ILAN PAPPE

The ETHNIC CLEANSING *of* PALESTINE

"Ilan Pappe is Israel's bravest, most principled, most incisive historian."
JOHN PILGER

PRAISE FOR *THE ETHNIC CLEANSING OF PALESTINE*

‘Ilan Pappe is Israel’s bravest, most principled, most incisive historian.’ —*John Pilger*

‘Ilan Pappe has written an extraordinary book of profound relevance to the past, present, and future of Israel/Palestine relations.’

—*Richard Falk, Professor of International Law and Practise, Princeton University*

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—Karma Nabulsi, research fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford University

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—Daniel McGowan, Executive Director, Deir Yassin Remembered, Hobart and William Smith College

'Pappe has opened up an important new line of inquiry into the vast and fateful subject of the Palestinian refugees. His book is rewarding in other ways. It has at times an elegiac, even sentimental, character, recalling the lost, obliterated life of the Palestinian Arabs and imagining or regretting what Pappe believes could have been a better land of Palestine.'
—The Times Literary Supplement

'Succinct, clearly written, sometimes emotionally overwhelming in its personalized presentation, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* should be put forward as a document serving as a prime witness to the war crimes and the
crimes against humanity of the destruction of Palestinian society and cultural geography by the Jewish state.'

—Palestine Chronicle

‘Pappe offers a scorching indictment of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinian people in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*.’

—Metro

‘Pappe is one of the brave few voices to stand up and be counted in the oppressive atmosphere of Israeli society.’

—Morning Star

‘For anyone who possesses a strong stomach and an equally strong desire to know the truth.’

—Counterpunch

‘Pappe is well positioned to lob a grenade such as this one into the twin worlds of Middle Eastern studies and politics.’

—Arab Banker

THE ETHNIC CLEANSING OF PALESTINE

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And finally, this book is not formally dedicated to anyone, but it is written first and foremost for the Palestinian victims of the 1948 ethnic cleansing. Many of them are friends and comrades, many others are
nameless to me, and yet ever since I learned about the Nakba I have carried with me their suffering, their loss and their hopes. Only when they return will I feel that this chapter of the catastrophe has finally reached the closure we all covet, enabling all of us to live in peace and harmony in Palestine.

Preface

THE RED HOUSE

We are not mourning the farewell
We do not have the time nor the tears
We do not grasp the moment of farewell
Why, it is the Farewell
And we are left with the tears
Taha Muhammad Ali (1988), a refugee from the village of Saffuriyya

‘I am for compulsory transfer; I do not see anything immoral in it.’ David Ben-Gurion to the Jewish Agency Executive, June 1938[1]

The ‘Red House’ was a typical early Tel-Avivian building. The

pride of the Jewish builders and craftsmen who toiled over it in the 1920s, it had been designed to house the head office of the local workers' council. It remained such until, towards the end of 1947, it became the headquarters of the Hagana, the main Zionist underground militia in Palestine. Located near the sea on Yarkon Street in the northern part of Tel-Aviv, the building formed another fine addition to the first 'Hebrew' city on the Mediterranean, the 'White City' as its literati and pundits affectionately called it. For in those days, unlike today, the immaculate whiteness of its houses still bathed the town as a whole in the opulent brightness so typical of Mediterranean port cities of the era and the region. It was a sight for sore eyes, elegantly fusing Bauhaus motifs with native Palestinian architecture in an admixture that was called Levantine, in the least derogatory sense of
the term. Such, too, was the 'Red House', its simple rectangular features graced with frontal arches that framed the entrance and supported the balconies on its two upper storeys. It was either its association with a workers' movement that had inspired the adjective 'red', or a pinkish tinge it acquired during sunset that had given the house its name.[2] The former was more fitting, as the building continued to be associated with the Zionist version of socialism when, in the 1970s, it became the main office for Israel's kibbutzim movement. Houses like this, important historical remnants of the Mandatory period, prompted UNESCO in 2003 to designate Tel-Aviv as a World Heritage site.

Today the house is no longer there, a victim of development, which has razed this architectural relic to the ground to make room for a car park next to the new Sheraton Hotel. Thus, in this street, too, no trace is left of the 'White City', which it has slowly transmogrified into the sprawling, polluted, extravagant metropolis that is modern Tel-Aviv.

In this building, on a cold Wednesday afternoon, 10 March 1948, a group of eleven men, veteran Zionist leaders together with young military Jewish officers, put the final touches to a plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. That same evening, military orders were dispatched to the units on the ground to prepare for the systematic expulsion of the Palestinians from vast areas of the country.[3] The orders came with a detailed description of the methods to be employed to forcibly evict the people: large-scale intimidation; laying siege to and bombarding villages and population centres; setting fire to homes, properties and goods; expulsion; demolition; and, finally, planting mines among the rubble to prevent any of the expelled inhabitants from returning. Each unit was issued with its own list of

villages and neighbourhoods as the targets of this master plan. Codenamed Plan D (*Dalet* in Hebrew), this was the fourth and final version of less substantial plans that outlined the fate the Zionists had in store for Palestine and consequently for its native population. The previous three schemes had articulated only obscurely how the Zionist leadership contemplated dealing with the presence of so many Palestinians living in the land the Jewish national movement coveted as its own. This fourth and last blueprint spelled it out clearly and unambiguously: the Palestinians had to go.[4] In the words of one of the first historians to note the significance of that plan, Simcha Flapan, 'The military campaign against the Arabs, including the "conquest and destruction of the rural areas" was set forth in the Hagana's

Plan Dalet'.[5] The aim of the plan was in fact the destruction of both the rural and urban areas of Palestine.

As the first chapters of this book will attempt to show, this plan was both the inevitable product of the Zionist ideological impulse to have an exclusively Jewish presence in Palestine, and a response to developments on the ground once the British cabinet had decided to end the mandate. Clashes with local Palestinian militias provided the perfect context and pretext for implementing the ideological vision of an ethnically cleansed Palestine. The Zionist policy was first based on retaliation against Palestinian attacks in February 1947, and it transformed into an initiative to ethnically cleanse the country as a whole in March 1948.[6]

Once the decision was taken, it took six months to complete the mission. When it was over, more than half of Palestine's native population, close to 800,000 people, had been uprooted, 531 villages had been destroyed, and eleven urban neighbourhoods emptied of their inhabitants. The plan decided upon on 10 March 1948, and above all its systematic implementation in the following months, was a clear-cut case of an ethnic cleansing operation, regarded under international law today as a crime against humanity.

After the Holocaust, it has become almost impossible to conceal large scale crimes against humanity. Our modern communication-driven world, especially since the upsurge of electronic media, no longer allows human made catastrophes to remain hidden from the public eye or to be denied. And yet, one such crime has been erased almost totally from the global public memory: the dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948 by Israel. This, the most formative event in the modern history of the land of Palestine, has ever since been systematically denied, and is still today not recognised as an historical fact, let alone acknowledged as a crime

that needs to be confronted politically as well as morally.

Ethnic cleansing is a crime against humanity, and the people who perpetrate it today are considered criminals to be brought before special tribunals. It may be difficult to decide how one ought to refer to or deal with, in the legal sphere, those who initiated and perpetrated ethnic cleansing in Palestine in 1948, but it is possible to reconstruct their crimes and to arrive at both an historiographical account that will prove more accurate than the ones achieved so far, and a moral position of greater integrity.

We know the names of the people who sat in that room on the top floor of the Red House, beneath Marxist-style posters that carried such slogans as ‘Brothers in Arms’ and ‘The Fist of Steel’, and showed ‘new’ Jews – muscular, healthy and tanned – aiming their rifles from behind protective barriers in the ‘brave fight’ against ‘hostile Arab invaders’. We also know the names of the senior officers who executed the orders on the ground. All are familiar figures in the pantheon of Israeli heroism.[7] Not so long ago many of them were still alive, playing major roles in Israeli politics and society; very few are still with us today.

For Palestinians, and anyone else who refused to buy into the Zionist narrative, it was clear long before this book was written that these people were perpetrators of crimes, but that they had successfully evaded justice and would probably never be brought to trial for what they had done. Besides their trauma, the deepest form of frustration for Palestinians has been that the criminal act these men were responsible for has been so thoroughly denied, and that Palestinian suffering has been so totally ignored, ever since 1948.

Approximately thirty years ago, the victims of the ethnic cleansing started reassembling the historical picture that the official Israeli narrative of 1948 had done everything to conceal and distort. The tale Israeli historiography had concocted spoke of a massive ‘voluntary transfer’ of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who had decided temporarily to leave their homes and villages so as to make way for the invading Arab armies bent on destroying the fledgling Jewish state. By collecting authentic memories and documents about what had happened to their people, Palestinian historians in the 1970s, Walid Khalidi foremost among them, were able to retrieve a significant part of the picture Israel had tried to erase. But they were quickly overshadowed by publications such as Dan Kurzman’s *Genesis 1948* which appeared in 1970 and again in 1992 (now with an introduction by one of the executors of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, Yitzhak Rabin, then Israel’s prime minister). However, there were also some who came out in support of the Palestinian

endeavour, like Michael Palumbo whose *The Palestinian Catastrophe*, published in 1987, validated the Palestinian version of the 1948 events with the help of UN documents and interviews with Palestinian refugees and exiles, whose memories of what they had gone through during the Nakba still proved to be hauntingly vivid.[8]

We could have had a political breakthrough in the battle over memory in Palestine with the appearance on the scene in the 1980s of the so-called 'new history' in Israel. This was an attempt by a small group of Israeli historians to revise the Zionist narrative of the 1948 war.[9] I was one of them. But we, the new historians, never contributed significantly to the struggle against the Nakba denial as we sidestepped the question of ethnic cleansing and, typically of diplomatic historians, focused on details. Nonetheless, using primarily Israeli military archives, the revisionist Israeli historians did succeed in showing how false and absurd was the Israeli claim that the Palestinians had left 'of their own accord'. They were able to confirm many cases of massive expulsions from villages and towns and revealed that the Jewish forces had committed a considerable number of atrocities, including massacres.

One of the best-known figures writing on the subject was the Israeli historian Benny Morris.[10] As he exclusively relied on documents from Israeli military archives, Morris ended up with a very partial picture of what happened on the ground. Still, this was enough for some of his Israeli readers to realise that the 'voluntary flight' of the Palestinians had been a myth and that the Israeli self-image of having waged a 'moral' war in 1948 against a 'primitive' and hostile Arab world was considerably flawed and possibly already bankrupt.

The picture was partial because Morris took the Israeli military reports he found in the archives at face value or even as absolute truth. Thus, he ignored such atrocities as the poisoning of the water supply into Acre with typhoid, numerous cases of rape and the dozens of massacres the Jews perpetrated. He also kept insisting – wrongly – that before 15 May 1948 there had been no forced evictions.[11] Palestinian sources show clearly how months before the entry of Arab forces into Palestine, and while the British were still responsible for law and order in the country – namely before 15 May – the Jewish forces had already succeeded in forcibly expelling almost a quarter of a million Palestinians.[12] Had Morris and others used Arab sources or turned to oral history, they might have been able to get a better grasp of the systematic planning behind the expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948 and provide a more truthful description of the enormity of the crimes the Israeli soldiers

committed.

There was then, and there is still now, a need, both historical and political, to go beyond descriptions such as the one we find in Morris, not only in order to complete the picture (in fact, provide the second half of it), but also – and far more importantly – because there is no other way for us to fully understand the roots of the contemporary Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But above all, of course, there is a moral imperative to continue the struggle against the denial of the crime. The endeavour to go further has already been started by others. The most important work, to be expected given his previous significant contributions to the struggle against denial, was Walid Khalidi's seminal book *All That Remains.* This is an almanac of the destroyed villages, which is still an essential guide for anyone wishing to comprehend the enormity of the 1948 catastrophe.[13]

One might suggest that the history already exposed should have been enough to raise troubling questions. Yet, the 'new history' narrative and recent Palestinian historiographical inputs somehow failed to enter the public realm of moral conscience and action. In this book, I want to explore both the mechanism of the 1948 ethnic cleansing, and the cognitive system that allowed the world to forget, and enabled the perpetrators to deny, the crime the Zionist movement committed against the Palestinian people in 1948.

In other words, I want to make the case for the paradigm of ethnic cleansing and use it to replace the paradigm of war as the basis for the scholarly research of, and the public debate about, 1948. I have no doubt that the absence so far of the paradigm of ethnic cleansing is part of the reason why the denial of the catastrophe has been able to go on for so long. When it created its nation-state, the Zionist movement did not wage a war that 'tragically but inevitably' led to the expulsion of 'parts of' the indigenous population, but the other way round: the main goal was the ethnic cleansing of all of Palestine, which the movement coveted for its new state. A few weeks after the ethnic cleansing operations began, the neighbouring Arab states sent a small army – small in comparison to their overall military might – to try, in vain, to prevent the ethnic cleansing. The war with the regular Arab armies did not bring the ethnic cleansing operations to a halt until their successful completion in the autumn of 1948.

To some, this approach – adopting the paradigm of ethnic cleansing as the a priori basis for the narrative of 1948 – may from the outset look as an indictment. In many ways it is indeed my own *J'Accuse* against the politicians who devised, and the generals who perpetrated, the ethnic cleansing. Still, when I mention their names, I

do so not because I want to
see them posthumously brought to trial, but in order to humanise the victimisers as well as the victims: I want to prevent the crimes Israel committed from being attributed to such elusive factors as 'the circumstances', 'the army' or, as Morris has it, '*à la guerre comme à la guerre*', and similar vague references that let sovereign states off the hook and enable individuals to escape justice. I accuse, but I am also part of the society that stands condemned in this book. I feel both responsible for and part of the story and, like others in my own society, I am convinced, as my final pages show, that such a painful journey into the past is the only way forward if we want to create a better future for us all, Palestinians and Israelis alike. Because, at heart, that is what this book is about.

I am not aware that anyone has ever tried this approach before. The two official historical narratives that compete over the story of what happened in Palestine in 1948 both ignore the concept of ethnic cleansing. While the Zionist/Israeli version claims that the local population left 'voluntarily', the Palestinians talk about the 'catastrophe', the Nakba, that befell them, which in some ways is also an elusive term as it refers more to the disaster itself rather than to who or what caused it. The term Nakba was adopted, for understandable reasons, as an attempt to counter the moral weight of the Jewish Holocaust (Shoa), but in leaving out the actor, it may in a sense have contributed to the continuing denial by the world of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948 and after.

The book opens with a definition of ethnic cleansing that I hope is transparent enough to be acceptable to all, one that has served as the basis for legal actions against perpetrators of such crimes in the past and in our own days. Quite surprisingly, the usual complex and (for most normal human beings) impenetrable legal discourse is here replaced by clear, jargon-free language. This simplicity does not minimise the hideousness of the deed nor does it belie the crime's gravity. On the contrary: the result is a straightforward description of an atrocious policy that the international community today refuses to condone.

The general definition of what ethnic cleansing consists of applies almost verbatim to the case of Palestine. As such, the story of what occurred in 1948 emerges as an uncomplicated, but by no means a consequently simplified, or secondary, chapter in the history of Palestine's dispossession. Indeed, adopting the prism of ethnic cleansing easily enables one to penetrate the cloak of complexity that Israeli diplomats trot out almost
instinctively and Israeli academics routinely hide behind when

fending off outside attempts to criticise Zionism or the Jewish state for its policies and behaviour. 'Foreigners', they say in my country, 'do not and cannot understand this perplexing story' and there is therefore no need even to try to explain it to them. Nor should we allow them to be involved in the attempts to solve the conflict – unless they accept the Israeli point of view. All one can do, as Israeli governments have been good at telling the world for years, is to allow 'us', the Israelis, as representatives of the 'civilised' and 'rational' side in the conflict, to find an equitable solution for 'ourselves' and for the other side, the Palestinians, who after all epitomise the 'uncivilised' and 'emotional' Arab world to which Palestine belongs. The moment the United States proved ready to adopt this warped approach and endorse the arrogance that underpins it, we had a 'peace process' that has led, and could only lead, nowhere, because it so totally ignores the heart of the matter.

But the story of 1948, of course, is not complicated at all, and therefore this book is written as much for newcomers to the field as it is aimed at those who already, for many years and various reasons, have been involved with the question of Palestine and how to bring us closer to a solution. It is the simple but horrific story of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, a crime against humanity that Israel has wanted to deny and cause the world to forget. Retrieving it from oblivion is incumbent upon us, not just as a greatly overdue act of historiographical reconstruction or professional duty; it is, as I see it, a moral decision, the very first step we must take if we ever want reconciliation to have a chance, and peace to take root, in the torn lands of Palestine and Israel.

Chapter 1
An 'Alleged' Ethnic Cleansing?

> It is the present writer's view that ethnic cleansing is a well defined policy of a particular group of persons to systematically eliminate another group from a given territory on the basis of religious, ethnic or national origin. Such a policy involves violence and is very often connected with military operations. It is to be achieved by all possible means, from discrimination to extermination, and entails violations of human rights and international humanitarian law . . . Most ethnic cleansing methods are grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and 1977 Additional Protocols.

Drazen Petrovic, ‘Ethnic Cleansing – An Attempt at Methodology’, *European Journal of International Law*, 5/3 (1994), pp. 342–60.

DEFINITIONS OF ETHNIC CLEANSING

Ethnic cleansing is today a well-defined concept. From an abstraction associated almost exclusively with the events in the former Yugoslavia, ‘ethnic cleansing’ has come to be defined as a crime against humanity, punishable by international law. The particular way some of the Serbian generals and politicians were using the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ reminded scholars they had heard it before. It was used in the Second World War by the Nazis and their allies, such as the Croat militias in Yugoslavia. The roots of collective dispossession are, of course, more ancient: foreign invaders have used the term (or its equivalents) and practised the concept regularly against indigenous populations, from Biblical times to the height of colonialism.

The Hutchinson encyclopedia defines ethnic cleansing as expulsion by force in order to homogenise the ethnically mixed population of a particular region or territory. The purpose of expulsion is to cause the evacuation of as many residences as possible, by all means at the expeller’s disposal, including non-violent ones, as happened with the Muslims in Croatia, expelled after the Dayton agreement of November 1995.

This definition is also accepted by the US State Department. Its experts add that part of the essence of ethnic cleansing is the eradication, by all means available, of a region’s history. The most common method is that of depopulation within ‘an atmosphere that legitimises acts of retribution and revenge’. The end result of such acts is the creation of a refugee problem. The State Department looked in particular at what happened around May 1999 in the town of Peck in Western Kosovo. Peck was depopulated within twenty-four hours, a result that could only have been achieved through advance planning followed by systematic execution. There had also been sporadic massacres, intended to speed up the operation. What happened in Peck in 1999 took place in almost the same manner in hundreds of Palestinian villages in 1948.[1]

When we turn to the United Nations, we find it employs similar

definitions. The organisation discussed the concept seriously in 1993. The UN's Council for Human Rights (UNCHR) links a state's or a regime's desire to impose ethnic rule on a mixed area – such as the making of Greater Serbia – with the use of acts of expulsion and other violent means. The report the UNCHR published defined acts of ethnic cleansing as including 'separation of men from women, detention of men, explosion of houses' and subsequently repopulating the remaining houses with another ethnic group. In certain places in Kosovo, the report noted, Muslim militias had put up resistance: where this resistance had been stubborn, the expulsion entailed massacres.[2]

Israel's 1948 Plan D, mentioned in the preface, contains a repertoire of cleansing methods that one by one fit the means the UN describes in its definition of ethnic cleansing, and sets the background for the massacres that accompanied the massive expulsion.

Such references to ethnic cleansing are also the rule within the scholarly and academic worlds. Drazen Petrovic has published one of the most comprehensive studies on definitions of ethnic cleansing. He associates ethnic cleansing with nationalism, the making of new nation states, and
national struggle. From this perspective he exposes the close connection between politicians and the army in the perpetration of the crime and comments on the place of massacres within it. That is, the political leadership delegates the implementation of the ethnic cleansing to the military level without necessarily furnishing any systematic plans or providing explicit instructions, but with no doubt as to the overall objective.[3]

Thus, at one point – and this again mirrors exactly what happened in Palestine – the political leadership ceases to take an active part as the machinery of expulsion comes into action and rolls on, like a huge bulldozer propelled by its own inertia, only to come to a halt when it has completed its task. The people it crushes underneath and kills are of no concern to the politicians who set it in motion. Petrovic and others draw our attention to the distinction between massacres that are part of genocide, where they are premeditated, and the 'unplanned' massacres that are a direct result of the hatred and vengeance whipped up against the background of a general directive from higher up to carry out an ethnic cleansing.

Thus, the encyclopedia definition outlined above appears to be consonant with the more scholarly attempt to conceptualise the crime of ethnic cleansing. In both views, ethnic cleansing is an effort to render an ethnically mixed country homogenous by expelling a

particular group of people and turning them into refugees while demolishing the homes they were driven out from. There may well be a master plan, but most of the troops engaged in ethnic cleansing do not need direct orders: they know beforehand what is expected of them. Massacres accompany the operations, but where they occur they are not part of a genocidal plan: they are a key tactic to accelerate the flight of the population earmarked for expulsion. Later on, the expelled are then erased from the country's official and popular history and excised from its collective memory. From planning stage to final execution, what occurred in Palestine in 1948 forms a clear-cut case, according to these informed and scholarly definitions, of ethnic cleansing.

Popular Definitions

The electronic encyclopedia Wikipedia is an accessible reservoir of knowledge and information. Anyone can enter it and add to or change existing definitions, so that it reflects – by no means empirically but rather intuitively – a wide public perception of a certain idea or concept. Like the scholarly and encyclopedic definitions mentioned above, Wikipedia characterises ethnic cleansing as massive expulsion and also as a crime. I quote:

> At the most general level, ethnic cleansing can be understood as the forced expulsion of an 'undesirable' population from a given territory as a result of religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or a combination of these.[4]

The entry lists several cases of ethnic cleansing in the twentieth century, beginning with the expulsion of the Bulgarians from Turkey in 1913 all the way up to the Israeli pullout of Jewish settlers from Gaza in 2005. The list may strike us as a bit bizarre in the way it incorporates within the same category Nazi ethnic cleansing and the removal by a sovereign state of its own people after it declared them illegal settlers. But this classification becomes possible because of the rationale the editors – in this case, everyone with access to the site – adopted for their policy, which is that they make sure the adjective 'alleged' precedes each of the historical cases on their list.

Wikipedia also includes the Palestinian Nakba of 1948. But one cannot tell whether the editors regard the Nakba as a case of ethnic cleansing that leaves no room for ambivalence, as in the examples of Nazi Germany or the former Yugoslavia, or whether they consider this a more doubtful case, perhaps similar to that of the Jewish settlers whom Israel removed from the Gaza Strip. One criterion this

and other sources generally accept in order to gauge the seriousness of the allegation is whether anyone has been indicted before an international tribunal. In other words, where the perpetrators were brought to justice, i.e., were tried by an international judicial system, all ambiguity is removed and the crime of ethnic cleansing is no longer 'alleged'. But upon reflection, this criterion must also be extended to cases that should have been brought before such tribunals but never were. This is admittedly more open-ended, and some clear-cut crimes against humanity require a long struggle before the world recognises them as historical facts.

The Armenians learned this in the case of their genocide: in 1915, the Ottoman government embarked on a systematic decimation of the Armenian people. An estimated one million perished by 1918, but no individual or group of individuals has been brought to trial.

ETHNIC CLEANSING AS A CRIME

Ethnic cleansing is designated as a crime against humanity in international treaties, such as that which created the International Criminal Court (ICC), and whether 'alleged' or fully recognised, it is subject to adjudication under international law. A special International Criminal Tribunal was set up in The Hague in the case of the former Yugoslavia to prosecute the perpetrators and criminals and, similarly, in Arusha, Tanzania, in the case of Rwanda. In other instances, ethnic cleansing was defined as a war crime even when no legal process was instigated as such (for example, the actions committed by the Sudanese government in Darfur).

This book is written with the deep conviction that the ethnic cleansing of Palestine must become rooted in our memory and consciousness as a crime against humanity and that it should be excluded from the list of *alleged* crimes. The perpetrators here are not obscure – they are a very specific group of people: the heroes of the Jewish war of independence, whose names will be quite familiar to most readers. The list begins with the indisputable leader of the Zionist movement, David Ben-Gurion, in whose private home all early and later chapters in the ethnic cleansing story were discussed and finalised. He was aided by a small group of people I refer to in this book as the 'Consultancy', an ad-hoc cabal assembled solely for the purpose of plotting and designing the dispossession of the Palestinians.[5] In one of the rare documents that records the meeting of the Consultancy, it is referred to as the Consultant Committee – *Haveadah Hamyeazet*. In another document the eleven names of the

committee members appear, although they are all erased by the censor (nonetheless, as will transpire, I have managed to reconstruct all the names).[6]

This caucus prepared the plans for the ethnic cleansing and supervised its execution until the job of uprooting half of Palestine's native population had been completed. It included first and foremost the top-ranking officers of
the future Jewish State's army, such as the legendary Yigael Yadin and Moshe Dayan. They were joined by figures unknown outside Israel but well grounded in the local ethos, such as Yigal Allon and Yitzhak Sadeh. These military men co-mingled with what nowadays we would call the 'Orientalists': experts on the Arab world at large and the Palestinians in particular, either because they themselves came from Arab countries or because they were scholars in the field of Middle Eastern studies. We will encounter some of their names later on as well.

Both the officers and the experts were assisted by regional commanders, such as Moshe Kalman, who cleansed the Safad area, and Moshe Carmel, who uprooted most of the Galilee. Yitzhak Rabin operated both in Lydd and Ramla as well as in the Greater Jerusalem area. Remember their names, but begin to think of them not just as Israeli war heroes. They did take part in founding a state for Jews, and many of their actions are understandably revered by their own people for helping to save them from outside attacks, seeing them through crises, and above all offering them a safe haven from religious persecution in different parts of the world. But history will judge how these achievements will ultimately weigh in the balance when the opposite scale holds the crimes they committed against the indigenous people of Palestine. Other regional commanders included Shimon Avidan, who cleansed the south and of whom his colleague, Rehavam Zeevi, who fought with him, said many years later, 'Commanders like Shimon Avidan, the commander of the Givati Brigade, cleansed his front from tens of villages and towns'.[7] He was assisted by Yitzhak Pundak, who told *Ha'aretz* in 2004, 'There were two hundred villages [in the front] and these are gone. We had to destroy them, otherwise we would have had Arabs here [namely in the southern part of Palestine] as we have in Galilee. We would have had another million Palestinians'.[8]

And then there were the intelligence officers on the ground. Far from being mere collectors of data on the 'enemy', they not only played a major role in the cleansing but also took part in some of the worst atrocities that accompanied the systematic dispossession of the Palestinians. They were given the final authority to decide which

villages would be destroyed and who among the villagers would be executed.[9] In the memories of Palestinian survivors they were the ones who, after a village or neighbourhood had been occupied, decided the fate of its occupants, which could mean the difference between imprisonment and freedom, or life and death. Their operations in 1948 were supervised by Issar Harel, later the first person to head the Mossad and the Shabak, Israel's secret services. His image is familiar to many Israelis. A short bulky figure, Harel had the modest rank of colonel in 1948, but was nonetheless the most senior officer overseeing all the operations of interrogation, blacklisting and the other oppressive features of Palestinian life under the Israeli occupation.

Finally, it bears repeating that from whatever angle you look at it – the legal, the scholarly, and up to the most populist – ethnic cleansing is indisputably identified today as a crime against humanity and as involving war crimes, with special international tribunals judging those indicted of having planned and executed acts of ethnic cleansing. However, I should now add that, in hindsight, we might think of applying – and, quite frankly, for peace to have a chance in Palestine we ought to apply – a rule of obsolescence in this case, but on one condition: that the one political solution normally regarded as essential for reconciliation by both the United States and the United Nations is enforced here too, namely the unconditional return of the refugees to their homes. The US supported such a UN decision for Palestine, that of 11 December 1948 (Resolution 194), for a short – all too short – while. By the spring of 1949 American policy had already been reoriented onto a conspicuously pro-Israeli track, turning Washington's mediators into the opposite of honest brokers as they largely ignored the Palestinian point of view in general, and disregarded in particular the Palestinian refugees' right of return.

RECONSTRUCTING AN ETHNIC CLEANSING

By adhering to the definition of ethnic cleansing as given above, we absolve ourselves from the need to go deeply into the origins of Zionism as the ideological cause of the ethnic cleansing. Not that the subject is not important, but it has been dealt with successfully by a number of Palestinian and Israeli scholars such as Walid Khalidi, Nur Masalha, Gershon Shafir and Baruch Kimmerling, among others.[10] Although I would like to focus on the immediate background preceding the operations, it would be valuable for readers to recap

the major arguments of these scholars.

A good book to begin with is Nur Masalha's *Expulsion of the Palestinians*,[11] which shows clearly how deeply rooted the concept of transfer was, and is, in Zionist political thought. From the founder of the Zionist movement, Theodor Herzl, to the main leaders of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, cleansing the land was a valid option. As one of the movement's most liberal thinkers, Leo Motzkin, put it in 1917:

> Our thought is that the colonization of Palestine has to go in two directions: Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel and the resettlement of the Arabs of Eretz Israel in areas outside the country. The transfer of so many Arabs may seem at first unacceptable economically, but is nonetheless practical. It does not require too much money to resettle a Palestinian village on another land.[12]

The fact that the expellers were newcomers to the country, and part of a colonization project, relates the case of Palestine to the colonialist history of ethnic cleansing in North and South America, Africa and Australia, where white settlers routinely committed such crimes. This intriguing aspect of the historical instance Israel offers was the subject of several recent and excellent studies. Gershon Shafir and Baruch Kimmerling informed us about the connection between Zionism and Colonialism, a nexus that can bring us at first to exploitation rather than expulsion, but once the idea of an exclusive Jewish economy became a central part of the vision, there was no room for Arab workers or peasants.[13] Walid Khalidi and Samih Farsoun connected the centrality of the transfer ideology more closely to the end of the mandate, and they ask why the UN entrusted the fate of so many Palestinians to a movement that had clearly included transfer in its ideology.[14]

I will seek less to expose the ideological inclination of those involved than to highlight the systematic planning with which they turned an ethnically mixed area into a pure ethnic space. This is the purpose of my opening chapters. I will return to the ideological connection towards the end of the book when I analyze it as the only adequate explanation we have for the ethnic cleansing by Israel of the Palestinians that started in 1948 but continues, in a variety of means, to today.

A second, more unpleasant task will be to reconstruct the methods Israel used for executing its master plan of expulsion and destruction, and

examine how and to what extent these were typically affiliated with acts of ethnic cleansing. As I argued above, it seems to me that, had we never heard of the events in the former Yugoslavia but had been aware only of the case of Palestine, we would be forgiven for thinking that the US and UN definitions were inspired by the Nakba, down to almost their last minute detail.

Before we delve into the history of the ethnic cleansing in Palestine and try to contemplate the implications it has had up to the present day, we should pause for a moment and think about relative numbers. The figure of three-quarters of a million uprooted Palestinians can seem to be 'modest' when set in the context of the transfer of millions of people in Europe that was an outcome of the Second World War, or the dispossessions occurring in Africa in the beginning of the twenty-first century. But sometimes one needs to relativise numbers and think in percentages to begin to understand the magnitude of a tragedy that engulfed the population of an entire country. Half of the indigenous people living in Palestine were driven out, half of their villages and towns were destroyed, and only very few among them ever managed to return.

But beyond numbers, it is the deep chasm between reality and representation that is most bewildering in the case of Palestine. It is indeed hard to understand, and for that matter to explain, why a crime that was perpetrated in modern times and at a juncture in history that called for foreign reporters and UN observers to be present, should have been so totally ignored. And yet, there is no denying that the ethnic cleansing of 1948 has been eradicated almost totally from the collective global memory and erased from the world's conscience. Imagine that not so long ago, in any given country you are familiar with, half of the entire population had been forcibly expelled within a year, half of its villages and towns wiped out, leaving behind only rubble and stones. Imagine now the possibility that somehow this act will never make it into the history books and that all diplomatic efforts to solve the conflict that erupted in that country will totally sideline, if not ignore, this catastrophic event. I, for one, have searched in vain through the history of the world as we know it in the aftermath of the Second World War for a case of this nature and a fate of this kind. There are other, earlier, cases that have fared similarly, such as the ethnic cleansing of the non-Hungarians at the end of the nineteenth century, the genocide of the Armenians, and the holocaust perpetrated by the Nazi occupation against travelling people (the Roma, also known as Sinti) in the 1940s. I hope in the future that Palestine will no longer be included in this list.

Chapter 2
The Drive for an Exclusively Jewish State

The United Nations General Assembly strongly rejects policies and ideologies aimed at promoting ethnic cleansing in any form
Resolution 47/80 16 December 1992

ZIONISM'S IDEOLOGICAL MOTIVATION

Zionism emerged in the late 1880s in central and eastern Europe as a national revival movement, prompted by the growing pressure on Jews in those regions either to assimilate totally or risk continuing persecution (though, as we know, even complete assimilation was no safeguard against annihilation in the case of Nazi Germany). By the beginning of the twentieth century, most of the leaders of the Zionist movement associated this national revival with the colonization of Palestine. Others, especially the founder of the movement, Theodor Herzl, were more ambivalent, but after his death, in 1904, the orientation towards Palestine was fixed and consensual.

Eretz Israel, the name for Palestine in the Jewish religion, had been revered throughout the centuries by generations of Jews as a place for holy pilgrimage, never as a future secular state. Jewish tradition and religion clearly instruct Jews to await the coming of the promised Messiah at 'the end of times' before they can return to Eretz Israel as a sovereign people in a Jewish theocracy, that is, as the obedient servants of God (this is why today several streams of Ultra-Orthodox Jews are either non or anti Zionist). In other words, Zionism secularised and nationalised Judaism. To bring their project to fruition, the Zionist thinkers claimed the biblical territory and recreated, indeed reinvented, it as the cradle of their new nationalist movement. As they saw it, Palestine was occupied by 'strangers' and had to be repossessed. 'Strangers' here meant everyone not Jewish who had been living in Palestine since the Roman period.[1] In fact, for many Zionists Palestine was not even an 'occupied' land when they first arrived there in 1882, but rather an 'empty' one: the native Palestinians who lived there were largely invisible to them or, if not, were part of nature's hardship and as such were to be

conquered and removed. Nothing, neither rocks nor Palestinians, was to stand in the way of the national 'redemption' of the land the Zionist movement coveted.[2]

Until the occupation of Palestine by Britain in 1918, Zionism was a blend of nationalist ideology and colonialist practice. It was limited in scope: Zionists made up no more than five per cent of the country's overall population at that time. Living in colonies, they did not affect, nor were they particularly noticed by, the local population. The potential for a future Jewish takeover of the country and the expulsion of the indigenous Palestinian people, which historians have so clearly recognised in retrospect in the writings of the founding fathers of Zionism, became evident to some Palestinian leaders even before the First World War; others were less interested in the movement.

Historical evidence shows that at some time between 1905 and 1910, several Palestinian leaders discussed Zionism as a political movement aiming to purchase land, assets and power in Palestine, although the destructive potential was not fully comprehended at that period. Many members of the local elite saw it as part of the European missionary and colonialist drive – which in part it was, but of course it had an additional edge to it that turned into a dangerous enterprise for the native population.[3]

This potential was not often discussed or articulated by the Zionist leaders themselves, but some Palestinian notables and intellectuals must have sensed the looming danger, since we find them trying to convince the Ottoman government in Istanbul to limit, if not totally prohibit, Jewish immigration and settlement into Palestine, which was under Turkish rule until 1918.[4]

The Palestinian member of the Ottoman Parliament, Said al-Husayni, claimed on 6 May 1911 that 'the Jews intend to create a state in the area that will include Palestine, Syria and Iraq'.[5] However, Al-Husayni belonged to a family, and a group of local notables, who until the 1930s preached against the Zionist colonization while selling lands to the newcomers. As the Mandatory years went by, the sense of a looming danger, indeed a catastrophe, settled in among the more intellectual sections of the elite,[6] but it was never translated into proper preparations for the existential danger awaiting their society.

Others around Palestine, such as the leading Egyptian literati, saw the movement of Jews into Palestine as an irresponsible attempt on the part of Europe to transfer its poorest and often stateless people into the country, not as part of a master plan aimed at the

dispossession of the local people. To them, this movement of wretched people seemed but a minor threat compared with the far more conspicuous attempt European colonial powers and churches were making to take over the 'Holy Land' through their missionaries, diplomats and colonies.[7] Indeed, prior to the British occupation of Palestine at the end of 1917, the Zionists were vague where their actual plans were concerned, not so much for lack of orientation, but more because of the need to prioritise the concerns of the as yet small Jewish immigrant community: there was always the threat of being thrown out again by the government in Istanbul.

However, when a clearer vision for the future needed to be spelled out for internal consumption, we find no ambiguity whatsoever. What the Zionists anticipated was the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine in order to escape a history of persecutions and pogroms in the West, invoking the religious 'redemption' of an 'ancient homeland' as their means. This was the official narrative, and it no doubt genuinely expressed the motivation of most of the Zionist leadership's members. But the more critical view today sees the Zionist drive to settle in Palestine, instead of other possible locations, as closely interwoven with nineteenth-century Christian millenarianism and European colonialism. The various Protestant missionary societies and the governments in the European Concert competed among themselves over the future of a 'Christian' Palestine that they wanted to pry away from the Ottoman Empire. The more religious among the aspirants in the West regarded the return of the Jews to Palestine as a chapter in the divine scheme, precipitating the second coming of Christ and the creation of a pietist state there. This religious zeal inspired pious politicians, such as Lloyd George, the British prime minister during the First World War, to act with even greater commitment for the success of the Zionist project. This did not prevent him from supplying his government at the same time with a host of 'strategic', rather than messianic, considerations for why Palestine should be colonised by the Zionist movement, which were mostly infused
by his own overriding distrust of, and disdain for, 'Arabs' and 'Mohammedans', as he called the Palestinians.[8]

Recent scholarship also tends to question the more Marxist flavour that the official Israeli historiography has claimed for the early colonization of Palestine by portraying Zionism as a positive endeavour to carry the socialist and Marxist revolutions beyond their less successful attempts in Russia.[9] The more critical view depicts this aspiration as doubtful at best and as manipulative at worst. Indeed, much like today's more liberal minded Israeli Jews who are

ready to drop the principles of democracy when faced with the prospect of a demographic majority of non-Jews in the country, so, it seems, did the socialist Zionists quickly substitute their more universal dreams with the powerful allure of nationalism. And when the main objective became making Palestine exclusively Jewish rather than socialist, it was significantly the Labour movement within Zionism that instituted and implemented the ethnic cleansing of the local population.

The early Zionist settlers directed most of their energy and resources towards buying up plots of land in an attempt to enter the local labour market and create social and communal networks that could sustain their as yet small and economically vulnerable group of newcomers. The more precise strategies of how best to take over Palestine as a whole and create a nation-state in the country, or in part of it, were a later development, closely associated with British ideas of how best to solve the conflict Britain itself had done so much to exacerbate.

The moment British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour gave the Zionist movement his promise in 1917 to establish a national home for the Jews in Palestine,[10] he opened the door to the endless conflict that would soon engulf the country and its people. In the pledge he made in his government's name, Balfour promised to protect the aspirations of the non Jewish population – a strange reference to the vast native majority – but the declaration clashed precipitately with both the aspirations and natural rights of the Palestinians for nationhood and independence.

By the end of the 1920s, it was clear that this proposal had a potentially violent core, as it had already claimed the lives of hundreds of Palestinians and Jews. This now prompted the British to make a serious, albeit reluctant, attempt to solve the smouldering conflict.

Until 1928, the British government had treated Palestine as a state within the British sphere of influence, not as a colony; a state in which, under
British tutelage, the promise to the Jews and the aspirations of the Palestinians could both be fulfilled. They tried to put in place a political structure that would represent both communities on an equal footing in the state's parliament as well as in government. In practice, when the offer was made it was less equitable; it advantaged the Zionist colonies and discriminated against the Palestinian majority. The balance within the new proposed legislative council was in favour of the Jewish community who were to be allied with members appointed by the British administration.[11]

As the Palestinians made up the majority of between eighty and ninety per cent of the total population in the 1920s, they understandably refused at first to accept the British suggestion of parity, let alone one that disadvantaged them in practice – a position that encouraged the Zionist leaders to endorse it. A pattern now emerges: when, in 1928, the Palestinian leadership, apprehensive of the growing Jewish immigration into the country and the expansion of their settlements, agreed to accept the formula as a basis for negotiations, the Zionist leadership quickly rejected it. The Palestinian uprising in 1929 was the direct result of Britain's refusal to implement at least their promise of parity after the Palestinians had been willing to set aside the democratic principal of majoritarian politics, which Britain had championed as the basis for negotiations in all the other Arab states within its sphere of influence.[12]

After the 1929 uprising, the Labour government in London appeared inclined to embrace the Palestinian demands, but the Zionist lobby succeeded in reorienting the British government comfortably back onto the Balfourian track. This made another uprising inevitable. It duly erupted in 1936 in the form of a popular rebellion fought with such determination that it forced the British government to station more troops in Palestine than there were in the Indian subcontinent. After three years, with brutal and ruthless attacks on the Palestinian countryside, the British military subdued the revolt. The Palestinian leadership was exiled, and the paramilitary units that had sustained the guerilla warfare against the Mandatory forces were disbanded. During this process many of the villagers involved were arrested, wounded or killed. The absence of most of the Palestinian leadership and of viable Palestinian fighting units gave the Jewish forces in 1947 an easy ride into the Palestinian countryside.

In between the two uprisings, the Zionist leadership had wasted no time in working out their plans for an exclusively Jewish presence in Palestine:

first, in 1937, by accepting a modest portion of the land when they responded favourably to a recommendation by the British Royal Peel commission to partition Palestine into two states;[13] and second, in 1942, by attempting a more maximalist strategy, demanding all of Palestine for itself. The geographical space it coveted may have changed with time and according to circumstances and opportunities, but the principal objective remained the same. The Zionist project could only be realised through the creation in Palestine of a purely Jewish state, both as a safe haven for Jews from persecution and a cradle for a new Jewish nationalism. And such a state had to be

exclusively Jewish not only in its socio-political structure but also in its ethnic composition.

MILITARY PREPARATIONS

From the outset, the British Mandatory authorities had allowed the Zionist movement to carve out an independent enclave for itself in Palestine as the infrastructure for a future state, and in the late 1930s the movement's leaders were able to translate the abstract vision of Jewish exclusivity into more concrete plans. Zionist preparations for the eventuality of taking the land by force, should it fail to be granted to them through diplomacy, included the building of an efficient military organisation – with the help of sympathetic British officers – and the search for ample financial resources (for which they could tap the Jewish Diaspora). In many ways the creation of an embryonic diplomatic corps was also an integral part of the same general preparations that were aimed at snatching, by force, a state in Palestine.[14]

It was one British officer in particular, Orde Charles Wingate, who made the Zionist leaders realise more fully that the idea of Jewish statehood had to be closely associated with militarism and an army, first of all to protect the growing number of Jewish enclaves and colonies inside Palestine but also – more crucially – because acts of armed aggression were an effective deterrent against the possible resistance of the local Palestinians. From there, the road to contemplating the enforced transfer of the entire indigenous population would prove to be very short indeed.[15]

Orde Wingate was born in India in the early twentieth century to a military family and received a very religious upbringing. He began an Arabophile career in the Sudan, where he gained prestige with a particularly effective ambush policy against slave traders. In 1936, he was assigned to Palestine where he quickly became enchanted by the Zionist dream. He decided actively to encourage the Jewish settlers and started teaching their troops more effective combat tactics and retaliation methods against the local population. It is no wonder that his Zionist associates greatly admired him.

Wingate transformed the principal paramilitary organisation of the Jewish community in Palestine, the Hagana. Established in 1920, its name literally means 'defence' in Hebrew, ostensibly to indicate that its main purpose was protecting the Jewish colonies. Under the influence of Wingate, and the militant mood he inspired among its

commanders, the Hagana quickly became the military arm of the Jewish Agency, the Zionist governing body in Palestine that in the end developed and then implemented plans for the Zionist military takeover of Palestine as a whole, and the ethnic cleansing of its native population.[16]

The Arab revolt gave the Hagana members a chance to practise the military tactics Wingate had taught them in the Palestinian rural areas, mostly in the form of retaliatory operations against such targets as roadside snipers or thieves taking goods from a kibbutz. The main objective, however, seems to have been to intimidate Palestinian communities who happened to live in proximity to Jewish settlements.

Wingate succeeded in attaching Hagana troops to the British forces during the Arab revolt so that they could learn even better what a 'punitive mission' to an Arab village ought to entail. For example, in June 1938 Jewish troops got their first taste of what it meant to occupy a Palestinian village: a Hagana unit and a British company jointly attacked a village on the border between Israel and Lebanon, and held it for a few hours.[17]

Amatziya Cohen, who took part in the operation, remembered the British sergeant who showed them how to use bayonets in attacking defenseless villagers: 'I think you are all totally ignorant in your Ramat Yochanan [the training base for the Hagana] since you do not even know the elementary use of bayonets when attacking dirty Arabs: how can you put your left foot in front!' he shouted at Amatziya and his friends after they had returned to base.[18] Had this sergeant been around in 1948, he would have been proud to see how quickly Jewish troops were mastering the art of attacking villages. The Hagana also gained valuable military experience in the Second World War, when many of its members volunteered for the British war effort. Others who remained behind in Palestine continued to monitor and infiltrate the 1200 or so Palestinian villages that had dotted the countryside for hundreds of years.

THE VILLAGE FILES

More was needed than just savouring the excitement of attacking a Palestinian village: systematic planning was called for. The suggestion came from a young bespectacled historian from the Hebrew University by the name of Ben-Zion Luria, at the time an

employee of the educational department of the Jewish Agency. Luria pointed out how useful it would be to have a detailed registry of all Arab villages, and proposed that the Jewish National Fund (JNF) conduct such an inventory. 'This would greatly help the redemption of the land,' he wrote to the JNF.[19] He could not have chosen a better audience: his initiative to involve the JNF in the prospective ethnic cleansing was to generate added impetus and zeal to the expulsion plans that followed.

Founded in 1901, the JNF was the principal Zionist tool for the colonization of Palestine. It served as the agency the Zionist movement used to buy Palestinian land upon which it then settled Jewish immigrants. Inaugurated by the fifth Zionist Congress, it spearheaded the Zionization of Palestine throughout the Mandatory years. From the onset it was designed to become the 'custodian', on behalf of the Jewish people, of the land the Zionists gained possession of in Palestine. The JNF maintained this role after the creation of the State of Israel, with other missions being added to its primary role over time.[20]

Most of the JNF's activities during the Mandatory period and surrounding the Nakba were closely associated with the name of Yossef Weitz, the head of its settlement department. Weitz was the quintessential Zionist colonialist. His main priority at the time was facilitating the eviction of Palestinian tenants from land bought from absentee landlords who were
likely to live at some distance from their land or even outside the country, the Mandate system having created borders where before there were none. Traditionally, when ownership of a plot of land, or even a whole village, changed hands, this did not mean that the farmers or villagers themselves had to move;[21] Palestine was an agricultural society, and the new landlord would need the tenants to continue cultivating his lands. But with the advent of Zionism all this changed. Weitz personally visited the newly purchased plot of land often accompanied by his closest aides, and encouraged the new Jewish owners to throw out the local tenants, even if the owner had no use for the entire piece of land. One of Weitz's closest aides, Yossef Nachmani, at one point reported to him that 'unfortunately' tenants refused to leave and some of the new Jewish land owners displayed, as he put it, 'cowardice by pondering the option of allowing them to stay.'[22] It was the job of Nachmani and other aides to make sure that such 'weaknesses' did not persist: under their supervision these evictions quickly became more comprehensive and effective.

The impact of such activities at the time remained limited because

Zionist resources after all were scarce, Palestinian resistance fierce, and the British policies restrictive. By the end of the Mandate in 1948, the Jewish community owned around 5.8% of the land in Palestine. But the appetite was for more, if only for the available resources to expand and new opportunities open up; this is why Weitz waxed lyrical when he heard about the village files, immediately suggesting turning them into a 'national project'.[23]

All involved became fervent supporters of the idea. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, a prominent member of the Zionist leadership, a historian and later the second president of Israel, explained in a letter to Moshe Shertock (Sharett), the head of the political department of the Jewish Agency (and later one of Israel's prime ministers), that apart from topographically recording the layout of the villages, the project should also include exposing the 'Hebraic origins' of each village. Furthermore, it was important for the Hagana to know which of the villages were relatively new, as some of them had been built 'only' during the Egyptian occupation of Palestine in the 1830s.[24]

The main endeavour, however, was mapping the villages, and therefore a topographer from the Hebrew University working in the Mandatory cartography department was recruited to the enterprise. He suggested conducting an aerial photographic surveys, and proudly showed Ben-
Gurion two such aerial maps for the villages of Sindiyana and Sabbarin (these maps, now in the Israeli State Archives, are all that remains of these villages after 1948).

The best professional photographers in the country were now invited to join the initiative. Yitzhak Shefer, from Tel-Aviv, and Margot Sadeh, the wife of Yitzhak Sadeh, the chief of the Palmach (the commando units of the Hagana), were recruited too. The film laboratory operated in Margot's house with an irrigation company serving as a front: the lab had to be hidden from the British authorities who could have regarded it as an illegal intelligence effort directed against them. The British did have prior knowledge of it, but never succeeded in spotting the secret hideout. In 1947, this whole cartographic department was moved to the Red House.[25]

The end results of both the topographic and Orientalist efforts were the detailed files the Zionist experts gradually built up for each of Palestine's villages. By the late 1930s, this 'archive' was almost complete. Precise details were recorded about the topographic location of each village, its access roads, quality of land, water springs, main sources of income, its sociopolitical composition, religious affiliations, names of its muhktars, its relationship with other villages, the age of individual men (sixteen to fifty) and many more.

An important category was an index of 'hostility' (towards the Zionist project, that is), decided by the level of the village's participation in the revolt of 1936. There was a list of everyone who had been involved in the revolt and the families of those who had lost someone in the fight against the British. Particular attention was given to people who had allegedly killed Jews. As we shall see, in 1948 these last bits of information fuelled the worst atrocities in the villages, leading to mass executions and torture.

Regular members of the Hagana who were entrusted with collecting the data on 'reconnaissance' journeys into the villages realised, from the start, that this was not a mere academic exercise in geography. One of these was Moshe Pasternak, who joined one of the early excursions and data collection operations in 1940. He recalled many years later:

> We had to study the basic structure of the Arab village. This means the structure and how best to attack it. In the military schools, I had been taught how to attack a modern European city, not a primitive village in the Near East. We could not compare it [an Arab village] to a
> Polish, or an Austrian one. The Arab village, unlike the European ones, was built topographically on hills. That meant we had to find out how best to approach the village from above or enter it from below. We had to train our 'Arabists' [the Orientalists who operated a network of collaborators] how best to work with informants.[26]

Indeed the problem noted in many of the villages' files was how to create a collaborationist system with the people Pasternak and his friends regarded as primitive and barbaric: 'People who like to drink coffee and eat rice with their hands, which made it very difficult to use them as informants.' In 1943, he remembered, there was a growing sense that finally they had a proper network of informants in place. That same year the village files were re-arranged to become even more systematic. This was mainly the work of one man, Ezra Danin, who would play a leading role in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.[27]

In many ways, it was the recruitment of Ezra Danin, who had been taken out of his successful citrus grove business, that injected the intelligence work and the organisation of the village files with a new level of efficiency. Files in the post-1943 era included detailed descriptions of the husbandry, the cultivated land, the number of trees in plantations, the quality of each fruit grove (even of each

single tree), the average amount of land per family, the number of cars, shop owners, members of workshops and the names of the artisans in each village and their skills.[28] Later, meticulous detail was added about each clan and its political affiliation, the social stratification between notables and common peasants, and the names of the civil servants in the Mandatory government.

And as the data collection created its own momentum, one finds additional details popping up around 1945, such as descriptions of village mosques and the names of their imams, together with such characterisations as 'he is an ordinary man', and even precise accounts of the living rooms inside the homes of these dignitaries. Towards the end of the Mandatory period the information becomes more explicitly military orientated: the number of guards (most villages had none) and the quantity and quality of the arms at the villagers' disposal (generally antiquated or even non existent).[29]

Danin recruited a German Jew named Yaacov Shimoni, later to become one of Israel's leading Orientalists, and put him in charge of special projects
inside the villages, in particular supervising the work of the informants.[30] One of these Danin and Shimoni nicknamed the 'treasurer' (*ha-gizbar*). This man, who proved a fountain of information for the files' collectors, supervised the network of collaboration for them between 1941–1945. He was exposed in 1945 and killed by Palestinian militants.[31]

Danin and Shimoni were soon joined by two other people, Yehoshua Palmon and Tuvia Lishanski. These, too, are names to remember as they took an active part in preparing for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Lishanski was already busy in the 1940s with orchestrating campaigns against the tenants who lived on plots of lands the JNF had bought from present or absentee landlords, and he directed all his energy towards intimidating and then forcibly evicting these people from the lands their families had been cultivating for centuries.

Not far away from the village of Furaydis and the 'veteran' Jewish settlement Zikhron Yaacov, where today a road connects the coastal highway with Marj Ibn Amir (Emeq Izrael) through Wadi Milk, lies a youth village (a kind of boarding school for Zionist youth) called Shefeya. It was here that in 1944 special units in the service of the village files project received their training and it was from here that they went out on their reconnaissance missions. Shefeya looked very much like a spy village in the Cold War: Jews walking around speaking Arabic and trying to emulate what they believed were the

customary ways of life and behaviour of rural Palestinians.[32]

In 2002, one of the first recruits to this special training base recalled his first reconnaissance mission to the nearby village of Umm al-Zinat in 1944. Their aim had been to survey the village and bring back information such as where the mukhtar lived, where the mosque was located, where the rich people of the village resided and who had been active in the 1936 revolt. This was not a very dangerous mission as the infiltrators knew they could exploit the traditional Arab hospitality code, and were even guests at the home of the mukhtar himself. As they failed to collect in one day all the data they were seeking, they asked to be invited back. For their second visit they had been instructed to get information about the fertility of the land, the quality of which seemed to have impressed them greatly. In 1948, Umm al-Zinat was destroyed and all its inhabitants expelled without any provocation on their part whatsoever.[33]

The final update of the village files took place in 1947. It focused on creating lists of ‘wanted’ persons in each village. In 1948 Jewish troops used these lists for the search-and-arrest operations they carried out as soon as they had occupied a village. That is, the men in the village would be lined up and those appearing on the lists would then be identified, often by the same person who had informed on them in the first place but who would now be wearing a cloth sack over his head with two holes cut out for his eyes so as not to be recognised. The men who were picked out were often shot on the spot. Criteria for inclusion in these lists were involvement in the Palestinian national movement, having close ties to the leader of the movement, the Mufti al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, and, as mentioned, having participated in actions against the British and the Zionists.[34] Other reasons for being included in the lists were a variety of allegations, such as ‘known to have travelled to Lebanon’ or ‘arrested by the British authorities for being a member of a national committee in the village’.[35]

The first category, involvement in the Palestinian national movement, was very liberally defined and could include whole villages. Affiliation with the Mufti or to the political party he headed was very common. After all, his party had dominated local Palestinian politics ever since the British Mandate was officially established in 1923. The party’s members went on to win national and municipal elections and hold the prominent positions in the Arab Higher Committee that became the embryonic government of the Palestinians. In the eyes of the Zionist experts this constituted a crime. If we look at the 1947 files, we find that villages with about

1500 inhabitants usually had between twenty and thirty such suspects (for instance, around the southern Carmel mountains, south of Haifa, Umm al-Zinat had thirty such suspects and the nearby village of Damun had twenty-five).[36]

Yigael Yadin recalled that it was this minute and detailed knowledge of what was happening in each single Palestinian village that enabled the Zionist military command in November 1947 to conclude 'that the Palestine Arabs had nobody to organise them properly.' The only serious problem was the British: 'If not for the British, we could have quelled the Arab riot [the opposition to the UN Partition Resolution in 1947] in one month.'[37]

FACING THE BRITISH: 1945–1947

Beyond carefully charting rural Palestine in preparation for the future takeover of the country, the Zionist movement had by now also obtained a much clearer sense of how best to get the new state off the ground after the Second World War. A crucial factor in this was that the British had already destroyed the Palestinian leadership and its defence capabilities when they suppressed the 1936 Revolt, thus allowing the Zionist leadership ample time and space to set out their next moves. Once the danger of a Nazi invasion into Palestine was removed in 1942, the Zionist leaders became more keenly aware that the sole obstacle that stood in their way of successfully seizing the land was the British presence, not any Palestinian resistance. This explains why, for example, in a meeting in the Biltmore Hotel in New York in 1942, we find Ben-Gurion putting demands on the table for a Jewish commonwealth over the whole of Mandatory Palestine.[38]

As the Second World War drew to a close, the Jewish leadership in Palestine embarked on a campaign to push the British out of the country. Simultaneously, they continued to map out their plans for the Palestinian population, the country's seventy-five per cent majority. Leading Zionist figures did not air their views in public, but confided their thoughts only to their close associates or entered them into their diaries. One of them, Yossef Weitz, wrote in 1940: 'it is our right to transfer the Arabs' and 'The Arabs should go!'[39] Ben-Gurion himself, writing to his son in 1937, appeared convinced that this was the only course of action open to Zionism: 'The Arabs will have to go, but one needs an opportune moment for making it happen, such as a war.'[40] The opportune moment came in 1948. Ben Gurion is in many ways the founder of the State of Israel and was its first prime minister. He also masterminded the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

DAVID BEN-GURION: THE ARCHITECT

David Ben-Gurion led the Zionist movement from the mid 1920s until well into the 1960s. Born David Gruen in 1886 in Plonsk, Poland (then part of Czarist Russia), he had come to Palestine in 1906, already an ardent Zionist. Short of stature, with a large shock of white hair swept backwards and invariably dressed in khaki uniform, his figure is by now familiar to
many around the world. When the ethnic cleansing operations began, he added a pistol to his military gear and a kufiyya around his neck, imitating the way his elite units were fitted out. He was by then approximately sixty years old and, although suffering from serious backaches, he was the Zionist movement's highly energetic and hard-working leader.

His central role in deciding the fate of the Palestinians stemmed from the complete control he exercised over all issues of security and defence in the Jewish community in Palestine. He had risen to power as a union leader, but was soon busy engineering the Jewish State in-the-making. When the British offered the Jewish community a state in 1937, but over a much smaller portion of Palestine than they had in mind, Ben-Gurion accepted the proposal as a good start, but he aspired to Jewish sovereignty over as much of Palestine as possible. He then swayed the Zionist leadership into accepting both his supreme authority and the fundamental notion that future statehood meant absolute Jewish domination. How to achieve such a purely Jewish state was also discussed under his guidance around 1937. Two magic words now emerged: Force and Opportunity. The Jewish state could only be won by force, but one had to wait for the opportune historical moment to come along in order to be able to deal 'militarily' with the demographic reality on the ground: the presence of a non-Jewish native majority population.

Ben-Gurion's focus on long-term processes and comprehensive solutions was atypical of most of his colleagues in the Zionist leadership. They still hoped that by purchasing a piece of land here and a few houses there they would be able to establish the envisaged new reality. Ben-Gurion understood early on that this would never be enough – and of course he was right: by the end of the Mandate, as we have already seen, the Zionist movement had only been able to purchase around six per cent of the land.[41]

But even the more cautious Zionist leaders, such as Ben-Gurion's second-in-command, Moshe Sharett, the 'foreign minister' of the

Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine, associated the settlement of Jews in Palestine with the dispossession of the indigenous Palestinians. For example, on 13 December 1938, when giving a lecture to the employees of the Zionist organisations in Jerusalem, Sharett could report to them on a particularly satisfying achievement: the purchase of 2500 dunam in the Baysan Valley in eastern Palestine (one dunam equals 1000 square metres, or 0.1 hectares). He added a telling detail:

> This purchase was accompanied, interestingly, by transfer of population [unsure of his audience's familiarity with the term, he repeated it in English]. There is a tribe that resides west of the Jordan river and the purchase will include paying the tribe to move east of the river; by this [act] we will reduce the number of Arabs [in Palestine].[42]

In 1942, as we saw above, Ben-Gurion was already aiming much higher when he publicly staked out the Zionist claim for the whole of Palestine. As in the days of the Balfour declaration, Zionist leaders understood the promise to include the country as a whole. But he was a pragmatic colonialist as well as a state-builder. He knew that maximalist schemes such as the Biltmore programme, which clamoured for the whole of Mandatory Palestine, would not be deemed realistic. It was also, of course, impossible to pressure Britain while it was holding the fort against Nazi Germany in Europe. Consequently he lowered his ambitions during the Second World War. But the post-war British Labour government under Clement Attlee had different plans for Palestine. Now that Jews in Europe were no longer facing the danger of annihilation, and most of them preferred to leave for the other side of the Atlantic rather than head towards the Middle East, the new British cabinet and its energetic foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, were looking for a solution that would be based on the wishes and interests of the people actually living in Palestine, and not of those the Zionist leaders claimed might want to move there – in other words, a democratic solution.

Armed, but especially terrorist, attacks by the Jewish underground militias failed to change that policy. Against the bombing of bridges, military bases and the British headquarters in Jerusalem (the King David Hotel), the British reacted mildly – especially in comparison with the brutal treatment they had meted out to Palestinian rebels in the 1930s. Retaliation took the form of a disarmament campaign of Jewish troops, a large number of whom they themselves had armed and recruited, first in the war against the Palestinian rebellion in 1937, and then against the Axis powers in 1939. Disarmament was

very partial, but arrests were relatively numerous, enough for the Zionist leaders to realise they needed to pursue a more adaptive policy as long as the British were still responsible for law and order in the land. As we have already seen, in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War Britain held a disproportionately large number of troops – 100,000 – in a country of less than two million people. This definitely
served as a deterrent, even when in the wake of the Jewish terrorist attack on the King David Hotel this force was somewhat reduced. It was these considerations that prompted Ben-Gurion to conclude that a somewhat more 'reduced' state, over eighty per cent of Palestine, would be sufficient to allow the Zionist movement to fulfill its dreams and ambitions.[43]

In the final days of August 1946, Ben-Gurion gathered together the leadership of the Zionist movement in a hotel in Paris, the Royal Monsue, to help him find an alternative to the Biltmore plan that had aimed to take over all of Palestine. An 'old-new' idea of the Zionist movement now resurfaced: partitioning Palestine. 'Give us independence, even on a small part of the land,' pleaded Nachum Goldman with the British government in London while his colleagues in Paris were deliberating their next move. Goldman was the most 'dovish' member of the Zionist leadership at the time, and his call for only a 'small' part of Palestine did not reflect Ben Gurion's ambitions: he accepted the principle but not the dimensions. 'We will demand a large chunk of Palestine' Ben-Gurion told those he had summoned to the French capital. Like generations of Israeli leaders after him, up to Ariel Sharon in 2005, Ben-Gurion found he had to hold back the more extremist Zionist members, and he told them that eighty to ninety per cent of Mandatory Palestine was enough to create a viable state, provided they were able to ensure Jewish predominance. Neither the concept nor the percentage would change over the next sixty years. A few months later the Jewish Agency translated Ben-Gurion's 'large chunk of Palestine' into a map which it distributed to everyone relevant to the future of Palestine. This 1947 map envisaged a Jewish state that anticipated almost to the last dot pre-1967 Israel, i.e., Palestine without the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.[44]

During all these deliberations, the Zionist leaders never discussed the possibility of any resistance from the local population: their chief concern was the British and, maybe, the international response. This is not accidental. The Zionist leadership was aware of the total collapse of the Palestinian leadership after the Second World War and of the hesitant position the Arab states as a whole were displaying on the Palestine question. The desperate situation of the

indigenous population of Palestine becomes poignantly clear the moment we realise that those who had crushed their liberation movement, the British Mandatory authorities, were now the only ones standing between them and a coolly determined and highly motivated Zionist movement that coveted most of their homeland.
But worse was to come as Europe prepared to compensate the Jewish people for the Holocaust that had raged on its soil with a state in Palestine, ignoring at the same time that this could only come about at the expense of the indigenous Palestinians.

Given the power vacuum on the Palestinian side, it is not surprising to see the Zionist decision-makers act as though the Palestinians were not a factor to be considered. But, of course, they still formed the vast majority in the land, and as such they were a 'problem'. Moreover, the Arab world, potentially at least, could come to their rescue and send in armies and provide arms. David Ben-Gurion was fully aware of this possible scenario, and therefore preoccupied himself and his closest associates with the issue of security, *bitachon* in Hebrew. This became an obsession Ben-Gurion nourished so carefully and successfully that it came to overshadow all other social and political issues on the agenda of the Jewish community in Palestine and later, of course, in Israel.[45]

Bitachon was then and remains until today a meta-term used by Zionist and, later, Israeli leaders to cover a wide range of issues and justify numerous core policies, from arms purchases abroad, internal struggle with other political parties, preparations for the future state, and the policy adopted against the local Palestinian population. The latter was retaliatory in nature and in discourse, but quite often provocative in action. From 1946 onwards, a more comprehensive set of strategic objectives emerged, aimed at consolidating the future scenarios and plans. David Ben-Gurion played a crucial role in shaping Israel's *bitachon* outlook because of the structural changes he introduced into the Zionist decision-making mechanism that placed him at the top of what before had been a rather cumbersome and ineffective pyramid. When in 1946 the 22nd Zionist Congress entrusted Ben-Gurion with the defence portfolio, he had total control over all security issues of the Jewish community in Palestine.[46]

Though as yet without a state, Ben-Gurion already now functioned as defence minister and as a prime minister of sorts (given his authority to pass resolutions within a government). In many aspects he shared responsibility, and most issues on the agenda of the Jewish community were discussed in a democratic way within institutions that represented the composition of the major political groups among the Jews in Palestine. But as the time came nearer

when crucial decisions needed to be made with regards to the fate of the Palestinians, Ben-Gurion began to ignore the official structure and started relying on more clandestine formations.

The major topic on the Zionist agenda in 1946 and 1947, the struggle against the British, resolved itself with the British decision, in February 1947, to quit Palestine and to transfer the Palestine question to the UN. In fact, the British had little choice: after the Holocaust they would never be able to deal with the looming Jewish rebellion as they had with the Arab one in the 1930s and, as the Labour party made up its mind to leave India, Palestine lost much of its attraction. A particularly cold winter in 1947 drove the message home to London that the Empire was on its way to become a second-rate power, its global influence dwarfed by the two new super-powers and its economy crippled by a capitalist system that caused Sterling to drop precipitously. Rather than hold on to remote places such as Palestine, the Labour party saw as its priority the building of a welfare state at home. In the end, Britain left in a hurry and with no regrets.[47]

Ben-Gurion had already realised by the end of 1946 that the British were on their way out, and with his aides began working on a general strategy that could be implemented against the Palestinian population the moment the British were gone. This strategy became Plan C, or *Gimel* in Hebrew.

Plan C was a revised version of two earlier plans, A and B. Plan A was also named the 'Elimelech plan', after Elimelech Avnir, the Hagana commander in Tel-Aviv who in 1937, at Ben-Gurion's request, had already set out possible guidelines for the takeover of Palestine in the event of a British withdrawal. Plan B had been devised in 1946 and both plans were now fused into one to form Plan C.

Like Plans A and B, Plan C aimed to prepare the military forces of the Jewish community in Palestine for the offensive campaigns they would be engaged in against rural and urban Palestine the moment the British were gone. The purpose of such actions would be to 'deter' the Palestinian population from attacking Jewish settlements, and to retaliate for assaults on Jewish houses, roads and traffic. Plan C spelled out clearly what punitive actions of this kind would entail:

> Killing the Palestinian political leadership.
> Killing Palestinian inciters and their financial supporters.
> Killing Palestinians who acted against Jews.
> Killing senior Palestinian officers and officials [in the Mandatory system].

Damaging Palestinian transportation.

Damaging the sources of Palestinian livelihoods: water wells, mills, etc.

Attacking nearby Palestinian villages likely to assist in future attacks.

Attacking Palestinian clubs, coffee houses, meeting places, etc.

Plan C added that all data required for the performance of these actions could be found in the village files: lists of leaders, activists, 'potential human targets', the precise layout of villages, and so on.[48]

However, within a few months, yet another plan was drawn up: Plan D (*Dalet*).[49] It was this plan that sealed the fate of the Palestinians within the territory the Zionist Leaders had set their eyes on for their future Jewish State. Indifferent as to whether these Palestinians might decide to collaborate with or oppose their Jewish State, Plan Dalet called for their systematic and total expulsion from their homeland.

Chapter 3

Partition and Destruction: UN Resolution 181 and its Impact

The most brutal element of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia was the 'ethnic cleansing', designed to force minority groups out of areas occupied by a different majority.

Previously, different peoples had lived together in the same village and there had been no division into ethnic groups and no ethnic cleansing. Thus, the causes of the situation were clearly political. Summary record of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 6 March 1995 with regard to the former Yugoslavia.

PALESTINE'S POPULATION

When the Zionist movement started its ethnic cleansing operations in Palestine, in early December 1947, the country had a

‘mixed’ population of Palestinians and Jews. The indigenous Palestinians made up the two-third majority, down from ninety per cent at the start of the Mandate. One third were Jewish newcomers, i.e., Zionist settlers and refugees from war torn Europe, most of whom had arrived in Palestine since the 1920s.[1] As of the late nineteenth century, the indigenous Palestinians had been seeking the right of self-determination, at first within a pan-Arab identity, but then, soon after the First World War, through the Mandate system that promised to lead the new nation-states it had created in the Middle East to independence and towards a future based on principles of democracy. But Britain’s Mandate charter for Palestine also incorporated, wholesale, the
1917 Balfour Declaration and, with it, Britain’s promise to the Zionist movement to secure a ‘homeland’ for the Jews in Palestine. Despite Britain’s pro-Zionist policies and the presence of a growing Jewish minority, Palestine was still very much an Arab country by the end of the Mandate. Almost all of the cultivated land in Palestine was held by the indigenous population – only 5.8% was in Jewish ownership in 1947 – which makes the use here of the adjective ‘mixed’ somewhat misleading, to say the least. Although the Zionist leaders had tried to persuade Jewish immigrants, ever since the movement had set foot in Palestine, to settle in the countryside, they had failed to do so: Jewish newcomers overwhelmingly preferred the cities and towns. As a result, most of the Zionist settler colonies in the rural areas lay far apart from each other; in some areas, such as the Galilee in the north and the Naqab (the Negev) in the south, they were effectively isolated islands amidst the surrounding Palestinian countryside.

This isolation meant these colonies were built like military garrisons rather than villages: what inspired their layout and design were security considerations rather than human habitation. Their introverted seclusion contrasted bizarrely with the open spaces of the traditional Palestinian villages with their natural stone houses and their accessible, unhindered, approaches to the nearby fields and the orchards and olive groves around them.

That so few Jews had settled in the Palestinian countryside proved to be a serious problem for those who wanted to base their solution to the growing conflict between the two communities on the principle of partition. On the one hand, logic and common sense dictated that the countryside as a whole – more than three quarters of the territory – should remain Palestinian. The towns, on the other hand, were almost equally inhabited. The question was, how to devise two distinct Palestinian and Jewish entities with homogenous populations when this was the reality on the ground? Partitioning Palestine was

originally a British solution, but it became a centrepiece of Zionist policy from 1937. Earlier, the British had put forward several other options, notably the creation of a bi-national state, which the Jews had rejected, and a cantonised Palestine (following the Swiss model), which both sides had refused to consider. In the end, London gave up the attempt to find a solution for the looming conflict and, in February 1947, transferred the question of Palestine to the United Nations. Favoured by the Zionist
leadership, and now backed by Britain, partition became the name of the game. The interests of the Palestinians were soon almost totally excised from the process.

THE UN'S PARTITION PLAN

An inexperienced UN, just two years old in 1947, entrusted the question of the future of Palestine's fate into the hands of a Special Committee for Palestine, UNSCOP, none of whose members turned out to have any prior experience in solving conflicts or knew much about Palestine's history.

UNSCOP too decided to sponsor partition as the guiding principle for a future solution. True, its members deliberated for a while over the possibility of making all of Palestine one democratic state – whose future would then be decided by the majority vote of the population – but they eventually abandoned the idea. Instead, UNSCOP recommended to the UN General Assembly to partition Palestine into two states, bound together federation-like by economic unity. It further recommended that the City of Jerusalem would be established as *corpus separatum* under an international regime administrated by the UN. The report UNSCOP came up with in the end envisaged that the two future states would be identical except for their internal demographic balance, and it therefore stressed the need for both entities to adhere to liberal democratic precepts. On 29 November 1947 this became General Assembly Resolution 181.[2]

It is clear that by accepting the Partition Resolution, the UN totally ignored the ethnic composition of the country's population. Had the UN decided to make the territory the Jews had settled on in Palestine correspond with the size of their future state, they would have entitled them to no more than ten per cent of the land. But the UN accepted the nationalist claims the Zionist movement was making for Palestine and, furthermore, sought to compensate the Jews for the Nazi Holocaust in Europe.

As a result, the Zionist movement was 'given' a state that stretched

over more than half of the country. That the members of UNSCOP veered towards the Zionist point of view was also because the Palestinian leadership had been opposed since 1918 to the partitioning of their land. Throughout its history this leadership, made up mainly of urban notables,
quite often failed to truly represent the native population of Palestine; however, this time they got it right and fully backed the popular resentment among Palestine's society towards the idea of 'sharing' their homeland with European settlers who had come to colonise it.

The Arab League, the regional inter-Arab Organisation, and the Arab Higher Committee (the embryonic Palestinian government) decided to boycott the negotiations with UNSCOP prior to the UN resolution, and did not take part in the deliberations on how best to implement it after November 1947. Into this vacuum the Zionist leadership stepped with ease and confidence, quickly setting up a bilateral dialogue with the UN on how to work out a scheme for the future of Palestine. This is a pattern we will see recur frequently in the history of peacemaking in Palestine, especially after the Americans became involved in 1967: up to the present day, 'bringing peace to Palestine' has always meant following a concept exclusively worked out between the US and Israel, without any serious consultation with, let alone regard for, the Palestinians.

The Zionist movement so quickly dominated the diplomatic game in 1947 that the leadership of the Jewish community felt confident enough to demand UNSCOP allocate them a state comprising over eighty per cent of the land. The Zionist emissaries to the negotiations with the UN actually produced a map showing the state they wanted, which incorporated all the land Israel would occupy a year later, that is, Mandatory Palestine without the West Bank. However, most of the UNSCOP members felt this was a bit too much, and convinced the Jews to be satisfied with fifty-six per cent of the land. Moreover, Catholic countries persuaded the UN to make Jerusalem an international city given its religious significance, and therefore UNSCOP also rejected the Zionist claim for the Holy City to be part of the future Jewish State.[3]

Partitioning the country – overwhelmingly Palestinian – into two equal parts has proven so disastrous because it was carried out against the will of the indigenous majority population. By broadcasting its intent to create equal Jewish and Arab political entities in Palestine, the UN violated the basic rights of the Palestinians, and totally ignored the concern for Palestine in the wider Arab world at the very height of the anti-colonialist struggle in the Middle East.

Far worse was the impact the decision had on the country itself and its people. Instead of calming the atmosphere, as it was meant to do, the
resolution only heightened tensions and directly caused the country to deteriorate into one of the most violent phases in its history. Already in February 1947, when the British first announced their intention to leave Palestine, the two communities had seemed closer to a total clash than ever before. Although no significant outbursts of violence were reported before the UN adopted its Partition Resolution on 29 November 1947, anxiety was particularly high in the mixed towns. So long as it was unclear which way the UN would go, life continued more or less as normal, but the moment the die was cast and people learned that the UN had voted overwhelmingly in favour of partitioning Palestine, law and order collapsed and a sense of foreboding descended of the final showdown that partition spelled. The chaos that followed produced the first Arab-Israeli war: the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians had started.

THE ARAB AND PALESTINIAN POSITIONS

As I explained above, the Palestinian leadership decided from the start to boycott the UN proceedings. This decision features often in contemporary Israeli propaganda as proof that the Palestinians themselves – not Israel – should be held responsible for the fate that befell them in 1948. Palestinian historiography has successfully fended off such accusations by exposing the extent to which the procedures the UN opted to follow were unjust and illegal, and by exploring the raison d'être behind the establishment of UNSCOP. Before we proceed I want to summarise these arguments and examine them in more detail.

By opting for partition as its primary objective, the UN ignored a basic principled objection the Palestinians were voicing against the plan, with which mediators had been familiar since Britain made the Balfour Declaration thirty years earlier. Walid Khalidi succinctly articulated the Palestinian position as follows: 'The native people of Palestine, like the native people of every other country in the Arab world, Asia, Africa, America and Europe, refused to divide the land with a settler community.'[4]

Within a few weeks of UNSCOP starting its work, the Palestinians realised the cards had been stacked against them: the final result of this process would be a UN resolution on partitioning the country between the

Palestinians, as the indigenous population, and a settler colony of newcomers, many of whom had arrived only recently. When Resolution 181 was adopted in November 1947, their worst nightmare began to unfold in front of their eyes: nine months after the British had announced their decision to leave, the Palestinians were at the mercy of an international organisation that appeared ready to ignore all the rules of international mediation, which its own Charter endorsed, and was willing to declare a solution that in Palestinian eyes was both illegal and immoral. Several leading Palestinians at the time demanded that its legality be tested in the International Court of Justice (founded in 1946), but this was never to happen.[5] One does not have to be a great jurist or legal mind to predict how the international court would have ruled on forcing a solution on a country to which the majority of its people were vehemently opposed.

The injustice was as striking then as it appears now, and yet it was hardly commented on at the time by any of the leading Western newspapers then covering Palestine: the Jews, who owned less than six per cent of the total land area of Palestine and constituted no more than one third of the population, were handed more than half of its overall territory. Within the borders of their UN-proposed state, they owned only eleven per cent of the land, and were the minority in every district. In the Negev – admittedly an arid land but still with a considerable rural and Bedouin population, which made up a major chunk of the Jewish state – they constituted one per cent of the total population.

Other aspects that undermined the legal and moral credibility of the resolution quickly emerged. The Partition Resolution incorporated the most fertile land in the proposed Jewish state as well as almost all the Jewish urban and rural space in Palestine. But it also included 400 (out of more than 1000) Palestinian villages within the designated Jewish state. In hindsight, it may be argued in UNSCOP's defence that Resolution 181 was based on the assumption that the two new political entities would peacefully coexist and therefore not much attention needed to be paid to balances of demography and geography. If this were the case, as some UNSCOP members were to argue later, then they were guilty of totally misreading Zionism and grossly underestimating its ambitions. Again in the words of Walid Khalidi, Resolution 181 was 'a hasty act of granting half of Palestine to an ideological movement that declared openly already in the 1930s its wish to de-Arabise Palestine.'[6] And thus Resolution 181's most immoral
aspect is that it included no mechanism to prevent the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

Let us look more closely at the final map that the UN proposed in November 1947 (see Map 5). Palestine was actually to be divided into three parts. On forty-two per cent of the land, 818,000 Palestinians were to have a state that included 10,000 Jews, while the state for the Jews was to stretch over almost fifty-six per cent of the land which 499,000 Jews were to share with 438,000 Palestinians. The third part was a small enclave around the city of Jerusalem which was to be internationally governed and whose population of 200,000 was equally divided between Palestinians and Jews.[7]

The almost equal demographic balance within the allocated Jewish state was such that, had the map actually been implemented, it would have created a political nightmare for the Zionist leadership: Zionism would never have attained any of its principal goals. As Simcha Flapan, one of the first Israeli Jews to challenge the conventional Zionist version of the 1948 events, put it, had the Arabs or the Palestinians decided to go along with the Partition Resolution, the Jewish leadership would have been sure to reject the map UNSCOP offered them.[8]

Actually, the UN map was an assured recipe for the tragedy that began to unfold the day after Resolution 181 was adopted. As theoreticians of ethnic cleansing acknowledged later, where an ideology of exclusivity is adopted in a highly charged ethnic reality, there can be only one result: ethnic cleansing. By drawing the map as they did, the UN members who voted in favour of the Partition Resolution contributed directly to the crime that was about to take place.

THE JEWISH REACTION

By 1947, David Ben-Gurion presided over a political structure of decision-making that probably constitutes the only complex aspect of the history related in this book, but this is dealt with in depth elsewhere,[9] and is beyond the remit of this book. Briefly, it allowed him to determine almost single-handedly the main policies of the Jewish community vis-à-vis the world, the Arab neighbours and the Palestinians. It was Ben-Gurion who
now led his associates simultaneously to accept and ignore the UN Partition Resolution on 29 November 1947.

The categorical rejection of the scheme by the Arab governments and the Palestinian leadership made it undoubtedly easier for

Ben-Gurion to believe that he could both accept the plan and work against it. Already in October 1947, before the resolution was adopted, Ben-Gurion clarified to his friends in the leadership that if the map of the partition plan were not satisfactory, the Jewish state would not be obliged to accept it.[10]

It is clear, therefore, that the rejection or acceptance of the plan by the Palestinians would not have changed Ben-Gurion's assessment of the plan's deficiencies where he was concerned. For him and his friends at the top of the Zionist hierarchy, a valid Jewish state meant a state that stretched over most of Palestine and allowed for no more than a tiny number of Palestinians, if any at all, to be included.[11] Similarly, Ben-Gurion was unfazed by the resolution's call that Jerusalem be turned into an international city. He was determined to make the entire city his Jewish capital. That in the end he failed to do so was only because of complications and disagreements arising in the Jordanian-Jewish negotiations over the future of the country and the city, of which more is said later.

As unhappy as he was with the UN map, Ben-Gurion realised that under the circumstances – the total rejection of the map by the Arab world and the Palestinians – the delineation of final borders would remain an open question. What mattered was international recognition of the right of the Jews to have a state of their own in Palestine. An observant British official in Jerusalem wrote to his government that the Zionist acceptance of the partition resolution was selective: the Zionists rejoiced in the international recognition of the Jewish State, but then claimed that the UN had offered 'non-Zionist conditions for maintaining it'.[12]

The expected Arab and Palestinian rejection of the plan[13] allowed Ben Gurion and the Zionist leadership to claim that the UN plan was a dead letter the day it was accepted – apart, of course, from the clauses that recognised the legality of the Jewish state in Palestine. Its borders, given the Palestinian and Arab rejection, said Ben-Gurion, 'will be determined by force and not by the partition resolution.'[14] As would be the fate of the Arabs living in it.

THE CONSULTANCY BEGINS ITS WORK

A formula now emerges. The less important the body Ben-Gurion appeared in front of, the more supportive the leader was of the Partition Resolution; the more significant the forum, the more adamant he proved in his scornful rejection of it. In the special body that advised him on security issues, the Defence Committee, he

dismissed the Partition Resolution out of hand, and already on 7 October 1947 – before UN Resolution 181 was even adopted – we find him telling the inner circle of his colleagues in the Consultancy that in the light of the Arab refusal to cooperate with the UN, there 'are no territorial boundaries for the future Jewish State.'[15]

In October and November 1947 the Consultancy became Ben-Gurion's most important reference group. It was only among them that he discussed openly what the implications would be of his decision to disregard the partition map and to use force in order to ensure Jewish majority and exclusivity in the country. In such 'sensitive' matters he could confide only in this highly select coterie of politicians and military men.

It was precisely because he understood that these questions could not be aired in public that Ben-Gurion had created the 'Consultancy' in the first place. As explained above, this was not an official outfit, and we have no proper minutes from most of their meetings.[16] It is doubtful whether notes were taken at all – apart from at one or two very crucial meetings that did get transcribed and to which I will come back later. However, Ben-Gurion recorded summaries of many of the meetings in his diary, an important historical source for those years. Moreover, some of the Consultancy's members would be interviewed in later years, and others wrote autobiographies and memoirs. In the following pages I take my cues from Ben-Gurion's diary, archival correspondence and the private archive of Israel Galili, who was present in all the meetings (all sources included in the Ben-Gurion Archives in Sdeh Boker). In addition, an intensive correspondence surrounded these meetings, which can be found in various Israeli archives. The meetings took place partly in Ben-Gurion's house in Tel-Aviv and partly in the Red House. As on 10 March 1948, some meetings were convened on Wednesdays in the Red House, within the official weekly meeting of the High Command, the *Matkal* (the formal parts
of these meetings are recorded in the IDF archives). Other, more private, consultations took place in Ben-Gurion's house, a day after the more formal Wednesday meeting. The latter meetings were referred to, very cautiously, in Ben-Gurion's diary, but can be reconstructed with the help of sources such as Yossef Weitz's diary, Israel Galili's archives and the letters of Ben Gurion to various colleagues, most notable of whom was his second in command, Moshe Sharett (who was abroad for most of this period).[17] On 15 May 1948, the meetings moved to a new place east of Tel-Aviv, which became the headquarters of the Israeli Army.

The Consultancy, as we saw, was a combination of security figures

and specialists on ‘Arab affairs’, a formula that was to serve as the core for most of the bodies entrusted with advising future governments of Israel throughout the years on issues of state security, strategies and policy planning towards the Arab world in general and the Palestinians in particular.[18] This entourage around Ben-Gurion began to hold regular meetings in February 1947, from the moment the British decided to leave Palestine, and more frequently in October 1947, when it transpired that the Palestinians would reject the UN Partition Plan. Once the Palestinian and general Arab positions were clear, the members of the Consultancy knew not only that they were to decide the fate of the Palestinians in the UN designated Jewish state, but that their policies were also about to affect the Palestinians living in areas the UN had accorded to the Arab state in Palestine. In the next chapter we shall see how the thinking of the Consultancy evolved until it devised a final plan for the dispossession of one million Palestinians, no matter where they happened to be in the country.

The first documented meeting of the Consultancy is that of 18 June 1947, during the regular Wednesday afternoon meeting of the High Command. Ben-Gurion reported the meeting both in his diary and in his published memoirs. He told those present that the Jewish community would need to ‘defend not only our settlements, but the country as a whole and Our National Future’. Later on, in a speech he gave on 3 December 1947, he would repeat the term ‘our national future’ and use it as a code for the demographic balance in the country.[19]

Chapter 4
Finalising a Master Plan

> NATO Spokesman Jamie Shea said all reports reaching NATO indicated that what was happening in Kosovo was a well-organized master plan by Belgrade. He said the reported pattern of violence was that Serb tanks were surrounding villages, then paramilitaries are going in rounding up civilians at gunpoint, separating young men from women and children. The women and children are then expelled from their homes and then sent forward towards the border. After they have left the villages, the homes are looted and then systematically torched.
>
> CNN, 30 March 1999

> These operations can be carried out in the following manner: either by destroying villages (by setting fire to them, by blowing them up, and by planting mines in their debris) and especially of those population centers which are difficult to control continuously; or by mounting combing and control operations according to the following guidelines: encirclement of the villages, conducting a search inside them. In case of resistance, the armed forces must be wiped out and the population expelled outside the borders of the state.
>
> Plan Dalet, 10 March, 1948

THE METHODOLOGY OF CLEANSING

The chronology of key events between February 1947 and May 1948 is worth recapping at this point. Hence, I will present an initial overview of the period I wish to focus on in detail in this chapter. First, in February 1947, the decision was made by the British Cabinet to pull out of Mandatory Palestine and leave it to the UN to solve the question of its
future. The UN took nine months to deliberate the issue, and then adopted the idea of partitioning the country. This was accepted by the Zionist leadership who, after all, championed partition, but was rejected by the Arab world and the Palestinian leadership, who instead suggested keeping Palestine a unitary state and who wanted to solve the situation through a much longer process of negotiation. The Partition Resolution was adopted on 29 November 1947, and the ethnic cleansing of Palestine began in early December 1947 with a series of Jewish attacks on Palestinian villages and neighbourhoods in retaliation for the buses and shopping centres that had been vandalised in the Palestinian protest against the UN resolution during the first few days after its adoption.[1] Though sporadic, these early Jewish assaults were severe enough to cause the exodus of a substantial number of people (almost 75,000).

On 9 January, units of the first all-Arab volunteer army entered Palestine and engaged with the Jewish forces in small battles over routes and isolated Jewish settlements. Easily winning the upper hand in these skirmishes, the Jewish leadership officially shifted its tactics from acts of retaliation to cleansing operations. Coerced expulsions followed in the middle of February 1948 when Jewish

troops succeeded in emptying five Palestinian villages in one day. On 10 March 1948, Plan Dalet was adopted. The first targets were the urban centres of Palestine, which had all been occupied by the end of April. About 250,000 Palestinians were uprooted in this phase, which was accompanied by several massacres, most notable of which was the Deir Yassin massacre. Aware of these developments, the Arab League took the decision, on the last day of April, to intervene militarily, but not until the British Mandate had come to an end.

The British left on 15 May 1948, and the Jewish Agency immediately declared the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, officially recognised by the two superpowers of the day, the USA and the USSR. That same day, regular Arab forces entered Palestine.

By February 1948, the American administration had already concluded that the UN Partition Resolution, far from being a peace plan, was proving a recipe for continued bloodshed and hostility. Therefore, it twice offered alternative schemes to halt the escalation of the conflict: a trusteeship plan for five years, in February 1948, and a three-month cease-fire, on 12 May. The Zionist leadership rejected both peace proposals out of hand.[2]

The official Zionist strategy was fed throughout this period by two impulses. The first consisted of ad-hoc reactions to two startling developments on the ground. One was the fragmentation, if not total disintegration, of the Palestinian political and military power systems, and the other the growing disarray and confusion within the Arab world in the face of the aggressive Jewish initiatives and the simultaneous international endorsement of the Zionist project and the future Jewish state.

The second impulse to propel Zionist strategic thinking was the drive to exploit to the full the unique historical opportunity they saw opening up to make their dream of an exclusively Jewish state come true. As we saw in the previous chapters, this vision of a purely Jewish nation-state had been at the heart of Zionist ideology from the moment the movement emerged in the late nineteenth century. By the mid 1930s, a handful of Zionist leaders recognised the clear link between the end of British rule and the possibility of the de-Arabisation of Palestine, i.e., making Palestine free of Arabs. By the end of November 1947, most of those in the inner circle of the leadership appeared to have grasped this nexus as well, and under Ben Gurion's guidance they now turned all their attention to the question of how to make the most of the opportunity that this connection appeared to have given them.

Before 1947, there had been other, more urgent, agendas: the primary mission had been to build a political, economic and cultural Zionist enclave within the country, and to ensure Jewish immigration to the area. As mentioned previously, ideas of how best to deal with the local Palestinian population had remained vague. But the impending end of the British Mandate, the Arab rejection of the partition resolution, and Ben-Gurion's keen realization of how much of Palestine he would need to the make the Jewish state viable now helped translate past ideologies and nebulous scenarios into a specific master plan.

Prior to March 1948, the activities the Zionist leadership carried out to implement their vision could still be portrayed as retaliation for hostile Palestinian or Arab actions. However, after March this was no longer the case: the Zionist leadership openly declared – two months *before* the end of the Mandate – it would seek to take over the land and expel the indigenous population by force: Plan Dalet.

Defining the Space

The first step towards the Zionist goal of obtaining as much of Palestine as possible with as few Palestinians in it as feasible was to decide what constituted a viable state in geographical terms. The UN Partition Plan, formalised in Resolution 181, designated the Negev, the coast, the eastern valleys (Marj Ibn Amir and the Baysan Valley) and lower Galilee for the Jews, but this was not enough. Ben-Gurion had the habit of regularly meeting with, what he called his 'war cabinet', which was an ad-hoc group of Jewish officers who had served in the British army (under pressure from other Hagana members, he later had to disband it). He now set out to impress on these officers the idea that they should start preparing for the occupation of the country as a whole. In October 1947, Ben-Gurion wrote to General Ephraim Ben-Artzi, the most senior officer among them, explaining that he wanted to create a military force able both to repel a potential attack from neighbouring Arab states and to occupy as much of the country as possible, and hopefully all of it.[3]

For the time being the Zionist leadership decided to determine the territory of their future state according to the location of the most remote and isolated Jewish settlements. All the land between these colonies, isolated at the extreme ends of the Mandatory state, had to become Jewish, and preferably enveloped by additional 'security zones' as buffer areas between them and Palestinian habitations.[4]

Since they were privy to the ongoing negotiations with the Hashemites in Transjordan, several members of the leadership allowed only one constraint to influence the shape of their future

map, and that was the possibility that certain areas in the east of Palestine, in today's West Bank, could become part of a future Greater Jordan rather than a Greater Israel. In late 1946 the Jewish Agency had embarked on intensive negotiations with King Abdullah of Jordan. Abdullah was a scion of the Hashemite royal family from the Hejaz – the seat of the holy Muslim cities of Mecca and Medina – that had fought alongside the British in the First World War. In reward for their services to the crown, the Hashemites had been granted the kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan that the Mandate system had created. Initially (in the Husayn-McMahon correspondence of 1915/1916) the Hashemites had also been promised Syria, according to their understanding at least, in a British attempt to block a French take-over of that part of the Middle East.

However, when the French ousted Abdullah's brother, Faysal, from Syria, the British compensated him, instead of Abdullah, with Iraq.[5] As the eldest son of the dynasty, Abdullah was unhappy with his share in the deal, all the more so because in 1924 the Hejaz, the Hashemites' home base, was wrested from them by the Saudis. Transjordan was little more than an arid desert princedom east of the River Jordan, full of Bedouin tribes and some Circassian villages. No wonder he wished to expand into fertile, cultural and populated Palestine, and all means justified the goal. The best way to achieve this, he soon found out, was to cultivate a good relationship with the Zionist leadership. After the Second World War he reached an agreement in principle with the Jewish Agency over how to divide post-mandatory Palestine between them. Vague ideas of sharing the land became a basis for serious negotiations that started after UN Resolution 181 was adopted on 29 November 1947. As there were very few Jewish colonies in the area the king wanted to acquire (today's West Bank), most of the leaders of the Jewish community were 'willing' to give up this part of Palestine, even though it included some biblical Jewish sites, such as the city of Hebron (al-Khalil). Many of them would later regret this decision and back the push to occupy the West Bank in the June 1967 war, but at the time the Jordanian quid pro quo was very tempting indeed: Abdullah promised not to join any all-Arab military operations against the Jewish state. There were ups and downs in these negotiations as the Mandate drew to an end, but they remained intact not just because there were so few Jews in the West Bank but also because the Jordanians, with the help of an Iraqi contingent, successfully repelled repeated Jewish attempts to occupy parts of the West Bank throughout the second half of 1948 (one of the few triumphant chapters in the Arab military history of 1948).[6]

This decided the geographical territory the Zionist movement coveted, in other words, Palestine as a whole, the same territory they had demanded in the Biltmore programme of 1942, but with this one qualification, if one accepts – as most historians do today – that the Zionist leadership was commited to their collusion with the Jordanians. This meant that the Jewish leadership anticipated their future state to stretch over eighty per cent of Mandatory Palestine: the fifty-six per cent promised to the Jews by the UN, with an additional twenty-four per cent taken from the Arab state the UN had allocated to the Palestinians. The remaining twenty per cent would be picked up by the Jordanians.[7]

This tacit agreement with Jordan in many ways constituted the second step towards ensuring the ethnic cleansing operation could go ahead unhindered: crucially it neutralised the strongest army in the Arab world, and confined it to battle with the Jewish forces solely in a very small part of Palestine. Without the Jordanian Army, the Arab Legion, the Arab world lacked all serious capacity to defend the Palestinians or foil the Zionist plan to establish a Jewish state in Palestine at the expense of the indigenous population.

Creating the Means

The third and possibly most decisive step towards ensuring a successful ethnic cleansing was building an adequate military capability. The Consultancy wanted to be left in no doubt that the military force the Jewish community possessed would be strong enough to implement successfully their two-pronged plan to take over most of Palestine and dislocate the Palestinians living there. In addition to taking over the Mandatory state once the last British troops had left, it would need to halt all attempts by Arab forces to invade the Jewish state in the making, while simultaneously carrying out the ethnic cleansing of all the parts of Palestine it would occupy. A highly competent professional army thus became a vital tool in the construction of a solidly Jewish state in ex-Mandatory Palestine.

All in all, on the eve of the 1948 war, the Jewish fighting force stood at around 50,000 troops, out of which 30,000 were fighting troops and the rest auxiliaries who lived in the various settlements. In May 1948, these troops could count on the assistance of a small air force and navy, and on the units of tanks, armoured cars and heavy artillery that accompanied them. Facing them were irregular para-military Palestinian outfits that numbered no more than 7000 troops: a fighting force that lacked all structure or hierarchy and was

poorly equipped when compared with the Jewish forces.[8] In addition, in February 1948, about 1000 volunteers had entered from the Arab world, reaching 3000 over the next few months.[9]

Until May 1948, the two sides were poorly equipped. Then the newly founded Israeli army, with the help of the country's Communist party,
received a large shipment of heavy arms from Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union,[10] while the regular Arab armies brought some heavy weaponry of their own. A few weeks into the war, the Israeli recruitment was so efficient that by the end of the summer their army stood at 80,000 troops. The Arab regular force never crossed the 50,000 threshold, and in addition had stopped receiving arms from Britain, which was its main arms supplier.[11]

In other words, during the early stages of the ethnic cleansing (until May 1948), a few thousand irregular Palestinians and Arabs were facing tens of thousands of well-trained Jewish troops. As the next stages evolved, a Jewish force of almost double the number of all the Arab armies combined had little trouble completing the job.

On the margins of the main Jewish military power operated two more extreme groups: the Irgun (commonly referred to as *Etzel* in Hebrew) and the Stern Gang (*Lehi*). The Irgun had split from the Hagana in 1931 and in the 1940s was led by Menachem Begin. It had developed its own aggressive policies towards both the British presence and the local population. The Stern Gang was an offshoot of the Irgun, which it left in 1940. Together with the Hagana, these three organisations were united into one military army during the days of the Nakba (although as we shall see, they did not always act in unison and coordination).

An important part of the Zionists' military effort was the training of special commando units, the Palmach, founded in 1941. Originally these were created to assist the British army in the war against the Nazis in case the latter reached Palestine. Soon, the Palmach's zeal and activities were directed against the Palestinian rural areas. From 1944 onwards, it was also the main pioneering force in building new Jewish settlements. Before being dismantled in the autumn of 1948, its members were highly active and carried out some of the main cleansing operations in the north and the centre of the country.

In the ethnic cleansing operations that followed, the Hagana, the Palmach and the Irgun were the forces that actually occupied the villages. Soon after their occupation, villages were transferred into the hands of less combatant troops, the Field Guard (*Hish* in Hebrew). This was the logistics arm of the Jewish forces, established

in 1939. Some of the atrocities that accompanied the cleansing operations were committed by these auxiliary units.

The Hagana also had an intelligence unit, founded in 1933, whose main function was to eavesdrop on the British authorities and intercept communications between the Arab political institutions inside and outside the country. It is this unit that I mentioned earlier as supervising the preparation of the village files and setting up the network of spies and collaborators inside the rural hinterland that helped identify the thousands of Palestinians who were later executed on the spot or imprisoned for long periods once the ethnic cleansing had started.[12]

Together these troops formed a military might strong enough to reinforce Ben-Gurion's conviction in the ability of the Jewish community both to become the heir to the Mandatory state and to take over most of the Palestinian territory and the properties and assets it contained.[13]

Immediately upon the adoption of UN Resolution 181 the Arab leaders officially declared they would dispatch troops to defend Palestine. And yet, not once between the end of November 1947 and May 1948 did Ben Gurion and, one should add, the small group of leading Zionist figures around him sense that their future state was in any danger, or that the list of military operations was so overwhelming that they would impinge on the proper expulsion of the Palestinians. In public, the leaders of the Jewish community portrayed doomsday scenarios and warned their audiences of an imminent 'second Holocaust'. In private, however, they never used this discourse. They were fully aware that the Arab war rhetoric was in no way matched by any serious preparation on the ground. As we saw, they were well informed about the poor equipment of these armies and their lack of battlefield experience and, for that matter, training, and thus knew they had only a limited capability to wage any kind of war. The Zionist leaders were confident they had the upper hand militarily and could drive through most of their ambitious plans. And they were right.

Moshe Sharett, the Jewish state's foreign minister 'designate', was out of the country during the months leading up to the declaration of the state. Every now and then he would receive letters from Ben-Gurion directing him how best to navigate between the need to recruit global and Jewish support for a future state in danger of being annihilated, and at the same time keeping him abreast of the true reality on the ground. When, on 18 February 1948, Sharett wrote to Ben-Gurion: 'We will have only enough troops to defend ourselves, not to take over the country,' Ben-Gurion replied:

> If we will receive in time the arms we have already purchased, and maybe even receive some of that promised to us by the UN, we will be able not only to defend [ourselves] but also to inflict death blows on the Syrians in their own country – and take over Palestine as a whole. I am in no doubt of this. We can face all the Arab forces. This is not a mystical belief but a cold and rational calculation based on practical examination.[14]

This letter was wholly consistent with other letters the two had been exchanging ever since Sharett had been dispatched abroad. It began with a letter in December 1947 in which Ben-Gurion sought to convince his political correspondent of the Jews' military supremacy in Palestine: 'We can starve the Arabs of Haifa and Jaffa [if we wish to do so].'[15] This confident posture regarding the Hagana's ability to take Palestine as a whole, and even beyond, would be maintained for the duration of the fighting, inhibited only by the promises they had made to the Jordanians.

There were, of course, moments of crisis, as I will describe later, in implementing the policies. These occurred when it proved impossible to defend all the isolated Jewish settlements and to secure free access of supply to the Jewish parts of Jerusalem. But most of the time the troops the Zionist leaders had at their disposal were sufficient to allow the Jewish community to prepare for both a possible confrontation with the Arab world and for the cleansing of the local population. Moreover, the Arab intervention only materialised on 15 May 1948, five and a half months after the UN partition resolution had been adopted. During that long period most of the Palestinians – apart from a few enclaves where paramilitary groups were trying to organise some sort of resistance – remained defenseless in the face of Jewish operations already underway.

When it comes to reconstructing that part of an historical process where intangible ideology becomes tangible reality, there are two options that we, as historians, can choose. In the case of 1948 Palestine, the first would be to draw the reader's attention to how consistent the Zionist leaders – from Herzl down to Ben-Gurion – were in their desire to empty the future Jewish state of as many Palestinians as possible, and then describe how this links up with the actual expulsions perpetrated in 1948. This approach is preeminently represented by the work of the historian Nur Masalha, who has meticulously charted for us the genealogy of the expulsionist dreams and plans of the Zionist 'founding fathers'.[16] He shows how the wish to de Arabise Palestine formed a crucial pillar in Zionist

thinking from the very first moment the movement entered onto the political stage in the form of Theodor Herzl. As we have seen, Ben-Gurion's thoughts on the issue were clearly articulated by 1937. His biographer Michael Bar-Zohar explains, 'In internal discussions, in instructions to his people, the "Old Man" demonstrated a clear stand: it was better that the smallest possible number of Arabs remain within the area of the state.'[17] The other option would be to concentrate on the incremental development of policy-making and try to show how, meeting by meeting, decisions about strategy and methods gradually coalesced into a systematic and comprehensive ethnic cleansing plan. I will make use of both options.

The question of what to do with the Palestinian population in the future Jewish state was being discussed intensively in the months leading up to the end of the Mandate, and a new notion kept popping up in the Zionist corridors of power: 'the Balance'. This term refers to the 'demographic balance' between Arabs and Jews in Palestine: when it tilts against Jewish majority or exclusivity in the land, the situation is described as disastrous. And the demographic balance, both within the borders the UN offered the Jews and within those as defined by the Zionist leadership itself, was exactly that in the eyes of the Jewish leadership: a looming disaster.

The Zionist leadership came up with two kinds of response to this predicament: one for public consumption, the other for the limited corps of intimates Ben-Gurion had collected around himself. The overt policy he and his colleagues started voicing publicly in forums such as the local People's Assembly (the Jewish 'parliament' in Palestine) was the need to encourage massive Jewish immigration into the country. In smaller venues the leaders admitted that increased immigration would never be enough to counterbalance the Palestinian majority: immigration needed to be combined with other means. Ben-Gurion had described these means already in 1937 when discussing with friends the absence of a solid Jewish majority in a future state. He told them that such a 'reality' – the Palestinian majority in the land – would compel the Jewish settlers to use force to bring about the 'dream' – a purely Jewish Palestine.[18] Ten years later, on 3 December 1947 in a speech in front of senior members of his Mapai party (the Eretz Israel Workers Party), he outlined more explicitly how to deal with
unacceptable realities such as the one envisaged by the UN partition resolution:

> There are 40% non-Jews in the areas allocated to the Jewish state. This composition is not a solid basis for a Jewish state.

> And we have to face this new reality with all its severity and distinctness. Such a demographic balance questions our ability to maintain Jewish sovereignty ... Only a state with at least 80% Jews is a viable and stable state.[19]

On 2 November, i.e., almost a month before the UN General Assembly Resolution was adopted, and in a different venue, the Executive of the Jewish Agency, Ben-Gurion spelled out for the first time in the clearest possible terms that ethnic cleansing formed the alternative, or complementary, means of ensuring that the new state would be an exclusively Jewish one. The Palestinians inside the Jewish state, he told his audience, could become a fifth column, and if so 'they can either be mass arrested or expelled; it is better to expel them.'[20]

But how to implement this strategic goal? Simcha Flapan asserts that the majority of the Zionist leaders at the time would have stopped short of mass expulsion. In other words, had the Palestinians refrained from attacking Jewish targets after the partition resolution was adopted, and had the Palestinian elite not left the towns, it would have been difficult for the Zionist movement to implement its vision of an ethnically cleansed Palestine.[21] And yet, Flapan also accepted that Plan Dalet was a master plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Unlike, for instance, the analysis Benny Morris offers in the first edition of his book on the making of the refugee problem, but very much in line with the shift he gave that analysis in the second edition, the clear blueprint for Palestine's ethnic cleansing, Plan Dalet, was not created in a vacuum.[22] It emerged as the ultimate scheme in response to the way events gradually unfolded on the ground, through a kind of ad-hoc policy that crystallised with time. But that response was always inexorably grounded in the Zionist ideology and the purely Jewish state that was its goal. Thus, the main objective was clear from the beginning – the de-Arabisation of Palestine – whereas the means to achieve this most effectively evolved in tandem with the actual military occupation of the Palestinian territories that were to become the new Jewish state of Israel.

Now that the territory had been defined and military supremacy assured, the fourth step for the Zionist leadership towards completing the dispossession of Palestine was to put in place the actual concrete means that would enable them to remove such a large population. In the territory of their future greater Jewish state there lived, in early December 1947, one million Palestinians, out of an overall Palestinian population of 1.3 million, while the Jewish

community itself was a minority of 600,000.

Choosing the Means: Worrisome Normality (December 1947)

The Arab Higher Committee declared a three-day strike and organised a public demonstration in protest against the UN decision to adopt the Partition Resolution. There was nothing new in this type of response: it was the usual Palestinian reaction to policies they deemed harmful and dangerous–short and ineffective. Some of the demonstrations got out of hand and spilled over into Jewish business areas, as happened in Jerusalem where demonstrators attacked Jewish shops and a market. But other incidents were attacks that, according to Jewish intelligence, had nothing to do with the UN decision. For example, there was the ambushing of a Jewish bus, an incident that almost all Israeli history books identify as the beginning of the 1948 war. Staged by the Abu Qishq gang, the action was motivated more by clannish and criminal impulses than by any national agenda.[23] In any case, after three days, foreign reporters observing the demonstrations and strikes detected a growing reluctance among common Palestinians to continue the protest, and noted a clear desire to return to normalcy. After all, for most Palestinians Resolution 181 meant a dismal, but not new, chapter in their history. Over the centuries, the country had been passed from one hand to another, sometimes belonging to European or Asian invaders and sometimes to parts of Muslim empires. However, the peoples' lives had continued more or less unchanged: they toiled the land or conducted their trade wherever they were, and quickly resigned themselves to the new situation until it changed once again. Hence, villagers and city dwellers alike waited patiently to see what it would mean to be part of either a Jewish state or any other new regime that might replace British
rule. Most of them had no idea what was in store for them, that what was about to happen would constitute an unprecedented chapter in Palestine's history: not a mere transition from one ruler to another, but the actual dispossession of the people living on the land.

The eyes of the Palestinian community now turned towards Cairo, the seat of the Arab League and the temporary residence of their leader, al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, in exile ever since the British had expelled him in 1937. The first days after the resolution found the Arab leaders in total disarray, but gradually during December 1947 some sort of a policy began to take shape. Arab leaders, especially of the countries neighbouring Palestine, preferred not to take

individual or drastic decisions on the subject. They were perfectly aware that public opinion in their countries wanted to see urgent action taken against the UN decision. Consequently, the Arab League Council, made up of the Arab states' foreign ministers, recommended the dispatch of arms to the Palestinians and the establishment of an all-Arab volunteer force, to be called the Arab Liberation Army (*Jaish al-Inqath*, literally 'Rescue Army', from the verb *anqatha*, 'to rescue from imminent danger'). The League appointed a Syrian general at its head. Later that month, small groups of this army began trickling into Palestine, thereby providing a welcome pretext for the Consultancy to discuss the further escalation of the Hagana operations already underway.

The pattern was set, and from this perspective the month of December 1947 is perhaps the most intriguing chapter in the history of Palestine's ethnic cleansing. The mild reaction in the Arab capitals surrounding Palestine was welcomed by Ben-Gurion's Consultancy – while the indifferent, almost lethargic Palestinian response *disturbed* them. In the first three days after the Partition Resolution was adopted, a small select group within the Consultancy met every day,[24] but they then relaxed somewhat and the format returned to the weekly Wednesday afternoon meetings of the High Command, with additional get-togethers of the smaller group a day after (usually at Ben-Gurion's home). The first meetings in December were devoted to assessing the Palestinian mood and intention. The 'experts' reported that, despite the early trickling of volunteers into the Palestinian villages and towns, the people themselves seemed eager to continue life as normal.[25] This craving for normality remained typical of the Palestinians inside Palestine in the years to come, even in their worst crises and at the
nadir of their struggle; and normality is what they have been denied ever since 1948.

But the swift return to normality and the Palestinians' wish not to become embroiled in a civil war posed a problem for a Zionist leadership determined to reduce drastically, if not totally, the number of Arabs within their future Jewish state. They needed a pretext, and this of course would be more difficult to create if the moderate Palestinian reaction continued. 'Fortunately' for them, at one point the army of Arab volunteers expanded their acts of hostility against Jewish convoys and settlements, thus making it easier for the Consultancy to frame the occupation and expulsion policy as a form of justified 'retaliation', *tagmul* in Hebrew. But already in December 1947, the Consultancy had begun to use the Hebrew word *yotzma* ('initiative') to describe the strategy it intended to follow with respect

to the Palestinians in the territory of their coveted Jewish state. 'Initiative' meant taking action against the Palestinian population without waiting for a pretext for *tagmul* to come along. Increasingly, pretexts for retaliation would be conspicuously missing.

Palti Sela was a member of the intelligence units that would play a crucial role in implementing the ethnic cleansing operations. One of their tasks was to report daily on the mood among, and trends within, the rural population of Palestine. Stationed in the north-eastern valleys of the country, Sela was astonished by the apparent difference in the way the communities on either side reacted to the new political reality unfolding around them. The Jewish farmers in the kibbutzim and in the collective or private settlements turned their residences into military outposts – reinforcing their fortifications, mending fences, laying mines, etc. – ready to defend and attack; each member was issued with a gun and integrated into the Jewish military force. The Palestinian villages, to Sela's surprise, 'continued life as usual'. In fact in the three villages he visited – Ayndur, Dabburiyya and Ayn Mahel – people received him as they had always done, greeting him as a potential customer for bartering, trading and exchanging pleasantries or news. These villages were near the British hospital of Afula, where units of the Arab Legion were stationed as part of the British police force in the country. The Jordanian soldiers, too, seemed to regard the situation as normal and were not engaged in any special preparations. Throughout December 1947, Sela summed up in his monthly report: normalcy is the rule and agitation the exception.[26] If these people were to be expelled, it could not be done as 'retaliation' for any aggression on their part.

THE CHANGING MOOD IN THE CONSULTANCY: FROM RETALIATION TO INTIMIDATION

On the top floor of the Red House, on Wednesday afternoon, 10 December 1947, a disappointed Consultancy met to assess the situation. Two speakers were leading the conversation, Ezra Danin and Yehoshua Palmon.[27]

Ezra Danin, as already mentioned, was a citrus grove businessman who had been invited into the intelligence corps because of his knowledge of Arabic (he was born in Syria). Danin

was in his mid-forties when he joined the Hagana in 1940; in 1947 he became the head of its ‘Arab section’, which supervised the work of Arab Jews and indigenous Arab collaborators who spied for the High Command within the Palestinian community as well as in neighbouring Arab countries. In May 1948 he assumed a new role: supervising the post-occupation activities of the Jewish forces when the ethnic cleansing operation began in earnest. His people were responsible for the procedures that were followed after a Palestinian village or neighbourhood had been occupied. This meant that, with the help of informants, they detected and identified men who were suspected of having attacked Jews in the past, or of belonging to the Palestinian national movement, or who simply were disliked by the local informants who exploited the opportunity to settle old scores. The men thus selected were usually executed on the spot. Danin quite often came to inspect these operations at first hand. His unit was also responsible, as soon as a village or town had been occupied, for separating all men of ‘military age’, namely between ten and fifty, from the rest of the villagers, who were then ‘just’ expelled or imprisoned for long periods in POW camps.[28]

Yehoshua (‘Josh’) Palmon was in many ways Danin’s second-in command and also took a great personal interest in the implementation of the policy of selection, interrogation and sometimes execution. Younger