

As Anzac Day approaches, let's remember the 543 New Zealand troops killed in the Mesopotamia campaign of 1916-17 which freed Palestine from Turkish rule and put it under British control, later formalised as a League of Nations Class A Mandate. Class A meant provisional recognition of statehood, with the League Covenant placing the mandatory power under a "sacred trust" to advance the interests of the Palestinian population. Britain's decision to not establish a Palestinian state, but instead lay the foundations for the State of Israel, was arguably in breach of black-letter international law.

As one of the victors in Mesopotamia, and as a member of the League, New Zealand had - and arguably still has - a double stake in the fate of Palestine. Now that Winston Peters has labelled Gaza "utterly catastrophic" and called for some action through United Nations institutions, here's a suggestion.

The International Court of Justice has in the past (in regard to Southwest Africa and Nauru) heard cases against former Mandate powers. Perhaps New Zealand could lead a case against the UK under the Covenant, seeking British recognition of the State of Palestine and a limit on British arms sales to Israel?

Geoff Bertram