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1

THE PARTITION OF PALESTINE AND THE CREATION OF ISRAEL

British and American Policies towards Palestine

With the end of the war came the 'Jewish Revolt', which drove the British out of Palestine and prepared the way for Jewish statehood. Despite the intense feeling of betrayal over the 1939 White Paper and continuing tensions between the Yishuv and the mandatory authorities during the war, the leaders of the Jewish Agency did not initially have the sense that conflict was inevitable, for in July 1945 Britain elected a new Labour government which was believed to be sympathetic to their aims. The British Labour Party had long professed a fellow-feeling with Zionism, which shared its social democratic ethos, and at its Blackpool conference in 1944 overwhelmingly endorsed the principle of a Jewish Palestine. But the initial enthusiasm with which Ben-Gurion and his colleagues greeted the election of their fellow socialists soon turned to incredulity and disillusion when it became clear that the 1939 White Paper policy still stood. Behind the Labour government's apparent volte-face was the formidable figure of Ernest Bevin, a former trade-union leader now Foreign Secretary. A hard, unsentimental man,

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Bevin was not likely to be moved by his party's traditional sympathy with Zionism as much as by his view of Britain's needs in the immediate post-war world. It was an analysis created and sustained by permanent Foreign Office officials who had long since concluded that Britain's interests could only be served by a pro-Arab policy.

Principal spokesman for that view was Bevin's chief adviser on Palestine, Harold Beeley, who had been regarded with great suspicion by Zionists even before the war, and who was to become their *bête noire* as he increasingly seemed to be influencing his chief against them. But Bevin was not likely to be easily swayed against his better judgement, and he was not long in office before he came to share the Foreign Office's pro-Arab sympathies. At the heart of his concerns was Britain's need to retain access to the oilfields of the Middle East and the pipelines which crossed Arab territory to the terminal at Haifa. This was believed to be essential to the economic reconstruction of a Britain which had been crippled by the financial costs of six years of war. In short, the Labour Party's emotional and ideological sympathy with Zionism was shunted aside by the Labour government's hard-headed view of where Britain's interests lay in the Middle East. Under Bevin, Britain stood by the provisions of the 1939 White Paper (Louis, 1984).

Much of the Arab Middle East still lay under British influence or control, but its politics were febrile and its structures brittle and undeveloped. In addition to the Aden colony, Britain had extensive interests in the Gulf and retained two air bases in Iraq. Of the states bordering Palestine, Lebanon and Syria had been freed from the French Mandate, but only just, in 1943 and 1946. Egypt was still uneasily linked to Britain by the 1936 treaty, the powerful symbol of which was the British military presence in the Suez Canal Zone, its future already challenged by the Egyptians in June 1945. Transjordan became independent in 1946, but was still tightly bound to Britain. If Arab opinion smarted under these conditions, Palestine provided a particular focus for

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their frustrations. But at what was to prove the decisive moment in their history, the Palestinians lacked the political structures and leadership they needed. Haj Amin, an exile since 1937, made his way at the end of the war to Egypt and Lebanon, but his knowledge of conditions in Palestine was inevitably second hand, and not everyone trusted his judgement. An alternative leadership failed to emerge, however. The Palestinians faced the further problems that they had always lacked political structures to mirror those built up so carefully by the Jewish Agency, and that they had never really recovered from the British repression of their revolt in the years 1936–39. In short, the Arab world in general, and Arab Palestine in particular, was in poor condition to resist the determined challenge soon to be mounted by the Zionists (Kirk, 1954; Mattar, 1988; Rogan and Shlaim, 2001).

Bevin's view that the West's interests lay with the Arabs found a strong echo in Washington where key officials of the Department of State broadly shared the perceptions of their counterparts in the Foreign Office. The Department's leading Arabist was the experienced diplomat, now head of the Division of Near Eastern and African Affairs, Loy W. Henderson. A former specialist on the Soviet Union whose jaundiced views of Stalin became inconvenient during the war, in 1942 Henderson was posted off as ambassador to Baghdad. His travels in the Middle East taught him the degree of Arab opposition to Jewish claims in Palestine, from which he drew two lessons. The first was that Jewish statehood could only come about through violence. The second that, even if statehood could be attained, the unremitting nature of Arab hostility would leave the Jews in the unenviable position of replacing the ghettos of Europe for a larger one in the Middle East. A surer future, he felt, would be found by settling in the United States, Latin America and the British Commonwealth. Such arguments did not endear him to American Zionists and others in Washington who were advising the President that a Jewish state could be accomplished without war, but Henderson was never afraid to

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repeat them. His views became those of the Department, establishing a tradition of pro-Arab attitudes amongst foreign-policy professionals that proved extremely persistent.

But responsibility for the making of American foreign policy rests ultimately with the President. Harry S. Truman, who had succeeded on Roosevelt's death, was acutely conscious of that prerogative. His entire background had, in a sense, immunised him against the kind of advice coming from Henderson and his colleagues. Unlike his immediate predecessors as President, Truman had no college education, and his feisty sense of self-reliance made him suspect the professionals, the 'striped pants boys' as he liked to call them, with their apparent Ivy League condescension. Thus the tone of the Department's first approach to him on Palestine, only six days after taking up office, with the patronising advice that the matter was 'highly complex' and that he should only take action after seeking 'full and detailed advice', proved to be uniquely ill-chosen. Far from following the Department's position on Palestine, Truman's earlier career meant that he was likely to respond positively to the Jews. During his service in the First World War he had made friends with a Jewish sergeant called Eddie Jacobson. After the war the two men set up a haberdashery business in Kansas City, only to see their hopes ruined in the Depression. For years they battled their way back to solvency. When Truman went to Washington in the 1930s as Senator for Missouri, he was befriended by the great Jewish lawyer Louis Brandeis, who widened enormously Truman's cultural and social perspectives.

Truman's pivotal position made it certain that he would be lobbied by American Zionist groups, and pressure from them built up steadily between 1945 and 1948. While he accepted that such lobbying would go on, he disliked it, preferring instead to listen to the advice of trusted colleagues. Two in particular, Clark Clifford and David Niles, came to have a decisive influence on his actions over Palestine. Clifford's view that the Jews were entitled to their own country was reinforced by his key role in helping ensure Truman's re-election

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in 1948. Why should the President forfeit any political advantage to the Republicans? In the context of American politics it was a logical question with an inevitable answer and it has led to a lively controversy about the motives behind Truman's support for Jewish statehood. It is pointless to deny that political considerations were part of Truman's motivation, but they were not the whole story. Like any decent person, he was moved by what he learned of the fate of European Jews, and that sympathy was reinforced by David Niles. Ostensibly Truman's adviser on minority affairs, Niles was really his link with the Jewish community. Niles was born into a poor Jewish family in Boston, and had become a trusted official of the New Deal. There is little evidence of any involvement with Zionism in the 1930s, but by 1945 it is clear that Niles felt keenly the distress experienced by the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in Europe. Niles's advice that something had to be done for them proved very important, for Truman trusted his judgement and his moderation, which contrasted favourably with the stridency of much of the lobbying campaign which was directed at him. Little in Truman's background made him sensitive to the Arab case over Palestine or responsive to the State Department's advocacy of it; but his friendships and emotions, combined with the political needs of his party, made him likely to respond positively to the Jews (Snetsinger, 1974; Ganin, 1979; Cohen, 1982; Louis, 1984; Fraser, 1989).

While Truman's later interventions were to prove critical for the establishment of Israel, his initial moves were of a different order, designed to offer some relief to the Jewish survivors in Europe. Indeed, he only turned to Palestine after the failure of attempts to persuade congressional leaders to permit large numbers of Jews to settle in the United States. This was followed by the dispatch to Europe of Earl G. Harrison, Dean of Law at the University of Pennsylvania, who was to report back on the conditions and desires of the Jewish 'Displaced Persons'. The policy of General Eisenhower's military administration was to persuade the Jews to return to

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their countries of origin; Harrison's report pointed firmly to Palestine. Shaken by what he saw of the condition of the 'Displaced Persons', Harrison readily adopted the suggestion of the Jewish Agency that 100,000 should be admitted into Palestine. It was exactly what Truman wanted. On 31 August, he formally requested that the British government issue 100,000 immigration certificates, pointing out that 'no other single matter is so important for those who have known the horrors of concentration camps'. The British response was both negative and, in the circumstances, callously insensitive, pointing out that the European camps held many victims of Hitler and that the Jews should not be put 'at the head of the queue'. The nature and tone of the British rejection showed just how far the government had travelled from the pro-Zionist sentiments of its 1944 Labour party conference, and the way was now clear for open resistance from the Jews of Palestine (Louis, 1984).

The Jewish Revolt

Although the Irgun and Leh'i had not been afraid to strike at the British before the end of the war, the leaders of the Jewish Agency had too many long-standing connections to the British for open warfare to be undertaken lightly. Moreover, the Jewish Agency was a legal body whose position would be imperilled once the Haganah started operations. However reluctantly, Ben-Gurion and his colleagues knew it was a decision that had to be taken and on 1 October the Haganah was ordered to begin the armed revolt. First, however, it was necessary to reach a working arrangement with the other two armed groups. At a meeting convened by the Haganah leader Moshe Sneh, Menahem Begin of the Irgun and Leh'i's Nathan Yellin-Mor agreed to cooperate in a united Hebrew Resistance Movement. Although the unified command flourished through the winter of 1945–46, it was always an uneasy alliance of unequal groups under

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Haganah primacy. But there could be no denying its effectiveness, backed as it was by the united resolve of the Yishuv and haunted by the fate of the Jews of Europe.

The striking power of the new alliance was demonstrated in a coordinated operation on the night of 31 October/1 November 1945 when the Haganah struck at the hated instruments of the British exclusion policy – police patrol boats – sinking two at Haifa and one at Jaffa. Simultaneously, Haganah forces disrupted the railway network with some 500 explosions, while the Irgun destroyed a locomotive and damaged six others at Lydda goods-yard. The operation also claimed its first victim when Leh'i member Moishele Bar Giora was killed in a premature explosion during an abortive attack on the Haifa oil storage tanks. Faced with this challenge, the British built up their troops and police to a total of 100,000, a burden their straitened economy could not long sustain. The virtually unanimous support of the Yishuv rendered the Hebrew Resistance impervious to penetration and memories of the German occupation in Europe were too close for the British security forces to resort to tough measures. Thus the winter of 1945–46 saw them consistently outwitted. On 25 February 1946, three airfields were attacked with the loss of 20 planes at an estimated cost of £2 million. Strikes against the communications system and installations continued, as did attacks on British personnel. On 25 April, seven paratroopers died in a Leh'i attack in Tel Aviv. The final symbol of British impotence came on the night of 16/17 June when a joint operation succeeded in destroying 10 of the 11 road and rail bridges into Palestine, temporarily isolating it from the rest of the Middle East (Bell, 1979).

The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry

While the British forces were being baffled by the Jewish underground groups, the winter of 1945–46 also saw a major attempt at a political settlement – the

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Anglo–American Committee of Inquiry – whose origins lay in a British attempt to involve their American critics directly in the affairs of Palestine. Irritated by what he saw as the gratuitous nature of Truman’s intervention over Palestine, Bevin invited the Americans to take part in a joint inquiry into the linked issues of Palestine and the Displaced Persons. As announced on 13 November 1945, the committee, six Americans and six British, was to examine the ‘political, economic and social conditions in Palestine as they bear upon the problem of Jewish immigration and settlement therein and the well-being of the people now living therein’. Although the two governments were agreed that no one of Arab or Jewish origin would serve, Truman and Niles went to some length to ensure that three of the Americans, Frank W. Buxton, James G. McDonald and Bartley C. Crum, sympathised with the Zionist position. Crum, in particular, maintained direct links with Niles during the committee’s work. The 12 men approached their task with great seriousness, hearing evidence in Washington and London before visiting camps in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. After travelling to various parts of the Middle East, they had extensive hearings in Palestine with the Mandatory government, the Arab Higher Committee and the Jewish Agency.

When the committee reported in May 1946, it was clear that the Jewish Agency had secured one major concession: 100,000 Jews from the European camps were to be allowed into Palestine. But the Jews could take much less comfort from the recommendations on the country’s political future, for only two members, McDonald and Crum, were prepared to see Jewish statehood come about through the mechanism of partition. Their colleagues believed that this would only make the situation worse. Instead, they were prepared to identify Palestine as the Holy Land, setting it ‘completely apart from other lands’ and dedicating it ‘to the precepts and practices of the brotherhood of man, not of narrow nationalism’. Hence, Palestine was to be ‘neither a Jewish

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state nor an Arab state', and was to be governed under a continuing system of trusteeship. Before these conclusions are too hastily dismissed, two things ought to be clearly noted: the rejection of partition as an unworkable device, and the unwillingness to concede either Arab or Jewish statehood. The responses of the Arab Higher Committee and the Jewish Agency were equally bitter (Nachmani, 1987).

In the summer of 1946 two events conspired to throw the British Mandate into its final crisis. On the diplomatic front the conclusions of the Anglo-American Committee failed to attract the support of either government in Washington or London, let alone the Arabs and Jews. This was despite an initial welcome from Truman who seems to have been ready to grasp at any viable proposal, especially one that gave him the 100,000 immigration certificates to which he had publicly committed himself. Bevin was not prepared to let him off so lightly. The British government's response to the report was to ask the Americans to provide two divisions of troops which they believed would be necessary to cope with the Arab disturbances that the extra 100,000 Jews would provoke. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington told Truman that there were no troops available for such a mission, the committee's conclusions were clearly in serious trouble. The President was, in any case, coming under very severe pressure from the American Zionists who were incensed at the committee's failure to endorse Jewish statehood. A further attempt at progress in July met with no greater success. Truman sent Henry F. Grady to London in an attempt to secure some movement on the 100,000 certificates. The plan that Grady agreed with the British minister Herbert Morrison, the so-called 'Morrison-Grady Plan', would have created autonomous Arab and Jewish provinces under a continued form of trusteeship. But this still fell far short of Jewish hopes and, after a stormy series of meetings with pro-Zionist congressional leaders, Truman telegraphed his rejection of the proposals to London on 7 August.

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The King David Hotel Attack and its Consequences

During this period of ill-fated attempts at Anglo-American cooperation in the summer of 1946, the situation in Palestine worsened alarmingly from the British point of view. After the dramatically successful attack on the bridges into the country on the night of 16–17 June, the British decided on tough measures to try to regain the security initiative by striking at the heart of the Jewish Agency. ‘Operation Agatha’ sealed off Tel Aviv and the main Jewish areas of Jerusalem and Haifa in pre-dawn raids, which concentration camp survivors found all too reminiscent of recent events in Europe. Jewish Agency leaders were seized and detained, though not key figures like Ben-Gurion who was in Paris, or Sneh who went underground, or the elder statesman Weizmann who was not disturbed. Few arms were found. The response planned by Sneh and his colleagues in the Hebrew Resistance was to be threefold. The Haganah was to attack the arsenal at Bat Galim, and Leh’i the Palestine Information Office in Jerusalem. Begin and the Irgun were set as their target the government headquarters in Jerusalem’s King David Hotel, an operation the organisation had been contemplating for some time. Then the remaining Jewish Agency leaders drew back, not least at the urging of Weizmann with his stubborn faith in British intentions. Although the decision was taken to call off the joint operation, Sneh, anxious to keep the Irgun a full part of the resistance, merely asked Begin to postpone his part of the plan. But Begin went ahead. On 22 July, bombs exploded in the King David Hotel: an entire wing of the building collapsed and 91 people were killed. It was by far the most dramatic blow delivered at the British and it had far-reaching consequences. Sneh resigned as head of the Haganah and the organisation suspended its operations against the British, leaving the Irgun and Leh’i alone in their campaign (Clarke, 1981). The Jewish Agency’s denunciations of the attack stung Begin and his organisation, contributing to a legacy of bitter-

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ness between the two wings of the movement that was to continue for decades after statehood had been achieved. More immediately, the attack convinced the British that they needed to resume the search for a political settlement.

The Palestine Conference that convened in London in September proved to be yet another exercise in futility, but at least it brought into sharp focus the strong possibility that the country's future would be decided on the basis of partition. The Arabs, led by Jamal Husseini, continued to reject the idea, as they had done consistently from the time of its first appearance in 1937, and they were strongly supported by Bevin. Since 1937, Zionist policy towards the prospect of partition had not been consistent, some seeing it as the only realistic way forward, others dismissing it as a betrayal of the Zionist dream. These hesitations could still be seen at a meeting of the executive of the Jewish Agency in Paris in August when, by divided vote, it was decided to break with the Biltmore Program and work instead for partition on the basis of 'the establishment of a viable Jewish State in an adequate area of Palestine'. This significant shift in policy was soon matched in Washington. Throughout the summer of 1946, Truman had been subjected to intensive lobbying by the American Zionists who had become increasingly alarmed at the nature of the proposals coming forward. With senatorial and gubernatorial elections due to be held in November, it was inevitable that there would be no lessening of their campaign, especially as Truman was vulnerable over his apparent inability to deliver the 100,000 immigration certificates. The result, on 4 October, was his 'Yom Kippur Statement', announcing America's support for partition as the best way forward. The United States had now committed itself to Jewish statehood, and to partition as the means of achieving it (Fraser, 1989).

Despite Arab opposition, the British were now under pressure to bring partition to the top of the agenda and there were those, notably in the Colonial Office, who believed that it was the only way of reconciling the various pledges Britain

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had made over the years. But Ben-Gurion, perhaps too conscious of the divided views of his supporters, would not be drawn into detailed discussions, with the result that the common ground was not seized. It was clear enough, however, that Ben-Gurion and the British were far apart in their thinking as to what might constitute an ‘adequate’ area for the Jewish state. Palestine was now only one of a number of problems pressing on a country enduring a miserable and impoverished winter. On 7 February 1947, the cabinet decided to present final proposals to the two sides which would involve a transition to independence over five years with considerable autonomy for Arab and Jewish areas. When these were rejected a week later, the problem was referred to the United Nations, without, it would appear, much thought being given as to the possible outcome.

The UNSCOP Report

If the British imagined that in doing this they were allowing themselves something of a respite and that the United Nations would prove too inchoate for anything of substance to emerge, then they were soon to be confounded, for there were strong feelings elsewhere that this new international body must be seen to work effectively. A special session of the General Assembly was convened in May. It was notable for an early declaration by the Soviet Union in favour of Jewish statehood. Its main result was the establishment of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), charged with reporting back to the General Assembly by 1 September with its conclusions on the country’s future. Its membership was to avoid the major powers and the Arab countries, whose sympathies were felt to be too engaged, and, with these exceptions, to reflect the nature of the membership: thus, Peru, Uruguay, Guatemala, Sweden, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Canada, Australia, India and Iran were selected.

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In retrospect, it is clear that UNSCOP's conclusions were always likely to have a decisive effect upon Palestine's future, but at the time this was something the Palestinian Arabs failed to grasp, with disastrous results. Believing that the committee was unfairly weighted against them, the Arab Higher Committee decided to boycott it. It was possibly the single most disastrous decision made by the Arab leadership. The Jews made no such mistake, offering full cooperation both in the public sessions and by attaching to the committee two able liaison officers, David Horowitz and Abba Eban, whose brief was to remind its members of the Zionist case. The Jewish purpose was twofold: they had to convince the committee of the futility of pursuing any kind of continuing British trusteeship, and then persuade it to recommend partition. The first was brought about by the ruthlessness of the Irgun and an act of considerable daring and sophistication by the Haganah. In July, the Irgun hanged two British sergeants in retaliation for the execution of three of its members. It was an action that attracted widespread publicity, not least because the bodies were left boobytrapped. Anti-Semitic incidents in a number of British cities, with the prospect of a revival of the pre-war Fascist movement, helped convince leading opinion in Britain that the Palestine Mandate was not really worth the struggle. Much more significant was the brilliant propaganda exercise conducted by the Haganah in mounting a spectacular challenge to the British during UNSCOP's time in Palestine. Chartering an elderly American ferry, the *President Warfield*, which they renamed *Exodus 1947*, the organisation sailed 4500 Jewish Displaced Persons from Sète in southern France towards the coast of Palestine where ships of the Royal Navy were waiting. After a violent confrontation, filmed for use by the American newsreels, the ship was brought into Haifa where its passengers were disembarked under the eyes of three UNSCOP members. The episode confirmed, as it was intended to, the longing of the Jews for Palestine and the bankruptcy of the British regime. As if to drive home that lesson, Bevin insisted

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that the passengers be returned to refugee camps in Germany. It was hardly surprising that UNSCOP was unanimous in recommending the end of the Mandate.

Partition was less obvious, not least because the Jews themselves were still not united behind it. In presenting the Jewish Agency's case before UNSCOP in Jerusalem, Ben-Gurion still had to press for acceptance of the Biltmore Program, but this was a formality. Weizmann then put forward, ostensibly unofficially, the case for partition, which Ben-Gurion confirmed he would consider. In reality, from the start Horowitz and Eban had been instructed to work for this outcome and Ben-Gurion privately assured UNSCOP's members that it was partition he wanted. Belatedly, the Arabs realised that the ground was threatening to slip from under them. A hastily arranged visit to Beirut allowed Arab foreign ministers to argue against partition, but it was all too little and far too late. By the time the committee retired to Geneva to consider its findings, a majority had been convinced that partition offered the only way forward.

The basic principle underlying the UNSCOP plan was that the claims to Palestine of the Arabs and Jews, each possessing validity, were irreconcilable, and that among the solutions advanced, partition would provide the most realistic and practicable settlement. As set out, the proposed Arab state was to consist of three geographically separate areas: a southern coastal strip from Rafah through Gaza; Galilee in the north; and the country's interior, including the important towns of Nablus, Hebron and Beersheba. In contrast, the Jewish state was to be contiguous, if in places only just: much of the coastal plain, including Tel Aviv and Haifa, the Negev Desert in the south, and the Jezreel and Hule valleys in the north. There were two important refinements to the plan. While conceding that political partition was necessary, UNSCOP believed that the country's economic unity should be retained. Hence, there was to be an economic union of Palestine, responsible for distributing revenue and maintaining a common currency, customs system and

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communications network. Secondly, as the result of Vatican lobbying, Jerusalem was to become a corpus separatum, an international city under the United Nations (Eban, 1977; Fraser, 1984).

The UNSCOP Report in the General Assembly

The plan was open to many objections, which its Arab and British opponents were quick to point out. If the political claims of Arabs and Jews were held to be irreconcilable, how could they be expected to cooperate in an economic union? How could two states so sinuously intertwined ever be defensible? More seriously, there was the problem of the large Arab population in the proposed Jewish state. UNSCOP admitted that it would have 498,000 Jews and 407,000 Arabs, but an ill-disposed British Foreign Office soon provided figures showing that the true Arab total would be 512,000. Critics also pointed to the fact that in none of Palestine's subdistricts did Jews own a majority of the land, and that in only one of them, the heavily Jewish areas around Tel Aviv and Petah Tikva, were they a majority of the population. Had the Arabs developed these arguments with force and skill they might have won important points in the discussions that followed, but once again their leadership failed them.

Instead, Palestinian leaders attacked the principle of partition, creating an impression of mean spiritedness against a people that had recently suffered so much. Their confidence was reinforced by the knowledge that the British shared their hostility to the proposal. Concluding that partition was so unfair to the Arabs, the British government not only rejected the idea, but made it plain, publicly and in private, that they would oppose its implementation. Not so public was the policy they actually adopted of leaving the two sides to fight it out.

The partition plan inevitably fell somewhat short of Jewish hopes, especially the provisions relating to Jerusalem, for not

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only had the city been the focus of Jewish yearning over the centuries, but its western suburbs were one of their main centres of population. Whatever reservations were held, and whatever hopes there might have been that one day the Jewish state might be expanded, the leadership had worked hard to lead UNSCOP to this conclusion and they were now determined that partition be secured. The plan offered them statehood guaranteed in the highest international forum, the General Assembly of the United Nations. In early October, the General Assembly changed itself into the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question to give full consideration to the UNSCOP proposals. Here would be the critical test. Interestingly support quickly came from the Soviet Union, no small matter given its three General Assembly votes and influence over the eastern European countries. Western diplomats interpreted this as nothing more than cynical support for the one plan that promised to get the British out of Palestine, but it should also be remembered that it had been the Red Army which had exposed the full extent of Jewish suffering in eastern Europe, an observation that Soviet spokesmen often made.

Significant though the Soviet response was, everyone understood that the key reaction would be that of the Americans, not least because of Washington's supposed influence over the voting intentions of other countries. Hence the consternation in Jewish circles when Secretary of State George C. Marshall announced that his government gave 'great weight' to the UNSCOP proposals, an endorsement of partition, if only just. What Marshall's guarded statement concealed was continuing bitter infighting in Washington over the prospect of Jewish statehood. At one level, there had been continuous Jewish lobbying of Truman over the summer as the President had held to a policy of non-interference with UNSCOP's work. The intensity of the campaign was not well advised, as Truman's testy response to one Zionist leader showed. There seems to be two sides to the question. He was finding it rather difficult to decide

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which one was right and a great many people in the country were beginning to feel just as he did. As expected, the Arab 'side' was being strongly urged by Henderson, who found a powerful new ally in Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, who was conscious of the need to keep the Arab oil-producing states on America's side. Once again, it fell to Niles to remind Truman of the political dangers of alienating Jewish voters. Any doubt about this was removed by the avalanche of lobbying which now fell upon the White House. From all over the country, leading Democrats and labour leaders wrote and telegraphed Truman urging support for partition. Power brokers like Democratic National Chairman Robert Hannegan and Paul Fitzpatrick, Chairman of the Democratic State Committee of New York, could not be ignored. On 7 October, Niles's chief contact with the Jewish Agency, Robert Nathan, sent a letter emphasising the urgency of open support for the UNSCOP proposals; failure to do this, he argued, would have an atomic impact on American Jewish voters with the Republicans the obvious winners. Three days later, on Truman's direct instructions, Herschel Johnson announced to the United Nations that the United States would support the partition plan (Fraser, 1989).

Even so, there were two important reservations. The first was to ensure proper implementation for the plan. Despite clear assurances to the contrary, the Americans continued to believe in British goodwill. The other was to reduce the Arab population in the Jewish state. A partial solution was to transfer Jaffa to the Arab state, but an attempt to do the same with the Negev was thwarted when Weizmann persuaded Truman that the desert was essential to the Jewish state's future development. On that basis, when the UNSCOP majority plan was put to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question on 25 November 1947, it was passed, by 25 votes to 13 but with 17 abstentions and 2 absentees. Had this been the vote of the General Assembly, the proposal would have failed, for the figures were short of the two-thirds majority needed. With the future of statehood clearly turning on the

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voting intentions of a few countries, the Jewish Agency mounted a desperate campaign. By themselves, they had little influence; Weizmann succeeded in changing the French vote by appealing to his old friend Léon Blum, but that seems to have been their one notable success.

Once again, the American connection was decisive. The initial instructions to the delegation in New York were to work ‘independently and without restraint’ to help secure the vote, but by 27 November it seems that their tactics were failing, for Jewish leaders telegraphed Truman demanding that he secure the votes of Greece, Haiti, China, Ecuador, Liberia, Honduras, Paraguay and the Philippines. Despite Truman’s later denials, it is certain that clear instructions were sent out for this to be done. The crucial interventions were made in foreign capitals. The President of Haiti was told that ‘for his own good’ the country should vote for partition. The President of the Philippines was warned by a group of American senators of the ‘adverse effect’ on relations between the two countries should the vote be cast against partition. Truman’s campaign had the desired effect, for when the General Assembly vote was taken on 29 November, the partition plan was endorsed by the necessary two-thirds majority: 33 votes to 13 with 10 abstentions (Louis, 1984; Fraser, 1989).

The End of the British Mandate

This endorsement of their right to statehood was understandably greeted with great emotion by the Jews, but their exuberant celebrations in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv grated harshly on the Arabs. Their spokesman, Jamal Husseini, had already warned the United Nations that the partition line ‘would be nothing but a line of fire and blood’, and so it proved. The passing of the partition resolution was greeted with disturbances throughout the Arab world; more seriously, in Palestine the Arab Higher Committee proclaimed a

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general strike for 2–4 December 1947 which proved to be the start of an undeclared, but increasingly bitter, civil war. Arab leaders had assured the British that their protests would be peaceful but tension was too high for this to be a realistic hope and on the first day of the strike a Jewish shopping area in Jerusalem was burned. As violence grew, the real consequences of Britain's decision to do nothing to implement partition before the surrender of the Mandate on 14 May 1948 became clear. British military commanders in Palestine had no desire to see more of their men killed and injured in a quarrel that was ceasing to be of national interest. The result was a minimalist policy which allowed both Arab and Jewish irregular forces to become ever bolder and more ruthless. They were also encouraged by the total collapse of the mechanism designed to set up the two states and the economic union, the United Nations Palestine Commission. Set up on 9 January 1948 under the chairmanship of Czechoslovakia's Karl Lisicky, the Commission was intended to be the executive arm of the partition resolution, but the British made it clear that its members would not be allowed to land in the country. Frustrated by this challenge to United Nations' authority, on 16 February the Commission approached the Security Council for armed assistance, but with the collapse of relations with the Soviet Union there was no chance that the Americans would sanction such a policy against their British allies. The partition plan was dead.

The British had now cleared the way for the two sides to fight for control of Palestine and too much was at stake for either to have a monopoly on virtue, though in some parts of the country Arab and Jewish communities tried for a time to work local peace arrangements. The overall reality was civil war. From the start the Arabs were less well coordinated. In the north of the country Fawzi al-Qawuqji, a Syrian officer who had taken a prominent part in the Arab uprising of 1936–39, led the Arab Liberation Army, a mixed force of some 5000 Palestinians and Syrians. In the Jerusalem area the Husseinis had more direct control with the Mufti's

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cousin, Abd al-Qadr al-Husseini, who was commanding there, and Hassan Salameh, who commanded the area around Lydda, each with around 1000 men. They could count on sympathy, and some support, from neighbouring Arab countries and the departing British, but few Arabs had experience of recent fighting. Nor did they have any clear political strategy beyond the desire to thwart Jewish statehood, and even that was tempered by the ambition of Transjordan's Abdullah to secure part of Palestine for himself.

In contrast, thousands of Jews had fought in the British army or the Jewish Brigade, bringing with them a clear knowledge of what it took to fight a modern war. Over the winter of 1947–48, the Jewish Agency transformed the Haganah from an underground force into the nucleus of a field army, creating six brigades to cover key areas: the 'Golani' in eastern Galilee; the 'Carmeli' in western Galilee; the 'Givati' and 'Alexandroni' on the coastal plain; the 'Etzioni' around Jerusalem; and the 'Kiryati' around Tel Aviv. These came to number some 15,000 well organised but, because of continuing British hostility, not particularly well armed. Independent of them were several thousand members of the Irgun and Leh'i who had their own agendas. Guiding the actions of the Jewish Agency's forces was 'Plan Dallet' or 'Plan D', the successful implementation of which was to make an immeasurable contribution to the Jews' ultimate success. Briefly, 'Plan D' consisted of a series of operational orders to the six brigades to enable them to secure the area of the Jewish state and protect Jewish settlements in the Arab state. In military terms the plan was much superior to those of the Arabs. More controversially, the perceived need to protect outlying Jewish settlements had led Arabs to see in 'Plan D' a design for occupying the whole country. While this was not its purpose, its practical results were to be disastrous for the Arabs.

In the critical months before the end of the Mandate, the balance of advantage fell on the Jewish side. Particularly

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bitter fighting took place around the western approaches to Jerusalem, with the Jews striving to break a siege of the city and secure lines of communication to Tel Aviv. In the course of this there took place the massacre at the Arab village of Deir Yassin, one of the communities that had reached a working arrangement with its Jewish neighbours. On 9 April a mixed Irgun and Leh'i force attacked the village and, in what well may have been a premeditated act, killed 250 of its inhabitants. Despite condemnation from the Jewish Agency, a new benchmark for atrocity had been cut; retaliation soon came with an attack on a Jewish medical convoy at Mount Scopus in Jerusalem which left 77 doctors and nurses dead. Horrific though these incidents were, they tended to mask the steady advances that the Haganah forces were making on a number of fronts. In mid-April, the 'Golani' brigade took Tiberias, and then Safed and Rosh Pinna in Galilee. On 22 April, the 'Carmeli' brigade secured the key port of Haifa with its mixed Arab-Jewish population. Then, in the final days of the Mandate, the 'Kiryati', 'Givati' and 'Alexandroni' brigades took Jaffa with its 70,000 Arab inhabitants, removing the threat it posed to Tel Aviv. All these operations resulted in the flight, or removal, of tens of thousands of Arabs. The success of 'Plan D' was preparing the way for a successful declaration of Jewish statehood the moment the British left (Morris, 1987).

The Proclamation of the State of Israel

With British authority fast disappearing and the Haganah holding the initiative in many key areas, Ben-Gurion and his colleagues prepared to proclaim statehood on the day the Mandate ended. While neither Ben-Gurion nor Weizmann, who was in the United States, had doubts about this decision, the risks were clear. The Arab states would attack, with the continuing support of the British. Much, then, would turn on the attitudes of the other major powers. Enough was

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known about Soviet intentions to reassure the Jewish leadership but even more critical was the likely position of the Americans. Once again, Washington was a key battlefield, with the State Department set against recognition of the new state and Truman increasingly inclined to do so. The President's aide, Clark Clifford, prepared a powerful memorandum which argued that as the Jewish state was already an 'accomplished fact', Truman should issue immediate recognition; otherwise, the Soviets and his Republican enemies at home would reap any benefit. On 12 May, Clifford presented these arguments at a meeting involving Truman, David Niles and leading State Department officials, including Secretary of State Marshall. Marshall irascibly responded that the proposal was a 'transparent dodge to win a few votes' and would have nothing to do with the idea. Truman had hoped to announce his intention to recognise the Jewish state at a press conference on the 13th but Marshall's hostile response thwarted the idea. The following day, Britain's High Commissioner, Sir Alan Cunningham, left Jerusalem and sailed from Haifa. Ben-Gurion and his colleagues assembled in the museum in Tel Aviv and announced the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel, which was to be open to all Jews and which promised to ensure the rights of all its citizens regardless of race or religion. The honour of being first President went to Weizmann, while Ben-Gurion assumed the task of Prime Minister. The same day, the power struggle in Washington had been resolved in Truman's favour. The new state was proclaimed at 6 p.m. Washington time; Truman's de facto recognition followed 11 minutes later (Ganin, 1979).

The First Arab–Israeli War

As American recognition was quickly followed by that of the Soviet Union, the new state could approach the dangers ahead with some confidence, for there seemed no prospect

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of Arab acceptance of Israel; rather their spokesman had promised 'a line of blood and fire'. The coalition of Arab League states which 'intervened' in Palestine on 15 May was neither united in its purpose nor adequately prepared for war. Four of the six Arab forces ranged against Israel – Lebanese, Syrian, Iraqi and Saudi Arabian – undertook little by way of offensive operations, though, of course, their presence tied down Israeli troops. The really hard fighting for the Israelis was against the Egyptians, who had two brigades threatening Tel Aviv, and Abdullah's British-officered Arab Legion in the Jerusalem sector. Egyptian participation in the war was problematic, despite considerable popular sympathy for the Palestinians. Indeed, it has been argued that it was the strength of public feeling that largely influenced King Farouk to intervene against the guidance of his military advisers and much of the political establishment. The Egyptian army was primarily a police force, with neither the training nor logistics to conduct a sustained offensive operation (Rogan and Shlaim, 2001). Transjordan's King Abdullah was the designated commander of the Arab League forces, but his resources were limited and his role largely meaningless. Abdullah, who had long since come to terms with the reality of the Jewish presence in Palestine, had his eye firmly fixed on securing the Arab areas of the country for his dynasty (Shlaim, 2000).

Even so, in the initial phases, the Arabs had clear advantages in terms of heavy weapons and air-power, and the Israelis had a major problem with the narrowness of the coastal plain which made in-depth strategic defence impossible. By the time the United Nations succeeded in arranging a truce on 11 June, severe fighting had taken place, especially around Jerusalem where the Jewish New City had struggled to survive Jordanian and Egyptian assaults and siege. The battles against the Arab Legion in and around Jerusalem entered Israeli military legend. The truce was to be supervised by Sweden's Count Folke Bernadotte, who had already been appointed as United Nations mediator in the

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conflict. It was welcomed by both sides after weeks of intense fighting which had left the balance of advantage unclear. The Arab war effort had suffered seriously from lack of a unified command, but they still held a powerful grip around Jerusalem where they had taken the ancient Jewish Quarter of the Old City, had inflicted heavy casualties in the Negev, and in the central sector were within ten miles of the Mediterranean coast. The Israelis had held their ground but desperately needed tanks, artillery and, above all, aircraft. The terms of the cease-fire did not allow them to remedy this, for neither side was to bring in men or supplies. Ben-Gurion's government honoured this in the breach. Links had already been forged with Czechoslovakia, which had access to the enormous amounts of war material left over from the war in Europe. From air-bases in Czechoslovakia, vitally needed supplies, including crated Messerschmidt fighters, arrived in Israel. Aircraft, including three American Flying Fortress bombers and several British Spitfire fighters, arrived by other routes later in the summer. During this period an episode occurred which finally brought to the surface the long-simmering tension between the Haganah and the Irgun. The latter had organised its own arms shipments in France which arrived off Tel Aviv on 20 June aboard the *Altalena*. Choosing to see this as a violation of the cease-fire and a challenge to the authority of the new government, Ben-Gurion ordered his forces to attack the vessel which was destroyed with heavy loss of Jewish life. By his action Ben-Gurion confirmed that there was now an Israeli government rather than a collection of factions, but in doing so he cut a deep wound in Israeli political life which festered for the next 30 years (Sachar, 1976).

When the war resumed on 8 July, it quickly became clear that the Israelis now held the advantage, with rapid advances being made in several key areas, notably in Galilee and the towns of Lydda and Ramle. Both these operations were accompanied by large-scale expulsions of Palestinians. In Galilee there was some distinction between Muslim villages

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and those with a largely Christian and Druse population; Nazareth, with its obvious significance for Christian opinion worldwide, was left untouched. Overall, some 30,000 Palestinian refugees left, many for Lebanon. Lydda and Ramle were attacked with particular ruthlessness. Under the partition plan the towns had been allotted to the Arab state. Strategically, they were important because of the airport at Lydda and their proximity to Tel Aviv. An operation which began on the night of 9 July left the towns in Israeli hands and at a meeting with army commanders on the 12th Ben-Gurion seems to have given the order for the expulsion of their inhabitants, who possibly numbered as many as 70,000. Controversy surrounds Ben-Gurion's action: there is little doubt that he wanted the Arabs expelled but that he was reluctant to be publicly identified with the action. Next to Deir Yassin, the 'Lydda Death March' which followed etched its way into the Palestinian consciousness as a symbol of their tragedy. Driven towards Ramallah in the summer heat, hundreds, especially children and the elderly, died from exhaustion and dehydration (Palumbo, 1987).

After ten days of hostilities, which left the Israelis much better positioned than before, a second truce came into operation on 18 July, giving Bernadotte the opportunity to work for a diplomatic solution. By early August, he believed he had the germ of a settlement. Talks with the Lebanese and Jordanian leaders indicated a willingness to acquiesce in Israel's existence. Discussions with Israeli leaders on the return of Palestinian refugees, whom he estimated at between 300,000 and 400,000, had been less satisfactory, but he was working towards a consolidation of Israeli territory that would reflect the way the military situation had developed. This formed the basis of the proposals he submitted on 16 September: Israel was to retain Galilee but surrender much of the Negev and return Lydda and Ramle to the Arabs; Jerusalem was to be an international city and Palestinian refugees were to have the right to return home. For some time Bernadotte had been regarded with suspicion

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by the Israelis. Working from an earlier draft of his plan, which had been less favourable to Israel, Lehi members in Jerusalem decided on his death. The day after submitting his plan to the United Nations he was murdered in the city (Bernadotte, 1951).

Bernadotte's death was condemned by the Israeli government, but his proposals still threatened their plans with regard to Jerusalem, with its large Jewish population, and over the future development of the Negev. They were not reassured by General Marshall's announcement on 21 September that the United States accepted the Bernadotte plan 'in its entirety'. A determined effort had to be made to attack the plan. On 27 September, an emergency meeting was held in Oklahoma City, where Truman was campaigning, at which Clifford and others impressed upon him the disastrous consequences Marshall's statement was having on Jewish voters in the key electoral states of New York and Pennsylvania. As a result, Stephen Wise was assured that de jure recognition would be given to Israel once elections had been held there and Marshall was instructed to make no further statement without presidential clearance. Lack of American support proved fatal to the plan, even though once Truman had been re-elected on 3 November he did toy with the idea of making the Negev part of an Arab state.

Ben-Gurion's government was resolved to settle the issue of the Negev on the ground. On 15 October, having manufactured an attack on a supply convoy, Israeli forces resumed fighting in the Negev around the Faluja crossroads, the key to the road network. Although their Egyptian antagonists fought well, they had no answer to Israeli superiority in the air and it was soon clear which side had the initiative. The Egyptians were now fighting the war on their own and, by the end of the year, the Israelis were positioned to destroy the Egyptian forces and take the final stretch of territory along the coast from Rafah to Gaza, but the war was brought to an end before they could do so. In January 1949, Israeli fighters shot down five British Spitfires flying in support of the

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Egyptians in the Sinai Desert across the international frontier. The prospect of war between Britain and Israel provoked the Americans into ending the conflict by warning the Israelis of British treaty obligations towards Arab countries. As a result, Ben-Gurion ordered a halt to military operations. The Negev had been secured, if not the area which soon came to be called the Gaza Strip (Fraser, 1989).

By this stage, negotiations for an Israeli–Egyptian armistice agreement were under way at Rhodes under the able direction of Ralph Bunche, Bernadotte’s former deputy and successor at the United Nations. The agreement concluded on 24 February 1949 set the pattern for others with Lebanon, Syria and Jordan which defined the nature of Israel’s boundaries, at least down to 1967. As these armistice agreements were seen as the forerunner of a full peace settlement, it was laid down that the ‘Armistice Demarcation Line is not to be construed in any sense as a political or territorial boundary, and is delineated without prejudice to rights, claims and positions of either Party to the Armistice as regards ultimate settlement of the Palestine problem’. While this seemed to give a sense of impermanence to Israel’s borders with her Arab neighbours, these came to be generally accepted as the boundaries of the state. The ending of the war and the holding of Israel’s first general election were quickly followed by the coveted confirmations of statehood. In January 1949, Truman extended *de jure* recognition and the American Export–Import Bank provided urgently needed loans; in May, Israel took her seat at the United Nations. The contrast with the situation of the Jews a mere four years before could not have been more stark. This was equally true of the Palestinians for whom the events of 1948–49 were *al-Nakba*, ‘the catastrophe’, the full extent of which they were only just beginning to understand. The pattern of the Arab–Israeli conflict had been set.

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