4

THE JEWISH RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

Preparations and First Operations

The Yishuv's military preparations had begun long before Bevin's statement in November 1945. Even before the end of the war, Ben-Gurion (chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive and first prime minister of Israel) had foreseen the main challenge that would face the Yishuv eventually—war with the Arabs. On July 1, 1945, he met in New York with seventeen Jewish millionaires sympathetic to Zionism and asked them to set up a special fund to meet the Yishuv's defense and immigration needs. A committee was formed, headed by Henry Montor and Rudolf Sonnenborn, which established a fictitious company called the Sonnenborn Institute, ostensibly dealing in agricultural and medical equipment.[1] Experts were commissioned to buy up at bargain prices obsolete military equipment and machinery from munitions factories closing down at the end of the war. By mid-1946, the Institute, which in effect became the American arm of the *Hagana* (underground Jewish defense directed by the Jewish Agency), began to buy ships, planes, jeeps, and surplus arms. These were stored in warehouses in the United States and in Europe, until they could be moved to Palestine legally at the end of the Mandate.[2]

[1] Henry Montor was the executive vice-president of the United Jewish Appeal, 1939-1950. Rudolf Sonnenborn was an oils and chemicals business executive.

[2] Leonard Slater, *The Pledge*, New York, 1970, pp. 18 ff.; M. Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion, A Political Biography*, Tel Aviv, 1957, pp. 515-516; Y. Slutsky, *History of the Hagana* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1975, vol. 3, pt. 2, pp. 1234-1235.

Ben-Gurion's decision to rebel against the British in Palestine crystallized during September 1945. The cabinet's decision of September 14 to continue with the White Paper policy until a permanent solution was formulated, was leaked to the world on September 16 by Reuters correspondent Jon Kimche. For the Zionists, this provided sufficient indication that the Labour government did not intend to fulfill its electoral promises. The London Zionist Executive met on September 21, when Ben-Gurion proposed that it issue a public statement warning that they, the Jews, would keep the doors of Palestine open, if necessary, by force. Ben-Gurion was opposed to any further negotiation. While he agreed that the recent press reports were unauthenticated, the very fact that after two months in office the Labour government had failed to act on the Palestine question and had not replied affirmatively to the Jewish Agency request for 100,000 immigration certificates, was sufficient evidence for him. In Ben-Gurion's opinion, the Zionists should now mount a publicity campaign to bring pressure to bear both in London and in Washington, in order to shift the two governments from their current positions.[3]

Ben-Gurion epitomized the synthesis between diplomacy and resistance that characterized Zionist policy during the last phase of the Mandate. In London, he was the diplomat, and in Paris (the Hagana European operations headquarters) he was the military planner, the conspirator communicating via secret transmitters. He believed that the British would have to be coerced by military action in Palestine into reversing their long-standing anti-Zionist policy.

On September 23, 1945, Sneh cabled from Palestine to Ben-Gurion in Paris, suggesting that the Hagana cause "one serious incident." He informed Ben-Gurion that the *Lehi* (Freedom Fighters, founded by Abraham Stern, now headed by Yellin-Mor) had already agreed to join the Hagana on the basis of the Jewish Agency program, and that the IZL (National Military Organization, headed by Menahem Begin), was also willing to join a joint resistance movement. Sneh intimated that such a union might prevent independent action by the IZL, which could lead to a state of anarchy in Palestine.[4] There was a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction

[3] Ben-Gurion to Jewish Agency (hereafter JA) Executive, Jerusalem, September 25, 1945, and Ben-Gurion to Goldmann, September 27, 1945, Ben-Gurion Archive (hereafter BGA).

[4] The British intercepted the telegram and published it in July 1946, in a White Paper showing evidence of Jewish Agency complicity with the dissident terrorist groups; see Cmd 6873.

with the Jewish Agency's sterile diplomacy. Some units of the Hagana had already deserted to the dissidents' ranks (that is, to the Lehi and the IZL). By October 1945, the joint resistance movement had become a domestic political necessity also, to prevent further alienation of public sympathy and further defections from the Labour camp.

Without confiding in his London colleagues, Ben-Gurion agreed to the revolt that Sneh had been calling for. On October 1, he telegraphed orders to Sneh to begin operations. He ordered the Hagana to promote illegal immigration, by force of arms if necessary (*aliya gimmel*). Each immigrant ship would now be accompanied by a Hagana unit, armed with guns, grenades, and the like. Ben-Gurion authorized Sneh to begin negotiations with the IZL and the Lehi, as requested. The Hagana was to engage in sabotage and reprisal, but to stop short of the personal terror methods engaged in at that time by the Lehi, and at a later stage by the IZL. Each act of sabotage was to be calculated so as to achieve maximum publicity, while every effort should be made to avoid human casualties.[5]

Yellin-Mor claimed later that tripartite negotiations had begun in Palestine at the beginning of September.[6] This may have been correct, since Sneh enjoyed considerable freedom of action when Ben-Gurion was out of the country. Begin claimed that official confirmation of the union never came. In his own inimitable style, he wrote later that the agreement was "not written in ink but sealed in blood."[7] The first operations of the joint resistance are generally considered to have been the renewal of the Hagana's secret radio transmissions (Kol Israel) on October 4; a clash between the Hagana and British forces at the northern settlement of Kfar Giladi on October 6, when the British tried to prevent a party of Jews from illegally crossing the Lebanese border into Palestine; and the attack by the *Palmach* (Hagana commando), on the Atlit transit camp, when on the night between October 9 and 10 they forcibly released 200 detained "illegal" immigrants.

The formation of the joint resistance came barely six months after

[5] Ben-Gurion to Sneh, October 1, 1945, BGA; also Y. Elam, *Hagana: The Zionist Way to Power* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1979, especially the appendix, pp. 331-349.

[6] N. Yellin-Mor, *Lehi* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1975, p. 271.

[7] M. Begin, *The Revolt*, Tel Aviv, 1951, p. 187. The joint resistance received retroactive endorsement from the JA Executive on December 6, 1945. Only after that, in mid-December, did the Hagana General Staff lay down general guidelines; see Elam, *Hagana*, pp. 348-349.

the cessation of the notorious "*Saison*" (literally, hunting season), when from November 1944 until May 1945 the Hagana had aided the British in hunting down Jewish dissidents.[8] The *Saison*, in its most drastic form, had been precipitated by the assassination of the minister of state in Cairo, Lord Moyne, an act that Zionist leaders feared would bring political catastrophe. At that time, London had been dangling generous hints that the Jews would get their own state in a part of Palestine after the war. But consequent British inaction regarding a political solution robbed the Jewish Agency of any moral raison d'être for its campaign against the dissidents. Ben-Gurion later told the Anglo-American committee that he had called off the *Saison* because the Hagana had refused to carry on. The IZL's self-restraint had averted civil war and transformed the *Saison* into a vendetta against men who now came to be regarded by the public as freedom fighters. The image of the IZL member was changing from bloodthirsty terrorist to persecuted martyr, betrayed by his brother Jew to the iniquitous British.

For the Jewish Agency, the joint resistance was intended to become the lever with which the Zionists would extract political concessions from London. The Hagana's most dramatic operations were in anticipation of or in reaction to some political event. When Sneh offered Begin a full merger of their respective organizations, the latter turned it down, it being clear to him that the Hagana itself was split between moderate and activist wings and would not be able to pursue an all-out fight against the British for any length of time without fatally compromising its political mentor, the Jewish Agency. The IZL rejected the political solutions that the Jewish Agency was prepared to accept—either a continuation of the Mandate, on pre-1939 White Paper terms, or partition. For Begin and Yellin-Mor, the revolt would continue until they had so undermined British rule in Palestine as to make it untenable.

A compromise of sorts was arrived at. Begin accepted the overall supervision of a special committee of the Jewish Agency ("X" command), on which his own and Lehi representatives also sat. The dissidents were supposed to obtain advance approval of all their operations, but they retained freedom to "acquire" money and arms.[9] On the eve of its revolt, the IZL had arms enough for fifty men—it therefore went out to steal weapons from the British, at times without even informing its own high command. By virtue

[8] Y. Shavit, *The Open Season* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1976; also Y. Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, Philadelphia, 1970.

[9] Yellin-Mor, *Lehi*, p. 271; also Slutsky, *History of Hagana*.

of its great numerical majority, the Hagana dominated the relationship. While demanding the right to vet each dissident operation down to the last detail, the Hagana itself merely informed the dissidents of the date and location of its own operations, without revealing details of their scope or character.[10]

On October 8, at a meeting of the London Executive, Weizmann reported on a meeting he had had with Bevin three days before. Bevin had reproached the aging Zionist for not accepting the 1,500 monthly immigration quota, claiming that the Jewish Agency was "holding a pistol to their heads." Ben-Gurion was furious that Weizmann was continuing negotiations with the government. In his opinion, the revolt in Palestine must first be allowed to make its impact: "The Jewish people were not in a position to make war, but there was a Jewish underground movement which would resist. While the Jewish Agency could not identify itself with this activity, he thought it would be impossible for them to do anything which was contrary, because without them they had nothing."[11]

Ben-Gurion demanded that no Zionist leader negotiate with the government until the White Paper was revoked; if they did, he would dissociate himself from any conclusions reached.

Ben-Gurion did not attend the next meeting of the executive on October 10; on October 19 he departed for Europe, where he toured the camps until November 6. In the meantime, the majority of the London Executive urged Weizmann to continue in his contacts with the government. On October 19, Weizmann met Colonial Secretary Hall. The latter, referring to the Kfar Giladi and Atlit incidents, stated that the government now had the impression that it was no longer a question of attacks by terrorist groups, but that the Jewish Agency, or some other important organization, was probably behind them. Weizmann denied that he had any prior knowledge of the attacks, or that the Jewish Agency had had anything to do with their organization.[12]

On the night between October 31 and November 1, 1945, in its first large-scale, combined operation, the joint resistance sabotaged the British railway network in Palestine in 153 places. Rolling stock and locomotives were destroyed by the IZL and the Lehi at Lydda

[10] S. Lev-Ami, *By Struggle and Revolt* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1978; Lev-Ami was a member of the IZL high command; also, transcript of interview with Amihai Paglin, also of the IZL high command, November 27, 1970, in Oral Interview Library, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

[11] Meeting of October 8, 1945, Z4/10.379, CZA.

[12] Meeting of October 22, 1945, ibid.

station; two police launches (used to track ships bringing in illegal immigrants) were damaged at Haifa and one sunk at Jaffa; the oil refineries at Haifa were slightly damaged. The *Times* commented that the relatively small loss of life and moderate damage involved suggested that the operation was intended as "a demonstration rather than a full-scale attack"; the number of places attacked suggested "a large force of trained men and careful planning and timing"—for some time it had been expected that the government would issue a new statement of policy on November 1 or 2.[13]

In London, on the morrow of the operation, Bevin called in Weizmann and Shertok (later Sharett), head of the agency's political department. Referring to the "night of the railways," Bevin asked them bluntly if the operation indicated that the Jews intended to settle the question by force, and if efforts at reconciliation should be considered at an end. Weizmann stated that both he and Shertok deprecated the "outrages," as indicated in the Jewish Agency's statement to the press. He argued that the violence had been prompted by the delay in issuing a policy statement. Bevin retorted that the operation had quite evidently been planned and coordinated long in advance and demanded that Weizmann issue a more categorical condemnation—the agency's statement had implied that its capacity to impose restraint had been tried sorely by "the maintenance of a policy which the Jews regard as fatal to their future." With regards the question of the much-delayed government statement, Bevin blamed the American government for determining its Palestine policy in the light of domestic electoral considerations. On the same day, Weizmann issued a personal statement: "Nobody understands better than I the state of mind out of which recent events have come. Nevertheless I deplore and disapprove of them, and urge for the sake of our cause that they should not recur."[14]

In one sense, Weizmann and Ben-Gurion complemented each other. While Ben-Gurion instigated a revolt to extort political concessions, Weizmann's moderation kept Britain from resorting to extreme reprisals which might have well found the Yishuv insufficiently prepared, which undoubtedly would have weakened the Hagana critically before it engaged upon its main battle against the Arab states in 1948. Had there been no Weizmann, had there been no Anglo-American committee for Bevin to pin his hopes on, the resistance movement might have, in November 1945, precip-

[13] The *Times*, November 2, 1945.

[14] Meeting of November 2, 1945, in E8437, FO 371/45383; also report to Zionist executive, in Z4/10.37911, CZA.

itated an all-out struggle with the British army for which it was at that time not prepared.

The British Reaction

Military reinforcements were sent promptly out to Palestine (the most publicized was the dispatch of the Sixth Airborne Division, veterans of the Normandy landings). By the end of 1945, the various security forces in Palestine had grown from 50,000 at the end of the war to some 80,000. By 1947, at the peak of Jewish terrorist activity, they would reach 100,000. By December 1945, four destroyers, two cruisers, and a large number of aircraft had been added to the blockade of Palestine's coastal waters, in the fight against illegal immigration. After Bevin's policy statement of November 13, the strict orders given to the forces in Palestine not to fire unless fired upon were relaxed; the number of military checkposts on the roads was increased; after each outbreak of violence, strict curfews were imposed, during which searches and large-scale arrests were carried out; terrorist suspects were deported to Eritrea; finally, on January 28, 1946, a 10,000-word amendment to the Defence Regulations extended the death penalty (hitherto applicable only to persons committing acts of terror or carrying arms and ammunition) to "any member of any group or body committing an offence against the regulations."[15]

During the last four years of the Mandate, the crucial question debated repeatedly would be whether to allow those forces full freedom of action against Jewish resistance: were they to be allotted an offensive or defensive role? In the long run, the politicians at Whitehall came to appreciate that a nationwide resistance movement, enjoying at least the latent support of virtually the entire Jewish population, could not be suppressed by military force alone. World public opinion, including British, would not have permitted the draconian measures that would have been necessary to pacify the Jews. Above all, London realized that the problem in Palestine, fueled by the pressure of the Jewish refugees in Europe, could be solved only by political measures that got to the heart of the problem and eradicated it.

The Zionist leaders had not convinced Bevin of their innocence on November 2. In any case, British intelligence had unearthed

[15] Intelligence report, NND 6E-3, December 1946, in the Cunningham papers, box 1, file 1, MEC; also Sachar, *Europe Leaves*, p. 457.

sufficient evidence of the Jewish Agency's involvement with the resistance, even if Weizmann himself was, as suspected by London, "no longer in control of his troops." The agency's condemnations of violence rang pretty hollow in British ears.

On November 5, the Defence Committee considered launching a full-scale operation to disarm the Yishuv (the question had been discussed several times during the war). The commanders in chief, Middle East, were asked to make an appraisal of the action and forces required to achieve the surrender of illegal arms in Palestine. At the end of 1944, such an operation had been rejected, on the grounds of insufficient troops to carry it out. Now, one year later, the commanders in chief, Middle East, who in 1944 had advocated the move, even at the expense of depleting the armies fighting in Italy, reported back:

> While it cannot be argued that there are now insufficient troops in the country to undertake a search for arms, if such a course is desirable, it nevertheless remains true that difficulties of conducting a search remain as great if not greater. Caches of arms are spread over a considerable area, and buried at some depth, and even when likely areas in which illegal arms are concealed are known, success in finding them depends on being able to pinpoint their location. Moreover the use of mechanical means, such as mine detectors, is frustrated by the practice of scattering small pieces of metal in vicinity of hidden arms.[16]

However, the main inhibition seemed to be political. Any large-scale arms search would lead inevitably to bloodshed and violence and, during the impending visit of the Anglo-American committee would lay Britain open to charges of prejudicing, even sabotaging, that committee's report.[17]

At a second meeting, the Defence Committee decided on November 26 to defer any operation for the time being, "until terrorist activities made such a course obviously necessary, and justifiable." Much would depend also on the Jewish Agency's reaction to Bevin's recent policy statement. Any decision to take action would be referred back to the cabinet, if and when the commanders in chief, Middle East, in consultation with the high commissioner in Palestine, thought it necessary.[18]

At the end of 1945, a new high commissioner, Gen. Sir Alan

[16] General Staff briefing paper, November 21, 1945, in WO 32/10260.
[17] DO(45) 31, November 19, 1945, Cunningham papers, box 5, file 4, MEC.
[18] WO 32/10260.

Cunningham arrived in Palestine (his predecessor, Viscount Gort, retired in August, because of ill health; he died in March 1946). After ten days in the country, Cunningham reported back that "a very high percentage of the Jews in this country, perhaps as many as 50%, are definitely desirous of offensive armed action against us, no matter how foolish or suicidal this policy may seem to be . . . both leaders and *Yishuv* are in highly emotional and hysterical state, and appeals to logic or reason have little effect . . . open fighting may yet be averted . . . more likely by influencing world opinion rather than by anything we can do here."[19]

Cunningham's assessment was in some contrast to an intelligence report sent in from Cairo one week later to the effect that the Jewish Agency had decided, by nine votes against five, not to take any further armed action, except in connection with illegal immigration. A further report at the end of December 1945 estimated that no large-scale anti-British action would occur until after the Anglo-American committee had declared its findings, although the interim period would not necessarily be tranquil.[20]

On December 27, a series of terrorist attacks on police and military buildings took place, in the course of which ten British policemen and soldiers were killed and eleven wounded. The internal contradictions within the joint resistance were becoming apparent. The Hagana, though restricting its own actions to the field of illegal immigration, and taking great care not to inflict casualties on British forces, could not now restrain its comrades in arms, the dissidents, whose methods were far removed from its own. Whereas in 1947 the dissidents' terrorism was to play a vital role in undermining British rule in Palestine, they would in 1946 precipitate the single large-scale operation ("Agatha") against the Yishuv which, had it been pursued with ruthless determination, without political restraints, might well have broken the Yishuv as a political and military entity.

The Jewish Agency was caught in a vicious circle. In unholy alliance with the dissidents, it had to appear in front of its constituents as leading resistance to what were considered Bevin's anti-Semitic policies. On December 28, Cunningham called in Ben-Gurion to assess the agency's attitude to the new wave of violence. While Ben-Gurion dissociated the agency from the recent incidents, he added his own "private" view that it would be unable to co-

[19] Cunningham to CO, December 8, 1945, Air 20/4963.

[20] Commander in chief, Middle East, reports of December 16 and 29, 1945, ibid. I was unable to trace the alleged JA decision to desist from further armed operations.

operate with the British in bringing the lawbreakers to book, nor even call upon the Yishuv to abide by the law, which in the people's eyes simply did not have validity any more. Ben-Gurion, together with Shertok, confessed somewhat lamely that the two of them had lost control over their own community.[21]

The ambivalence of the agency's attitude was brought out by its public communiqué issued two days later, which stated unequivocally that the British were no longer entitled to rule the country. Both Cunningham and the commanders in chief, Middle East, felt that the agency's defiant attitude could not be ignored any longer and that retaliatory measures were now justified.[22] Two days later still, Ben-Gurion wrote a private, conciliatory letter to Cunningham, explaining away the public statement as "tactical":

> The Executive begs to confirm its complete and emphatic dissociation from the terrorist attacks committed against Government and military establishments on the night of Thursday December 27th. The Executive begs to point out in general that the Jewish Agency can have nothing to do with such excesses and that its functions are strictly confined to political activity and to practical and constructive work in the sphere of immigration, economic development and settlement. . . .
>
> Without in the least condoning the acts committed, the Executive considers the policy at present pursued by the Mandatory Government, which is based on the violation of fundamental provisions of the Mandate, to be primarily responsible for the tragic situation which has developed in Palestine. *The Executive cannot agree that it can in fairness be called upon to appear in the invidious position of assisting in the enforcement of that policy* the less so as the performance of what is essentially a police function cannot properly be construed as an indispensable part of the tasks devolving upon the Jewish Agency under Article 4 of the Mandate.[23]

Ben-Gurion's explanation was in some contrast to the agency's attitude of less than a year before (during the *Saison*)—but consistency has never been the hallmark of politicians.

The cabinet considered the new situation on January 1, 1946, together with Cunningham's recommendation (for the first time)

[21] CO 733/57, pt. 2.

[22] Ibid.; and commander in chief, Middle East, to War Office, December 29, 1945, Air 20/4963.

[23] Ben-Gurion to Cunningham, January 1, 1946, BGA (my emphasis).

that the Jewish Agency's offices should be occupied and members of its executive placed under administrative detention. For the present, Cunningham was overruled by the Colonial Office, whose representative Creech-Jones (at the time parliamentary undersecretary) told the cabinet that the disadvantages of such an act still outweighed the advantages: it would play into the hands of the extremists and discredit finally those leaders who yet believed in negotiation and the folly of violence; it would produce a strong reaction in the United States; the Jews would inevitably boycott the Anglo-American committee, making it impossible for that body to carry out its work in Palestine.[24]

The plan to occupy the agency buildings and arrest its leaders was not rejected out of hand, but simply placed in cold storage until the appropriate time. Both the agency and the government wanted to avoid untoward provocation pending the committee's report, from which each side sought solace, if not salvation.

In October 1945, when the Jewish Agency set up the joint resistance, it had not foreseen the appointment of the Anglo-American committee. Now, on the one hand the agency prepared its case to present to the committee; on the other, it continued the revolt on a limited scale, concentrating its efforts against the instruments with which the British prevented "illegal" immigration. (On February 20, 1946, the Palmach blew up the radar station at Haifa with which the British tracked illegal ships.) All the time, the agency was compelled, for domestic political purposes, to maintain a firm anti-British stance, to keep ahead of the rising anti-Labour sentiment spreading through the Yishuv. On February 13, Shertok, normally counted among the Zionist moderates, made a public speech that in its virulent polemic was regarded by the high commissioner as a grave departure:

> The continued existence of the White Paper . . . causes people to despair of peaceful ways and abolishes the public basis for a stand against terrorism. Unable to subdue those who fight against it, Government retaliates by murderous and atrocious laws, which threaten the public as a whole. Elementary ideas of law and justice are trodden down . . . peaceful Jewish citizens are being shamelessly murdered by military forces. Official communiqués hush up the bloody facts in distorted descriptions. Jews who have been abducted from their homeland by force and sent to detention abroad, are being abandoned there to acts of murder by human beasts who have been put in charge of them.[25]

[24] Cab 128/5.

In reporting the speech to London, Cunningham regretfully urged restraint, while at the same time adding his own shrewd analysis of a domestic situation rapidly getting out of hand:

> My legal advisers inform me that speech undoubtedly is seditious. . . . After full consideration, I have with reluctance decided to take no immediate action. Situation vis à vis the Agency grows more intolerable and it is only on account of the very short time which will elapse before the arrival of the Committee of Enquiry, and the fact that Shertok also announced . . . that the Agency will appear before the Committee, that I could advise such restraint. Ever since I saw Ben Gurion and Shertok after the blowing up of Police Headquarters on 27th December, it has been apparent that the Agency had placed themselves in a difficult position. By their incitement of *Yishuv*, through constant anti-British and anti-Government propaganda, they have so inflamed Jewish young men and women that terrorist organizations have received a fillip both in recruits and sympathy. Now the Agency find themselves no longer able to draw back without losing their authority over the Jewish community, and are being forced to greater lengths of extremism. The extent to which they cooperate with the terrorist organizations is in some doubt. . . . There is, however, some evidence that they have pre-knowledge of most incidents which have taken place.[26]

Notwithstanding the Palmach's destruction of the Haifa radar station on the previous day, the cabinet noted Cunningham's assessment and confirmed his call for restraint, on February 21.[27]

In Palestine itself, the military were chafing at the bit, aroused ever more by the crescendo of terrorist attacks. They were impatient for the joint committee's report, after which they might at last be allowed to take some action. On the night of April 25, seven British soldiers were killed in a further series of terrorist attacks in Tel Aviv. The incidents were debated the next day in Jerusalem by Cunningham and the GOC (general officer commanding) Palestine, Lt. Gen. J. C. D'Arcy. The military were most upset by the policy

[25] Report in Cunningham to CO, February 19, 1946, Cunningham papers, box 1, file 1, MEC.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Cab 128/5.

of restraint and warned that unless some "drastic and spectacular punitive action" was taken their soldiers might get out of hand and resort to reprisals. But the various options considered by the meeting (demolition of buildings, collective fines, placing Tel Aviv out of bounds to the British forces, or a general curfew) were all rejected once again, because of the "peculiar delicacy and complexity of the political situation" only five days prior to the publication of the committee's report.[28]

In London, a General Staff conference decided on April 30 that in the event of further acts of terrorism in Palestine, any decision to take reprisals or arrest local Jewish leaders must remain in the hands of the cabinet, "in order to avoid the risk of alienating American opinion." However, on May 4, the Commander in Chief, Middle East, Gen. B. Paget, anticipated that in the event of further terrorist attacks in reaction to the committee's report, the troops might take matters into their own hands. Lord Ismay (secretary to Attlee in his capacity as minister of defense) told the prime minister that the Chiefs of Staff were now asking for a revision of the April 30 decision; they believed that it was only right on purely military grounds that the man on the spot should possess some latitude of action.[29]

But Attlee, while appreciating the trials facing the troops in Palestine, insisted that wider considerations must take precedence: "To put into operation the full plans against the Jewish Agency and *Hagana* on account of outrage for which they cannot be proved responsible would have widespread repercussions at a time when it is hoped to deal with Palestine problem through Anglo-American cooperation." In the event of further outrages, action would have to be limited to the actual perpetrators of the outrage and those who aided them locally.[30]

But General D'Arcy pressed home his point in a further report to the Chiefs of Staff, discussed by them on May 15, 1946: "If we forcibly implemented the disarming of the Palestine population and broke up the illegal armed organizations, no other action would have such a beneficial effect towards influencing the Arabs to accept a compromise and to accept a certain measure of further immigration. They would then see that our intentions were firm in putting down the illegal armed organizations and would be deterred from

[28] Cunningham papers, box 5, file 4, MEC.
[29] Ismay to Attlee, May 8, 1946, E4623, FO 371/52525.
[30] Chiefs of Staff to General Paget, May 13, 1946, E4624, ibid.

forcibly opposing whatever recommendations were finally carried out."[31]

D'Arcy was confident that the army was capable of mounting a disarming operation—so much so that he objected to the possible dispatch of American troops to Palestine as a result of the joint Committee's report. D'Arcy feared that the appearance of American troops in Palestine would complicate his own position and alienate the Arabs.

D'Arcy believed that it was essential to British interests to mount a disarming operation now. Should terrorist acts recur, he did not believe he would be able to restrain his troops, who had reached breaking point. He could not condone their breaches of discipline, but he sympathized with their feelings. Because of the "catastrophic" depletion of the Palestine police, the troops, already severely strained, were being used also in a police role. The effective deficiency in the police was 2,500, out of an establishment of 5,500.

In D'Arcy's opinion, there would be little point in disarming the illegal organizations before first breaking them up and arresting the implicated leaders. He felt there was little prospect of persuading the Jews to surrender their arms peacefully, though there might be a token surrender to cover up the bulk. D'Arcy had prepared a plan, which could be put into effect within forty-eight hours, for seizing the leaders of the Hagana and Palmach and *pari passu* seizing whatever arms it was possible to obtain. He concluded: "Disarmament of the Jews was a limited liability which could militarily be calculated. On the other hand, if there was a general uprising amongst the Arabs, it was not possible to estimate the extent of the commitment nor to foretell how long it would continue . . . there were sufficient troops in Palestine at the present moment to begin the forcible disarming of the Jews providing the Arab population remained quiet."[32]

Operation Agatha

The British and the Yishuv were moving inexorably on a collision course. The Zionists, while far from satisfied with the Anglo-American report published at the end of April (see Chapter Five), had derived some comfort from the recommendation, immediately endorsed by Truman, that the 100,000 DPs be allowed into Palestine.

[31] General D'Arcy to Chiefs of Staff, at 77th meeting, May 15, 1946, E4774, ibid.
[32] Ibid.

They had consequently suffered deep disillusion when the British insisted that the report be implemented in its totality, but on condition that the Jewish resistance groups be disarmed first.

The Jewish Agency concluded that American political pressure would not, of itself, bring about the desired change in British policy. Noting that Britain's talks with the Egyptians on the treaty revision had suffered a setback, and that she was concentrating large numbers of troops in Palestine, the Zionists concluded that the British response to the report was a sham, a cover-up for imperialist machinations. The agency therefore planned one further large-scale Hagana operation to demonstrate to the British, without inflicting heavy casualties in human life, the Jews' capacity to paralyze Palestine's communications system and cast grave doubts on the country's strategic value. But before embarking on the proposed operation, the agency tried to ascertain, via Crossman, the likely political repercussions. Crossman approached John Strachey, a member of the Defence Committee of the cabinet, who undertook to find out. On the next day, in a smoking room of the House of Commons, Strachey, apparently after consulting colleagues on the Defence Committee, met Crossman and gave his approval to the Hagana operation. Incredibly, a British minister (Food) had given illicit, but nonetheless top-level approval for an attack against British strategic installations in a trouble spot overseas. A few days later, the British finally broke the Jewish Agency code, and Crossman and Strachey spent the next few days in a state of some alarm, lest their role be discovered.[33]

The Jewish Agency regarded the pending operation as a political demonstration and therefore announced its goals in advance. On May 12, the secret Hagana transmitter broadcast the following warning to London:

> Present British policy is executing a dangerous manouvre and is based on an erroneous assumption. Britain, in evacuating Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, intends to concentrate her military bases in Palestine and is therefore concerned to strengthen her hold over the Mandate, and is using her responsibility to the Jewish people as a means to that end. But this double game will not work. . . .

[33] Hugh Thomas, *John Strachey*, London, 1973, p. 229. See also J. Heller, "From Black Saturday to Partition" (in Hebrew), *Zion*, vol. 43, c-d, 1979, p. 19. Heller insinuates, incorrectly, that it was the British ministers who took the initiative, advising the Jews to "make some trouble," like the Arabs. This interpretation cannot be sustained from Thomas's Strachey biography, upon which Heller also relies.

> We would therefore warn publicly His Majesty's Government that if it does not fulfil its responsibilities under the Mandate—above all with regard to the question of immigration—the Jewish Resistance Movement will make every effort to hinder the transfer of British bases to Palestine and to prevent their establishment in this country.[34]

On the night between June 16 and 17, 1946, the Hagana carried out concerted attacks on the road and rail bridges linking Palestine with its neighbors, destroying ten of the eleven bridges then functioning, causing damage estimated later at £250,000. The most extensive damage was done to the Hijaz railway bridge over the Yarmuk gorge, which linked Palestine with Transjordan and Syria. The destruction of the Yarmuk bridge not only hindered trade between the three countries, but also slowed construction of the Iraqi Petroleum Company's (IPC) pipeline, material for which was transported via this route.[35]

On the evening of June 17, the Lehi attacked the Haifa railway workshops, and on the next day, the IZL kidnapped five British officers who were lunching in their club in Tel Aviv, as well as a sixth officer in Jerusalem. The men were to be held hostage against the lives of two IZL men under sentence of death. The kidnappings, carried out by the IZL in the interest of its own men, were disapproved of by the Jewish Agency, whose own operations were mounted for the political and propaganda effect anticipated. At a meeting with Colonial Secretary Hall on June 19, Ben-Gurion appeared to be in some distress about the kidnappings. He gave his assurance that he would condemn the act in public, and telegraph to Palestine, to appeal to the Yishuv to do all it could to help obtain the release of the officers. Somewhat disingenuously, and in contradiction of the manifold evidence already in British hands, Ben-Gurion also gave his categorical assurance that no relationship existed between the Jewish Agency, the IZL, and the Lehi.[36]

The series of incidents between June 16 and 18 did not provoke Operation Agatha, but rather provided the pretext for British action. Since the Anglo-American report had failed to produce the hoped-for Anglo-American consensus, the military could now act without fear of prejudicing some imminent political solution. Be-

[34] Statement of Information Relating to Acts of Violence in Palestine, Cmd. 6873, July 1946.

[35] Shaw (chief secretary) to Martin, June 25, 1946, CO 733/456, pt. 2.

[36] Hall memorandum of June 20, 1946, CP(46) 238, in Cab 128/5.

cause of recent terrorist acts, they could act in confidence that their operation would be received sympathetically by the general public.

Cunningham recommended that all discussion on the admission of the 100,000 be suspended, pending the return of the kidnapped officers, and asked authorization to put into effect D'Arcy's plan to disarm the illegal organizations and arrest Jewish Agency leaders, at whatever point he considered appropriate. In his estimation, the recent conflict between the moderates (led by Weizmann) and the extremists (led by Sneh) had clearly been won by the latter, resulting in victory for the advocates of terrorism.[37]

Since detailed plans for the transfer of the 100,000 were already being discussed in London by British and American teams, the cabinet decided against Cunningham's first proposal. It would have prejudged the current discussions and gravely disappointed the Americans at a time when the government was most anxious to secure their cooperation in the Middle East. But the cabinet did agree that firm action might now be taken against the Hagana and the Jewish Agency. In order not to appear to be discriminating against the Jews, the official announcement was to enunciate the government's policy of disbanding *all* illegal armies, although the most overt action would be against the Jews. It was decided also not to inform the American government about the operation in advance, to guarantee against premature leaks to the Zionists.[38]

On June 20, 1946, Hall conveyed the government's decision to High Commissioner Cunningham:

> You may at once take such steps as you think necessary to break up illegal organizations . . . including arrest of any individuals against whom there is clear evidence. . . . H.M.G. recognize that this will involve the arrest of certain persons connected with Jewish Agency and may necessitate raiding of Agency's premises in search of information and for individuals. They are not, however, prepared to authorise you to close or prescribe [*sic*] Jewish Agency as such. Nor are they prepared at this stage to authorise wholesale disarming of individuals. Any comprehensive disarming of the whole civil population would have to extend to Arabs as well as Jews, and, as at present advised, H.M.G. do not think it right to accept the heavy risks, both Military and Political, which such action would involve.[39]

[37] Cunningham to CO, June 18, 1946, E5747, FO 371/52530.

[38] Draft CO memorandum, June 19, 1946, and Hall to Cunningham, June 20, 1946, both in Cunningham papers, box 1, file 1, MEC.

[39] Hall to Cunningham, ibid.

At 4:45 A.M. on Saturday, June 29, 1946, Operation Agatha was launched, with the occupation of the Jewish Agency buildings in Jerusalem. Some 17,000 British soldiers took part in a nationwide search-and-arrest operation, which proceeded for the next two weeks. Some 2,700 Jews were arrested, including several members of the Jewish Agency Executive: Shertok, Joseph, Itzhak Grünbaum, and Rabbi J. L. Fishman. (The executive members were detained in the Latrun prison, while members of the Hagana were concentrated at a British army camp in Rafiah.) Sneh was warned in time and made good his escape; Weizmann and Golda Myerson (later Meir, prime minister of Israel) were not picked up; Ben-Gurion was abroad at the time, but an arrest warrant against him made it impossible for him to return to Palestine or set foot in Britain.

The operation achieved almost total surprise and stunned the Yishuv, despite the fact that Hagana intelligence had learned details of the plan in advance (which they broadcast on Kol Israel on June 15), including a "black list" of those to be arrested.[40] Ben-Gurion himself was quite evidently unaware that the operation was imminent, for on the day before it was executed he wrote from Paris to his son to tell him he would shortly fly out to Palestine for a visit.[41] It is an enigma, why, with advance information, so many Hagana leaders and officers were apprehended, and so many members of the agency were caught in their beds early Saturday morning. Israel Galili, national commander of the Hagana apparently told Begin that over half the Palmach had been detained.[42] On the other hand, the head of Hagana intelligence at the time wrote later that no senior Hagana officers were caught and that the agency leaders had chosen detention and had not tried to hide.[43]

The operation did not attempt to track down arms caches, though some fifteen were uncovered with their arms and a similar number empty. One huge quantity was discovered at Kibbutz Yagur, north of Haifa. British forces "conducted intensive searches in Tel Aviv, the Jewish sections of Jerusalem and Haifa, and twenty-seven collective villages."[44]

Though terrorist action had provoked it, Operation Agatha was

[40] Cunningham to CO, June 20, 1946, Cunningham papers, box 1, file 1, MEC; E5846, FO 371/52532; and Slutsky, *History of Hagana*.

[41] Ben-Gurion to Amos (his son), June 28, 1946, BGA.

[42] Begin, *Revolt*, p. 204.

[43] A. Dekel, *Shai—The Secret Exploits of the Hagana*, London and New York, 1959, pp. 145-146.

[44] Hurewitz, *Struggle*, p. 254; Cunningham to CO, June 30, 1946, E6106, FO 371/52534; and report to cabinet, July 1, 1946, Cab 128/6.

quite evidently designed to break the main military strength of the Yishuv, the elite Palmach Force of the Hagana, and to stifle the activist leaders, in order, it was hoped, to pave the way for moderates who would be willing to cooperate with the mandatory. One week before implementation, Gen. Sir Evelyn Barker, who had replaced D'Arcy in May, set down the goals of the operation.[45] Barker admitted that intelligence regarding the IZL and the Lehi was insufficient to permit any preconceived plan for their eradication. Moreover, any final solution to the terrorist problem would require the cooperation of the whole Yishuv; so long as the community was "afraid of them and out of sympathy with the local Government," little information on them would be forthcoming.

Neither did Barker consider it possible to achieve the complete disarming and neutralization of the Hagana. Large-scale disarmament was severely handicapped by the diffuse concealment methods employed—a fact borne out by the largely abortive results of recent searches, though it was hoped that during the operation documents revealing the whereabouts of arms might be seized. Further, any all-out attack on the Hagana would set the whole Yishuv against the British. He also admitted that "as a result of persecution of their defenceless people over a number of years, they are now determined to hold on to their arms for self-defence, and in this there is a certain degree of right on their side." The Hagana, concluded Barker, needed reorganization, not disbanding.

Moreover, it was the army's estimation that most operations were the work of the Palmach, the Hagana's regular army, whereas the Hagana had a defensive role only. The Palmach, used on the offensive, was therefore the real enemy of law and order, but since it took orders from GHQ Hagana, the latter was also fully compromised. Barker hoped that the distinction to be made between the Palmach and the Hagana, implying as it did the Jews' fundamental right to self-defense, would encourage the more moderate elements. But he realized there were limits to any operation; the Hagana might well lose many of its leaders and a portion of its arms, but the great bulk of its rank and file, and a portion of its arms would remain to present a major problem. The only solution would be, somehow or other, to incorporate the Hagana into the Palestine police.

But the mandatory's prime target must be the political leadership:

[45] For the following text, see memorandum of June 22, 1946, Cunningham papers, box 5, file 5, MEC.

"The chief responsibility, however, must ultimately rest with the Jewish Agency who have made a state within a state, and have built up this illegal offensive army. Furthermore, their inflammatory propaganda has helped to turn the minds of the youth of the *Yishuv* into ways of violence and sedition . . . if law and order is to return to the country, action must be taken against those primarily responsible, and in this category I place the extreme element of the Jewish Agency, GHQ *Hagana* and the whole of the *Palmach* force."[46]

Even so, these measures could only be palliatives: "The ultimate solution must depend on a satisfactory political answer."

On the afternoon of Operation Agatha, Weizmann rushed to the high commissioner in Jerusalem. In great distress, he pleaded with Cunningham to call off the operation, which represented a virtual declaration of war on the Jews. Cunningham retorted that if any war had been declared at all, it was that of the Jews against the mandatory. Hinting at the political goal of the operation, Cunningham told Weizmann "it would be easy to stop operations if the Jews approached the govenment with a plan for reducing their armed forces and placing the rest under government control, and made an offer to cooperate against *IZL* and *Lehi*." Weizmann did not refute Cunningham's assertion that the Jewish Agency was in control of the Hagana and that he (Weizmann) had no idea to what extent the political leaders were involved.[47]

Weizmann sent his aide Meyer Weisgal to place an ultimatum before Sneh: either the latter called off all further acts of violence, or Weizmann would resign his Zionist offices and publish his reasons. Sneh brought the issue before the X Committee, which agreed to Weizmann's demand by a vote of four against two (Sneh and Israel Idelson, later Bar-Yehuda, of *Ahdut Avoda*, the radical activists who dominated the Palmach). Weizmann met with Chief Secretary Shaw on July 8, and told him of a meeting he had held with the rump of the agency executive the previous day, a Saturday. The executive had promised Weizmann it would stop all further Hagana-Palmach operations, but stressed that it was impotent while its leaders were under arrest. Shaw told Weizmann that the basis of any negotiations now must be a cessation of all acts of violence; disbandment of the Palmach, government control of the Hagana, and cessation of propaganda against the mandatory. Weizmann

[46] Ibid.

[47] Interview of June 29, 1946, Cunningham papers, box 1, file 1, MEC.

promised to do all he could and spoke disparagingly of Ben-Gurion and the American Zionist leader Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver.[48]

On July 14, two days before he left Palestine, Weizmann had one last interview with Cunningham. He reported that his threat of resignation had brought an end to the Hagana-Palmach revolt, though he could not answer for the dissidents. He was about to return to Europe where, because of the warrants outstanding against Sneh and Ben-Gurion, a decisive meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive was about to take place in Paris. Ironically, the two principal activists on the executive, Ben-Gurion and Sneh, were still at large, whereas many of the moderates were now interned at the Latrun camp. Weizmann claimed that he intended to recast the current trend of Zionism and begged for the release of the interned leaders, moderates whose presence at the European meeting would strengthen his hand. But Weizmann would have to deliver something tangible first; for the present, the internees were held by the British as a trump card for prospective negotiations.[49]

The Yishuv leadership felt that something substantial must be done in retaliation for Operation Agatha, even if the Hagana did suspend operations. On June 30, the Va'ad Leumi and the Inner Zionist Actions Committee (the highest Zionist body between congresses) decided in Jerusalem to launch a policy of noncooperation with the mandatory. They resolved (a) to resign from all government committees (they sat on thirty-nine), apart from two considered essential to the Yishuv's own welfare, those dealing with the citrus crop and with demobilized soldiers; (b) to declare a tax strike; and (c) to sever all relations between the Jewish municipalities and the authorities. These steps were opposed vigorously by Weizmann, the Farmers' Union, and some of the *Mapai* moderates, including the Jewish Agency treasurer Eliezer Kaplan and his economic advisers. Kaplan warned that such steps would spell economic ruin for the Yishuv and would also put at risk the absorption of the anticipated 100,000 immigrants, since funds that might have been available for them would have to be transferred to finance the noncooperating municipalities. In response to Weizmann's appeal, and in view of the evident fact that the strike would not receive the 100 percent support necessary, the measures were postponed. Myerson inferred that the opponents of the boycott feared personal economic losses and made caustic comments about personal interest being placed above the national. After the King David Hotel explosion in July, a secret decision put off the measures indefinitely.[50]

[48] E6507, FO 371/53538.

[49] Interview of July 14, 1946, in E6757, FO 371/52540.

What did Operation Agatha in fact achieve? It did not produce the alternative leadership the British had hoped for. True, on the morrow of the operation itself, the liberal-center paper *Ha'aretz* (The Land) printed an editorial demanding the replacement of the Jewish Agency Executive, "whose policy had led the Yishuv to its present condition of bankruptcy." But *Ha'aretz* reflected the views of a minority. By August 1946, Cunningham himself was driven to the conclusion that any effort to mobilize the moderate elements was doomed to failure until all the radical elements were totally eliminated: "[I] fear that any moderates who aimed at taking control would be in fear of their lives, and it would be over-optimistic to think they could command much influence in present circumstances." He concluded that the only hope was that the moderates, Weizmann, Wise, and Dr. Nahum Goldmann, would purge the movement from within.[51]

The British had labored under a basic misconception. Weizmann himself had given his full support to the Yishuv's efforts to aid the DPs reach their homeland, with or without legal certificates. He considered British insensitivity to the refugees' predicament to be inhumane, unworthy of traditional British values. Indeed, Weizmann had been apprised by Sneh of some, though not all, of the resistance operations. Weizmann agreed to the sabotage of radar stations and patrol boats that prevented the landing of illegal immigrants. But he drew the line at operations that might have detrimental political repercussions or, worse still, provoke a premature, all-out war with the British. The Hagana action on the night of June 16-17 had been a breaking point for Weizmann, and Operation Agatha seemed to confirm his most pessimistic apprehensions. Weizmann was also concerned that events in the field were running beyond his control, that too many decisions were being taken without his knowledge or assent. But for all this, and notwithstanding his ultimatum to the agency executive, Weizmann was not prepared to become the Yishuv's Pétain, certainly not for Bevin's sake.

However, Operation Agatha was not the total failure that some accounts claim.[52] Weizmann did make a successful stand against

[50] Executive minutes, August 2, 1946, vol. 43, CZA.

[51] Cunningham to Hall, August 19, 1946, Cunningham papers, box 1, file 1, MEC.

[52] See, for example, Hurewitz, *Struggle*, p. 255.

the activists, thanks to which the Zionists returned to the negotiating table. The unofficial talks, which continued throughout the summer and autumn of 1946, were headed by the moderate Goldmann, acting as proxy for the ailing Weizmann. Ben-Gurion's silent acquiescence, even by abstention on crucial votes, was tantamount to admission that the method of violent resistance must, if only temporarily, give way to diplomacy.

For the British the most tangible gain was the fact that from June 1946 until November 1947, Hagana actions virtually stopped. There were no further clashes between it and the British and practically no further sabotage by Hagana forces.[53]

The King David Hotel Tragedy

On July 22, 1946, the IZL succeeded in penetrating and planting explosives in the south wing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The hotel housed the administration's senior executives, British military headquarters, and the Central Intelligence Department. In the resulting explosion, some ninety-two men and women lost their lives, and many more were injured. Among the victims were a large number of Arab, Jewish, and British officials and officers.[54]

The tragedy is to this day the subject of much controversy, denial, and counterdenial. Begin persists in the claim that three separate telephone warnings gave the British ample time to evacuate the hotel, but that Chief Secretary Shaw was too proud to suffer the humiliation of being ordered out of his own headquarters by the IZL. British documents indicate that the telephone warnings arrived too late to permit safe evacuation.[55] Other sources claim that Shaw failed to act on the warnings because he was waiting final confirmation of the bomb attempt from an agent within the IZL itself; he waited in vain, since IZL units involved allowed no one out of their sight once they were informed that morning that D-day had arrived.

Controversy also surrounds the role of the Hagana in the whole episode. The bombing was in fact one of three operations planned by the Hagana itself, the day after Operation Agatha, in order to

[53] Lt. Gen. Sir Alan Cunningham, "The Last Days of the Mandate," lecture given at Chatham House on July 22, 1948, published in *International Affairs*, vol. 24, 1948, pp. 481-490.

[54] Begin, *Revolt*, chapter 15; Cunningham to Hall, July 24, 1946, Cunningham papers, box 1, file 1, MEC; cabinet meeting of July 23, 1946, Cab 128/6.

[55] Nicholas Bethell, *The Palestine Triangle*, London, 1979, pp. 257-268.

demonstrate to the British that the operation had not broken it. The Palmach was to recapture the arms confiscated during Agatha from a British arms depot near Haifa where they were now stored; the IZL was to sabotage the King David Hotel, an act that would not only deliver a blow to British morale and prestige, but might also succeed in recovering or destroying incriminating documents seized during Agatha; the third operation—an attack on government offices sited near the King David—was to be carried out by the Lehi.[56]

All three operations were approved by the X committee, but a few days later, Weizmann's ultimatum arrived. Sneh, in a minority on the committee, did not comply with its decision and continued to consult with the IZL.[57] He asked the IZL repeatedly to delay the operation. There was also much debate about the time of day to set off the explosives and how much warning to give. Begin claims that Palmach chief Itzchak Sadeh persuaded the IZL to cut down the length of the time fuse from forty-five to thirty minutes (presumably to minimize the interval during which the British might rescue incriminating documents).[58]

A member of the Hagana high command allegedly claimed later that he had been summoned, together with Sneh, to face the wrath of Weizmann at his home at Rehovot, at 1:30 P.M., half an hour after the explosion. Weizmann ordered Sneh to deliver his resignation by 6:00 P.M. that evening, or else Weizmann himself would resign. When Sneh claimed that the operation had taken place without his permission, Weizmann did not believe him. Sneh's letter of resignation arrived in time, and he left the country for Paris, where he tried to persuade Ben-Gurion to continue the revolt. Ben-Gurion himself was stunned by the tragedy and didn't believe Sneh's professions of ignorance either.[59]

The success of the IZL in penetrating the nerve center of the mandatory in Palestine, and the great loss of life inflicted, even if inadvertently, produced a profound shock in Palestine itself and across the world. The high commissioner recommended to London the immediate suspension of all Jewish immigration pending a final

[56] Slutsky, *History of Hagana*, p. 896.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Begin, *Revolt*, p. 215; David Niv, *History of the Irgun Zwai Leumi* (in Hebrew), vol. 5, Tel Aviv, 1976; E. Oren, *Settlement amid Struggles, 1936-1947* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1978, p. 155, n. 4.

[59] U. Millstein, *By Blood and Fire Judea* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1974, p. 120. The Hagana member he interviewed was Joseph Yezre'eli.

political solution, and the sequestration of Jewish funds. He warned London that it was "essential that some immediate and striking action be taken to avoid Arabs taking law into their own hands and to maintain morale of British community and soldiers in Palestine."[60]

The tragedy was discussed by the cabinet twice, on July 23 and 25.[61] Hall suggested two alternatives: either large-scale arms searches with a view to breaking the Jewish resistance (admitting by implication the limited success of Operation Agatha), an action that would probably provoke a state of war in Palestine; or a final political solution which, since further negotiations with the Jews seemed impossible, might have to be imposed on them. Hall's proposals indicated quite clearly that the British never possessed sufficient will or ruthlessness to suppress the Yishuv, that from the beginning they had realized the limits of Agatha and, as is evident from the documents, that the only viable solution was a political one, reached in collaboration with the Americans.

In the cabinet on July 23, Attlee ruled out any large-scale arms searches. These would affect mainly the Hagana which, it seemed clear was not associated with the King David explosion. Lord Tedder, chief of the Air Staff was not convinced that arms searches would necessarily provoke war. In his view, even if the searches did drive the Hagana to armed rebellion, the military forces in Palestine, together with reinforcements already in the Middle East, would be able to deal with the situation. But Tedder was overruled in the cabinet, whose discussion took place during the final stages of further talks between British and American experts, talks that would shortly produce an Anglo-American plan for provincial autonomy in Palestine. Again, apprised of the progress of the talks, the cabinet was sanguine about an imminent agreement and had no wish to be rushed into drastic measures that might prejudice it. The cabinet did agree to publish a White Paper, using documents seized during Operation Agatha, to demonstrate to the world the Jewish Agency's complicity with the Hagana and the dissident movements.

On July 25, the cabinet ruled out two other proposals (both by Cunningham): to impose a collective fine of £500,000 on the Jews by freezing the assets of their construction funds; and to suspend immigration. It was feared that "the stoppage of immigration would

[60] Cunningham to Hall, July 24, 1946, Cunningham papers, box 1, file 1, MEC.
[61] Cab 128/6.

cause hardship to innocent people, and was hardly consistent with the announcement of a new policy in a few days that would include 100,000 immigrants in the near future." Field Marshal Montgomery, chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) from June 1946, requested permission to act against several large arms dumps whose whereabouts the army knew of. But the cabinet ruled out any action "which would arouse a pathological community, on the eve of a new policy." It did agree to the seizure of IZL arms dumps, while at the same time avoiding any action against the Hagana, or against the community as a whole.

The cabinet's discussions reflect again the fateful interplay between diplomacy and resistance. There can be no doubt that the dissidents' actions had placed the Yishuv and its armed forces in grave jeopardy. The King David affair caused tremendous political harm to the Zionists' cause. But ironically, it was the much-vilified Morrison-Grady plan, still in conception, that inhibited the cabinet and thus saved the Yishuv from punitive reprisals.

The King David affair also produced a wave of revulsion inside the Yishuv itself. It created a convenient atmosphere in which the Jewish Agency could dissociate itself from its current allies. But the holier-than-thou recriminations in which the agency and its press indulged contained more than a smattering of hypocrisy and opportunism. The Hagana asked the IZL to publish a communiqué stating that the explosion was its responsibility alone. The IZL held its silence about the Hagana role in the operation for more than a year. The Jewish Agency and the press it controlled joined in the British condemnation of the tragedy.[62]

For the Zionists, the net results of the joint resistance added up to failure. Far from coercing the British into a pro-Zionist policy, it had precipitated a British counterattack, which had struck a heavy blow at the Yishuv's morale and had culminated in an atrocity that had earned their cause universal opprobrium.

British Morale and Discipline in Palestine

Political restraints imposed from on high caused the army in Palestine deep frustration. All through the ranks there penetrated a feeling that the men were being set up as a target for Jewish terrorism and prevented from reacting in the manner in which they had been trained. Shortly after the King David affair, GOC General

[62] Niv, *History*, p. 278.

Barker issued a letter to his troops which, although internal, was intercepted and published by Hagana intelligence. With its frankly anti-Semitic overtones, the letter reflects the low state to which relations between the administration and the Yishuv had deteriorated:

> No British soldier is to have any social intercourse with any Jew and any intercourse in the way of duty should be as brief as possible and kept strictly to business in hand.
>
> I appreciate that these measures will inflict some hardship on the troops but I am certain that if my reasons are fully explained to them they will understand their propriety and will be punishing the Jews in a way the race dislikes as any by striking at their pockets and showing our contempt for them.[63]

At the very least, the document represents extreme shortsightedness. At a time when the British were still hoping to stay on in Palestine, Barker's orders helped transform British security forces into even more of a resentful and hated enemy occupation force. The universal publicity which the Zionists ensured the letter received helped counteract the damage done by the King David affair. When Anglo-Zionist conciliation talks began in October 1946, the removal of Barker was at the head of the Zionists' demands. He was removed shortly after, to be replaced in January 1947 by the last GOC Palestine, Lt. Gen. Sir Gordon MacMillan.

Yet General Barker's letter reflected faithfully the great pressures and strain imposed by the peculiar conditions of service pertaining in Palestine. An inside view is afforded by a lecture given soon after the King David affair by Lt. Col. Martin Charteris, chief of military intelligence in Palestine from September 1945 until September 1946.[64] The colonel's affinities with the Zionist cause possibly had something to do with his transfer from Palestine shortly after the King David affair, after a mere one year's service in the country.

According to Charteris, the attitude of the average soldier was conditioned not by politics, nor by imperialist ambition, but by more mundane issues, such as the date of his demobilization, the comfort in his camp, the long hours spent on guard patrol, and the "uncomfortable hours erecting barbed wire and even more

[63] Order of July 26, 1946, copy in WA.

[64] The lecture, entitled "A Year as an Intelligence Officer in Palestine," found its way into the Zionist Archives, S25/7697, CZA. Charteris became private secretary to the queen in 1972.

uncomfortable hours living behind it." The soldier was a "bird of passage" in Palestine, stationed there at a maximum for three years. In contrast to the Arabs and Zionists who would spend the rest of their lives there, or the civil servants who made it their career, the conscript saw Palestine largely as a "fatigue"—for him it was a question of waiting to go home; for the regulars, it was another job of imperial policing, which interfered unduly with the real job of soldiering.

Most soldiers, continued Charteris, arrived in Palestine pro-Zionists, the result of what they had seen of Jewish suffering in Europe. Since they were unpolitical, they had few preconceived ideas and few prejudices. But soon after arrival, they were overcome by bewilderment; they discovered that most of the people who lived in the country were "superintelligent" and could tie them in knots with their arguments, that the government and army were always wrong, and that the only point on which all were in agreement was in blaming him and his government for inefficiency, dishonesty, and self-interest. The result was growing irritation.

But, according to Charteris, the greatest impact on the soldier was that made by Jewish terrorism. The soldier was not in a position to evaluate the terrorists at their true worth. Because he spent so much of his time in activity that was directly or indirectly connected with it, terrorism filled his whole picture. From the military point of view, one of the hardest things about fighting the terrorists was that they looked the same as everyone else. They were hard to find, and therefore retaliatory actions inevitably caught up innocent people and their property. The net result was friction, irritation, and anger of the soldier against the civilian. The soldiers inevitably allocated the blame on a broader basis than was really justified by the facts and, concluded Charteris, it was not altogether surprising that sometimes they took matters into their own hands, which was later regretted by all, by the majority of soldiers as much as by anyone else.[65]

By 1946, the military command had become deeply concerned that the pent-up bitterness and frustration within the ranks would burst its banks in large-scale infringements of military discipline and wholesale private reprisals against the Yishuv (see Chapter Ten).

[65] Ibid.

Michael J. Cohen

PALESTINE AND THE GREAT POWERS

1945-1948

Princeton University Press

DS
126.4
.G45
G72



Copyright © 1982 by Princeton University Press
Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, Guildford, Surrey

All Rights Reserved
Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data will be
found on the last printed page of this book

This book has been composed in Linotron Palatino

Clothbound editions of Princeton University Press books
are printed on acid-free paper, and binding materials are
chosen for strength and durability

Printed in the United States of America by Princeton
University Press, Princeton, New Jersey

For Elissa, Ilan, and Natalie