**Bickerton: World War II, Jewish Displaced Persons, and the Partition of Palestine**


[Emphasis in the text—italics, bold face, and / or underlining— is added.]

**CHRONOLOGY**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 30, 1933</td>
<td>Adolf Hitler assumes power in Germany</td>
<td>Oct. 4, 1946</td>
<td>Truman announces support for partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states</td>
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<td>April 1936</td>
<td>Formation of Arab Higher Committee</td>
<td>April 28, 1947</td>
<td>Opening of special session of U.N. General Assembly on Palestine issue</td>
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<td>July 1937</td>
<td>Evian Refugee Conference</td>
<td>May 13, 1947</td>
<td>U.N. General Assembly establishes a Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP)</td>
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<td>July 1938</td>
<td>MacDonald White Paper</td>
<td>Aug. 31, 1947</td>
<td>UNSCOP report presented to General Assembly</td>
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<td>Dec 1941</td>
<td>Death camps put into operation</td>
<td>Nov. 29, 1947</td>
<td>U.N. General Assembly votes to partition Palestine</td>
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<td>May 1942</td>
<td>Zionist Conference at Biltmore Hotel in New York City</td>
<td>Jan. 1948</td>
<td>Arab Liberation Army enters Palestine</td>
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<td>Nov. 4, 1944</td>
<td>Churchill makes promise to Weizmann</td>
<td>March 18, 1948</td>
<td>Weizmann sees Truman</td>
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World War II was a pivotal point in the history of twentieth-century Palestine, as well as the dominant event of twentieth-century Europe. Within three years of war's end in Europe, British forces withdrew from Palestine and David Ben Gurion, head of the Jewish Agency in Palestine, immediately proclaimed the existence of the state of Israel. Palestine, as constituted under the mandate, ceased to exist, and a new era began as the struggle between the Arabs and Jewish people for the establishment of a Jewish state.

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<tr>
<td>Nov. 6, 1944</td>
<td>Lord Moyne assassinated in Cairo</td>
<td>March 19, 1948</td>
<td>U.S. proposes U.N. Trusteeship in Palestine</td>
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<td>Feb. 1945</td>
<td>President Roosevelt meets with King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>April 9, 1948</td>
<td>Jewish attack on Deir Yassin</td>
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<td>March 22, 1945</td>
<td>Arab League founded in Cairo</td>
<td>April 13, 1948</td>
<td>Arab attack on bus convoy to Mt. Scopus</td>
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<td>April 12, 1945</td>
<td>Death of FDR; Harry S Truman becomes U.S. president</td>
<td>April 22, 1948</td>
<td>Haganah captures Haifa</td>
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<td>May 8, 1945</td>
<td>Germany surrenders</td>
<td>May 14, 1948</td>
<td>Israel established; U.S. extends de facto recognition</td>
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<td>Nov. 13, 1945</td>
<td>Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry into Jewish refugee question announced</td>
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<td>May 1, 1946</td>
<td>Anglo-American Committee report issued</td>
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<td>July 22, 1946</td>
<td>British headquarters in King David Hotel in Jerusalem bombed</td>
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<td>Aug. 5, 1946</td>
<td>Jewish agency meeting in Paris indicates willingness to accept partition of Palestine west of the Jordan River</td>
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Jews of Palestine now became part of a general Arab-Israeli conflict.

In this chapter we shall trace the events leading to the decision of the UN General Assembly on November 29, 1947, recommending the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state with economic union, and we will weigh the arguments of both sides about the significance of World War II and the Holocaust on the history of Palestine. 

When reviewing the period preceding the establishment of Israel, the majority of Zionist historians stress the importance of the Allied victory, the Holocaust, and the plight of its survivors in shaping the events that led the newly formed United Nations to opt for the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, which provided the legal framework for the Jewish Agency to make its proclamation. Pro-Palestinian and revisionist Zionist historians, on the other hand, while not entirely ignoring the destruction of the European Jews and efforts to find a safe homeland for the "remnants" following the war, emphasize the Yishuv's use of "gun-Zionism" in Palestine itself and the effective use of terror and guerrilla tactics in ousting the British from Palestine and later defeating the Palestinian Arabs and their supporters.

Interestingly, both groups of historians agree that American Jews played an important role in influencing Washington to adopt a policy of support for the partition of Palestine, and that the United States was significant in persuading the United Nations General Assembly to vote for partition.

What is noteworthy about British policy during and immediately after World War II, especially in the light of the Holocaust, is just how closely it preserved the intent of the White Paper of 1939, issued before Hitler embarked upon the "final solution." Considering what Britain and its allies later learned about the fate of European Jewry in all its horrific detail and the continued tragedy of the survivors following Germany's defeat, the British government's adherence to its stated 1939 policy concerning the admission of Jewish refugees into Palestine is quite extraordinary. It does, however, add weight to the argument that if World War II was important in the establishment of Israel, it was not because the Christian nations felt an obligation to the survivors of the Holocaust to provide them with a homeland. British policy, at least in this respect, tends rather to support the view that the war was important because it forced the Yishuv to realize that if Jews wanted a state, they would have to win it with deeds as well as words.

In fact, during the war the British government did reconsider its postwar policy toward Palestine. Recognizing that the end of the mandate was inevitable, in December 1943, a cabinet committee on Palestine backed by Churchill recommended British support for the partition of Palestine—the plan first proposed by the 1937 Peel Commission. Chaim Weizmann and the Jewish Agency knew of this decision. The assassination in Cairo on November 6, 1944, of Lord Moyne, deputy minister of state for Middle East affairs and a close personal friend of Churchill's, by the Jewish terrorist group LEHI ("Fighters for the Freedom of Israel"—also known as the Stern Gang, after its founder Abraham Stern), prevented this recommendation from becoming official British policy.

Had there been no war in Europe, the Jews of Palestine in their resort to arms would, presumably, have met the same fate at the hands of the British army as had the Arabs of Palestine in the 1936-1939 uprising. In this context it is perhaps also worth considering what would have happened to the Jews of Palestine had General Erwin Rommel of Germany won his North African campaign. Clearly the history of Palestine and the Middle East would have been entirely different; under an agreement signed by the mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini
and the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini in October 1941, the Jews of Palestine would have been exterminated by the Germans, with the help of the Arabs.

Both Arabs and Jews objected to British policy in 1939. The Arabs felt cheated; their hoped-for independence had once again been deferred, and Jewish immigration was going to continue for five more years. Zionists had to face the unacceptable idea that the British felt that the existing Jewish population and their institutions were such that they had fulfilled their promise of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine. Although most people see the two statements of British policy as mutually contradictory, the 1939 White Paper may be compared with the previous major document of British policy toward Palestine—the Balfour Declaration. Both documents appear to make contradictory promises; both appear to be the result of compromises that failed to satisfy fully either Jews or Arabs; and while Jews accepted the Balfour Declaration, both Jews and Arabs rejected the 1939 White Paper.

During World War II, Zionists supported the Allies against Germany. They had no alternative. Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the most influential leader of Palestinian Arabs, supported Germany, and many Arab leaders, including Anwar Sadat, for example, joined German front organizations. But far more important was the Nazi policy of extermination of Jews both in Europe and, if they had been victorious, in Palestine.

Although the Holocaust may be viewed by many as the catalyst in the establishment of Israel after World War II, the internal forces of Jewish history striving toward independent statehood had been set in motion long before. Zionist leaders did not learn the facts of the Holocaust until the summer of 1942, following the Biltmore conference held in New York City. Even then they did not grasp its scale and extent. It was deeply shocking that such events could happen in the twentieth century. While for the world's Jews—and doubtless also for the majority of Christians in Britain and the United States—the Holocaust created an irresistible sense that something should be done in Palestine to atone for the Holocaust and to compensate the remnants of European Jewry, this attitude did not prevail over all other concerns among British and American policymakers. The Holocaust clearly did not influence Ernest Bevin, the British foreign secretary in the new Labor government, who resisted efforts to admit Jewish displaced persons into Palestine between 1946 and 1948. Nor did it figure in the minds of American State Department officials, including Secretary of State George Marshall, whose prime concern was European security and the future interests of American oil firms in the Middle East. Harry Truman, the grandson of Southerners forced to become refugees after the Civil War, was an exception, but even he had many other reasons for his attempt to persuade the British to admit 100,000 Jewish displaced persons into Palestine. And the Holocaust certainly did not figure in the minds of Palestinian Arabs. They took the understandable view that they did not perpetrate the Holocaust, and if Europeans felt, rightly, that they should make amends, they should not do so at the expense of the Arabs.

THE HOLOCAUST

There are a number of observations we should make about the Holocaust before we continue. In the first place we must be very clear what we mean when we speak of the Holocaust. Was it just a greater version of previous Jewish persecutions, or an extended pogrom? The Holocaust does not simply mean that Jews suffered more death and destruction than other groups in Europe, such as the Russians or Poles, or others, such as the Cambodians,
who have been massacred by the millions since that time. There are many examples in history of mass murder; for example, the Armenians by the Turks during World War I. We should remember also that 29 million non-Jews perished in World War II in addition to the approximately 6 million Jews. But the Holocaust differs from these events in one basic way: The Holocaust was the attempt to annihilate—indeed, totally exterminate—all the Jews of Europe. None of the other massacres—with the possible exception of that of the Armenians—however horrifying, had as their basic aim the total elimination of a people. And none were conducted on the scale of the Holocaust.

Second, we should note that while the Holocaust was and remains a Jewish tragedy, it was carried out by Gentiles, and so it raises fundamental questions for non-Jews as well as for Jews. The Holocaust had a profound effect on surviving Jews worldwide, and it also had a profound effect on non-Jews. It forced Europeans to ask themselves just what did European civilization stand for; what levels of bestiality was it capable of? Nor was it the Holocaust per se that most influenced subsequent events in Palestine; the future of Palestine was shaped more by the question of the future of the survivors of the Holocaust. We cannot overemphasize the effect of the Holocaust on the European survivors and especially the Yishuv. The Holocaust created the determination that "Never Again" would Jews be victims, that "Never Again" would Jews be found wanting in the capacity to defend themselves. This almost fanatical but understandable resolve has been the driving force of all Israeli policies relating to the security and future of the Jewish state in its dealing with the Palestinians and the Arab states.

Third, we must also understand the equally strong sense of bitterness and betrayal among the Palestinian Arab population in relation to the Holocaust. Their sense of resentment and hatred is not directed so much against Jews as it is against Western Europeans. Palestinians did not initiate or participate in the Holocaust, but they feel they have been made to pay the price for the actions of Europeans, both during and after the Holocaust. First, because the Europeans powers did so little to intervene to prevent or lessen the Holocaust and second, because following the end of the war, Palestine was seen as the appropriate location for the survivors, thereby depriving the Arabs of their homes and land. Thus, they too feel they are victims of the Holocaust. Eric Hobsbawm has claimed that the Holocaust has given superiority to Jewish assertions of the right to the land, and he quotes Israeli writer Amos Elon as arguing that the genocide of the Jews by Hitler has been turned into a legitimizing myth for the existence of the state of Israel.

The Holocaust differed quantitatively and qualitatively from previous European anti-Semitism. Hitler's "final solution" was the logical conclusion of neo-Darwinian views: Aryans were superior to Jews (and Gypsies and Slavs as well), who were polluters of civilization and culture. Jews should, therefore, be eliminated. In addition, Hitler believed that Jews were part of a Jewish-Communist conspiracy that, in his mind, was responsible for Germany's defeat in World War I. Beginning in 1942, extermination of Jews ranked high in priority among the Nazis' activities. At the beginning of World War II, there were approximately 18.5 million Jews in the world; by the end of the war, 6 million had been murdered. Only 1 million of Europe's 7 million Jews survived the Holocaust.

The German government had not embarked on mass murder of Jews at the outset; the "final solution" was reached by stages. The first step was to define Jews in terms of race. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 prohibited marriage and sexual relations between Aryans (the designations "Aryan" and "non-Aryan" were introduced in 1933) and Jews in an attempt to
isolate and identify Jews. Nazi regulations became more and more repressive; soon, Jews were required to register with the state and to wear the Jewish badge—a large yellow six-pointed star worn on the back and on the chest.

With the events of Kristallnacht in November 1938, when roving Nazi gangs destroyed Jewish homes, property, and synagogues throughout Germany, Nazi policy approached that of inciting a pogrom. Jews were "encouraged" by threats of internment in concentration camps to leave Germany and to abandon their possessions. The majority did not leave, of course, because they either felt assimilated, believed that the danger would pass, or had nowhere else to go. Remember, most European nations had their own problems at that time—it was still the period of world depression—and non-European Western countries like the United States, Australia, South Africa, and nations in South America had restrictions (usually economic and/or racial) upon the number and type of immigrants they would admit. These restrictions barred most of Europe's Jews. The depressed economic conditions most nations were experiencing during the late 1930s probably made it easier for most statesmen to believe Hitler would not carry out his stated policies toward Jews, even though it was becoming clearer, day by day, that he would indeed attempt to exterminate them.

Some belated steps were taken, however—although it was pretty much a case of too little, too late. In July 1938, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had convened an international conference at Evian, on the French shore of Lake Geneva, to discuss ways of rescuing Jewish refugees from Germany. It was a failure. Most countries would take very few if any Jews. Moreover, leaders of world Zionism did not really want the Jews to go to lands other than Palestine. The British, as we noted earlier, would not allow increased Jewish entry into Palestine, but they did try to find alternative locations for some Jewish refugees, such as Guyana and, later, Australia.

After the Germans marched into Poland in 1939, Jews were rounded up and concentrated in ghettos. Nazi leaders decided on mass murder as the "final solution" to the "problem" of European Jewry after the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Several methods were used. At first, the Einsatzgruppen, killing squads of the S.S. (Schutzstaffel) who were especially selected and trained, followed front-line troops, and, after rounding up suspected Jews, shot them en masse and buried them in huge graves that they had forced their victims to dig. The S.S., formed in 1925, became the elite organization of the Nazi party and carried out the central tasks in the "final solution." Hitler placed Adolf Eichmann in charge of ridding Germany and German-occupied Europe of all Jews and gave him practically unlimited powers. Heinrich Himmler, head of the S.S., became the chief executor of the "final solution." Gassing in sealed trucks became the preferred method of killing as early as December 1941, and eventually special camps, or extermination centers, were created for the purpose of mass murder. It is impossible to convey the brutal, sadistic, and terrifying nature of these camps by merely describing them. All we can say is that the use of death camps by the Nazis was a horrifying example of how humanity can debase itself. (See Document 3-1.)

JEWISH RESISTANCE TO THE HOLOCAUST

Prompted by the stupefying immensity and brutality of the Holocaust, people continue today to ask questions about the Jewish response to these events. How much Jewish resistance was there? What did the Allies do? What could they have done? A popular notion was that the
Jews somehow contributed to the magnitude of their own destruction because they went without resistance "like lambs to the slaughter." In a sense, the murdered victims have become the defendants. The absurdity of this view can be seen when we recall that the German Army swept through most of Europe in less than a year. France surrendered in the Blitzkrieg without a major battle, and the Baltic and Balkan states, many of whose people were deported for slave labor and never returned, capitulated with little defense or defiance. In addition, the Nazi policy of persecuting Jews, if not actively supported, certainly was not opposed by large sections of the non-Jewish populations of Germany and Eastern Europe, especially in Poland. Some Gentiles, to be sure, did attempt to help individual Jews, but the number was small. The best-known "Righteous Gentile" was Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who was instrumental in saving the lives of thousands of Hungarian Jews before his capture and imprisonment by the Russians in 1945. Even the Roman Catholic Church was ambivalent in its response to Jewish persecution at the hands of the Nazis. Finally, the entire operation of the death camps was shrouded in secrecy.

What is surprising about Jewish resistance when we consider these facts is not that there was so little resistance, but that there was so much. Despite the lack of arms or the means to buy them, there are countless stories of active Jewish resistance to the Nazis, both inside and outside the death camps. The Warsaw Ghetto uprising in April 1943 is the most dramatic example. The Allied war planners contented themselves with the belief that the most effective method of assisting Jews was victory over Germany.

Jewish resistance to the Holocaust also included Jewish Agency efforts to rescue Jews from Europe and transport them to Palestine, and offers to form Jewish fighting units with the British against the Germans in North Africa. Both these activities formed part of the broader Zionist goal of circumventing the Malcolm MacDonald White Paper and securing ultimate Jewish statehood. And both were opposed by the British, who were anxious not to anger the Arabs, whose support they would need for their own postwar interests. The conflict between Jewish efforts to spirit Jewish refugees to Palestine and British determination to stop them from reaching their destination was dramatically highlighted with the sinking of two ships, the Patria and the Struma, filled with refugees. In November 1940, the Patria, with over 1,700 "illegal" refugees whom British authorities were deporting to Mauritius, was sabotaged by the Haganah and sank in Haifa Bay with the loss of more than 100 lives. In February 1942, 770 refugees were lost when the Struma sank in the Black Sea after being delayed by British pressure on Turkey to prevent its passage to Palestine.

Meanwhile, Chaim Weizmann, the Jewish Agency, and the Haganah sought to gain British approval for the formation of a Jewish unit, either a brigade or a division, to fight under the Zionist flag alongside British troops. There were several reasons for this proposal. One was for the Haganah to gain greater military training, experience, and access to arms; another was to strengthen Jewish claims on British gratitude in the negotiations over Palestine that would take place after the war. Finally, of course, was the desire to defeat the Nazis. Winston Churchill supported the idea, but it was not until late 1944 that a Jewish infantry brigade was formed that fought as a separate unit in Europe (in Italy), although many Jews fought in regular British units. Altogether, some 26,000 Palestinian Jews had joined British forces by the end of the war.

Some Zionist goals were realized. A considerable number of arms were stored by the Haganah. Several underground paramilitary groups had been formed: the Irgun, led by a young Polish soldier, Menachem Begin, and LEHI (the Stern Gang), among whose members was
Yitzhak Shamir, organized along militaristic lines. The function of the Irgun and LEHI was to strengthen the armed capabilities of the Yishuv for what they regarded as the inevitable war with the Arabs, as well as with the British. This was done by building up the supply of weapons (mainly stolen from the British), conducting guerrilla—or terrorist—attacks on the local British forces and police, and by arranging the illegal entry of refugees from Europe on ships secretly purchased or leased for this purpose by the Jewish Agency. Communication networks were established for the movement of refugees from Europe to Palestine. These networks later became especially useful to the Bricha, meaning "flight," the organized underground network of Jewish fighters and Zionist leaders from Palestine, who helped many thousands of Holocaust survivors break the British blockade to reach Palestine between 1945 and 1948. The function of Bricha was essentially that of getting the refugees to the point of embarkation in Europe.

THE UNITED STATES, AMERICAN JEWS, AND PALESTINE TO 1945

As the dimensions of the Holocaust became clearer, Jewish communities everywhere became increasingly anxious and united, and support for Zionist aspirations dramatically grew in strength. This was particularly true of the 4.5 million Jews in the United States. Many claims have been made about the persuasiveness of Zionist pressure groups in influencing American policy; indeed, it has been argued by some that Jewish control of the mass media meant that Zionists were able to manipulate American public opinion at large. These claims are mostly exaggerations, based either on ignorance of the situation of Jews in America or on hostility to Zionism, which stems often from opposition to policies pursued by Israel in its relations with its Arab neighbors and with the Palestinian refugees who were displaced by the establishment of the Jewish state. However, it should also be said that these claims are also made by pro-Zionists attempting to emphasize the importance of Zionism in the United States. Thus, this view that Jews are far more significant in American politics than their numbers suggest is very widespread. There is some truth in this, as in all such exaggerations, but as we shall see when we look at the events between 1942 and 1948, there were also many other factors at work in shaping American policy toward the Middle East. Only where there was a coincidence of Jewish (or Zionist) and non-Jewish aspirations did the Zionists achieve their goals.

Given the importance that historians have attached to American Jewry in influencing U.S. policy toward supporting a Jewish state in Palestine, we should say something about the political activities of American Jews during and after the war. The Jews of the United States, some 1.5 million of whom had migrated from Russia and Eastern Europe in the first decade of the twentieth century, were a highly assimilated group by the 1930s, although they were hardly as well-off or as educated as Jews are today. There were still visible signs of anti-Semitism in those years, and Jews were excluded from joining certain organizations and clubs. In particular, America's restrictive immigration laws were based on a quota system, which discriminated against people of Eastern European origin, thereby limiting the number of Jews admitted. If Jewish immigrants—refugees—were to be admitted, it would be at the expense of nationals of predominantly Catholic, or possibly even Protestant, countries. Neither Catholics nor Protestants, inside or outside of Congress, desired this. Nor, it must be said, did some Zionist leaders desire this. They believed that if refugees could be resettled anywhere, including the United States, it would weaken their claim on Palestine as the only homeland for Jews. In addition, many feared that additional Jewish immigrants would inflame anti-Semitism and cost
money to absorb.

The Jewish population of the United States was heavily concentrated in the urban states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and California. For a number of reasons—mostly to do with the policies of the Democratic administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt during the Great Depression, the role of many Jews in the New Deal, and FDR's opposition to Nazi Germany even before the outbreak of the war—Jews identified with the Democratic party and supported it with their votes and campaign funds. Before the war, the Zionist movement in the United States was opposed by most of the religious establishments and Jewish organizations. Orthodox rabbis objected to Zionism for upsetting the messianic idea, and Reform rabbis objected to its parochial nationalist emphasis rather than the universal sense they attached to it. Some Jewish organizations rejected the notion that Jews everywhere constituted one nation and were unassimilable as casting doubt on their loyalty to the United States. They feared such views would only fuel anti-Semitism throughout the country.

Zionist leaders, on the other hand, believed that the war in Europe and the Holocaust made it essential that they enlist American Jewry in an attempt to get U.S. government support for a Jewish state. To Zionists, the Holocaust proved beyond all doubt that security was a vain dream. They argued that neither emancipation nor assimilation had stayed the hands that throughout history had been raised against the Jews. The survivors would find security and peace only in a national home in Palestine.

Prior to World War II, the American government had regarded Palestine as a British responsibility. The oil resources of the Middle East, and the strategic importance of Palestine in relation to containing Soviet expansion into the region, did not emerge as major considerations until the postwar years. The United States had officially endorsed the Balfour Declaration in 1922, but beyond sending an American delegation—which included Senator Warren Austin (later to be the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations at the time of the partition resolution)—to Palestine in 1936 at the time of the Arab Rebellion, the United States had not shown much interest. The war was to change that situation. By March 1943, the U.S. State Department was concerned about American production of oil for the war and the supply of oil for postwar Europe. In May 1943, alarmed over the security of the Middle East and its oil supplies, the State Department advised President Roosevelt that he should reassure the Arab world of American friendship. In early 1945, returning from the Yalta conference shortly before his death, Roosevelt met with the king of Saudi Arabia, Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud, and promised him that no decision would be made concerning the future of Palestine without full consultation with both Arabs and Jews.

Meanwhile, in May 1942, an Extraordinary Conference was called by the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs in the United States and held at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City. At this conference, Zionist leaders finally called unequivocally for the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth (that is, a Jewish state). (See Document 3-2.) This now became the policy of the World Zionist Organization. Shortly after the Biltmore conference, Chaim Weizmann was replaced as Zionist leader by David Ben-Gurion. Weizmann, longtime president of the World Zionist Organization, had advocated a policy of gradualism, which meant using diplomacy and working with the political leaders of Britain and the United States. Ben-Gurion, at the time leader of the Mapai (Labor) party in Palestine and chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive in Palestine, was an activist. He advocated achieving immediate statehood by the use of force if necessary, and he backed a policy of pressuring the United States into
supporting a revolutionary change in Palestine to which the British would then have to agree. The conflict over the role of diplomacy, or the role of force, as a means of achieving their goals has remained a major source of division among Zionists.

By the end of 1943, to Jews throughout the world, the situation seemed hopeless. Groups sympathetic to Zionism, such as the Christian American Palestine Committee, formed in 1941 and chaired by New York senator Robert Wagner, a Roman Catholic, joined with the newly formed American Zionist Emergency Council, jointly chaired by two rabbis, Stephen S. Wise and Abba Hillel Silver, in lobbying Congress and the White House to support a Jewish state in Palestine and unrestricted immigration of Jews into Palestine. Early in 1944, the American Palestine Committee was able to have resolutions introduced into the Congress calling on the United States to urge Britain to permit unrestricted Jewish immigration into Palestine. Both Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Chief of Staff George C. Marshall strongly opposed these resolutions, on the grounds that American troops might very well be involved in maintaining oil supplies to the Allies were the Arabs to carry out their threats to resist unrestricted Jewish immigration with force. Thus, the resolutions were dropped. At this stage, as throughout, national interest defined in military and strategic terms by the State Department won out over moral and humanitarian considerations. The only significant step taken in this direction by the U.S. government was the establishment, in January 1944, of the War Refugee Board to bring help to the persecuted Jews and other minorities in Europe, but by then it was too late to save most of the victims.

Both the British and U.S. governments opposed Zionist policies because they realized that the Arabs would not support the Allies if it meant that Palestine would then be handed over to the Jews. Prime Minister Churchill was sympathetic to the Zionist cause, and on November 4, 1944, he promised Chaim Weizmann unreservedly to find an acceptable solution. He told Weizmann of his government's plans for the immediate immigration of 100,000 Jewish orphans, settlement of 1.5 million refugees over a ten-year period, and the partition of Palestine. On the other hand, the Foreign Office under Anthony Eden was unsympathetic. As with the U.S. State Department, the British Foreign Office did not wish to antagonize Arab leaders. Britain's oil interests and its preeminent influence in the Middle East would be endangered, it was argued, by the establishment of a Jewish state. Furthermore, there was increasing violence from the Jewish extremists in Palestine. On November 6, 1944, just two days after Churchill's promises to Weizmann, the British resident ambassador in the Middle East, Lord Moyne—who had in fact supported the partition of Palestine—was murdered in Cairo by the Stern Gang. The Jewish Agency attempted to curb terrorist activity, but the damage had been done; the British were not prepared to consider a change in their Palestine policy under these circumstances.

PALESTINE AFTER WORLD WAR II

At the end of the war in Europe, no one knew what would happen in Palestine. The British government wanted an end to the mounting violence perpetrated by the Yishuv, and it wanted to retain its predominance in the Middle East. In particular, the British wanted to keep control of the strategic oil port of Haifa. The U.S. government wanted to increase its share of the oil resources in the Middle East. It did not, however, want to send in troops in the event of a Soviet intrusion or a possible conflict between Arabs and Jews over the future of Palestine. The U.S. government was prepared to let the British have that responsibility. The Palestinian Arabs
wanted an end to Jewish immigration and an independent Arab state, while Palestinian Jews wanted a Jewish state, probably achieved by partition of the mandated area, although the Revisionists always envisaged having a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River. The other factor pervading all the discussions on the future of Palestine was the question of the fate of the survivors of the Holocaust. Between May 1946 and November 1947, events moved in the direction of partition and the establishment of a Jewish state.

The most important factors leading to the formation of Israel in this postwar period were, \textit{first, the success of the Yishuv in creating a situation that forced the British to take the issue to the United Nations}, and \textit{second, activities related to Europe’s Jewish displaced persons}. During the war, the Jewish Agency and its military arm, the \textit{Haganah}, had greatly strengthened the position of the Yishuv in Palestine. The Haganah had operated on several fronts, in line with \textit{Ben-Gurion’s motto to fight the British as if there were no war and to fight the war as if there were no White Paper}. The Yishuv, fired by shame, agony, and hatred caused by the Holocaust, \textit{merged into a cohesive and determined national community}. It was, in reality, far stronger than Cairo, Damascus, London, or Washington believed.

**THE DISPLACED PERSONS AND PALESTINE**

After Germany’s surrender in May 1945, the Allied forces faced the staggering problems of repatriating \textit{about 7 million dislocated and displaced persons (DPs)}. \textit{By September 1945, 1.5 million refused to, or could not, return to their former homes}. Of these, 50,000 to 100,000 DPs were Jews who had been liberated by the Allied armies. By 1946, this number had swelled to 250,000 with the arrival of refugees from Eastern Europe. The story of the Jews in the DP camps, and the emigration of the survivors over the next three years, is the last chapter in the Nazi persecution of the Jews. We should note several aspects of this story.

First, various Jewish and non-Jewish philanthropic organizations such as the American-based Joint Distribution Committee and the \textit{UN Relief and Rehabilitation Agency} (established in November 1943), together with the Allied armies, provided for the immediate physical and material needs of the DPs. Second, Zionist groups worked in Europe to assist Jews to get to Palestine or to DP camps in the American Zone of Germany and Austria. Third, the Jewish Agency and Zionist organizations in Britain, and especially in the United States, tried to influence their respective governments to solve the problem of admitting the Jewish DPs to Palestine. Fourth, the British and American governments moved slowly in deciding the fate of the DPs and accepting the viability of a Jewish state in Palestine. And finally, the Yishuv and the Haganah used all the means at their disposal to win a Jewish state. All these factors can be seen in the web of events leading to the UN General Assembly resolution to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state.

The Allied forces, especially Supreme Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower, were shocked by the discovery of the concentration camps and the condition of the prisoners. Nothing had prepared the officers or troops for what they found, and they worked feverishly to restore some level of health, nutrition, decency, and self-esteem to the survivors. Despite their best efforts, however, conditions remained far from desirable. The United States had trouble feeding and clothing the DPs, and many remained billeted in the camps where they had been prisoners, wearing the same striped uniforms the Nazis had required them to wear. And after the initial shock, many American GIs began to regard the Jewish DPs as a nuisance. Officers complained
that the Jews wanted special consideration and did not seem very grateful to their liberators. Nor were Jewish philanthropic organizations much able to alleviate the situation.

In fact, Jewish survivors from Germany and Austria could not return because their homes were either destroyed or occupied, and there was no legal mechanism for recovery or compensation from the governments of those countries. The Jewish communities, synagogues, and schools were virtually nonexistent, and survivors could not bear to return to such devastated places. In other countries like Poland, the anti-Semitism was still so strong that returning Jews risked their lives. In July 1946, in Kielce, Poland, over 130 returning refugees were killed by the local inhabitants. Not surprisingly, thousands of Eastern European Jews made their way to the American Zone in Germany for protection. Bricha set up an underground railroad to get their fellow Jews to safety. The Jewish Agency encouraged this process in the hope that if enough Jews congregated in the American Zone, the U.S. government would pressure the British government to allow 100,000 Jews into Palestine.

The Allied nations had not planned much beyond the immediate locating of Jewish DPs into camps at the end of the fighting, as they hoped that most would return to their former homelands. When it became apparent, as it had by June-July 1945, that 50,000 to 100,000 Jews were either stateless or homeless, the Allies did not know what to do. The British government wanted the survivors to stay and rebuild their lives in Europe, and it was unwilling to allow further immigration into Palestine. Its opposition was strengthened by the increase in Jewish terrorist activity against the British in Palestine and by attempts to embarrass London by the highly publicized voyages of ships packed with refugees trying to run the British blockade that was enforcing the restrictions.

Perhaps the best-publicized venture was that of the ship Exodus, which in 1947 arrived in Haifa with 4,500 refugees but which was forced to return to Europe. Another dramatic humiliation for the British was the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in July 1946. The hotel was the main British military and civilian headquarters in Palestine and was heavily fortified. Irgun leader Menachem Begin planned the bombing, and on July 22 the wing of the hotel housing the military headquarters was blown up, killing approximately ninety people, many of them Arabs and Jews. Begin and others claimed that the British had been warned of the impending explosion in time to evacuate the hotel, but the evidence is conflicting, and not everyone has accepted Begin's version.

The United States government wanted to resolve the situation of the DPs for several reasons. The DP camps could not remain in existence indefinitely—conditions there were not acceptable, and the United States felt an obligation to care for the survivors. Also, the camps were expensive to maintain. The new American president, Harry Truman (FDR, exhausted by the war, had died on April 12, 1945), prompted by Jewish complaints, sent Earl G. Harrison, who was experienced in assisting refugees, to report on the condition of the camps in July 1945. Among his many observations, Harrison noted that the majority of the DPs wanted to go to Palestine, and he recommended that 100,000 be allowed to do so as soon as possible.

Truman was appalled by the conditions Harrison described. He immediately ordered General Eisenhower to place the Jews in separate camps and to move them into towns and villages, and he wrote to British prime minister Clement Attlee (the Labor party had defeated Churchill and the Conservatives in the British elections in July) urging him to admit 100,000 Jews into Palestine without delay. Americans might have felt an obligation to rehabilitate the survivors of the German death camps, but they were not, it seems, willing to admit them to the
The new Labor government once again assessed Britain's situation in the Middle East. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin worried about Britain's ability to defend the Middle East oil fields and pipelines from the designs of the Soviet Union. And the Soviet Union seemed to the British and the United States very interested indeed in establishing itself in the Middle East and was causing great anxiety by its presence in Iran and its pressure on an unstable Greece and Turkey. It seemed to Bevin more urgent than ever to foster Arab goodwill. Accordingly, he pursued two policies.

First, he opposed large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine. Second, he tried to involve the United States not only in solving the refugee crisis but also in securing the Middle East for the West. These policies antagonized Zionists everywhere, and Bevin was bitterly attacked as anti-Semitic. This was not altogether fair since Bevin had supported the Zionists in the early 1930s, and he was not opposed to a Jewish state in Palestine as such. He was, however, very blunt in his manner, and he may have shared many of the vulgar anti-Jewish prejudices of his working-class background, a background he had not forgotten. Furthermore, he was undoubtedly the strongman of the British Labor party. He could not be threatened or intimidated, and he resented what he regarded as undue Zionist pressure. In addition, he was to some extent in the hands of his Foreign Office officials. Nevertheless, Bevin also believed in conciliation, and he did not want to get involved in a major conflict over Palestine; thus, he tried to get the United States to share the responsibility.

Both the U.S. State Department and President Truman shared Bevin's reluctance to get involved in a shooting war in the Middle East. The Joint Chiefs of Staff told Truman that it would take 100,000 troops to keep the peace in the event of hostilities in Palestine, and while Truman was ready to do what he could to help get Jewish DPs to Palestine, he was not prepared to send American soldiers. We must keep in mind that everyone, except the Jewish Agency and the Haganah, believed at that time that if hostilities did break out in Palestine, the Yishuv, which at that time numbered only 560,000 while the Arab population of Palestine was 1.2 million, would be convincingly defeated, even massacred, by the Arab armies opposing them. (For population and land ownership, see Maps 3-1 and 3-2.)

**THE ANGLO-AMERICAN COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY**

On November 4, 1945, Bevin proposed an Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry into the refugee problem. Truman agreed. The committee, consisting of six Britons and six Americans, held hearings and heard proposals from spokespersons for both Jews and Arabs in Washington, London, Palestine, and Europe where the committee visited the DP camps. (See Documents 3-3 and 3-4.) In its report, issued on May 1, 1946, the committee unanimously recommended that 100,000 Jews be immediately admitted into Palestine, but on the future of the area they could not reach agreement. As a result, the report rejected either a Jewish or an Arab
state and recommended a vague kind of unitary state to which Jews could be allowed to immigrate, but in which they would not constitute a majority. Until this was established, the mandate should continue. Despite his assurance that he would support a unanimous report, Bevin flatly rejected the proposal to admit 100,000 refugees into Palestine.

Looking back, we can say that Bevin's refusal to admit the suggested number of DPs at this point was a serious error of judgment. It would have taken much of the force out of the Zionist arguments and would probably have avoided much of the subsequent bloodshed. Nevertheless, he followed the advice of his military planners, who informed him that such a step would require eight divisions of troops and over £40 million, neither of which Britain in 1946 could afford. Truman, on the other hand, supported the proposal. Prime Minister Clement Attlee cabled Truman on May 26 that if the United States helped with costs and troops he would go ahead. Further talks were scheduled.

These developments produced considerable friction and hostility between the United States and Britain. The future of Palestine, coupled as it was with the fate of the Jewish DPs and the many other strategic and economic considerations already mentioned, was a highly emotional issue. All those involved—Jews, Arabs, British, and American leaders—were deeply committed to finding a solution. The only problem was they all believed they had the right or only solution. Truman wanted the British to resolve the problem by allowing DPs into Palestine, a stand that angered Attlee and Bevin. Bevin accused Truman of bowing to domestic political pressure from Jews, and he accused the Americans of favoring Jewish migration to Palestine because they did not want the Jews admitted into the United States.
MAP 3-1  Distribution of Population in Palestine (estimate 1945)

Source: Statistics from UN Map No. 93(b), August 1950, and the Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer, 1952.
MAP 3-2 Land Ownership in Palestine, 1945

Source: Statistics from UN Map No. 94(b), August 1950.
British frustration was understandable. Between May 1945 and September 1946, the United States had admitted fewer than 6,000 Jewish refugees. The British, on the other hand, had 80,000 troops in Palestine by the end of 1945, and Jewish terrorist activity was increasing. Between November 1945 and July 1946, approximately 20 British army personnel had been killed and over 100 wounded, and the police had about the same number of casualties at the hands of the Irgun or Stern groups. Railway installations and airfields were also targets of sabotage, which caused damage estimated at around £4 million. In return, the British, already laden with heavy military commitments elsewhere, sought out arms caches and carried out raids on the Jewish Agency and Haganah headquarters, arresting suspected ringleaders. Attitudes on both sides hardened.

Several solutions were considered in the next few months. At the end of June 1946, the U.S. War Department agreed to provide the transportation necessary to move 100,000 Jews to Palestine. In July, Bevin suggested that an Arab province that included part of Transjordan and Lebanon could be formed and an independent Jewish state created. Truman indicated that he would ask Congress to admit 50,000 Jewish refugees into the United States. A second Anglo-American Committee (the Morrison-Grady Committee) recommended setting up separate and autonomous Jewish and Arab provinces, with Britain retaining final authority for the time being, and with the right of the 100,000 Jewish refugees to enter Palestine conditional upon the adoption of the plan. It was a solution that satisfied no one.

The failure to reach a satisfactory solution was due largely to the fact that many Zionist activities were counterproductive, and that Arab opposition to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine remained, not surprisingly, inflexible. American Zionists and the Jewish Agency in Palestine were frustrated and angry by the turn of events. It was at about this same time that Polish and Eastern European Jews were learning how much anti-Semitism remained in their homelands. Between July and September 1946, 90,000 of them fled to the safety of the American zones in Germany and Austria. By the end of the year, more than 250,000 Jews crowded the DP camps of West Germany.

This situation alarmed the Americans. Many in the State Department and the military in Europe thought that it was a deliberately organized mass movement planned by Zionists to force a decision in favor of their migration to Palestine. It should be said that many of Ben-Gurion's remarks as head of the Jewish Agency, and the creation of the underground railroad moving Jews around Europe, lent credence to this point of view. Ben-Gurion had told the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry in relation to the DPs, for example: "We are not going to renounce our independence, even if we have to pay the supreme price, and there are hundreds of thousands of Jews...both in the country and abroad who will give up their lives, if necessary, for Jewish independence—for Zion." From this time on, as noted earlier, Haganah harassment of the British and illegal Jewish immigration increased. The violence between the British and the Jewish military organizations in Palestine increased, not only in terms of the number of clashes, but also in cruelty and vindictiveness. Bevin, in particular, resented the fact that Jews were killing English soldiers who, in his view, had fought the battles of the Jews against the Nazis.

Let us cite just one example of the process of brutalization that was taking place. A sixteen-year-old convicted Zionist terrorist, too young to be hanged, was sentenced in December 1946 to eighteen years' imprisonment and given eighteen lashes with a cane. This humiliation outraged Menachem Begin, and his Irgun kidnapped four British officers and flogged them, giving each eighteen cuts with rawhide whips. The act and the reprisal did not reflect well on
either side.

The Arabs told the British in October 1946 that they wanted a unitary Arab state in which they would be the permanent majority. They feared that a Jewish state would transform the region economically as well as demographically. By now, Bevin had begun to think seriously about handing the entire problem over to the United Nations. In this, he was helped by events in the United States.

The Zionist leader, Nahum Goldman, had indicated in August 1946 that the Jewish Agency in Palestine would accept partition, and Truman believed that if this could be achieved peacefully, it was a solution that would not involve the United States directly. American oil interests in the Middle East would, therefore, not be threatened. At the same time, it would enable the American president to satisfy Jewish voters in the forthcoming congressional elections, thereby retaining their support for the Democratic party. Thus, on October 4, on the eve of the Jewish Day of Atonement, *Truman announced that he believed partition would "command the support of public opinion in the United States."

Truman's Day of Atonement statement accomplished few, if any, of the things he had hoped for. The Saudi king, Ibn Saud, not to mention the Arab League, was angry that Truman favored admitting 100,000 Jewish refugees to Palestine. At home, the Republicans won a majority in both houses of Congress in the 1946 congressional elections despite Truman's words. Furthermore, Truman was becoming very annoyed with the threats of political retaliation by American Zionist leaders if he did not pursue a pro-Zionist line. Truman indicated to Britain that the United States would take responsibility for the protection of Greece and Turkey from Russian aggression but hinted that this might depend on the British finding a peaceful settlement to the Palestine question. This was a halfhearted threat, for, as with the emergence of the Cold War, the security of Greece, Turkey, and Iran was far too important to the United States to be jeopardized by the situation in Palestine.

**PALESTINE BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS**

In January 1947, the British government decided that if no settlement could be reached the matter would have to go to the new United Nations organization, and, on February 14, the British took that course without recommending any preferred solution. The future of Palestine was among the first questions addressed by the new world body and was a crucial test case. In place of war, public debate and private bargaining were to resolve international conflicts. Not wanting to give up this strategically valuable area, the British, at first, had hoped that the United Nations General Assembly might not be able to find an acceptable formula and would turn the matter back to them. *However, the British had gone through a cold winter in 1946-1947, with fuel shortages, exhausted credit reserves, and growing Communist pressure in Greece and Turkey, all of which made the maintenance of a garrison in Palestine unpalatable.* Moreover, the British were finding it increasingly difficult to keep the peace.

The United States hoped to use the United Nations as a tool to contain Communist influence and Soviet expansion. *As it happened, there was no real issue between the United States and the Soviet Union over partition and the founding of a Jewish state in Palestine. The Soviets welcomed the idea of a Jewish state as a way of extending their influence into the Middle East; they believed that the predominantly Socialist ideology of the Israeli leaders would gain them an ally in the region.* It would also mean the departure of Britain from at least one area of
the region. In fact, one of the worries that the American intelligence community (the OSS, now the CIA) had about the establishment of Israel was the number of Communists from Soviet satellites who might take up residence in the new nation.

The UN General Assembly met in April 1947 and agreed to a British request for a Special Session to consider the problem. This Special Session, the first such, immediately set up a Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) of eleven "neutral" nations to investigate and draw up recommendations. The nations comprising UNSCOP were Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, India, Iran, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay, and Yugoslavia. It was a reasonably balanced group, and it was given the task of investigating all aspects of the Palestine question, including the plight of the displaced persons. The committee's hearings included five weeks in the Middle East gathering evidence from the Jewish Agency and nations of the recently formed Arab League. The Arab League had been established in Cairo in 1945 and was endorsed by Great Britain as a possible way of continuing to exert influence and provide a sounding board and outlet for ideas of Arab nationalism. Despite the tension and disorder in Palestine created in part by the Haganah's hostility to the British, the Jewish Agency cooperated fully with the committee. On August 5, 1946, in Paris, the Jewish Agency, in a retreat from the maximalist position espoused at the Biltmore Conference, had accepted partition of Palestine west of the Jordan River, on more or less the principles set out in the Peel Commission Report. The Palestine Arab Higher Committee, on the other hand, boycotted the proceedings and treated the committee with defiance, asserting that Arab rights were self-evident, and that the committee's membership was weighted in favor of the Zionists. Delegates from some states of the Arab League did meet with UNSCOP in Lebanon, however, to present the Arab case. On August 31, 1947, UNSCOP presented its report to the General Assembly at its second regular session. (See Document 3-5)

The members unanimously recommended termination of the mandate, the granting of independence to Palestine, provision of a transitional period before independence, and they agreed on a number of other related issues. On the vital question of the future shape of Palestine, a majority of seven (Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, and Uruguay) recommended partition into an Arab state, a Jewish state, the internationalization of Jerusalem, and economic union between the two states. Britain was to administer the mandate during a two-year interim period under UN auspices and admit 150,000 refugees into the proposed Jewish state. The minority (India, Iran, and Yugoslavia) proposed an independent federal state. Australia abstained.

UNSCOP MAJORITY REPORT

In the majority proposal, of the 10,000 square miles comprising Palestine, the Arabs were to retain 4,300 square miles (approximately 43 percent). The Jews, who at that time made up roughly one-half of the population (the population of Palestine at the end of 1946 was estimated at around 1,269,000 Arabs and about 608,000 Jews), were allotted 5,700 square miles (approximately 56 percent). At this time Jews owned 6 to 8 percent of the total land area representing approximately 20 percent of the arable land. The Arab territory was to be the less fertile hill country of central Palestine and northern Galilee. The Jewish territory was to be the more fertile coastal plain from a line south of Acre to a line south of Jaffà. Jaffà, almost totally Arab, was included in the Jewish state. The Jewish state also would include most of the Negev
Desert. Strangely, the Jews were denied those places such as Jerusalem and Hebron to which they were most sentimentally attached. Demographically, the Jewish state would face the problem of a built-in hostile fifth column. As envisaged, it was to contain almost as many Arabs (approximately 407,000) as Jews (approximately 498,000) at least until the immigrants arrived. And the boundaries of the Jewish state seemed to make it virtually indefensible in the event of hostilities with the Arabs. The Arab state would have 725,000 Arabs and 10,000 Jews. The international enclave of Jerusalem and its environs would contain approximately 100,000 Jews and 105,000 non-Jews.

Despite its shortcomings from their point of view, the Jewish Agency welcomed the majority report of UNSCOP. It was preferable to the minority report, and it did offer two essential requirements: sovereignty and uninterrupted immigration. The Arabs rejected both reports outright. The reports, by legitimizing the Balfour Declaration and the mandate, in essence stated that the claims of the Jews, the majority of whom had been in Palestine less than thirty years, were equal to those of the Arabs, many of whose ancestors had lived there for hundreds of years. The Arabs were so angered by the UNSCOP reports that the Arab League threatened war if the United Nations approved either report. There was no room for negotiation between the two positions. The British stated that they would accept the recommendation to end the mandate but would remain neutral on the outcome for Palestine; the General Assembly would have to decide the future of the region. The British did not want to be seen in the eyes of the Arabs—especially the Egyptians with whom they were negotiating the future of their Suez Canal bases—as participating in something as objectionable to the Arabs as a Jewish state.

The British, too, were determined to get out of Palestine as soon as possible; they had had enough and were bitter toward the Zionists. During the months of the UNSCOP investigations, the attacks on British soldiers and police, especially by the Irgun, reached new levels of ferocity and barbarism. One particularly horrifying incident had occurred in July 1947. Two British Army sergeants were hanged in retaliation for the execution of Zionist terrorists. British and American outrage was triggered not so much by the hanging of two innocent men as by the fact that their bodies had been left booby-trapped. Menachem Begin boasted: "We repaid our enemy in kind," but many Americans as well as British wondered about the sanity of the terrorist mentality that lurked behind such outrages. It was this event, as much as any other, that led British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin to refuse to allow the 4,500 illegal DPs aboard the *Exodus* to land in Palestine. Britain could no longer support the financial and human drain of maintaining troops in Palestine. In 1947, about 80,000 troops and 16,000 British and local police tried to preserve the peace in Palestine, and the British had spent £50 million since the Labor party had come to power. In September 1947, the British government decided to end the mandate by May 1948, and Bevin made this public the following month. By announcing in advance of the UN General Assembly's (UNGA) decision that it would surrender the mandate, and that it would not participate in enforcing any UNGA decision, it could be argued that Britain was sabotaging the United Nation's solution. Britain's stance—together with the pro-Zionist positions taken by the United States and the Soviet Union—strengthened the views of both Arabs and Zionists that they could achieve their objectives without compromise.

**THE UNITED STATES AND THE PARTITION PROPOSAL**

The United States supported the UNSCOP majority plan. President Truman had indicated
in November 1946 that he favored partition. Many historians have explained the president's support for a Jewish state as the result of domestic political considerations. They argue that Truman and the Democratic party needed the strategically important Jewish vote for electoral success, and consequently American policy was shaped in ways demanded by Zionist pressure groups. They further argue that the president's policy was not in the nation's interest and was opposed by the State Department. Truman, in his memoirs, adds credence to this point of view. He expressed his displeasure at "the striped-pants boys" in the State Department, and he resented the patronizing attitude of pro-Arab foreign service officers.

Referring to Zionist pressure, Truman wrote that he had never had so much pressure on him as he had on the question of Palestine. And he certainly did have pressure placed on him. The Zionist Organization of America under the aggressive and dynamic leadership of Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, and other organizations like the American Christian Palestine Committee, constantly sent letters of advice, comment, and threats of political retaliation to the White House, and many meetings were held between the president and Jewish leaders. But Truman was not a man who gave way to threats; his record as president suggests a strong, independent, even stubborn Missourian. All chief executives are subject to domestic political pressure in reaching their decisions. The mere existence or even the amount of that pressure does not mean that it is effective.

Zionist pressure was often counterproductive since it made Truman angry. In reality, Truman felt strongly that something had to be done for the Jewish refugees, and largely because of his fundamentalist Protestant background he believed that the Jews should be allowed to return to their ancient homeland. If he was influenced by domestic political considerations, it was not because of the letters and pressure from Zionist groups, but because of the advice of his White House political consultants, David Niles, himself a Jew and a Zionist, and Clark Clifford—who was later to become secretary of defense in the Johnson administration. Certainly, Truman did not go nearly as far in his support for partition as American Zionist leaders wanted. Indeed, in the 1948 presidential election—despite Truman's apparent giving way to Zionist pressure—the president did not carry the heavily Jewish state of New York.

There were many factors influencing Truman in addition to domestic political considerations. Truman shared the concern of the State Department over the postwar spread of Soviet influence especially in the increasingly important and unstable Middle East. The degree of conflict between the president and Foggy Bottom has been over-stated; Truman and Secretary Marshall had an unusually close working relationship. In addition to its own oil interests in Saudi Arabia, the United States was concerned about Europe's access to the region's oil for postwar reconstruction. By 1947, American oil companies owned about 42 percent of Middle Eastern supplies. The Middle Eastern desk of the State Department argued, wrongly as it turned out, that American support for partition would drive the Arabs into the waiting arms of the Soviet Union. Some even believed that the new Jewish state would be a Communist regime.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that in the event of Soviet penetration of the Middle East the United States would have to fight a war without the oil resources of the region. There was also the possibility that the United States might have to send troops to the area once the British had withdrawn. *Truman was more convinced by the Zionist's argument that the new Jewish state would be a bastion of democracy in the Middle East, and that supporting Israel would be a clear indication of the world leadership role America was to assume.* These arguments, whether used by Zionists as propaganda pressure on the White House or not,
influenced Truman much more than those suggesting the political expediency of gaining Jewish votes.

**UNGA APPROVES THE PARTITION OF PALESTINE**

Two days after receiving the UNSCOP report, in September 1947, the General Assembly designated itself an Ad Hoc Committee to consider the two UNSCOP proposals. All members of the United Nations were represented on this Ad Hoc Committee. Between September 25 and November 25, the committee held thirty-four meetings. Both the Jewish Agency and the Arab Higher Committee—who had by now grasped their error of not cooperating with UNSCOPmade presentations. On November 25, 1947, the Ad Hoc Committee passed what was essentially an amended version of the UNSCOP majority partition proposal for consideration by the General Assembly. The amendments slightly altered the boundaries and the populations of the two proposed states. Jaffa was to be an Arab enclave in the Jewish state, and the Arab population of the Jewish state was to be reduced. The final outcome was as follows: *The Arab state was to occupy 4,500 square miles and contain approximately 800,000 Arabs and 10,000 Jews. The Jewish state was to be an area of 5,500 square miles and contain 538,000 Jews and 397,000 Arabs.* (See Map 3-3.)
MAY 3-3  Israel's Boundaries, 1949–1967
On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly in UN Resolution 181 voted in favor of the partition of Palestine by a vote of 33 to 13 with 10 abstentions. The Muslim countries (together with India, Yugoslavia, and Greece) voted against partition. The United States and the Soviet bloc (together with several other nations, including France and Australia) supported partition. Considerable controversy abounds over the role of the United States in securing a favorable outcome.

In the few days prior to the vote, American Zionists exerted unprecedented pressure on the White House to influence the delegates of other nations to vote for partition. President Truman, however, refused, but in some cases private American citizens did make strenuous efforts to secure votes. The pressure that was exerted on delegates who appeared hesitant—for example, those from Haiti, the Philippines, Liberia, Greece, and China—was primarily exerted by Jewish Agency representatives. Not all of this pressure was effective; Greece and Turkey, for example, which were so dependent upon American aid, did not vote for partition. At the same time, Arab spokespersons, in their attempts to influence the outcome, warned that a bloodbath would erupt and retaliation would ensue against Western oil interests if partition were approved. In any event, partition was construed by most as an American plan.

In the final analysis, partition was successful probably because the Jews were perceived as Western as opposed to the Eastern Arabs. And to a United Nations that consisted mostly of Western nations at the time, the Jewish argument was strengthened by the West's sense of guilt for its inaction, which was partly responsible for the Jews' present plight. This time the West would do something. In addition, a major push for adoption of the partition resolution came from Latin American and European nations, in part because Catholics liked the special international status planned for Jerusalem, a plan that the United Nations found it could not enforce.

Passage of the partition resolution in November 1947 virtually assured a Jewish state in Palestine. The resolution liquidated the mandate, defined a legal framework in which the Yishuv could establish a state, and gave to the Haganah a definite goal around which it could rally its forces. Passage of the resolution was, however, merely the acceptance of a principle; it was not a specific blueprint. This must be kept in mind when considering the events of the next six months, especially when reflecting on American policy. (See Document 3-6.)

ARAB AND JEWISH RESPONSE TO THE UN PARTITION RESOLUTION

These months were full of uncertainty and confusion as to the future of Palestine. Efforts by moderate Palestinian leaders to prevent bloodshed failed. Arab leadership was divided. World War II had led to the dispersion of the Husseini family; the mufti, Hajj Amin, had been exiled following his escape late in 1937, and his nephew, Jamal, was interned in Rhodesia during the war. This provided an opportunity for their rivals, the Nashashibis, to seek leadership of Palestinian politics. Two other groups also sought successfully to extend their power: the Palestine Arab party under the leadership of a Greek Orthodox, Emile al-Ghuri, and the popular and widely supported party Istiqlal (meaning Independence). At the end of the war, the Palestine Arab party was the most powerful Arab voice opposing a Jewish state and calling for an Arab government to control the entire mandate area. Nevertheless, by 1947-1948, using their local kin leaders and village heads, the urban-based notable family of the Husseinis had again reasserted its traditional leadership among the Palestinian Arabs.

Both the Zionists and Abdullah, who became king in 1946 when Britain recognized
Transjordan's independence, were concerned that the partition resolution would result in a Palestinian state headed by the mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husseini. Both had a common interest in preventing such an outcome. Abdullah, as noted in Chapter 2, had long sought to control Arab Palestine, and there had been contacts over the years with officials of the Jewish Agency about their mutual interests.

Shortly before the UN partition resolution, in early November 1947, Abdullah met with representatives of the Jewish Agency, including Golda Meir, acting head of the agency's Political Department. An understanding was reached in which the Jewish Agency agreed to Abdullah's annexation of Arab Palestine; in return, Abdullah promised not to attack the Jews or stand in the way of the establishment of a Jewish state. Another meeting was to have followed the vote on partition, but owing to the tumult in Palestine, it did not take place. As the months passed, Abdullah was unable to avoid the pressures on him to join the Arab states in their determination to fight the Jews.

There was one last meeting between Golda Meir and the king just before the partition plan was to take effect, but by then, the constraints on the king were simply too great. Moreover, the outbreak of hostilities would provide him with an opportunity to cross the Jordan and annex central Palestine whether or not a Jewish state came into being.

In January 1948, the volunteer "Arab Liberation Army," (ALA) formed in December 1947 and organized, trained, and armed by Syria for the Arab League states, began entering Palestine. By the end of March, 5,000 men, mainly Arab irregulars from Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, had infiltrated the territory. Surprisingly few Palestinian Arabs joined the ALA. Many Palestinian Arabs were suspicious of the other Arab states. They feared, for one thing, that their neighbors had designs of their own for the future of Palestine, which did not include an independent Palestinian state. For that reason, many Palestinians favored partition and indicated a willingness to live in peace alongside a Jewish state. The ALA was also billeted in various Arab villages and in the major Arab towns where their presence was often a source of local resentment. The strategy of the ALA was to dominate the roads, thus controlling the lines of communication. It hoped in this way to isolate the outlying villages from the main centers of Jewish population in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Tel Aviv. At first, the ALA had considerable success; the Haganah was forced on the defensive, and the Yishuv was completely demoralized by Arab successes by the end of January 1948. By March, Jerusalem was virtually in the hands of the Arabs, and Jewish hopes appeared slight without outside assistance. It was with the knowledge of these circumstances that Truman stated that he was prepared to send troops to Palestine to assist in enforcing a UN trusteeship.

During April, the balance swung in favor of the Haganah. Armed with a shipment of arms that arrived from Communist-controlled Czechoslovakia at the end of March 1948, the Haganah took the offensive. Its most significant victory was the capture of Haifa on April 22, 1948. By early May, the Haganah also had control of Jaffa and most of eastern Galilee. But eastern Jerusalem remained in Arab hands. The most surprising aspect of the Haganah offensive was the complete evacuation of the Arabs from their towns and villages as the Jews advanced, the cause of which remains a subject of heated debate even today. Both sides resorted to terrorist atrocities against each other, especially in the major cities, with little regard for noncombatants or women and children. In one series of attacks and retaliation, Jewish terrorists (Irgun or LEHI members) threw bombs at a group of Arab oil refinery workers in Haifa, killing six and wounding forty-two. The Arabs then rioted and killed forty-one Jews and wounded forty-
eight more before being quieted by British troops.

Two days later, Haganah members disguised as Arabs entered a village close to Haifa and killed approximately sixty people, including a number of women and children, to avenge the Jewish deaths in Haifa. Later we will discuss the well-known incidents at **Deir Yassin** and **Mount Scopus**, which occurred at this time. British forces, who were withdrawing, found it increasingly difficult to be evenhanded. They assisted Jewish settlers against a Syrian terrorist attack, and they arranged a truce for the withdrawal of about 10,000 Arabs from Haifa. Both sides accused the British of favoring the other. *By May 2, the Haganah had carved out for itself a state roughly equivalent to that approved by the United Nations earlier in November 1947. The Jews went ahead with plans to announce an independent state on May 14. The United Nations let events take their course.*

**PARTITION IN DOUBT**

With Palestine in chaos by early 1948, members of the UN Security Council concluded that an international police force would be required to put partition into effect. America's representative to the UN, Warren Austin, told the Security Council that the United States doubted the ability of the UN to carry out partition. Ambassador Austin did not formally present any specific American alternatives for consideration, but his comments, made on February 25, reflected President Truman's dilemma. The United States, Austin said, was not prepared to impose partition by force, but it would join any UN effort to safeguard international peace and security. Truman made another final appeal to the Arabs for peace, but it was summarily rejected. As March of 1948 drew to a close, there were signs that the Arabs were planning massive military action.

Faced with this prospect, President Truman agreed to Secretary of State Marshall's suggestion that Palestine be placed under a temporary United Nations trusteeship. He had little choice. If he stood by and did nothing, it seemed certain that the Jews would be driven into the sea. It was essential to the success of the **Yishuv**, however, with the British withdrawal now set for May 15, that the United Nations not abandon partition. Partition was, in fact, already crystallizing in Palestine. Both Jews and Arabs were, to a large degree, obedient to their own institutions. The central British administration was in a state of virtual collapse. The Jewish Agency intended to proclaim the state of Israel when the British left, but without continued American support for partition this seemed almost impossible.

Early in March 1948, as American policy appeared to waver, Chaim Weizmann had sailed from Palestine to put the Zionist case before President Truman, but by this time Truman was refusing to see anyone. Jewish leaders realized that this might be the turning point. At this juncture, the president of the B'nai B'rith, Frank Goldman, turned to the president's old friend and former partner in a Kansas City haberdashery, Eddie Jacobson, who agreed to intercede for Weizmann. Jacobson decided to visit the White House personally and was given an appointment with Truman. According to Jacobson, Truman angrily refused to see Weizmann. Jacobson then appealed to Truman by using an analogy to Truman's hero, Andrew Jackson. Weizmann, Jacobson said, was his hero just as Jackson was Truman's hero. Jacobson voiced surprise that the president refused to see Weizmann simply because of the treatment the president had received at the hands of some of America's Jewish leaders. Truman relented, and a meeting was arranged. Trump saw Weizmann on March 18, 1948. The Zionist leader stressed that
abandonment of partition at a time when Palestine was threatened by outside Arab aggression and internal warfare would be disastrous. He also argued that there was no reason to think that the Arabs would accept, or assist in setting up, trusteeship any more than they would partition. Truman was convinced, and he told Weizmann that the United States would not abandon partition. However, on the following day, March 19, in the Security Council, Ambassador Austin called for a suspension of all efforts aimed at partition and asked for a special meeting of the General Assembly to approve United Nations' trusteeship.

Austin's announcement, coming as it did the day after the president's assurance to Weizmann, considerably embarrassed Truman, who was bitterly condemned by all sections of Jewish opinion for "betraying" the Jews and was criticized in non-Jewish quarters for "brutally reversing" American policy. If the president was seeking political advantage in his Palestine policy, he was very inept in going about it. In fact, Truman had approved Ambassador Austin's statement prior to his meeting with the Zionist leader, but he had not known when it was to be made.

The U.S. trusteeship proposal was not, in fact, an abandonment, reversal, or substitute for the partition plan. Truman was concerned that there would be no public authority in Palestine capable of preserving law and order when the mandate terminated. Trusteeship was the only solution. Secretary of State Marshall explained American thinking to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee a few days later. If partition had to be implemented by the use of UN forces, this would involve Soviet troops. They, Marshall said, had shown a tendency to remain in the areas they occupied. The Soviets would again press down on Greece, Turkey, and the Arabian oil fields, which were vital for the entire European recovery program. The fact that the Soviets were looking for a warm-water port also added to the danger of Soviet troops in the area. The only solution, Marshall argued, was to turn the matter over to the UN Trusteeship Council. The Soviet Union was not represented on the council, so the danger of Soviet military intervention could be avoided.

The second Special Session of the General Assembly met briefly to discuss Palestine on April 1 and resumed on April 16 to discuss the American proposal. It soon became clear that the discussion would be drawn out and that trusteeship, like partition, could not be enforced without an adequately armed neutral force. Britain was determined not to remain longer than May 15, 1948, a fact only then being fully realized by the United States and both protagonists in Palestine. On the morning of May 14, 1948, the Union Jack was hauled down from Government House in Jerusalem for the last time, and as the British high commissioner, Sir Alan Gordon Cunningham, sailed out of Haifa at 11:30 p.m. that night, the British mandate came to an end.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

York, Holmes and Meier, 1985.