

Arab-Israeli War- “War for Independence”

On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly, by a large majority, approved the resolution calling for two independent states to be established alongside each other in the land of Israel (Resolution 181). Members of the Jewish community danced in the streets to celebrate but shortly afterward Palestinian Arabs and volunteers from Arab countries that rejected the partition plan attacked, and the war began.

The war that began on November 29, 1947 is known as the War of Independence because it resulted in the land of Israel, in spite of the fact that at the beginning local Arabs, and then armies from Arab countries tried to prevent it. Local Arab troops and volunteers attacked isolated Jewish communities, Jews in cities with mixed populations, and the roads. They also employed terror tactics- all Jewish people, settlements and property were considered legitimate targets. The most serious terror attacks were against Haifa oil refineries, where 39 Jews were murdered in December of 1947.

Because of Arab attacks, some Jewish people were cut off from the center and became isolated. The Israeli defense tried to supply the isolated populations using convoys. These convoys became the focus of armed confrontations between the Jews and Arabs, but in spite of everything, no Jewish settlement was abandoned.

Dozens of fighters were killed in attempts to relieve isolated communities. The main efforts were dedicated to bringing supplies to the besieged city of Jerusalem, and this resulted in many victims.

The isolated Jewish communities decided it had to change its tactics from defensive to offensive and thus before the British withdrew from the country, they prepared **Plan Daled**. The reasons for implementing the plan were: The growing distress of besieged and isolated Jewish settlements, especially in Jerusalem; the need to plan for invasion of regular troops from Arab countries; the suspicion that the US was about to propose a diplomatic move to abandon the partition plan; and information that the British would not, at least at that particular point, reverse Jewish military gains. The purpose of Plan Daled was to gain control of the areas designated in the partition plan as part of the Jewish state, plus Jerusalem and the road leading to it.

During the first stages of the war Arab residents began leaving their communities in the land of Israel. The first were those who were well off economically. Most of the Jewish military and civilian leaders in the land welcomed the flight of the Arabs for political reasons (that the future Jewish state would include as small an Arab minority as possible); and for military reasons (to distance a hostile population from the field of battle). During the Course of Plan Daled, Jewish Israeli forces began to deport Arabs. However, not all Arabs were deported and there were no high-level political orders to do so. Thus the flight was due to deporting and frightening Arabs and because of their own fears without regard to Israeli actions. During the course of the war about 370 Arab villages were destroyed.

On May 14, 1948 at 4:30 in the afternoon, the leaders of the Jewish Israeli forces met in Tel Aviv. David Ben-Gurion announced the establishment of the State of Israel, read the Declaration of Independence and formed temporary government and national institutions. It was a triumphal hour for the state, although it was clear that it was but a short moment, as an invasion by Arab countries would directly follow the birth of the state of Israel.

The various defensive forces that later united into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) tried to block the invading Arab armies. After a month of fighting all sides were exhausted and accepted the UN call for a one-month

cease-fire. During that month the regular armies of the Arab countries were unable to penetrate deeply into Israel.

After the cease-fire the thrust of battle changed. For ten days the fighting renewed, during which the IDF took the initiative. After ten days of fighting the second cease-fire took effect and held until October 1948. In October 1948 the IDF launched another attack.

The first election of the Israeli Knesset [parliament] in January 1949 set the state of Israel well on its way to being an independent, democratic, sovereign country. The UN mediated the armistice agreements that were signed by Israel and the Arab countries. The agreements meant the end of fighting, but did not bring reconciliation to Israel, the Arab countries, or the Palestinians. Israel achieved its independence thanks to its organizational ability and the remarkable mobilization of the entire military force.

The Israeli military force paid an enormous price – some 60,000 were dead, nearly one percent of the entire Jewish population, at the time. The Palestinian state was not established and the Palestinian people were compelled to live under the rule of Israel, Egypt, and the Kingdom of Jordan.

However, the borders of Israel were not quiet: There were Palestinians who tried to return to their homes, and there were attempts to infiltrate Israel in order to kill its citizens. The Israeli government responded to the murder of its citizens with retaliatory actions, so the dynamics of hostility continued.

1. What action caused the Arab countries to attack and begin the war in 1947?
2. Give one reason by the isolated Jewish communities implemented the Plan Daled.
3. Why did the Jewish military and civilian population support the emigration of Arab communities from the land of Israel?
4. Explain why the celebration after the reading of the Declaration of Independence was short-lived.

Arab-Israeli War – The “Catastrophe”

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 181, which called for the partition of Palestine into two states, Arab and Jewish. This was the start of the countdown for the establishment of the state of Israel on May 15, 1948 and the 1948 Catastrophe, which uprooted and dispersed the Palestinian people.

The Catastrophe was: 1) the defeat of the Arab armies in the 1948 Palestine war; 2) their acceptance of the truce; 3) the displacement of most of the Palestinian people from their cities and villages; and 4) the emergence of the refugee problem and the Palestinian Diaspora.

First and foremost, Britain bears responsibility for the defeat of the Palestinian Arab people in 1948. It received the mandate for Palestine from the League of Nations in 1917 and did all it could to suppress the Palestinian people and to arrest and deport their leaders. The British did not allow Palestinians to exercise their right to defend themselves and their land against the Zionist movement. It suppressed the popular uprisings, which followed one after another beginning in 1920 (including those of 1921, 1929, 1930, 1935, and 1936). The rules considered all forms of Palestinian resistance to be illegal acts of terrorism and extremism, and issued unjust laws against every Palestinian who carried arms or ammunition. Punishment included: “Six years in prison for possessing a revolver, twelve years for a grenade, five years of hard labor for possessing twelve bullets and eighteen months for giving false information to a group of soldiers asking for directions.”¹

The British allowed the Zionist movement to have its own armed brigade attached to the British Army. It took part in battles of World War II, thereby acquiring training and experience in the techniques of war. In 1939 ten detachments of Zionist settlement police were formed, each led by a British officer-altogether 14,411 men. There were 700 policemen in Tel Aviv and 100 in Haifa, all of whom were members of the Hagana. By 1948 most Jews over the age of 14 had already undergone military training. For these reasons they were militarily superior to the Palestinians during the 48’ war.

Before the war broke out and just before they withdrew, the British either turned a blind eye, or actually conspired with the Zionists who seized British arms and equipment. This strengthened the Zionist movement’s superiority over the Palestinians. It is worth mentioning that when Britain relinquished its Palestinian mandate to the UN, it was a very influential member of the international organization.

Fighting and clashes between the Jews and Palestinians began after UN Resolution 181 was passed by the General Assembly, on November 29, 1947. The situation deteriorated into an unequal confrontation. Zionist forces were organized, armed, and trained. Not only were they superior to the Palestinians, who for over 30 years had been exhausted by unjust British policy and Zionist terrorism, but these gangs were also superior to the Arab armies, which entered the war on May 15, 1948.

The results of the catastrophe, from which Palestinians still suffer, are not simple at all. The word “catastrophe” (*Nakba*) actually expresses what happened to this nation, which was subjected to massacres about which only a little is known. What happened to the Palestinian people is the assassination of rights, murder of the land and uprooting of human beings. This did not occur by chance.

The catastrophe was the result of continual subjugation, killing, executions, arrests, exile, and conspiracy – international and Arab- against Palestinians; it was the accumulation of ignorance, weakness and anarchy

¹ Issa Al-Sifri: *Palestine Between the Mandate and Zionism*. Palestine Now Library. Jaffa 1930. p.100

within Palestinian society which had to contend with Zionist bands supported by the British. David Ben-Gurion said: “We should destroy Arab pockets (in Jewish areas), such as Lod, Ramlah, Beisan and Zir’in, which will constitute a danger when we invade and thus may keep our forces engaged.”²

The destruction of 418 Palestinian villages inside the green line [pre-1967 Israeli border], concealing the landmarks of Palestinian life and the massacres against the Palestinian people are the best evidence for the brutality to which the Palestinians were exposed. They were dispersed throughout the world.

Concerning the exodus, the Palestinians did not have the least doubt that it would be for few days, after which they would return to their houses: “We thought that we would return after one or two weeks. We locked the house and we kept the key, waiting to return.”

Some 1,400,000 people inhabited Palestine in 1948. After the catastrophe about 750,000 Palestinians wandered with nowhere to go. Families were separated. The elderly died; children carried younger children; nursing children died of thirst. Suddenly they found themselves exiled from their homes, in an alien world that regarded them as a different kind of frightening human being- Refugees! The international community did not focus on learning the reasons for the refugee problem and finding a remedy. Rather than investigating the reasons for the forced migration and displacement, all they did was to provide them with humanitarian assistance.

1. What was the “catastrophe?”
2. Why are the British to blame for the defeat of the Palestinian Arab people?
3. List examples of the brutality suffered by the Palestinian Arab people.
4. Explain what happened to the Palestinians after they were exiled.

² David Ben-Gurion *Diary of war 1947/1948*, edited by Gershon Devlin, Walhrajon Oron, translated by Samir Jabbour, Institute of Palestine Studies, Beirut 1992, 1st ed., p. 316.