

the facts

ABOUT THE PALESTINE PROBLEM

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PLAN DALET

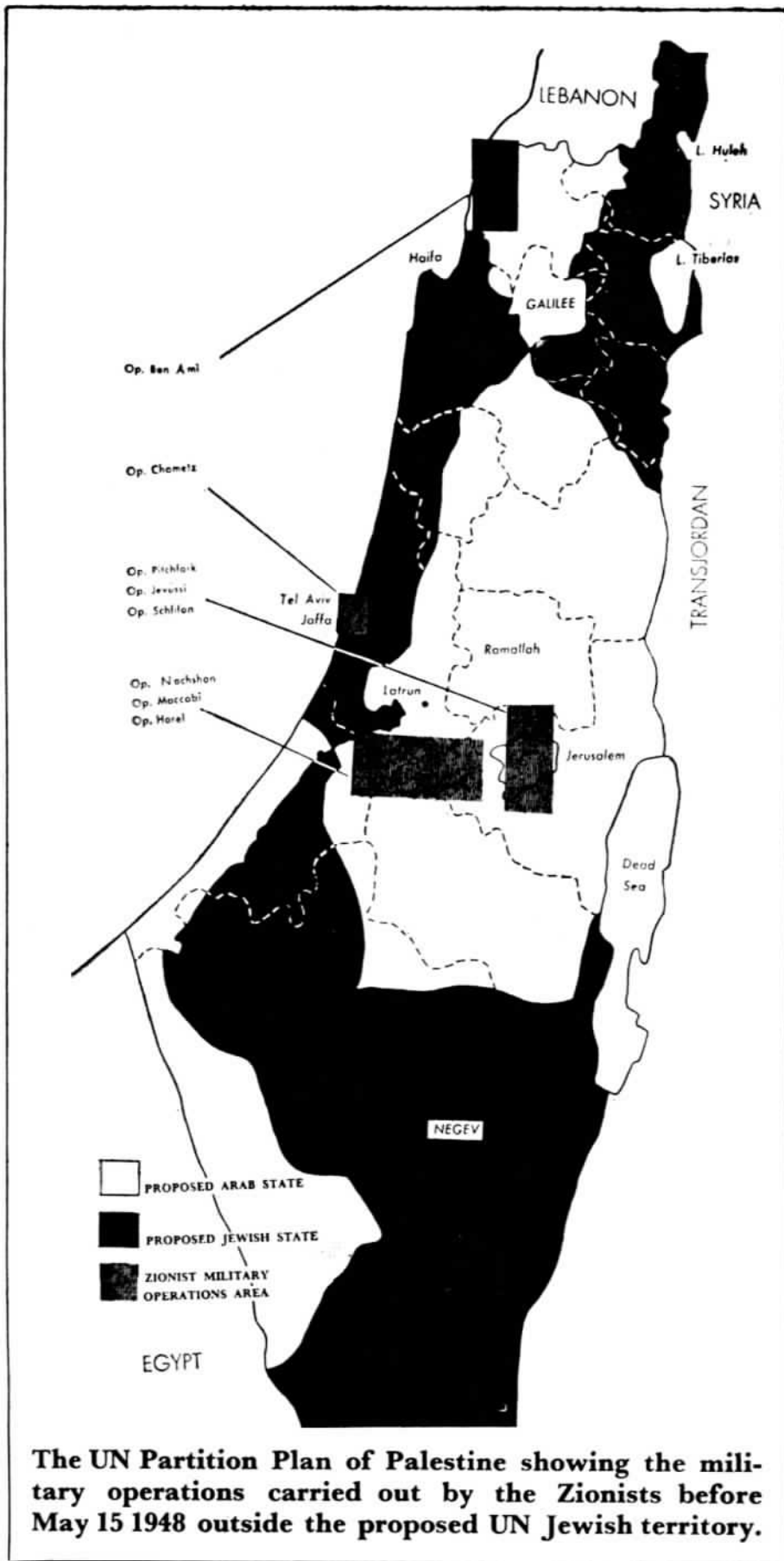
**The Zionist Plan for
the occupation of
Palestine
before 15 May 1948**

PLAN DALET

Until quite recently a corner-stone of Zionist propaganda has been the charge that the Palestine Arabs left their homes in 1948 in obedience to their leaders' orders. This charge has been part of a general campaign to undermine world sympathy for the plight of the Palestine Arab refugees. The fact is that starting with Herzl, the Zionists have always recognized one fact : that they had to get the Arabs out of Palestine before they could comfortably instal themselves. Professor Khalidi draws upon Hebrew material which Zionist writers in English have not so far seen fit to use. He gives in the following article a full account of the Zionist plan for the military conquest of Palestine before May 15, 1948

The following is a reprint of an article published in the Middle East Forum, Beirut, in November 1961, by Mr. Walid el-Khalidi Professor of Political Studies at the American University, Beirut.





“PLAN DALET” or “Plan D” was the name given by the Zionist High Command to the general plan for military operations within the framework of which the Zionists launched successive offensives in April and early May 1948 in various parts of Palestine. These offensives which entailed the destruction of the Palestinian Arab community and the expulsion and pauperisation of the bulk of the Palestine Arabs were calculated to achieve the military fait accompli upon which the state of Israel was to be based.

It is only recently that direct reference has been made in English Zionist sources to the fact that such a plan as “Plan D” ever existed. Jon and David Kimche in their book *A Clash of Destinies* give a version of this plan. But Jon Kimche, the senior author of the two, heroically straddling his perennial dilemma, is precariously poised between the necessity for approximation to the truth and the tactical requirements of Zionist propaganda. A still more recent Zionist work in English which makes explicit references to Plan D is *The Edge of the Sword* by Netanel Lorch. The author, an Israeli and former member of Haganah, is, like many Israelis, not unduly sensitive about public opinion. His account is therefore refreshingly forthright though still highly selective. Both the Kimches and Lorch have leant heavily on Hebrew sources, notably *Ha Sefher Ha Palmach (The Book of the Palmach)* vols 1 and 2 (particularly 2) and on *Qravot (Battles)* of 1948, an equally definitive Hebrew work covering both Palmach and Haganah operations. But neither the Kimches nor Lorch mention these works or acknowledge their striking indebtedness to them. It is therefore only by comparing the Kimche and Lorch versions with *Ha Sefher* and *Qravot* that a truly rounded picture of Plan D can be drawn.

THE TERRITORIAL PROBLEM

The study of Plan D is important because of the light it throws on the background of the intervention of the Arab regular armies and the consequences of this intervention. It is also important with regard to the origins of the Arab refugee problem. The traditional Zionist account of this has been that the Palestine Arabs left on orders broadcast to them by their leaders. It is true that in recent months the Zionists have shown a certain diffidence in stressing this theme too categorically but they have not altogether dropped it, as is witnessed by Ben Gurion's reiteration of this explanation of the Arab refugee problem in his last speech on the refugees in the Knesset. There is no need here to go into this particular problem. The Zionist claim of the existence of Arab evacuation orders has already been shown to be a piece of mythmaking. What does need to be mentioned here is that the Zionist emphasis on Arab evacuation orders is in fact a skilful propaganda tactic with manifold purposes : it shifts the moral responsibility for the refugees on to the Arabs themselves, puts them on the defensive and shoulders them with the burden of proof. Above all it directs the attention from the primary to the derivative : from the actual course of events in 1948 in Palestine to the realm of patience-consuming allegation and counter-allegation.

The ideological premises of Plan D are to be found in the very concept of Zionism. The 19th century Zionists of Eastern Europe shared characteristics with many other nationalists of the time. But unlike the other nationalist movements Zionism did not then possess a land it could call its own. The other nationalists were basically trying either to break away territorially from a foreign ruling power or to extract greater concessions in their own territories from

such powers. But the Zionists were literally in search of a territory. The land the Zionists were looking for was one which they wanted to possess and unmistakably stamp with their own image. But what if this land was already possessed by others ? The Zionists had to face this dilemma from the very beginning. And we know that as early as Herzl they had decided that the answer was to be found in the theory of "the lesser evil": in other words, that any hardship inflicted on the indigenous population of the land chosen by them was outweighed by the solution that the Zionist possession of the land offered to the Jewish problem. The yard stick of the lesser evil (consciously or subconsciously applied) became the moral alibi of the Zionist movement, dwarfing and finally submerging the anguish of its victims. Thus Herzl could say with little qualms of conscience of the indigenous population of the land to be possessed : "We intend to work the poor population across the frontier surreptitiously (*unbemerkt*) by providing work for them in transit countries but denying them any employment in our own land." (*The Truth about Palestine* by L. Leonhard in *Libertas*, 1960.) Thus, too, was this principle institutionalised in the Jewish National Fund which financed land acquisition in Palestine and in whose constitution land acquired from the Arabs was to become "inalienably Jewish" and Arab labour was to be excluded from Jewish land.

THE ZIONIST POLICY

But if the premises of Plan D can be seen in the very concept of Zionism, the implementation of the plan, too, has origins rooted in Zionist strategic thought. It is the mild, learned, and socialist Arlosoroff, Director of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, who throws the most instructive light on this aspect of the prob-

lem. As early as June 30, 1932 Arlosoroff sent Weizmann a confidential letter (see the *Jewish Frontier*, October 1948) in which he outlined his views on Zionist strategy : Zionist policy, he pointed out, should be judged only against "the relationship of forces of the two peoples contending in the country". The present stage (i.e. in 1932) was that "the Arabs are no longer strong enough to destroy our position but still consider themselves strong enough to establish an Arab state." The next stage will be attained when "the relationship of the real forces will be such as to preclude any possibility of the establishment of an Arab state in Palestine." This will be followed by another stage during which "Arabs will be unable to frustrate the growth of the Jewish community." This will be followed by yet another stage during which "the equilibrium between the two peoples will be based upon real forces and an agreed (*sic*) solution to the problem." The real test of Zionist policy is whether the next stage in this sequence is attainable on the basis of its current strategy. Arlosoroff concluded that "under present circumstances Zionism cannot be realised without a transition period during which the *Jewish minority would exercise organised revolutionary rule...* during which the state apparatus, the administration and the military establishment would be in the hands of the minority." Arlosoroff is aware that this "might even resemble dangerously certain political states of mind which we have always rejected," but he will "never become reconciled to the failure of Zionism before an attempt is made whose seriousness corresponds to the seriousness of the struggle."

TRANSFER OF THE ARABS

Except for the Revisionists the Zionists did not publicly talk of moving the Arab population

from the country. But there is no doubt that the problem was discussed among themselves. As early as 1931 Harold Laski, at that time constantly in touch with Weizmann, wrote to Felix Frankfurter in the U.S. saying that "the economic problem" in Palestine was insoluble "unless the British Government uses Transjordan for Arab settlement." (*Harold Laski* by Kingsley Martin, p. 210) But it was left to the Royal Peel Commission of 1937 to articulate Zionist thoughts. For the Commission's report (p. 391) stated that "if (as a result of investigation) it is clear that a substantial amount of land would be made available for the Jewish area, *the most strenuous efforts* should be made to obtain an agreement for the exchange of land and population." The report continued, "it should be part of the agreement that in the last resort the *exchange would be compulsory*." Since according to the partition recommendations of the same report some 1,250 Jews were to fall inside the Arab state as opposed to about one quarter of a million Arabs in the Jewish state the Commission's use of the word "exchange" (still a favourite word when talking about the future of Palestine Arabs) can only be said to be somewhat unusual. But these recommendations of the Commission were not unilaterally suggested by the British side. Weizmann and Ormsby-Gore (then British Colonial Secretary) had thrashed them out together *before* the publication of the Commission's report. According to the minutes drawn up by Weizmann of the meeting on July 19th between the two men (*Jewish Chronicle*, August 13th, 1937) Weizmann had said on the subject of the transfer of the Arab population: "I said that the whole success of the scheme depended upon whether the Government genuinely did or did not wish to carry out this recommendation. The transfer could only be carried out by the British Govern-

ment and not by the Jews. I explained the reason *why we considered the proposal of such importance*." The transfer of the Arabs of Palestine was again recommended towards the end of the war on two notable occasions. First in 1944 by the Labour Party Executive in Britain which resolved that "the Arabs be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in" and secondly by ex-President Herbert Hoover who in October 1945 advocated a solution of the Palestine problem by "engineering" which involved the transfer of the Arabs of Palestine to Iraq. There is no doubt that at least the first of these recommendations was Zionist-inspired and was almost certainly the work of Laski who was Chairman of the Labour Party at the time. The Hoover scheme if not Zionist-inspired was blessed by the Zionists (*vide* the two-column letter in its praise in the *N.Y. Times*, December 16, 1945 by Elisha Friedman of the Hadassah Organisation). Commenting on this scheme the American Zionist Emergency Council issued a statement to the effect (in the words of the Zionist official periodical *Palestine*, vol. 2, Nos. 9-10, November-December, 1945, p. 16): "that the Zionist movement has never advocated the transfer of Palestine's Arab population but has always maintained that Palestine has room enough for its present population, Jew and Arab, and for several million more of Jewish settlers. The developments of the last 20 years have amply proved this; nevertheless *when all long accepted remedies seem to fail it is time to consider new approaches*. The Hoover plan, the Emergency Council states, represents an important new approach in the realisation of which Zionists would be happy to cooperate with the great powers and the Arabs."

AN IRREDUCIBLE MINIMUM

The UN partition recommendation of 1947 heralded the cataclysm. The decision had given the Zionists who held less than seven per cent of Palestine about fifty-five per cent of the country. Officially the Zionist attitude was that this was the "irreducible minimum" that they would accept. But the opportunities now beckoning to them were dazzling beyond words. For although the UN recommendation had (inexplicably) envisaged a peaceable partition the means of implementation had never been seriously considered. An umbrella of legalism was therefore offered to the side that "acquiesced" in the will of the international community and dutifully proceeded with its implementation. Conversely there need be no limit to the punitive measures to be meted out to those who in defence of their primal rights defied "the will of the international community." The situation in terms of *realpolitik* was susceptible to the fullest exploitation. There were other urgent considerations too from the Zionist point of view. The most important was the question of land ownership. Although 90 per cent of the Jewish landholdings in Palestine fell within the proposed Jewish state yet the bulk of the land in the proposed Jewish state was not Jewish-owned nor even in the category of state domains whose ownership could be automatically assumed by a successor government. Thus, of 13,500,000 dunums (6,000,000 of which were desert and 7,500,000 of cultivable land) in the Jewish state according to the partition plan only 1,500,000 dunums of cultivable land were Jewish owned. On 30 January 1948 the *Zionist Review* in its Jewish National Fund Supplement pointed out: "We can purchase 3,000,000 dunums without displacing or causing any injury to the non-Jewish population. As a result we should then have about 4,500,000 du-

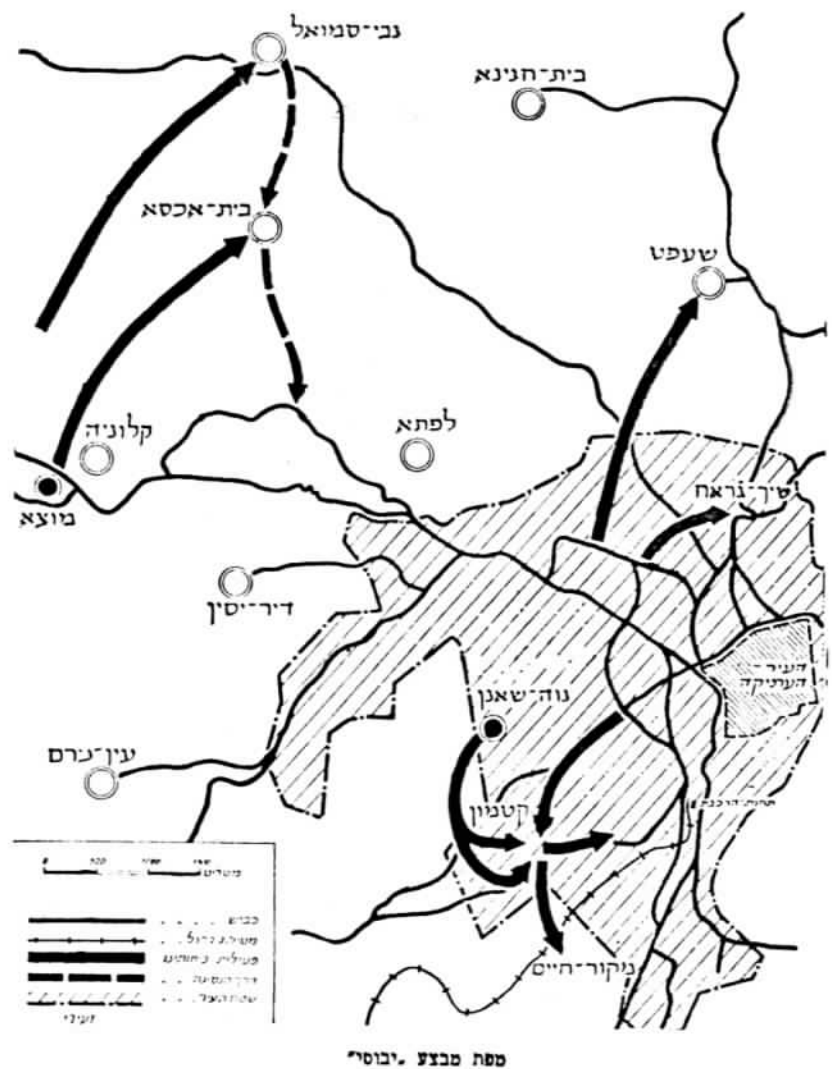
nums out of 7,500,000 which can be utilised. That means 60 per cent of the present cultivable area. Can we afford as a people to hold less than 60 per cent of the soil ?”

The problem of land ownership was compounded by the Zionist plans for large-scale Jewish immigration into the proposed Jewish state. The difficulty here was that there were in fact more Arabs than Jews in the Jewish state proposed by the UN.

But above all it was the consciousness of power that dictated Zionist policy. As early as March 1946 Haganah had told the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry : “If you accept the Zionist solution but are unable or unwilling to enforce it, please do not interfere, and we ourselves will secure its implementation.” Since then the British reluctance for various domestic and international reasons to reply with any severity to repeated Zionist provocations greatly increased Zionist self-confidence. American and Russian backing of Zionism at the UN in 1947 further inflated the Zionist ego. But however exaggerated the Zionist consciousness of power may have been, it did rest upon a basis of fact, particularly in relation to local Arab strength. By the end of March 1948 the Zionists could put in the field three brigades of the Palmach (a highly mobile striking force used wherever it was needed most), six brigades of the KHISH (Khayl Sadeh or field force) which operated in six brigade areas into which the country was divided and two brigades of the Irgun terrorist organisation. In addition there were the forces of the KHIM (Khayl Matza or garrison troops) who were at least as numerous as the KHISH, the Jewish Settlement Police numbering some 12,000, the Gadna Youth Battalions, and the armed settlers.

The arms at the disposal of these forces were plentiful and much in excess of what may be

OPERATION JEVUSSI



The light shaded area is new Jerusalem; the dark shaded is the Old City of Jerusalem. Black arrows pointing in north-easterly direction indicate outflanking movements aiming at Ramallah, north of Jerusalem. Broken arrows indicate Jewish retreat. The lower circular arrows indicate south-easterly outflanking movements to capture Arab residential quarters and dominate the Bethlehem-Hebron road. They aim at, from left to right, Sheikh Jarrah, Hadassah, Mount of Olives and the Jericho road. White circles are Arab villages: white circles with black dots are Jewish settlements. The line stretching from the new city towards the north is the main Jerusalem-Ramallah road.

think that here was some harmless and rather quaint engine. But the fact is that the Davidka tossed a shell containing 60 lbs of TNT usually into crowded built-up civilian quarters where the noise and blast maddened women and children into a frenzy of fear and panic.

THE REAL PROBLEM

It was this power which the Zionist authorities now bent to the task of realising Herzl's vision.

The basic features of the situation from the power point of view were as follows : As between the Jews and the Arabs of Palestine the former unquestionably possessed overwhelming power. The Arab strength lay however in the fact that they were *in situ*. To be defeated the Arabs had to be dislodged and dislodged they had to be if the Zionists were to get the state "given" them by the UN. For the UN partition decision of November 1947 did not consecrate the existing status quo in Palestine. On the contrary the partition decision was a revolutionary decision designed to effect a radical territorial redistribution in favour of the Zionists. To succeed, the Zionists had to revolutionise the status quo, and action, initiative, and offense were therefore the sine qua non for the realisation of the Zionist objectives. But there were at least two potentially limiting factors. The first was the presence of the British in Palestine. The second was the regular armies of the neighboring Arab states. The British had declared their intention of leaving Palestine by May 15, 1948. On that day the Mandate would end, and juridically there would be a vacuum since Britain refused to share responsibility with the UN during the Mandate as a preliminary to the establishment of the successor states. It was therefore possible that the Arab armies

might enter Palestine on May 15 and do so with legal immunity because of the juridical vacuum. But if the regular Arab armies entered Palestine while the Arabs of Palestine were still *in situ* the forces in support of the status quo in the country (i.e. against the UN partition decision) would be overwhelming. The most urgent problem for the Zionists was therefore to dislodge the Palestine Arabs before May 15th. But how were they to do that with the British still in the country and claiming exclusive jurisdiction over it ? The question in the last analysis hinging on the British attitude partition and the actual timetable of British withdrawal from the country. In spite of what the Zionists may say the British Government was not hostile to the idea of partition as such though they probably favoured a smaller Jewish state than that envisaged by the U.N. But it was the time-table of British withdrawal that was the crux of the matter and this was basically a technical military decision in which the requirements of the security of the British forces being withdrawn predominated over all other considerations. At first the chief worry of the Zionists was that the British would maintain effective control over the whole country and surrender it in one go on May 15th, thus facilitating the consolidation of the Arab status quo in Palestine by the regular Arab armies. But it soon became obvious that the British, while maintaining *de jure* authority over the whole country, were surrendering *de facto* power over successive areas of it. This was precisely what the Zionists wanted, for the *de jure* authority claimed by Britain over Palestine acted as a shield protecting the Zionists from the regular Arab armies. This gave the Zionists time to dislodge the Arabs of Palestine and to create by the 15th of May a new status quo in the country which would be beyond the means of the regular Arab armies to reverse.

THE PLANS

Zionist military planning was accordingly based upon a two-phased strategy fitted to the situation. In the so-called Plan C the objectives were to maintain constant pressure everywhere against the Arabs of Palestine while maintaining contact with the Jewish settlements in the area of the proposed Arab state. Yigal Allon, the commander of the Palmach, gave two main reasons for the maintenance of these settlements "(a) the absolute necessity to divert an enemy advance upon large civilian centres (b) when the forces under attack intend to mount an *offensive soon, in order to unite with the settlements that had been cut off.*" The second phase of Zionist strategy was the all-out offensive to conquer and hold territory in the wake of the retreating British forces. This logically was a continuous process which was unlikely to stop voluntarily but only if effectively counter-checked. This was the essence of Plan D. In the words of *Qravot 1948*, p. 16, the purpose of Plan D was "control of the area given to us by the UN *in addition to areas occupied by us which were outside these borders* and the setting up of forces to counter the possible invasion of Arab armies after May 15." This is explicit enough.

The transition from Plan C to D depended to some extent on the speed and extent of British withdrawal. But there were other considerations too, foremost among which was the economic factor. The Zionist economy in Palestine was delicately balanced and closely interrelated. This directly influenced the rate of mobilisation and therefore the hitting power available at any one time to the Zionist High Command. But it was two largely unpredictable factors which in fact dictated the timing of Plan D. The first was the extraordinary resistance put up by the Arabs of Palestine. In spite of the explosion of mines in Arab residential quarters, and

the repeated and merciless raids against sleeping villages carried out in conformity with Plan C the Arabs held their ground throughout the period from November 1947 to March 1948. Up to March 1st not one single Arab village had been vacated by its inhabitants and the number of people leaving the mixed towns was insignificant. It looked in fact as though the Arabs were to remain in situ and so frustrate the revolution in the status quo envisaged by the UN decision. Not only that but by the end of March the Zionists had desperately tried and failed to maintain contact between the various parts of the country. The minimum necessary for the whole basis of Zionist initiative and therefore success seemed threatened.

THE CRISIS IN MARCH

No wonder the UN Palestine Commission gave up, declaring that partition could not be peaceably implemented. No wonder too that *Qravot* (p. 15) described this period, particularly the last week of March 1948, "as perhaps the most serious operational crisis" confronted by the Zionists during the war. But even more serious from the Zionist point of view was the reversal that had occurred in the American attitude to partition. By the middle of March the U.S. Government had to all intents and purposes turned its back on partition whatever may have been President Truman's personal feelings on the subject. Dr. Silver of the Jewish Agency described the new American policy as "a shocking reversal" (*New York Times*, March 2, p. 3), the American Jewish Congress as "shameful tactics and duplicity" and the Zionist Congressman Celler as "shady and underhand turnabout" (*New York Times*, March 21, p. 6). The most significant comment perhaps came from Dr. E. Neumann, President of the Zionist Organization of America, who said that "if the General Assembly recommendation is

nullified there is no doubt about it, the Jews will press the claim for immigration and settlement in all of Palestine."

It is against this background that Plan D was finally put into operation. The plan visualised a series of operations which if they had succeeded would have left the whole of Palestine under Zionist military occupation. It is not the object here to give a detailed description of these operations but simply to list them and point out their objectives :

*1. *Operation Nachshon* :
1st April—

To carve out a corridor connecting Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and by so doing to split the main part of the Arab state into two. (Defeated)

*2. *Operational Harel* :
15 April—

A continuation of *Nachshon* but centered specifically on Arab villages near Latrun (Defeated)

3. *Operation Misparayim* :
21 April—

To capture Haifa and rout its Arab population. (Successful)

*4. *Operation Chametz* :
27 April—

To destroy the Arab villages round Jaffa and so cut Jaffa off from physical contact with the rest of Palestine as a preliminary to its capture. (Successful)

*5. *Operation Jevussi* :
27 April—

To isolate Jerusalem by destroying the ring of surrounding Arab villages and dominating the Ramallah-Jerusalem road to the North, the Jericho-Jerusalem road to the South. This operation would have caused the whole of Jerusalem to fall and would have made the Arab position west of the Jordan altogether untenable. (Defeated)

6. *Operation Yiftach* :
28 April—

To purify Eastern Galilee of Arabs. (Successful)

7. *Operation Matateh* :
3 May—

To destroy Arab villages connecting Tiberias to Eastern Galilee. (Successful)

*8. *Operation Maccabi* :
7 May—

To destroy the Arab villages near Latrun and by an outflanking movement to penetrate into Ramallah district north of Jerusalem. (Defeated)

9. *Operation Gideon* :
11 May—

To occupy Beisan and drive away the semi-sedentary Bedouin communities in the neighbourhood. (Successful)

10. *Operation Barak* :
12 May—

To destroy the Arab village in the neighbourhood of Bureir on the way to the Negev. (Partially successful)

*11. *Operation Ben Ami* :
14 May—

To occupy Acre and purify Western Galilee of Arabs. (Successful)

*12. *Operation Pitchfork* :
14 May—

To occupy the Arab residential quarters in the New City of Jerusalem. (Successful)

*13. *Operation Schifion* :
14 May—

To occupy the old city of Jerusalem. (Defeated)

The asterisks above indicate the operations which were carried out *before* the entry of the Arab regular armies *inside the areas allotted by the U.N. to the Arab state*. It will be noted that of thirteen specific full-scale operations under Plan D eight were *outside* the area given by the UN to the Zionists. It is interesting to note that the Kimches in their book mention by name only five of these thirteen operations, in spite of the learned introduction to the book by Kimche entitled "On Writing Contemporary History".

THE PALMACH TACTICS

The best description of the means adopted by the Zionists to achieve their objectives in these operations is given by Yigal Allon, the head of the Palmach and the great hero of the war of "liberation". Surely he more than anyone else, ought to know what really happened. The quotation occurs in *Ha Sepher Ha Palmach* Vol. 2, p. 286. The translation is literal: "There were left before us only five days, before the threatening date, the 15th of May. We saw a need to clean the inner Galilee and to create a *Jewish territorial succession* in the entire area of the upper Galilee. The long battles had weakened our forces, and before us stood great duties of blocking the routes of the Arab invasion (literally *plisha* or expansion). We therefore looked for means which did not force us into employing force, in order to cause the tens of thousands of sulky Arabs who remained in Galilee to flee, for in case of an Arab invasion these were likely to strike us from the rear. We tried to use a tactic which took advantage of the impression created by the fall of Safed and the (Arab) defeat in the area which was cleaned by Operation Matateh—a tactic

which worked miraculously well.

"I gathered all of the Jewish Mukhtars, who have contact with Arabs in different villages, and asked them to whisper in the ears of some Arabs, that a great Jewish reinforcement has arrived in Galilee and that it is going to burn all of the villages of the Huleh. They should suggest to these Arabs, as their friends, to escape while there is still time. And the rumour spread in all the areas of the Huleh that it is time to flee. The flight numbered myriads. The tactic reached its goal completely. The building of the police station at Halsa fell into our hands without a shot. The wide areas were cleaned, the danger was taken away from the transportation routes and we could organise ourselves for the invaders along the borders, without worrying about our rear".

As was said above Plan D had potentially considerable possibilities the limits to which could be set only by an adequate counter-force. A study on the map of the theatres of the operations listed above will indicate that the Zionist were well on the way to the complete military dominance of the whole of Palestine. That they did not entirely succeed in their

plans was due not to political scruples or technical limitations but to the long-delayed intervention of the regular Arab armies. This point is conceded by Yigal Allon who again was in a supreme position to know.

"This stage of the war which was made possible by the gradual British evacuation and ended with the invasion of the Arab armies into the country, gave Haganah valuable victories. Thanks to the local offensive war, the continuity of the Jewish territories was accomplished and also the penetrating of our forces *into Arab areas*. The Arab flight which reached great numbers made it easier on our forces to supervise vast areas and was a burden to the enemy who had to put all of its efforts into the absorption and organisation of the refugees. It is easy to imagine the spirit of defeat that the refugees took with them to the Arab areas. *If it wasn't for the Arab invasion there would have been no stop to the expansion of the forces of Haganah* who could have, with the same drive, reached the natural borders of western Israel, because in this stage most of the local enemy forces were paralysed."