

## FACTSHEET: JEWISH TERRORISM UNDER THE BRITISH MANDATE



### What was the British Mandate in Palestine?

Inaugurated in 1920 and ending in 1947, the British Mandate for Palestine was the product of 1) British political ambitions to replace the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, 2) Britain's promises of colonial control to the French in the region, and 3) conflicting British promises of self-determination to the Arabs and Jewish statehood for Zionists. The British ruled Palestine under the League of Nations Mandate which followed Britain's Balfour Declaration of 1917, whose unilateral principle was "the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people," in Biblical Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

### What was the intent of Jewish violence under the British Mandate?

In the 11 years leading up to the creation of the state of Israel in Palestine in 1948, Zionist extremists who lived in the territory of Palestine under the British Mandate used terrorism as a military strategy to accelerate the establishment of an independent Jewish state. Their violence was directed against the British authorities who governed Palestine and against the Palestinian indigenous population throughout Palestine. Over 57 violent attacks were carried out by Zionist terrorist groups (e.g. Haganah, Lehi, Irgun – ultra-nationalist groups from the far right wing of the Revisionist Zionist movement) killing over 5,000 Palestinians and dozens of British.<sup>2</sup> While Zionist terrorist groups assassinated UN personnel, murdered British officers and attacked British military headquarters to overthrow the Mandate, they terrorized Palestinian inhabitants in order to provoke mass flight, displacement and migration.<sup>3</sup>

### Who were these Zionist terrorist groups? Who did they target?

Prominent Zionist Terrorist Groups during the Mandate period included:

**The Irgun (Etzel):** Known as the National Military Organization and the Military sector of the Revisionist movement, the Irgun stated that "political violence and terrorism" were "legitimate tools in the Jewish national struggle for the Land of Israel." Their attacks included:

- Al-Quds massacre, December 1937: Member of the Irgun hurled a hand grenade at the marketplace near al-Quds mosque, killing and injuring dozens.
- Haifa massacre, March 1938: Members of the Irgun and Lehi gang throw grenades at Haifa market, killing 18, and injuring 38.
- Haifa massacre, July 1938: The Irgun explodes booby trapped vehicles in Haifa market, killing 21 and injuring 52.
- Balad El-Sheik Village Attack, June 1939: This Palestinian village was attacked by members of the Haganah, the Main Jewish Defense. Five villagers were kidnapped and murdered.
- King David Hotel Bombing, July 1946: Led by Menachem Begin, the Irgun planned and carried out the bombing of the King David Hotel, the British military headquarters in Jerusalem in July 1946 in order to destroy documents proving the terrorist campaigns of Zionist groups. The attack killed 28 Britons, 17 Jews, 41 Palestinians and 5 others for a total of 91 victims.
- Attack on the British Officers' Club at Goldschmidt House, March 1947: This Jerusalem attack killed 17 British military and intelligence officers.
- Kidnapping and murder of British Soldiers, July 1947: This attack which led to the murder of two British sergeants in Netanya was the straw that broke the camel's back. Very soon afterward, the British abandoned the British Mandate, turning Palestine over to the UN.
- Bombing of the Jerusalem Railway Station, October 1947: The Irgun bombed the Jerusalem Railway Station in addition to mining roads and attacking army vehicles.

**The Stern Gang:** Founded by Avraham Stern in 1939, the Stern Gang was an eccentric group which even sought contact with the Nazis in order to subvert British control in the Middle East. Under Stern, the

group conducted robberies and attempted assassinations against the British. Stern is also noted for his “Eighteen Principles of National Renewal,” which articulated an expansionist mandate of Zionism, claiming a Jewish state from the Nile in Egypt to the Euphrates in Iraq.<sup>4</sup>

**The Lehi:** After the British assassinated Stern in 1942, his followers regrouped as an underground movement called the Lehi, acronym for Fighters for the Freedom of Israel:

- Assassination of Lord Moyne, November 1944: Assassinated in Cairo, Egypt, Lord Moyne was the highest ranking British government representative in the Middle East at the time. The Lehi targeted him because of his support for a Middle Eastern Arab Federation.
- Cairo-Haifa Train Bombings, Early 1948: A few months before the 1948 Israeli-Arab war, the Cairo-Haifa train was bombed several times, attacks claimed by or attributed to the Lehi. An attack in February killed 28 British soldiers, and wounded 35 more. An attack in March killed 40 civilians, and wounded 60 more.
- Deir Yassin Massacre, April 1948: Commandos of Lehi and Irgun headed by Menachim Begin attacked Deir Yassin, a village of 700 Palestinians, ultimately killing between 100 and 120 villagers.<sup>5</sup> The Master Mind behind the Deir Yassin massacre, Begin justified the attack in his book The Revolt:

*Arabs throughout the country, induced to believe wild tales of ‘Irgun butchery,’ were seized with limitless panic and started to flee for their lives. This mass flight soon developed into a maddened, uncontrollable stampede. The political and economic significance of this development can hardly be overestimated.<sup>6</sup>*

- Assassination of Count Folke Bernadotte, September, 1948: Count Bernadotte, a UN Peace mediator who had come to the Middle East 1948 to modify the Palestine partition plan in an effort to resolve Arab-Jewish disputes, was also assassinated by the group.
- A Legacy of Assassinations: More than any other Jewish terrorist group, Lehi was known for using assassinations as a terror mechanism, even using them against Jews they accused of being traitors. Lehi carried out 42 assassinations, more than twice as many as the Irgun and the Haganah combined. Of its politically-motivated assassinations, over half of them were carried out against other Jews.<sup>7</sup>

## **What happened to these terror groups following the establishment of Israel?**

A building block of Israel’s political perspective and statehood program, most Zionist terrorist groups transitioned from underground terrorist groups to political mainstreams parties rapidly with the founding of Israel in May, 1948. (Note, however, that some groups continued to operate even after May, 1948, e.g. assassination of Count Bernadotte in September, 1948 as mentioned above.) Menachim Begin transformed the Irgun into a political party called Herut. The Lehi became the Moledet party which today continues to openly advocate the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, territories now occupied by Israel. Paradoxically, terrorist leaders Menachim Begin and Yitzhak Shamir later became Prime Ministers of Israel – their political heirs now forming part of the political establishment of Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen, Michael J. *The origins and Evolution of the Arab-Zionist Conflict*, University of California Press, 1987.; Also see <http://www.palestinecenter.org/palestine/britishmandate.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.palestine-encyclopedia.com/EPP/Chapter04\\_1of2.htm](http://www.palestine-encyclopedia.com/EPP/Chapter04_1of2.htm), accessed March, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Chomsky, Noam, "Blaming The Victims," ed. Said and Hitchens.

<sup>4</sup> Amichal Yevin, Ada, In purple: the life of Yair-Abraham Stern, 1986, Tel Aviv: Hadar Publishing House, p. 316 (Hebrew) See also <http://www.saveisrael.com/stern/saveisraelstern.htm>

<sup>5</sup> See <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=341600202419569830>

<sup>6</sup> Begin, Menachim, The Revolt.

<sup>7</sup> Ben-Yehuda, N., Political Assassinations by Jews (State University of New York, 1993), p. 397