22

“Give Me a Country Without Wars”

1.

One morning, sometime after General Sir Evelyn Barker had arrived in Palestine to suppress the Jewish terrorist organizations, he heard Irving Berlin’s “Dancing Cheek to Cheek” on the radio program *Musical Clock.* That was in the summer or autumn of 1946, at 7:15 in the morning. The general immediately sat down to write to Katy Antonius: “You are the first woman I’ve ever done it with,” he wrote, referring apparently to dancing cheek to cheek. “I enjoyed every moment and wished it could have gone on.” She had told him that he had, perhaps, fallen in love with her. Barker appreciated her comment more than anything, he wrote, because in fact he had been in love with her for months.[1]

Their love story is revealed in close to one hundred letters that the general wrote on official army stationary and sent by special messenger, his driver, to his beloved’s house in east Jerusalem, a few blocks from his own home on the city’s west side. The letters tell a story of ecstasy and tragedy, pathos, mystery, and deception, danger, hope, and disappointment, romance, tears, and kisses—all against the background of nationalist terror, the crumbling of an empire, the birth of one nation and the devastation of another.

Barker was forty-two, married, and the father of a son. Before arriving in Palestine in May 1946 he had enjoyed a celebrated military career that began when he decided in his youth, a short time before World War I, to enlist in the army and become a professional soldier like his father. In the 1930s, Barker was sent to Palestine for the first time to help the army suppress the Arab rebellion.

In World War II, he participated in the invasion of Normandy. He distinguished himself in the battle to liberate Le Havre, as a result of which the king granted him a knighthood. Afterward he joined the VIII Corps, which crossed the Rhine under General Montgomery and advanced through northern Germany. On April 15, 1945, his men liberated the Bergen-Belsen death camp. An officer of the old school, he exuded colonial arrogance—tall, thin, slightly bent, with a steely, penetrating gaze devoid of emotion. Yet in his letters to Katy Antonius he sounds like a schoolboy in love.*

The widow of George Antonius, Katy was the daughter of Dr. Faris Nimr Pasha of Alexandria, senator, expert on the Arab language, and owner of the prestigious newspaper *Al-Muqadam.* From a young age she had been taught that her culture was European. She kept company with Western diplomats and spoke a number of their languages as if they were her own. Her sister married Sir Walter Alexander Smart, a high official in the British embassy in Cairo.† "Katy Antonius was an intelligent, bright, and witty woman, full of humor and charm," Anwar Nusseibeh said of her, "always up-to-date on the intricacies of political events, pretty, good-hearted, and generous." She lived in a house that was owned by the mufti and was a high-society hostess; her guests included everyone who was anyone in the British administration—Western politicians, journalists, artists, notables from around the world, as well as many leaders from the Arab countries.[5]

One of her guests, British journalist and politician Richard Crossman, described her house as a political salon in the French style. He wrote of one magnificent party: "Evening dress, Syrian food and drink, and dancing on the marble floor." As far as he could make out, the guests were a mix of Arabs and Britishers. "It is easy to see why the British prefer the Arab upper class to the Jews," Crossman went on. "This Arab intelligentsia has a French culture, amusing, civilized, tragic and gay. Compared with them the Jews seem tense, *bourgeois*, central European." In the car that took Crossman back to the King David Hotel, a British official explained that there were two societies in Jerusalem, not three—one Anglo-Arab, the other Jewish, and the two could not mix.[6]

Barker seems to have fallen in love with Katy Antonius at one of those parties. When they saw each other at social events they would keep a discreet distance; the following day he would write how hard he had found being in her company without touching her. He frequently visited her home in the evenings, and the next morning would write to her how much he enjoyed her company, how important she was to him, how much he loved her. “I am not sentimental,” he wrote once during a flight home, “but am sensitive to love and kindness. I could not keep the tears away from my eyes as I drove off this morning—stupid as you may think me.”[7] By the time Barker’s plane had landed he had written Katy another letter.[8] He promised over and over again that he was on the Arab side and made her party to several military secrets, including some dealing with the fight against Jewish terrorism.

2.

With the war in Europe over, Ya’akov Cohen was now a pessimist, he told his diary. “How will peace be established in the world?” he wondered. He also worried that he was too preoccupied with politics and not enough with life itself. On Saturdays he would go on hikes with the children from the institution where he worked. “There is nothing finer than the season of cyclamens and anemones,” he wrote, but he was lonely and bored and longed for love.[9] Once, by chance, he ran into Bebs on Ben-Yehuda Street in Tel Aviv. As usual, nothing came of it. Bebs had also enlisted in the Palmach; they called her Bracha now. A short time later she was killed. Ya’akov Cohen read about it in the newspaper.

Tel Aviv had been waiting for a ship that had sailed from Italy, bringing close to 250 illegal immigrants. In commemoration of the second anniversary of Orde Wingate’s death, the boat was named the *Wingate*. The operation was especially large: hundreds of people—thousands, according to one source—were deployed by a special staff under the command of Yitzhak Sadeh himself, and his deputy Yigal Allon. People were stationed at key posts along the shore; many roads were blocked by trucks and cars to prevent army and police from approaching. Hundreds of families were standing by, ready to house the passengers. But the

British discovered the boat at sea and intercepted it before the immigrants reached the shore. There was an exchange of fire between Palmach members and the British. Bracha Fuld was wounded and died in the hospital; six months later an illegal immigration ship was named after her.[10]

The day after her death Ya'akov Cohen wrote, "My day will come as well. I will not hesitate even for a moment. I will do my duty." A few days later the British captured another illegal immigration ship, called the *Tel Hai.* No, people were not dying because it is good to do so for one's country, Cohen wrote, invoking Yosef Trumpeldor's legendary last words. They were dying to make life secure. Sacrifice was unavoidable; there were no alternatives. One heretical thought did come into Cohen's mind, however: Was it all absolutely necessary? He quickly repressed the question, almost in alarm. "There must be no wavering," he warned himself.[11]

By the first anniversary of "Wingate night," as the clash came to be called, Bracha Fuld had become a national symbol. This bothered Cohen: up until then Bebs had been his alone, a secret love. How he had admired her, how he had longed to serve her, how he had wanted to be like her, he wrote. At times, he felt, she had seemed almost to be making fun of him, as if saying, "He knows he will not succeed, because I am not just his, I belong to everyone." Which is exactly what had happened. "Bebs gave me a stinging blow," Cohen wrote. In the months since her death the forbidden thought had recurred: "We should ask ourselves if this is worthwhile," he recorded in his diary. "Should we risk the lives of young men and women just for prestige? After all, the immigrants will come anyway."[12]

Ben-Gurion was troubled by the possibility that Holocaust survivors would not want to come to Palestine but would choose to settle elsewhere. "I think we should not treat this danger lightly. It is the greatest danger not only to Zionism but to the Yishuv," he wrote, even before the war was over.[13] The competition between the labor movement and the Revisionists continued to occupy his thoughts. Terror was deployed, among other reasons, to forcibly take control of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement as a whole, he claimed.[14] The conflict might even lead to civil war, he believed. "We must take up our rifles against

them," he declared. "Whoever tries to have their way with guns—I will answer him with guns." He was convinced however, that unlike the Germans, the Jewish community in Palestine would not capitulate to the right wing.

This was no chance comparison. He continued to call Etzel a "Nazi gang" and "Jewish Nazis." The Revisionists are liable to murder each and every one of us sitting here, Ben-Gurion told his colleagues in the Histadrut. He compared Begin to the fuehrer. "Hitler also had boys who joined his movement and were killed to sanctify their ideal. Certain Nazis had pure, idealistic motives. But the movement as a whole was reprehensible and destroyed the German people. "Etzel was similarly liable to destroy the Yishuv, Ben-Gurion argued, describing the organization and its supporters as a bubonic plague.[15]*

The labor movement was also divided internally. Some advocated operations against the British, including terrorist attacks, particularly members of the kibbutzim and the Palmach. Unwilling to limit themselves to illegal immigration operations, they put pressure on the leadership, which ultimately led, in October 1945, to the establishment of the Hebrew Resistance Movement, a joint Haganah venture with Etzel and Lechi. The labor movement's cooperation with Etzel and Lechi lasted for only eight months but represented a general acceptance by the Jewish leadership of the principle that the British should be fought militarily; for the Revisionists this was an important achievement. The two organizations received recognition and a role in the national decision-making process; the Jewish Agency and the Haganah also stopped turning their members in to the authorities. The Hebrew Resistance Movement provided an outlet for the growing activist agitation in the Palmach, which now allowed its men to carry out a few attacks on railroad tracks and bridges.

The period of cooperation between the Haganah and the competing organizations endangered relations between the Jewish Agency and the authorities but gave the Haganah a certain amount of control over the two other groups, enabling it to restrain them.[17] During this period an attempt was made to murder Raymond Cafferata, and an attack on the King David Hotel was planned.

3.

Cafferata was chief of police in Haifa at the time. His name continued to appear in the British press. At the end of 1942, Lord Wedgwood claimed that the British policemen in Palestine were dyed-in-the-wool antisemites; they had even cheered when Italian warplanes bombed Tel Aviv. Noting the “Fascist spirit” prevalent among the police, Wedgwood referred sarcastically to “these gentlemen with the good old Anglo-Saxon names,” citing Cafferata in particular.[18] In response, Raymond Cafferata sent a sharp letter of protest. Only the Nazi enemy could benefit from Wedgwood’s charges, he wrote. The comment on his family name was more appropriate to a Hyde Park tub-thumper, he said, though perhaps he was being unjust to the tub-thumpers, since they at least had some decency.[19]

In fact, Cafferata was sympathetic to the tragedy of the Jewish refugees. At one point, probably just after he completed his service in Palestine, he wrote down a sad memory of an encounter, during the war years, with a fifty-year-old man named Kupperman. Cafferata had met him at a café in Tel Aviv, and Kupperman had told his story. He had come from Germany alone, leaving his family behind. He described the harsh conditions on board the illegal immigration ship. When the ship came in to dock, it ran up on a sandbar not far from the Tel Aviv shore. The passengers were told to jump into the water. Kupperman jumped. He didn’t mind leaving his baggage behind—he was wearing a belt around his waist in which there were several diamonds. He managed to reach the shore, and together with several other people he stood there, soaked and shivering in the cold and the dark. Suddenly a boy of sixteen or seventeen appeared and led them to a wooden hut where there were several bunks, eating utensils, and a dirty kerosene stove. The boy told the refugees to stay there and gave them food. After some time they dared venture out. Some of them had relatives in Palestine.

Kupperman went into Tel Aviv. At a coffeehouse he struck up a conversation with several people, who realized he was an illegal immigrant. Kupperman was alarmed, but they reassured him. Kupperman said he had to get his family out of Germany and bring them to Palestine, and the people he had met promised to help but demanded money. Kupperman gave them one of the diamonds from his

belt. Later he gave them another and then another. It turned out that his new acquaintances were confidence men and extortionists. When he refused to give them more diamonds they threatened to notify the Gestapo chief in Frankfurt whom he had fled. He would never see his wife and children again, they threatened. He gave away the last of his diamonds and was left with nothing. At this point he encountered Cafferata, who was not surprised by the story. He had been in the country for ten years—everything cost money.

He tried to give Kupperman some encouragement, buying him a sandwich and a cup of tea. The British did not send Jews back to Nazi Germany after they had fled, Cafferata explained, and he promised to try to arrange an immigration permit for Kupperman's wife and children. The two were supposed to meet at the same café the next evening. A few hours before setting out, Cafferata was handed a summary of the day's events. Several burglaries, a knife fight or two, and the arrest of two small-time hashish pushers. The body of a man, about fifty years old with gray hair, had been found on the beach. Cafferata went to the morgue and identified Kupperman. He had drowned himself.[20]

Several Jewish community leaders in Haifa testified that they had a correct working relationship with the city's police commander. But the members of the Haganah remembered their clash with Cafferata at Ramat HaKovesh and Givat Haim. Those from Etzel remembered the Hebron massacre and accused the police chief of killing one of their men, Asher Trattner, an eighteen-year-old student from Breslau. Some Haifa policemen had run into Trattner while he was pasting up Etzel broadsides in the street. He had tried to flee, and the policemen had shot and hit him in the leg. He had been arrested for interrogation and taken to Acre prison, where apparently he did not receive proper medical care. Three weeks later he was brought to the hospital, where his leg was amputated. Two days after that he died. Etzel claimed that Trattner had died of sadistic torture and held Cafferata responsible. Trattner himself had managed, before dying, to tell his brother that he suffered from pain in his leg, but his interrogators had not tortured him.[21]

The initiative for Cafferata's murder came from Lechi; the commanders of the Hebrew Resistance Movement knew of the plan in advance—they neither

approved it nor forbade it. In the spirit of unity that prevailed among the terrorist organizations at that time, members of Lechi and Etzel worked together. Cafferata lived with his wife, Peggy, and their two children on Mount Carmel; his office was on Kingsway in the lower city, not far from the entrance to the port. His driver took him to his office every morning in a blue Ford. The plan was to block the car not far from the Herzliya Court Hotel, at the entrance to the Hadar HaCarmel neighborhood; there was a sharp turn in the road and trees to provide cover. The attackers planned to shoot Cafferata or throw a bomb into his car. Nehemia Ben-Tor of Lechi, who was assigned to carry out the assassination, wrote, “I was happy to accept the job and proud to be among those who avenged the blood of the victims of 1929.” Ben-Tor recalled his orders: if Peggy Cafferata was in the car with her husband, the operation should be canceled.

The day of the attack was stormy; rain had emptied the streets, which was good, but the plan failed anyway. The driver of the car supposed to block Cafferata’s vehicle was not quick enough, and Cafferata’s driver managed to maneuver his way out of the trap. Ben-Tor emptied his revolver into the car’s back window; one bullet backfired and hit Ben-Tor in the leg. Inevitably, the incident led to an exhaustive debate over the details of the operation and the apportionment of blame for its failure. Many years later Ben-Tor wrote, “More than once I have been overcome with curiosity to know what happened to the man whose life I was ordered to take, what kind of man was he?” They had at least one thing in common: Cafferata had also once been hit in the leg by a bullet that had backfired from his pistol.[22]

Cafferata escaped unharmed. He proceeded to his office as if nothing had happened. His secretary noticed that he was a bit upset, but she knew nothing about what had happened. In the days that followed the police chief was in a bad mood; he had long known that his life was in danger, but had always felt that nothing would happen to him.[23*]

Cafferata’s secretary described him as a generous man, devoted to his family. He had few friends and seldom went to pubs. She never heard a bad word about the Jews escape his lips; her impression was that he had no political views. As it turned out, she was a secret agent for the Zionists: she copied every letter he

dictated to her and sent it to the Haganah.[24]

A few weeks after the attack, Cafferata was shipped home. He claimed that he had submitted his resignation before the assassination attempt. The Jews had done everything to ruin him, Cafferata wrote, explaining that some Jewish friends had made him aware of the intensity of the opposition he roused in Palestine. The hostility toward him made it impossible for him to do his job, he maintained, citing Wedgwood's remarks in the House of Lords. So he decided to go. But had Cafferata not gone of his own initiative, he would have been forced to leave. He was shocked, he wrote. He was not antisemitic—he had played soccer for many Jewish football teams, which was more than most officials in Palestine had done. Most of his contacts with Jews had been in connection with saving their lives, he wrote. He did not want to leave Palestine—had he stayed six years longer he would have received a full pension.[25†]

In June 1946 terrorist attacks intensified, and at the end of the month General Barker ordered Operation Agatha: more than 100,000 soldiers and policemen surrounded dozens of Jewish settlements throughout the country and imposed a curfew that included Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. To the Jews, the event became known as "Black Sabbath." Some 3,000 people were arrested, among them members of the Jewish Agency Executive; a large cache of weapons was found at Kibbutz Yagur.[27] Four weeks after Black Sabbath, Etzel operatives blew up the south wing of the King David Hotel, which housed the government secretariat. As the country was in flames, General Barker shared a fantasy with Katy Antonius that should he ever find himself single again he would return to the Middle East to help the Arabs fight for their rights. "We might even combine," he suggested to her.[28] Soon, however, he got himself in trouble, and was forced to leave his Katy.

4.

Black Sabbath was the most extensive and violent operation against the Jews of Palestine; the attack on the King David had killed more than ninety people and was the largest action against the British.[29] Both events were exceptional—the

Jews and the British tended to restrain themselves and not fight at full force.

One evening in the winter of 1946 Etzel men attacked a police station in Jerusalem, having previously laid mines in several surrounding streets. The action failed, and the mines were discovered and dismantled. In the wake of the incident the high commissioner canceled a formal dinner, since the mines in the city streets made it difficult for the guests to get to his residence. Canceling the dinner was the most dramatic response the authorities made that evening. A meeting to discuss the attack was called only the following day. Viscount Montgomery, now chief of the Imperial General Staff, was furious. Had the matter been handled properly, mobile army forces would have been sent to the scene within ten minutes and the terrorists would have been captured, he wrote. He also criticized the local police: they did not function in a tolerant and good-natured way, as they did in England; they did not enjoy the confidence of the community. In Palestine they were armed to the teeth and often drove in armored cars. Instead of being first-class policemen they were third-class soldiers. And the population hated them because Jews in general hated policemen.[30]

The legendary Monty had returned to Palestine to repress Jewish terrorism with an iron hand, just as he had done with the Arab rebellion. Years before, Orde Wingate had told Ben-Gurion that Montgomery hated the Yishuv. The situation in Palestine infuriated him—the government had for all practical purposes lost control of the country; the real rulers, in his view, were the Jews, who were telling the authorities “Don’t you dare touch us.”[31] Things could not go on like this, Montgomery told Prime Minister Clement Attlee; there were 100,000 soldiers stationed in Palestine with their hands tied. Two of them were being killed each day. He, Montgomery, would not allow this state of affairs to continue. “If we are not prepared to maintain law and order in Palestine, then it would be better to get out,” he said.

The army and the civilian government were caught in yet another confrontation: the army demanded freedom of action, while the high commissioner’s inclination was toward restraint. In the back of everyone’s mind was concern with how history would portray them. The army was readying its argument that Palestine had been lost because Britain was not prepared to use the

force at its disposal. Indeed, the official version in the end was that the government and the high commissioner had been too weak.[32]

Their hands were not stayed by weakness, however, but by a powerful sense of moral limitations on harsh behavior toward Jews. The British had both operational and legal justifications for action and were well aware that terrorism was dealing a blow to the empire's prestige elsewhere in the world. But even after the murder of Lord Moyne they held their force in check. When they went to search for weapons they acted not on mere hunches but only on the basis of authoritative intelligence information, and they worked in parallel to disarm the Arabs.[33]

The authorities did institute draconian emergency laws; the Jewish Bar Association complained that the regulations were worse than those imposed in Nazi Germany.[34] A general night curfew lasted for many months. On four occasions the British declared a total curfew in Tel Aviv while they conducted house-to-house searches. They arrested and tortured suspects, deported people to Africa, and hanged prisoners. But they never acted against the Jews with the determination and harshness that characterized the suppression of the Arab rebellion.[35] Judge Anwar Nusseibeh pointed out that the residents of Yemin Moshe, the Jewish neighborhood adjacent to the King David Hotel, had not been punished for the explosion in the hotel. Likewise, the population of Givat Shaul had not been held in any way responsible for the nearby attack on the high commissioner. Yet punishing entire Arab neighborhoods or villages for crimes that occurred in their vicinity, he noted, was common British practice.

There were some differences in the two situations, though. Many Jews opposed anti-British terrorism, so collective punishment would have proved counterproductive. During the Arab rebellion, the authorities acted on the assumption that most Arabs supported the terror campaign. Also, the Jewish terrorists acted largely in the cities rather than in the villages, which made it difficult for the British to locate and act against them. But mostly, the Jews were Europeans, not "natives," allies in the war against the Nazis and Holocaust survivors. The British were acutely aware of the limitations these circumstances imposed: "Every honorable member will agree that we are not prepared when we

use the phrase ‘at all costs’ to resort to mass extermination of the population in the way that the Nazis did,” said one parliamentarian; Winston Churchill echoed this sentiment.[36] In addition, the Jewish Agency and the Haganah continued to see themselves as part of the regime in Palestine, despite the terror, and the British recognized their allegiance until the very last day of the Mandate.*

The unified Hebrew Resistance Movement did not last beyond the explosion at the King David Hotel. The Haganah condemned the bombing and claimed it had taken no part in the action. This was not quite accurate: the joint Jewish command had approved the attack, but in the wake of the huge number of deaths that resulted there was a heated debate over the details of how it had been carried out.†

After the united underground movement was dismantled, rivalry between the different Zionist organizations resumed. When the British sentenced an Etzel operative, Dov Gruner, to death, Ben-Gurion responded the same way he had to the earlier sentences against Revisionists. He didn’t want anyone hanged, he said, but he would do nothing to prevent the execution. Nor would he fly a black flag. Begin and his men were playing fast and loose with the Yishuv and had to be stopped once and for all. Otherwise the labor movement might as well just hand him the keys.[39] Begin was Ben-Gurion’s number one enemy, more important than any Englishman.

Etzel continued its operations, however. The most famous of these were an attack on the officers’ club in Goldschmied House in Jerusalem, a breakout from Acre prison freeing some major Revisionist prisoners, and the hanging of two British sergeants in retribution for the deaths of Etzel men.[40] Ben-Gurion was particularly angry about the hanging because the deed coincided with the arrival of the illegal immigration ship the *Exodus*, and diverted attention from it. The *Exodus* was planned as dramatic propaganda, the boldest illegal immigration operation yet, “one of the greatest displays of the Jewish struggle, of Jewish pride, and of the connection with the Land of Israel,” according to Ben-Gurion. Now Etzel had stolen the show from the Jewish Agency. Who in the world would pay any attention to the *Exodus* after a deed like this, he wondered. He called the hanging a “Nazi act.”[41]

The Mandatory government was focusing most of its security efforts on protecting its personnel, not on maintaining the regime. Montgomery instructed Evelyn Barker to stress to the soldiers that they were facing a cruel, fanatical, and cunning enemy, and there was no way of knowing who was friend and who foe. There were female terrorists as well, so all fraternizing with the local population would have to cease.[42]

In the wake of the King David bombing, Barker translated these instructions into an order declaring all Jewish establishments, including restaurants and places of entertainment, off-limits to British soldiers. He knew this would be difficult, Barker wrote to his men, but the Jews had to learn just how much the British despised them, and the best way to punish them was by striking at their pockets, which the race particularly disliked. His choice of words was unfortunate. They were interpreted as antisemitic and caused an uproar. Katy Antonius preserved among her papers a caricature that appeared in England showing Barker brandishing his statement while standing on a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Barker was soon returned to England. Many years later he claimed, in a conversation with Lord Nicholas Bethell, that it had been "a rotten letter written on the spur of the moment."[43]

But Barker's disclaimer was false. Sometime after returning to England, he wrote to Kate Antonius. "They do hate having their pockets touched, as I said in my letter," he noted, adding, "I hope the Arabs will no longer think we are afraid to hang Jews." Two terrorists had committed suicide in prison before being executed, and Barker commented, "So that's two more less." His hostility to the Jews was clearly an inseparable part of his love for his Katy, and that love was part of his hostility. He would gaze at her picture, his eyes growing damp: "Katy, I love you so much, Katy," he wrote her. "Just think of all this life and money being wasted for these b—y Jews. Yes I loathe the lot—whether they be Zionists or not. Why should we be afraid of saying we hate them—it's time this damned race knew what we think of them—loathsome people."[44]

A few months after returning from Palestine, Barker received a package. "The smell was strange," he wrote Antonius that same day. He discerned greenish powder, silver paper, and two wires, and then was certain what it was.

He called a sapper, who dismantled the device, a letter bomb. Two Etzel men had also planned to mine the road leading to his home in England. One of them was Ezer Weizman, the Zionist leader's nephew, who would follow in his uncle's footsteps to become president of Israel. At the time Barker received the bomb, Weizman was checking out the possibility of killing Raymond Cafferata.[45]

Barker was not the only one to make antisemitic comments. Another officer, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Webb, summoned reporters and gave his pejorative views of the Jewish race. One intelligence evaluation stated that "making money is almost a second religion with the Jews." The Jewish Agency was constantly filing complaints about soldiers who had used antisemitic expressions: they frequently said "bloody Jew" or "pigs," sometimes shouted "*Heil Hitler,*" and promised they would finish off what Hitler had begun. Churchill wrote that most British military officers in Palestine were strongly pro-Arab.[46]

This hostility was largely a problem of morale. Most of the soldiers, a British intelligence officer reported, had come to Palestine with sympathy for the Jews, partly because of the suffering they had endured in World War II.[47] As a British paratrooper named Wilson wrote, the men of the Sixth Airborne Division had seen the persecution of the Jews with their own eyes when they fought the Nazis in Europe. But when these same soldiers arrived in Palestine, they found themselves facing large, hostile groups of Jewish demonstrators chanting "Free immigration," and "a Hebrew state." The men of the Sixth Airborne Division were "mystified" by the Jews' enmity, Wilson wrote. The terror campaign angered and often humiliated them; once, Etzel agents kidnapped two of the division's men, pulled down their pants, and gave them a whipping, retribution for a lashing received by one of their own members.[48] Wilson complained about what seemed to him a violation of fair play. The men were revolted and frustrated by Lechi's methods, he wrote, and he termed one operation, an attack on soldiers guarding a military parking lot in Tel Aviv, "mass murder."[49] Many of the soldiers would soon consider all Jews terrorists.

The members of the Sixth Airborne arrived in Palestine in 1945 under the command of Major General E. L. Bols, the son of Allenby's chief of staff, who had had Herbert Samuel sign the famous "receipt" for Palestine. They were first

stationed in Gaza and then deployed to suppress the terrorist organizations.[50] The paratroopers wore red berets, leading the Jews to call them “anemones.”

Nathan Alterman, a Hebrew poet who wrote about the struggle against the British, penned a pretty love song called “Anemones.” Its most political lines are “Oaths of love may be forgotten *Anemones will always blossom* Like smoke the oaths have come and gone / Anemones go on and on.”[51] The song was hardly political, but the “anemones” themselves considered it a stinging insult, one of the many they had to endure. Jews would shout “Gestapo” at them, or call out “English bastards,” and children would taunt them by singing the song’s chorus, “Anemones, anemones.” In writing his chronicle, Wilson quoted a line from the song that, he claimed, compared anemones to the paratroopers—their heads were red but their hearts were black. These words hurt them more than anything, he said, because British troops were renowned for their love of children.[52] Their pride was wounded gratuitously; while the metaphor might have been popular, there is not a trace of it in Alterman’s lyrics.

Once the soldiers were restricted to their camps, to strike the Jews “in their pockets” and protect the lives of the men, they were sentenced to a “fairly monastic” life. They played bridge and poker and read books. They saw movies and played cricket and football, but had few other forms of recreation.[53] So they liked going out on missions. Some were very young and considered the action in Palestine compensation for what they had missed in World War II. There were also soldiers who wanted to use stronger measures than those permitted. From time to time, soldiers went out on their own to take revenge on civilians. Wilson made note of one of the soldiers’ major obstacles: the international press, in the form of reporters and photographers, was around all too often. The soldiers frequently felt they had gotten caught up in a propaganda war, especially when they had to arrest illegal immigrants.

Wilson wrote of the refugees with compassion, without rancor, even though some of them acted, he said, with fanatical violence. There was something tragic and touching in their yearning to remain in the Holy Land, he thought. The Holocaust survivors were miserable and pathetic, another officer noted, and the orders to arrest and deport them troubled many of the soldiers.[54] Nathan

Alterman wrote of one such soldier, “It is not easy to drag orphans and mothers / Or to tussle on one’s knees with mourning fathers *And be loyal and worthy of the homeland* That sent him off with its flags.” What it came down to, one paratrooper concluded, was that the soldiers had an unpleasant job often requiring them to deal with unpleasant people.[55]

A Jewish Agency emissary in London, Teddy Kollek, reported that he had seen letters sent by soldiers serving in Palestine in which they clearly recognized there was no purpose and no justice in the war they were fighting. Parents and friends often sent these letters to the press, but the newspapers did not print them. Abba Eban, another Zionist representative, also reported from London that the soldier’s low morale was of much concern to the army’s officers; they had trouble explaining to the soldiers why they were in Palestine. Many were again inclined to minimize the country’s strategic importance. In Jerusalem antipathy to the British was growing ever stronger. A Jewish Agency official expressed his fear that the Yishuv’s leadership might lose control of the community.[56]

5.

Hostility to the British focused on the Labour government’s foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin. The party’s platform had promised free Jewish immigration to Palestine and even transfer of the Arabs.[57] But the party did not keep its promises; the number of immigrants was limited to fifteen hundred a month. This was reprehensible, a base betrayal, Ya’akov Cohen wrote in his diary. “We came out of World War I with the Balfour Declaration,” he said. “We came out of this war with nothing.”[58]

Cohen went on, “The Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Persians, and others have all been here, they’ve all been here and now they are gone. You will also be thrown out. England, know what your end will be if you persist in your mistreatment and your provocations. God will take his revenge on you as he took revenge on the Germans. There is justice in the world. Neither the airborne division nor the atom bomb will quell us. We know where we are going. Justice is with us. The day will come, whether you want it or not, that you will

leave this country. It is not your country." To prove the justice of their presence in Palestine, the British were deliberately inciting the conflict between Jews and Arabs, Cohen wrote, expressing a common belief.[59] He proposed disobedience to the authorities. Foreign Secretary Bevin was, in his eyes, an antisemite.[60] This view was also widely shared. Bevin was considered one of the great nemeses of the Jews, like Haman, Titus, Hitler, and Himmler, wrote Alan Bullock, his biographer. Golda Meir (Meyerson) wrote: "I don't know (nor really does it matter any more) whether Bevin was a little insane, or just antiSemitic, or both." Hers was a relatively mild assessment.[61] The postwar hostility to "Nazi Britain," as it was often called, clouded the collective memory of the entire Mandatory period. The strength of anti-British feeling nourished a patriotic surge, but it did not last—many people were not anti-British at all. The anti-British terror and illegal immigration operations were prompted more by the battle between different Zionist parties than by a genuine national struggle against a foreign ruler.[62] The Revisionists and the labor movement, and various factions within the labor movement, were competing for control of the state that would soon be established. The "resistance" against the British was thus to a large extent a political and psychological fiction. The British were not the real enemy; the Arabs were.

In January 1947, a Jewish Agency official, Yehezkel Sahar, went to the police inspector general and complained, as Jewish leaders had done countless times in the previous thirty years, that the authorities were employing too many Arab policemen. The inspector-general, Colonel William Nicol Grey, explained that Sahar would have to understand that the war between the British and the Arabs was over. Now the British were at war with the Jews. Sahar, who would soon replace Grey as head of the police force for the State of Israel, promised there was no war between the Yishuv and the British but rather between two Jewish terrorist organizations and the British. He proposed cooperating in the struggle against the terrorists, "with the exception of steps liable to lead to civil war." The high commissioner was inundated with letters, some in German, from citizens proposing how to fight terrorism.[63]

A few months later, the Jewish Agency published a broadside in which it

called on parents to turn in members of terrorists organizations, even their own children. The demand was based on Deuteronomy 21:18–21: “If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son,” he should be handed over to the city’s elders, to be taken to the city gate and stoned to death. The British would not do that, the Jewish Agency promised; at most the authorities would hold the prisoners for a year or two, and then release them.[64] As late as February 1947, Golda Meyerson reminded the high commissioner of his promise to assist the Jewish Agency in its fight against the Revisionists. She raised the issue in the context of a request to allow several hundred illegal immigrants being detained in Cyprus to enter the country legally, “as an advance on next month’s quota.” Such a concession would help enormously in the fight against the terrorist organizations, she wrote. Meir’s request reveals the joint interests of two parties sharing government responsibility, not resistance to a foreign ruler.[65] Intercepting illegal ships and diverting them to transit camps in Cyprus was now carried out with the consent of—indeed in coordination with—the Jewish Agency.

Most Jews continued to view the British administration as a legitimate authority and did not join in a general boycott. People obeyed the law and heeded the government until its final day. Thus, the chairman of the Hefer Valley regional council asked the authorities to release several prisoners on the grounds that they were innocent; his letters tacitly assume the government’s legitimate right to arrest real criminals. Hannah Ben-Eliezer and Yaffa Tamarkin, wives of imprisoned Etzel men, met with the chief secretary and asked that the government provide financial aid to their families; afterward, they protested that the British were sending them on a wild goose chase from one office to another. Laja Faitlowicz contacted the authorities through the agency of the Ethiopian consulate in Jerusalem, requesting that the valuable library belonging to her brother, a scholar of Ethiopian Jewry, not be harmed during the search actions in Tel Aviv. A few days after the attack on the King David Hotel a search operation was conducted in Tel Aviv called Operation Shark. The searches prompted a series of complaints, all of which reflect the same assumption: the security forces had gone beyond the proper behavior expected of them.[66]

The council of the Beit Yisrael neighborhood in Jerusalem petitioned his

excellency the high commissioner to prevent soldiers from molesting people “in violation of British tradition.” Thus, with obedient courtesy, Kibbutz Shefayim asked his excellency to conduct an investigation into the beating of a kibbutz member by policemen. The unstated assumption of the letter was that the act was exceptional and that the policemen would be punished.[67]

Dr. Georg Beer of Haifa sent his excellency a long and touching letter that might have made General Barker happy. Before escaping to Palestine, apparently from Germany, Beer had been a judge. He had brought all his savings and had invested them in a small pub at 67 Jaffa Street in Haifa, called the Nelson. Most of the patrons were members of the British security forces. Now the military authorities had declared his bar off-limits, simply because it was owned by a Jew. So he was being punished for crimes committed by other Jews. His family had lost its livelihood and was on the verge of starvation, all because of the new policy. In his three-page letter, Beer pleaded for justice: soldiers should be allowed to return to the Nelson.*

The Friends of the Palestine Folk Opera asked the government for financial assistance in January 1947. During the war, they claimed, more than 600,000 people had attended opera performances. They had seen, among other works, Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* and Verdi’s *Rigoletto,* as well as an opera called *Dan the Guard* by Mark Labri, a local composer. The chief secretary responded that he greatly appreciated the importance of music, but “in the present circumstances” government help was inconceivable, since the authorities did not have enough money even to eliminate illiteracy. In fact, a long list of Hebrew cultural institutions received assistance from the government. The Hebrew University was awarded a grant of £14,500 in the spring of 1948, an act described as one of the last decisions of the British administration.[69]

For a long time the British tried to preserve an appearance of normalcy, as if there were no threat of terror. The army tried to persuade the media in Palestine and in England not to use the term *terror,* lest it give the impression that the authorities were frightened—the media were not convinced.[70†] In June 1947 a big parade was held in honor of King George VI’s birthday. Special programs were printed in English, Arabic, and Hebrew, including a large map for the

convenience of guests, showing the parade route around the Old City, along Julian's Way, and past the King David Hotel. The hotel was still in ruins, but the map made the city out to be a colorful, gay place; it showed the locations of all the hotels and cafés—the Regent, the Savoy, the Trocadero, the Empire, the Queens Restaurant, as well as a bar called Fink's.[72] The celebration was somewhat grotesque—just a half year earlier the authorities had evacuated some two thousand British subjects from Jerusalem for their own safety, most of them women and children.

David Ben-Gurion was making great efforts to persuade the British to stay in Palestine; but despite their best efforts to carry on as normal, the British wanted to go home.

Jock Jardine, of the British Council, was sick of the country. He had no idea where the government would send him next, and he did not care—just as long as it was somewhere else. "Give me a country without wars and fighting and threats and barbed wire," he wrote. "I want a rest from war and talk of war and above all from emotionalism and nationalism and all the isms which go with immaturity and youth and muddled education!" Yes, he admitted, he was dreaming of paradise, or perhaps simply about England.[73] "And so we left," the last high commissioner wrote.[74]

One British company commander considered his service in Palestine the high point of his military career. "Excellent climate, lovely flowers, a spice of danger, but a lot of fun—riding, shooting and trips to Jerusalem and the Holy Places," he recalled. His memories were included in an official British publication that sums up thirty years of British rule with the words, "Little has been achieved."[75] That was true, of course, only for the British. The Jews, for their part, had achieved independence.

23

The Last Salute

1.

At the beginning of 1946 the Jewish Agency received a report on the tragic story of a young woman who had come to Palestine from Austria, met a British soldier in Jerusalem, and married him. A while later he abandoned her; she murdered their baby and tried, unsuccessfully, to kill herself. “You should give this case maximum publicity,” the agency’s man in London wrote back to Jerusalem. He didn’t want any mention made of the fact that when the baby was born the couple had still not married, so as to avoid sullying the girl’s reputation. “But it is essential,” he wrote, “to play up the negative aspects of the story as a warning,” since the case was hardly an exception. Romantic attachments between Jewish girls and British soldiers had long been the object of scorn even before the Jewish Agency considered putting them to use in aid of the Zionist cause.

“On the face of it, you can see her point,” the editor of *Yediot Aharonot* wrote sarcastically of one exemplar. “She went out once with a Jewish boy, but he left her. You all know our boys—they are very ill-mannered. And then she met the English boy. He was so different. What a gentleman. You couldn’t begin to compare him to our boys. A real lord!” She dreamed of foreign climes, the editor went on; he promised her a life of pleasure, luxury, and respectability. She followed him home, but in England everyone humiliated her and made fun of her. Finally she understood that she would never be a lady in England because her mother-in-law hated her and in church they made fun of her foreign accent.

The girl from Tel Aviv would always be a provincial outsider. The article, headlined “Liberated Darling,” mentioned twenty women, the mothers of twenty children, whose British husbands had left them. “I would like to have a photograph of these forty lost souls and paste it up on all the notice boards in Palestine.” That would “deter Jewish girls from relations with gentiles,” he wrote.[1]*

When Lotte Geiger came to Palestine from Germany, in 1933, she was eighteen and expected to find a liberal country without class and social divisions. She worked in a number of offices, including the Public Works Department and the British military censor. Many *yekkes*, as Jewish immigrants from Germany were called, as well as lawyers and businessmen from the old, pre-Zionist Sephardic community in Jerusalem, mixed socially with the British, unlike most other Jews in Palestine.[3] Lotte Geiger’s friendship with Michael Bryant, the British director of the Jerusalem Electric Corporation, blossomed against the backdrop of a city that seemed to have become ever more cosmopolitan as the days of the British in Palestine neared their end.

Geiger, Bryant, and their friends used to meet at the Salvia Hotel, near Salameh Square in Talbieh. They were immigrants and escapists, do-gooders, plotters, terrorists, poets, and British officials, foreign correspondents from anywhere and everywhere, connoisseurs of whiskey and war stories—all spinning romance among the pines and geraniums and addicted to the intoxicating times. The final anarchic days of the British regime were much like those of the winter of 1917 when the winds of war were blowing through the city; Jerusalem is “at war with itself,” a British official wrote.[4] The city of eternity had sunk into twilight, much as it had thirty years earlier. The British were leaving, and no one had taken their place. For a brief while, there were no norms, no binding rules. Free from the grip of history, people lived only for themselves. These were fine days for a forbidden and impossible love between an Englishman and a Jewish woman.

But it was not easy for Bryant and Lotte. He was kidnapped by Etzel, which suspected him of aiding the Arabs. “I always knew,” he wrote to her, that “an Englishman would never really be accepted here unless he identified completely

with the Jews." He did identify with the Jews, but his interrogators did not believe him. "Maybe I should just tell them that I stayed because I was in love with a Jewess," he wrote.[5] Bryant's colleagues were packing up; the fate of their suitcases concerned them more than the fate of the Holy City.

2.

Along with evacuating some seventy-five thousand people and a quarter of a million tons of possessions, the British also had to decide what to do with their desks, who would get the horses, when to release criminals from the prisons, and how much food to leave behind in the mental hospitals. "The administration's task was to cut off the branch on which it was sitting," Chief Secretary Henry Gurney wrote.[6] As their departure approached, the British were unsure what to do with the dogs the police had used in their counterterrorism operations. "They 'speak' Afrikaans," one government document states—the dogs had been brought from South Africa. Several alternatives were considered, and finally the police decided to destroy the dogs rather than subject them to possible starvation.

They also destroyed documents, stamps, and paper money. Still, the British planned to take most of the equipment, from their locomotives to the last of the paper clips. Some supplies and a few buildings were put up for sale. One official proposed making a list and simply hanging it on the door before they all left, but bureaucratic tradition required a certain protocol: every rifle and typewriter had to be accounted for, with remarks on the condition of each item and its monetary value. Special forms were printed up for the purpose and had to be filled out in octuplicate. The operation was rather complex—the authorities discovered that it was easier to establish an administration than to dismantle one.[7]

The British left the country because more and more of them had come to realize that the Balfour Declaration had been a mistake—something various officials had said twenty years earlier. Sir John Hope Simpson of the Foreign Office shared the following thought with former high commissioner Chancellor: "What a lot of Jews are now in authority.… The world is no pleasant thing to

contemplate these days."[8]

This was a widespread feeling. In both Jerusalem and London people once again thought that the Jews had influence on American policy, as in World War I. Then the feeling had spurred the British to conquer Palestine; now they were inclined to leave it. "The American press and American Zionists are responsible more than anyone else for the present troubles in Palestine," Chief Secretary Gurney wrote in his diary, adding, "The sooner we go the better." Soon after, Sir Henry was left with but a single word to account for the British presence in Palestine: stupidity.[9]

The pro-Zionist lobby in the United States had in fact grown stronger since the end of World War II, and wielded greater influence than ever before. At one stage America seemed to be trying to force Britain to remain in Palestine and reaffirm its support of the Zionist movement, against its will. This additional pressure from abroad convinced the British that in leaving the country they were saving themselves from sinking even deeper into a quagmire.

For many years thereafter, Israelis conducted an agitated and sensitive debate over the question of who had really gotten rid of the British. Former members of Etzel, Lechi, the Haganah, and the Palmach vied with each other to claim credit for "ejecting" the British; all invested considerable energy in the argument, enlisting historians, educators, journalists, and other shapers of memory and myth. The political stakes were high, the assumption being that whoever had expelled the British had thereby won the moral and national right to lead Israel's government. All the warring parties completely ignored the role played by the Arabs in sending the British packing.

The Arab rebellion of the late 1930s had been cruelly suppressed, but it had brought home to the British that compromise between the Arabs and the Jews was impossible. Only war would decide the issue; whoever won would control the country, or as much of it as they could conquer. The British had drawn the right conclusion. Once the Zionist movement came to Palestine with the intention of creating an independent state with a Jewish majority, war was inevitable. All indications pointed toward a long war that would end without a clear victory. This projection greatly reduced the country's strategic value and

increased the risks to the British themselves. With hindsight they could—justly—say to themselves that they had erred in allowing the Zionist movement to drag them into this adventure. Twenty years after the Balfour Declaration, they could even claim that they had kept their commitment: at least the foundations of the Jewish national home were in place.

The Arab rebellion had made the British sick of Palestine. World War II had delayed their exit, but during the war they continued to discuss how to rid themselves of the country when the war ended. Terrorism and illegal immigration only served to intensify a feeling that had crystallized among many of the British by the end of the 1930s. After three decades of Zionism in Palestine, there was still no clear timetable for the Jewish state, but no doubt remained that Jewish independence was on the horizon. The social, political, economic, and military foundations of the state-to-be were firm; and a profound sense of national unity prevailed. The Zionist dream was about to become reality.

There is therefore no basis for the frequent assertion that the state was established as a result of the Holocaust. Clearly, the shock, horror, and sense of guilt felt by many generated profound sympathy for the Jews in general and the Zionist movement in particular. That sympathy helped the Zionists advance their diplomatic campaign and their propaganda, and shaped their strategy to focus efforts on the survivors, those Jews in displaced-persons camps demanding that they be sent to Palestine. All the survivors were Zionists, the Jewish Agency claimed, and they all wanted to come to Palestine. The assertion was not true.

The displaced persons were given the choice of returning to their homes in Eastern Europe or settling in Palestine. Few were able or willing to return to countries then in the grip of various degrees of hunger, antisemitism, and communism, and they were never given the option of choosing between Palestine and, say, the United States. In effect, their options were narrowed to Palestine or the DP camps. Many, but not all, wanted to settle in Palestine; others came because there was nowhere else for them to go or in response to the exhortations of Zionist emissaries. A secret report on the first immigrants to reach the country after the war stated that a considerable number felt let down.

“The disappointment derives from the lack of a Zionist outlook and Zionist education, on the one hand, and from the hasty, even dishonest promises, of our overseas emissaries.… The [immigrants] believe in no vision.”[10] Mutual disappointment was one of the causes of a great schism between the Jews of Palestine and the Holocaust survivors.*

The problem of the displaced persons required a solution; one of the loudest voices demanding they be allowed to settle in Palestine was that of Herbert Samuel, the high commissioner Ben-Gurion had once described as a “traitor.”[12] President Truman also supported sending the refugees to Palestine. Foreign Secretary Bevin was angry: Truman wanted to settle them in Palestine to keep them out of America, he said, in one of the acerbic comments that earned him his reputation for antisemitism.

Bevin seems, in fact, to have sincerely believed that the Jews could be repatriated, and he considered this to be part of Europe’s moral rehabilitation. His view of the world contradicted the foundations of Zionist ideology: he had been brought up as a pacifist and considered Judaism a religion, not a nation. That did not make him an antisemite; on the contrary. The speech in which he proposed that the refugees be reabsorbed in Europe expressed a deep abhorrence of all kinds of racial discrimination and a genuine concern for the future of the DPs. An Anglo-American commission of inquiry would soon be established to study the problem and recommended, among other things, that 100,000 refugees be settled in Palestine.[13]

Khalil al-Sakakini was angry at the suggestion that Palestine take in Holocaust survivors. “If this is a human problem, then let humanity solve it,” he wrote; the Jews were exploiting the Holocaust parasitically, by demanding Palestine as a homeland. When they got it, Sakakini believed, the Jews would say, “Throw the Arabs out so we can take their places!” He was aware of the Jews’ influence in the United States. Were he able, he wrote, he would divest the American Jews of their right to vote.[14]

For a brief moment, the possibility of making the United States a partner in ruling Palestine made a renewed appearance in the diplomatic world, as it had after World War I. The British were thinking principally of the financial burden

involved in continuing their control of the country.[15] The idea of establishing an American administration in Palestine was fascinating but improbable; unlike the British, the Americans generally knew to keep themselves out of such a predicament. Helplessly, seeing no way out, the British again tried to bring the two peoples of Palestine to some sort of accord, and as expected, failed.

3.

In early 1947, David Ben-Gurion held a series of talks with Ernest Bevin in which he tried to persuade the foreign secretary to turn the wheel back to the period preceding the White Paper of 1939. He entered discussions as if the various Zionist parties in Palestine were not at the same time doing their patriotic best to throw the British out. The talks with Bevin and other cabinet ministers were not merely a diplomatic trick as some of Ben-Gurion's admirers said later, trying to prove that he too had worked to get rid of the British. The Zionist movement had nothing to gain from such a deception, and Ben-Gurion could only have been hurt by it politically. Ben-Gurion wanted British rule to continue because the Haganah was not ready for a war with the Arabs. His goal was to gain time. In July 1947 he was still talking about the possibility of "international supervision" instead of independence, estimating that this supervision could last for "years."[16]

Ben-Gurion must have known that the chances of persuading the British to remain were poor, but the minutes of his conversations with Bevin reflect how hard it was for him to grasp that the British were really ready to leave. Ben-Gurion seems not to have understood the depths of Britain's postwar economic, social, and psychological crises. For many years thereafter he tended to attribute the difficulty in his relations with Britain to Bevin's personal hostility to Zionism.[17]

Ben-Gurion already felt that the focus of world decision making had passed from London to Washington, but he continued to cling to the colonial myth. Zionism had hitched itself to the British Empire, advancing under its sponsorship to the verge of independence, and Ben-Gurion wanted to revive the old alliance.

In fact, he even tried to convince the British to remain in Palestine on the basis of the original mandate. Bevin, however, proposed dividing the country into quasi-autonomous cantons and restricting immigration. The Zionists rejected the plan; the Arabs rejected it also.[18] The British were left with only one alternative: to go home.

The talks were, however, interesting, delving as they did into the roots of the Palestine conflict. Ben-Gurion maintained that a man could walk for days through the country without meeting a living soul, echoing the platitude that Palestine was a land without people for a people without a land.* He kept praising the historic friendship of the Jewish and British peoples; he spoke of the two nations' common values and even at that late stage tried to tempt Bevin with Chaim Weizmann's old promise of a European foothold in the Middle East—the Jews were the sole representative of Europe in a Muslim world, he argued, and always would be. Bevin, pessimistic and occasionally downright hostile, compared Palestine to twins sired by different fathers.

Bevin devoted many hours to his talks with Ben-Gurion. In one set of minutes he is quoted as saying, "Palestine is not vital to England but England does not want to have to admit failure," thus articulating the crux of Britain's position. He did not know how to explain to his people what their sons were doing in distant Palestine, two years after the end of the World War, he explained. Feeling was running high all over England.[20] Everywhere people were demanding that he bring the boys home. Their voices were being heard in the press, in Parliament, and in the cabinet.

"Rule or Quit," one newspaper declared; a second asked, "Must Our Boys Die?" And a third simply said, "It's Time We Get Out." The headlines reflected, among other things, the psychological effect of terrorism. Internal government correspondence also mentions public opinion as a reason for giving up Palestine.[21] One MP recounted a memory from his military service in Ireland. Putting a twist on the enlistment slogan "Join the army and see the world," the soldiers had joked, "Join the Royal Irish Constabulary and see the next world." The same slogan was now applicable to Palestine, he suggested.[22]

The man who raised the loudest voice in favor of getting out of Palestine was

Winston Churchill. He had no lack of arguments for his position but, as in the past, the thing that seemed to bother him most was the price: the 100,000 soldiers deployed there were costing the British taxpayer £30 million a year, Churchill said over and over again—£30 million in order to keep 100,000 men away from home. This huge force was necessary not only to suppress Jewish terrorism but to check the growing tension between the Jews and the Arabs. The continued British presence in Palestine would seem doubly grotesque once Britain left India. "To abandon India … but to have a war with the Jews in order to give Palestine to the Arabs," Prime Minister Clement Attlee told the cabinet, "appears to carry incongruity of thought and policy to levels which have rarely been attained in human history."[23]

Churchill at one point addressed the claim that Palestine was needed to defend the Suez Canal. This was "a very wrong idea," he said, declaring, "Let us then stay in the Canal Zone and have no further interest in the strategic aspects of Palestine." For his part, he had never believed that Britain had any strategic interest in Palestine. The army and War Office continued in the meantime to compose position papers on the country's strategic value, which the government then chose to ignore. Like Winston Churchill, the government thought that controlling Palestine cost too much: "British troops … have been the British taxpayers' liability throughout," Sir Henry Gurney noted in his diary.[24]

Attlee, Bevin, and Colonial Secretary Arthur Creech Jones did not always see eye to eye. Attlee was skeptical of Britain's economic and military ability to preserve its status as a great power in the Middle East. Bevin feared Soviet penetration and still thought in terms of international greatness and prestige; he still believed in the military value of the Middle East and was also interested in Arab oil. In the final analysis, however, he agreed with the prime minister that Palestine should be dropped. Creech Jones was inclined to support the moderate branch of the Zionist movement, but not so fervently that he would argue for the continuation of the Mandate. This was a rare moment of consensus on Palestine.[25]

The most conclusive formulation of Britain's position on Palestine was written by one of the ministers in a letter to Attlee. "The present state of affairs is

not only costly to us in manpower and money," he wrote, "but is, as you and I agree, of no real value from the strategic point of view—you cannot in any case have a secure base on top of a wasps' nest—and it is exposing our young men, for no good purpose, to abominable experiences and is breeding antiSemites at a most shocking speed."[26] Not coincidentally, the letter's author, Hugh Dalton, was serving as chancellor of the exchequer. Economics had not motivated Britain to enter Palestine or to remain there, but it was a major factor motivating them to leave.

Dalton's letter bears the date August n, 1947. Four days later, India's independence was declared, a profound trauma for Britain; if India was the jewel in the empire's crown, Palestine was hardly more than an anemone in the king's buttonhole. The Holy Land had brought joy to British hearts, but not for long. "The people are fed up with the whole business," the high commissioner told Ben-Gurion.[27]

In February 1947, the British government had decided to turn the Mandate over to the United Nations, the League of Nations' successor. The U.N. set up its own commission. Surveys and reports were prepared and witnesses were summoned and their comments recorded, producing yet more impressive documentation of positions and historic claims set down in meticulous detail. Finally, the commission decided, by a majority, to recommend to the General Assembly that Palestine be partitioned. This decision prompted a worldwide diplomatic campaign involving pressure, threats, promises, and bribes. The Jewish Agency budgeted a million dollars for its own campaign of bribery; in official parlance the money was allocated to "irregular political activity."[28]*

Until the actual vote in the United Nations there was no way to be certain how the General Assembly would decide. But on November 29, 1947, the U.N. voted to divide Palestine into two states, one for the Jews and one for the Arabs; Jerusalem was to remain under international control.

The Arabs were as unprepared for battle as the Jews, and thus also had an interest in the continuation of British rule. But they may have believed that ultimately they would win. In any case, still hostage to the rejectionist position they had adopted in 1917, they opposed partition and continued to demand

independence in all of Palestine, promising to respect the rights of the Jewish minority. The partition boundaries proposed by the U.N. assigned the Jewish state almost twice as much territory as the British partition plan of ten years previously, and the Arabs had turned down that proposal as well. “They refused at any time to sign their own death warrant,” Anwar Nusseibeh wrote.[30] But in rejecting the partition plan, the Arabs missed a chance to gain time to prepare for war. They had made a tactical error.

There were Jews who opposed partition as well. Revisionist “hawks” would not agree to give up the territories assigned to the Arabs; the binationalist “doves” decried the principal of separation, believing in one or another form of coexistence. The Zionist movement accepted the partition plan, in a wise tactical step. Even then all the players understood that geographically and demographically the U.N.’s partition plan could not be implemented. The border between the two states was long and contorted, impossible to defend; the Jewish state would include more than half a million Arabs, slightly more than the number of Jews then living within the proposed boundaries. Some ten thousand Jews, including the inhabitants of the city of Nahariya, would find themselves within the Arab boundaries. Furthermore, there was no reason to trust that international control of Jerusalem was viable.[31] No one believed in the U.N.’s map; everyone knew there would be war.*

The proposal was passed by a majority of thirty-three—including the United States and the USSR—against thirteen, with ten abstentions, including Britain. The victory was largely due to the work of the Zionist lobby. David Lloyd George would not have been surprised—he had always known that the Jews controlled the world. Sir Henry Gurney, the chief secretary, followed and analyzed the components of the Zionist movement’s propaganda carefully; his analysis was hostile, but not unintelligent. He noted that the Zionists had successfully equated anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Gurney supposed that the Americans would have been unenthusiastic about helping the Jews had they wanted to establish an independent state in New York. The pressures “the Zionist” creates, he wrote, makes the world hate him, but apparently he does not care. He has a suicidal urge. That was what made him so desperate and self-

centered, Gurney wrote.[33†]

Ya'akov Cohen sat glued to the radio all night, listening to the progress of the historic vote in New York. When he heard the result, he could hardly contain himself: "The ear cannot comprehend it, the heart does not believe it—a Hebrew state! Unbelievable!" Once again, he wrote, "the people of Jerusalem have taken to the streets, just like the time of the victory over Germany, old and young danced, sang, drank, and cheered en masse all day." The British policemen and soldiers even danced with them, he noted. No, this was not the state the Zionists had hoped for. "After all, the entire country was in our sights," he remarked. Now the Jews had a territory that did not include Jerusalem.[‡]

But when the vote was counted, there was no room for doubt. "I was happy to the depths of my soul," Cohen wrote. He ran through the streets all day, as if there were no university, as if he did not teach school. "A light has risen for the future, mass immigration, the liberation of the oppressed, intensified building, independence and freedom," he noted in his diary. At the time he was in love with a girl named Dolly. They went to concerts starring Shoshana Damari; they especially liked to hear her stirring rendition of "Anemones."[36]

4.

General Evelyn Barker felt obliged to apologize. His government had not been fair. It should not have returned the mandate to the U.N. in New York, since the atmosphere there was so pro-Jewish. On the other hand, he wrote to Katy Antonius, he could not blame the British—even Haj Amin al-Husseini, the former mufti, thought only of his own interests and not of his people, and had done the Palestinian Arabs a great disservice. The mufti sought only to augment his political power. The Arabs had only dissension and petty jealousies. Their tragedy was that they had no real leadership.[*]

The U.N. debate might have been avoided had the Arabs come forth with constructive suggestions instead of turning down all the British ideas, Barker wrote. The Arabs needed to use a Western approach in evaluating their problems, he added, and he imagined himself serving as political adviser to the

Arab Higher Committee. Katy Antonius seems to have agreed with at least some of his criticism. It was too bad the Arabs didn't listen to her, he said—maybe they dismissed her because she was a woman.[38]

Barker was serving as commander in chief, eastern command, in May 1947; Antonius had left her home in Jerusalem and moved to Egypt. "I shall always love you for your own sweet self and for your grand fighting spirit which I so much admire," he wrote her.[39] He was pained that the British were imposing such a situation on their Arab friends, he wrote a short time after the General Assembly had adopted the partition plan; he was angry at President Truman for selling himself to the Jews. But as a military man he had no doubt: the Jews would not be able to withstand the force of the entire Arab world, and in the end they would all be eradicated. They could blame their destruction only on the Zionist policy they had adopted, and on Lord Balfour, of course. Even though Barker had not been appointed adviser to the Arabs, he offered them advice through his lover. They had to unite, to be more cunning, to work according to a plan. He would willingly fight at their side in order to exterminate Zionism, he reiterated.[40]

A year had gone by since Barker had last seen his Katy, yet his heart was full of her. A lot had happened in the meantime, but his deep affection for his dear little love remained constant. He recalled one evening in particular, when they had consummated their love. Yes, he wrote, perhaps she had been right in saying he loved her more than he should, but he was so happy to have had those rapturous months in Jerusalem—her friendship was a pearl of great price. He thought of her at night when he went to sleep and in the morning when he woke, when he was in the bathtub and at work—always always he thought only of his Katy, with the white streak of hair, whom he loved and still loved.[41]

One day Barker was nearly caught. He left some letters on his desk, and his wife noticed the Egyptian stamps. Luckily, another letter from Egypt was in the pile and he was able to explain away the correspondence somehow. But the moment was very alarming for him. Now he asked Katy to send him, along with her real letters, something formal for him to show his wife. Please, do this even if you think it is cheating, he wrote her.[42] Sometimes he had friends over who

also knew Antonius, and her name would come up in conversation. One evening he had supper with Musa Alami. Barker held him in high esteem, and would have liked to see him leading the Arab movement in Palestine, despite some concern that Alami would be too uncompromising.[43]* Alami was connected to the Husseini family by marriage; for a time he had indeed been considered the chief representative of Palestine's Arabs.

Alami had been expelled from Palestine during the Arab rebellion but had since been allowed to return to Jerusalem, where he worked as a lawyer. For a time he coordinated Arab public relations in diplomatic circles, setting up liaison offices in London, New York, and Washington. This venture was financed by the Arab League, which had been established in 1945 by several Arab states, with its headquarters in Cairo. Sari al-Sakakini, who had left his job at the American consulate, was asked to direct the Arab League's office in Washington, which was in need of new and better management. He was just right for the job. While working at the consulate, he had learned how to explain Palestinian Arab politics to the Americans and how to explain American politics to the Arabs. His father was correct when he wrote in his diary that "a person like Sari has what it takes to do this work and may it be for his good and for the good of the Arab nation."[45] But the proud father seems not to have known about the powerful love that kept his son tied to Palestine.

In an effort to remain in Jerusalem, Sakakini drew up a detailed proposal for the American consulate to establish an Arab department, which he wanted to head. His letters to the consul are intimate in tone, evincing a measure of personal attachment. "I want to stay with you no matter what," Sakakini wrote, whether his preference served the Arab cause or not.[46] A similar mix of subservience and ambition marks Sari al-Sakakini's letters to Musa Alami. Again and again Alami tried to persuade him to take the job in Washington, but Sakakini made grandiose demands. He wanted a luxurious home, an unlimited entertainment budget, and freedom of action to do as he saw fit. "I have to be my own master," he wrote. Alami ran into various difficulties that also served to delay Sakakini's departure, but the impression is that Sakakini was being evasive, both wanting and not wanting to go. In one letter he said he was

remaining in Jerusalem “for personal reasons”; in another he claimed to have begun working as an English teacher and explained that his students needed him.[47]

In the end he remained with Omran and assisted Alami in the Arab office in Jerusalem. When the U.N. General Assembly decided to partition Palestine into two states, Alami believed that the plan should be accepted as a starting point for negotiations with the Jews. Alami would soon fall out with Haj Amin al-Husseini, resulting in Alami’s dismissal from all official activity.[48] One of the first Zionist diplomats, Eliahu Eilat, would later describe him as a humanist, a man of justice and peace.[49]

5.

The first shots were fired at a bus on its way to Jerusalem. Six Jewish passengers were killed. The attack occurred a few weeks after the U.N.’s vote on partition; the assailants were Arabs. Many of the city’s Jews were still celebrating the U.N. decision. In the weeks that followed, more than eighty Jews and ninety Arabs were killed.[50]

The Arab forces facing the Haganah, Palmach, Etzel, and Lechi were made up of volunteers, some of whom had participated in the Arab rebellion ten years previously. There were also youth organizations that received military training and were linked, like the Jewish youth movements, to competing political parties. Thousands of other volunteers had received military training and combat experience in the British security forces, including the police, which again employed many Arabs. There was also the Arab Legion of Transjordan, a unit the British used against Jewish terrorists similar to the Special Night Squads, which had enlisted Jews to provide protection from Arab terrorism.

In the first stages of the conflict, the Arabs attacked Jewish stores and set off bombs in city centers. The Haganah attacked Arab villages, sometimes without orders from the top command, as in the case of Khasas, a village in the Hula Valley, where two men and five children were killed in retribution for the death of a Jewish settler. Although some observers dubbed the conflict a “civil war”