

NAKBA

The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



INTRODUCTION

May 2008

May 2008 marks 60 years since the Palestinian Nakba – the catastrophic expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes and homeland, which was carried out in accordance with operational plans drawn up by the Haganah and in compliance with orders issued from the highest echelons of the Zionist leadership. Although frequently represented as crimes committed by individuals, the massacres, looting and destruction that characterized the depopulation of Palestine were components of a carefully designed military strategy developed and implemented by the leaders of the emerging State of Israel.

As Palestinians commemorate their painful loss, Israelis embark upon a lavish celebration of the 60 years since their declaration of statehood; at this time, it is important for the world to notice that the Palestinians are not retiring into their grief, nor shutting their ears to the sounds of the Israeli revelry. They will continue to present the history that led to the Nakba in order to open the eyes of the outside world, which has been blind to the truth of the Palestinian tragedy.

Although the PLO leadership has for over 15 years officially recognized, acknowledged and accepted Israel as a state along the borders of 1967, Palestinians are still denied self-determination and statehood. They continue to live the Nakba: the Palestinian territories are under occupation and continue to be fractured and expropriated by Israeli land grabs, millions of refugees are still in exile, and those Palestinians who remained within the borders of Israel live as second-class citizens in their homeland.

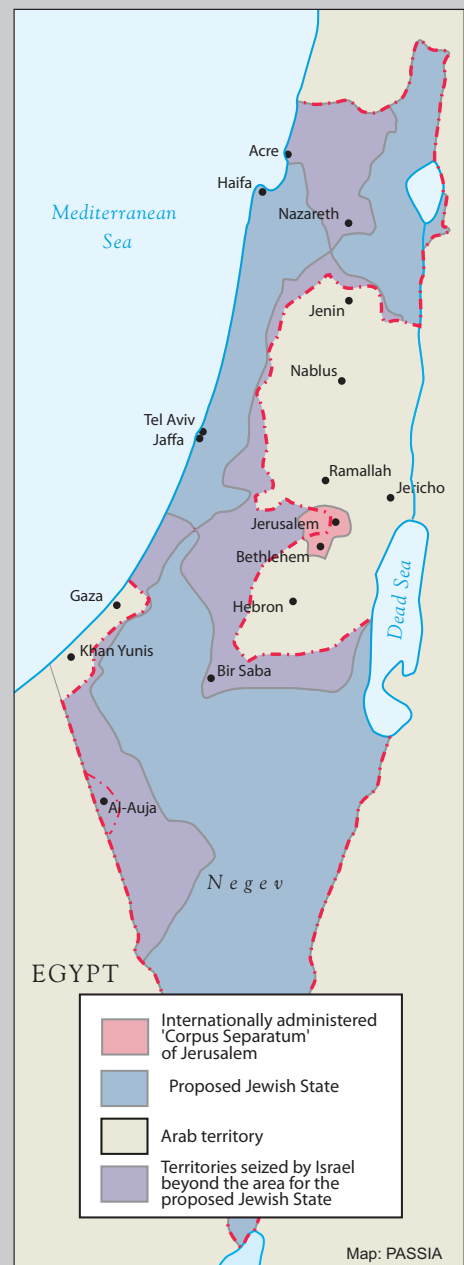
This bulletin intends to present a Palestinian record of the Nakba – a calamity which has been reduced in the minds of many to a few months of violent conflict and labeled “The 1948 War”. It is in fact a continuous process of colonialism that began with the first Zionist settlements and the idea of an organized Zionist movement at the end of the 19th century. After gathering momentum with the establishment of the Jewish National Fund - whose express purpose was the acquisition of Arab land in Palestine, Syria and the Sinai - in 1901, the process of the Nakba continues to this day through the discriminatory and expansionist practices of the Israeli establishment, facilitated by the support or soft criticism of the international community that has been an integral part of Israeli strategy for the past 60 years.



My feet are torn,
and homelessness has worn me out.
Park seats have left their marks on my ribs.
Policemen followed me
with their suspicious looks.
I dragged myself from place to place,
destitute except for
day-long memories of a home
that yesterday, only yesterday,
was mine,
and except for evening dreams
of my dwelling there again.

Tawfiq Sayigh (1932-71),

UNGA Partition Plan of 1947 and Armistice Lines of 1949



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Ottoman Palestine

Ottoman Palestine was made up of three Sanjaks, or sub-provinces, each ruled by a provincial governor. Of these, the Sanjaks of Acre and Balqa' (Nablus) were under the administration of the larger Vilayet (province) of Beirut, while the largest Sanjak of Jerusalem was independent due to its religious and historical significance and its governor directly responsible to the Sultan (see map).

The population of Ottoman Palestine in 1878 was in excess of 440,000 and was made up of many ethnic groups and members of various denominations of the three monotheistic faiths, each of which had maintained a presence in the area for well over a millennium. Muslims represented the overwhelming majority of the Ottoman citizens of Palestine (88%), which had been under uninterrupted Muslim rule since 1187. This population included both Sunni (the vast majority) and Shi'ite communities as well as members of the Druze sect. Much of the population was rural, with agriculture as the principal source of income and the center of traditional life.

Christians of various denominations constituted 9% of the population in 1878, generally living in long-established urban communities. Jews accounted for the remaining 3% of the total population of Palestine, numbering approximately 14,000 people and living predominantly in urban communities.¹ They consisted primarily of Orthodox Jewish citizens of the Ottoman Empire without a separate agenda or allegiance.

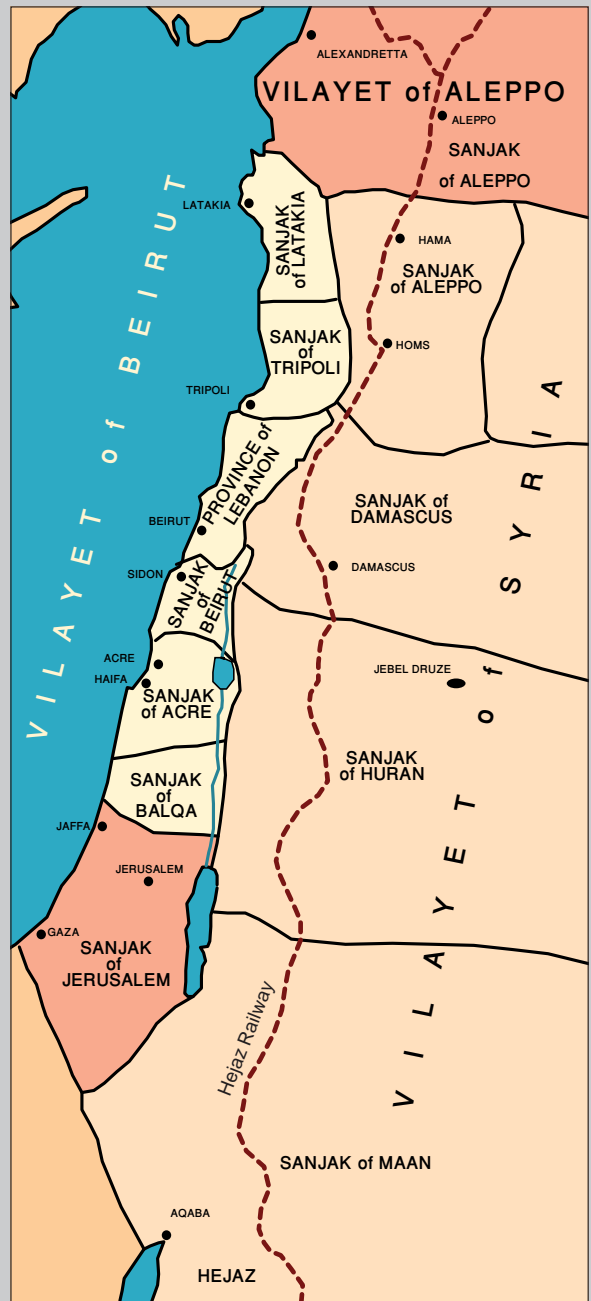
When Zionism began to threaten the sound equilibrium of cultures in Palestine, opposition to Jewish immigration came from Arabs, Palestinians and the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid, who saw the Zionist movement as a vehicle for European colonial ambitions in the region and was keen to limit the risks it posed to his ailing empire. Meanwhile the Young Turks, who controlled the Ottoman Empire from 1908, were apprehensive about the influx of large numbers of Russian Jews to Palestine possibly furthering Russian interests in controlling access to the Bosphorus and the Mediterranean from their Black Sea ports.



Sultan Abdul Hamid II



Administrative Boundaries in Ottoman Palestine



Proud of both their Arab identity and their Canaanite ancestry, the inhabitants of Palestine were a vibrant society with a rich cultural heritage deeply invested in the cities, the villages and the land they had inhabited for millennia. Governed from Istanbul by the sultan, they formed part of the decentralization movement in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire that sought autonomy and self-determination for their people.

¹ Figures from *The Palestine Question in Maps*, PASSIA publications, 2002

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Palestinian Awareness of the Challenges of Zionism



Yusef al-Khalidi

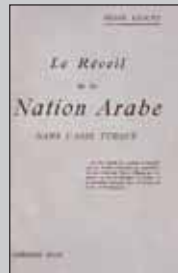
In addition to their desire for independence from the Ottoman Empire, Palestinians were well aware of the Zionist threat to their land from a very early stage. As early as 1899, Mayor of Jerusalem Yusuf al-Khalidi wrote to the Chief Rabbi of France, Zadok Khan, suggesting a different location for Zionists to realize their political ambitions. "In the name of God," he wrote, "let Palestine be left in peace." The response came from Zionist leader Theodor Herzl:

"You say to Mr. Zadok Khan that the Jews would do better to turn elsewhere. That may well happen the day we become aware that Turkey does not wish to partake in the enormous benefits offered by our movement... I have submitted our propositions to His Majesty the Sultan. If he does not accept them, we will seek and, believe me, we will find elsewhere what we need."² Unfolding events soon proved these words to be insincere.

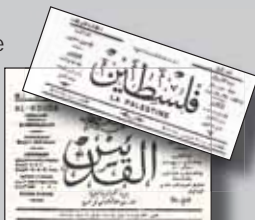


Theodor Herzl

Palestinians were quick to address the threat of Zionism in the public discourse of the region. In 1904, Najib Azouri, a Christian official under the Ottomans in Jerusalem, published *Le Reveil de la Nation Arabe* – "The Awakening of the Arab Nation" – in Paris. The book appealed to all Arab citizens to break away and establish a greater Arab kingdom which would include Syria, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. It also warned of Zionist ambitions in Palestine and forecast the conflict between national movements in the Middle East.



In 1908, three delegates from the Jerusalem district – Ruhi al-Khalidi, Sa'id al-Husseini and Hafez as-Sa'id – were elected to the Ottoman parliament, and Istanbul became a platform for opposition to Zionism. At the same time, three new Palestinian newspapers were founded



Filasteen and Al-Quds

to raise awareness of the dangers of Zionist colonization: *Al-Quds*, *An-Najah* and *Al-Carmel*. The next year, *Al-Mufid* newspaper was founded in Beirut by Abdul Ghani al-Uraysi and in 1911 and the bi-weekly *Filasteen* by Issa Daoud al-Issa in Jaffa, addressing its readership as "Palestinians" and warning them of the consequences of Zionist colonization.



Issa Daoud al-Issa

Al-Uraysi also chaired the first Arab Nationalist Congress, held in France in 1913, which called for increased autonomy for the Arab provinces and laid the foundations for an Arab vision of post-Ottoman Palestine.



Abdul Ghani al-Uraysi

² Walid Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, Beirut, 1991.

British Contradictions and Controversy



Sharif Hussein

During the First World War (WWI), the British government negotiated simultaneous and contradictory agreements in order to further its strategic interests. The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence of 1915-16 pledged support for the formation of an Arab state in the lands then governed by the Ottoman Empire, including Palestine, in exchange for Arab military support for the British campaign against the Ottomans. The map below shows the Arab state in green; the area in orange in the north of the region was to be excluded, as McMahon argued that those portions of land "cannot be said to be purely Arab."



Henry McMahon



At the same time, the British and French were conducting secret talks to divide the same land promised to Sharif Hussein between them. Negotiated by Sir Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot, the agreement carved the region into "spheres of influence" which would come under French or British control after WWI.



Broken Promises: the Arabs and the West

In the years leading up to WWI, the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire were becoming increasingly active in their quest for independence and began engaging in secret meetings in Damascus in 1914 between representatives from Syria, Palestine, Iraq and the Hejaz. When the Ottoman Empire entered WWI on the side of Germany, various Arab initiatives and delegations were formed to win the support of the British and French governments and to strike an alliance against the Ottomans. This perfectly matched the search by Britain and France for allies who would help them achieve a speedy victory against the Ottoman Empire and ensure their vital interests in the Arab region.

The British therefore made an alliance with the Arabs: in exchange for the promise of support for an independent Arab state, Sharif Hussein Ibn Ali of Mecca was to lead the Arab people seeking independence from the Ottoman Empire to join the British forces in the war against the Ottomans. Arab irregular troops in the Hejaz rose up against their Ottoman overlords and marched north, cooperating closely with the British forces advancing on Palestine from Egypt. By harassing the Ottoman supply convoys, sabotaging their railways, and providing intelligence to the British Army, Arab troops led by Emir Faisal of the Hejaz greatly facilitated the British Army's advance on Jerusalem in 1917. The capture of Aqaba by the Arabs was a major defeat for the Turkish forces and a crucial battle in the British conquest of Palestine.

Upon reaching Jerusalem, General Allenby of the British Army immediately assembled the city's notables and religious leaders and announced the imposition of British martial law over Palestine. The province liberated from Ottoman rule was now at the mercy of the policies of the British government.



General Allenby declares martial law on Palestine



to the Jews, it also acknowledged Arab rights by stating that "nothing will be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."



Arthur Balfour

Meanwhile, in November 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour sent a letter to Lord Rothschild expressing the British government's "sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations" and supporting the "establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." Although the Balfour Declaration was a British pledge to

Emir Faisal, influenced by the maverick British officer T.E. Lawrence, had acted in good faith with the British assurances made by Sir Henry MacMahon to his father, Sharif Hussein of Mecca. Meeting General Allenby in Damascus in October 1918, Faisal was shocked to hear of the Sykes-Picot Agreement by which the British general was required to abide. The British were caught between conflicting interests and alliances with the Zionists, the French, and the Arabs, and were forced to prioritize their promises according to strategic value in the context of WWI. While maintaining their support for the Arab call for independence, their policies changed to nurture more profitable alliances with the Zionists.



Allenby with Emir Faisal

Faisal-Weizmann Document



Emir Faisal

In June 1918, a series of meetings between Arab and Zionist leaders was facilitated by T.E. Lawrence, and Emir Faisal met with Chaim Weizmann – who introduced himself as a representative of the British government – to discuss the future of the region. To al-



Chaim Weizmann

lay Arab suspicions of Zionist intentions, Weizmann assured Faisal that the Zionists did not intend to set up a Jewish state in Palestine. The subsequent Faisal-Weizmann conditional agreement of January 1919 expressed Faisal's support for Arab-Jewish cooperation in Palestine in exchange for Jewish support of Arab aspirations for unity and independence. He endorsed the Balfour Declaration and boundaries were to be determined in the Paris Peace Conference later the same year.

Faisal spoke no English and Weizmann no Arabic, so communication between the two was through interpretation by Lawrence, who was a fluent Arabic speaker. The document that was signed was in English, and Faisal signed in good faith in Weizmann's integrity and Lawrence's translation, adding in handwriting that "if changes are made, I cannot be answerable to failure to carry out this agreement."



T. E. Lawrence

Awni Abdul Hadi, Faisal's political secretary and a Palestinian nationalist, told the Zionist delegation at the post-WWI peace conference in Paris that the Arabs "were troubled on the point of Zionist claims to British Trusteeship for Palestine... What the Arabs really wanted was that Syria should be an independent state under Arab rule." Awni Abdul Hadi proposed the Arab political agenda in which Palestine, Syria and Iraq would be united in an independent confederation, and all rights and liberties would be given to the Jews in Palestine on equal terms with the Arabs. The Zionist reaction was that this agenda fell short of the Zionist program and "could not be entertained for a moment"³, and some were not sure whether Awni Abdul Hadi was presenting his own personal thoughts or those of Emir Faisal.



Awni Abdul Hadi

3 Abdul Hadi, Awni. *Private Papers*, Beirut: PLO Research Center, 1974.



Wilson's Fourteen Points

In January 1918, US President Woodrow Wilson presented his "Fourteen Points", which he believed should be adopted as a framework of principles for the world to enter a just and peaceful postwar era. Although Wilson was rewarded with the Nobel Prize for his efforts at promoting peace, ten of the fourteen points did not correspond to the ambitions of the Great Powers and were discarded; among them, predictably, were the following two points:



President Wilson

"Point 5: A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined..."

"Point 12: The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development."⁴

The Rising Threat of Zionism

Although Zionism had been an ambition among certain groups within the Jewish community, it was only politicized in the late 19th century. By the turn of the 20th century, this ambition had been articulated by Theodor Herzl in his *Der Judenstaat*, Zionist leaders had been brought together in the World Congress of Zionists in Basle, and a methodical strategy had been put together for the establishment of a Jewish state.



Herzl's Formula

At the First Zionist Congress held in Basle in 1897, Herzl outlined the formula for a successful Zionist campaign:

1. The formation of a permanent organization to unite all Jews in the cause of Zionism.
2. The promotion of an organized, large-scale Jewish colonization of Palestine.
3. The acquisition of an internationally recognized legal right to colonize Palestine.

The establishment of Israel in May 1948 and the Palestinian Nakba which ensued was a landmark in a five-decade campaign for a Jewish state – a campaign that involved extensive international diplomacy, massive financial backing, the services of the British Army and, only finally, military force. Much work had been done by the Zionists by the time General Allenby marched into Jerusalem in December 1917; at that moment, Palestine came under the control of the new converts to Zionism in the British government, and the groundwork for the Nakba could begin in earnest.

⁴ Woodrow Wilson, "Speech on the Fourteen Points," *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress 2nd Session, 1918, pp. 680-681.

The Zionist movement placed a high priority on the recruitment of Jewish millionaires into the leadership of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). It is no coincidence that the Balfour Declaration, which in 1917 completed Herzl's formula by



Herzl addresses the First Zionist Congress in Basle, 1897

securing official British support for a "Jewish homeland" in Palestine, was addressed to Walter Rothschild - a member of that same family that had sponsored the first Zionist colonies in Palestine, that had created the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association, and that had been the target of Herzl's first draft of his *Judenstaat* 20 years before.

Jewish Immigration and Colonization

Between 1882 and 1914, an average of 2,000-3,000 Jews entered Palestine every year, bringing the total Jewish population in Palestine to 60-63,000 by the beginning of the WWI.⁵ The majority arrived without a political ideology and was fleeing rising discrimination in the immigrants' home countries, settling in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa and Hebron. Only 5% of those arriving in this period participated in forming the early Zionist colonies, but they represented the beginning of organized Zionist land acquisition and colonization in Palestine.

The first Zionist colonies were subsidized by French millionaire Baron Edmond de Rothschild and their agricultural projects were provided with extensive logistical support to ensure their survival. In 1900, following the rise of the WZO, Rothschild transferred his plantations to the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA). By the turn of the century, 22 plantation-colonies were already operating.

Between 1905 and 1914, the second immigration wave descended on Palestine. By this time the Zionist focus on land acquisition and demographic build-up was official, and it was this second wave of immigrants that established the political leadership of the new Jewish community, founded the first kibbutzim and politicized its relationship with the pre-existing Jewish community and the Palestinian Arabs. Ottoman regulations limiting land sales were bypassed through bribery or intermediaries as Jewish financiers and the JCA spent vast sums in their quest for land acquisition. Yehoshua Khanen, head of the Palestine JCA, developed a method of acquiring land by offering large loans to Palestinian landowners and confiscating their land when they were late with repayments. Less than 10% of all the land acquired by the Zionists in this early period was willingly sold by Palestinian occupants, while sales by Turkish Ottoman landowners living outside Palestine accounted for over half of the Zionists' acquisitions.



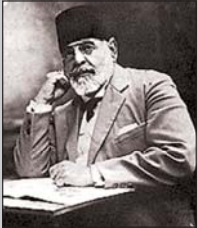
Yehoshua Khanen

By the beginning of the WWI, at least 11,000 Jews were working on 47 rural plantations and cooperatives supervised and subsidized by the WZO. Their presence and practices upset the demographic, economic and political balance in Palestine, and contributed to a steady rise in tension and incidents of violence.

⁵ All figures from *The Palestine Question in Maps*, PASSIA publications, 2002

Palestinians Rise to the Challenge

In response to the sudden need to protect their property and rights in the face of the new threat posed by Zionist funds, institutions and land purchases, Palestinians became active in trying to make up for the Ottoman government's failure to safeguard their interests. They began setting up political and economic bodies to empower and co-ordinate their efforts.



Aref Dajani

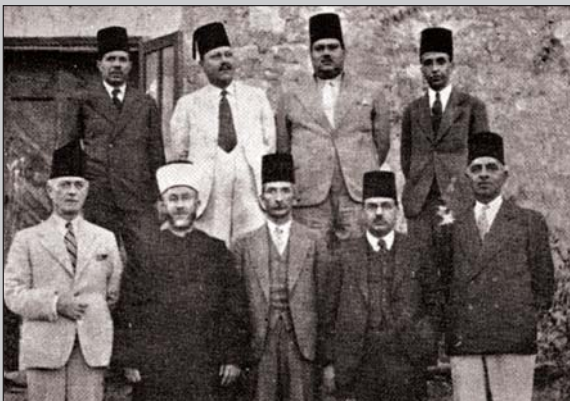
The **Muslim-Christian Association** was formed in 1918 to reflect the deep-rooted Arab identity of the Palestinian people and their opposition to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, to the Balfour Declaration and to Zionism. It soon became a countrywide network of national groups and parties with its headquarters in Jerusalem under the presidency of Aref Dajani. These were amalgamated into the **Arab Executive Committee (AEC)** in 1920 under the leadership of Musa Kazem al-Husseini, who had served in the Ottoman government before returning to become Mayor of Jerusalem during WWI.



Musa Kazem al-Husseini

The British Mandatory authorities tried to contain this Arab political mobilization, attempting first to set up a Legislative Council of Jews and Arabs under High Commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel, then proposing the formation of an Arab Agency as a counterpart to the Jewish Agency, which was fast becoming the official Jewish governing body. The same Arab consensus which opposed the Balfour Declaration and mass Jewish immigration thwarted this attempt to give the Zionist organizations political legitimacy in Palestine.

After Musa Kazem al-Husseini's death in 1934, the AEC fragmented into various parties. In 1936, when an Arab general strike protesting British rule turned into a revolt, the **Arab Higher Committee (AHC)** was formed under the leadership of Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini to assume overall Palestinian leadership of the movement and to coordinate the activities of the various nationalist parties. It was outlawed by the British in 1937, and many of its members were arrested or exiled to the Seychelles – a serious blow to the Palestinian leadership working to confront the increasing power of the Jewish Agency in Palestine.



Members of the Arab Higher Committee in 1936; absent from the group is Secretary-General Awni Abdul Hadi, imprisoned by the British for his role in the 1936 uprising.

Arab Congresses

In order to formulate Palestinian national aspirations, seven national congresses were held between 1919 and 1928, initially organized by the Muslim-Christian Association. The **First Congress** (Jerusalem, 1919) rejected the Balfour Declaration and presented the Palestinian national position as part of Emir Faisal's demands to the Paris Conference. The **Second Congress** (Jerusalem, May 1920), convened to protest the confirmation of the British Mandate in Palestine, was forbidden by the British authorities. The **Third Congress** (Haifa, December 1920) called for the establishment of a National Government and elected the Arab Executive Committee to direct and oversee the the Palestinian national movement. The **Fourth Congress** (Jerusalem, June 1921) elected the first Palestinian delegation to London, led by Musa Kazem al-Husseini, to present the Palestinian case against Jewish immigration to Palestine to the British government. The **Fifth Congress** (Nablus, 1922) decided to boycott the Legislative Council elections planned by the British and to establish an information office in London. The **Sixth Congress** (Jaffa, 1923) reiterated the boycott of Legislative Council elections and the rejection of the Anglo-Hejaz treaty, which proposed a British-supported Arab confederation of the Hejaz, Iraq and Transjordan. The **Seventh Congress** (Jerusalem, 1928) called for the establishment of a representative government.



7th Palestinian National Congress, Jerusalem, 1928

These congresses were of limited benefit to the Palestinian cause, and highlighted the problems of divisions within Palestinian ranks. Most apparent was the rivalry between Mayor of Jerusalem Ragheb Nashashibi and Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini. Nashashibi favored fostering good relations with both the British and the Jewish Agency in the hope that a conciliatory approach would yield better results than an uncompromising one. In direct contradiction was the policy adopted by the Grand Mufti, who was a constant voice of resistance and was the main architect of the 1936 general strike which evolved into the three-year Great Revolt.



Hajj Amin al-Husseini



The first official representatives of a Palestinian women's delegation meet with British High Commissioner Lord Chancellor in Jerusalem

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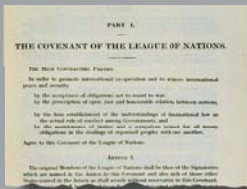
The Mandate Years

After WWI, the occupation by Allied powers of the territories that had formed part of the Ottoman Empire - officially designated the "Occupied Enemy Territory Administration" - was given international legitimacy by the League of Nations in 1922 when it issued Mandates to the Allied occupiers. Palestine remained under the control of the British without the consent of the Palestinians. In theory, the Mandatory powers were in place to assist local populations in the administration of their lands until ready to govern themselves independently. In practice, the Mandatory system was simply colonialism under another name.

The "civilizing mission" comes to Palestine

"To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by people not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the wellbeing of such people form a sacred trust of civilization ... The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations ... and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League."

- Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations



Palestine remained under British control until 1948, by which time Palestine's political infrastructure had been systematically dismembered, its people weakened, and waves of Zionist immigrants allowed to appropriate land, organize and arm.

Throughout the Mandatory period, Palestinians attempted to negotiate with the British to persuade them to fulfill their responsibilities towards the long-established population of Palestine. As early as 1918, a Palestinian delegation led by Musa Kazem al-Hussein presented a petition to British Military Governor Sir Ronald Storrs protesting the pro-Zionist policies of the British. Musa Kazem would later lead the Arab Executive Committee and the delegations it sent to several conferences in London in order to represent the Palestinian cause.

Turning the British to the Zionist Campaign

"Zionist colonization... can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population - behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach. What need, otherwise, of the Balfour Declaration? Or of the Mandate? Their value to us is that an outside Power has undertaken to create in the country such conditions of administration and security that if the native population should desire to hinder our work, they will find it impossible. And we are all of us demanding... that this outside Power should carry out this task vigorously and with determination."⁶ With these words, Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinski expressed the entire Zionist strategy, unchanged since the days of Herzl.



Ze'ev Jabotinski

In the early years of the WWI, Russian chemist Chaim Weizmann insinuated himself into British political circles by assisting the British Admiralty to increase their production of explosives for the war effort. In doing so, he formed close ties with Lord Arthur Balfour, the First Lord of the Admiralty whose name would forever be associated with the scheming duplicity and Zionist agenda that shaped British policy. Balfour would later refer to Weizmann as "the man who made me a Zionist."⁷ The extent of his commitment to Zionism can be seen in a letter to Lord Curzon in 1919:



Chaim Weizmann and Arthur Balfour

"In Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country... The four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land."⁸



Herbert Samuel, Winston Churchill and David Lloyd-George

Powerful friends within the British establishment would prove crucial in laying the foundations for active British sponsorship of the Zionist goal. Securing the support of high-level politicians such as Herbert Samuel (who would, by no coincidence, become the first High Commissioner for Palestine under the British Mandate), Mark Sykes, Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George, he prepared to bend British policy towards a Zionist agenda.



Herbert Samuel arrives in Jaffa to assume his position of British High Commissioner for Palestine, 27 March 1920

⁷ Meyer W. Weisgal (ed.), *Chaim Weizmann, Statesman, Scientist, and Builder of the Jewish Commonwealth*. New York: Dial Press, 1944, p. 131.

⁸ Doreen Ingrams. *Palestine Papers, 1917-1922: Seeds of Conflict*. New York, 1973.

⁶ Ze'ev Jabotinski, *The Iron Wall*, 1923.



The First Phase of the Mandate

The appointment of the first High Commissioner for Palestine was a controversial one that made the British intentions in the upcoming Mandate clear: Sir Herbert Samuel was a Jew and a fervent Zionist who had played a central role in shaping British policy towards Palestine expressed in the Balfour Declaration. His appointment was greeted with dismay by the Palestinians and with joy by the Zionists, and his policies went a long way towards setting the foundations for a Jewish takeover of Palestine. While denying the Palestinians a cohesive authority, he allowed the Jews to build institutions and even granted them the right to levy taxes. His appointments of rival Nashashibis and Husseinis to positions of authority weakened the Palestinian political resistance to Zionism, and his administration of the land set the precedent for a system of expropriation which is still employed by the Israeli government today. His tenure as High Commissioner, during which the Jewish population in Palestine was allowed to double through immigration, was marked by anti-Palestinian policies including closure of Palestinian institutions and a ban on Palestinian flags. These policies have been faithfully reproduced by the Israelis in the post-1967 occupation of Palestine.

Diplomatic Timeline during the Mandate

1919: The Hejaz delegation to the post-WWI Paris Peace Conference appeals unsuccessfully for self-determination and the implementation of the Hussein-McMahon agreement, with no success.

1919: The American King-Crane Commission visits Palestine and determines that the Mandate would not be the best choice for the former Ottoman territories. Its report comes too late to forestall the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference.

1920: The first Palestinian delegation (*below*) travels to London to explain the Palestinian aspirations and their opposition to the Balfour Declaration, led by Musa Kazem al-Husseini (3rd from left).



1921: The Cairo Conference is called by Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill to determine the future of the former Ottoman provinces captured during WWI.

1921: The Haycraft Commission of Inquiry investigates the Jaffa Riots and places responsibility on the Arabs, concluding that they highlighted fears of the consequences of mass Jewish immigration.

1922: The Churchill White Paper confirms the British position on the Balfour declaration and holds the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence inapplicable to Palestine.

1930: The Shaw Commission and the Hope-Simpson Commission investigate the riots of 1929 and recommend that Jewish immigration and land purchase be restricted.

1930: A Palestinian delegation to London demands cessation of Jewish mass immigration and land acquisition in Palestine, and the establishment of a representative government.

1930: The Passfield White Paper articulates a new British policy that Jewish immigration and land purchase should stop, but is repealed in PM MacDonald's "Black Letter" to Chaim Weizmann a few months later after Jewish protests.

1936-7: The Peel Commission (*below*) investigates the causes of the Palestinian revolt against the Zionists and British, and recommends partition and population transfer for the first time.



1938: The Woodhead Commission proposes a strategy to implement the Peel Commission's partition plan.

1939: Palestinian, Arab and Jewish delegates fail to come to a satisfactory agreement at the St James's Palace Conference in London. It is followed by the 1939 MacDonald White Paper restricting Jewish immigration and land purchase.

1946: The Anglo-American Commission of Enquiry visits Palestine and recommends continuation of the British Mandate, while the Morrison-Grady Plan recommends a binational federated state. Neither proposal gains approval.

1947: Yet another conference on Palestine convenes in London at St. James's Palace to consider British proposals for its division into Arab and Jewish provinces (federal solution) under a British High Commissioner.

1947: The British submit the Question of Palestine to the UN, which issues UN Resolution 181 for partition of Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state, with Jerusalem and Bethlehem as a *corpus separatum* under international control.



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Palestinian Uprisings

1920: The Nabi Musa riots in Jerusalem were a consequence of Arab frustration at the failure of the international community to honor the promises of independence made to the Arab leaders during WWI. As a result of the riots, Musa Kazem al-Husseini was deposed as mayor of Jerusalem by the British and replaced with the much more accommodating Ragheb Nashashibi.

1921: Arab anti-immigration protests in Jaffa turned into clashes with Jews, leading British High Commissioner Samuel to declare a state of emergency.



Demonstration in Jerusalem, 1920

1929: Breaches of the code of conduct for Jewish and Arab worshippers at the Al-Buraq (Western) Wall led to demonstrations and clashes in Jerusalem that quickly spread around the country. When the disturbances finally settled, the Hope-Simpson Royal Commission investigated the causes of the riots and recommended limiting Jewish immigration.

1930s: Seeing the futility of diplomacy and appeals to the British authorities, the first armed militias, such as Izz Eddin al-Qassam's *Black Hand* group, began taking up arms against Zionist settlers. Qassam, through his dedication to the resistance movement and his death in combat at the hands of the British in 1935, became the first hero of Palestinian nationalism and an inspiration to generations of resistance fighters.



Izz Eddin al-Qassam

1936: "The Great Rebellion" arose from Jewish-Arab clashes, a nationwide Arab strike demanding an end to Jewish immigration and land sales to Jews, and the establishment of an Arab national government. The popular national committees refused to pay taxes until the British fulfilled their demands for representation, and the British declared the AHC an illegal organization. The riots resumed in 1937 in the wake of the report by the Peel Commission recommending partition, and the British arrested and deported prominent AHC members and stripped Hajj Amin al-Husseini of his titles as Chairman of the *waqf* and President of the Supreme Muslim Council. The uprising ended only in 1939 with the issuing of the MacDonal White Paper abandoning the recommendations of the Peel Commission.



Arab fighters in the 1936 revolt

The main Palestinian parties

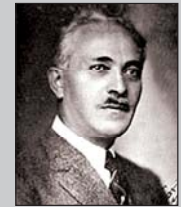
Istiqlal (Independence) Party under Awni Abdul Hadi

- established in 1932 as the first regularly constituted Palestinian political party, reflecting the frustration of educated nationalists over the national movement's failure to effectively confront Zionism and its British sponsors. It called for an end to the Mandate and advocated Arab unity close to Emir Faisal and independence of all Arab countries. It was critical of the divisive effect of the Husseini-Nashashibi rivalry but was unable to challenge either camp.



National Defense Party under Ragheb al-Nashashibi

- established in 1934 by the Nashashibi family and its followers. It opposed Jewish immigration and land sales to Jews, but favored compromise with regard to the British and Zionists. It maintained close relations with Emir Abdullah and was the only political group to formally accept partition, with the Arab state linked to Transjordan.



Palestine Arab Party under Jamal al-Husseini

- established by the Grand Mufti and his supporters in 1935 and close to the Saudi family. It opposed the Balfour Declaration, the British Mandate, Jewish immigration and land sales to Jews, calling for complete Palestinian independence. Many of its leaders were exiled after the 1936 revolt.



Reform Party under Hussein al-Khalidi

- established in 1935. It accepted the British-proposed Legislative Council as a step towards greater influence and eventual independence, but rejected the 1939 White Paper proposal which abandoned the idea of partition and advocated a single state with proportional representation for Arabs and Jews in Palestine.



National Bloc under Abd al-Latif Salah

- established in 1935. It stood for the political independence of Palestine but was unable to mobilize sufficient support, remaining weak due to its wavering policies of co-operation and resistance towards the British.



Facing the Threat of Jewish Funds



During the 1920s and 1930s, Palestinians set up financial institutions to safeguard the Palestinian land and economy. The first major Palestinian banks were founded, such as the *Palestinian Agricultural Bank*, the *Egypt-Palestine Bank* (both 1928), the *Umma Fund Bank* and the *Arab Bank* (both 1931). In addition, in 1943 the *Arab National Fund* was established by AHC treasurer Ahmad Hilmi Abdul Baqi (photo) with the aim of purchasing land and safeguarding it from acquisition by Zionist bodies.

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The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



Loading the Dice

As friction increased between the Arabs and the Jewish immigrants, both sides started to build defensive and offensive capabilities against each other. However, while the British security forces did their utmost to disarm the Palestinians and disrupt the establishment of any Arab paramilitary organization, the Zionists were encouraged to arm and organize and were often given training and logistical support by the British authorities. From this unequal treatment during Mandatory times, the Zionist forces were to emerge in a vastly superior military position to their Palestinian adversaries.



Jewish forces in British uniform training in 1940

The Haganah evolved from a protective force defending kibbutzim into an effective underground military organization. With thousands of recruits from settlements, where almost all able-bodied individuals became members, the group operated in close collaboration with British forces. The Jewish Settlement Police were organized, trained and equipped by the British, and preparations for combat were taken a step further in the formation of the violent and brutal "Special Night Squads" by Major Orde Wingate of the British Army.



Orde Wingate

During WWII the British Army set up the Palmach in association with the Haganah in order to have a specialized local force to counter the German threat from the North African theater of war. Highly trained, efficiently organized and well-equipped by the British, the Palmach produced many of the leaders of what would later become the Israeli Army.

In the meantime, Palestinians were forbidden to carry weapons, and any attempts to form a coherent Palestinian military force or political system were systematically dismantled. Following the outlawing of the AHC, Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini escaped to Lebanon, where he remained in exile. His absence during the fighting between the Palestinians and the Zionists in the months before partition was a serious detriment to the morale of the Palestinian guerrillas.



The citizens of Abu Ghosh pledge allegiance to the AHC.



Palestinians being searched by British troops.

Roots in Terrorism

The 1930s saw the creation of the Irgun and the Lehi or "Stern Gang". Formed in the wake of the 1929 riots, the Irgun began as a protecting force acting against the Palestinians in parallel with the British Army and began organizing large-scale illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine to increase their numbers. By the late 1930s it was undertaking active offensive operations against the Arab population of Palestine; and with the publication of the 1939 White Paper it soon turned its sights on the British infrastructure, engaging in acts of sabotage and murder of British police officers.



A 1947 poster for the Irgun, clearly showing their claim to all of Palestine and Transjordan

In November 1944, two Lehi terrorists assassinated British politician Lord Moyne in Cairo both for his involvement in reformulating Britain's Palestine policy and as a gesture to show that imperialist targets were not limited to the boundaries of Palestine. Two years and many murderous attacks later, a massive explosion destroyed part of the British headquarters at the King David Hotel (left) in Jerusalem.



As a result of these terrorist attacks, the two groups gained a reputation for violent and brutal actions against the Arab civilian population. The massacre of Deir Yassin on 9 April 1948 (see p.12) by a combined force of the Irgun and the Stern Gang stands out as the most notorious example of the brutality of their methods. In September 1948, the world took notice as UN mediator Count Bernadotte was murdered in his car in cold blood by members of the Lehi.

Both groups were at various stages condemned both by the international community and by upstanding Jews. Both Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, commanders of the Irgun and Lehi respectively and terrorists in any definition of the term, went on to become Prime Ministers of Israel.



Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir

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The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



The Partition Process Begins

In February 1947, the beleaguered British administration, under pressure both from the international community and from the local guerrilla war being waged by the Zionists, decided to submit the Question of Palestine to the United Nations. The body that would determine the future of Palestine – the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) – was immediately boycotted by the Arab Higher Committee; in their opinion, post-Mandatory Palestine did not need investigation and should only take the form of an independent Arab Palestinian state, with the UN having no authority to decide on the matter. In addition, Arab League Secretary-General Azzem Pasha greatly overstated both the Arabs' military capabilities and their commitment to defeating the Jewish forces.



Azzem Pasha, with the Grand Mufti in the background

In contrast, the Zionists welcomed the UNSCOP delegation and were careful to present their case in a tone of compromise. The rhetorical and persuasive skills of Chaim Weizmann proved to be particularly effective and contributed to the UNSCOP delegation's increasing sympathy for the Zionists.

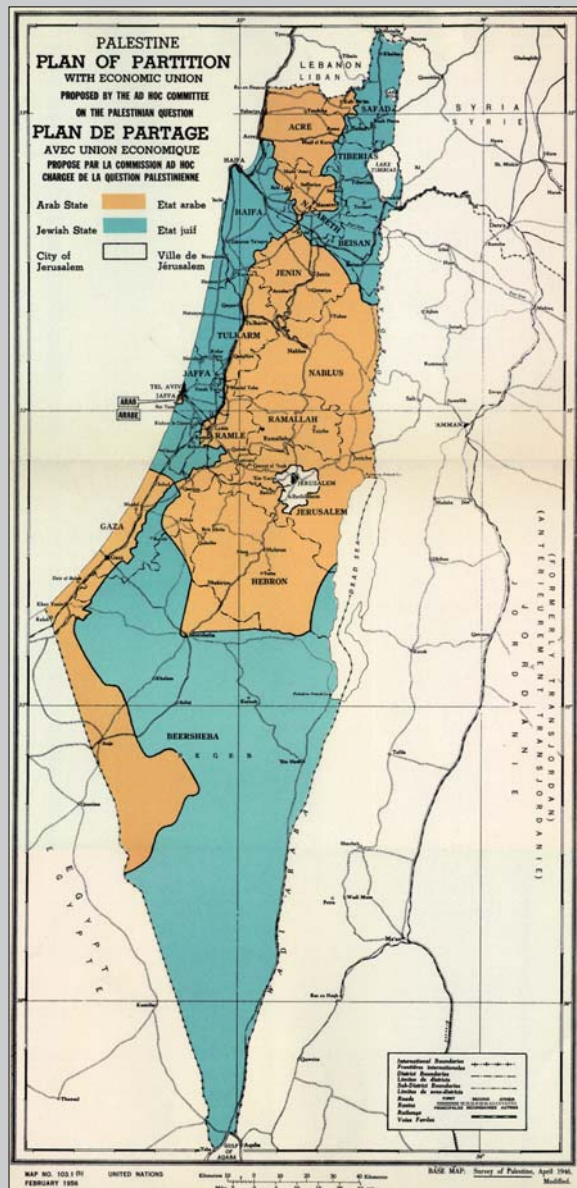


Members of the UNSCOP delegation

UNSCOP prepared two reports, one endorsed by the majority of the delegates favoring partition, and the other proposed by the minority, recommending a single federated state. On 29 November 1947, the UN General Assembly voted in favor of the majority report and the partition of Palestine into separate Arab (42%) and Jewish (56%) states with economic union. Jerusalem, due to its cultural and religious importance, was to be a separate demilitarized *corpus separatum* (2%) that would include Bethlehem and be administered according to the recommendations of an international Trusteeship Council.

Extract from UN Resolution 181

"The General Assembly recommends to the United Kingdom, as the Mandatory Power for Palestine, and to all other Members of the United Nations the adoption and implementation, with regard to the future Government of Palestine, of the Plan of Partition with Economic Union... The City of Jerusalem shall be established as a *corpus separatum* under a special international regime and shall be administered by the United Nations. The Trusteeship Council shall be designated to discharge the responsibilities of the Administering Authority on behalf of the United Nations."



In the words of Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi,

"[the UN resolution] was... the ostensibly disinterested verdict of an impartial international body. This endowed the concept with the attributes of objectivity and evenhandedness – in short, of a compromise solution. But a compromise – by definition is an arrangement acceptable, however grudgingly, to the protagonists. The 'partition' of Palestine proposed by UNSCOP was no such thing... Also, 'compromise' implies mutual concession. What were the Zionists conceding? You can only really concede what you possess. What possessions in Palestine were the Zionists conceding? None at all... It surely goes against the grain of human nature to expect the party that would suffer this reversal to enter into the transaction just because some third party, itself affiliated to a political aggrandizer, chose to befof the issue by calling this transaction a 'compromise'."⁹

⁹ Walid Khalidi quoted in Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan*. Oxford, 1988.



The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

After the UN vote in favor of partition in November 1947, the violence between Jews and Arabs escalated, with frequent roadside ambushes and bombings being perpetrated by both sides. Isolated, stripped of most of its weapons, with its leadership sent into exile, and facing an organized and well-armed enemy, the Palestinians proved no match for the Zionist forces, and the gallant resistance movement of Hajj Amin al-Husseini's *Jihad al-Muqaddas* Army was fighting an impossible war. The death of their charismatic and capable leader Abdel Qader al-Husseini at the battle of Qastel on 8 April 1948 was an especially severe blow to Palestinian morale.

In the process of putting down the indigenous resistance movement, the Zionist leadership embarked upon a ruthless program of ethnic cleansing prior to the end of the British Mandate and the inevitable confrontations with the surrounding Arab countries. Knowing that the Arab armies would not intervene before the British withdrawal, the Zionists could turn their full focus on the Palestinian population with frequent and brutal raids on villages, quickly creating a state of unprecedented fear. Villages near Jewish settlements were forcibly depopulated, and the Jewish forces soon took their maneuvers further afield to expel as much of the Palestinian population from Mandatory Palestine as possible.

With the majority of rural Palestinian populations living a simple agricultural existence, most of the *fellahin* had no social, political or economic need for extended contact with the affairs and politics of the major cities. Their participation during the armed conflict between the Zionists and the Palestinians was therefore limited to defending their villages; and with little communication or cooperation between one village and the next, each village undertook its own defense. Concentrating on one village at a time, it was an easy task for the organized, well-armed Jewish forces to effect the depopulation of over 200 Palestinian villages prior to their declaration of nationhood in May 1948. Their undertaking was greatly facilitated by the widespread news of the brutality of their methods; the massacre of Deir Yassin in particular had a traumatic effect on the Palestinian population, and many fled the advancing Jewish forces in terror of being subjected to a similar fate.

Large Palestinian cities presented only slightly different challenges to the Zionist forces. Under pressure to establish a contiguous Jewish territory along the coastal strip before the British withdrawal, Jewish forces launched attacks upon Haifa and Jaffa to secure the coast. Fighting in Haifa had been ongoing since December 1947, but when the British abruptly withdrew their troops in April 1948, the Haganah staged a mass attack upon the city. With the news of Deir Yassin very fresh in the minds of the inhabitants, all but 4,000 of the city's 70,000 Arabs fled in terror, leaving behind all they could not carry.



Deir Yassin

Deir Yassin was a small Palestinian village near Jerusalem which had made and scrupulously abided by a non-aggression agreement with the Haganah. On 9 April 1948, the Irgun and the



Stern Gang launched an unprovoked attack on the village and massacred over 245 Palestinians. According to Benny Morris in *Righteous Victims*, entire families were killed, and reports from Jewish commanders spoke of "barbaric behavior towards the prisoners and dead", with Palestinian villagers being paraded in Jerusalem city streets in trucks before being taken back to the village and murdered. Although the Haganah leadership condemned the operation, it served a useful purpose in their expulsion plan as its psychological effect on Palestinians was devastating.

The accounts from survivors and witnesses were harrowing:¹

"The Jews ordered all our family to line up against the wall and they started shooting us. I was hit in the side, but most of us children were saved because we hid behind our parents. The bullets hit my sister Kadri (four) in the head, my sister Sameh (eight) in the cheek, my brother Mohammed (seven) in the chest. But all the others with us against the wall were killed: my father, my mother, my grandfather, my grandmother, my uncles and aunts and some of their children."

- Fahimi Zeidan, who was 12 in 1948

"[I saw] a man shoot... my sister Salhiyeh who was nine months pregnant. Then he cut her stomach open with a butcher's knife."

- Haleem Lei

"I saw bodies of women and children, who were murdered in their houses in cold blood by gunfire, with no signs of battle and not as the result of blowing up the houses. From my experience, I know well that there is no war without killing, and that not only combatants get killed. I have seen a great deal of war, but I never saw a sight like Deir Yassin."

- Eliahu Arbel of the Haganah, who arrived in Deir Yassin on 10 April

"All I could think of was the SS troops I'd seen in Athens."

- Jacques de Reyner of the Red Cross, the first to reach the site

"It was a lovely spring day. The almond trees were in bloom, the flowers were out and everywhere there was the stench of the dead, the thick smell of blood, and the terrible odor of the corpses burning in the quarry."

- Yeshurun Schiff of the Haganah, who arrived just after the massacre.

Deir Yassin was not an isolated incident, nor were these atrocities limited to the radical Irgun and Lehi fringe groups. The villages of Balad esh-Sheikh, Sa'sa', Hula and ed-Dawayimeh were all the scenes of similar attacks. (See, for example, Sami Hadawi's *Bitter Harvest* for further details).

¹ All quotes from Collins and Lapierre, *O Jerusalem!*, (Touchstone, 1988) and Yitzak Levi, *Nine Measures* (Maarachot, 1986)

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The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



Palestinians flee Jaffa

Only days after the fall of Haifa, the Jewish forces turned their full attention on Jaffa despite its being an all-Arab city outside the area allocated to the Jews by the UN Partition Plan; a heavy and indiscriminate mortar bombardment of the city and the flight of Jaffa's Arab leadership, combined with the news of the brutality of Zionist forces at Deir Yassin, led the city's population to flee the city. Most left in dangerous and overcrowded boats, many meeting a tragic end by drowning on the way.

Also in the spring of 1948, Jewish forces launched operations to secure the Galilee. Yigal Allon commanded "Operation Yiftach" with the strategy that the simplest and best way of securing the frontier was by clearing the area completely of all Arab forces and civilians. In the case of Safad, Jewish forces attacked the surrounding villages in order to demoralize its population before assaulting the town itself, at which point the residents of the district took flight.



The last British troops leave Palestine, 14 May 1948

All this took place under the indifferent eye of the British authorities who, after tilting the scales firmly in favor of the Zionists during their occupation of Palestine, adopted a policy of non-interference in the conflict despite their supposed responsibility for law and order in their Mandate.

After the ignominious withdrawal of British forces in May 1948 and the first Israeli engagements with the regular Arab armies, the expulsions continued. Lydda and Ramle, two Arab towns strategically placed on the road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, came under attack in July 1948 despite being squarely within the land allocated to Arabs in the UN Partition Plan. King Abdullah's Arab Legion, although

in a position to come to the defense of the towns, chose not to confront the Israeli forces. Over 60,000 Palestinians were expelled from the towns and were forced to walk towards the lines of the Arab Legion.

In the six months before Britain abandoned Palestine, half of the Palestinian population had been forced from their homes.

"Yigal Allon asked Ben-Gurion what was to be done with the civilian population. Ben-Gurion waved his hand in a gesture of 'drive them out.' 'Driving out' is a term with a harsh ring. Psychologically, this was one of the most difficult actions we undertook. The population of Lydda did not leave willingly. There was no way of avoiding the use of force and warning shots in order to make the inhabitants march the ten or fifteen miles to the point where they met up with the Arab Legion."

-Yitzhak Rabin, Service Diary, published in the New York Times, 23 October 1979.

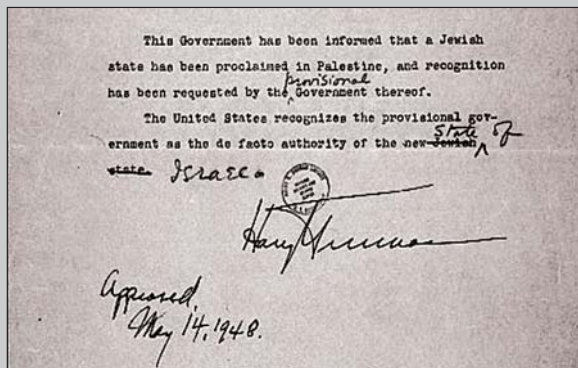
The End of the Mandate

The Zionists, having exploited their alliance with the British to its fullest before turning against them to expel them from Palestine, had made a new and powerful friend to replace them in the form of US President Harry Truman. The US State Department had been working feverishly to negotiate an alternative to war in Palestine through a postponement of an Israeli declaration of statehood. In direct contradiction to the efforts of his own administration, the President secretly informed Chaim Weizmann – the same man who had manipulated the British into support of Zionism – that he would recognize such a declaration if it was made.



President Truman and Weizmann at the White House in 1948

This assurance allowed the Zionists to declare their independence in the full knowledge that the American government would support them; their state was recognized by the United States within hours of its proclamation. The ability to ignore the pressures placed upon them by the international community thanks to unconditional American support has been one of the most important factors in Israeli policy ever since.



The cable from the US recognizing Israel only 11 hours after its declaration

The Arab-Israeli Military Engagements of 1948

The events of 1948 have been portrayed as the victory of an outnumbered Israeli people attacked by a monolithic Arab army determined to “drive the Jews into the sea.” This “David and Goliath” version of events, which was given weight by the saber-rattling rhetoric of Arab propaganda vowing to prevent partition, has become one of the founding myths of the Israeli State and one which continues to define both the identity of Israelis and their attitudes towards their neighbors. However, even the most superficial analysis of the facts proves that version of events to be false on all counts. There was no miraculous victory, nor did the Israelis win a war alone; with massive international support – both diplomatic and material – and a fractured and weak opponent, the partition of Palestine was a predictable outcome.

The widely held notion that the Arab armies were a united force acting with the sole aim of defending Palestine is very far from the truth. Even if the popular voice on the Arab street clamored for their countries to come to the aid of their brethren in Palestine, at no stage was this the real goal of the Arab leaders. In practical terms, the Palestinians were on their own from the very beginning.



King Abdullah of Transjordan, President Bechara al-Khoury of Lebanon, President Shukri Quwatli of Syria and Crown Prince Abdul Ilah of Iraq

The essence of the events of 1948 can be defined as a conflict between Hashemite and anti-Hashemite Arab blocs as they attempted to rearrange their borders in the wake of the British withdrawal from Palestine. Behind a veil of Arab unity against a Jewish state which they had accepted was going to survive the conflict, the Hashemite rulers of Transjordan and Iraq joined forces in an uncomfortable alliance of mutual mistrust and jealousy to test the shrewdness of Syria and Egypt both in gaining control of land in Palestine and in protecting their borders from their neighbors.

Caught in the middle of this triangular conflict were the Palestinians. Crippled by the machinations of their Arab brethren, the Palestinian guerrillas were the only Arabs truly fighting for the Palestinian cause, and the only ones with everything to lose. The Grand Mufti’s *Jihad al-Muqaddas* army numbered only several hundred men and had some early successes under the capable leadership of Abdel Qader Husseini, but suffered from many strategic disadvantages. The first and most obvious was numerical; in addition, their morale was affected by the absence of their leader Hajj Amin, who was in exile since 1937. Strategically, they were crippled by having been suppressed and disarmed during the British Mandate while the Zionists had been



Abdul Qader Husseini



Hasan Salameh

allowed to build up organized, well-armed and well-trained forces, many of which had gained experience with the British in WWII. Their approach was that of a guerrilla army, capable of victories in small engagements but ultimately ineffective without a wider long-term strategy or the support of regular armies.

The Palestinian resistance suffered a serious setback even before the military involvement of the Arab nations when Abdel Qader Husseini was killed at the battle of Qastel on 8 April 1948. When his successor Hasan Salama died at the battle of Ras al-Ein on 2 June, the Palestinian fighters were left leaderless and in disarray, and the Israelis no longer faced a serious threat from within the borders of Mandatory Palestine.

The Grand Mufti, understanding the intricacies of inter-Arab politics, had always argued against the intervention of Arab countries into Palestine and appealed simply for financial and material support. He was disappointed on both counts. At a meeting of Arab leaders held in Cairo (right) under the patronage of King Farouk of Egypt, King Abdullah was declared the High Commander of Arab Forces in Palestine.



Abdullah with Farouk

Military Capability

Most of the Arab armies had little or no combat experience, were hampered by a lack of suitable weapons and ammunition and were manned in the main by local police forces. The only army with good training, adequate equipment and combat experience was King Abdullah’s Arab Legion, which comprised only 4,500 of the approximately 20,300 Arab troops deployed at the beginning of the conflict.

The Israeli forces at the beginning of the war consisted of approximately 27,000 troops, bolstered by a centralized command structure, good training, many soldiers with combat experience from WWII, massive financial support and a carefully planned military strategy. In addition, they had as many as 90,000 reserve troops in settlements, youth battalions and home guard, as well as the Irgun and Lehi. Once they had received their first arms shipments and reinforcements from overseas, the Zionists were superior in every military aspect.

Figures by Walid Khalidi, quoted in Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, Toronto, 1987, p. 196.

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The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



Transjordan

At the time of the 1947 UN resolution to partition Palestine, the Jews had prepared a government, a police force, and an army to take control after the British withdrawal at the end of the Mandate; meanwhile the Palestinians had been prevented from taking any measures to govern themselves, and had been stripped of the means to form a military force. Transjordanian Prime Minister Tawfiq Abul Huda predicted that without intervention, either the Jews would disregard the UN Partition Plan and capture all of Palestine up to the River Jordan, or King Abdullah's rival Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini would return to Palestine and make a bid to become leader of a new Arab state.¹⁰



King Abdullah



Tawfiq Abul Huda

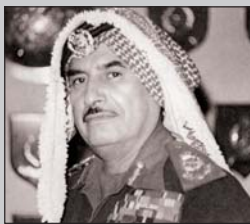
In January 1948, Abul Huda, accompanied by his Foreign Minister Fawzi al-Mulki and Transjordan's British commander of armed forces Glubb Pasha, traveled to London to meet with British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin. According to Glubb, the Transjordanian government proposed to send the Arab Legion across the Jordan when the Mandate ended to take control of that part of Palestine awarded to the Arabs which was contiguous to Transjordan. Glubb tempered this plan by reminding Abul Huda that the Arab Legion would not be able to hold the Galilee or the Gaza area. Bevin agreed with the proposal, adding that "it seems the obvious thing to do, but do not go and invade the areas allotted to the Jews." To this the Transjordanian PM replied that "we would not have the forces to do so, even if we so desired."¹¹

King Abdullah and the Zionist leaders began a series of communications through emissaries, culminating in meetings with Jewish Agency representative Golda Meir in 1947 and again in May 1948, only days before the British withdrawal from Palestine. By the time the Zionists declared statehood on 14 May, an understanding had been forged between the Jewish Agency and Transjordan.



Golda Meir

The initial fighting between the Arab Legion and Jewish forces was fierce in spite of the agreements between King Abdullah and the Zionist leadership. While the Arab Legion remained within the area designated as Arab in the UN Partition Plan as agreed, the Jewish troops attempted to push into the Arab-designated area towards Jerusalem. The former British fort at Latrun that controlled the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road was within the Arab area, and was held by the Arab Legion in the face of Jewish attacks. Meanwhile Jewish assaults on Jerusalem's Old City were repelled by Jordanian troops.



Habes al-Majali, under whose leadership Arab Legion forces repelled Jewish attacks at Latrun

Glubb Pasha placed a high strategic importance on holding Latrun and was reluctant to commit his limited resources elsewhere. The towns of Lydda and Ramle – which were deep inside the Arab state designated in the Partition Plan – were within easy reach of his troops, but protecting them would have left Latrun and the road to Jerusalem vulnerable to Jewish forces. He made a strategic decision to sacrifice the two towns after consulting with King Abdullah and PM Abul Huda.¹² The subsequent depopulation of Lydda and Ramle by Jewish forces and the expulsion of their populations across the lines of the Arab Legion earned Glubb and King Abdullah heavy criticism after the second truce of early 1949.

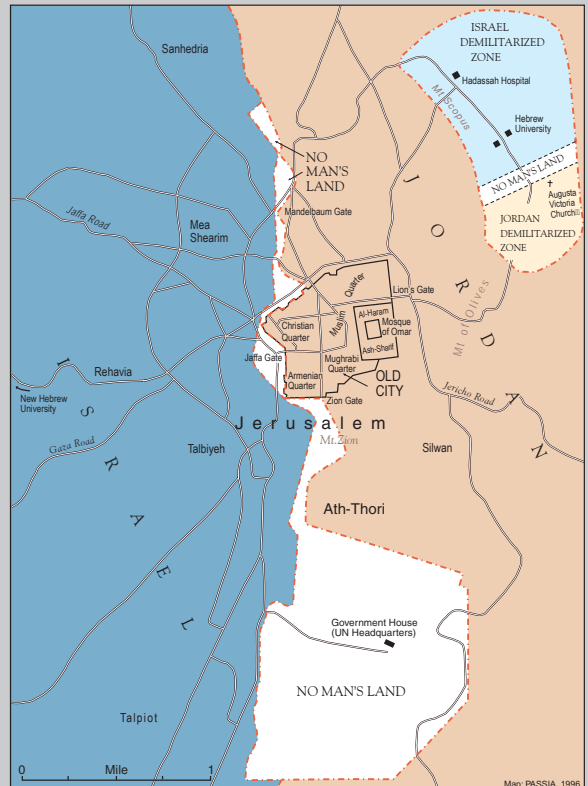


Glubb Pasha



Above: Generals Abdullah Tal of Transjordan and Moshe Dayan meet to discuss the partition of Jerusalem.

Below: The status of Jerusalem after 1949, with a UN-supervised no-man's land separating the two halves of the city.



Map: PASSIA, 1996

¹⁰ Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 136.

¹¹ John Glubb, *A Soldier with the Arabs*, London: H&S, 1957.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.142, 157.

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The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



The Arab Liberation Army

The Arab leaders in Cairo, Riyadh and Damascus were keen to prevent Transjordan's Arab Legion under Glubb Pasha from entering Palestine and securing new lands to come under King Abdullah's rule, but they were reluctant to send their own troops into combat before the British withdrawal. The Arab League therefore organized volunteers into the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) under the leadership of Fawzi al-Qawukji to try to pre-empt the Jordanian maneuvers.



Fawzi al-Qawukji was a Syrian who had served many different masters in the region, including Ottoman, French, and Iraqi forces. His talent for self-publicity had earned him a reputation as a successful military leader in spite of frequent displays of incompetence and duplicity which would be repeated throughout the armed conflict of 1948. His appointment as head of the ALA was a political one, as his well-known enmity for Hajj Amin al-Husseini tallied well with the Arab leaders' unwillingness to see the emergence of an autonomous Palestinian state under the Mufti's rule. It suited the Zionists too; for the



Fawzi al-Qawukji

rest of the military engagement, Qawukji's primary focus was to hinder the efforts of the Mufti's *Jihad al-Muqaddas* army, all the while giving the impression to the outside world of conducting a successful campaign against the Zionists. His reports of resounding victories over the Jews where none had occurred did nothing to help the Palestinian cause in the conflict, and his treacherous refusal to resupply the Palestinian irregulars at the battle of Qastel may have lost them that battle and the life of Abdul Qader Hussein, their most capable commander.



Abdul Qader Hussein (center) with his commanders just before the battle of Qastel, April 1947, in which they were betrayed by Qawukji's ALA.

Egypt

The Egyptian leadership was ambivalent about committing troops to Palestine from the outset. The majority among them opposed the concept: Prime Minister Noqrashi Pasha because of its implications in the context of the enduring British military presence in Egypt, the army generals for military strategic reasons, and certain members of the Senate because of the consequences for their good relations with Egypt's Jewish community.



Abdel Aziz al-Saud of Saudi Arabia, Azzem Pasha of the Arab League and King Farouk of Egypt.

Fearful of the threat posed by the Hashemite bloc of Transjordan and Iraq, the Egyptian focus was on containing King Abdullah rather than on defeating the Zionists. The overwhelming majority of the Egyptian street, however, was calling for Egypt to come to the aid of their Arab brethren in Palestine, in large part due to the efforts of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was a powerful support for the Palestinian cause in mobilizing public opinion and influencing decisionmakers. Encouraged to do so by Aziz Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, who had his own personal rivalry with the Hashemites, King Farouq committed his forces to the conflict in Palestine.



Egyptian PM al-Nahhas (r) speaks to the Arab League's Azzem Pasha, with Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia in the background



Leader of the Muslim Brotherhood Sheikh Hassan al-Banna (with beard) in a rally in support of Palestine with Syrian MP Mardam Bey (center) in Cairo in 1945.

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Egyptian commander Mohammed Said Taha Bey negotiating the evacuation of his troops from the Negev. On his left is future Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin.

The subsequent Egyptian contribution to the conflict was badly organized, poorly led, and planned along very optimistic intelligence analysis and a refusal to acknowledge the quality of the Jewish forces they would be facing. After a campaign in which Egyptian troops surged into the Negev, they soon assumed a passive strategy with their forces in a defensive line, a situation complicated by their support routes passing through a large group of Jewish settlements behind their lines. When Jewish forces under the command of Yigal Allon launched "Operation Yoav," they broke through the defensive line and attacked Egyptian forces from the rear. Beersheba fell within days and the bulk of Egyptian forces retreated in disarray. All that remained of fighting Egyptian forces was a small contingent in what became known as the "Fallujah pocket", where the surrounded and isolated soldiers fought superbly against Jewish attacks for four months, withdrawing only after the UN-brokered armistice agreement. One of the senior Egyptian officers in the Fallujah pocket, whose angry colleagues would join him in forming the Free Officers movement that would topple Farouk in 1952, was future President of Egypt Gamal Abdul Nasser.



Gamal Abdul Nasser

In his memoirs, Nasser reflects on Egypt's entry into the conflict in 1948:

"This could not be a serious war. There was no concentration of forces, no accumulation of ammunition or equipment. There was no reconnaissance, no intelligence, no plans. Yet we were actually on the battlefield... The only conclusion that could be drawn was that this was a political war, or rather a state of war and no-war. There was to be advance without victory and retreat without defeat."¹³

Nasser credits his experience with the unprepared and fragmented Arab forces in the military conflict of 1948 as the origin of his drive for Pan-Arabism.

¹³ *Memoirs of the First Palestine War*, translated and annotated by Walid Khalidi, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. II, No. 2, 1973.

Iraq

Following UN Resolution 181, Iraqi public opinion was putting intense pressure on the Iraqi leadership to come to the aid of the Palestinians, with demonstrations and hunger strikes by Iraqis clamoring for intervention. On 15 May 1948, three Iraqi battalions numbering approximately 2,000 men deployed from Baghdad through Transjordan towards Palestine under the command of General Baker Sidki.

The Iraqi campaign was characterized by miscommunications between Baghdad and the generals on the ground, and by confusion between the generals themselves. After initial unsuccessful and costly frontal assaults on Jewish positions on the hills of the Jordan Valley, Iraqi troops took up defensive positions and inflicted heavy losses on counterattacking Jewish forces. When the Jewish troops withdrew to regroup, the Arab Legion handed over control of the Jenin-Tulkarem-Nablus triangle to the Iraqis to deal with the growing Jewish pressure on Jerusalem. Wary of the Jewish forces, short of funds and ammunition and increasingly mistrustful of their Transjordanian allies, the Iraqis made no attempts to reach the Mediterranean or the crucial Tel Aviv-Haifa road only 6 miles away, which would have cut Israel in two, and were content to hold the north of what is now the West Bank.



King Abdullah of Transjordan reviewing Iraqi troops during a visit to Iraq in 1941. Left to right: General Nuri as-Said, Iraqi Prime Minister Emir Abdul Ilah and Transjordan's King Abdullah.

Lebanon

Although listed in the Israeli narrative as one of the massed Arab armies bearing down on Israel in the military engagements of 1948, Lebanon's contribution was merely a token gesture of Arab solidarity. In the wake of its recent independence from France, it had been left in a delicate political balance between the various Lebanese factions and was in no political or military position either to engage in a war against an organized enemy or to alienate its own Muslim community. A small Lebanese contingent holding parts of the Galilee was defeated by the Jewish forces towards the end of the military conflict.



Lebanese PM Riad al-Sulh (center) at an Arab League meeting in Cairo, 1948. On the far left is Haji Amin al-Husseini, and on the right are Mardam Bey of Syria and Azzem Pasha of the Arab League.

Syria

Syria's leadership was preoccupied with three central concerns: internal instability in the wake of its independence from France in 1946, opposition to King Abdullah's ambitions to rule over a Greater Syria, and an interest in acquiring the water resources just within the borders of the British Mandate. These had been carefully included in Palestine by the British drawing the borders in 1923, with a 10-meter wide stretch of shoreline denying the Syrians access to Lake Tiberias and a strip of land between 50 and 400 meters wide on the Syrian side of the river from Lake Tiberias to Lake Hula securing it for Palestine.

With these considerations in mind, President Shukri Quwwatli supported the Arab League's plans to create the Arab Liberation Army in order to delegate the expense and manpower of combat within Palestine to volunteers, enabling him to keep his troops close to Syria's borders. Just as importantly in the context of the political instability in the country, any defeat endured by the ALA would reflect upon the Arab League and not upon his personal leadership.



President Shukri Quwwatli

President Quwwatli was very boastful of his army's ability to defeat the Zionists prior to the engagement of the Arab armies, telling Palestinian politician Musa Alami that "I am happy to tell you that our Army and its equipment are of the highest order and well able to deal with a few Jews." He went on in a display of vanity and bluster: "I can tell you in confidence that we even have an atomic bomb... It was made locally; we found a very clever fellow, a tinsmith..."¹⁴

In spite of these words, Quwwatli was very aware of the inferiority of the Syrian army and was reluctant to engage in maneuvers that might leave his border with Transjordan vulnerable to King Abdullah's ambitions. When the Syrian regular army finally entered Palestine, Glubb Pasha estimated their numbers at only 3,000 of 4,500 available troops, while the CIA estimated a deployment of 1,000 troops by late June and 1,500 more near Syria's border. Heavy defeats in the first week of hostilities at Samakh in the Galilee and defended *kibbutzim* left 300 Syrian soldiers dead. The subsequent outcry by the parliament and press, accusing the government of failing to make adequate preparations for the war, forced President Quwwatli to fire both his Chief of Staff and his Defense Minister. The new appointee to the Defense Ministry was Colonel Husni al-Za'im, who would lead a coup against Quwwatli's government in 1949.



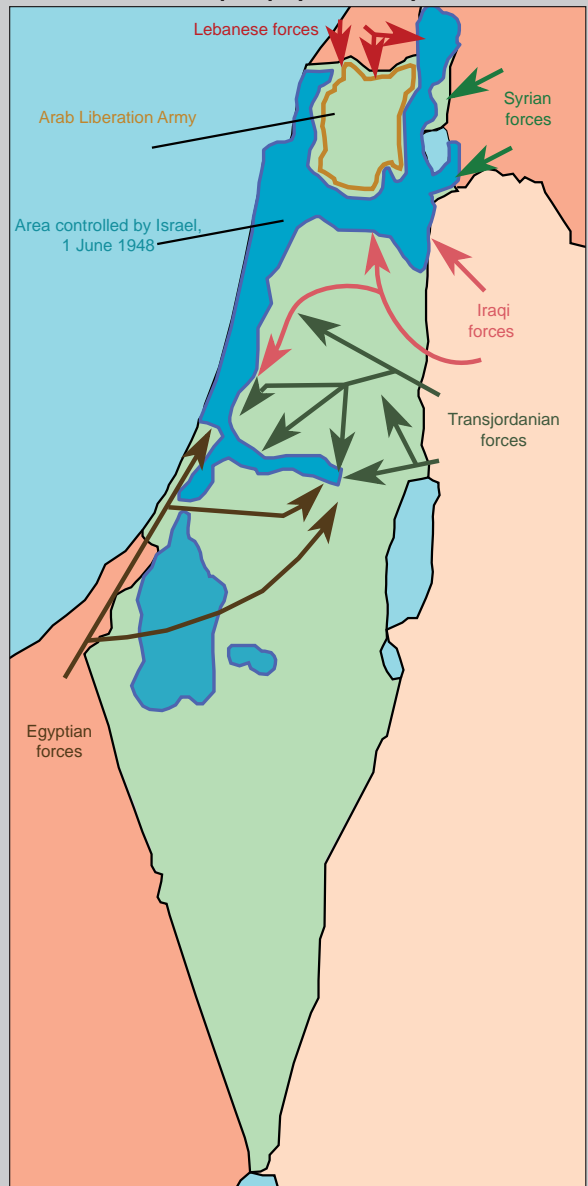
Colonel Husni al-Za'im

By the end of hostilities, the Syrians had penetrated just far enough to seize the strategic water resources near the border and were content to defend them for the duration of the military confrontation with Jewish forces without challenging them any further. They had taken no more than 66.5 square kilometers of land, and had denied the ALA any assistance as they were being driven north into Lebanon by the advancing Jewish forces.



Former Syrian PM Saadallah al-Jabri, PM Jamil Mardam Bey and Iraqi PM Nuri as-Said consulting in the mid-1940s.

Arab Troop Deployments, May 1948



¹⁴ Jeffrey Furlonge. *Palestine is my Country*. London, 1969.

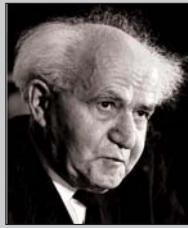
NAKBA

The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



Israel

In the lead-up to partition, the various organizations and political bodies in the Jewish community were consolidated into the Executive Committee headed by David Ben Gurion who, in addition to his other positions, now wielded more power than any of his colleagues in the Zionist leadership.¹⁵ With the entire Jewish Agency and military forces under his control, he



David Ben Gurion

was able to orchestrate a cohesive and coordinated campaign to secure not only the territory designated to the Jewish State in the Partition Plan, but a large portion of the land allocated to the Arab state. Under his leadership, the Jewish militias were transformed in 1947 into a national conscript army with professional training under the overall command of Yaakov Dori and Yigael Yadin.



Yaakov Dori

Greatly assisted by the British during the Mandate, the Zionists had been able to build up a large, well-armed, well-trained army with significant combat experience. When it was disbanded by the British during WWII, it had responded by changing its structure and sinking its roots deep into the societies of the Zionist colonies in Palestine. As such it became self-sustaining and recruitment was greatly facilitated, and the culture of armed Jewish settlements was born which still plagues the Palestinian people to this day.

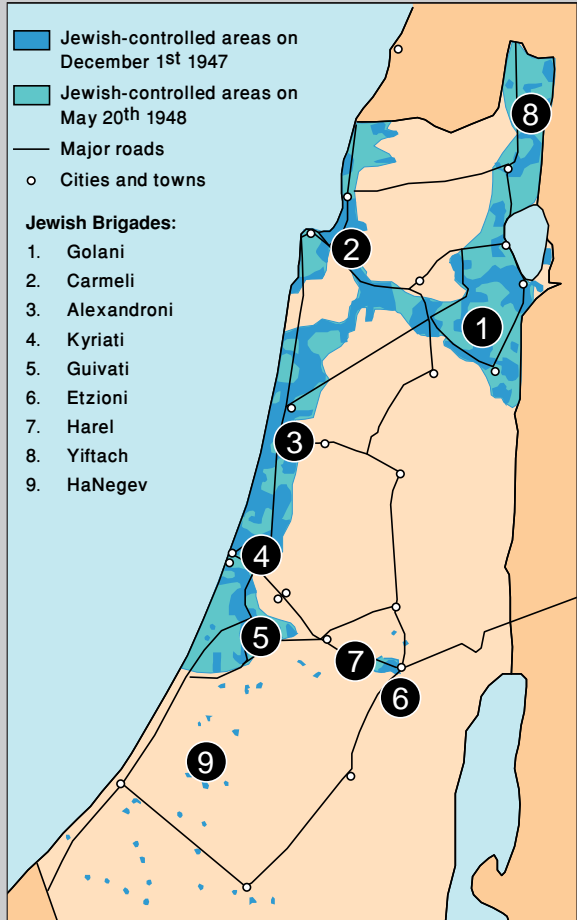
During the Jewish military operations prior to the end of the Mandate, in which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled from their homes and lands, the coastal strip and the Galilee were secured by the Zionists in preparation for the expected confrontation with the Arab armies. During this process the militias of the Irgun and the Lehi, although small, played a crucial role in operating with a brutality which struck fear into the hearts of the Palestinian people and precipitated the exodus into the surrounding Arab countries.

The Jewish leadership was well aware of the lack of coordination among the forces they were facing, thanks both to intelligence technology and to contact with Arab and Palestinian individuals. Ben Gurion had always been keen to know to what extent Hajj



Having depopulated Lydda and driven Palestinian civilians towards the lines of the Arab Legion, Jewish troops march on Ramle to perform further expulsions.

Jewish Controlled Areas and Troop Deployments



Amin al-Husseini had the power to control unfolding events from exile, where he had been since 1937. Ben-Gurion's diaries repeatedly reflect on how powerless, divided and lacking in direction the local Palestinian were on the ground.

In addition, the Zionists were aware of the logistical and political obstacles the Arabs were facing and knew that Arab armies would be incapable of or unwilling to come to the assistance of their allies. Ben Gurion admits in his memoirs that "we were victorious because the Arabs were weak and were subjected to unusual circumstances".¹⁶ One of the major considerations behind his decision to attack the Egyptians in the Negev in the late stages of the 1948 conflict was his certainty that the other Arab states would not enter the battle. His gamble paid off, and the Transjordanians stood back as the Egyptians were routed by the Israeli forces.



Yitzhak Rabin, then a commander on the Jerusalem front, and General Yigal Allon in 1948

¹⁵ Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, London, 1994, p. 51.

¹⁶ David Ben Gurion. *Zichronot*. Am Ovid Publishers, 1971.

The First Truce

The period between 11 June and 8 July marked a truce between the Israelis and the Arab armies, brokered by the United Nations. The designated mediator appointed by the UN Security Council was Count Folke Bernadotte, and in June 1948 he sent a letter to the Israeli Foreign Minister expressing his belief that it was impossible to isolate Jerusalem from its Arab environment in any partition scheme, and that the city had never been a part of the Jewish State. In September, he submitted his first progress report to the UN, stating:

“No settlement can be just and complete if recognition is not accorded to the right of the Arab refugee to return to the home from which he was dislodged by the hazards and strategy of the armed conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. It would be an offence against the principles of elemental justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right to return to their homes while Jewish immigrants flow into Palestine, and, indeed, at least offer the threat of permanent replacement of the Arab refugees who have been rooted in the land for centuries.”¹⁷

The day after he presented his report to the UN, Bernadotte was ambushed in his car and murdered in Jerusalem by the Stern Gang at the order of Yitzhak Shamir, future Prime Minister of Israel.



Count Bernadotte presenting his report to the United Nations. On his left is UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie and behind him is Ralph Bunche, the man who succeeded Bernadotte after his murder.

During the truce, the Israelis redeployed their troops to be in the most advantageous possible position when fighting resumed. In contrast, the Arab forces did nothing to reinforce or redeploy their troops, and by the time fighting resumed after the four-week lull, Israel enjoyed total military superiority over the Arab armies.

The Soviet role during the first truce

Like its Cold War enemy, the Soviet Union played a crucial role in the process of the Nakba. Stalin's regime was a generous source of trained Jewish manpower and equipment, supplying the largest single shipments of immigrants to Palestine from their Black Sea ports and providing massive consignments of heavy weapons, tanks and aircraft through Czechoslovakia. This would become of crucial importance during the four weeks of the first truce, when the Soviet Union violated a UN arms embargo on the combatants, which was respected by the Arabs' Western sponsors and tilted the scales decisively in favor of the Zionists.

¹⁷ From a report by UN Special Mediator to Palestine Folke Bernadotte, 1948, GAOR, 3rd. Sess., SuppNo.11, UN Doc.A/648 (1948)

The Second Truce

In the first half on 1949, the Arab leaders came to terms with Israel being a *de facto* state on Palestinian land and had no other option but to abide by the UNSC Resolution 62 of November 1948 calling for a ceasefire. Negotiations took place through the mediation of Bernadotte's successor Ralph Bunche, and stressed that the armistice lines agreed upon in no way constituted recognition of final territorial arrangements.

Arab-Israeli Armistice Agreements

24 February: Egyptian and Israeli representatives are the first to sign an armistice agreement, the ceasefire line following the border of the British Mandate except for the coastal strip leading up to Gaza City. The Egyptian forces still defending the Fallujah pocket return to Egypt with their weapons.

23 March: Lebanon signs an armistice agreement with Israel, the ceasefire line following the previous international border, and Israeli forces withdraw from 13 occupied villages in Southern Lebanon.

3 April: The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan concludes armistice negotiations which began in early March on the Greek island of Rhodes. Israel's main concerns are free access to Mount Scopus and the Jewish Holy Places in Jerusalem, border rectification, and the presence of Iraqi forces in the West Bank, while Jordan seeks to raise the refugee question and the question of passage from the Old City of Jerusalem to Bethlehem. An agreement is signed satisfying all these demands with the exception of the refugee question, determining the armistice line of the West Bank, transferring to Israel a number of Arab villages in the central part of the country and providing for a mixed committee to work out arrangements in Jerusalem.

July 20: Syria agrees to withdraw from most areas captured during the conflict, which become demilitarized zones.

Iraq did not sign an agreement, its withdrawal from the northern West Bank coming under the provisions of the Israel-Jordanian armistice agreement.



Jordanian representatives at the signing of the armistice with Israel, 3 April 1949. Standing is Colonel Ahmed Sidki al-Jundi; to his left are Lt.-Col. Mohammed Maayte and Colonel Ali Abu Nuwwar.

The All-Palestine Government

Even the formation of an independent Palestinian entity was not undertaken to benefit the Palestinian cause. The transformation of the temporary civil administration that had been appointed by the Arab League into a government for all Palestine led by the AHC was brokered by the Egyptians both to challenge King Abdullah's authority over the West Bank and to absolve the Arab nations of responsibility for the conflict. Once again, a pretence of solidarity with the Palestinians was serving internecine rivalries among the Arab nations. The first Palestinian National Congress was held in Gaza on 23 September 1948, presenting the first Palestinian National Charter proclaiming a Government for All Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital, Hajj Amin as its President, Ahmad Hilmi Abdul Baqi as its Prime Minister, Jamal Husseini as its Foreign Minister, and ten further notables as ministers. The All-Palestine Government was practically helpless in every respect and totally dependent on its Egyptian sponsors, while Transjordan and Iraq refused to recognize it.



The Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini heading the Palestinian National Congress which endorsed the National Charter and formed the All-Palestine Government in Gaza

Proclamation of Independence, 1 October 1948

[Excerpt]

“Acting on the basis of the natural and historic right of the Arab people of Palestine to freedom and independence – a right for which they have shed the noblest blood and for which they have fought against the imperialistic forces which, together with Zionism, have engaged our people to prevent them from enjoying that right – we, members of the Palestinian National Council, meeting in the city of Gaza, proclaim on this day, the 28th of the Dhi al-Qi’da, 1367 (A.H.), corresponding to October 1, 1948, the full independence of the whole of Palestine as bounded by Syria and Lebanon to the north, by Syria and Transjordan to the east, by the Mediterranean to the west, and by Egypt to the south, as well as the establishment of a free and democratic sovereign State.

“In this State, citizens will enjoy their liberties and their rights, and this State will advance in a fraternal spirit side by side with its sister Arab States in order to build up Arab glory and to serve human civilization. In doing so, they will be inspired by the spirit of the nation and its glorious history, and will resolve to maintain and defend its independence.

“May God bear witness to what we say.”

Transjordan and Palestine

In October 1948, King Abdullah began a series of steps in order to effect the annexation of Palestine. They began with a congress in Amman, convened upon the initiative of the Transjordanian government, in which King Abdullah's representatives and a large number of Palestinian refugees called for a wider Palestinian congress to declare Palestinian unity and acknowledge King Abdullah as King of Palestine. The King then toured the cities and villages of Palestine, where he revived his personal relations with a number of mayors, notables and the traditional leadership.

On 1 December 1948, a conference in Jericho called for annexation of what was left of Palestine under the Hashemite crown in order to salvage what was left of Palestine as soon as possible, particularly in view of Arab failure to confront Zionism and in light of the new reality that the Palestinian territory was already administered by the Jordanian authority. The conference voted in favor of a resolution which called for the unification of Transjordan and Palestine as a step towards total Arab unity and recognizing King Abdullah as King of All Palestine. The Transjordanian cabinet and parliament agreed within the following two weeks.



A Palestinian delegation from the Jericho Conference presenting King Abdullah with the conference resolution for unity of the West Bank with Jordan under the Hashemite crown.

A Palestinian conference in Ramallah personally attended by King Abdullah on 26 December 1948 declared its support for the Jericho Conference resolution, as did a subsequent Nablus conference, calling for unification of the two banks of the Jordan under the Hashemite crown.

The Arab League condemned the Jericho Conference, and the Syrian press considered its resolution a violation of self-determination. Iraqi PM Nuri as-Said called upon King Abdullah to hold his moves for annexation, which succeeded in delaying implementation of the Transjordanian plans for a year and a half. Hajj Amin al-Husseini attacked the King Abdullah's measures, declaring them null and void and calling to boycott them, but his voice was ignored.

The Transjordanian government gradually assumed the civil functions of the West Bank, paying the salaries of civil servants and absorbing local governors into what was henceforth called the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

In February 1949, the Jordanian Nationality Law was amended to grant every Palestinian Jordanian citizenship.

Continuation of the Nakba

Having owned under 7% of the land of the Palestinian Mandate, the Jews were promised 56% by the UN Partition Plan and seized a total of 78% in the conflict of 1948. In securing their nation, they had uprooted 90% of Palestinians from their homes and sent the vast majority into exile. After the armistice, they immediately embarked upon a campaign to complete the dispossession of the Palestinian people. The refugees who found themselves outside Israeli borders after the conflict frequently tried to return to their homes. Referred to as “infiltrators” by the Israeli government, they were regularly arrested, imprisoned and expelled, and it was not long before Israel adopted a policy of firing at Palestinians making their way home.



The Israelis were quick to improvise a legal structure to facilitate the expropriation of Arab lands depopulated during the War. Even before their declaration of nationhood, bodies were already being formed to administer the lands acquired through the expulsion of their legitimate owners. They were given a legal basis in the Emergency Regulations of 1948 before developing into the Absentees’ Property Law in 1950, which granted Israelis “custodianship” of absentees’ lands until the resolution of the refugee problem.

An “absentee” was defined as any Arab who had once left his village after November 1947, even if he had remained within the 1948 borders of Israel. This included, for instance, landlords in Acre who had traveled the few meters from the New City to the Old City and were therefore liable to have their homes confiscated. The Custodian had overwhelming powers in declaring absentee status and was not obliged to provide the sources of the information in coming to a decision; in addition, once land was sold by the Custodian, the sale could not be reversed – a technicality which ensured that land would remain in Jewish hands once it had been reallocated. This authorized the theft of the property of over a million Palestinians chased off their land in 1948.

Of the more than 800 Palestinian towns and villages that had existed in Palestine in 1945, less than 450 remained after the War and only 105 of them within the Israeli borders.

A Refugees Conference was held in Ramallah on March 17, 1949, calling for the implementation of UN Resolution 194, which recommended the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland. A three-member delegation of refugees subsequently traveled to Lausanne to meet Israeli representatives in order to present the resolutions of the Refugees Conference. They stated their willingness to negotiate with the Israelis and their refusal to be represented by the AHC or by Arab states. The Israelis announced their refusal to deal with popular bodies or organizations and advised the delegation to influence the Arab govern-

ments to negotiate with Israel on behalf of the refugees. In this way, the refugees were introduced to their role as political pawns, in which they would be used both by Israel and the Arab states.

Theft of Palestinian Taxes

In August 1948, the Anglo-Palestine Bank – now Israel’s Bank Leumi – issued the lira to replace the existing Palestine pound employed during the British Mandate. Public and private bank accounts in Palestine were seized, and the Mandatory governmental accounts held in England were delivered by the British into Israeli hands. In this way the British were complicit in depriving the Palestinians of a lifetime of taxation, completing the dispossession of the Palestinian refugees.

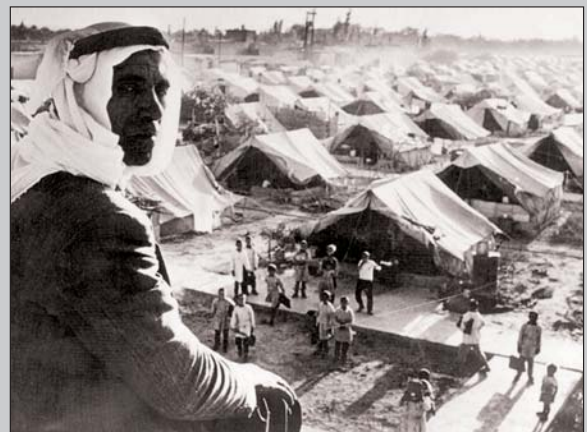
Demographic Tools

Two laws were adopted after the War to ensure an overwhelming majority of Jews in Israel. The first, passed in 1950, was the *Law of Return* which granted any Jew in the world the right to settle in Israel and become an Israeli citizen, institutionalizing a process which had been a fundamental part of the Zionist movement since its earliest days. The second, passed in 1952, was the *Law of Entry into Israel* and controlled the entry of foreigners to Israel, stripping Palestinian refugees of any legal rights they might have claimed to return to their homes. Much debate revolves around the nature of the expulsions, but refugees around the world invariably return home after a conflict regardless; the essence of the Nakba is that the Israelis wish to permanently deny Palestinians their right to return to their homeland.

The Lasting Legacy of the 1948 Refugee Problem

The clearing of the Arab population in Palestine has always been an essential component of Zionist strategy. Chaim Weizmann had likened the indigenous population to “the rocks of Judea, as obstacles that had to be cleared on a difficult path”¹⁸, and this vision has persisted and been incorporated into Israeli policy ever since. As a result of the ongoing process of the Nakba, Palestinians have become the world’s oldest and largest refugee population and now make up more than one quarter of the world’s total refugees.

Many of the Palestinians fleeing their homes in 1948 left with a minimum of luggage in the belief that they would be returning to their homes within days, as soon as the violence passed their villages. Now living in overcrowded and underprivileged camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, or the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, they and their descendants, now entering a fourth generation, are still waiting.



18 Masalha, Nur. *Expulsion of the Palestinians*. Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992.

NAKBA

The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



The UN Conciliation Commission estimated that 726,000 Palestinians (75% of the Arab population of Palestine) had fled outside Palestine ("1948 refugees") while 32,000 remained within the armistice lines. Some 531 villages and towns were destroyed or resettled with Jews. The total losses of destroyed or confiscated Palestinian property is estimated at US\$209 billion. In addition to the refugees, there are internally displaced Palestinians who were expelled from their villages – located in what became Israel – during the 1948 War. At the end of the war, they numbered some 30-40,000 people within Israel who were not allowed to return to their homes and were placed under military rule to facilitate the expropriation of their land. Until today, Israel does not recognize internally displaced Palestinians, whose number is estimated today at 263,000-300,000.¹⁹

In 1950, 914,221 refugees were registered with UNRWA. In 1967, some 300,000 Palestinians were displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip ("1967 displaced persons"), including approximately 175,000 already-registered UNRWA refugees who became refugees for a second time.

Today, the total 1948 refugee population is estimated at 5.5 million, including 4 million registered with UNRWA and 1.5 million who either simply did not register or who did not need assistance at the time they became refugees. In addition, there are 263,000 internally displaced (of 1948) and some 773,000 1967 displaced persons.²⁰



19 BADIL Center, Bethlehem.
20 PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, Factsheet on Palestinian Refugees, May 2003.

Unfulfilled Commitment

Israel was admitted into the UN on 11 May 1949 upon the condition that it would implement UN Resolution 194, which was passed by the General Assembly in December 1948:

"The refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and... compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible."

Anxious for membership to the United Nations, Israel agreed to the repatriation of 100,000 Palestinian refugees. In keeping with its traditions of abiding by an agreement until it becomes irrelevant to their need and then ignoring their obligations with total impunity, the Israeli government never fulfilled these requirements once its position in the UN General Assembly had been secured.



NAKBA

The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



"The phenomenon that has prevailed among us for years and years is that of insensitivity to acts of wrong... to moral corruption... For us, an act of wrong is in itself nothing serious; we wake up to it only if the threat of a crisis or a grave result – the loss of a position, the loss of power or influence – is involved.

"We don't have a moral approach to moral problems but a pragmatic approach to moral problems... Once, Israeli soldiers murdered a number of Arabs for reasons of blind revenge... and no conclusion was drawn from that, no one was demoted, no one was removed from office. Then there was Kufr Kassem [massacre of 1956]... those responsible have not drawn any conclusions. This, however, does not mean that public opinion, the army, the police, have drawn no conclusion; their conclusion was that Arab blood can be freely shed.

"All this must bring about revulsion in the sense of justice and honesty in public opinion; it must make the [Israeli] state appear in the eyes of the world as a savage state that does not recognize the principles of justice as they have been established and accepted by contemporary society..."

Moshe Sharett, former Israeli Prime Minister (quoted in Livia Rokach, *Israeli's Sacred Terrorism: A Study Based on Moshe Sharett's Personal Diary and Other Documents*. Belmont: AAUG Press, 1980, p.36)

A Final Note

After 60 years of the Nakba, we Palestinians understand the ongoing process of dispossession to consist of four layers:

- The first is the *international community's* complicity in transferring the Jewish question from Europe to Palestine, its continuing support for the State of Israel, and its failure to enforce international law to protect Palestinian rights and meet their needs for self-determination through an end to Israeli occupation.
- The second is the *State of Israel's* relentless colonization of Palestinian land, endless atrocities against the Palestinian people, constant violations of international law and human rights, and its failure to implement Article 11 of UN Resolution 194 on the return of refugees, as well as their violation of all agreements with the Palestinian leadership since the Oslo Accords of 1993.
- The third is the *Arab leadership's* political hypocrisy, its cynical use of the tragedy of Palestine as a manipulative tool in local, regional and global politics, and the tangled web of inter-Arab alliances and rivalries that prevents it from meeting its responsibilities towards its Palestinian brothers.
- The fourth is *Palestinian society's* internal conflicts, wavering loyalties according to events and priorities, infiltration and influence by their Arab brothers and foreign actors including Israel, and crisis of leadership characterized by a lack of strategy, bitter rivalry, and a priority on political survival; and most painfully for Palestinian society, the current fragmentation of the proud, deep-rooted Palestinian identity.

People are invited to learn from the ongoing process of the Palestinian Nakba and to draw their conclusions of what went wrong during the last century of political struggle for freedom and independence, with the hope that justice and human values will become the foundation for ending the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Mahdi Abdul Hadi
Jerusalem, May 15th 2008

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