

IN EXILE



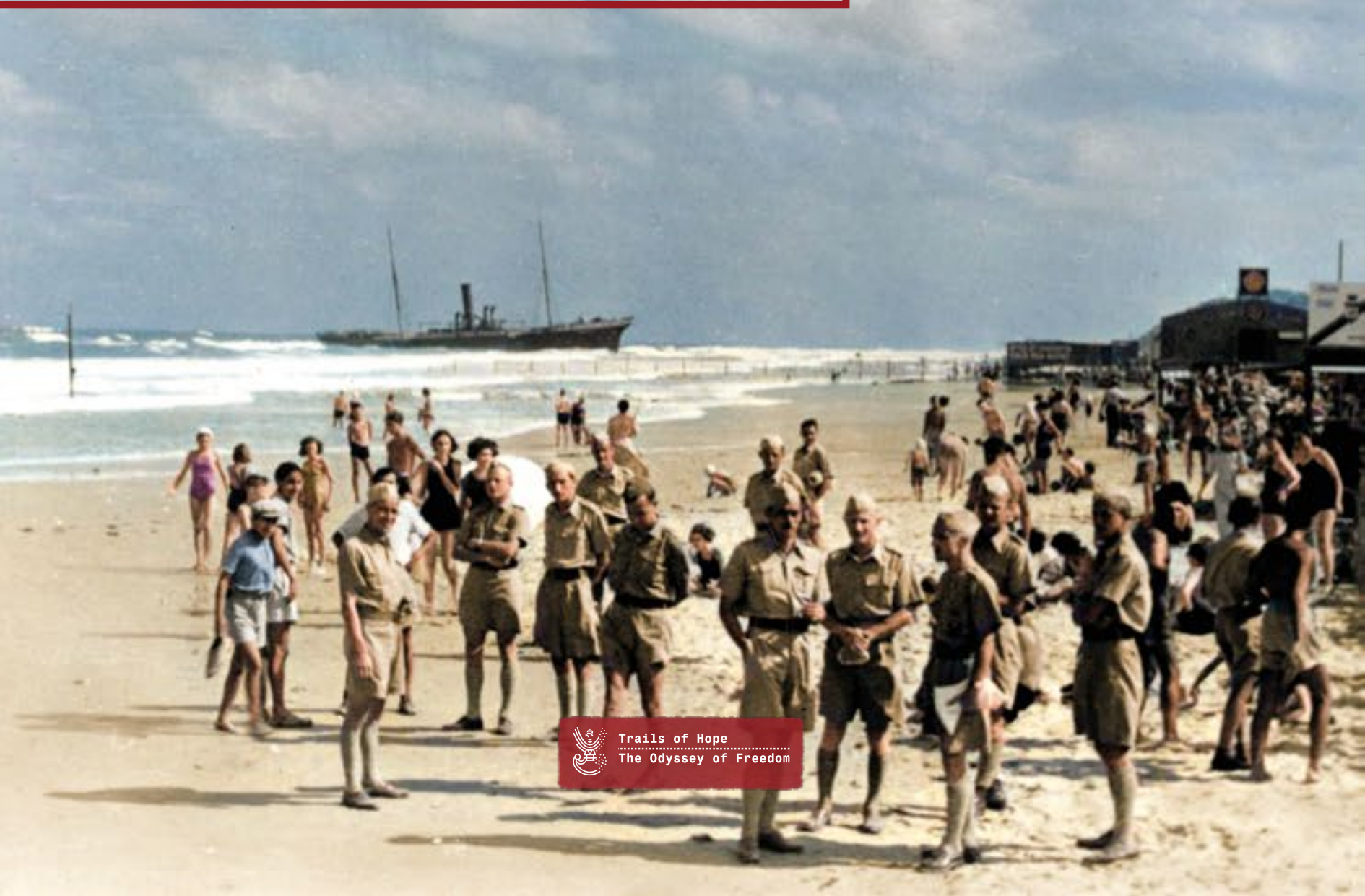
The German and Soviet invasions of Poland led about a wave of war refugees. The fleeing population headed mainly to Romania and Hungary, but after the defeat of France, these countries found themselves in the German sphere of influence, and thus a search for a safe haven for Polish refugees began. Those most at risk of German repression found it in British-controlled Palestine. The first transport of Polish refugees from the Balkans arrived in Haifa in November 1940, followed by others in subsequent months. In June 1941, a transport of Polish refugees from Cyprus arrived in Haifa. On behalf of the Polish government-in-exile, they were looked after by the Polish consulates in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and a delegation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Henryk Rosmarin, a well-known Zionist activist and member of the Second Polish Sejm, became Poland's Consul in Tel Aviv in 1940. The newcomers were welcomed kindly by the local population and, to their amazement, could communicate in Polish virtually wherever they went. Among the Polish refugees in Palestine there were many representatives of the authorities of the Second Polish Republic, including former Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski, ministers, MPs and other high-ranking officials. Many artists and scientists also settled there, including the well-known writer Melchior Wańkowicz.

Henryk Rosmarin was a Polish politician of Jewish descent, lawyer and member of the Polish Sejm of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd term. After the outbreak of the Second World War, he got to Romania and from there to Palestine in 1940. In the years 1941-1945, he was the Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Tel Aviv (Photo: NAC)



Poles in the Kfar Nahum National Park by the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias, Palestine. December 1940 (Photo: KARTA Centre collection)

Soldiers at the beach, Tel Aviv, July 1940 (Photo: Czesław Dobrecki, KARTA Centre collection)



THE PROMISED LAND



📍 Olive trees and view of the city of Bethlehem, Palestine, 1940s (photo: AIPN)

By the decision of the League of Nations, Palestine became a Mandate Territory administered by Britain as a result of the First World War. The British mandate extended over the territory that now includes the states of Jordan and Israel.

The years 1918–1938 saw about 100,000 Jews emigrate from Poland to Palestine. They played an increasingly important role in the social and economic life of their new country. The Polish government supported Jewish aspirations for their own state and emigration to Palestine. It covertly supported the Jewish paramilitary organisations 'Etzel' and 'Haganah' by supplying them with weapons and money, all the while hiding this fact from the British.

📍 The first training course for Haganah instructors, 1938 (Photo: Alamy)

📍 Jerusalem, Old City, Israel (Photo: Alamy)



THE BRIGADE



📍 A group of soldiers setting up a tent in Latrun, Palestine, 1940 (Photo: Józef Piłsudski Institute of America)

📍 Two soldiers of the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade buying vegetables from a street vendor, Palestine, 1943 (Photo: Józef Piłsudski Institute of America)



During World War II, Polish Army troops were stationed in Palestine. It was there that they were established and underwent training before participating in some of the war's most difficult campaigns.

Following the defeat of France in June 1940, the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade under the command of General Stanisław Kopański was evacuated to Palestine from Syria. The first stopping point was the village of Samakh on Lake Tiberias. Shortly afterwards, the brigade was redeployed to Latrun, received new weapons and continued training. During their stay the soldiers established friendly relations with the local population.

Being the only combat-ready Polish land unit, the brigade was redeployed to Egypt in early October 1940, and then, starting in August 1941, fought on the Libyan front. Camp Latrun also became home to the Officers' Legion, which was then redeployed to Egypt, where it provided security.

One can say without exaggeration that our troops have the best possible reputation. The entire local press and public refer to us with sincere great affection.

General Stanisław Kopański

📍 Soldiers of the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade taking a break in Bir 'Asluj during their journey to a camp in Palestine, April 1942 (Photo: AIPN)



REGROUPING

General Władysław Anders holding the banner of the 5th Infantry Division, made thanks to donations by Polish refugees in Palestine, 1943 (Photo: The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum In London, courtesy of the KARTA Centre Foundation)



A dog tag belonging to Julian Bussgang, Polish soldier of Jewish descent, from his time in the Polish II Corps. Julian Bussgang was born in Lviv. September 1939 saw his family make their way to Romania. A few months later, they found themselves in Palestine. After the arrival of the Polish II Corps in Palestine, Bussgang volunteered to join its ranks. He fought in Italy, including at Monte Cassino. After the war, he studied in Italy and England. He then left Europe for the United States in 1949 (Photo: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews)

Polish troops evacuated from the USSR awaiting orders, Palestine, 1940s (Photo: AIPN)

The spring of 1942 saw the arrival in Palestine of the first Polish troops evacuated from the Soviet Union. Among the arriving units was the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade. In May, the brigade was expanded into the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division. In July 1943, the decision was made to establish the Polish II Corps, comprising units redeployed from Iraq and stationed in Palestine. The Corps used the Galilee training grounds to prepare for the Italian campaign.

Several thousand soldiers of Jewish descent served in the Polish Army evacuated from the USSR. While in Palestine, most left its ranks, with many joining paramilitary organisations fighting to create a Jewish state. One of them was Menachem Begin, who would then go on to become the Prime Minister of Israel. He was given permission to leave the Polish Army by General Michał Tokarzewski-Karaszewicz.



SCHOOL MEMORIES



Polish schoolgirls of the Cadet Common School, Nazareth, Palestine, 1946 (Photo: Collection of Alina Inez Złotogórska, photo courtesy of the KARTA Centre Foundation)

Palestine became an important centre of Polish education in exile. A Polish school complex consisting of a primary and secondary school, as well as a high school, was established in Tel Aviv as early as 1940. A Polish Girls' Centre along with primary and secondary schools was established in Ain Karem. University education was also made available as part of Higher Education Courses in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Women's Auxiliary Service Training Centres were established in Rehovoth and Gedera. Female volunteers of the Polish Army were trained in sanitary and transport services. Cadet schools, attended also by children orphaned during their stay in the Soviet Union, were moved to Palestine.

A student of the Cadet Common School receiving a meal in the canteen at the Palestine camp, 1942 (Photo: AIPN)

Polish school, Palestine, 1943 (Photo: Menachem Begin Heritage Center)



CULTURE



📷 A Polish cadet, Palestine, 1942-1945 (photo: AIPN)



During the war, Polish social and cultural life flourished in Palestine. This included the publishing of magazines, military (e.g., 'Tygodnik Armii Polskiej na Wschodzie', 'Nasze Drogi', 'Ochotniczka') and civilian (e.g., 'Odrodzenie', 'Biuletyn Wolnej Polski', 'Gazeta Polska') alike. The printing houses of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa published Polish literature, textbooks and guides on the Middle East. Theatres gave performances, too. A Drama Theatre operated near Tel Aviv and saw as many as 25,000 spectators attend a performance based on *Dom otwarty*, a play by Michał Bałucki. The performances were watched not only by Poles but also by Jews from Poland. Some Polish artists continued their work in Palestine. Polish painters Krystyna Domańska, Alicja Drwęska and Anna Zaleska exhibited their artworks at Jerusalem's Cabinet of Arte. Hanka Ordonówna's performances were highly popular as well.

📷 Polish troops in Palestine, 1942-1944 (Photo: AIPN)

📷 Soldiers of the Polish II Corps at the Franciscan Chapel in Jerusalem. The chapels at the 3rd and 4th station of Via Dolorosa were renovated thanks to the efforts of Polish soldiers. Lieutenant Tadeusz Adam Zieliński was the author of the sculptures, Jerusalem, 1943 (Photo: The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, London; courtesy of the KARTA Centre Foundation)



MENACHEM BEGIN



📍 Menachem Begin (front row, first from the left-hand side) wearing the uniform of the Polish Army in the East, next to his wife Aliza, Palestine, December 1942 (Photo: National Photo Collection of Israel)

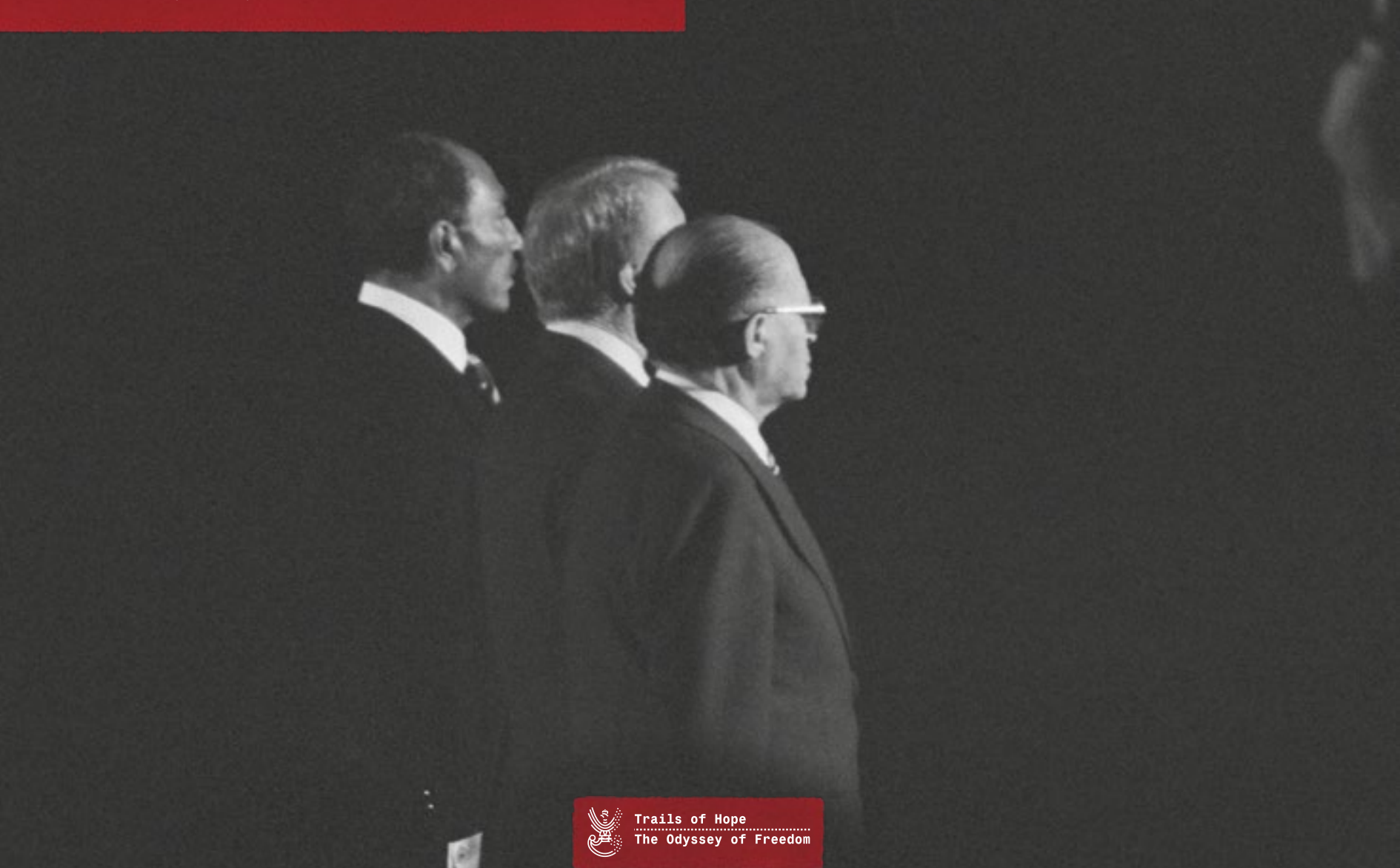
Menachem Begin (born 16 August 1913 in Brest, died 9 March 1992 in Tel Aviv) came from a traditional Jewish family. In 1935, he graduated from the University of Warsaw with a law degree. In 1939, he became the leader of Poland's Beitar – a Zionist-revisionist youth organisation whose goal was to establish the state of Israel. After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, he escaped to Wilno. On 3 August 1940, he was arrested by the NKVD and imprisoned at the Lukiškės Prison, where he was sentenced to eight years in a Siberian labour camp. Pursuant to the Sikorski-Majski Agreement, he joined the Polish Army in the USSR and, together with Polish soldiers, was evacuated to Iran in 1942. By the time he arrived in Palestine, he was a corporal cadet. After receiving permission to be discharged from the army, he became involved in the struggle for the establishment of Israel. The independent state of Israel came into being on 14 May 1948.

Begin, himself a charismatic leader, headed the Israeli government between 1977 and 1983. He would go down in history (along with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat) as the negotiator of the Egypt–Israel peace treaty of 1979. Both leaders were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for bringing about the signing of the treaty.

📍 US President Jimmy Carter, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin at the signing of Camp David Accords, 6 September 1978, Maryland, USA (photo: Glasshouse / BE&W)



📍 Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and US presidential advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski playing chess, Camp David, 1978 (photo: Alamy)

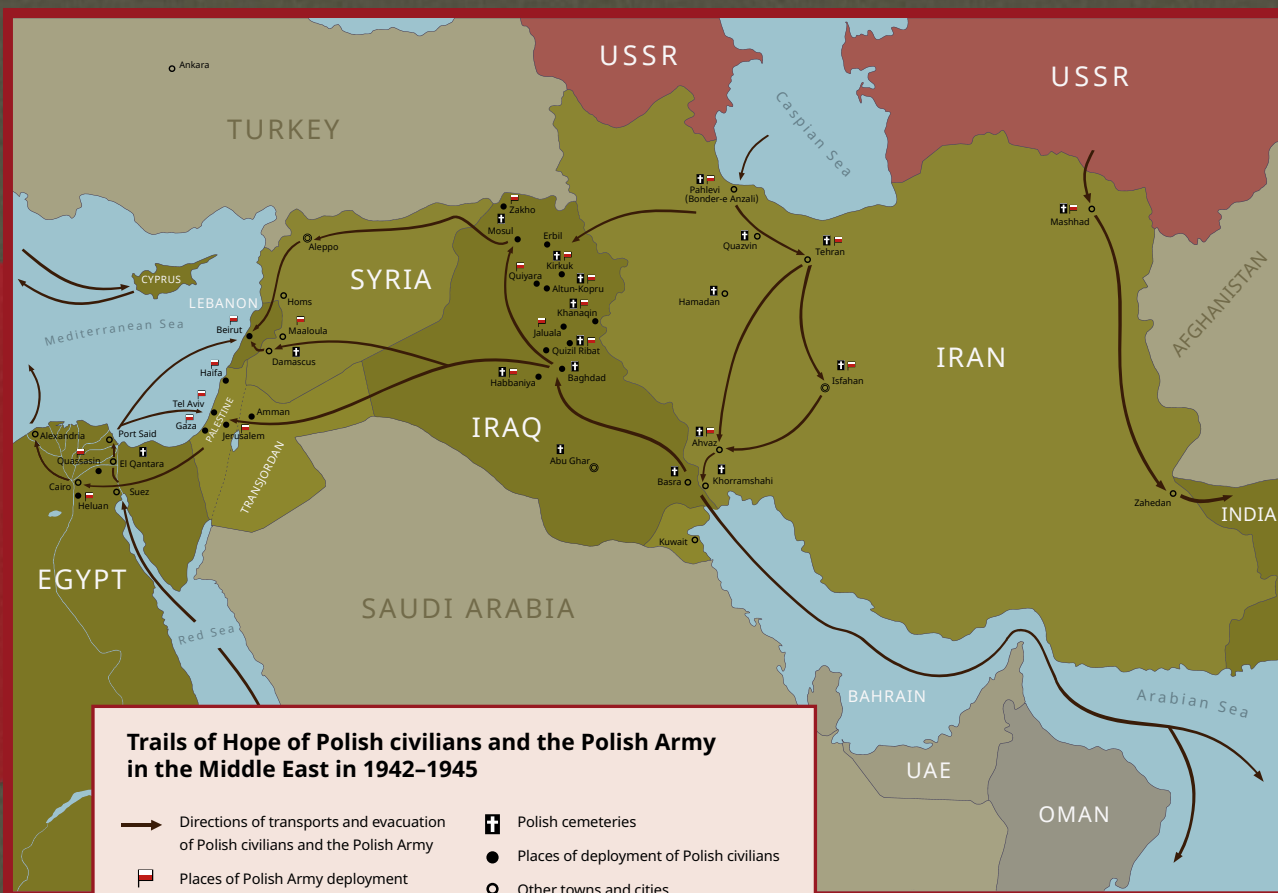


DISTRIBUTION



For Poles evacuated from the USSR, the countries of the Middle East were but one stop in the long journey back home. Many set off for other countries, serving as the next stops on the trail of hope. Exhausted by their stay in the Soviet Union and suffering diseases, many would never regain their freedom or return home. They would forever remain in this hospitable land. Traces of the Poles' presence in the Middle East include numerous graves in many local cemeteries.

Polish Army soldiers in Nazareth, 1943 (Photo: Menachem Begin Heritage Center)



Polish Army soldiers unloading cargo at a camp in Palestine, 1943 (Photo: AIPN)

