

NAKBA

The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



The Partition Process Begins

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



Azzem Pasha, with the Grand Mufti in the background

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

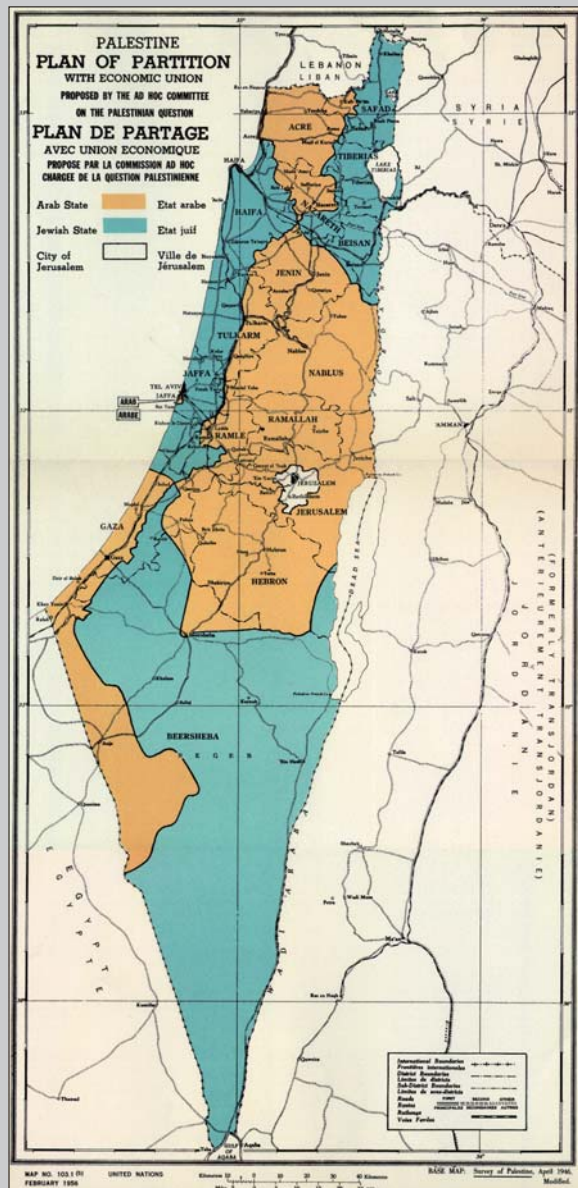


Members of the UNSCOP delegation

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

Extract from UN Resolution 181

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



In the words of Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi,

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

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