

NAKBA

The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



Loading the Dice

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



Jewish forces in British uniform training in 1940

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



Orde Wingate

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

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



The citizens of Abu Ghosh pledge allegiance to the AHC.



Palestinians being searched by British troops.

Roots in Terrorism

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



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

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



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

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



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