The Irgun Zvai Leumi Under the Leadership of Menachem Begin

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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This paper discusses the volatile political scene of Palestine during the period of the 1940s. The role of Jewish politics and Jewish terrorism in the withdrawal of the British from Palestine are discussed as are the methods employed by the leading dissident group, the Irgun Zvai Leumi. The interaction between the British and the Jews as well as interaction between various Jewish organizations is also addressed. In this very violent and complex time, there was an unlikely leader, who had a dream for the Jewish people and he pursued that dream. That man was Menachem Begin and his influence in the Irgun and in the politics of the times is also examined.
For two thousand years, the Jewish people have been spread out to the four corners of the world. They were a people without a homeland. A people whose land, whose birth right has been taken away. For most of those two thousand years the Jews accepted their position calmly and patiently waiting for the Lord God to restore Eretz Israel, the "Land of Israel" to them. Some felt that this would never occur unless Jews intervened and took hold of their destiny. One such individual was Theordore Herzl, an author and a Viennese Jew, who after seeing Jews persecuted in the pogroms in Russia and the travesty of the Dreyfus Affair, wrote "The Jewish State" in 1896. In this work, Herzl argued that the Jews are one people and are thus entitled to a separate state (Gerner, 14). Herzl attended the First Zionist Congress in 1897 and felt that the creation of the Congress was the first major step towards the creation of a Jewish state. The "movement" gained momentum and under the prowess of Vladimir Jabotinsky, the British in 1917, established a homeland for the Jews in Palestine with the Balfour Declaration. There was a clause in the declaration that would hamper the creation of a Jewish state. That clause in the declaration stated that "... nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine..." The identical phrasing was used when the United Kingdom received the Mandate. The language of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate was very vague, it stated that "His majesty's government view with favour the establishment of a national homeland for the Jewish people " (Laquer, 18). This
vagueness brought many questions by Jew and Arab alike. What was meant by a homeland and doesn't the very presence of Jews on formerly Arab lands prejudice the Arab's civil and religious rights (Gerner, 17). This vagueness was the very beginning of a very vague British Mandate.

The inter-war period was a very volatile time for the Zionists. In Eretz Israel, there was a limiting of Jewish immigration and there were pogroms in the 20s in which hundreds of Jews were killed by mobbing Arabs. Many within the Zionist Organization felt that the British were giving too little protection to the Jews. As a result, a wave of militancy rose through the Zionist Organization causing a rift between the left and the right wing, known as the Revisionists. During this time, there were increasing numbers of Arab-Israeli clashes and it was during this time that several militant Revisionist organizations arose one of which being the Irgun Zvai Leumi. The Irgun Zvai Leumi or National Military Organization, was created by Jabotinsky who was unable to convince the Zionist leadership of the need for a Jewish army (Begin, 3). During the Arab revolts in the late 30s the Irgun felt that the only response to continued Arab violence was that of retaliation. As a result of the Arab violence, the Irgun began to gather arms, increase training and begin to take on some form of order. During this period, the British began to take action against the Irgun and the Irgun fought back. This action was viewed as the threat to the good of the Jewish whole and the Zionist Left began to look with disfavor upon Jabotinsky and the Irgun (Bell,
The situation worsened when the deteriorating situation in Germany and Eastern Europe led to an increased influx of Jews to Eretz Israel. This increasing number of Jews angered the Arabs and it led to further violence. The British attempted to study how peace cab come in the region and thus created the Peel Commission. The Peel Commission recommendation to partition the Mandate only worsened the situation and led to increased Arab violence. To attempt to curb the new violence, the MacDonald White Paper was drafted that concluded that the partition of Palestine was unworkable and that their would be a limit on Jewish immigration to 75,000 for five years (Gerner, 40). This in turn infuriated the Revisionist who see the immigration of other Jews into Israel as the only means of Jewish survival. The news of the 1938 White Paper caused anti-British sentiment among the Jews to increase and with that, bombings and shootings of British soldiers and police were almost commonplace.

With the outbreak of World War II, there was a dramatic change in the Irgun’s policy against the British. Jobotinsky felt that it would be mad to attack Hitler’s most capable enemy (Bell, 51). The quick early German victories in Eastern Europe cost the Irgun very much. Located in Poland was the Irgun branch in the Diaspora known as the Betar. With the loss of the Polish Betarim, the Irgun lost the support and funds from the most enthusiastic and militant segment of the Diaspora. These losses included the jailing of several of the Betar’s best commanders including the Menachem
Begin. Then another calamity befell the Irgun, Jabotinsky died. The Irgun seemed to have "... no mission in Palestine, the Irgun had no apparent purpose" (Bell, 53).

With seemingly no direction, some members of the Irgun joined the British Army to fight the apparently victorious Axis, but many more stayed in Eretz Israel to work on a very crucial matter, the immigration to Palestine of European Jewry. Jews attempted to enter Palestine aboard unsafe, unkept vessels aided by agents of the Zionist Organization. All risked their lives attempting the voyage but only a few managed to succeed in the quest. Many more like the individuals aboard the Atlantic were deported to other nations such as Mauritius or Cyprus. These individuals, according to the words of Lord High Commissioner MacMichael, "would never be permitted to return (Bell, 53).

After the death of Jobotinsky, the Irgun was under the leadership of Yaacov Meridor. Meridor did not take an aggressive position, he felt his was a caretaking responsibility. With the death of Jobotinsky, there was constant changing of the High Command of the Irgun. There were many difficulties. "There were sporadic distribution of pamphlets and boardsheets, and an occasional sporadic clandestine radio broadcast. Some arms were lifted from the British, but little could be hidden" (Bell, 56).

At the beginning of 1943, Meridor felt that it was time for action. However the prospect for a revolt seemed dim. The strength of the Irgun was eroded, there was few arms, few safe houses, little equipment and even less money. Meridor decided to try one
spectacular operation. He intended to kidnap the High Commissioner of the Mandate, the senior British official in the area. He felt this would not harm the war effort yet, it would punish the British for the closing of the gates of Eretz Israel. The news of the treatment of the European Jewry was fortifying the will of the Irgun to open the gates of Palestine. Macmichael would be kidnapped and be "deported" to Cyprus. The aim was to humiliate the British and to shed light and bring to the world's attention the cruelty of the closed gates. However, the plan like so many other Irgun plans and expectations faded. Bell stated that, "He [Meridor] approached Menachem Begin and suggested that he had done all he could and that the Irgun needed a new commander... a new direction and a new man were needed."

Menachem Begin did not appear like your stereotypical underground leader. He was not a gunman, he was not a hardened fugitive he was not physically large and was described in the British Jewish Terrorist Index as having "a long hooked nose, bad teeth, and large horned spectacles." Bell described him as," far from handsome, slender, immaculately dressed, with impeccable manners... he resembled a small town lawyer." He was a great orator and a logical man. His contacts were limited to his wife and a few members of the high command of the Irgun, but his influence spread throughout the organization.

Begin's Irgun had much to be desired. The membership was eroded by years of inactivity. Many left and joined the British to fight the Nazis. Even with the rumors of action when Begin took
over in December of 1943, there were only six hundred activists left. The stores of arms and explosives were gone - lost, stolen or forgotten- leaving a grand total of four sub machine guns, thirty rifles, and sixty pistols, and less than a ton of explosives, no decent printing materials, no radio, no communications, and no money (Bell, 107). The Irgun didn't have the primary ingredients for revolt, what they did have was a core of dedicated and competent men.

In January 1944, members were getting tired of inactivity and decided to carry out an Irgun attack and mine some government cars. The police arrived and captured one of the men and sentenced him to ten years. Begin could sense the urgency for action and thus, he decided the time was right to issue "The Proclamation of Revolt." The Proclamation stated the political demands of the Jewish people. The proclamation stated:

"There is no longer any armistice between the Jewish people and the British Administration in Eretz Israel which hands our brothers over to Hitler. Our people is at a state of war with this regime - war to the end.

"This war will demand many and heavy sacrifices, but we enter on it in the consciousness that we are being faithful to the children of our people who have been and are being slaughtered. It is for their sake that we fight, to their dying testimony that we remain loyal."

"This is our demand: Immediate transfer of power in Eretz Israel to a Provisional Hebrew Government."
"We shall fight, every Jew in the Homeland will fight. The God of Israel, the Lord of Hosts, will aid us. There will be no retreat. Freedom - or death.

"Build a protecting wall around your fighting youth. Do not forsake them..."

"The fighting youth will not flinch from tribulation and sacrifice, from blood and suffering. They will not surrender until they have renewed our days of old, until they have ensured for our people a Homeland, freedom, honour, bread and justice. And if you will give them your aid you will see in our days the Return to Zion and the Restoration of Israel" (Begin, 243).

The Proclamation's message was clear, it was intended to declare the Irgun's goal which Begin labeled as the goal of the Jewish people. It was also declared to garner support of the Yishuv, or the Jewish people in Eretz Israel. For without the support of the people, it would be next to impossible to organize and carry out underground actions. Begin wanted the people to know that there would be sacrifices made not only by the Irgun, but by the Yishuv as well. This was to be expected. Some sacrifice was to be made, however the reward for the sacrifice, the creation of a Jewish state was well worthy of their sacrifice.

The reaction of the British was the same as the reaction of most of the masses. A leading anti-underground constable J.T. Wilken announced to his employers, "There's nothing to worry about" (Begin, 45). Initially he seemed correct. The Irgun began with small scale bombings. They bombed the Immigration Departments
in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem. The bombings increased in intensity and by the end of the year, the arrogant constable Wilken was killed by the underground.

The struggle was not all military in nature, to a large extent the struggle depended on political pressure as well. As the struggle moved forward, the Irgun developed strategies in this area based on: a comprehensive study of the methods used by oppressor administrations in foreign countries, on an objective study of the international situation, and the examination of the position and the condition of Great Britain at the end of World War II (Bell, 72).

The British have vast experience in ruling over foreign and often times backward people. After study, the Irgun found out that the British avoid making their rule dependent on force, but rather on the power of prestige. When British administrators are faced with violent opposition they tend to find a way out by foregoing direct British rule with indirect British rule "History and our observation have persuaded us that if we could succeed in destroying the government’s prestige in Eretz Israel, the removal of its rule would follow automatically. ...We[Irgun] hit at the British Governments prestige, deliberately, tirelessly, unceasingly" (Begin, 52).

During the struggle all attacks were a success even if they were a failure. The Irgun learned from their failure and even if the attacks were not a military success, they were a political success because of the damage that the battles inflicted on the
prestige of the British. The Irgun gained something valuable as well from the losses. The Irgun always told the truth after an attack (Bell, 120). This policy of honesty, no matter how bad the news built a feeling of trust among the Yishuv that helped the image of the Irgun as honorable freedom fighters immensely.

The struggle of the Irgun was the most publicized partisan struggle in the world (Begin, 56). The reports screamed across the world headlines whether the battles were successful or not. Each of them brought the struggle into the public eye, especially the eye of the United States. The increase of media attention also increased the protection for the Yishuv for the British wouldn’t risk the condemnation of the world community and especially the United States for killing members of an ethnic group that has just been victims of a genocide.

After the Second World War, there was an upheaval in the world’s political picture. World powers became weak, armies and navies were dispersed, and the world came to be dominated by two huge superpowers. In this picture Britain fell in the awkward position of being situated very close to the enemy in the east and also facing a huge deficit in the budget to which the Mandate was only adding to. The British could not maintain or afford to secure the Mandate. After the exhausting war, Britain was low on resources and when the attacks began, it seemed more and more in Britain’s self-interest to withdraw.

The Irgun did not carry out operations against individuals except in rare cases (Begin, 95). The battle tactics were based on
the idea of maximum exploitation of surprise and the employment of small forces for a big effect. The Attack Force of the Irgun typically blasted a path with explosives, and blew up their objective while being covered by machine gun cover. The Attack Force (A.F.) attacked every day of the week except for the Sabbath (Begin, 52). It was for this reason that the "nervous" British troops looked forward to the Sabbath rather than Sunday. Begin stated, "We too were believers. We believed in the Almighty, we believed in our mission and in the justice of our cause. And though we knew that our struggle was obligatory and so permissible on the Sabbath, we generally gave our arms respite on that day."

The informing and the support of the Yishuv was very important to the struggle. The Irgun distributed an unending stream of Irgun proclamations, posters, and position papers as to inform the Jews what the revolt was, why it was taken, and what its results would be. Begin communicated with his people and with the entire mandate from the pages of the Herut. He himself produced this one man newspaper (Bell, 118). Even more effective was the clandestine radio. The Irgun broadcasted from different positions for six minutes at a time to avoid British monitoring and location.

The Irgun and the other major separatist group the LEHI or Stern Gang were going against the consensus of the Haganah or the Zionist left. The Haganah felt that the creation of the state would come about through negotiation and through peaceful methods. They felt that violence against the British would only delay the leaving of the British and would only anger them further, thus injuring the
Yishuv. The Haganah felt that the actions of the separatist had gone far enough and in November 1943, during the sixth Histadrut convention, approved by the Haganah leadership and supported by David Ben Gurion, activated the four part motion: expulsion of members of the separatist groups from employment, denial to them of shelter and refuge, no submission to threats and extortion, and most importantly cooperation with the British to wipe out the terror (Bell, 127). Some extreme leftist such as Pinchas Lubianiker felt, "By fair means or foul we must fight this thing[Irgun] as one united body" (Pedazur, 3). The Zionist Jewish Agency, the "official" Jewish governing body, was anything but united. Some opposed the persecution of the Irgun, some opposed the cooperation with the British, but many went along with Ben Gurion and the majority in the persecution of the Irgun who were not just a terrorist organization but the political opponents of Ben Gurion and his majority as well (Bell, 127).

During the action against the Irgun, which was referred to as The Season, one thousand Irgun suspects were handed over to the British. The Haganah was also interrogating the suspects often times, torturing them. Many lost their homes, their jobs and their freedom. The Haganah commander Eliyahu Golomb stated that "The organized Yishuv has brought terrorist activity to a standstill" (Pedazur, 25). Golomb was very much correct. However the Haganah did not understand why the Irgun was not retaliating for the kidnapings, the beatings, and the torture. The Season created an absolute crisis in the Irgun. The British were getting lists of
hundreds of suspects per day. The British broke into arms dumps, broke into safe houses. The situation was looking bleaker and bleaker for the Irgun. The obvious step would seem to be to retaliate however, Menachem Begin had other ideas.

Begin stated in his book that two factors saved the people from civil war: One was the fact that the Irgun taught its members not to hate their political opponents, and the second factor being that the Irgun fought for the establishment of Jewish rule, not Irgun rule.

Begin also noted the pragmatic logic of not attacking the Haganah. "A policy of retaliation would inevitably lead to gunbattles in the street ... and could have had only one victor -- the British. Given time the Haganah would surely have won an extended underground war" (Bell, 134). Begin hoped that with luck The Season would end soon. Begin hoped that the events of The Season, would be distasteful to the Yishuv; making the Haganah seem to be collaborators in their own country. In the mean time, the Irgun would go deeper into hiding. The Season continued for months. The months of coercion did have some positive outcomes for the Irgun. The Season, strengthened the Irgun and created support where there had been none before. The Irgun attracted the sympathy and understanding of many who abhorred their politics and who doubted their sanity. Begin had crossed a very painful road for the Irgun but he had avoided what he felt would be the downfall of the Jewish people, a civil war.

With the growing support of the Yishuv, there also came a
growing body of young men who wished to aid in the revolt. Many people wished to join the Irgun for a variety of reasons, some of which were not acceptable to the Irgun. The process of induction into the Irgun was very difficult. A candidate had to make contact with a member and then was interviewed by a three member committee. The committee asked the candidate a variety of questions but focused primarily on his ideological awareness. Who are the Jews? What is the revolt? What's in stake in Palestine? The committee eliminated anyone who hesitated when it came to questions that involved sacrifice, expulsion and even death. Once the selection was made, the individual went through four months of training where they learned the ways of the underground. They later recognized safe houses and later learned weapons training in the desert. In the early part of the struggle where there were limited weapons the individuals learned the art of explosives (Bell, 108). Many were disappointed that they were not armed but rather were assigned to posting up the Herut. Granted this was not a glorious assignment, yet this was a very important task that could result in imprisonment or a bullet in the back. The posting of literature was just as important as blowing up a building.

At this point in time, the Irgun also did not have need for many men to blow up buildings at this point for two reasons. One, there simply were not enough weapons to arm the entirety of the Irgun. The Irgun was actively robbing establishments for capital and the some of its favorite targets have been British armories. The second reason is that the Irgun was what Begin called a small
group of efficient "idealists." Due to the small size of the Mandate there were risks in having a large organization. Because of its small size, the Irgun could move very freely. There were also other benefits to a small organization: A small size decreased the risk of arrests and the loss of arms, men from a small organization could be replaced with an increase in efficiency, and in a large organization it would be difficult to maintain the high level of efficiency. The Irgun was a small body of loyalists (Bell, 112). They added to their efficiency, passion and often times that was all that was needed to accomplish a mission.

The Irgun operated in a land that offered them very little protection as Begin stated, "We were completely visible to the enemy’s eyes... we saw but were unseen. We naturally had a variety of names, we used a selection of identity documents... but we were never in bunkers, we carried no arms for our defence. We were teachers and students real or imaginary...merchants or bookkeepers..indistinguishable from other citizens. The police came across our people time out of number.... But what could they find on them, they carried no arms. They carried work tools or documents of the firm employing them. Who would suspect peaceful citizens going to work or coming home (Begin, 105-106)?" This policy of an "open underground" was as effective as any daring Irgun operation. The policy of not carrying weapons spared the lives of many Irgunists and saved the arms as well. It is with this policy of blending into the populace that the Irgun retained its people and did not need a large number of highly active members. This remained
true until the numbers of the Irgun swelled in 1948 out of necessity.

With the failure of The Season, the British lost their best opportunity to stamp out the Irgun. Now that the war was over, the world began to look closer at the actions of imperialist Britain. The actions of the British remained to maintain law and order in the Mandate and wait for instructions from London. None were to come until after the election.

The Jewish Agency waited very anxiously for the election of 1945. Churchill being victorious in the war felt that his party would be rewarded at the polls, he was quite wrong. In a shocking upset, the Labour party with Clement Attlee as prime minister and Ernest Bevin as foreign secretary won. The Zionists were very exited and optimism ran high. Now that the government of Churchill was out, the Jewish Agency felt the feelings of imperialism and the support of the Arabs were soon to follow. Most agreed with the statement of the Zionist paper David that stated, "The victory of the Labour party ... is a clear victory for the demand of the Zionists" (Pedazur, 34). Most felt that statehood was very close with the installation of the more liberal Attlee government. The Yishuv were so certain of good things to come that even the Irgun stopped operations for two weeks to permit the British an opportunity to produce a satisfactory initiative.

The initiative did not come. The new government was facing many economic problems at home, they were facing a potential new enemy. The British could not afford to disrupt the British position
with the Arab nations. This position was key to British economic interests. The alienation of the Arabs would hurt the already shaky British economy and that was more important than the Zionist demands.

As a result of British prioritizing, pre-election promises of a new state went unanswered and the Zionists in London found themselves facing many closed doors. On August 25, 1945 the Colonial Office announced to the Zionists that immigrant quotas would not be lifted. This caused the embitterment of most of the Zionists and created the stage of a strange union.

Bevin seemed immune to persuasion and thus, many within the Haganah urged for a policy of pressure, as signal to Bevin. Herut stated that 25 men from the Palmach, the military arm of the Haganah, resigned to join the Irgun (Bell, 142). Action was needed and a truce, between the Haganah and the Irgun, was called. The Haganah felt that now was the time for action. A unified fighting force was suggested. Begin agreed to join the men that persecuted him only a short time earlier. He however doubted the stamina of the Haganah and suggested that rather than a meshing of all men and resources, there be a strategic command set up in which the Agency had veto powers over all operations except operations for funds. The units were to be separate yet work together (Begin, 187). This plan was acceptable to the Haganah, the Irgun and the LEHI or the Stern Group. Thus the Tenuat Hameri, the United Resistance Movement was created.

The movement was plagued with poor coordination, yet the
addition of the Haganah manpower and firepower caused an acceleration of bombings. The British began to feel the massive bombings on railways, bridges, government buildings, and police stations. The British Colonial Secretary issued a warning that if this "wanton resort to force...is not stopped... further steps we had in mind in our endeavor to settle this difficult problem will be brought to nought (Parliament Papers, 4)." Two weeks after this statement the violence continued and the British began sending more units to Palestine, Lt. General Alan Cunningham replaced the more moderate Field Marshal Viscount Gort as High Commissioner, Britain was poised to punish the Jews. British troop levels rose to 80,000, and there were thousands of other police units. The ratio of British security forces to Jewish population rose to one to five (Bell, 153). The Mandate took on the appearance of a fortress. The land was covered with barbed wire and blocks of check points.

On the morning of June 29, 1946 the British were out to defeat Jewish terrorism. Tens of thousands of soldiers fanned across the countryside, imposed a curfew, and led thousands away. The building of the Jewish Agency was occupied. The results of these searches was devastating to the Palmach. Over half were jailed, many prominent members of the Haganah were detained and numerous arms were confiscated in the effort. The blow was tremendous. (Begin, 205-207). After long discussions the Haganah felt it could not afford to continue in the movement. After the public Haganah institution denouncing terrorism, the V.I.Ps within the Haganah
were released. For the Haganah, the struggle was suspended.

The offensive of the British against the Haganah did not only suspend the action of the Haganah, it also created another by-product, this was the most infamous terrorist attack of the entire revolt - the King David Hotel bombing.

During the Mandate, the King David Hotel in Jerusalem was used to house the major military and civil institutions of the British. This was the heart of the British command and was a veritable fortress in Eretz Israel.

During the Spring of 1946, the Irgun had began making plans for the attack on the structure but, the Haganah command said that the plan was too ambitious and that the time was not right for an attack that would excessively inflame the British. The Irgun opposed the Haganah position but adhered to the agreement of the United Resistance Movement.

The plans for the attack were pending until the British offensive on June 29. After the offensive, the situation changed somewhat and the attack not only seemed correct, it also became necessary and the position of the Haganah changed completely.

The Irgun commenced with the attack for what they felt were three very important reasons. One reason is the fact that the Irgun supported the notion of "the scope of the reprisal is equal to the magnitude of the attack" (Begin, 214). The British attacked and occupied the Offices of the Jewish Agency. The Jewish Agency was regarded as the Jewish headquarters so the equal British counterpart was the King David Hotel. The second reason was that
the Yishuv began to doubt the ability of the resistance in fighting the British. The resistance recognized the danger of defeatism and felt that something was to be done to reassure the masses that the revolt could be won. The third and most important reason was the fact that the Haganah had become used to its semi-legal status and thus it didn’t take steps to secure its documents thinking that it had a certain amount of immunity. As a result of this oversight, the British had acquired many secret Haganah documents from the building. Many of these documents were very incriminating to the resistance effort as well as to very senior Haganah individuals. An example of the severity was a speech which corroborated Jewish Agency responsibility for various sabotage operations carried out by the Haganah which was contrary to what Ben Gurion had said before the Anglo-American Commission only a few months ago (Begin, 215). As could be expected, the Haganah leadership was very eager to destroy these very damaging documents and the Irgun attack on the hotel seemed like the perfect vehicle to accomplish this.

The bombing was carefully planned out and it was decided to place the explosives in milk cans in the basement of the hotel. Next, the leadership argued about how much time to give as a warning. The time was crucial for the Irgun wanted enough time to allow the people in the hotel to escape, yet they didn’t want to give the British enough time to remove the incriminating documents from the building. After much debate, the time decided upon was half an hour (Begin, 216). The operatives placed the explosives and fled. As soon as the operatives were safe, the Irgun called in the
warning to the hotel. In addition to calling in the warning to the hotel, the Irgun also called the Palestine Post and they also warned the French Consulate, due to its close proximity to the hotel, to open its windows, to avoid damage from the blast. A half an hour had passed and a tremendous explosion rocked Jerusalem. The military wing of the hotel was in ruins. The explosion was extremely effective. However, for some reason, the building was not evacuated and as a result more than 200 people, both British and others, were killed or injured. The bombing shocked the world and the Irgun were labeled as murderers.

The reaction was very severe. The British insisted that no warning had been given and that this act was a deliberate act of terror. The Haganah and the Yishuv didn't want to accept the blame. They stated the Irgun was guilty of "treason and murder." The Davar stated that there was "no reason and no atonement." In Paris, David Ben-Gurion stated that "The Irgun are the enemy of the Jewish people." The Haganah wanted their involvement buried and the Irgun understood the hint.

After the bombing the curfews began and continued for two weeks. The house to house searches began and Gen. Barker stated that "I am determined that they should be punished and made aware of our feelings of contempt and disgust at their behavior ... I understand that these measures will create difficulties for the troops, but I am certain that if my reasonings are explained to them, they will understand their duty and will punish the Jews in the manner this race dislikes the most: by hitting them in the
pocket, which will demonstrate our disgust for them (Kimche, 42)."

The Irgun received a copy of Barker's order and within a week they had plastered this anti-Semitic statement all over Eretz Israel. The combination of the indiscriminate searches and the anti-Semitic statements of the British leadership caused the Yishuv to shift their anger from the Irgun to the British, who were making their lives unbearable.

In the autumn of 1946, the Irgun began operations in Europe. The Irgun began training and planning in areas with heavy detainees, Jews who were denied visas to Eretz Israel. The heaviest concentrations of detainees was in southern France and in southern Italy. Due to an agreement with some sympathetic French officials, who were accommodating to the revolt, the Irgun agreed not to carry out operations on French soil. As a result, the other practical point of attack was southern Italy, primarily Rome. With the help from detainees from Poland, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, the Irgun painted a swastika on the British consulate and later bombed the British embassy (Bell, 180). The Irgun later claimed responsibility and the British press had a field day. The press viewed the Irgun as a real threat to the British people in Britain. Headlines across the Island read, "Irgun Threatens London." The British felt that the Irgun had planned to assassinate various officials who had served in Palestine and they intended to blow up various government buildings (Bell, 181). In actuality, the Irgun had next to no operatives in Britain. However due to the bombing, the Palestine problem became more urgent and visible for the
British people. Pressure grew on the government out of the fear that the Irgun was poised to attack London. This was a great gift for the revolt, because all this fear and pressure arose at no cost to the Irgun.

Soon after the attack on the embassy, the Irgun carried out an operation in Eretz Israel in which two Irgun members were captured by the British for carrying weapons, and were sentenced to eighteen years in prison and eighteen lashes. Begin was outraged and said, "Was an oppressor now to whip us in our own country? Would the rebels of our generation, ready and willing to sacrifice their lives for the liberation of their people, tolerate this humiliation?" Begin wrote the Irgun response himself stating that the punishment of the British is against "soldiers' honour" and that "if put into effect - every[British] officer will be liable to be punished in the very same way: to get 18 whips." This declaration was pasted all over Eretz Israel. This statement was consistent with the policies of reciprocating actions in kind of the Irgun. The British decided to call the bluff of the Irgun. Both men were indeed whipped. As they had promised, the Irgun captured two British officers and gave them eighteen thrashes each. The Irgun responses humiliated the British in the world's eyes, as a result, the whip was never used again in the Mandate (Bell, 185).

The winter of 1946-47 was a very trying period for the British economy. The Empire was teetering and six years of war and two of peace had taken their toll on the budget. It seemed that throughout the Empire, uprisings were brewing. During the winter, the worst
storms in memory raged through the country, imports were down and factories began to shut down, due to lack of power. Unemployment was rampant and the nation had an agenda full of imminent and important decisions, in a cold and exhausted nation, the shaken Cabinet felt that now was the time to give up on the boggled mess that is Palestine. On February 14, the British announced that they were turning over the Mandate to the United Nations in September. Four days later in a speech to the Commons, Nevin said, "For the Jews, the essential point of principle is the creation of a sovereign Jewish State. For the Arabs the essential point of principle is to resist to the last the establishment of Jewish sovereignty in any part of Palestine... There is no prospect of resolving this conflict by any settlement between the parties." The British could not afford to alienated the United States and the rest of the world on one hand, or the Arabs on the other. What's more is that the British no longer had the resources to impose a decision no matter what the decision may be. So as a result, Britain had little option but to leave the burden up to the United Nations (Bell, 188).

The Irgun did not believe that the British were going to leave. They asked why would they still be recruiting for the police? Why were military operations being expanded? The British Colonial Secretary stated to Commons that "we are not going to surrender the mandate to the United Nations." This was all the proof the Irgun needed. Begin knew that the British would delay their departure as to strengthen the Arabs in arms and in tactics.
The British stay in Eretz Israel had to terminated as soon as possible (Begin, 325).

The situation in Palestine went from bad to worse. The British condemned four Irgun men that were captured after being injured during an operation. The men were to be hanged as terrorists. The sentencing of these men prompted the Irgun to state that if these four men are to be hanged, so too shall British soldiers meet the same fate. This was another ultimatum that received world attention and thus pressure as well. The British balked and issued a stay, to the uproar of the British administration in London. The world saw that the British gave in again to the terrorists. Feeling humiliated, General Barker issued his final order before leaving his position as High Commissioner in Palestine. That order was to hang the men immediately. The Irgun issued its response to the hangings, by stating, "In the future, every combatant unit of Irgun will be accompanied by a war court of the Jewish Underground Movement. Every enemy subject will immediately be brought before the court. He will be tried for entering illegally into Palestine, for illegal possession of arms and their use against civilians, for murder, oppression and exploitation; there will be no appeal against the decision of the people's court. Those condemned will be hanged or shot (Gitlin, 98)." As a result of this the British confined troops to barracks and with good reason, for the Irgun were trying to locate some personnel to hold hostage. They did locate two men, however they managed to escape. The Irgun next kidnapped M.M. Collins, a sales manager. The Irgun drove him out to
a grove and prepared a noose. He begged for mercy and stated that he was a British Jew. They asked for proof and the only thing he could think of was that he was circumcised. This didn’t satisfy the men. As they were fitting the noose around his neck, he began to sing children’s prayers and the prayers of lament for the dead in Hebrew. This satisfied the men. They knew Begin’s orders no to kill other Jews so, Collins was driven back to the city and released. The search went on (Bell, 202).

The attention was diverted from the kidnappings for the moment as there was news of a weakness in the Acre Prison. The Acre prison was an old Crusader fortress that the British used to house the "political" prisoners. The Irgun had hundreds of men there and when the opportunity presented itself the Irgun jumped on it. On May 4, 1947, the Irgun performed what the New York Herald Tribune referred to as a perfectly executed dangerous mission. The world was at awe at the bravery of the Irgun and the British were outraged. The jailbreak released 120 Jews some LEHI but most of them were Irgun (Begin, 299). The operation was successful, but not without cost. Five men were captured.

Shortly after the Acre breakout, the United Nations felt that it did not have enough information on the situation in Palestine. As a result, it created UNSCOP, United Nations Special Committee on Palestine. The committee consisted of a collection of pro-Zionist as well as pro-Arabs supporter. It was headed by Emil Sandstrom of Sweden and it also included the director-general of the Trusteeship Council, Dr. Ralph Bunche. Few people believed that the
Committee would accomplish anything. The Jews felt it was a British stalling tactic, and the Arabs had their doubts about the British and placed little faith in the international intervention process.

Shortly before the arrival of UNSCOP, the Irgun returned to the task at hand and kidnapped two British policemen and a war clerk. The Irgun knew that the five prisoners from the Acre breakout would soon be tried and condemned. The Irgun felt it must maintain the advantage and take the initiative.

The UNSCOP arrived in Palestine just as the trial for the men was concluding. The five men were found guilty of several capital charges. Three were condemned and two were given fifteen years due to their youth. Upon hearing their sentences, the accused broke out in song. They and the people watching all began to sing Hatikvah, the mournful anthem of Zionism. The conditions in Palestine upset the UNSCOP observers. The land was full of roadblocks and barricades, patrols, and barbed wire. This was the way that the British maintained order and the observers were shocked. They were also those among the observers who felt that the men that were convicted were dedicated patriots rather than common felons as the British would like them to believe (Bell, 224). Begin felt that the Irgun position could only be explained effectively if there was a face to face meeting with the UNSCOP Committee members and himself and some other leaders of the Irgun. Through the intersession of Carter Davidson, and Samuel Katz, Begin met with Sandstrom, Bunche and his aid. Both men had an open mind and were sympathetic to the Jewish cause. As the men were leaving the meeting site, Bunche
turned to Begin and said, "I can understand you. I am also a member of a persecuted minority (Katz, 160)." The Irgun was cautiously optimistic about the meetings. With the Irgun, words carry no weight, it is action that gets things accomplished.

The attention of the world again focused on the question if the men involved in the Acre prison break would indeed be hanged. The British knew they were in an awkward position. They knew the Irgun position of equal reprisal and thus they faced the grim choice of either giving in to blackmail or risking the lives of the two sergeants that the Irgun was holding hostage. The British decided they must let justice and the preservation of British rule triumph. They executed the five men on July 29. Upon hearing of the hangings, Begin was urged to respond quickly. He knew he must hang the two men, but the question was how. The British soon put up roadblocks and waited for any possible Irgun move with anticipation. The Irgun high command stressed that failure to act would result in the dimming of Irgun prestige (Bell, 237). Begin then approved a daring plan to execute the men and then remove their bodies and then leave them in an orange grove. The plan was successful.

Upon hearing of the deaths of the two soldiers, Britain was in an uproar. There were anti-semitic protests in the streets, headlines that urged for reprisals, and various acts of vandalism against Jewish property. The violence did not stop in Britain. It also occurred in Palestine. There were cases of shootings of buses and cars, some occurring while the men were still in British
uniforms (Bell, 238). The initial reaction of the news was anger but as that faded the feeling that the British should pull out began to gain support. The Manchester Guardian ran an article stating that it was "Time to Go". The news from the mandate was always bad. It was costing the treasury money that it could not afford, and the general feeling was that the men were dying for nothing. Britain felt it was time to hand the quagmire over to the United Nations.

The UNSCOP also witnessed another act of violence. There have constantly been attempts by Jews to smuggle other Jews into Eretz Israel. Perhaps no single case had drawn so much attention as the case of the Exodus. The Exodus was an old ship purchased by the Haganah for the use of bringing Jewish immigrants into Eretz Israel. After some quick maneuvers and some quick loading the Exodus left France. The ship had a total of 4,554 refugees (Gruber, 18). The ship broke through the British blockade and was twenty miles off the coast of Palestine, well in international waters, when a British destroyer came alongside the vessel and attempted to board her. Another destroyer arrived and it began to ram the stern of the Exodus. The rammings continued as well as the lobbing of tear gas into the vessel. After the gas, then came the boarding. The British sailors boarded the ship while the Jews fought with whatever they could find (Bell, 231). The result was one dead, five seriously wounded, and 120 injured (Gruber, 18). There was outrage in Eretz Israel upon hearing the news, general strikes occurred in several cities and many marches took place, but
nothing could prevent the transfer of the illegal immigrants from the Exodus onto three British vessel for the journey to the detention camps in Cypress. These refugees would join the 10,000 Jews already detained there. The scene of the British herding these Jews through the gangways onto the other ships was not an attractive mission for the British. The action drew much world attention and the exercise was witnessed personally by Justice Sandstrom who was watching form behind the rolls of barbed wire. He was learning quite a lesson (Bell, 232).

The general economic situation in Britain was worsening. Atlee was declaring a new "Battle of Britain" a battle on the worsening economy. In this new plan, the large contingency of forces in Palestine would have to be reduced. Thus, it was very interesting when the UNSCOP recommendation came out on the deadline of August 31, 1947.

The UNSCOP agreed in essence to partition the land into two states with economic union. There were differences among the delegates concerning the size and the conditions of the territories. Bell states, that "the majority proposed a Jewish territory to include eastern Galilee, the central coastal plain, and the Negev Desert. The Arabs would have western Galilee, central Palestine, and the coastal plain. The Jerusalem - Bethlehem area would be an international zone. There would be two year probationary period, and Jewish immigration would continue at a monthly rate of 6,250 in the first two years and 5,000 after that."

The Irgun and the Arabs were both not happy with the
recommendation, the Irgun and the Arabs each want all of Palestine and opposed a partition.

On September 23, the Colonial Secretary stated to the General Assembly that Britain would not agree to a partition (Bell, 243). This meant only one thing to Begin, that the British would continue to seal off the Mandate so that their Arab allies could invade Eretz Israel and improve their military position (Begin, 333). The Irgun felt that the naive Jewish Agency would once again sell out Eretz Israel for empty promises. As the vote on Palestine neared, less attention was paid to the Irgun. Many felt that their extreme actions and their immovable position of no land concessions would hamper the diplomatic solution to the problem. Many people felt that the Irgun was out of the mainstream and thus did not represent the Jewish people.

During the debates over the Palestine issue, Britain seemed to oppose partition. "They offered no alternatives, and would implement nothing unacceptable to both Arabs and Jews; in effect, they would implement nothing.... Those who suspected that Britain had shifted all but openly to the Arab side had ample evidence... Those who suspected that Britain intended to stay no matter what happened had ample evidence too. (Bell, 247)"

As the various subcommittees tried to create a solution that would be agreeable to two-thirds of the General Assembly, the size of the Jewish state was reduced by 500 square miles, with the removal of Jaffa and the Negev, and it was understood that the British would decide when the mandate was to end. On November 29
1947, the partition subcommittee resolution was put up to a vote before the General Assembly. By a vote of 33 yes, 13 no, and 10 abstentions, a new Jewish state was created (Bell, 249). Upon hearing the news, there was much jubilation amongst the Jews. Their dream had become a reality. Amongst the festivities, there were some unhappy groups most importantly were the Arabs and the Irgun.

Jamal Husseini who represented the Palestinian Arabs summed up Arab feelings when he warned that partition would mean war. The Arabs would not stand for this injustice (Bell, 250). Amir Arslan of Syria stated "Let the consequences be on the heads of others, not on ours" (Official Record of the Second Session of the General Assembly, 1425). The Arabs were preparing for war.

The Irgun was very much against the partition. In a statement the Irgun stated, "The Partition of the Homeland is illegal. The signature by institutions and individuals of the partition agreement is invalid. It will not bind the Jewish people. Jerusalem was and will for ever be our capital. Eretz Israel will be restored to the people of Israel. All of it. And for ever" (Begin, 335).

Begin also stressed that the partition gives the Arabs time and land to improve their position and that this is no time for rejoicing, it is time to prepare for war, a war for the very lives of the people of Israel.

This was a correct prediction by the Irgun for shortly after the vote, Arabs began to fire of Jewish buses, the killing had begun. The Mandate fell into disorder. As the violence escalated and more and more Jews began to die, "the British simply stood by
and observed, having no intention of risking further lives to monitor Arabs or defend Jews... The Jewish/Arab edges of the major cities became battlegrounds. The roads were unsafe. The isolated kibbutzim came under siege" (Bell, 255).

During the violence, London finally gave High Commissioner Cunningham a firm policy in the area. He was to keep out of the conflict. He was to "have nothing to do with the Partition in any way, shape, or form ... Just go out and govern the country" (Collins and Lapierre, 84).

This supposed neutrality was anything but that, the British were directing the Arab legions that were attacking the Jews. The British still turned away immigrants, the settlements being attacked were still prohibited by British law from possessing arms, and the British were still building bases well into December (Bell, 256). This stance not only favored the Arabs, it also could in theory allow the British to stay in Palestine indefinitely.

The Irgun not only maintained its attacks on the British, it also extended the revolt against the attacking Arabs. This meant that the Irgun would have to transform from a strictly underground force to a conventional army. This was a very difficult task for there was a gross lack of arms. In the fight against the British a vast armory was not crucial, but against the regular and irregular armies of the Arabs, weapons would be precious. As a result, the Irgun increased efforts to acquire arms. One method employed was to increase their own production methods and the other was a daring one in which the Irgun came out into the open and asked the public
to contribute to the Irgun’s "Iron Fund" (Begin, 340). This was a
dangerous step indeed but the situation was grim. The proposed date
of May 15, the date in which the British would pull out of
Palestine, was approaching quickly and if the Jews were not prepared
to assume the frontier posts, they would be destroyed. The response
was great, much to the surprise of the Jewish Agency.

The High Command was optimistic about the abilities of the
Irgun fighters. However, they felt that with only seven hundred
armed troops, they could only maintain two areas of combat: Jaffa
and the Ramele-Lydda Arab sector of Jerusalem that strangled the
ancient city from the north. The Irgun knew they could only sustain
small raids but they must act. The primary focus of the Irgun was
to "enlarge, train, and equip a more orthodox army as fast as
possible" (Bell, 257).

The Irgun who felt that action was needed and that Ben Gurion
was too reliant on the generosity of the U.N. began to increase its
offensive operations. With the actions came Arab reprisals, and
with these came the Irgun call to unite all fighters and to create
a provisional government. Some within the Jewish Agency agreed with
this yet, very few in the Agency leadership wished to align
themselves with the dissidents. Ben Gurion did not trust the Irgun
and did not support any such an enterprise (Bell, 263). In fact,
the Irgun – Haganah relationship began to strain and soon
kidnappings and reprisals began to occur once again. One of the
most serious incidents occurred when during one of the Irgun’s
drive for funds, Haganah men threw grenades into a Pro-Irgun crowd
This began to cause much anti-Haganah sentiment among the Yishuv. This and the promise from Begin to dissolve the Irgun led to an operational agreement on March 8. The Irgun would be under Haganah orders through Irgun officers. The Irgun would still oppose British attempts to disarm them and they were still permitted to raise funds that aren’t Agency sources (Begin, 344). Fortunately for the Jews, the Arabs were having even more difficulties in creating a single unified policy towards the Jews. This lack of cohesion helped buy time for the Jews.

During the winter months, there was quite a bit of sporadic violence. There were bombings and counter-bombings. The roads were almost impassible due to snipers. Trusted employees killed their employers, friends turned on friends. Angry mobs of both Arabs and Jews attacked members of the other ethnic group. Scores of people died in the area weekly. The Irgun retaliated in a quick and ruthless manner. Yet all their reprisals had no effect on the rate of Arab violence against Jews. The region was in a state of chaos and the British were staying as distant as possible.

With the Arabs having the ability to furnish their troops with arms, the prime aim of attaining weapons was of the utmost importance for the Irgun, they supplemented their policy of attempting to gain funds to purchase weapons with the policy of increased operations of which the main objective was the theft of British weapons. The increased cache of Irgun weapons allowed them to feel they could carry out a major attack - an attack that would occur at Deir Yassin.
Deir Yassin was a village which was a haven for Arab snipers, it was initially a prime target for the Haganah, but after some very bloody battles at Kastel and Hulda, the new Haganah commander, David Shaltiel, was very low on men and supplies and thus was begging for aid from the Irgun and LEHI. He contacted the Irgun commander, Mordechai Raanan and the LEHI commander Yehoshua Zettler and soon was involved in a shouting match with both of them, for the two commanders viewed Shaltiel as a Ben Gurion’s hypocrite and a man who only a few years earlier betrayed the patriots by leading The Season against the Irgun (Bell, 291). The two commanders decided to organize an attack by themselves. Upon hearing this news, Shaltiel wrote both of them a letter stating that, "I wish to point out that the capture of Deir Yassin and its holdings are one stage in our[Haganah’s] general plan. I have no objection to your carrying out the operation provided that you can hold the village. If you are unable to do so I warn you against blowing up the village ... which would lead to the occupation of foreign forces. This situation would increase our[Haganah] difficulties in the struggle and the second conquest of the place would require heavy sacrifices" (Kurzman, 293). The Irgun and LEHI commanders ignored this warning due to their busy preparations.

The battle began on April 9, this tiny village soon came to symbolize Zionist cruelty. As the attack began, LEHI men began to broadcast the warning that "You are being attacked by superior forces... The west exit of Deir Yassin leading to Ein Karim is open to you! Run immediately" (Kurzman, 142)! Shortly after it began to
move, the vehicle that was broadcasting this message became disabled by Arab fire, as a result, very few Arabs heard the warning. The Jews met stiff resistance and sniping. The combat soon turned to house to house and often times it took indiscriminate fire and bombings to stop the sniping. As a result, many Arabs including women and children died. The battle was a victory for the Irgun and LEHI, but it soon became a public relations nightmare. Upon arriving at the edge of town, Shaltiel was asked by Raanan to take over the village. Shaltiel's response was, "We're not going to take responsibility for your murders" (Kurzman, 147)! Shaltiel and his Haganah forces left the town and soon the stories of Irgun atrocities began. The Irgun denied all these charges and claimed that the attack was straightforward (Bell, 296).

On April 10, Shaltiel and the Haganah tried to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the dissidents. Ben Gurion sent a letter of apology to the Arab leadership fearing that the incident at Deir Yassin would end all chances of a negotiated settlement. A settlement that both the Irgun and the LEHI felt would never come about and if it did would only end in the eventual death of the Jewish state.

After the loss at Deir Yassin and the death of the Arab "Military Messiah" Abdul Kader, the Arab masses began to lose hope. Many of the prominent Arabs began to leave Jewish controlled areas. Soon the rest of the masses began to flee due to the tide of the war and because of the news from Deir Yassin - they were scared of the Jews. As Begin noted in his book, some good did come out of the


