoked a significant wave of public antisemitism in the Czech Lands, then part of Austria-Hungary, largely fueled by deep-seated anti-Jewish prejudices. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, at the time a university professor, was among those who openly condemned the antisemitism surrounding the case and criticized the trial's lack of fairness – See for more details Jiří Kovtun, *Tajuplná vražda:*

but also to Czechoslovakia. In 1935, the mayor of Tel Aviv, Meir Dizengoff, awarded Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk honorary citizenship of the city on the occasion of the president's 85th birthday. Later in 1940, the Czechoslovak-Lithuanian kibbutz Mishmar Zevulun was renamed Kfar Masaryk.[29]

Figure 1: President Tomáš G. Masaryk (left) visiting Jerusalem in 1927 together with philosopher Hugo Bergmann (middle) and the Czechoslovak Consul Vladimír Fric (right) © Wikipedia Commons

Despite the escalating conflict between Zionists and the local Arab population, which had already led to violent riots in Mandatory Palestine during the 1930s and created a highly tense security situation,[30] mutual relations between the actors persisted through various forms of cooperation. However, these interactions were ultimately disrupted by the destruction of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany and the subsequent events of the Second World War. The former Czechoslovak territory—now the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia—and the clerofascist puppet Slovak State also implemented racial and discriminatory

Případ Leopolda Hilsnera [A Mysterious Murder: Case of Leopold Hilsner] (Prague: Sefer, 1994); Martin Wein, *History of the Jews in the Bohemian Lands* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 40–45.

29 Jitka Radkovičová, "Československo pod palmami aneb s Masarykem po Izraeli" [Czechoslovakia under the Palms, or With Masaryk through Israel], *Masarykův lid* 21, no. 3 (2015): 8–10.

30 See Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–1998* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 121–128.

anti-Jewish laws, leading to the near-total elimination of approximately 90% of prewar Czechoslovak Jewry.[31] Nevertheless, even during Second World War, Czechoslovak contacts in the Middle East remained strategically significant, as the Czechoslovak consulate in Jerusalem played an important role in coordinating Czechoslovak military activities within Western Allied units in the Middle East and North Africa.[32] Additionally, some Czechoslovak soldiers participated in the conflict as part of allied military units operating in the Middle East.[33]

Principles and Evolution of Czechoslovak Foreign Policy in the Post-War Era

Following the end of the Second World War, the international community faced a range of complex political challenges. The post-war period was marked by significant turbulence, characterized by profound political, social, economic, and ideological transformations, both in Europe and the Middle East. These regions quickly emerged as key arenas in the geopolitical struggle between the two dominant superpowers of the era—the United States and the Soviet Union.[34] Efforts to rebuild war-torn territories and revive devastated economies across Europe were accompanied by rising tensions and growing resistance in colonial and dependent territories, ultimately contributing to the global process of decolonization. This period was further shaped by a severe economic crisis, ethnic and religious tensions, and instability driven by rapidly changing international dynamics, alongside a growing danger of political coups that often resulted in the establishment of undemocratic, authoritarian regimes and, in some regions, even the outbreak of armed conflicts.[35]

31 See Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Benjamin Frommer, "Holocaust v Čechách a na Moravě" [The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia], in *Židé v českých zemích: Společná cesta dějinami* [Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Lands], ed. Kateřina Čapková and Hillel J. Kieval (Prague: NLN, 2022), 241–291.

32 Yegar, *Československo, sionismus, Izrael*, 60–61.

33 Paul Lenormand, "The Palestinian Triangle: Czechoslovaks, Jews and the British Crown in the Middle East, 1940–1943," *European Review of History–Revue européenne d'histoire* 27, no. 1–2 (2020): 99–221; Zdenko Maršálek, *"Česká" nebo "československá" armáda? Národnostní složení československých vojenských jednotek v zahraničí v letech 1939–1945* ["Czech" or "Czechoslovak" Army? The National Composition of Czechoslovak Military Units Abroad, 1939–1945], 1938–1953 (Prague: Academia, 2017), 271.

34 See John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Melvyn P. Leffler and David S. Painter, *Origins of the Cold War: An International History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

35 Nicholas White, *Decolonisation: The British Experience since 1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 11–32.

Simultaneously, there were concerted efforts to establish a new international order, with the newly founded United Nations (UN), established in 1945, envisioned as its central guarantor. Despite widespread hopes for the construction of a better, more peaceful world grounded in international law—where potential violators would be held accountable and all nations could coexist in harmony and prosperity—the post-war reality diverged significantly from this vision.[36] Instead of universal cooperation, the emerging global order was characterized by ideological polarization, strategic rivalries, and the frequent undermining of the very legal and moral principles upon which the new international system was ostensibly founded. These developments collectively ushered in a new era of international relations—one often marked by instability, rapid transformations, and recurrent conflicts.[37] Already in the final stages of the Second World War, it was apparent that internal tensions existed within the wartime alliance of the victorious powers, and both superpowers were already pursuing the formation of networks of allied states, either under their direct influence or aligned with their respective ideological frameworks.[38]

In the post-war period, Czechoslovakia was primarily tasked with the challenging process of restoring its statehood, consolidating its domestic political, economic, and social conditions, and, crucially, defining its position in the emerging new system of international relations.[39] Following the end of the Second World War, significant efforts were undertaken to restore Czechoslovak foreign policy, notably through the reappointment of Jan Masaryk as Minister of Foreign Affairs and the facilitation of the return of interwar-era diplomats to their former posts. Available data indicate that, as of January 1, 1948, the MFA employed a total of 1,256 individuals, 602 of whom had already been serving at the Ministry prior to 1938.[40] Although the Ministry was not initially a stronghold of the KSČ, over time an increasing number of communist-aligned diplomats—among them Deputy Minister Vladimír Clementis—were able to consolidate their influence and ultimately achieve dominance within the institution.[41] Al-

36 Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (New York: Random House, 2006), 3–50.

37 Maarten van Alstein, "The Meaning of Hostile Bipolarization: Interpreting the Origins of the Cold War," *Cold War History* 9, no. 3 (2009): 301–319.

38 See John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).

39 Jan Rychlík, *Československo v období socialismu 1945–1989* [Czechoslovakia in the Period of Socialism 1945–1989] (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2020), 35–44.

40 Jan Vytopil, "1948: Likvidace samostatné zahraniční politiky" [1948: The Liquidation of an Independent Foreign Policy], *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic*, 2005, http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/o_ministerstvu/historie_a_osobnosti_ceske_diplomacie/unor_1948_na_mzv.html.

41 Jindřich Dejmek, *Diplomacie Československa: Díl I. Nástin dějin ministerstva zahraničních věcí a diplomacie (1918–1992)* [Czechoslovak Diplomacy: Vol. I. An Outline of the History of

though certain members of the Czechoslovak leadership—most notably President Edvard Beneš and Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk—initially envisioned the country as a bridge between East and West, the geopolitical reality proved to be markedly different.[42]

Already during the period of the Third Czechoslovak Republic (1945–1948), Czechoslovakia increasingly aligned itself with the Soviet sphere of influence, primarily through the actions of the KSČ, which functioned as an agent of Soviet policy. The Soviet Union was regarded not only as the principal guarantor of Czechoslovakia's security—especially in view of persistent fears of potential German revanchism—but also as an increasingly dominant force shaping the country's political and ideological orientation.[43] Although considerable debate persists regarding the precise turning point at which Czechoslovakia became a Soviet satellite—and whether a realistic opportunity ever existed to reverse this trajectory—Soviet influence over foreign policy became particularly evident during key political moments, such as the Czechoslovak deliberations on the *Marshall Plan* in the summer of 1947. On that occasion, the Czechoslovak delegation initially accepted the proposal, only to reverse its decision three days later after consultations with Moscow. According to some historians, this episode marked a milestone that effectively—albeit not officially—terminated Czechoslovakia's independent foreign policy prior to the communist coup of February 1948.[44]

Already functioning in several respects as a Soviet satellite and certainly a close ally, Czechoslovakia in the late 1940s served as a Soviet intermediary in the increasingly polarized Middle East. This development was largely shaped by the Soviet Union's unsuccessful experience in Iran during 1945–1946, when, under intense international pressure, the Red Army was compelled to withdraw from the northwestern provinces of Iran, where it had supported the establishment of short-lived, Soviet-backed Republic of Mahabad and the Azerbaijan People's Government.[45] The so-called Iranian Crisis attracted significant global attention and resulted in substantial diplomatic pressure—particularly through the UN—on the Soviet Union to retreat. This episode placed Soviet leadership in a polit-

the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diplomacy, 1918–1992] (Prague: Academia, 2012), 119–120.

42 Karel Kaplan, *Československo v poválečné Evropě* [Czechoslovakia in Postwar Europe] (Prague: Karolinum, 2004), 34–44; John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 32–33.

43 Vít Smetana, "Czechoslovakia and Spheres of Influence towards the End of the Second World War," *Central Europe* 5, no. 2 (2007): 125–134.

44 Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State That Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 166–176; Rychlík, *Československo v období socialismu 1945–1989*, 62–69; Zbořil, *Československá a česká zahraniční politika*, 216–217.

45 Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941–1946* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 255–284.

ically vulnerable position and contributed to a more cautious and indirect approach to sensitive Middle Eastern affairs in the subsequent years.[46]

Czechoslovak diplomacy quickly revived pre-war networks in the Middle East, reopening embassies in key territories and dispatching regular reports to Prague on the region's shifting political landscape. Czechoslovak diplomats observed the mounting resistance to European colonial authorities and the accompanying efforts toward independence among national and subnational entities, regarding these developments as a significant opportunity for the Eastern Bloc to extend its sphere of influence. In this context, Czechoslovakia emerged as one of the most active East European actors in the region, engaging in economic, cultural, and intelligence activities, and playing a pivotal role in supporting the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, as well as cultivating relations—albeit in late 1940s with limited success—with strategic countries such as Iran, Egypt, and Lebanon.[47]

Czechoslovak Diplomacy after February 1948: Soviet Domination and Political Purges

The communist coup d'état in February 1948 itself undoubtedly represented the culmination of the process of subordination of Czechoslovakia to the Soviet Union in all aspects including foreign policy.[48] For the following four decades, both the political landscape and the foreign orientation of the country were fundamentally shaped by the dominance of the KSČ, which operated under the direct influence of Soviet leadership. In the aftermath of the coup, the MFA experienced profound transformations, both in terms of personnel and institutional orientation. The mysterious death of Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk in March 1948[49] was soon followed by the appointment of KSČ member Vladimír

46 Louise Fawcett, "Revisiting the Iranian Crisis of 1946: How Much More Do We Know?" *Iranian Studies* 47, no. 3 (2014): 379–439; Geoffrey Roberts, "Moscow's Cold War on the Periphery: Soviet Policy in Greece, Iran, and Turkey, 1943–8," *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, no. 1 (2011): 58–81.

47 Zídek and Sieber, *Československo a Blízký východ*, 16.

48 See Karel Kaplan, *Pět kapitol o únoru* [Five Chapters on February] (Brno: Doplněk, 1997); František Hanzlík, *Tajné služby na cestě KSČ k moci 1945–1948: Únor 1948 – výsledek nerovného zápasu* [Intelligence Services on the Road to the Communist Party's Accession to Power 1945–1948: February 1948 – The Outcome of an Unequal Combat] (Prague: Academia, 2021); Jiří Pernes, "The Coup d'État of February 1948," in *A History of the Czech Lands: Second Edition*, ed. Jaroslav Pánek and Oldřich Tůma (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2019), 543–550.

49 Jan Masaryk was found dead on 10 March 1948 beneath the window of his apartment in the Černín Palace. Since then, there have been ongoing speculation as to whether his death was the result of suicide, homicide, or a tragic accident. For more information see Pavel Kosatík

Clementis to the position, thereby consolidating communist control over the ministry. The subsequent resignation of President Edvard Beneš on 7 June 1948, followed by his death in September of the same year, further affirmed the ascendancy of the KSČ. His replacement by Communist leader Klement Gottwald marked the definitive establishment of pro-Soviet leadership in Czechoslovakia.[50]

Figure 2: Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk (right) and his deputy Vladimír Clementis (left) in 1946 © Wikipedia Commons

Over time, the MFA' independence eroded even in its interactions with other state institutions, as the appointment of new employees became subject to approval by the International Department of the ÚV KSČ and by the security

and Michal Kolář, *Jan Masaryk: Pravdivý příběh* [Jan Masaryk: The True Story] (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1998); Ladislava Kremličková, ed., *Jan Masaryk (Úvahy o jeho smrti)* [Jan Masaryk (Reflections on His Death)] (Prague: Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu, 2005).

50 Vytopil, "*1948: Likvidace samostatné zahraniční politiky*"; Karel Kaplan, *Kronika komunistického Československa: Klement Gottwald a Rudolf Slánský* [Chronicle of Communist Czechoslovakia: Klement Gottwald and Rudolf Slánský] (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2009), 76–100.