

Israeli Perspective: The War of Independence

In 1947, the UN General Assembly approved Resolution 181 (the Partition Plan) calling for two independent states to be established. Members of the Jewish community danced in the streets to celebrate the creation of a Jewish state. But shortly afterward Palestinian Arabs and volunteers from Arab countries that rejected the partition plan attacked, and the war began. This war is known as the War of Independence because it resulted in the state of Israel.

Local Arab troops and volunteers attacked isolated Jewish communities, Jews in cities with mixed populations, and Jews on the roads. They also employed terror tactics – all Jewish people, settlements and property were considered legitimate targets. The most serious terror attacks were against Haifa oil refineries, where 39 Jews were murdered in December of 1947.

Before Britain withdrew from the country, the Israeli leadership decided it had to change its tactics from defensive to offensive and thus prepared Plan Daled. The purpose was to secure control of the areas the U.N. Partition Plan had said were part of the Jewish State.

In the beginning of the war, Arab residents started leaving their communities in the land of Israel. Most of the Jews welcomed the flight of the Arabs. Using Plan Daled, Israeli forces also began to deport Arabs. However, not all Arabs were deported and there were no high-level political orders to do so. Most Arabs fled because of their own fears, not in response to the actions of Israelis. During the course of the war about 370 Arab villages were destroyed.

On May 14, 1948, the Jewish leaders met to announce the establishment of the State of Israel. At midnight that night Arab armies invaded the new state. The various defensive forces that later united into the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) tried to block the invading Arab armies. After a month of fighting all sides were exhausted and accepted the UN call for a one-month cease-fire. After the cease-fire ended, fighting started again for ten days before another cease-fire was signed. In October 1948, the IDF launched another attack.

Palestinian Perspective: *Al-Nakba* (The Catastrophe)

In 1947, the U.N General Assembly passed resolution 181, which called for the partition of Palestine into two states, one Arab and the other Jewish. This was the start to the countdown for the establishment of the state of Israel on May 15, 1948 and the 1948 Catastrophe, which uprooted and dispersed the Palestinian people.

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

Britain bears most of the responsibility for the defeat of the Palestinian Arab people in 1948. During the time it controlled Palestine, from 1917-1948, Britain did all it could to suppress the Palestinian people and to arrest and deport their leaders. The British did not allow Palestinians to exercise their right to defend themselves and their land against Zionist movement.

The British allowed the Zionist movement to have its own armed brigade attached to the British Army. This brigade took part in battles of World War II and acquired training and experience in the techniques of war. By 1948 most Jews over the age of 14 had already undergone military training. Because of this, the Jewish military was superior to the Palestinian army during the 1948 war. The fighting that began in 1948 quickly turned into an unequal conflict. Zionist forces were organized, armed, and trained, superior to armies from Palestine and other Arab countries.

The results of the catastrophe, from which Palestinians still suffer, are not simple at all. The word “catastrophe” (*nakba*) actually expresses what happened to this nation: the assassination of rights, murder of the land and uprooting of human beings. This did not occur by chance.

The destruction of 418 Palestinian villages is the best evidence for the brutality to which Palestinians were exposed. Some 1,400,000 people inhabited Palestine in 1948. After the catastrophe about 750,000 Palestinians were left homeless. Families were separated.

The first election of the Israeli parliament in January 1949 set the state of Israel well on its way to becoming an independent and democratic country. The UN mediated the armistice agreements that were signed by Israel and the Arab countries. The agreements meant the end of direct fighting, but did not bring peace to the area. Israel achieved its independence thanks to its organizational ability and the remarkable mobilization of the entire Jewish population: tens of thousands of citizens and soldiers participating in the fighting.

Suddenly they found themselves exiled from their homes, in an alien world that regarded them as a different kind of frightening human being – Refugees! Instead of investigating the reasons for the forced migration and displacement of the Palestinian people and working to find a solution to the problem, all the international community did was provide them with humanitarian assistance.

Article 11 of UN Resolution 194 (Dec. 1948) said that refugees wishing to return to their homes and live peacefully should be allowed to do so as soon as possible and that compensation should be paid for the property of those who decided not to return. Despite these recommendations, Palestinians continued to suffer in refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and elsewhere around the world.

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