

General Assembly vote much less than critics of partition were willing to admit. Far more important was the unexpected but impressive phenomenon of Soviet-American agreement on an international issue. Moreover, the General Assembly was offered little valid alternative to the partition plan. Both Arabs and Jews had insisted that they would not accept a federalized Palestine, while partition claimed the support of at least one of the parties in the dispute. Significantly, on the morning of the final vote the Arab delegates panicked, announcing that they would support a federal solution in principle. Yet it was clear that Jewish immigration was still unacceptable to them, and that the tragedy of the DPs would not be alleviated by the minority plan. By then, too, the supporters of partition had the necessary votes and were uninterested in further delay.

The Arab scholar Albert Hourani shrewdly evaluated the factors responsible for the partition decision. The Jews belonged mainly to the West, he observed; they were far better known than the wholly alien Arabs. Their plight, registering directly and intimately on the Western conscience, was magnified by the Western sense of guilt by inaction. It was surely not a coincidence that the nations whose doors remained closed to Jewish immigrants were precisely the ones voting in favor of the Jewish state. Hourani noted also that the order, efficiency, and social philosophy of the Zionists appealed to Western minds. “[Westerners] were attracted by the gallant little people with a great and tormented past, by the pioneers taming the wilderness, the planners using science to increase production, the collective farmers turning away from the guilt and complexity of personal life, the terrorist making his gesture in the face of authority—all images of a new world ... hopeful, violent, and earnest.” The Zionists had a simpler explanation. It was the one Weizmann had offered the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry a year earlier, when he suggested that the decision to establish Jewish and Arab states and thus provide asylum for a nation of refugees was a choice not between right and wrong, but between the greater and the lesser injustice.

THE RESPONSE TO PARTITION

The partition formula anticipated a reasonable degree of economic cooperation between Arabs and Jews in common association. The members of the General Assembly hoped also to minimize difficulties by seeking British help on a number of crucial issues. These included the evacuation of Palestine not later than February 1, 1948, the use of a port adequate for substantial Jewish immigration, and a willingness to share the administration of the country with the appointed Palestine commission during the transitional period of British departure. To achieve these goals, a Palestine commission was appointed less than a month after the resolution was passed, consisting of delegates from Bolivia, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Panama, and the Philippines. Like the General Assembly itself, the commissioners expected active support from Britain.

These hopes were disappointed. Sir Alexander Cadogan had warned repeatedly that his government would play neither a lone nor a leading role in effecting a plan that was not “accepted by both Arabs and Jews.” Eventually Britain declined to assume any tutelary responsibility whatever, refusing so much as to fix a schedule for the evacuation

of its troops until the partition subcommittee's work was nearly completed. Even then the date was finally set at August 1, 1948, well beyond the United Nations deadline, although several weeks later the British advanced the timetable to May 14. Cadogan balked, too, at the suggested gradual transfer of authority to a United Nations commission. His explanation was that this procedure would result in "confusion and disorder." On December 1, 1947, Ben-Gurion paid a call on High Commissioner Cunningham at Government House in Jerusalem. Cunningham received the Jewish Agency chairman with reserve, offering no word of congratulation. "I suppose you are happy about the Resolution," was his only comment. Ben-Gurion attempted to discuss the future, requesting photostatic copies of land registry deeds, information about supplies of food and fuel in the country, and permission to organize a militia. Cunningham promised to reply to these requests. But no information was ever forthcoming. Indeed, the British refused to allow members of the UN commission to visit Palestine before May 1. When an advance UN party nevertheless arrived early in January 1948, British mandatory officials pointedly made the group unwelcome. The six commission members were housed in an unventilated basement opposite British headquarters in Jerusalem, where they did their courageous but futile best to represent the majesty of the world body. Under increasingly difficult and dangerous conditions, they searched for methods to develop a transitional regime in Palestine. But soon they were reduced to foraging for food and drink. They accomplished nothing.

There were tangible reasons for British noncooperation. The most obvious was London's determination to avoid provoking the Arab world at a time when Britain's foothold in the Middle East was already precarious, when oil royalty and pipeline agreements were continually under review in Arab capitals, and delicate treaty negotiations were under way with Egypt. Another was simple bitterness at the Jews. British security forces had lost 127 killed and 331 wounded at the hands of Jewish terrorists between May 1945 and October 1947. The Jewish refugee traffic and Zionist propaganda had shamed Britain before the world. Bevin personally had been harassed beyond endurance by what he considered to be Truman's politically motivated intrusiveness. An insight into the foreign secretary's mentality was provided by Richard Crossman, who met with him on August 4, 1947, and afterward described Bevin's outlook as corresponding roughly with the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a notorious anti-Semitic canard of the 1920s. The main points of Bevin's discourse were, first, that the Jews had successfully organized a worldwide conspiracy against Britain and against him personally. He went on to claim that the whole Jewish "pressure" was a gigantic racket run from America. Here Crossman pointed out that the Irish Republic had also been a racket operated from America, but that Britain had been forced to concede a state. "Yes," Bevin replied, "but they did not steal half the place first." Referring to the latest Etzel outrage, the foreign secretary added that he would not be surprised if the Germans had learned their worst atrocities from Jews. From this discussion Crossman sadly concluded that Bevin was insane on the Palestine issue.

If concern for Arab goodwill and personal vindictiveness both were factors, so was London's evaluation of Palestine's future, now that the mandate was ending. The

likelihood of an Arab military triumph was hardly remote. The opportunity, therefore, to return to Palestine in unofficial association with the Arabs, particularly with Britain's treaty partner, Abdullah of Transjordan, was worth safeguarding. Years later, Edward Francis-Williams, one of the foreign secretary's closest advisers, revealed that Bevin had predicted an Arab military victory in the developing hostilities, and an appeal to the British by the Jews to intervene on their behalf, with the result being a partition of Palestine in which the Jews would control neither Haifa nor the Negev. These were the sites Britain's military general staff urgently coveted in the event of a withdrawal from Egypt; it was hoped that they could be regained afterward by treaty arrangements with Abdullah. On December 17, Bevin warned Marshall that the Jews would get their "throats cut." The foreign secretary's appraisal was entirely shared by British military leaders. In March of 1948, with hostilities now begun, Field Marshal Montgomery offered his opinion that "the Jews had bought it"—that they were unable to protect their lines of communication. The reports of British officers in Jerusalem, Amman, and Cairo sustained this view. The following month General Sir Gordon Macmillan, commander of British forces in Palestine, stated flatly that the Arab armies "would have no difficulty in taking over the whole country."

It was therefore in Britain's interest to refuse help to a scheme that in any case appeared likely to founder against Arab resistance. On the contrary, a policy of deliberate chaos would serve Whitehall as a means of returning to influence in Palestine. The British undoubtedly had this aim in mind in removing Palestine from the sterling bloc and freezing its currency balances in London, a measure that threatened to bankrupt the embryonic Jewish state at the outset. Not a penny was left in the Palestine treasury for a successor regime. In February 1948 the one financial concession that was approved for the post-mandate period was an appropriation of £300,000 for the Supreme Moslem Council, equivalent to an indirect subsidy of the Arab war effort. As the British relinquished their hold, moreover, the railroads ceased to run and the post office gradually stopped functioning; the local inhabitants of Palestine were barred from operating these facilities until the British evacuated.

The single most notable feature of mandatory noncooperation by late 1947 was Britain's undisguised partiality for the Arab military effort. The embargo on Jewish immigration and Jewish weapons acquisition was stringently maintained. The Jews were denied the right to organize a militia. Haganah members were disarmed wherever they were found. All the while, Britain continued to sell weapons to Iraq and Transjordan under its treaty relations with those states. With 50,000 troops at his disposal in Palestine, General Macmillan could have easily and swiftly throttled Arab infiltration. Yet, under orders, he limited all attempts to maintain law and security to the areas held by British troops during evacuation. Occasionally, pro-Arab bias took the form of overt support. For example, having almost completed the sale to the Jews of Sarafand, the largest army camp in Palestine, Macmillan received instructions from London that the installation must instead be sold to the Arabs. The identical procedure was followed with strategically placed fortresses and other government property up and down the country.

General Taha Hashimi, an Iraqi general charged with training Arab volunteers in Damascus, told in his *Mudhakkarat 'an al-Harb* (War Memoirs) of Arab leaders receiving detailed advance notice of Britain's schedule for evacuating the police stations of Safed and Nebi Yusha. Both these stockades were immediately occupied by Arab irregulars. In this manner, too, the fortress of Samakh and the large army camp nearby were turned over to the Arabs. By Hashimi's account, the British deputy police commander in Jerusalem alerted the Arabs to the impending military evacuation from the New City, to facilitate their occupation the moment the British departed. The Jaffa attorney Muhammad Nimr al-Hawari recalled that "members of the British Office for Arab Affairs came to me offering help, in arms and men.... The British were distributing arms and ammunition to our fighting men on the field and in the streets. This was a secret to no one." Christopher Sykes provides an unsparing evaluation of the British mandate in its concluding phase: "When one compares the British and French records in protectorate administration, the advantage ... is strongly in favour of the British, but there is nothing in the French record in next-door Syria comparable in mischievous incompetence to the British record in Palestine from November 1947 to May 1948."

The initial Arab response to the Partition Resolution was to carry out their oft-repeated threat of violence. It set the pattern for the months and years ahead. In Aleppo, Syria, three hundred Jewish homes and eleven synagogues were burned to the ground, and half the city's four thousand Jews fled elsewhere. At Aden, seventy-six Jews were killed. In Palestine itself the Arab Higher Committee proclaimed a three-day general strike from December 2 to December 4, 1947. Violence began immediately with attacks on Jewish quarters in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Jaffa. Soon after, the Higher Committee began recruiting volunteers throughout Palestine Arab towns and villages. Most of the ensuing "militias" were organized around the nucleus of the Futuwwa and Najjada societies. Their opening tactics were essentially hit-and-run assaults on isolated Jewish settlements and transportation, and the pillage and destruction of Jewish property. The attacks were launched entirely by Palestine Arabs, although part of the funds and some military equipment came from neighboring Arab countries. Offensive planning at this stage was quite uncoordinated, even on a local basis. Frequently it was impeded by the lingering hostility between the Nashashibi and Husseini factions.

In the weeks immediately following the Partition Resolution, a number of moderate Arab leaders interceded with the mandatory government and with leaders of the two national communities to avoid bloodshed. One of these was Hawari, who had begun his public career as a Mufti partisan ([this page](#)), but who later became increasingly disenchanted with Husseini terror tactics. "The question is, was I a traitor in this struggle?" asked Hawari. "Could I incite the people of Palestine to engage in a war they could not fight?" Convinced that the spread of violence would end in disaster for his people, the Arab lawyer met frequently with Jewish authorities. "In many instances, I succeeded in avoiding clashes between Arabs and Jews. We initiated a successful effort to convince our people that it was to our advantage to coexist peacefully with the Jewish people." Hawari did not exaggerate. Left to their own devices, Arabs and Jews for the most part continued to live together peacefully, if fearfully. The Higher

Committee's violence alone would not have precipitated a full-scale war between the two peoples.

But the Palestine Arabs and Jews were not left alone. During the September 16, 1947, meeting at Sofar, Lebanon ([this page](#)), the Arab League Political Committee appealed for economic reprisals against Britain and the United States, and for money and weapons for the Palestine Arabs. Three weeks later the group met again in the Lebanese town of Alay, this time to organize a military committee of Arab states. At first the decision on armed intervention was put off. After the United Nations vote, however, the fiery Iraqi prime minister, Salih Jabr, took the initiative once again in calling a meeting of Arab premiers in Cairo, on December 12, 1947. By then Salih Jabr wanted no further procrastination. He insisted that the secret decisions of the Bludan conference ([this page](#)) be put into immediate effect, that the Arab countries now move to intervene directly in Palestine. The proposal was still too far-reaching for the Egyptian and Saudi governments. Abdullah of Transjordan disliked even the notion of volunteers. Yet a compromise plan eventually was adopted to supply the League's military committee with 10,000 rifles and other light weapons, to arrange for the passage of 3,000 Arab volunteers through Syria into Palestine, and to supply £1 million toward the cost of the "defense of Palestine."

These were the circumstances in which the "Arab Liberation Army" was organized. General Sir Ismail Safwat Pasha, an Iraqi staff officer, was appointed its commander in chief and promptly established his headquarters at a Syrian military camp on the outskirts of Damascus. Field command of this ostensibly volunteer force was invested in the redoubtable Fawzi al-Qawukji, guerrilla leader of the Palestine civil war of 1936. Following his participation in the Vichy defense of Syria in 1941, Qawukji had escaped to Germany, where he lived until the end of the war. In 1945 he was granted sanctuary in France (together with the Mufti and other Arab enemies of Britain) and eventually made his way back to Syria. Most of his "volunteers" now actually were mercenaries from Syria, combined with a scattering of Yugoslav Moslems, Circassians from the Caucasus, a few Poles from the Anders Army, some German SS veterans, and a few Spanish Falangists. In late January 1948 elements of the Liberation Army began infiltrating over the Palestine border. Soon afterward Qawukji transferred his headquarters to Tiberias, in north-central Palestine, and almost immediately set about moving larger detachments of men into the country, until by the end of February they numbered 5,000, and by the end of March, 7,000. In contrast to the Mufti's undisciplined gangs, these non-Palestinian units lent their Arab billet communities a certain protection and security.

By early spring of 1948 the guerrillas had divided Palestine into fronts. The northern sector of the country, with 7,000 men, remained under the personal command of Qawukji and of the Syrian Adib al-Shishakli. The central sector was held by 5,000 men, the largest number of them the Higher Committee's irregulars under the command of Abd al-Qadr al-Husseini, a nephew of the Mufti. The southern "front," comprising the entire Negev, was given over to a fluctuating number of about 2,000 Moslem Brotherhood volunteers from Egypt. It was by no means a tightly organized military

force. With superiority in numbers, nevertheless, Arab operations at least became more extensive by the winter and early spring of 1948. Assaults were launched against Jewish quarters in the cities, particularly in Jerusalem. There were concentrated attacks against outlying kibbutzim in the Hebron hills. Far from interfering with these Arab military activities, the British turned over their police fortresses to the guerrillas. As a result, the Arabs succeeded during this period in cutting the roads between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, between Haifa and western Galilee, between Tiberias and eastern Galilee, and between Afula and the Beisan Valley. Jewish farm colonies in the Negev soon were isolated from the rest of Palestine.

In Jerusalem the situation of the Jews was particularly grave, as relief columns moving along the highway from the lowlands were systematically decimated by ambushes in the hills. Prohibited by the British from bringing in ammunition, from organizing their reserves and defending their communications openly, the Jews faced the grimmest period of their struggle for independence in these spring months. By the end of March 1948, as the gauntlet of Arab fusillades from the hill areas became increasingly lethal, the entire Haganah convoy system was in danger of collapse. By then, too, the three roads leading to Jerusalem were in the hands of Arab irregulars, and the Jewish population of the city faced the imminent likelihood of being starved or overrun.

The Zionists had not foreseen the speed with which they would be thrown on their own, politically or militarily. Nor, preoccupied with their campaign against the British, had they anticipated the gravity of the Arab military threat. The only Jewish forces immediately available throughout 1947 were the Palmach, a standing group of approximately 3,000 youths, some 5,000 ill-armed Etzel "troops," and a scattering of perhaps 800 to 1,000 Lech'i members. The Haganah reserves, numbering about 21,000 by March 1948, were only partially trained and quite ill-equipped. Indeed, weapons even more than manpower now became the priority for the Jewish Agency. As early as the summer of 1945, Ben-Gurion had traveled to New York to raise several million dollars for the purchase of surplus American arms machinery. The equipment was acquired, dismantled, and its 75,000 parts shipped to Palestine as "textile machinery." Yet, hidden as they were in kibbutz underground warehouses, the parts could not be assembled until the British left Palestine. Other weapons were purchased in Europe in isolated odd lots: a dozen rifles here, fifty there, three machine guns elsewhere. There was little standardization among them.

Strategic planning had also to be improvised quickly. In late 1947, once the United Nations decision for partition was assured, the Haganah leadership concentrated on two major objectives. The first was the security of the Yishuv against local Arab forces during the half-year period of British withdrawal. The second was defense of the country against a possible full-scale Arab invasion after May 15. The initial phase was the more difficult of the two. It was based on the decision taken by Ben-Gurion and the Agency Executive to hold every square mile of territory allocated to the future Jewish state. In the long term, the commitment was an inescapable one for the Zionists: withdrawal in the immediate aftermath of the UN Resolution would have been politically disastrous.

But in the short run the decision was to prove exceptionally costly; for its implications were that Haganah forces would have to be dispersed in small units throughout Palestine rather than concentrated in strength. It also meant that supply convoys would be obliged to move through Arab-controlled territory, where they would run the certain risk of ambush. Galilee and the Negev, for example, were mainly Arab. So were Jaffa, Ramie, Lydda, and Acre. Haifa and Jerusalem were divided. The Jewish enclaves in this territory would somehow have to be provisioned. Initially, therefore, the Haganah command was obliged to think in terms of static defense, avoiding military action against Arab population centers even for the most compelling strategic reasons. The British would have blocked any other move.

PARTITION IN JEOPARDY

In its endorsement of the Partition Resolution, the United States government had counted on a swift, surgical division of Palestine. But now, with the escalation of hostilities, it appeared that this gamble had failed. No sooner, in fact, was the resolution approved than State Department officials began discreetly qualifying their government's pro-Zionist stance. Early in December 1947, Washington suspended the licensing of arms shipments to the Middle East. On the twenty-second of the month Loy Henderson turned down the request of Eliezer Kaplan, treasurer of the Jewish Agency, who had come from Palestine to request a \$500-million American loan to help settle immigrants. Henderson's State Department colleague, Gordon Merriam, noted afterward: "It is inconceivable that Congress or the Eximbank would now provide funds for the purpose of setting up an economic and immigration regime on a shaky, indigent basis ... to carry forward an unsuccessful investment."

Arab pressure on Washington and on American oil companies lent weight to the argument that partition must now be quietly dropped. On January 6, 1948, Secretary of Defense Forrestal met with the president of the Socony Vacuum Company. The latter regretfully declared that, as a consequence of the Palestine unrest, his company and other associated oil corporations were suspending work on the pipeline in Saudi Arabia. Forrestal's shock was compounded on February 21, when the Arab League tentatively agreed to deny American firms pipeline rights until the United States altered its Palestine policy. Syrian Prime Minister Jamil Mirdam Bey announced his intention of visiting Riyadh in the hope of inducing Ibn Saud to take punitive steps against Aramco.

Temporarily free of White House interference, then, and assured of the tacit support of Secretary Marshall, State Department officials became increasingly evasive on the question of partition. On January 21, Undersecretary Robert Lovett showed Forrestal a document recently prepared by the State Department planning staff. It concluded that partition was unworkable, that the United States was not obliged to support this measure if it could be made to work only through force, and that the American government should now seek cancellation or, at least, postponement of the United Nations Resolution. In ensuing weeks, Henderson and his group at the Near East desk elaborated upon this theme with increasing persistence and urgency. Eventually it won

the approbation of Marshall. Thus, on February 24, Warren Austin, the American ambassador to the Security Council, asked his fellow delegates to consider whether there did not exist in Palestine a threat to international peace and security. He then declared his government's willingness in principle to consider the use of armed force for the sake of restoring peace, but not to enforce partition.

The Zionist leadership, watching breathlessly for a clue to American intentions, recognized the magnitude of the policy shift here. They exerted every effort now to persuade the administration to resume its original line. But in mobilizing their supporters throughout the United States, the Zionists very nearly alienated their most dependable ally, the president himself. Truman recalled:

The Jewish pressure on the White House did not diminish in the days following the partition vote in the U.N. Individuals and groups asked me, usually in rather quarrelsome and emotional ways, to stop the Arabs, to keep the British from supporting the Arabs, to furnish American soldiers, to do this, that, and the other. I think I can say that I kept faith in the rightness of my policy in spite of some of the Jews.... As the pressure mounted, I found it necessary to give instructions that I did not want to be approached by any more spokesmen for the extreme Zionist cause.

The spokesman most intent upon seeing the president at this juncture was Weizmann, who to that end had just made the 6,000-mile trip from Palestine. Truman at first was unwilling to receive him. In a somewhat incongruous episode, however, he was persuaded to change his mind through the intercession of Edward Jacobson, a Kansas City Jewish merchant who had been Truman's business partner years before. Weizmann was brought in through a side entrance of the White House on March 18. The discussion lasted nearly an hour and was cordial. Weizmann's unfailing dignity and charm, in marked contrast to the near-hysteria of the American Zionists, had their effect on the president. "I told him, as plainly as I could," Truman wrote, "why I had at first put off seeing him. He understood. I explained to him what the basis of my interest in the Jewish problem was and that my primary concern was to see justice done without bloodshed. And when he left my office I felt that he had received a full understanding of my policy and that I knew what it was he wanted."

On March 19, one day after the Truman-Weizmann "understanding," Warren Austin dropped a bombshell in the Security Council by recommending that partition be suspended. "There seems to be general agreement that the plan cannot now be implemented by peaceful means," the ambassador explained. He proposed instead that the General Assembly be convened in special session to consider the establishment of a temporary trusteeship over Palestine "without prejudice ... to the character of the eventual settlement." This announcement horrified the Zionists. Their response to the United States was to deluge the president with wires and petitions, to organize large and angry parades of American Jewish war veterans. On March 23 the Jewish Agency Executive cabled Washington that the Zionists would oppose with all their strength any postponement of Jewish independence. Only Weizmann appeared to retain his faith in the American president. "I do not believe that President Truman knew what was going to happen in the United Nations on Friday when he talked to me the day before," he

told Jacobson. This interpretation was at least partly correct. Truman had known of Austin's statement in advance. Surprised and embarrassed, however, by the timing, if not the content of the proposal, he immediately ordered Clark Clifford, a political adviser, "to find out how this could have happened. I assured Chaim Weizmann that we were for partition and would stick to it. He must think I am a plain liar."

Actually, the State Department, without being privy to Truman's conversation with Weizmann, had interpreted the president's recent silence on Palestine as approval for a gradual shift of policy. Endorsing the long-held views of Henderson, Merriam, and other Foreign Service professionals, Secretary Marshall had authorized the trusteeship proposal in an official memorandum to his United Nations delegation. When Truman learned of this development, he spoke by long-distance telephone to the secretary of state, who was in San Francisco. Marshall apparently convinced the president that a trusteeship was regarded as an interim expedient until the fighting died down, not a repudiation of partition. Yet it is doubtful by then if government officials, aside from the president himself, were contemplating simply a postponement. Dean Rusk, recently appointed chief of the State Department's United Nations division, called a news conference and vigorously defended the trusteeship plan. His language referred to the scheme as "temporary," but the overtones of cancellation were not hard to discern.

The proposal was received badly by other delegations. More than their governments, these diplomats viewed "postponement" as a serious blow to the authority of the United Nations. Trygve Lie, secretary-general of the world body, was aggrieved enough to suggest to Austin that both of them resign as a gesture of protest (the American refused). Ironically, Bevin himself was now hostile to the trusteeship plan. He suspected that Washington's *volte-face* would lead ultimately to a request for extending the mandate, and developments in Palestine had convinced him that such an extension was out of the question. Jewish underground activity had not abated. Since passage of the Partition Resolution, in fact, the Lech'i had intensified its attacks on mandatory forces and installations. Hardly a day passed without an incident of anti-British violence. It was becoming apparent, too, that Washington had no clear notion of the way a trusteeship could be put into effect. On March 29, Forrestal admitted to Lovett that American troops were unavailable, although he did not see how the United States "could avoid making an effort to contribute." Lovett then spoke to Truman, who said "he did not want to make any firm commitment to send troops into Palestine."

The lack of international enthusiasm for the American plan was increasingly evident in the United Nations. At the Security Council meeting on March 30, Austin pointedly avoided making reference any longer to a trusteeship. He spoke now merely of seeking a truce between Arabs and Jews and of the need for a special session of the General Assembly to consider an interim government for Palestine. On April 1, the Security Council approved this innocuous suggestion. When the General Assembly convened two weeks later, scarcely a month was left before the British mandate expired, and these final proceedings took on an air of unreality. "A strange lethargy overtook the United Nations," recalled Jorge Garcia Granados, the Guatemalan delegate. "War continued in Palestine but nothing seemed to move at [the United Nations]." On May 3 the sentiment

of the Assembly was expressed by Creech-Jones, who proposed that the United Nations drop the American plan entirely and appoint a “neutral” authority to do what it could to maintain administrative and public services in Palestine. It was another way of saying that partition already was in effect.

THE JEWS FORCE THE ISSUE

With their military position crumbling badly, the Jews in late March 1948 embarked on a desperate effort to provision their beleaguered communities in Jerusalem and the Galilee. The rescue operation failed; the Arabs annihilated the convoys. It was accordingly at this moment that a painful decision was taken. On April 1 the Haganah commander of operations, Yigael Yadin, met with Ben-Gurion and the latter’s advisers to report that the Arab guerrillas were strangling the Yishuv. It was impossible any longer, Yadin said, to rely on passive defense and isolated convoys to supply Jerusalem and the outlying Jewish settlements. The one remaining alternative was for the Haganah to go on the offensive, immediately to seize control of Palestine’s interior road network, as well as the country’s important heights. The operation would require the capture of all Arab towns dominating vital arteries and communications, something entirely new in the Haganah tradition. The gamble was a quite frantic one, for the danger of inadequate manpower and weapons was compounded by the likelihood of pitched battle with the British. The exodus of mandatory forces was going forward according to plan; yet there was no way of predicting General Macmillan’s reaction to a full-scale Jewish military campaign. The Zionist cabinet debated the proposal for three hours. It was Ben-Gurion who forced the issue.

No decision Ben-Gurion later took, to declare the State of Israel, or even to invade Sinai in 1956, was fraught with profounder risks. His willingness to face them revealed the true dimensions of the man’s tenacity and boldness. Only then, in fact, did the Jewish Agency chairman become a household name outside Palestine itself. Yet no Jew alive had been more fully identified with the Yishuv than Ben-Gurion—since the moment, in 1906, of his arrival in Jaffa harbor from Poland as a nineteen-year-old youth named David Green. From then on, every facet of his career reflected a stage in the history of the Zionist redemptive effort. In the years before 1914 he labored as a farmhand in the citrus groves. During World War I he served in the Jewish Legion. After the war he became a leader of Achdut HaAvodah (later Mapai), then a secretary-general of the Histadrut. In 1935 he was elected chairman of the Palestine Executive of the Jewish Agency and found himself thrown willy-nilly into the world of statecraft.

Ben-Gurion was no suave diplomat in the Weizmann manner. At heart he remained the tough union leader, as forceful and outspoken as Bevin, yet even more stubborn. He looked the militant role he was to play: short, stocky, his hands still callused, his face hard and weather-beaten, with a granitic chin thrusting belligerently forward. His colleagues remembered a single-minded devotion to the cause of the Jewish National Home that approached fanaticism, a total disinterest in material comforts, and a lack of personal vanity that was not to be confused with indifference to authority. Certain in

his mind where the fate of the Yishuv lay, Ben-Gurion was determined to ensure his nation's security against any opposition and any odds. It was with this approach that he browbeat the members of the Jewish shadow government into approving the plan to clear the Palestine interior.

Weapons were the initial priority. Several days before, Ben-Gurion had cabled Ehud Avriel, his Haganah agent in Prague, ordering a shipment of rifles and machine guns to be flown in immediately. On the night of April 1, the first Dakota transport plane arrived from Czechoslovakia at an abandoned British airstrip in the south of Palestine. The plane's cargo was immediately unloaded and the arms distributed among neighboring farm settlements. Two days later a ship arrived secretly off a coastal inlet with additional Czech weapons, including a few hundred machine guns and additional thousands of rifles. The recruits were then sent into action to break the Arab grip on the Jerusalem road.

Even as the Jews made preparations for their offensive, they found an ally in Arab factiousness. Hawari later recalled that the purchasing agents of the Arab League's military committee bought weapons at cut-rate prices in Cairo, then sold them to the Palestinians for exorbitant profits. A number of these dealers made fortunes out of the arms traffic. Not uncommonly, too, their guns were inferior in quality (although not to Jewish weaponry) or of World War I registry. At the same time, the Mufti was determined to retain effective personal control over all Arab forces in Palestine. It was then that the rivalry between himself and Fawzi al-Qawukji, commander of the Arab Liberation Army, became noticeably acute. "Qawukji confided to me," wrote Hawari, "how the Mufti had accused him, while in Europe, of spying for Britain ... and of drinking wine and running after women and therefore, he, Qawukji, did not deserve to be the general of the Army of Liberation." Yet the Arab rulers by and large favored Qawukji and often provided him with handsome payments and gifts. Incensed at this favoritism, Haj Amin simply undertook to operate on his own, and appointed his personal lieutenants as commanders in various parts of the country. He did a bad job of it. His officers failed to impose general conscription among the Palestine Arabs. As a result, the local defense forces were all volunteers, most of them irregulars operating without central direction or discipline. While not unsuccessful in the 1936 civil war, this rough-and-ready approach lost much of its effect when matched against growing Jewish organization.

The conflict between Qawukji and the Husseinis intensified during the early spring of 1948. The former preferred to exclude all Palestine Arabs from his ranks. "They can blow up a bridge here and there," explained one of his officers to the press, "but for military operations they simply get in the way." General Safwat Pasha, the League-appointed commander of Arab forces in Palestine, complained that the indiscipline of the Mufti's bands was undermining the entire military operation against the Jews. The earlier division of authority continued. The Liberation Army maintained responsibility in the northern part of the country, in loose cooperation with the Syrian general, Shishakli, who was assigned the Galilee front. Central Palestine, as has been seen, was reserved for the Mufti, whose nephew, Abd al-Qadr al-Husseini, was placed in command

of Jerusalem and the Hebron mountains; while Hassan Salamah, another Husseini partisan, directed operations in the coastal area. Yet even with this understanding, coordination among the various groups remained poor. The Mufti's troops acted on their own, ignoring the directives of the Arab League. Mutinies and desertions, often of entire units, were not uncommon among both Qawukji's followers and the Mufti's. "One city or village may fall to the enemy while the next village stands idle and careless," wrote one participant. "Each faction operates separately and independently of the others." Safwat warned the League that "if the situation is not changed, general headquarters will become an empty farce." The factional hostility became so bitter that a tacit understanding actually was reached between Qawukji and the Haganah for the Arab Liberation Army to refrain from supporting Abd al-Qadr if the Jews attacked on the Jerusalem front. This private agreement was soon to be put into effect.

The Zionist operation to break the Arab grip on the Jerusalem highway comprised 1,500 Haganah men, much larger than any Jewish force thrown into action before. The newly arrived Czech weapons were now to be put to their first use. The offensive began with an attack on the mountain fortress of Castel, only five miles west of Jerusalem. During the vicious fighting, Abd al-Qadr telephoned Fawzi al-Qawukji for arms. Qawukji's answer (intercepted by the Haganah) was: "Ma'fish"—I have not any! In fact he had plenty, but was not about to share them. Soon afterward Abd al-Qadr was killed—in the act of surrender—and the village fell to the Jews. Enough of the road was then captured to enable the Haganah to rush three large convoys of some 250 vehicles into Jerusalem. The Arabs reimposed a stranglehold on the highway within days, but the relief supplies enabled the city's Jewish population to hold out for the next few weeks.

Toward the end of April, the British markedly increased the tempo of their evacuation. Although they continued to provide the Arabs with advance notice of their withdrawal, the Haganah by then had also succeeded in capturing its share of police fortresses and abandoned army camps. The most decisive coup in this period took place in Haifa, a city of mixed population. It was known that the British intended to leave on April 18, and both sides prepared for battle. The Arabs comprised a slight majority of the city's 150,000 inhabitants, but lacked effective leadership. On the other hand, the Jews for the first time enjoyed the strategic advantage. Their population was concentrated on the slopes of the mountain city, while the Arabs were located essentially in the lower port area. The Haganah also learned the routes of eleven arriving Arab arms convoys and ambushed nine of them. By mid-morning of the twenty-first, after a day and a half of intermittent shooting, several hundred Jewish troops descended suddenly from the Carmel heights and wrested control of Haifa's major buildings and crossroads. The Arab population of the city fled soon afterward ([Chapter XIII](#)).

The Jews' offensive tactics clearly were succeeding. Yet the Arabs maintained their advantage in the upper Galilee. As the British withdrew in the last weeks of April, twenty Jewish farm communities on the northern valley floors were exposed to mounting pressure from surrounding Arab forces in the hills. Accordingly, the Haganah operation to relieve this siege was entrusted to Yigal Allon, a twenty-nine-year-old native-born Palestinian and perhaps the ablest field commander of the Jewish defense

forces. In a calculated gamble, Allon stripped all the Galilee kibbutz settlements of their arms and turned the weapons over to his troops. His force of a thousand Palmach youths then advanced on the key British police fortress and army camp near Rosh Pina, investing these sites before the Arabs could move in. Safed was the next objective. The circumstances of the 1,400 native Jews in this remote little mountain community, surrounded by 10,000 Arabs, were altogether desperate. Syrian mercenaries, operating under the command of Adib al-Shishakli, were tightening their vise on the Jewish quarter. Neighbors who had lived together in peace for decades were now furiously at each other's throats. On the night of May 9–10 Allon's troops launched their offensive, engaging in house-to-house and room-to-room fighting. The Arab military position was hardly untenable, for Shishakli's men outnumbered Allons. But their morale cracked first under the pressure of close-quarter combat, and the irregulars fled, together with the rest of the Arab inhabitants.

The fall of Safed was a defeat of considerable magnitude for the Arabs. Over the generations the mountain fortress had been the administrative center of northeastern Palestine. Indeed, from his field headquarters in nearby Tyre, Lebanon, the Mufti had designated Safed as the capital of his future Arab state of the Galilee. Its capture now by the Jews became the signal for most of the Arabs in the surrounding area to flee to Lebanon and Syria. Communications between the Jewish settlements in eastern Galilee were restored for the first time in months. Northern Palestine was virtually cleared. So was the coastal plain. Its one remaining Arab city, Jaffa, was captured by the Jews on May 14; the local Arab population of 70,000 fled in terror ([Chapter XIII](#)). In this manner, the Haganah was freed of the responsibility of protecting isolated Jewish enclaves and was able now to concentrate on the anticipated May 15 invasion by the neighboring Arab armies.

On the evening of April 22, 1948, as the Jews consolidated their victory in Haifa, Bevin telephoned Attlee at Downing Street. The foreign secretary was in a state of panic. The newspaper reports from the Arab capitals, he said, told of the Jews massacring 23,000 Arabs in Haifa while the British had stood by and done nothing. Bevin complained that the army had "let him down" and placed him in an impossible position with the Arabs. Attlee immediately summoned Field Marshal Montgomery, then army chief of staff. Bevin arrived at the same time, as did Field Marshal Alexander, the war secretary. Montgomery wrote later that "Bevin was very worked up," and Attlee was inclined to support him. Early the next morning, the four men met again, and the foreign secretary, by Montgomery's recollection, "was even more agitated." Matters clearly were not going as Bevin had intended. In order to salvage Arab goodwill, therefore, the government began urgently reformulating its policy. On April 23, Creech-Jones proposed to the General Assembly that the United Nations now aim at a "more modest objective" than partition, without seeking to arrive at a final solution of the Arab-Jewish conflict. The British would cooperate in the effort. But it was too late by then, as Creech-Jones himself would admit only ten days later. The Jews had established a new military reality in Palestine.

They had moved far toward establishing a new political reality, as well. No one took

seriously any longer Bevin's statement, issued in late March, that the British were responsible for "law and order" in Palestine until the mandate expired. "Law and order" plainly were the opposite of the mandatory's intention. In the ensuing chaos the inhabitants of Palestine experienced an almost total stoppage of public services: of law courts, post offices, telephone exchanges, rail transportation. It was to fill this administrative vacuum and to lay the groundwork for the Jewish state that, in early spring, a Jewish interparty committee appointed a provisional Zionist Council of State, under the chairmanship of Ben-Gurion. In a series of emergency meetings, the body's thirteen-member Council of Government—an embryonic cabinet—agreed that all taxes in the Jewish sector would be collected on the same basis as before, that Jewish Agency and Va'ad Le'umi officials would remain at their posts with their former quasi-official functions now transformed into ministerial responsibilities. Offices were commandeered for a temporary capital in north Tel Aviv, office equipment was foraged, and secretaries and clerks were recruited from throughout the Yishuv. A national loan was authorized, a manpower and supplies directorate organized. On April 27, the Haganah and Etzel signed an agreement of full cooperation. At the last minute a printer's shop in Tel Aviv even managed to run off a design for postage stamps, and paper currency was also printed. Actually the typical Palestine Jew did not require these legal verifications from the national administration, and did not ask for them. The habits of communal discipline, inculcated through years of Zionist settlement, remained intact.

The achievement of Jewish state-building was in marked contrast to the almost total dissolution of the Palestine Arab community. Perhaps the British had believed that chaos in Palestine would affect only the Jews and not harm the Arabs—or, at least, encourage the Arab population's hope for redemption through Abdullah of Transjordan. But in the final weeks of the mandate everything seemed to be going wrong. Administrative pandemonium was giving the Jews a decisive advantage. The Higher Committee thereupon issued a belated, rather panic-stricken appeal for all Arab civil servants in the collapsing mandatory administration to remain at their posts; supervisory jurisdiction in each district would be exercised by the Mufti's local agents. Too much precious time had elapsed for this kind of innovation, however. Nor was the Arab exodus alone responsible for aborting the plan. During the entire mandatory period, Arab leaders had refused to cooperate with the British in any scheme of national autonomy as long as the Jews were similarly included. They were now to pay for their unbudging stand. The Arabs possessed nothing comparable to the Jewish quasi-government. At no time had the Supreme Moslem Council or the Arab Higher Committee ever served as more than organs for propaganda or violence. Neither organization had provided administrative training or governmental experience. For the tradition-bound Arab community, therefore, the moment of reckoning had arrived at last. It was to be a flight of such unprecedented proportions that the Arab leadership was incapable either of organizing or of inhibiting it ([Chapter XIII](#)). Indeed, the leadership itself was the first to take refuge in neighboring lands. The Husseinis and the Nashashibis were precisely the intellectual and political elite who were absent when the Palestinians needed them most.

These developments did not go unremarked in Washington. While abandoning the ill-fated trusteeship scheme, the State Department intensified its efforts to avoid a full-blown war in the Middle East. In early May 1948, Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk entreated the Zionists at least to postpone their declaration of independence. If they did not, the threat was implicit that Washington might block the transfer of American Jewish philanthropic funds to the Jewish state. This veiled warning made a strong impression on Dr. Nahum Goldmann, chairman of the Agency's American section, who thereafter worked closely with State Department officials in an effort to delay the proclamation of sovereignty. Ben-Gurion and his colleagues in Jerusalem refused to be budged, however, particularly in an American election year. On May 4 they sent Rusk a cable of refusal. Four days later Moshe Shertok, foreign minister in the Jewish provisional administration, flew to Washington to meet with Marshall and Undersecretary of State Lovett. The Americans uttered no threats. Yet they predicted that the Arab regular armies would invade, and "if the Jews persisted in their course, they must not seek the help of the United States in the event of an invasion." Far from appearing intimidated, Shertok tersely scored the Americans for having failed to maintain their support of the Partition Resolution. Much of the bloodshed in Palestine could be attributed to the equivocation of the United States government, he insisted, for it had encouraged the Arabs in their belligerence. At this point Marshall terminated the conference with a warning:

I shall remember all that you have said. I fully appreciate the weight of these considerations. It is not for me to advise you what to do. But I want to tell you as a military man: don't rely on your military advisers. They have just scored some success. What will happen if there is a prolonged invasion? It will weaken you. I have had experience in China. At first there was an easy victory. Now they've been fighting two years and they've lost Manchuria. However, if it turns out that you're right and you will establish the Jewish State, I'll be happy. But you are undertaking a grave responsibility.

In fact, Shertok took the warning seriously. With Goldmann's support, he told his Zionist colleagues in New York that Marshall's words at least deserved much thought.

The gravity of the decision was made equally plain by Yigael Yadin in Tel Aviv. The young officer gave his report on May 12, in a lengthy meeting with Ben-Gurion and other members of the national administration. Haganah troops had won control of Palestine's interior lines of communication, Yadin explained. The situation in Jerusalem nevertheless remained extremely critical, for the Arabs dominated half the city, together with all the surrounding high ground and road network, including vital stretches of the highway from the coast. At that very moment, units of Transjordan's British-trained Arab Legion were converging on Jerusalem along most of these arteries. Additionally, the Legion had just succeeded in overwhelming and capturing the Ezion bloc of kibbutz settlements between Jerusalem and Hebron. Yadin pointed out that the shortage of equipment was no less serious. Even with supplies from Czechoslovakia, no artillery whatever had yet arrived. It was known that the Arab armies possessed large quantities

of British guns, some of which already were shelling Jerusalem with devastating effect. When the invasion came, the Arabs plainly would outnumber the Jews in manpower and in the quantity and quality of weapons. On the other hand, Yadin noted, the British were evacuating, and full-scale Jewish mobilization was now possible. More important, the Jews possessed the morale, the tactical ability, and the planning and military experience the Arabs lacked. Presumably manpower and weapons would be coming in after May 15. If these could be distributed and integrated swiftly, the chances of a successful defense were even. Yadin personally was inclined to be cautious, however, and wished that a truce might still be possible without sacrificing political objectives.

After discussing the pros and cons through the night, the Jewish cabinet voted six to four to reject the American proposal for a truce and to proceed with the declaration of the state. Contacted by phone in New York, Weizmann endorsed the decision: "Proclaim the State, no matter what happens," he said. Two days later the die was cast. At eight o'clock on the morning of May 14, the British lowered the Union Jack in Jerusalem. By mid-afternoon full-scale fighting had erupted throughout the country. The Jews mounted a new offensive to relieve Jerusalem, while elsewhere in Palestine bitter struggles were going on for the last evacuated Taggart fortresses. At 4:00 P.M. the Jewish population, except for Jerusalem, which was without electricity, heard the proclamation ceremonies as they were broadcast from the Tel Aviv Museum. Ben-Gurion read the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel. It notified the world that the Land of Israel was the historic birthplace of the Jewish people, that the Zionist movement was testimony to the role Palestine had fulfilled in Jewish history and religion, that the Balfour Declaration, the United Nations Partition Resolution, the sacrifice of the Zionist pioneers, and the torment suffered by Jews in recent years—all had laid the moral and legal foundations for the new state. Israel, it was announced, would be open to all Jews who wished to enter, would extend social and political equality to all its citizens without distinction of religion, race, or sex, and would guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, education, and culture to all. On the eve of the Arab invasion, the authors of the declaration issued a final plea: "We extend our hand in peace and neighborliness to all the neighboring states and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all. The State of Israel is prepared to make its contribution to the progress of the Middle East as a whole." Immediately after adopting the Declaration of Independence, the Council of State unanimously passed an ordinance abolishing the White Paper of 1939.

Two days earlier, on May 12, a letter from Weizmann had arrived at the White House asking the United States government to recognize Israel when it came into existence shortly. The appeal reached the mark. Truman had been uneasy in recent weeks at the State Department's equivocation on partition. On April 23 he had told Judge Samuel Rosenman: "I have Dr. Weizmann on my conscience." There was a certain pathos in Truman's eagerness to regain Weizmann's respect. Now, on May 12, Truman discussed the issue with his advisers. He personally favored recognition. Marshall and Lovett did not. After lengthy discussion and further consideration, Truman eventually made up his mind on May 14 to extend de facto recognition to the State of Israel. The announcement

was issued at 6:10 P.M. of the same day. “The old doctor will believe me now,” the president murmured.

Political considerations unquestionably influenced Truman’s gesture. There was a national election approaching, and the votes of the major urban communities could be decisive. The president must also have appreciated the importance of anticipating action by Moscow. The Soviets, whose recognition of Israel was expected momentarily (it came two days later), hardly deserved a monopoly on Jewish gratitude, after all. But at the same time there were personal qualities of tenacity and stubbornness that welled out of Truman’s character. He wrote later: “I was told that to some of the career men of the State Department this announcement came as a surprise. It should not have been if these men had faithfully supported my policy.... I wanted to make it plain that the President of the United States, and not the second or third echelon in the State Department, is responsible for making foreign policy.” The president’s compassion for a beleaguered minority people, apparent earlier on the refugee issue, similarly influenced his decision to recognize the Jewish state. Ben-Gurion, who met Truman years after 1948 (although while both men were still in office), recalled in a series of taped interviews with Moshe Pearlman:

At our last meeting, after a very interesting talk, just before he left me—it was in a New York hotel suite—I told him that as a foreigner I could not judge what would be his place in American history; but his helpfulness to us, his constant sympathy with our aims in Israel, his courageous decision to recognize our new State so quickly and his steadfast support since then had given him an immortal place in Jewish history. As I said that, tears suddenly sprang to his eyes. And his eyes were still wet when he bade me good-bye. I had rarely seen anyone so moved. I tried to hold him for a few minutes until he had become more composed, for I recalled that the hotel corridors were full of waiting journalists and photographers. He left. A little later, I too had to go out, and a correspondent came up to me to ask “Why was President Truman in tears when he left you?”

If Washington’s recognition of Israel evoked Jewish gratitude, the opposite effect could have been anticipated in the Arab world. There had been no shortage of warnings that the Arab governments would retaliate against American oil interests. Yet, shortly after the birth of Israel, when the management of Aramco announced its intention of laying “Tapline” to the Mediterranean across Palestine, Egypt made a simultaneous bid for the legal easement, and the Syrian government similarly rushed to approve a license for the project. Relations between the Saudi government and Aramco continued harmonious throughout. In the summer of 1948, longstanding negotiations on the division of oil royalties were at last settled amicably between the company and Riyadh. In July of 1948, too, the sheikh of Kuwait announced that he had granted a concession to the American Independent Oil Company for exploring and developing Kuwait’s undivided half-interest in the neutral zone between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Neither then nor for the next twenty-five years, until October 1973, was there ever to be a serious interruption in the flow of oil to the Mediterranean from American-owned wells in the Middle East.

On May 14, as Ben-Gurion was reading the independence proclamation, Sir Alan

Cunningham left his official hilltop residence in Jerusalem and drove quietly down to Haifa. There he boarded the awaiting cruiser *Euryalus* and departed for Cyprus. In London several hours earlier, War Secretary Alexander rose in the House of Commons to announce briefly that Palestine was no longer part of the Commonwealth. There was an hour's listless debate. Soon afterward, the Foreign Office issued an official statement of policy for Palestine, concluding:

Although British responsibility for Palestine has ceased, it is the earnest hope of His Majesty's Government that, as both sides come to realize the tragic consequences of attempting to conquer Palestine by force, some compromise may yet be possible which will prevent the destruction of all that has been achieved during the last thirty years and which will enable the people of Palestine to live at peace and to govern themselves. To that end His Majesty's Government are still prepared to give every assistance in their power, short of imposing by force a solution not acceptable to both peoples.

The statement was less apologia for Britain's role in the Palestine tragedy than a bid for the continued friendship of the Arab world. It was already apparent that London's posture of officious neutrality had redounded calamitously against the Palestine Arabs.

Notwithstanding the labored officialese of the document, the reference to "all that has been achieved during the last thirty years" did not ring entirely hollow. Later, when passions were cooler and wounds healed, the Jews would have occasion to remember what they owed Great Britain. They owed their first meaningful foothold on Palestine to the Balfour Declaration, after all. For three decades, until the last six months of the mandate, a kind of junior membership in the British Commonwealth had been theirs, assuring them the protection of the British fleet and the British army—against Rommel no less than against the Mufti. That membership also had brought with it the immeasurable advantage of participation in the sterling bloc of trade and finance, a virtually open market in Britain for the Yishuv's citrus products, and a free-spending area in Palestine for British military and civilian personnel. British administrative innovations in Palestine were hardly less impressive than in Egypt or Iraq, while the Common Law provided no less matchless a standard of justice here than elsewhere in the Commonwealth. The accomplishment was rich. It deserved a better epitaph than the one Bevin provided.

With few exceptions, the Arabs anticipated a renewal of security within their own zone of Palestine, and hopefully more than that if the neighboring governments fulfilled their promise to redeem the entire country. The lot that awaited the Jews, on the other hand, the invasion of their newborn republic by the armies of five Arab nations, was the last ordeal the Zionists would have anticipated a decade, or less, earlier. But for the holocaust of European Jewry and its aftermath in the displaced persons' camps, no responsible Jewish Agency leader, neither Ben-Gurion nor Weizmann, would have envisaged statehood as the irreducible minimum of Zionist demands. None would have predicted sovereignty except within the framework of the British Commonwealth, or under the active protection of the international community. It seemed a kind of ordination of fate, and one that was consistent with the central pattern of Jewish history. Nothing was to be achieved except within the matrix of immense tragedy.

Jewish nationalism had been reborn at the moment when European anti-Semitism of a new and profoundly virulent nature first made its appearance in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The Jewish National Home was established in a period when Arab nationalism, the feeblest autonomist instinct among all the former member races of the Ottoman realm, belatedly sputtered into life. Afterward, the waves of immigration that transformed the Zionist experiment into a thriving and viable community consisted largely of human derelicts, the impoverished fugitives of envenomed European Judeophobia between the wars. And by the time the Jews of Europe were prepared at last to recognize Palestine as their final sanctuary, the doors to the Promised Land were closed and European Jewry itself was doomed. Even the United Nations Partition Resolution seemed at best an uncharacteristic spasm of the Western conscience, for humanitarianism did not extend so far as to offer assurance of protection to the peoples on each side of the line. The Arab nations presumably could be depended upon to take care of their own, but the Jews faced the less than remote possibility of another genocide. Nothing in the Jewish experience elsewhere, then, should have prepared them for a better fate. As it developed, the Yishuv was not a fatalistic community.

CHAPTER XIII THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

THE ARAB STATES PREPARE FOR INVASION

“How beautiful was this day, May 14,” an Arab Legion officer said, “when the whole world held its breath anticipating the entry of seven Arab armies into Palestine to redeem it from the Zionists and the West. On this day Arab forces broke forth from all sides and stood as one man to demand justice and to please God, conscience, and the sense of duty.” Lieutenant General Sir John Bagot Glubb, the British commander of the Transjordanian Arab Legion, recalled of the invasion:

It was a sultry May day, with a haze of dust hanging over the roads. In the city of Amman and in every village along the road the people were gathered, cheering and clapping wildly as each unit drove past. The flat roofs and the windows were crowded with women and children, whose shrill cries and wavering trebles could be heard above the roar and rattle of the vehicles, and the cheering of the crowds of men beside the road. The troops themselves were in jubilation. In some trucks, the soldiers were clapping and cheering. In others, they were laughing and waving to the crowds as they passed. Many of the vehicles had been decorated with green branches or bunches of pink oleander flowers, which grew beside the road. The procession seemed more like a carnival than an army going to war.

Yet behind the excitement lay months of indecision and cross-purposes. Almost until the last week before the end of the mandate, it was not certain that the invasion of Palestine actually would take place. The possibility of armed intervention had been discussed as far back as June 9, 1946, during the conference of Arab leaders at Bludan, Syria. Abdullah of Transjordan supported the idea. So did the Iraqi prime minister, Salih Jabr, and the Mufti himself. Their aims were quite different, however.

Abdullah recently had been elevated by treaty with Britain to king in his realm, and his ambition thenceforth was primarily to extend his dynasty to the Arab sector of the Holy Land; he was willing to arrange his own deal with the Jews for the rest of the country ([this page](#)). The Syrians, on the other hand, were determined to seize as much as they could of northern Palestine, preempting this area from the Arab Legion. The Mufti's aims were simplest of all. They were to drive the Jews out of Palestine and rule the country. The rest—Lebanon and Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia—by and large were anti-interventionist. As a consequence of this lack of unanimity, the invasion decision had to be postponed.

Later meetings, at Sofar and Alay, Lebanon, did not effectively resolve the issue, although a military committee was organized. In early 1948, we recall, as fighting gained momentum in Palestine, the Arab League appointed an Iraqi general, Sir Ismail

Safwat Pasha, to coordinate the training of “volunteers.” But it was not until the Jews captured Haifa and Tiberias that the Arab League summoned its military commanders and demanded a plan for the intervention of regular Arab armies in Palestine. Even then, as the Iraqi minister of defense wrote afterward, “... the members of the Political Committee were convinced that a [mere] show of determination to engage in battle would suffice to prevail on the major powers to intervene on behalf of the Arabs, and that thus the Jews would be forced to comply with Arab demands.”

By the end of April, a “show of determination” clearly was not going to be enough to block partition. The Jews were tightening their grip on Jaffa, the largest Arab community in Palestine. Except for the Jerusalem area, the military balance seemed to be shifting in favor of the Zionists. The Arab chiefs of staff therefore hurriedly met in Damascus to work out a united approach. As the strategy was formulated, the Syrian and Lebanese armies were to invade northern Palestine and occupy Tiberias, Safed, and Nazareth. Once these forces engaged Jewish units in the north, the principal effort would be opened by the Iraqi army and the Arab Legion south of Lake Galilee, moving west toward Haifa. The port city was scheduled to fall to a combined assault of the four Arab armies on May 21. The role of the Egyptians in this first phase was to be essentially diversionary, pinning down Jewish forces south of Tel Aviv.

The scheme was never put into operation. With ideas of his own for eastern Palestine, Abdullah was totally uninterested in a joint effort to share the division of the country. Anyway, the plan was outdated once the Haganah defeated Qawukji’s Arab Liberation Army in the north. By the first week of May the Jews were in firm possession of the whole of western Galilee, with their lines of communication to Haifa well protected. Safed, intended as a base for invading Syrian forces, was captured instead by Allon’s Palmach troops. As a consequence of this reversal, the elaborate Arab blueprint deteriorated into a loose understanding that the Iraqis would enter north-central Palestine on the flank of the Arab Legion, the Syrian brigade would enter southeast of Tiberias, while the far northern sector would be left to the undersized Lebanese division. The Egyptians, finally, would be responsible for investing the southern half of Palestine.

Logistics compounded the difficulties of Arab invasion. The distance from Baghdad to Haifa was fully 700 miles. The Egyptian army’s line of communication extended 250 miles, mainly across desert. Even the Arab Legion required between 80 and 90 miles of travel to the Palestine front, including first a descent and then a climb of 4,000 feet in crossing the Jordan Valley. Advance knowledge of this extensive terrain was so grossly inadequate that the Syrian and Iraqi general staffs lacked even a single military map of Palestine and were obliged to rely on geographic charts used by school pupils and the advice of civilian guides. Neither was there a unified command worthy of the name. On May 14 Abdullah appointed himself commander in chief by virtue of his Legion’s recognized military superiority in the Arab world. The title was purely honorific. Coordination among the various Arab armies was nonexistent. Indeed, the Hashemite ruler admitted as much to Muhammad Fadil al-Jamili, the Iraqi minister of interior, who was visiting Amman the day the war started. “At dinner the king told me that he was chosen as commander in chief of all Arab armies,” Jamili recalled, “but that he did not

know anything about the Arab armies and he had not been given the information he had requested.”

THE JEWS FACE INVASION

The Arabs would have been considerably less hesitant to invade Palestine had they known the actual state of Jewish defenses. As late as May 12, the Haganah mobilized barely 30,000 men and women. The number itself was perhaps not much smaller than the total of Arab forces on the Palestine front, consisting of approximately 10,000 Egyptians, 4,500 Arab Legionnaires, 7,000 Syrians, 8,000 Iraqis, and 3,000 Lebanese. But the Arabs' strength, however limited, was concentrated primarily in their much greater firepower, the air forces at their disposal. At the beginning the Jews had nothing comparable. Nor, lacking defense in depth, could they afford to give ground on any of their four fronts. The Jewish general staff also remained unwieldy in its command structure. Ben-Gurion was obliged to pass his orders to senior officers through Israel Galili, a civilian intermediary. The system was a vestige of the Haganah's early ideological role as a pioneer-labor defense force.

The Jews' most important resource was to be found, rather, in the dedication and military experience of their troops. Yigael Yadin, Israel's commander of operations, was a case in point. A graduate student of archaeology in civilian life, Yadin from his earliest youth had followed a typical Haganah career of secret maneuvers and operations against both Arab guerrillas and British military installations in Palestine. Demonstrating flair and imagination in clandestine officers' training courses, he rose swiftly through the ranks of the underground, becoming chief of Haganah planning operations in the last years of the mandate. In 1948 he was called to assume acting command of the Jewish defense forces. A tall, prematurely balding man with a photographically detailed archaeological knowledge of the Palestine terrain, Yadin was thirty years old when he assumed this responsibility. None of his brigade commanders was older, or less experienced in underground operations. The task they now faced, to be sure, was more formidable than any they had previously encountered. Jewish agents and hired informers in neighboring Arab lands confirmed that a major invasion was imminent. A general plan of battle had to be put into effect immediately.

Yadin divided his forces with care. Three of his nine brigades were allocated to the north. Two were held back in the coastal plain to guard the Tel Aviv area. In the south, as a counterpoise to the Egyptians, a brigade was dispatched to the Rehovot-Isdud (Ashdod) area, and another to the northern Negev region. Finally, in the Judean hills one brigade was allocated for the defense of Jerusalem, and one to the struggle for the highway in the Jerusalem Corridor. These 30,000 troops represented the full complement of Jewish fighting strength. In ensuing weeks, additional thousands of recruits were pressed into service, but on May 14 Jewish manpower resources were still critically limited. So was the supply of weapons. Quantities of arms had been hurriedly accumulated in Europe and elsewhere during preceding months, and even carried across the Mediterranean. But the British refused to allow the unloading of these cargoes until

the mandate ended. It was only now that the arms-producing machinery, formerly disguised as “textile equipment,” could be assembled for the manufacture of small grease guns and grenades. By the evening of May 14, Haganah intelligence had begun piecing the military situation together. Transjordan’s Arab Legion was concentrating on Jerusalem and its surrounding villages. Detachments of the Iraqi army were buttressing the Legion in the central Palestine sector. In the north, the Syrians and Lebanese were moving into Galilee, while Iraqi and other Syrian units were deploying against Jewish farm settlements in the Jordan Valley. In the southwest, meanwhile, the Egyptians were crossing Sinai with a force of two brigades.

The Lebanese army of between 3,000 and 3,500 men was the weakest threat to the newly established Jewish republic. Its officers were essentially young men of leisure from “good” families; like their government, they cared more for striking a belligerent pose than actively fighting. The government itself, for that matter, was precariously balanced between rival Moslem and Christian factions, which held divergent views of the emerging Jewish state. Two days after the end of the mandate, a thousand Lebanese troops seized the Palestine frontier post of Malkiyah, lost it to a Palmach counterattack, recaptured it on June 5, then were content to stop there for the rest of the war. In theory the Syrian army represented a weightier factor. Trained initially by General Maxime Weygand before World War II, and later by a British military mission in 1945, it reached a manpower strength of 7,000 troops by May 1948. The typical Syrian recruit demonstrated little fighting spirit, however. The army lacked a general staff, and its single effective formation was a mechanized brigade, which took the leading role in the invasion of Palestine. Actually the Syrians’ major asset was their equipment. It was far superior, in tanks and artillery, to anything the Jews possessed at the beginning of the war.

Thus, shortly after May 16, a Syrian column of two hundred armored vehicles, including forty-five tanks, moved deliberately toward the southern tip of Lake Galilee. Its target was the cluster of lush, prosperous Jewish settlements on both sides of the Jordan River. Several of these were overrun. The column then proceeded to attack Degania, the oldest kibbutz in Palestine. Without artillery, Jewish forces were helpless to block the Syrian advance. Until then the only heavy weapons that had been unloaded at Haifa were four howitzers of the type used by the French army in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Two of these ancient fieldpieces were promptly dismantled and rushed to Degania. The local commander, Lieutenant Colonel Moshe Dayan, had them reassembled at the very moment the first Syrian tanks rumbled through the kibbutz perimeter, and they scored a hit on the advance tank. Had the Syrians known that these two obsolete weapons represented half the arsenal of Jewish fieldguns in Palestine, they might have pressed the attack. Instead, the armored vehicles swung around in their tracks and clattered back up the mountain road. They never returned. From then on, the Syrian government and high command concentrated on a more limited strategy. The Damascus regime had inherited from the French mandatory several territorial claims against Palestine dating back to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919–20. The most important of these was the protruding finger of northeastern Galilee, giving access to

additional water resources. Farther south, too, the Syrians laid claim to the eastern shore of Lake Galilee. Accordingly, their subsequent military campaign was designed to resolve these essentially local issues in their favor.

The Iraqis proved only barely more effective than the Syrians. Their contingent, stationed in Transjordan near the Palestine frontier before May 15, numbered about 8,000, of whom 3,500 were combat troops. An effort was launched to cross the Jordan River opposite Beisan the day the mandate ended. It failed. The Iraqi battle commander, General Tahir, thereafter withdrew his men from this region and stationed them in the Samaritan "triangle," where they were dispersed thinly as far as Jenin and Tulkarem, only eleven miles from the Mediterranean. Qawukji's irregulars held the Mount Gilboa range and several nearby Arab villages, thus acting as a protective screen for the Iraqis. On May 28 the Jews managed to destroy this screen by clearing the northern tip of the mountains.

Five days later, however, a Jewish frontal attack on Jenin itself was driven back by Iraqi reinforcements. A second Jewish effort failed two days later. Remarkably, the Iraqis were unwilling to counterattack. From then on until the truce of June 11, they simply held their earlier positions. Had they continued their offensive in the early days of the war, they might well have cut the newborn Jewish state in half. But enthusiasm for battle was notably lacking among the Iraqi peasant-conscripts. There were instances when the Jews found dead Iraqi gunners chained to their weapons.

ISRAEL'S SURVIVAL IN THE BALANCE

The most critical battle areas of the Palestine war proved to be in the south, along the Egyptian line of invasion up the coast, and in the Judean hills, where the Arab Legion laid siege to Jerusalem. Ironically, until May 6, Egyptian army headquarters assumed that military activity would be limited to occasional volunteers or to Moslem Brotherhood irregulars in southern Palestine. When the order came to march on Palestine with two brigades, Major General Ahmad Ali al-Muawi, commander of the Egyptian expeditionary force, protested to the government that the condition of his troops was deplorable. The military staff was responsible for this, of course. The contrast between its officers and men was that of pharaohs and slaves. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Nuqrashi Pasha assured Muawi that little fighting actually would be necessary. The United Nations would surely intervene in Palestine before hostilities began. The Egyptian force gathering at al-Arish consisted of about 10,000 men, reasonably mechanized and organized into the Second and Fourth Brigades. Brigadier Muhammad Naguib commanded the Second Brigade; his principal staff officer was Major Abd al-Hakim Amir.

Naguib led his troops toward the coastal road extending to Gaza and Tel Aviv. The Fourth Brigade, under Lieutenant General Abd al-Aziz, moved inland toward the Hebron hills. On May 20, en route, Aziz's column entered the small Bedouin town of Beersheba, and then continued northward through Hebron to Bethlehem, which was handed over to

the Egyptians on May 22 by the Arab Legion. Thereupon this brigade moved at once against the kibbutz of Ramat Rachel, guarding the New—Jewish—City of Jerusalem. Naguib, meanwhile, leading 5,000 troops, proceeded cautiously up the littoral road toward the Tel Aviv urban enclave. To counter this threat, Yadin ordered the 2,000 men of his southern brigade pulled from their battle stations on the Jerusalem highway. These troops had already suffered grievous losses fighting the Legion, and were exhausted and underequipped. Naguib was unaware of the actual precariousness of the Jewish situation, however. The Egyptians had just encountered unexpectedly stiff resistance from the isolated kibbutz of Yad Mordechai, which had managed to withstand five days of intensive Egyptian shelling before being evacuated. Those five days had tied up approximately half of Naguib's coastal force and mauled one of his battalions so thoroughly that it had to be deactivated temporarily. Several miles away from Yad Mordechai, another kibbutz, Negba, was blocking the Egyptian advance in a resistance of equal ferocity. Although General Naguib eventually decided to skirt the bristling farm community, Negba remained a continual threat to his flank. He moved with elaborate caution, as a result, slowing his drive barely sixteen miles from the outskirts of Tel Aviv.

With a population of a quarter-million, Tel Aviv had burgeoned spectacularly into one of the most advanced and impressive cities of the Middle East; it was now more than three times larger than New Jerusalem, the former concentration of Jewish settlement. Its fall clearly would mean the end of the war for Israel. At this point, therefore, Yadin decided to risk a tactical offensive. On May 29 he ordered reinforcements from the Jerusalem Corridor to circle Naguib's positions at night and attack the Egyptians from the rear. With a troop strength barely half that of the invaders, the relief force nevertheless found darkness and surprise no less effective than had Sadeh and Wingate in the 1930s. The Egyptians were thrown into confusion by the unexpected descent upon their flank. Yadin shrewdly exploited their disarray by calling a press conference and announcing that the Egyptian supply lines had been cut by "overwhelming concentrations" of Israeli troops. The "news" was immediately dispatched over the international wire services, and eventually reached Cairo. As Yadin had hoped, the Egyptian high command accepted the story at face value and radioed Naguib to pull up short. The bewildered commander dutifully followed these instructions.

Naguib's setback proved to be the turning point of the Egyptian invasion. Tel Aviv was never again in jeopardy. In any case, the Egyptian government and high command were not dissatisfied with their accomplishments thus far. By June 11, when the first United Nations truce came into effect ([this page](#)), Egyptian troops were within artillery range of Tel Aviv and encamped near the suburbs of Jerusalem. They dominated all the main roads of the Negev, as well. Conversely, the Jewish reinforcement column in the south had lost nearly 1,200 dead and wounded and urgently needed rest and new equipment. The Zionist settlements in the Negev were isolated and in danger of being starved out.

The Jewish situation in the Jerusalem area, besieged by Transjordan's Arab Legion, was even more precarious. It was the more unexpected, as well. Both the Zionists and the British had long considered Abdullah to be the most accommodating of all the Arab

leaders. Indeed, the Hashemite ruler had always made clear that his interest lay exclusively in the Arab sectors of Palestine. In the spring of 1948, Transjordanian Prime Minister Tewfik Pasha, visiting London to negotiate a new treaty, informed Bevin that the Amman government had decided to send the Arab Legion across the Jordan River when the British mandate ended. Its goal would be limited to the occupation of eastern Palestine, the portion awarded the Arabs by the United Nations Partition Resolution. General Glubb, who attended this meeting, recalled: “I can to this day almost see Mr. Bevin sitting at his table in that splendid room. When I finished my translation thus far, he interrupted Taufiq Pasha’s statement by saying: ‘It seems the obvious thing to do.’ He added later, ‘but do not go and invade the areas allotted to the Jews.’ ‘We should not have the forces to do so, even if we so desired,’ [replied the Arab prime minister].”

Abdullah did not disguise his intentions from the Arab League. At an earlier meeting with the other Arab delegations in Amman, on October 14, 1947, the king warned that he was reserving his “freedom of action” in Palestine. Under no circumstances would he countenance a Palestinian government, with or without the Mufti. He also disliked the notion of using Palestine Arabs for operations against the Jews. Two weeks before, he had explained his views to a close friend:

The Mufti and Kuwatly [the Syrian president] want to set up an independent Arab state in Palestine with the Mufti at its head. If that were to happen I would be encircled on almost all sides by enemies. This compels me to take measures to anticipate their plans. My forces will therefore occupy every place evacuated by the British. I will not begin the attack on the Jews and will only attack them if they first attack my forces. I will not allow massacres in Palestine. Only after quiet and order have been established will it be possible to reach an understanding with the Jews.

Such an understanding apparently was reached as early as the following month. Under British patronage, the Hashemite realm had coexisted for two and a half decades in intimate economic association with the Jews. Abdullah himself had always entertained a shrewd appreciation of Zionist dynamism and staying power, and of the advantages the Jewish redemptive effort in Palestine could offer his own impoverished little nation. Over the years he had made and cultivated numerous friendships with the Jews. He expected to be able to reach a political agreement with them. Conceivably there was leeway for minor alterations to be negotiated in the Partition Resolution—for example, granting a Transjordanian easement to Haifa harbor and an outlet for Arab agricultural produce. In November 1947, therefore, the diminutive king held a secret meeting with Mrs. Golda Meyerson (later Meir) in Rutenberg House at the Jordan River power station of Naharayim. The conversation was entirely amicable. If the United Nations decided to partition Palestine, Abdullah explained, he frankly preferred to annex the Arab sector to his kingdom. Mrs. Meyerson foresaw no difficulties, agreeing with Abdullah that “we both have a common enemy—the Mufti.” She added that the Jews would themselves do nothing to breach the partition line envisaged in the United Nations Resolution, but what would happen in the Arab area was no business of theirs.

This genial exchange was typical of the understanding that had always existed not only between Abdullah and the Zionists but also, we recall, between Abdullah’s late

brother Feisal and the Jews—and was accordingly a source of deep suspicion throughout the rest of the Arab world. In later years continued reference would be made to the “Hashemite-Zionist partnership.” “Of all the Arab leaders, King Abdullah, dean of the Hashemite family, was closest to the hearts of the Zionists,” wrote the Iraqi historian Muhammad Uadah. “Their most important writers considered his tenure on the Jordanian throne one of the greatest assurances for the preservation of Israel.” Yet as late as Tewfik Pasha’s discussion with Bevin, and Abdullah’s conversation with Mrs. Meyerson, it was still by no means certain that the Arab League would authorize military intervention in Palestine. Only later, when this step became increasingly likely, did Abdullah admit to a visiting journalist on April 26: “[A]ll our efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Palestine problem have failed. The only way left for us is war. I will have the pleasure and honour to save Palestine.”

Abdullah cherished no illusions of winning the entire country for his dynasty; the Legion comprised barely 4,500 men available for battle operations. Even so, he expected to do well. His troops were equipped with artillery and commanded by British officers. Two days before the British withdrawal from Palestine, moreover, the Arab League had promised Abdullah a war chest of up to £3 million, in deference to his position as commander in chief. Now that hostilities were certain in Palestine, the king was determined to exploit these advantages by stealing a march on the other Arab states. He explained his position to Mrs. Meyerson in a second secret conversation of May 11, this one in Amman. Accompanied by Ezra Danin, a veteran Sephardic native of Palestine with extensive connections among Palestinians and other Arabs, Mrs. Meyerson had disguised herself as a peasant woman to make the dangerous trip to the Transjordanian capital. Abdullah implored his visitors to postpone the declaration of the Jewish state and to accept instead an undivided Palestine with autonomous Jewish areas. Mrs. Meyerson turned down the offer. Somewhat embarrassedly, then, the king explained that he had intended to honor his original agreement not to invade Jewish territory, but now “I am one among five. I have no alternative and I cannot act otherwise.”

As the discussion continued, Mrs. Meyerson warned Abdullah that the Jews were his only friends. “I know it,” he replied, “and I have no illusions on that score. I know the [other Arabs] and their ‘good intentions.’ I firmly believe that Divine Providence has restored you, a Semite people who were banished to Europe and have benefited by its progress, to the Semite East, which needs your knowledge and initiative.... But the situation is grave, and we must not err through hasty action. Consequently I beg of you to be patient.” Mrs. Meyerson firmly rejected the proposal of delaying Jewish statehood. “I am sorry,” Abdullah replied. “I deplore the coming bloodshed and destruction. Let us hope we shall meet again and will not sever our relations. If you find it necessary to meet me during the actual fighting, do not hesitate to come and see me.” On their way back to Palestine, the two Jewish visitors could see at a distance Iraqi army units moving toward the front with their heavy transport and extensive field artillery.

Abdullah’s decision to engage in hostilities was influenced not merely by suspicion of his Arab neighbors but by a deeply rooted, almost visceral yearning for the city of

Jerusalem, with all its Moslem historical associations. Indeed, capture of the venerated shrine community would recompense the Hashemite king for his father's loss of Mecca and Medina to the Saudi dynasty in 1925. It was for this reason, too, that Abdullah indicated his disapproval of the Arab League plan of battle, which assigned the Legion to northern Palestine and Haifa. Rather, he ordered his troops to concentrate on Jerusalem and its hinterland and on those sectors of Palestine awarded to the Arab state. It is of interest that the decision was taken over the strenuous objections of the Legion commander, General Glubb. The Englishman was fearful of bogging his army down in Jerusalem. The Jews were experts in street fighting, he pointed out, and by engaging in the enemy's kind of warfare the Legion would dissipate the advantage of its superior tactical training and mobility. "With our slender manpower and no reserves, we could not afford a sloggish match," he insisted. Yet the king would not be budged. Glubb, in turn, was so unnerved at the prospect of war in Jerusalem that (he recounted later) he fell upon his knees. " 'O God,' I said, 'I am not equal to these events. I entreat Thee to grant me Thy help.' "

But if Abdullah was shortsighted in committing himself to the battle for Jerusalem, Glubb was equally ill-informed in his estimation of Jewish defenses. They were much less formidable than he imagined. The Arabs controlled every height around the city and within it. Their fighting strength by then was nearly 4,500 armed men, while the Jews, if numerically their equal, were virtually weaponless. Half the Haganah field strength was committed to protect ten or twelve beleaguered settlements around the Judean hills, and was isolated from Jerusalem and the rest of the Yishuv. A large minority of the city's Jewish population was Orthodox and quite fatalistic, unwilling to resist a major invasion. Had Glubb known, then, how desperate the enemy's circumstances were, he would have concentrated all his forces on Jerusalem immediately.

THE BATTLE FOR JERUSALEM

Thus, for the 85,000 Jews in the Holy City, already weakened by the Arab stranglehold on their lifeline from the coast, the initial weeks of the Transjordanian attack nearly proved disastrous. On May 19, Abdullah sent his first units into the Old City, that historic enclave consisting of mixed communities of Arabs, Armenians, and Greeks, with a small Jewish quarter, all surrounded by a medieval Turkish wall. Simultaneously an additional 2,000 Legionnaires, well equipped with artillery and commanded by British officers, moved on Jerusalem from the north and soon invested its outlying perimeter. Within the opening days of hostilities, they threatened a breakthrough into the Jewish inhabited area of the New City.

After ten days of savage fighting, however, the outnumbered Jewish troops finally managed to drive the Legion back from the point of its farthest advance at the Mea Sh'arim quarter. On May 28, Glubb decided to call off the attack in the northern part of the city. Some of his companies had lost fully half their effective strength, and others were unnerved by the shattering blast of homemade Jewish mortars. From this point on, the Arabs switched their offensive to Jerusalem's southern approaches. Units of the

Egyptian army had already achieved a juncture with the Legion's advance lines in Bethlehem. On May 2, under cover of a heavy Transjordanian artillery bombardment, Egyptian infantrymen stormed the kibbutz of Ramat Rachel, lying astride the entrance to southern Jerusalem. What followed was the single most furious encounter of the Palestine war. The little kibbutz changed hands five times during the next four days. Soldiers pressing forward in bayonet attack often had to climb over bodies piled on top of each other. When the last attack was over, the Jews—most of them former Etzel members—remained in control. For the moment, at least, the imminent possibility of the Arabs capturing the New City had faded.

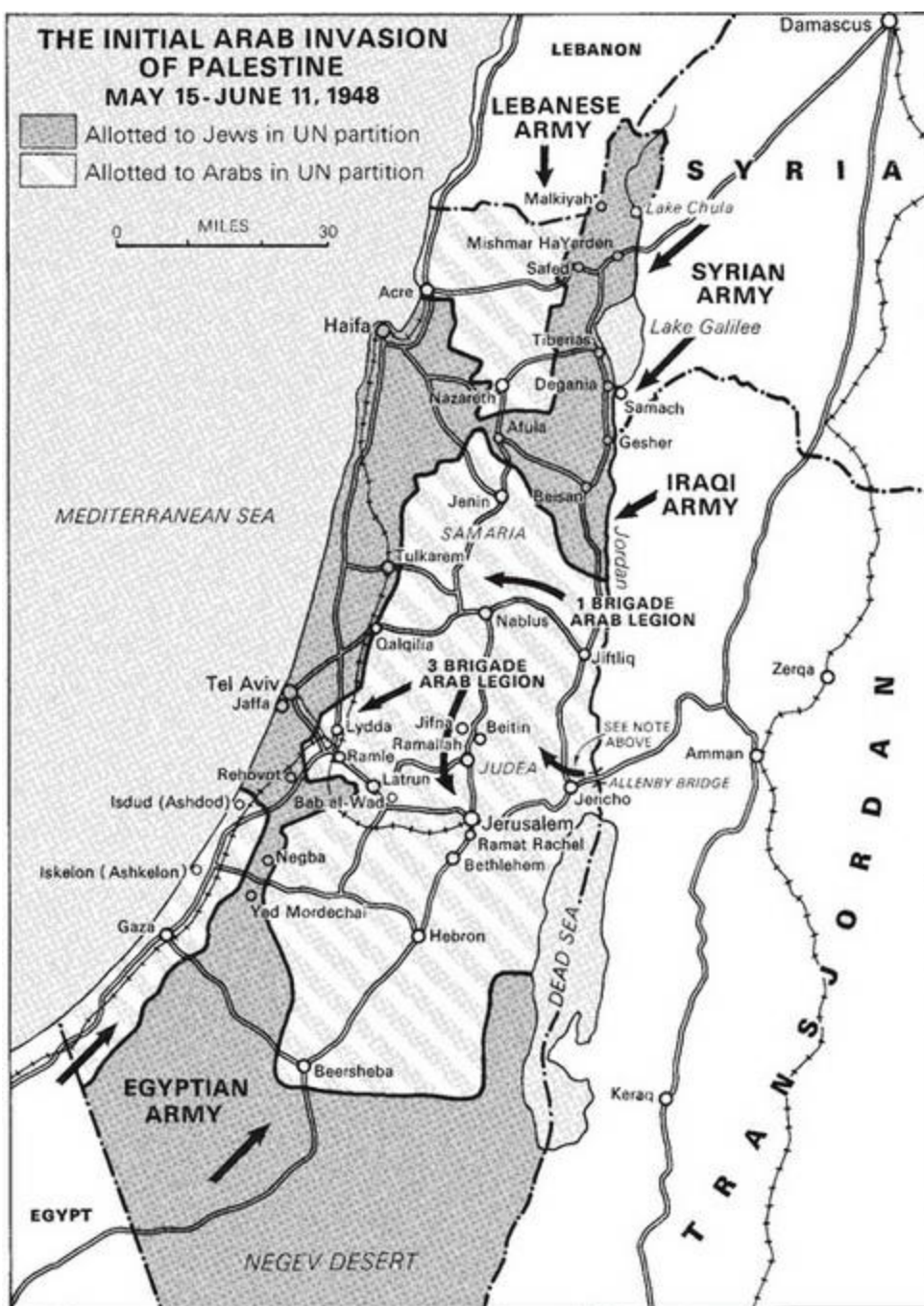
The Jewish quarter behind the Turkish wall failed to hold out, however. This congested little warren of streets and courtyards was inhabited exclusively by Orthodox pietists and defended by a single Haganah unit. On May 18 a second company of Jewish troops fought its way into the Old City and took up positions at the side of the defenders. In the following week other Jewish units made repeated attempts to break through the tightening Arab ring, but each time a Legion artillery barrage drove them off. At last, on May 28, the Jewish quarter surrendered. News of the fall of the Old City was received with profound shock by the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine. The venerable enclave had traditionally been revered as the site of the ancient Hebrew Temple, of the surviving Western Wall ([Chapter VIII](#)), and was the cynosure of Orthodox Jewry the world over. Its loss, and the subsequent desecration of its Jewish shrines, was to be lamented with unalleviated bitterness in years to come.

Yet from the purely military viewpoint, the fate of the New City and of its Jewish inhabitants had to be the principal concern of the Israeli high command. The Arabs thus far had been unable to conquer the sprawling urban complex through direct assault. By the opening of June, nevertheless, the ability of the metropolitan area to hold out was far from certain. During the three and a half weeks of fighting after May 15, the city was hit by more than 10,000 shells that destroyed some 2,000 homes and other structures and inflicted 1,200 civilian casualties. With the supply line from Tel Aviv blocked, ammunition for the New City defenders was nearly exhausted. Under a firm, efficient military governor, Bernard (Dov) Joseph, the largest numbers of the Jewish population somehow maintained their discipline, except for fainthearted elements among the Orthodox. This civilian tenacity was to prove crucial, inasmuch as the water pipeline from the coast had also long since been cut, and citizens were obliged to queue up each day for rations of drinking water. The prospect of mass starvation was also very real. In a number of the poorer, Sephardic-Oriental neighborhoods, children were foraging in the streets. During prolonged and anguished meetings with Yadin, therefore, Ben-Gurion insisted that full military priority now be given to the opening of the Jerusalem highway.

To that end, Israel's most respected field commander, Yigal Allon, was called down from the north on May 23 to assume strategic responsibility for the assault on Latrun, the Arab strongpoint controlling the road. New recruits had to be coopted to augment the Jewish forces, including hundreds of recent immigrants possessing no military experience or even basic training. They were rushed up now by bus and taxi from Tel

Aviv. On May 25, under the operational command of Colonel Shlomo Shamir, the attack was launched in a blistering desert sirocco. Despite the lack of adequate reconnaissance or artillery support, the men were thrown into a direct frontal offensive. Thereupon the Arab Legion's Fourth Regiment, ensconced in the village heights, raked the attackers with mortars and artillery. The Jews were thrown back with heavy loss of life. During the next few days additional efforts were mounted, and each time with the same result. Latrun very nearly became the graveyard of Jewish hopes for breaking the siege of Jerusalem.

A single alternative remained for opening the Jewish supply line. During the previous weeks, Colonel David Marcus, an American Jewish volunteer and West Point graduate serving as area commander for the road, had been using a path south of Latrun and Bab al-Wad to infiltrate troops on foot through the hills to Jerusalem. Marcus speculated that the path might be widened to enable vehicles to pass through. With Yadin's approval, hundreds of laborers were now summoned from Tel Aviv and immediately put to work clearing boulders and dynamiting rock sidings. There was no opportunity for rest, even in the fiercest heat, for a United Nations truce was to come into effect on June 11. If the "Burma Road" were not completed before then, no further efforts would be permitted after the truce deadline, and Jerusalem would starve. Finally, by June 9, a primitive roadbed was cut through the Jerusalem mountains. The first trucks, loaded with cans of food and water, ventured out on the pitted makeshift highway. Several hours later they entered Jerusalem, where they were greeted rapturously by the awaiting Jewish population.



THE FIRST UNITED NATIONS TRUCE

It was the British representative, Sir Alexander Cadogan, who had repeatedly voted against a truce resolution in the Security Council. Indeed, throughout the UN debates, Cadogan refused to use the word "Israel." His favorite circumlocution was to refer to the new state as "the Jewish authorities in Palestine." Maintaining a proprietary interest in the Arab war effort, then, the Englishman declined to approve a cease-fire order until the Arab armies clearly were reaching the exhaustion point. Even then he was unwilling to go further than to suggest the appointment of a United Nations mediator, with power to recommend a settlement. This minimal proposal, at least, was endorsed by the Security Council on May 20, and the chosen mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte of Sweden, arrived in the Middle East the following week. The Arabs were generally receptive to the idea of a truce, but the Jews were unprepared to accept Bernadotte's

limitations on immigration during the projected month-long cease-fire. Eventually a compromise was reached. It provided for a ban to be imposed on the introduction of additional weapons, and male immigrants of military age would be gathered in camps under United Nations supervision (neither side, as it turned out, observed this restriction). All fighting would stop on June 11.

The truce descended on the exhausted armies “as dew from heaven,” in the words of one Israeli commander. Both sides were at the limit of their resources. Strategically, the Arabs had gained little. The Syrians had established a bridgehead on Israeli territory, but it was a negligible one. The Arab Legion had taken the Old City, but the achievement was of questionable military importance. The Egyptians had acquired a foothold in the Negev, but this was barren desert. Whatever pretense to a united command ever existed among the Arab armies had disintegrated in the actual fighting. The Syrians, for example, had attacked at Samakh, and the Iraqis had launched an offensive six miles to the south at Gesher; neither army had attempted to coordinate its strategy with the other. During the lull in the hostilities, the Iraqi chief of staff, General Salah Saïb al-Jaburi, presented a long report to his government, warning that the Jews would come back much strengthened after the expiration of the truce, and urging that the Arabs unify their forces immediately.

Such an effort was briefly made. On their own, the Iraqis offered the post of commander in chief to General al-Muawi, who was leading the Egyptian expeditionary force. When informed of the offer, however, Abdullah promptly vetoed it. The truth was that the Hashemite king by then had lost interest in continuing the war. His casualties had been heavy, and the likelihood of further territorial gain in Palestine was minimal. Glubb recalled that when he, Glubb, asked the government for new troops, he was rebuffed. “ ‘There won’t be any more fighting,’ [Prime Minister Tewfik Pasha] said to me, shaking the first finger of his right hand to the right and left... ‘No more fighting! I and Nokrashy Pasha [the Egyptian prime minister] are agreed on that, and when we two are agreed we can sway the rest. No! No more fighting!’ ” Glubb commented sourly afterward that a month’s priceless respite was wasted. In contrast, the other Arab leaders made effective use of the truce. The Iraqis increased their numbers at the front to 10,000 and added large quantities of equipment. The Syrians also carried out an extensive recruiting campaign, as did the Egyptians. By the first week in July, the number of Arab regular troops in Palestine had grown from 32,000 to some 45,000.

As the time approached for the truce to expire, the Arab League Political Committee met again in Cairo. There Tewfik Pasha argued strenuously against resuming hostilities. He was a minority of one, although most of the Arab chiefs of staff privately supported him. The decision was made by the politicians, who evidently hoped to protect their reputations by declining to renew the cease-fire; the Security Council then hopefully would impose a new truce. Nuqrashi Pasha in Egypt actually doubted that his cabinet would survive if the cease-fire were prolonged. As it turned out, by renewing the war after having given the Jews a month’s respite, the Arab governments doomed their military effort in Palestine. “Those governments did not know either how to enter the battle or how to get out of it,” wryly observed Musa al-Alami later.

For the Jews, the issue of continuing the struggle was much simpler. Their military position at the time of the United Nations truce was by no means assured. The invading Arab armies had been contained, but more than a third of the territory allocated to Israel—essentially the Negev—remained in Arab hands. The Syrians on the west bank of the Jordan still threatened the safety of Galilee, while the Iraqis in the central sector were ensconced only twelve miles from the Mediterranean. Not least of all, the narrow artery to Jerusalem remained vulnerable, and in the city itself the Jewish population was far from secure in its provisions of food, water, and medicine. Gravely short of manpower and weapons, the fledgling Israeli army actually was in danger of collapse on nearly every front. Troop morale was poor as a result of delayed or inadequate compensation to soldiers' families.

By the truce provisions, neither side was permitted to introduce new troops. Jerusalem was to be allowed enough food and water for a month, but not more. The Israeli high command had no intention of abiding by these conditions, however, which it regarded as suicidal. Convoys of food and medicines were rushed to Jerusalem. Mobilization was continued and increased dramatically in early July. The little armaments factory moved into full production, turning out bullets, grenades, and mortar shells. Weapons were secretly unloaded at coastal sites. By then the quantity of guns and equipment had become more substantial. Well before the end of the mandate, the Czechoslovak government had expressed a willingness to sell the Jews weapons from the great Skoda works. This decision was in part political (reflecting the Soviet line), in part humanitarian (evinced a traditional Czech compassion on the refugee issue), and in part economic (the payment was in dollars). On May 20 the Czechs turned over an entire military airfield to the Jews, which in the following months became Israel's principal base in Europe for the shuttle service of arms and planes. Eventually several Dakota transports commuted back and forth between the two nations, ferrying to Israel dismantled fighter planes, artillery pieces, armored vehicles, and lighter weapons and ammunition. Planes arrived from other countries, as well, including bombers and fighters often flown illegally by veterans of the Allied air forces out of Britain and the United States. For each plane that crashed or was interned en route, two others landed safely. Thousands of tons of ammunition, military equipment, and clothing now arrived, much of it purchased, much donated from Jewish sources throughout the world.

The French government, too, continued its support. Weapons were sold in large quantities to the Jews. Training, storage, and assemblage facilities were provided near French arms depots and at abandoned French air force landing strips. Airfields in Corsica were made available to planes refueling en route to Israel. Nor did Prime Minister Georges Bidault obstruct Etzel agents from conducting their recruiting and arms purchases on French soil. It was in this manner that the Etzel purchased an American LST vessel and sailed it to France in early May. Anchored near Marseilles, the ship was to be loaded with several hundred European and North African Jews of military age and with large quantities of French weapons. Indeed, at Bidault's intercession, these arms actually were supplied free of charge. Meanwhile General Rouen, the French army chief

of staff, and Inspector-General Weibeau of the French police made embarkation facilities available to the Etzel. It was expected that the vessel, called *Altalena*, a pen name of the late Jabotinsky, would make several trips between France and Israel with additional recruits and weapons. The LST sailed on May 29 with 500 men and women aboard, and a cargo of 5,000 rifles, 450 machine guns, and millions of rounds of ammunition. It was still en route when the United Nations truce came into effect.

Ben-Gurion had consented secretly for the *Altalena* to land on June 20. Difficulties arose only when the Etzel demanded that 20 percent of the weapons go to its own units. The prime minister adamantly refused this challenge to the authority of the Israeli government. Soon shooting broke out between regular forces and the Etzel as the LST commander sought to land the vessel on a beach north of Tel Aviv. The firing continued for several hours. The *Altalena* then burst into flame; twelve of its crew were killed (one of them was Avraham Stavsky, who had been tried in 1933 for the murder of Arlosoroff), together with seventy of the recruits. Some of the cargo was lost. The incident immediately terminated all further arms shipments from France. It reopened, too, a bitter factional dispute between the Israeli Right and the Labor government that was destined to envenom the politics of the Jewish republic for the next generation. Yet the immediate consequence of the *Altalena* episode was the Israeli cabinet's decision to arrest a number of Etzel leaders and to abolish remaining Etzel units within the army.

For that matter, Ben-Gurion was determined now to impose unity and discipline at all levels of the military effort. He announced his intention henceforth to bypass Israel Galili, the civilian Haganah intermediary, and to issue orders directly to the military staff. Whenever possible, too, he appointed former officers of the British army's Palestinian units as front commanders. These decisions, perhaps understandably, provoked a near-mutiny within the Haganah and Palmach command, including Yadin himself. But, after intensive discussions and considerable tension, Ben-Gurion had his way in all essentials. Uniforms became standard, and a differential pay scale was established for commissioned officers. During the month-long truce, new recruits were given intensive training and new weapons were mastered. With 60,000 men in service and growing quantities of European and American equipment at its disposal, the army was systematically transformed into a modern fighting force. Its power now emerged as a central fact of Middle Eastern life in the months—and years—that lay ahead.

TERRITORIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

The Egyptians prepared to strike the first blow. On July 8, even before the truce expired, General Naguib renewed the attack against Negba, the linchpin of the Israeli defense system in the south. But Negba, too, had been reinforced with heavy equipment during the truce, and now successfully hurled back repeated Egyptian assaults. Thereupon the Jews themselves began a limited offensive, reoccupying a number of villages in the northwestern corner of the Negev, forcing back the main Egyptian line in the center. It soon became evident to Yadin and his staff that the Egyptians no longer represented a serious offensive threat. They would be dealt with at a more opportune

time later.

In the north, meanwhile, the Syrians were content to dig in at the captured farm settlement of Mishmar HaYarden, where they shelled the approach road. Their foothold in Jewish territory no longer constituted a bridgehead. The presence of 2,000 Arab irregulars under Fawzi al-Qawukji in the lower Galilee mountains was a more serious potential danger. The Jews disposed of it, however, in a brutal week-long campaign, during which they overran the Arab town of Nazareth and cleared the surrounding Arab villages. At the same time, the principal Israeli military effort was concentrated on the Legion-occupied Lydda-Ramle area that formed a wedge only eleven miles from Tel Aviv and threatened to cut the nation in two. The salient also dominated Palestine's major road junctions, north-south, east-west, including the neck of the Jerusalem Corridor, and the country's one major airport. On July 9, therefore, Yigal Allon led two of his brigades in an attack on this Arab strongpoint. In the course of a day and night of fighting, the enemy positions were completely encircled. On the eleventh, Lydda and its international airport fell to Lieutenant Colonel Moshe Dayan's mechanized infantry. The following afternoon, Dayan led his column of jeeps into Ramle. Barreling through the main street at full speed, machine guns firing, Dayan's troops sent the Legionnaires fleeing. With this sledgehammer operation, the Jews eliminated any remaining Arab threat to the Tel Aviv area. An alternative, if precarious, route to Jerusalem was simultaneously opened, and the most important communications centers in Palestine were wrested from the Arabs. Allon's subsequent efforts to outflank Latrun failed. Yet it did not escape Glubb, the Arab Legion commander, that the Jews had been continuously on the offensive during the entire period of fighting, and the Arabs on the defensive—a precise reversal of the earlier phase of the war.

By mid-July, too, Glubb was compromised in Abdullah's eyes for having failed to save Lydda and Ramle. The moment the second truce came into effect, the king sent his English commander on leave to Europe for "rest." Like Glubb himself, Abdullah now turned entirely defensive in his thinking and concentrated exclusively on protecting his strongholds in and around Jerusalem. The Legion thenceforth ceased to be a factor in the Palestine war. In truth, the shift in military fortunes registered no less dramatically on Abdullah's patron, the British government. On the first day of renewed fighting after July 9, the Arab capitals had turned down an appeal for another cease-fire, expecting that their armies would retrieve the situation. The British shared this illusion. But on July 12 the news reached Whitehall that Lydda airport had fallen to the Jews; an Israeli "gunboat" (actually a reconverted landing craft) had shelled the Lebanese city of Tyre; three heavy "Flying Fortresses," new additions to the Israeli air force, had bombed Cairo en route from the United States to Israeli air fields. Thereupon, under urgent instructions from London, Cadogan pressed the Security Council to order an immediate truce under penalty of sanctions. The Council endorsed this proposal unanimously on July 15, with instructions for hostilities to cease three days later. Meanwhile Glubb met with Bevin in London. "The [foreign secretary] opened the conversation with bitter complaints against the Arabs," the Legion commander wrote later, "whom he had done his best to help, but who had in reply only loaded him with complaints and abuse." It

was painfully evident to Bevin that by July 18 Israel occupied far more of (inhabited) Palestine than the UN Partition Resolution had allocated, while the Arabs occupied only one Jewish settlement, Mishmar HaYarden, together with an indeterminate Egyptian foothold in the Negev.

There were other unanticipated changes in the configuration of Palestine. These were demographic. In the months immediately following the Partition Resolution, approximately 30,000 Arabs decided to leave Palestine. As in the civil war of the 1930s, most of these émigrés were businessmen and their families from the larger cities. Liquidating their holdings, they transferred their accounts to banks in Egypt and Lebanon and departed unobtrusively. No one else budged. On the contrary, with the arrival of Arab volunteers and weapons, and the early successes of Qawukji's Arab Liberation Army in the first two months of 1948, the morale of the Palestine Arab community was measurably strengthened.

It was afterward, we recall, in April and May of 1948, that the Jews began to secure the upper hand in Palestine, clearing the interior road network, seizing the vital towns, and dominating the principal arteries except for the Jerusalem highway and small pockets in the Galilee. Simultaneously, Arab public services collapsed in the pandemonium of British evacuation. The exodus of Arab families resumed, and this time included large numbers of communal officials, village mayors, judges, and cadis. Thousands of fellahin and town dwellers began to accompany them. The most dramatic episode of flight in this second phase of Arab departure occurred in Haifa. Approximately 70,000 Arabs lived in the harbor city. The businessmen among them began leaving directly after the Partition Resolution. As early as February and March 1948, Archbishop George al-Hakim, the Greek Catholic primate, arranged for the removal of large groups of Arab children to Damascus and Beirut. By the end of March, approximately 25,000 Arabs had already left. An additional 20,000 departed in early April, following Qawukji's offensive and rumors that the Arab air forces would soon bomb the Jewish quarters on Mount Carmel. Finally, on April 21 and 22, the British garrison withdrew and the Jews captured the city.

On the afternoon of the twenty-second, the Jewish mayor of Haifa and his colleagues met with Arab leaders and pleaded with them to remain in the city with their fellow townsmen. With three and half weeks remaining before the end of the mandate, and the United States no longer firmly in support of partition, the Jews were apprehensive of the interpretation world opinion would place on mass Arab departures. For their part, the Arab spokesmen, including Archbishop al-Hakim, initially agreed to stay on; they asked only for several hours to consult with the Higher Committee. Couriers were then promptly sent off to Lebanon to hold discussions with representatives of the Mufti and the Arab League. That same afternoon the reply was conveyed to the mayor and his associates: the Arabs would not live for a single day under Jewish rule; they demanded permission to leave the city. All efforts to change their minds failed—as United States consular reports to Washington confirmed. Within thirty-six hours the remaining Arab population of nearly 30,000 left the city and departed for Lebanon, either overland or by sea.

Elsewhere in Palestine, too, the Arab exodus gained momentum, reaching nearly 175,000 during the last weeks of the mandate. There were various reasons for this flight, but none of them could be traced to an alleged appeal for evacuation by the Arab governments themselves, ostensibly to make way for the impending invasion of Arab armies. This was a frequently repeated Israeli claim after the war. Yet no such order for evacuation was ever found in any release of the Arab League or in any military communiqués of the period. Rather, the evidence in the Arab press and radio of the time was to the contrary. By and large, except for towns like Haifa, already captured by the Jews, the Arab League ordered the Palestinians to stay where they were, and stringent punitive measures were reported against Arab youths of military age who fled the country. Even Jewish broadcasts (in Hebrew) mentioned these Arab orders to remain. Azzam Pasha, Abdullah, and the various “national committees” appealed repeatedly to the Arabs not to leave their homes. The Ramallah commander of the Arab Legion threatened to confiscate the property and blow up the houses of those Arabs who left without permission. At one point the Lebanese government decided to close its frontiers to all Palestinians, except for women, children, and old people.

The most obvious reason for the mass exodus was the collapse of Palestine Arab political institutions that ensued upon the flight of the Arab leadership—at the very moment when that leadership was most needed. The departure of mukhtars, judges, and cadis from Haifa and the New City of Jerusalem, from Jaffa, Safed, and elsewhere, dealt a grave blow to the Arab population. The semifeudal character of Arab society rendered the illiterate fellah almost entirely dependent on the landlord and cadi, and once this elite was gone, the Arab peasant was terrified by the likelihood of remaining in an institutional and cultural void. Jewish victories obviously intensified the fear and accelerated departure. In many cases, too—in the battle to open the highway to Jerusalem, for example—Jews captured Arab villages, expelled the inhabitants, and blew up houses to prevent them from being used as strongholds against them. In other instances, Qawukji’s men used Arab villages for their bases, provoking immediate Jewish retaliation.

The most savage of these reprisal actions took place on April 9, 1948, in the village of Deir Yassin, a community guarding the entrance to Jerusalem. The Etzel and Lechi initiated the operation, and the ruthlessness these groups had earlier demonstrated against the British was now applied in even fuller measure against the Arabs. The village was captured, and more than two hundred Arab men, women, and children were slain, their bodies afterward mutilated and thrown into a well. Although the deed was immediately repudiated by the Haganah command, then by the Jewish government, which arrested the Etzel officers responsible, the consequences of the massacre were far-reaching. News of the outrage rapidly circulated throughout Palestine, and characteristically was embellished and soon dramatically exaggerated by the Arab population. The fellahin found these accounts wholly credible, for they knew well how their own guerrillas had stripped and mutilated Jewish civilians; photographs of the slaughter were peddled openly by Arab street vendors. Later, too, the villagers were to recall the words of Azzam Pasha on the eve of the Arab invasion, describing the coming

fate of the Jews: “This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacre and the Crusades.” It was not unnatural for the Palestine Arabs to expect the same treatment from the Jews. Arab leaders similarly gave wide publicity to authentic or rumored acts of atrocity committed by the Zionist enemy, with utter indifference to the impact these accounts would have on Arab civilian morale. In April and May, entire Arab communities were fleeing in terror even before Jewish forces overran their homes. A Swiss observer, Jacques de Reynier, described the panic among the inhabitants of Jaffa when the Jews attacked:

Immediately everyone was consumed with terror, and soon the evacuation started. In the hospitals, the drivers of cars and ambulances took their vehicles, assembled their families, and fled in complete disregard of their responsibilities. Many of the ill, nurses, even physicians, departed the hospital wearing the clothes they had on, and fled to the countryside. For all of them the one obsession was to escape at any cost.

The arrival of the regular Arab armies after May 15 had a brief stabilizing influence on the Palestine Arab population. The friendly cooperation between the makeshift civil administration and the local Arabs has been described in the published war memoirs of various Arab officers, including those of Nasser, Abdullah al-Tel, Kamal al-Din Hussein, and even Qawukji himself. But it was an intermittent relationship at best; the Arab armies failed to consolidate their positions. By June 11, when the first United Nations truce came into effect, some 250,000 Arabs had fled the Jewish-occupied areas of the country. Once on the offensive, moreover, Israel changed its policy toward the local Arabs. No further effort was made to persuade them to stay and share in the anticipated benefits of Jewish statehood. Rather, attacking on the central front after the truce expired, Israeli troops occupied Lydda, Ramie, and the cluster of surrounding Arab villages, and “encouraged” approximately 100,000 of the local inhabitants to flee. The method was simple. By spreading tough warnings ahead of them, the Jews ensured that most of these settlements were evacuated even before the Israeli army arrived. The number of Arab émigrés reached 300,000 by July 9 and swelled rapidly in the early autumn after the Jews launched their first Negev offensive ([this page](#)). By then even the most optimistic Palestine Arab recognized that the Jewish republic, far from succumbing helplessly to armed invasion, was in fact capable of waging ruthless and brutal warfare on its own.

After the hostilities ended, the United Nations placed the number of Arab fugitives from Israeli-controlled territory at approximately 720,000 (the Jews listed the number as 538,000), 70 percent of the Arab population of Palestine. Not all of those who fled their homes departed Palestine itself. Roughly 240,000 Arabs simply crossed into the Legion-occupied, eastern sector of the country. Another 55,000 to 60,000 crossed the Jordan River and entered the Hashemite Kingdom proper. There were as well 180,000 refugees who originally had encamped in the south, and who now fled toward the Gaza area, within Palestine territory, but on the edge of the Sinai Peninsula. The fate of these Gaza derelicts was to be particularly cruel. Refused employment and resettlement by Israelis and Egyptians alike for the next generation, they were destined to vegetate in a

confinement even more tragic than that endured by Jewish displaced persons in Europe between 1945 and 1948. In addition to the fugitives in Gaza and Hashemite-occupied territory, nearly 100,000 Arabs sought refuge in Lebanon, another 70,000 in Syria, with smaller groups traveling on to Iraq and Egypt—and later to the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms. The descent of the Palestinians upon neighboring Arab lands at first served Israel's short-term purpose. It did away with the likelihood of fifth-column activities and similarly inundated the Arab nations with thousands of penniless families, thereby complicating their economies and obstructing their military efforts. After the war, however, the refugees ultimately would fulfill as useful a political purpose for the Arab states as the Jewish displaced persons had served initially for the Zionists.

Well before hostilities ended, the Jewish leadership made plain its approach to the refugee question. As early as April 1948, addressing his Labor Zionist colleagues, Ben-Gurion declared: "The Arabs are wrong if they think they will lose nothing in entering the war: what has happened in Haifa or Jerusalem might happen in other parts of the country." He frankly predicted a "great change in the composition of the population of the country." Later, at a cabinet meeting of June 16, the Israeli leader stated his attitude more unequivocally: "As for the return of the Arabs, not only can I not accept the opinion of encouraging their return ... but I think that one should prevent their return. ... War is war ... and those who declared war upon us will have to bear the consequences after they have been defeated." In answer to Count Bernadotte's appeal to permit Arab repatriation, the Israeli prime minister made his stand official on August 1, 1948, consciously resolving a half-century-old Zionist policy dilemma on the Arabs:

When the Arab States are ready to conclude a peace treaty with Israel this question [of refugees] will come up for constructive solution as part of the general settlement, and with due regard to our counter-claims in respect of the destruction of Jewish life and property, the long-term interest of the Jewish and Arab populations, the stability of the State of Israel and the durability of the basis of peace between it and its neighbors, the actual position and fate of the Jewish communities in the Arab countries, the responsibilities of the Arab governments for their war of aggression and their liability for reparation, will all be relevant in the question whether, to what extent, and under what conditions, the former Arab residents of the territory of Israel should be allowed to return.

For all its self-serving intent, the language bore a remarkable similarity to that used by Turkish diplomats at the Conference of Lausanne, in 1922–23, as they rejected Greek demands for repatriation following the late war between the two countries. What ensued at that time was the first great exchange of refugees in Near Eastern history. Nor were the circumstances entirely dissimilar in the Arab-Israeli war, although the plight of the Arab refugees was destined to weigh increasingly heavily on the consciences of later Israeli intellectuals. Even as Ben-Gurion was speaking, the Damoclean sword of Moslem xenophobia was descending on the large and historic Jewish communities of North Africa and the Islamic Middle East. Between 1948 and 1957, as a consequence of government pressure, economic strangulation, and physical pogroms, some 467,000 Jews would be compelled to flee their ancestral homes in Moslem lands. The largest number of them would find asylum in Israel ([Chapter XV](#)).

With these emerging demographic changes in mind, reinforced by a growing awareness of military success, the Israeli government evaluated the possibilities of transforming the United Nations truce into a permanent peace. The world organization and its mediator in Palestine, Count Folke Bernadotte, had moved with unanticipated dispatch in effecting the second cease-fire of July 18, 1948. This had not been a negotiated but rather an imposed truce with warnings of severe economic sanctions against those refusing to comply. It was intended, moreover, to remain in force without time limit. Bernadotte now had an enlarged staff at his disposal to supervise the querulous lull in hostilities, including 310 Swedish, American, French, and Belgian military observers and enough technical personnel to man his eighteen planes, four ships, his fleet of hundreds of vehicles and radio transmitters. This was in fact an apparatus capable of supervising rather more than a limited cease-fire. The mediator intended to use it in a strenuous effort to achieve permanent peace.

Bernadotte was supremely confident of his abilities as a negotiator. Fluent in six languages, an experienced diplomat with family ties to the Swedish royal dynasty, he had served as president of the Swedish Red Cross during and after World War II. In that capacity, throughout the last weeks of the German Reich he had engaged in critical negotiations with the SS chieftain, Heinrich Himmler, in an effort to rescue surviving prisoners in Nazi death camps. At the time, Bernadotte had conducted the discussions with elaborate (and in the eyes of the Jews, unforgivable) caution and circumspection, refusing until the last moment to promise Himmler immunity from Allied retribution. Although many thousands of Jews were transferred to western Germany, where they were eventually liberated by the American and British armies, the majority of the death camp inmates still alive in April had perished by May. The Swedish count nevertheless regarded his mission as a success and was not hesitant afterward to describe the imaginative stroke by which he had rescued "his" Jews from the Nazi maw. Now, in the summer of 1948, a tall, long-jawed, vigorous extrovert in his late fifties, Bernadotte viewed the Palestine war as a dramatic challenge and was determined to transform the cease-fire into the first stage of a binding peace treaty, his personal triumph and an assured lien on the Nobel Peace Prize.

Speed and initiative were of the essence, more even than perfect justice for either side. "The experience I had during the past month," wrote Bernadotte of the first truce in June 1948, "had gradually ... strengthened me in my view that the resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 29th November 1947 had been an unfortunate one.... The artificial frontiers given to the State of Israel and the solid resistance put up by the Arab world against the partition of Palestine and the creation of a separate Jewish State were bound to result in warlike complications." The mediator's proposal, therefore, completed on June 27, offered new variations on the Partition Resolution. Instead of two independent states, it provided for two independent members of a "union" in which the Arab partner would not be a Palestine Arab state at all, but an enlarged Kingdom of Transjordan. Bernadotte suggested unlimited Jewish

immigration during the first two years, after which the right to decide Palestine's absorptive capacity would be transferred to the United Nations Social and Economic Council. The mediator emphasized, too, that all Palestine Arabs must be returned to their homes and have their property reinstated. Finally, it was his suggestion that the Negev be assigned to Transjordan, with western Galilee transferred to Israel. Jerusalem would be given outright to Transjordan, with assurance of full autonomy to its Jewish population. Haifa and Lydda airport would become free zones.

In one fell swoop, Bernadotte had managed: to disregard eighteen months of painstaking United Nations investigation and formulation; to outrage all the Arab states except Transjordan; and to infuriate the Jews, who had not declared and successfully defended the independence of their sector of Palestine, including the New City of Jerusalem, only to return half of it and forfeit their right to control immigration. Not surprisingly, Cadogan in the Security Council discerned in the mediator's scheme a way out of the "proved impossibility" of enforcing partition. For London, the Bernadotte plan had the obvious merit of giving over the larger part of Palestine to Abdullah, a British protégé. But the Arab League response was pithily expressed by a Syrian staff officer, Muhammad Nimr al-Khatib: "Most of these mediators are spies for the Jews anyway," he insisted. "This is a fact known to everyone." The Arab statesmen icily rejected Bernadotte's plan, and Abdullah was obliged to maintain a common front with them. The Israeli government refused even to discuss it. "From the expressions on the faces of many of those who sat nearest to me," Bernadotte wrote of a Tel Aviv conference, "I realized that they strongly disapproved both of my proposals and myself." Sobered by the hostile reception on both sides, the mediator decided not to press the issue for the time being. In the weeks following the second truce, from August 13 to September 16, he flew back first to Stockholm for rest and reflection, and then to the island of Rhodes for additional consultations with his staff. "The Jews had shown a blatant unwillingness for real co-operation," he explained, "and the Arabs had asked me to leave them in peace for a few weeks, so as to allow time for popular excitement in their countries to die down."

By the time the mediator returned to Jerusalem, the Jews had won more defensible frontiers for themselves, and Bernadotte, in turn, had decided to abandon his scheme for transferring Jerusalem to the Arabs or limiting Jewish immigration. In his final report to the Security Council, a ninety-page document that he and his colleagues prepared at Rhodes and transmitted on September 16, Bernadotte sharply modified his original proposals. He noted that the Jews had established their state and that Israel was "a living, solidly entrenched and vigorous reality." The initial conception of a political and economic union accordingly was dropped. Jerusalem no longer was envisaged as an Arab city but rather as an international community, under United Nations control. Bernadotte still anticipated giving the Negev to the Arabs, together with Lydda and Ramle (recently captured by the Jews). But the entire Galilee would be assigned to Israel as compensation. In a heartfelt warning, too, at the very outset of the report, Bernadotte emphasized that "no settlement can be just and complete if recognition is not accorded to the right of the Arab refugee to return to [his] home...." Yet, for all its

apparent balance and evenhandedness, the document was contemptuously rejected by both sides.

In Jerusalem, the day after the report was submitted to the United Nations and to the Arab and Israeli governments, Bernadotte and a group of colleagues started on the drive back to their headquarters at the YMCA building in the Jewish New City. Their three automobiles entered a neutral zone where Arab and Jewish snipers were known to be active. At this point a jeep suddenly pulled out of an alley and blocked off passage. The four men inside were dressed in the khaki short trousers and peaked caps of the Jewish army. Three of them jumped out and approached Bernadotte's vehicle. The first soldier immediately thrust the muzzle of a Sten gun through the driver's window and fired a burst of shots. Bernadotte and another member of the United Nations staff died almost immediately. Two days later, on September 19, the mediator's body was flown back to Sweden. Deeply shocked and mortified by the killing, the Israeli government immediately launched a wide-ranging manhunt. It was assumed that the Lech'i had perpetrated the assassination; but the murderers were later described as even more fanatical right-wingers, zealots who considered Bernadotte a secret agent. They were not found. Nevertheless, in the course of the search more than four hundred Sternists were arrested, including their leader, Nathan Friedmann-Yellin. Many of them were kept imprisoned for the remainder of the war and even after, on the accusation of "incitement to treason." Few were actually brought to trial, however, a matter that did not escape the attention of the Swedish and other Western governments.

The tragedy of Bernadotte's assassination lent further weight to his report. What initially had been intended as mere suggested lines of thought became the "political testament" of a man who had sacrificed his life for peace in the Holy Land. Bevin eagerly seized upon the document to announce in the House of Commons that "the recommendations of Count Bernadotte have the whole-hearted and unqualified support of the Government." In Washington, too, Secretary of State Marshall endorsed the report and urged the General Assembly to accept it. The Israelis followed these developments with intense concern. The mediator's scheme for amputating the Negev and internationalizing Jerusalem gave the British and Americans a convenient handle for applying pressure on the Jewish state. It was evident to Ben-Gurion and his colleagues that Israel's bargaining position would have to be strengthened by new and decisive military realities.

THE BATTLE FOR THE NEGEV

In the last days before the imposition of the second truce, on July 18, 1948, the Jews managed to recapture a number of villages in the northwestern corner of the Negev. Yet the majority of Negev settlements still remained under Egyptian blockade. As Yadin and his staff viewed it, strategic considerations alone would have dictated a future Israeli offensive in the desert. The need to abort the Bernadotte proposals now lent such a campaign a final measure of urgency. It was agreed that the Egyptian danger was potentially the greatest, and that priority henceforth should be given to a full-scale

offensive in the Negev. In this southern desert region, Egyptian forces loosely controlled three long strips. The first was the coastal region from Rafa to Gaza. The second was an inland strip running south to north, from al-Auja through Beersheba and Hebron to Bethlehem. Linking the two enclaves was the third, a cross-country strip running from west to east along the road from Majdal to Beit Gubrin, through Faluja (see map, [this page](#)). Tactically, these holdings were extremely vulnerable, although the Egyptians had reinforced them with 15,000 new troops and large quantities of heavy weapons.

The Jewish no less than the Egyptian forces had grown impressively in troop and weapons strength since the early weeks of fighting. By the middle of October their personnel numbered 90,000 men, including some 5,000 Jewish volunteers and several hundred non-Jewish mercenaries from abroad with extensive military experience. During the same period the flow of supplies from Czechoslovakia and elsewhere continued uninterrupted, bringing in fighter planes, tanks, artillery, thousands of cases of light weapons and ammunition, as well as machine tools for Israel's armaments industry. In preparation for the new offensive, Israeli transport planes ferried men and matériel to an airstrip carved in the northern Negev. From August until late October 1948, some 2,000 tons of equipment and 1,900 troops were carried down in this fashion. Under cover of darkness, the soldiers were infiltrated into the Negev kibbutzim, until a full Israeli brigade was operating behind Egyptian lines. During the same period, Yigal Allon slowly moved his veteran northern brigades southward. By mid-October the young commander had 30,000 troops at his disposal on a single front, plus a small air fighter squadron. He chafed impatiently to move onto the offensive.

The opportunity came on October 14. With United Nations approval, the Israelis set out to provision their settlements by conducting an unarmed convoy across the Egyptian-controlled Faluja crossroads. The moment the column drew within sight of the farms, the lead vehicles were blown to bits. In fact, undetected by United Nations observers, the Israelis themselves had dynamited the trucks. Armed with the pretext he needed, Allon went into action immediately. The speed with which he now launched his offensive was a shattering surprise for the Egyptians. Sweeping low behind enemy lines, the fledgling Israeli air force bombed and strafed Egyptian bases and supply lines in the Sinai Desert. Simultaneously, the Israeli brigade that had been operating clandestinely in the Negev destroyed the railroad line near the Egyptian supply dumps, hammered wedges between Egyptian positions, and drove steadily up the coastal road toward Beit Hanun.

It was all a feint. Allon's actual goal was the Faluja crossroads, the junction controlling the highway net into the Negev Desert. Throughout the next day, other detachments of Israeli infantry launched a major attack against the Egyptian fortifications at Iraq al-Manshiya. The battle was an exceptionally vicious one, with serious losses on both sides. The Jews took the fortress. On October 20, in another costly frontal assault lasting a day and a night, Allon's men invested Huleiqat, the heavily defended stockade anchoring the Egyptian line in the upper Negev. That line was now breached, and the major concentration of Egyptian troops in the Negev, over 35,000 men, faced the possibility of defeat or even entrapment near Faluja. There was little

time for the Jews to exploit this victory, however. Chagrined by the turn of events, the British introduced a resolution in the Security Council demanding yet another Palestine cease-fire. The measure was adopted. The Jews were determined to strike quickly. Without pausing to consolidate his position, Allon sent his three brigades racing down the newly opened road to Beersheba, the sleepy little Arab “capital” of the Negev. The Egyptian garrison in Beersheba was caught off guard, and surrendered after only brief resistance. Two days later the neighboring Lachish area was occupied by fast-moving Jewish motorized columns.

During the next week of October 22, as the United Nations truce gradually settled on the desert, the Egyptians began evacuating their units from the western Negev, loading their troops on naval vessels anchored off the coast. Even here they suffered painful losses. Two of their destroyers were sunk by Israeli underwater demolition teams. One of the vessels, *Emir Farouk*, flagship of the Egyptian navy, went down off the coast of Gaza with 700 soldiers aboard. Finally, 3,000 of Egypt’s elite troops, the crack Fourth Brigade, were entirely encircled and immobilized in the northwestern Faluja “pocket.” Both sides chose to ignore the truce in this isolated sector. Under the command of a resourceful Sudanese brigadier, Taha Bey, the Fourth Brigade dug in and steadfastly resisted the tightening Israeli vise.

The reaction of Egypt’s allies to the new military crisis was instructive. Rather than attack the Jews on another front to alleviate the pressure on Faluja, Glubb sent a Legion force down to Bethlehem and Hebron to “save” this district for the Hashemite kingdom. The Legionnaires simply moved into the area vacated by the Egyptians. On October 23, the Arab heads of government met in Amman, where once again they went through the ritual of discussing ways to help the Egyptians. The meeting was a travesty. In his memoirs, Abdullah recalled:

Directing my words to Nokrashi Pasha [the Egyptian prime minister], I said:

“Let us hear what His Excellency has to say.”

His reply, word for word, was “God, I have come to listen, not to talk.”

I answered, “I think that Your Excellency should do the talking under the present circumstances in view of the fact that Beersheba has been lost and al-Faluja is besieged.”

“Who says so?” he inquired. “The Egyptian forces are still holding their positions.... [T]he Egyptian Government has no need of anyone’s assistance. But where are the royal Jordanian and Iraqi forces? And we all know that the Syrian forces are useless.” This was said in the presence of Jamil Mardam Bey, who was listening.

Eventually Glubb submitted a plan for two Iraqi battalions and one Legion battalion to attack Jewish positions in the Beit Gubrin area. Meanwhile the isolated Egyptian brigade at Faluja would destroy its heavy equipment and escape along a secret trail known to one Major Lockheed, a British officer serving with the Legion who was already in contact with Taha Bey. The Egyptian military staff immediately turned down the suggestion. Aside from the risk in destroying heavy equipment, the scheme was compromised by the fact that the Englishman Glubb had proposed it.

On his own, meanwhile, the Israeli commander, Allon, decided to enter into conversations with Taha Bey. Under a flag of truce, a meeting was arranged between the generals at Kibbutz Gat, two miles east of the Faluja “pocket.” The Egyptian commander was a stocky, square-jawed Negro, gentle of manner and quick to smile. He congratulated Allon on Israel’s “admirable” military victories and agreed that the Egyptian position at Faluja was grave. “But one thing I shall be able to save,” he insisted, “the honor of the Egyptian army. And therefore I shall fight to my last bullet and my last man.” Nothing would persuade Taha Bey to change his mind, in this or two subsequent meetings. The one consequence of the discussions was to establish friendly ties between Major Yerucham Cohen, Allon’s Yemenite, Arabic-speaking aide, and Taha Bey’s adjutant, Major Gamal Abd al-Nasser. Nasser was fascinated by the kibbutz settlements and the evidence he saw around him of Jewish social democracy, and contrasted Israeli “progressivism” with the venality and absentee landlordism of his own country. He reserved his angriest diatribes, however, for the British. “They maneuvered us into this war,” he insisted. “What is Palestine to us? It was all a British trick to divert our attention from their occupation of Egypt.” Egypt’s “so-called” allies were equally the target of Nasser’s wrath, particularly Abdullah, who was not lifting a finger to help the trapped Egyptians. Someday the Hashemite ruler would pay for his “betrayal,” Nasser declared.

The young major’s comments accurately reflected the festering suspicion that had developed among the Arab states, and most notably between Egypt and the Transjordanian kingdom. The distrust eventually became uncontainable on the issue of occupied Palestine. The Egyptians, determined to block a Hashemite annexation, paid worshipful lip service to the “rights of the Palestinian people” and announced plans for a separate, quasi-independent government for the Holy Land. To that end, in late September 1948, Cairo organized an “All-Palestinian Government,” with its seat in Gaza. And on October 1 an Egyptian-sponsored “National Palestinian Council” dutifully met in Gaza to elect the Mufti as president. Within two weeks the Gaza regime was extended formal recognition by Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Yet its status as an Egyptian puppet became entirely transparent the moment Haj Amin himself eagerly visited Gaza, against the orders of the Cairo government. Upon being recognized, the Mufti was immediately seized by military authorities, driven to Suez, and placed under tight surveillance there.

Abdullah did not sit by quietly in the interval. Warning that the Gaza “government” was unwelcome in Hashemite-occupied territory, the Transjordanian ruler swiftly organized his own hand-picked conference of Palestinian delegates, most of them refugees. In late October the gathering assembled in Amman, where it solemnly repudiated the Gaza regime as a façade for de facto partition. Afterward, in Arab towns and villages on the west bank of the Jordan, crowds demonstrated “spontaneously,” entreating Abdullah to annex the Legion-occupied sectors of Palestine. Finally, on December 1, a ceremonial conference of Palestinian and Transjordanian delegates assembled at Jericho and issued a resolution favoring the joinder of Palestine and Transjordan as an indivisible “Arab Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.” Abdullah

“accepted” the resolution in principle and appointed Sheikh Hassan Muhyi al-Din al-Jarallah as Mufti of Jerusalem, in place of Haj Amin al-Husseini.

Abdullah’s countermaneuver provoked an infuriated response from Cairo and other Arab governments. On December 10, 1948, King Farouk issued a statement anathematizing the Palestinians who had attended the Jericho conference. The Egyptian army had not shed its blood to leave the destinies of Palestine in their hands, Farouk warned; the Jericho resolution was a threat to Arab unity and would not be countenanced by the Arab League. The next day the Grand Ulema of al-Azhar University formally denounced the Hashemite regime for “nefarious interference threatening to destroy Arab unity.”

THE FINAL CAMPAIGN OF THE PALESTINE WAR

Even as the Egyptians and Hashemites reviled each other, the Jews were making preparations to attack and eradicate the Egyptian army’s last remaining garrison on Israeli territory. The purpose this time was to establish the irrefutable fact of Israel’s sovereign power and viability and, it was hoped, end the war altogether. The armed forces were ready. They had successfully rationalized their structure, absorbed the last Palmach and Etzel elements into the general rank and file, and organized clear mobilization schedules. Their manpower surpassed 100,000 by December 1948, and their accumulated weaponry included even such heavy equipment as landing craft and frigates.

The Egyptians were deployed slightly to the north of the Sinai frontier, between their own country and Israel, and formed two prongs. The northern force, consisting of two brigades flanking Rafa and Gaza, was supported by the principal Egyptian staging base of al-Arish. The southern prong, also of two-brigade strength, extended from al-Auja to Bir Asluj and aimed upward toward Beersheba. Additionally, the Egyptian Fourth Brigade, locked in the Faluja pocket, tied down a Jewish unit of comparable size. The Egyptians defended well-fortified positions. The Israelis enjoyed the advantages of surprise and the choice of terrain best suited for the offensive—advantages that Yadin and Allon were determined to exploit to the maximum. The Egyptians presumably would expect the attack to be launched against their northern line, the detachments threatening the heavily populated coastal area. Without hesitation, therefore, the Israeli command agreed to thrust southward, driving toward al-Auja, the anchor of the Egyptian position in the Negev Desert. If al-Auja fell, the Jews would be in a position to sweep upward into the Sinai Peninsula itself, toward al-Arish and the Mediterranean, breaking the back of the Egyptian military effort in one crushing offensive.

However daring the conception, it presupposed the capture of al-Auja, and the main road from Bir Asluj to al-Auja was well protected by sizable Egyptian artillery and tank units. A direct assault along the southern highway was hardly feasible except at prohibitive cost in men and equipment. Yadin grappled with the problem for nearly a week. On December 17, he discovered a possible solution in his archaeological guide to Greco-Roman Palestine. There, in the classicist’s map, an alternative road was

identifiable just south of al-Auja. Actually it was the barest memory of a road, a stone-knuckled Roman pathway. Allon thereupon ordered his scouts to determine whether the road still existed. Eventually it was found in the dunes above Bir Asluj. With effort it could be made usable.

During the next three days the effort was mounted. Under cover of darkness, engineers laid boards and Bailey-bridge remnants on the most difficult stretches of this ancient route of march. The work was completed in such uncanny silence that the Egyptian outposts, less than two miles away, remained completely unsuspecting. On the night of December 22 the offensive began. According to plan, Allon sent an armored column rolling ominously toward Gaza. Another brigade of infantrymen, protected by strafing aircraft, charged in the direction of the main highway between Bir Asluj and al-Auja. Both attacks were feints. They effectively convinced the Egyptians that the Israeli offensive was unfolding according to orthodox pattern. During the next few days, then, as the Egyptians braced themselves against repeated frontal assaults on their central fortifications, a powerful Israeli column of half-tracks and troop carriers was already moving slowly along the Roman road. At dawn of December 26 the Jews were within firing range of al-Auja. The mighty fortress was silent; its garrisons had taken up positions to the north. The muzzles of the Egyptian artillery faced northward, too, covering the approaches of the main highway. Now, suddenly, the vanguard of the Israeli army battered into the defenders' rear, the assault tanks and Bren carriers careening into the town square. Although stunned, the Egyptians fought back courageously. But after a full day and night of close-quarter fighting, they raised the white flag. Their colonel was still in his pajamas; the lightning attack had caught him in bed.



Allon was determined to forge ahead now without pause. In an enveloping movement, his columns overran Abu Agheila, ten miles inside Egyptian territory. From there they pressed on unhesitatingly toward the Mediterranean coast and the central Egyptian base of al-Arish. The Jews had come farther in eight months of war than the limited distance of mere geographical advance. In May their ill-armed little militia had faced Egyptian tanks only sixteen miles from Tel Aviv. In December their battle-seasoned troops, supported by armor and fighter planes, were driving into Egypt, to the very gates of al-Arish, cutting the last exit routes of the Egyptian expeditionary force. Reeling from these blows, meanwhile, Cairo undertook feverish diplomatic activity to seek military assistance from other Arab states. It was a doomed effort. The Syrians and Iraqis were exhausted. Abdullah considered the war over for his kingdom. Indeed, throughout November 1948, a series of meetings between Moshe Dayan and Transjordanian Colonel Abdullah al-Tel, the Legion commander in Jerusalem, produced an agreement for a "sincere cease-fire," which came into effect on December 1. Further

talks between the two officers dealt with the passage of Jewish convoys to Mount Scopus and the relief of Israeli policemen stationed there. The discussions transcended local military issues without quite reaching the level of armistice negotiations.

Virtually bereft of support from its Arab allies, at this point, the Egyptian government soon had to face equally painful repercussions at home. By entering the Palestine war, Farouk had intended to divert national attention from the internal difficulties of his country and upstage his perennial rival, the Wafd party. For a while he appeared to have succeeded. Real and imaginary victories filled the press. In advance, the king had his “triumph” inscribed on postage stamps. With the onset of Allon’s final December offensive, however, Cairo found it necessary to conceal its defeats not only from its allies but also from the Egyptian public. Ultimately the failures became known, of course. In November violent demonstrations, largely instigated by the Moslem Brotherhood, were launched against foreign-owned and Jewish business houses. Riots erupted in the streets of the larger cities. Nationalist slogans were intermingled with epithets against Nuqrashi Pasha and his government. The prime minister reacted by outlawing the Brotherhood and ordering the confiscation of its property. But before the order could be carried out, Nuqrashi himself was murdered on December 28 by a Brotherhood member. Some observers believed that Egypt was on the verge of civil war.

Help came to the distraught nation from another quarter. Under the terms of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, Britain was obliged to assist Egypt in the event of attack from an outside party. On December 29, as it happened, the Security Council ordered an immediate cease-fire in Palestine. Now was Britain’s chance to revive its tenuous presence in Egypt—and conceivably in Palestine. In fact, by 1948 there were hardly any circumstances, not even an enemy presence on Egyptian soil, that would have persuaded the Cairo government to invoke its 1936 treaty of mutual defense with Britain. London nevertheless chose this moment to deliver a warning. Unless Israel obeyed the Security Council resolution, it declared, Britain would employ its forces in accordance with the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. The ultimatum was a chilling one. Whatever Israel’s rights under international precedent, Ben-Gurion appreciated that he dared not risk a confrontation with a Great Power. Yadin shared this view; the Israeli armed forces had won too much to gamble with their victory now. On January 2, 1949, orders reached Allon’s headquarters to withdraw his men from Sinai.

At Yadin’s insistence, however, Ben-Gurion permitted Allon and his troops to seize the heights above the border town of Rafa. Thus was sealed off the final escape route of the shattered Egyptian forces in the Gaza Strip. It was here again that the British made another ominous move. For several weeks RAF planes had regularly been flying with Egyptian air squadrons over the Egypt-Israel frontier. On January 7, the day the United Nations issued yet another cease-fire order, four of these British fighters were shot down by Israeli Messerschmitts. Bevin apparently was convinced now that he had found his pretext for threatening direct intervention against the Jewish state, thereby presumably limiting Israel’s bargaining strength in any future Arab-Jewish negotiations. On January 8 he announced that the Jews had made “unprovoked aggressions” against Egyptian territory, but “so far” the British had not chosen to move from their Suez bases toward

the Palestine frontier. Three days later the British Foreign Office informed the press that it took “an extremely serious” view of Jewish military operations.

Cairo was not hesitant in exploiting the threat of British intervention against Israel. On January 12 the Egyptians issued an ultimatum of their own. No armistice negotiations would begin unless the Jews first evacuated the Rafa heights, they warned. To the Israeli army staff, on the other hand, acceptance of this demand was unthinkable; release of the encircled enemy troops would nullify Israel’s most effective bargaining weapon and leave Egypt with a contiguous strip of land well within Jewish territory. Again the decision was Ben-Gurion’s to make. As the prime minister saw it, refusal of Egyptian terms would bring with it a continuation of the war on Egyptian soil and the inescapable possibility, therefore, of British intervention. On the other hand, the Jewish state was born, secured, and functioning. It had carved out an additional 600 miles of territory and had changed the demographic composition of the nation in its own favor. The other Arab nations had indicated their willingness to follow Egypt to the armistice table. Perhaps the wiser course now would be to allow the Egyptians an opportunity of saving face. Despite the urgent entreaties, then, of Allon, who rushed to Tel Aviv personally to implore the prime minister not to abandon Israel’s strongest bargaining weapon, Ben-Gurion made the decision to pull back.

In the second week of January the Jews withdrew their troops from the Rafa heights. Two weeks after that (following the opening of armistice negotiations), the mauled and battered remnants of Taha Bey’s brigade were permitted to depart Faluja. As the Egyptians assembled in formation, Yerucham Cohen, Allon’s aide, watched the ceremonies from a hillside. Suddenly he caught sight of Major Nasser. Cohen shouted a greeting, and the two men ran toward each other, warmly shaking hands for the last time. To the strains of an Israeli army band, the Egyptians then marched off toward their encampment at al-Arish.

NEGOTIATIONS FOR AN ARMISTICE

On December 29, 1948, the Security Council, which for a half-year had confined itself to orders for cease-fire and truce, issued a call for a permanent armistice in all sectors of Palestine. Although the Egyptians and other Arab nations were exhausted by then and palpably eager to end hostilities, it was understood that no Arab state would agree to negotiate “directly” with Israel—that is, without benefit of mediation by the United Nations. When, therefore, initial discussion opened between Israel and Egypt on the island of Rhodes early in January 1949, the talks were clearly defined as United Nations negotiations. Both delegations were housed in the same hotel. This produced occasionally ludicrous complications. Walter Eytan, the foreign ministry official who led Israel’s negotiating team, recalled that whenever the Egyptians spotted an Israeli approaching in the corridor downstairs “they would eye him, literally askance—demonstratively turning away their heads, although soon overcome by curiosity and turning back sufficiently to catch a glimpse.” The United Nations acting mediator, Dr. Ralph Bunche, an American Negro in his early forties and Bernadotte’s deputy until the

Swedish diplomat's assassination, was a resourceful and imaginative negotiator. Yet even Bunche's considerable charm failed initially to persuade the Egyptians to meet with their Jewish opposite members. As a result, the mediator or his deputy held the opening conversations separately with each delegation.

After several days, however, Bunche's persistence was rewarded. The Egyptians and Israelis finally were gathered together in his suite, while he himself presided from his sofa. It was the pattern that was adopted for subsequent armistice conferences (not all of them in Rhodes) with Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. At first, to be sure, the Egyptians insisted on addressing all their remarks to Bunche, as if the Jews were not in the room. But it was impossible to maintain an artificiality of this kind. Soon the two groups were arguing with each other directly, in English and French. Both Israelis and Egyptians assured each other that their intention was to secure permanent peace for Palestine. To that end, and as a first step, the armistice agreement was drawn on the basis of the existing military lines. The Negev accordingly would remain in Israel except for the narrow Gaza coastal strip occupied by Egyptian troops. Only the town of al-Auja and its vicinity were to be demilitarized under United Nations supervision. Israel agreed to this arrangement as a domestic face-saving gesture for the Egyptian government, which could then inform its people that it continued to exert influence in at least one sector of Palestine, even as the Hashemites did.

Each side assumed that the armistice would be supplanted in the near future by a permanent peace treaty (see [Chapter XVI](#)). In fact, the armistice agreement itself included such phrases as: "With a view to promoting the return of permanent peace in Palestine and in recognition of the importance in this regard of mutual assurances concerning the future military operations of the parties, the following principles ... are hereby affirmed"; and "the establishment of an armistice between the armed forces of the two Parties is accepted as an indispensable step toward the liquidation of armed conflict and the restoration of peace in Palestine." The agreement was signed on February 24, 1949. Eytan, chief of the Israeli delegation, later recalled the amiable mood in which the conversations ended:

In the course of the six weeks we spent together at the Hotel des Roses, we became quite friendly with the Egyptians.... We did not meet socially much, but when Abdul Moneim Mustafa, the chief political adviser of the Egyptian delegation, fell ill, we sat at his bedside and comforted him and when the armistice agreement was finally signed, Dr. Bunche had us all to a gay party in the evening, for which the Egyptians had sent in a special plane from Cairo with delicacies from Groppi's. I well remember sitting with the head of the Egyptian delegation, as he showed me photographs of his family. ... It was an atmosphere as different as one could imagine from that of the first day in the corridor, with its averted heads.

The precedent established at Rhodes was generally followed in subsequent negotiations between Israel and other Arab states. Once Egypt, the greatest of the Arab powers, had agreed to treat with the Jews, it was much less difficult for the others to follow. Thus, the discussions with Lebanon were conducted without incident at Rosh HaNikrah on the Israel-Lebanon frontier. By the terms of an agreement signed on March

23, 1949, the Israelis abandoned the fourteen Lebanese villages their troops had occupied during the war and restored the old international border. Except for specific territorial provisions, the language of the agreement was virtually identical with that of the Israeli-Egyptian document. It, too, stated the expectation that the end of hostilities would usher in permanent peace. The agreements with Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan ([this page](#)) were all signed within less than six weeks. The Syrians alone of the signatories raised difficulties. Their intransigence was due in part to a highly inflamed nationalism—Syria was the birthplace of Arab nationalism, after all—and in part to an instinctive unwillingness to remove their forces from occupied Israeli territory. The meetings between the two delegations took place in the stifling heat of late spring and summer, in a tent pitched across the no man's land of the Tiberias-Damascus highway. Negotiations dragged on from April 5 to July 20. After endless haggling, the Syrians agreed finally to withdraw to the original frontier, but stipulated in turn that Israeli troops should not replace theirs in the evacuated areas. In this way another series of demilitarized zones were created. Otherwise, the document adopted the basic provisions of the earlier agreements.

On March 19, the Iraqi government informed Bunche that it had authorized the Jordanian delegation to negotiate in its place, and that its troops would then be withdrawn. They were. As matters turned out, Iraq was the only one of the Arab belligerents not to sign an armistice agreement directly with the Jews. This exception later permitted Baghdad to adopt a verbal hostility to Israel even more uncompromising than that of the Jewish state's immediate neighbors, without the corresponding obligation to translate words into deeds. As Nuri es-Saïd had discovered years before, the technique was a useful one for winning popularity at home and, conceivably, political leadership in the Arab world. Later the approach would be adopted by other Moslem governments even further removed from the scene of battle—by Algeria and Libya, for example.

Of all their negotiations with the Arab regimes, the Israelis found dealings with the Hashemite Kingdom to be at once the most complex and potentially the most hopeful. Talks began at Rhodes within days of the armistice agreement with Egypt. The Transjordanians were a somewhat less impressive group than their Egyptian predecessors; they looked helpless and lost, and uncertain of their instructions. Actually, no clear guidelines had been given them. Abdullah had preferred to make direct contact with the Jews through Colonel al-Tel in Jerusalem, and it was arranged that an Israeli delegation should secretly meet with the king in his winter palace at Shune, near the Dead Sea. Evidently Abdullah was not willing to devolve negotiating authority on his emissaries at Rhodes, although he agreed that the talks on the island should formally continue.

Colonel al-Tel arranged the passage into Transjordan of the Israeli delegation, identifying the visitors at checkpoints as United Nations observers. The charade was not a simple one, for, in addition to Eytan, the Jews included Yadin and Dayan, whose faces were well known. The crossings were never challenged, however. Abdullah received his guests personally at Shune, and once again was as gracious a host as before the war. In

the first joint meeting with the assembled Jewish and Arab negotiators, the king addressed the whole room, reviewing the events that had brought the delegates together at this strange gathering. He spoke with unusual frankness and emphasized that his own ministers must recognize that it was they, together with the Egyptians, who had forced him into a war he had not wanted. He continued in this vein—accusing his officials, berating them—for twenty minutes. When the Arabs and Jews sat down afterward to a banquet, the prime minister, Abd al-Uda, asked to be excused, complaining of a stomach ache.

Abdullah himself withdrew following the dinner, and his negotiators continued talks without him. After bargaining through the night, the Jews left in Tel's car, to reach Jerusalem before daybreak. These nocturnal journeys and talks continued for a week. All the while, to maintain pressure, the Israeli army demonstratively continued its preparations for a large-scale offensive against the "Iron Triangle," the Jordanian-occupied salient in eastern Palestine. The price of calling it off was Abdullah's willingness to agree to a revised border area. And in the end, a compromise agreement was reached. The demarcation line was not drawn strictly in accordance with the position of the armies, but several miles to the east, favoring Israel, and ceding to Israel the Chadera-Afula highway and the Lydda-Haifa railroad, as well as a portion of the dominating hill country. For prestige reasons, the Jordanians kept the largest number of villages on their side of the line, but were less interested in retaining village lands. Many farmers were cut off from their soil, as a result. The arrangement at best was considered temporary, pending a formal peace treaty and the establishment of an agreed frontier. A revised, demilitarized border line was established between the Dead Sea and Aqaba, and from the Dead Sea northward to Beisan. On the other hand, the Jerusalem district was exempted from these revisions. Here the status quo continued: the New City remained in Jewish hands, the Old City in Arab hands. The Jordanians promised the Israelis free access to the Hadassah hospital and the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, and to the shrines and cemeteries on the Mount of Olives.

This was the essence of the understanding approved on both sides at three o'clock on the morning of April 1. Immediately afterward, Dayan and Jundi, the respective Jewish and Arab delegates, flew the agreement to Rhodes, where it was formally signed on April 3 by the "official" Israeli and Jordanian representatives. The Jews thereupon moved forward to occupy the strategic hills. In August 1949 the United Nations staff remained behind to watch over the cease-fire, but on a presumed temporary basis. In later months Abdullah carried on secret, but detailed, conversations with Israeli representatives, and a draft peace instrument actually was initialed in March 1950 ([Chapter XVI](#)). For reasons of political expediency alone, however, the king allowed the document to lie for a while. That may have been his mistake. Had he negotiated and signed a treaty immediately, it probably would have been accepted as a *fait accompli*. Instead, news of the conversations leaked during the uncertain limbo of a protracted armistice period. It doomed the ablest statesman in the Arab world ([this page](#)).

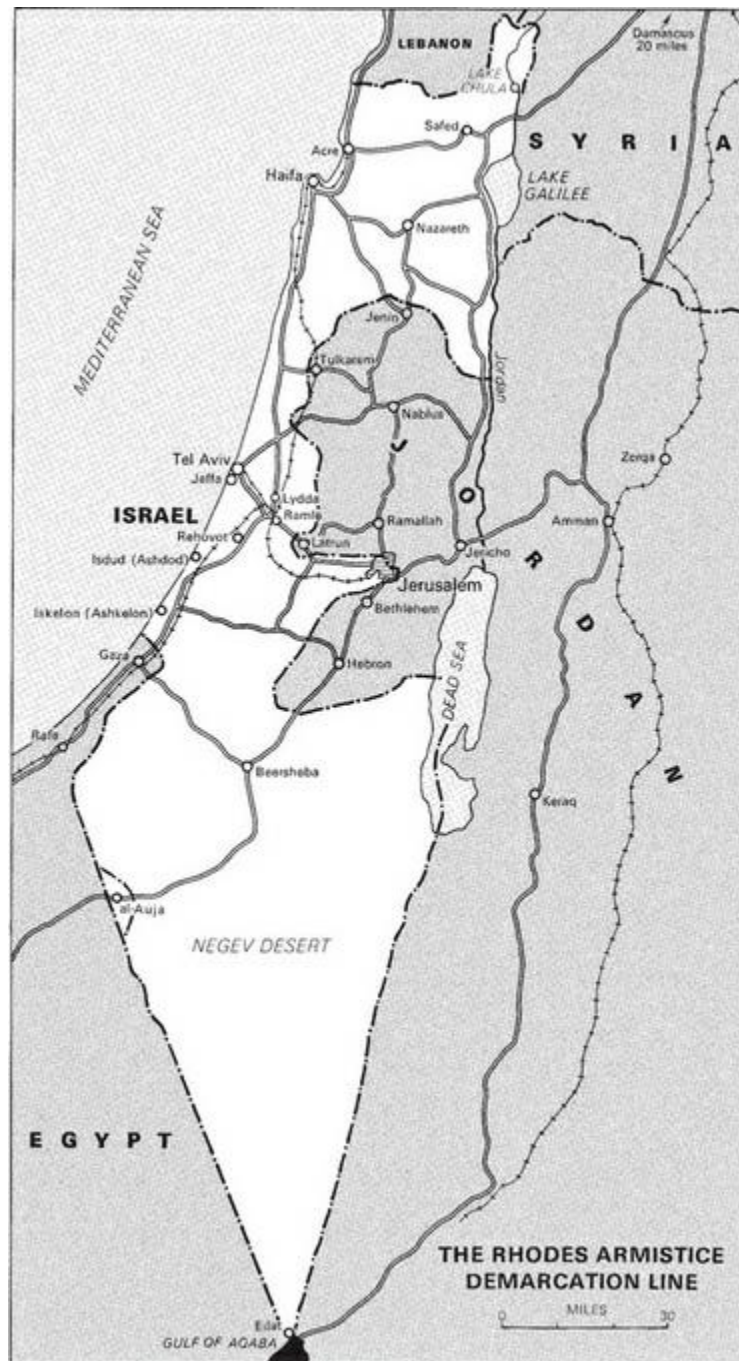
The agreements left Israel in possession of approximately 8,000 square miles of Palestine, or 21 percent more land than had been allotted under the partition plan. It

was assumed, nevertheless, that the frontiers were tentative and that they would be adjusted and altered in subsequent peace negotiations. Because they were not, the accords represented a built-in time bomb for Israel. The demarcation line with Jordan, for example, quite heartlessly separating many Arab farmers from their land, became a perennial magnet for infiltrators and a source of endemic border violence between the two countries. The convoluted nature of the Jerusalem settlement, with its precarious easements to educational sites and holy places, was too dependent upon Arab goodwill to be inherently workable. The Jews were obliged to guard their hospital and university on Mount Scopus by special police. No agreement was ever satisfactorily achieved for access to, or proper care of, Jewish religious shrines in the Old City. This was an endless source of dismay to Jewish religionists in Israel and elsewhere.

The arrangements with Syria were equally fraught with danger. The territory adjacent to Israel's demilitarized zones along the Syrian frontier was populated by Jewish farmers. Several of Israel's major agricultural development schemes were being planned for these areas, including the drainage of Lake Chula and the realignment of the bed of the Jordan River. Intending to work the demilitarized zones themselves, the Jews cited the clause in the Syrian-Israeli Agreement of July 20, 1949, that recognized "the gradual restoration of normal civilian life in the area of the Demilitarized Zone" as a basic aim of the armistice. The Syrian government rejected this interpretation, and very quickly the region became a source of conflict. When the Jews undertook agricultural or irrigation activities along the border area, the Syrians periodically fired on them from their revetments on the Golan Heights. It was in this fashion, as shall be seen, that Syria blocked Israel's original plans for tapping the Jordan River and forced the Jews to adopt the less practicable and more expensive method of siphoning water directly from Lake Galilee. The zones remained a critical focus of danger and possible warfare ([Chapters XVI, XXI](#)).

So, also, did the Gaza Strip, where the Egyptians continued to maintain armed forces within Palestine territory. At the instigation of Cairo, the densely congested refugee zone in future years would become a major staging base for the infiltration of Arab guerrillas into Israel. The ambiguous text of the Israeli-Egyptian agreement offered a cover for these quasi-military operations. All the armistice settlements spoke of a full armistice and a moratorium on "aggressive action" by either party against the other. But one provision in the other agreements was not incorporated into the Israeli-Egyptian covenant (at the time, possibly by inadvertence). It was: "No warlike act or act of hostility shall be conducted from territory controlled by one of the Parties to this Agreement against the other Party." The Egyptian government subsequently construed this lack of reference to aggressive action as legal justification for encouraging guerrilla activity, for denying Israel access to the Suez Canal, and—before 1956, and briefly again in the spring of 1967—for proclaiming its right to bar Israel's use of the Strait of Tiran. Here, too, was an unimaginably lethal delayed-action bomb. But so remote did these dangers appear in 1949, so transitional in nature the armistice agreements themselves, that even before the final documents were signed in the summer of that year a newly appointed United Nations body, the Palestine Conciliation Commission, began

to take over and enlarge upon the functions of the mediator. By the terms of the General Assembly resolution of December 11, 1948, the PCC's announced intention was to arrange nothing less than "a final settlement of all questions outstanding between [Israel and the Arabs]." This matter-of-fact statement appeared so pregnant with hope for the future that it was compensation enough to the Jews for all they had recently endured.



Indeed, they had endured much. The war had taken 6,000 lives and five times that many wounded, an appreciable number for a nation of less than 600,000. Military expenditures alone had consumed nearly \$500 million. Once again, as in the 1917–18 period, the land was desolated. Many of its most productive fields lay gutted and mined. Its citrus groves, for decades the basis of the Yishuv's economy, were largely destroyed. These grievous wounds notwithstanding, the little Jewish republic at least was alive and operating, and its statehood was an internationally accepted fact. Once the nation's

elections were held in January 1949, and a functioning government and parliament given a public franchise, the countries that had extended Israel de facto recognition at the moment of its birth began to open legations and embassies in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Following the Rhodes Armistice agreements, Israel's application for membership in the United Nations was approved by the Security Council on March 11, 1949, and membership itself came the following May. (In those days admission to the world body was still considered meaningful evidence of a nation's sovereign viability.) As the Israeli flag was ceremoniously hoisted in the plaza of the General Assembly building, Shertok, Eban, and other participants, together with the Jewish world at large, asked themselves whether only four years had passed since the Star of David had been identified primarily as the seal of doom worn by concentration camp inmates. The rise to independence of history's most cruelly ravaged people transcended the experience, even the powers of description, of case-hardened journalists and social scientists alike. It appeared somehow as if a new law of nature had been born.