

## The First Truce

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

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

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



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

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

### The Soviet role during the first truce

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

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

## The Second Truce

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

### Arab-Israeli Armistice Agreements

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

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

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

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

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



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