CHAPTER X PALESTINE IN WORLD WAR II

AN OSCILLATION OF BRITISH FORTUNES

Nowhere did Britain enter the war more confident of early triumph than in the Middle East. With the French solidly based in North Africa and the Levant, and the British themselves in firm control of Egypt, Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq, London had no reason to doubt the seeming invulnerability of Allied military and naval forces in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. This assurance was shaken, of course, by the disaster of the Nazi blitzkrieg in Europe, by the collapse of France, and the subsequent entry of Italy into the war. Almost overnight a thousand miles of North African coast, the entire Syrian littoral, and the French Mediterranean fleet passed into an uncertain Vichy neutrality, under the supervision of German and Italian armistice commissions. Yet, even then, Britain's position was less than desperate. The Italian forces emplaced in Libya were more imposing on paper than in actual battle. This became evident in the winter of 1940–41 when a numerically inferior British army commanded by General Wavell all but annihilated Mussolini's legions in North Africa.

The respite was to be short-lived, however. In an effort to salvage his ally's faltering position, Hitler shipped two German armored divisions under a crack general, Erwin Rommel, to Tripolitania in March 1941. On the last day of that month German advance units crossed the Cyrenaican border. From then on, during the next year and a quarter, the British would be thrust on the defensive, and ultimately placed in mortal jeopardy, at the very nexus of their Mediterranean-Suez lifeline. Their gravest moment was unquestionably June 1942, when the port of Tobruk, defended by some 35,000 Commonwealth troops, fell to Rommel's Panzerarmee. During the ensuing three weeks the British Eighth Army was hurled back to the gates of Alexandria. At this point the British suddenly were threatened with the most far-reaching military disaster since the collapse of France. If Alexandria should fall, the Suez Canal would become untenable. So would Palestine and Syria. In anticipation of the impending and decisive battle, a mass evacuation of British dependents was begun. In Cairo, all east-bound trains to Palestine were jammed. A thick mist of smoke hung over the British embassy on the banks of the Nile as huge quantities of secret documents were burned.

Throughout the long and painful ordeal of retreat, moreover, Britain derived small encouragement from its Arab treaty partners. The Egyptian government refused at the outset to declare war on Italy, even when Italian bombs were falling on Alexandria. In May 1941, General Aziz Ali al-Misri, a former inspector general of the Egyptian army,

left Cairo secretly for Beirut in an Egyptian air force plane. The RAF intercepted his craft, and it was subsequently revealed that the general had intended to defect to the Axis with vital data on British troop strength. Indeed, the discovery opened a window on a far more ramified Egyptian collaboration effort. A month earlier, King Farouk himself had communicated with Hitler through his ambassador in Tehran, stating that "he was filled with strong admiration for the Führer and respect for the German people, whose victory over England he desired most sincerely.... Now that German troops stood victorious at the Egyptian frontier the [Egyptian] people ... long for an occupation of the country, certain that the Germans are coming as liberators...." In subsequent communications, Farouk provided intelligence information on British military dispositions and offered "to come to the aid of the Axis troops at the decisive moment." In Iraq, meanwhile, a virulently anti-British government was installed under the premiership of Rashid Ali and a cabal of nationalist officers; and in April 1941 this pro-Axis cabinet solicited German "protection" against the British. Hitler immediately responded to the offer, mounting an airlift of guns and ammunition by way of Vichy Syria. It required a costly British military expedition in May to overthrow the Rashid Ali regime, and an even larger-scale invasion of Vichy Syria the following month to abort a growing Nazi presence in the Levant.

No courtship of the Axis was more avid, however, than the one carried out by the emigré Mufti of Jerusalem. Haj Amin had fled al-Zug and reached Baghdad in October 1939, where he was granted an honorific status equal to that of a government minister. From the Iraqi capital he then dispatched his protégé, Naji Shawkat, on a secret mission to Ankara. There the Arab messenger transmitted to German Ambassador Franz von Papen a personal letter from the Mufti. The message extended felicitations to Hitler

> on the occasion of the great political and military triumphs which [the Führer] has just achieved through his foresight and great genius.... The Arab nation everywhere feels the greatest joy and deepest gratification on the occasion of these great successes.... The Arab people ... confidently expect the result of your final victory will be their independence and complete liberation.... [T]hey will [then] be linked to your country by a treaty of friendship and collaboration.

While Berlin was mulling over this proposal, Haj Amin dispatched yet another emissary in August 1940 to reaffirm the offer of collaboration. Eventually, on October 23, 1940, Berlin and Rome issued a joint statement offering sympathy for Arab efforts to achieve independence.

For the moment the relationship was suspended on the level of generalities. But later, upon the overthrow of the Rashid Ali government in May 1941, the Mufti fled Iraq for Iran, and afterward departed for Turkey. In late July he was spirited out of Ankara in a German plane and flown to Rome. On October 27 he was received by Mussolini. By then, Axis victories in the Middle East had given Arab affairs a new importance. Following conversations between Haj Amin and the Duce, therefore, a draft pronouncement was worked out and—upon agreement with Berlin-issued jointly by Mussolini and Hitler. It committed the two Axis governments to recognize the sovereignty and independence of the Arab countries and promised Axis help in "the

elimination of the Jewish National home in Palestine."

The Mufti thereupon departed Rome on November 3, 1941, for Berlin. He was received in the German capital with much ceremony and presented to Hitler on November 30. Again, the Arab leader expressed his profound gratitude to the Führer and his willingness to cooperate with Germany in every way, including the recruitment of an Arab legion. But once more, Haj Amin insisted that Arab loyalty could best be mobilized by an immediate public declaration of support for Arab independence and unity. While agreeing in principle, Hitler replied that he preferred to wait until his armies had broken through the southern exit of the Caucasus. The Reich's objective then would not be the occupation of the Arab lands (as the British had warned) but solely the destruction of Palestine Jewry. Then, too, the Führer added, the Mufti would become the official spokesman for the Arab world. Haj Amin was gratified by this assurance.

With Hitler's approval, the Mufti at once set about recruiting Arabs in Axis-occupied territory to serve in their own Arab legion. The effort failed; only a few Palestine Arab prisoners of war expressed an interest. By the summer of 1942, nevertheless, as German troops reached the gates of Alexandria and approached the Caucasus on the Soviet front, the Axis governments intensified their propaganda efforts throughout the Arab and Moslem world. The Mufti did not spare himself in this task. Broadcasting repeatedly over Germany's Radio Seesen, speaking in the "name of God and the Prophet," he urged Moslems everywhere to rise up against the Allies. To encourage that uprising, Haj Amin visited Yugoslavia to recruit units of Bosnian Tatars. Approximately 6,000 of these eventually were dispatched to fight under German command on the Russian front. The Mufti by then no longer entertained great expectations for Arabs living under German and Italian control. His plans were based, rather, upon a mass uprising of Arab peoples the moment Rommel invested the Nile Delta and crossed into Palestine. By late June 1942, those hopes appeared on the threshold of fulfillment.

A LONELY ALLY

Although sorely tried, the British were not entirely bereft of local support in the Middle East. The Jews proved loyal. Faced by a common Axis menace, they could hardly have been otherwise. Four days before the outbreak of war, Weizmann assured Chamberlain by letter of the Jews' determination to stand by Britain, of their willingness to enter into immediate arrangements for placing their manpower and technical ability at Britain's disposal. "The Jewish Agency has recently had differences in the political field with the Mandatory Power," Weizmann added, with some understatement. "We would like these differences to give way before the greater and more pressing necessities of the time. We ask you to accept this declaration in the spirit in which it is made." The prime minister's response was noncommittal. "You will not expect me to say more at this stage," he remarked, "than that your public-spirited assurances are welcome and will be kept in mind." Weizmann's promises were honored, although not without opposition. Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, favored a struggle to reverse the White Paper, even if this required a policy of militance and serious unrest against the

British. Several meetings of the Agency Executive were held in 1940 to discuss the issue, but each time Ben-Gurion was outvoted. In any case, the Nazi blitzkrieg in Europe soon put an end to these debates, as did the appointment of Churchill as Chamberlain's successor. Acts of violence ceased, and the illegal Haganah radio station closed down.

The Jewish Agency forthwith mobilized the Yishuv's resources for wartime agricultural and industrial purposes. Soil under tillage was expanded by 70 percent. Two thousand Palestine Jewish factories were operating when the war broke out. Within the next year, four hundred new ones were built, essentially related to British military needs, and the number tripled by 1945. Indeed, the Yishuv's economy overall was progressively linked to Britain's defense effort. Among the equipment produced were antitank mines, weapons' components, tank engines and treads, light naval craft, machine tools, and uniforms. Guns, ships, and machinery were repaired; specialized scientific apparatus, optical instruments, medical supplies, and vaccines and pharmaceuticals were manufactured. By 1943, 63 percent of the total Jewish work force was employed in occupations immediately connected with defense needs. It was a supportive effort that, not incidentally, laid the basis for an expanded postwar Jewish economy in Palestine.

The Yishuv's identification with Britain's cause assumed other, equally tangible forms. In the first month of the war, the Va'ad Le'umi announced the registration of volunteers for national service. Within five days, 136,000 men and women enrolled. Their motivation was not simply an understandable desire for battle against the Nazis, but the expectation that an armed and active Jewish force would obligate Britain to reconsider the Zionist case. Additionally, military skills acquired during the war could be put to good use later. It was the Jewish Agency's hope, meanwhile, to organize these troops as a separate force under its own flag, something akin to the Jewish Legion of World War I. But from the outset, the idea was opposed by British military and civilian officials in the Middle East. General Sir Evelyn Barker, the British army commander in Palestine, warned London that the establishment of a Jewish fighting unit in the region would provoke a renewed Arab uprising. Accordingly, the war secretary, Leslie Hore-Belisha (himself a Jew), vetoed the idea of a Jewish legion "for the time being." Instructions simultaneously went out to Lord Lothian, Britain's ambassador in Washington, to avoid commitments of any kind to American Zionists. Jewish support in the war was needed, but "there must be no misunderstandings as to the possibility of rewards, whether in the form of further immigration to Palestine or otherwise."

It was the Allied collapse in Europe that raised the possibility of a more forthcoming approach. In the spring of 1940, the Chamberlain government was replaced. Winston Churchill assumed the prime ministry. Lord Lloyd succeeded Malcolm MacDonald as colonial secretary. Anthony Eden replaced Hore-Belisha at the War Office. Thereupon Weizmann again requested permission for the Jews to be trained in their own military units. With the growing Axis threat to the Middle East, he observed, it was the "elementary human right" of the Jews "to go down fighting." Lord Lloyd was impressed by this argument. So was the vice-chief of the imperial general staff, General Sir Robert Haining, who promised to authorize the training of Jewish cadres. Yet once again the Zionists faced disappointment when Lloyd, alerted by General Wavell, reconsidered the

matter. For the time being, the cautionary views of the Middle East army commanders were respected.

Their misgivings were not shared by the new prime minister, as it happened. Rather, Churchill was intrigued by the idea of arming Palestine Jewry, if only to release British troops in the Holy Land for other fronts. On June 25 he complained in a memorandum to Lloyd that "the cruel penalties imposed by your predecessor [MacDonald] upon the Jews in Palestine for arming have made it necessary to tie up needless forces for their protection. Pray let me know exactly what weapons the Jews have for self-defense." Three days later he rebuked Lloyd, who had ventured to protest. "I do not at all admit that Arab feeling in the Middle East and India would be prejudiced in the manner you suggest," the prime minister insisted. On September 6, 1940, in the most critical phase of the Battle of Britain, Churchill invited Weizmann to a private luncheon and assured the Zionist leader of his full support for the Jewish army project. A memorandum was sent afterward to the chief of staff:

1. Recruitment of the greatest possible number of Jews in Palestine for the fighting services to be formed into Jewish battalions or large formations.
2. The Colonial Office insists on an approximate parity in the number of Jews and of Arabs recruited for specific Jewish and Arab units in Palestine. As Jewish recruitment in Palestine is certain to yield much larger numbers than Arab, the excess of Jews is to be sent for training to Egypt or anywhere else in the Middle East.
3. Officers' cadres, sufficient for a Jewish division in the first instance, to be picked immediately from Jews in Palestine and trained in Egypt.

The issue apparently was resolved, and a week later Eden officially informed Weizmann that "the Government have decided to proceed with the organization of a Jewish army on the same basis as the Czech and Polish armies [in exile]." Conceived initially as a force of 10,000, including 4,000 troops from Palestine, the Jewish army unit would be trained in England and then shipped back to the Middle East. Weizmann was ecstatic. "It is almost as great a day as the Balfour Declaration," he informed his friends. In February 1941 the Zionist leader was introduced to Major General Leonard A. Hawes, an officer with extensive service experience in India, who had been chosen to command the Jewish force. Plans already were being worked out for Hebrew badges and insignia.

Then, in the same month, Lord Lloyd died suddenly. He was succeeded in office by Lord Moyne. The new colonial secretary, impressed by Wavell's and Barker's objections, was determined to block the Jewish army proposal. In a series of memoranda to Churchill, he referred to delicate political conditions in the Middle East and to the lack of supplies and equipment; it appeared unfeasible to equip a new army under such circumstances. At this point, Churchill reluctantly conceded, agreeing to postpone the matter. A terse statement accordingly was sent off to Weizmann on March 4: "The Prime Minister has decided that owing to lack of equipment the project must be put off for six months…." A half-year later, on October 23, 1941, Moyne announced a further postponement: "Since the Government has to give every aid to Russia it would not be possible to form a Jewish Division." In ensuing months the Zionists failed to win any

satisfaction on this issue. The rigor with which mandatory officials continued to enforce the White Paper, meanwhile (this page), suggested that political considerations alone were now dictating British policy. Another year and a half would pass before anything came of the Jewish army concept; by then the war in the Middle East itself was over.

In the interval, the Jews found other ways of identifying themselves with the military effort. Smaller Palestinian units gradually evolved, consisting wholly of Jews, with their own Jewish junior and noncommissioned officers. Again, this development emerged out of a tangle of British red tape. At the outset of hostilities, General Barker suggested the formation of mixed Arab-Jewish companies of "Pioneers"—actually truck drivers, storekeepers, and trench diggers—to be sent to the Western Front. The Jewish Agency was offended by the proposal, but chose not to reject it. It was understood that the number of Jews to be accepted was dependent upon an equivalent number of Arab recruits. But inasmuch as Jewish volunteers exceeded their quota within a few days, while the Arab quota was never filled, the parity rule soon had to be eased. The first groups of five hundred Palestine Jews arrived in France in 1940. They were used essentially for repair and maintenance work. After the French surrender, most of them were returned temporarily to Palestine, where they served as ground personnel for the RAF. Soon afterward, upon Italy's entrance into the war, an additional 1,400 Jews were permitted to fill RAF crew openings. Several dozen of these men eventually were accepted for flight training.

By the opening of 1942, 11,000 Jews were serving with British forces in the Middle East. Nominally they were still members of the mixed Arab-Jewish companies, the "Palestine Buffs." In fact, the units were almost entirely Jewish by then. On the basis of their predominating numbers, moreover, the Zionists demanded that the various scattered Jewish companies be organized into battalions. London ultimately gave in on this point, and by August 1942, 18,000 Palestine Jews were incorporated into purely Jewish battalions. By then, too, approximately 25 percent of them were given front-line combat positions. During the retreat of Britain's Eighth Army from North Africa in June 1942, a thousand Palestine Jews served with the Free French Brigade in defending the village of Bir Hacheim; forty-five of these troops remained alive on July 2, the day they were relieved by a Gaullist column under General Pierre Koenig.

Simultaneously with this "official" participation in the British army, there was a second, parallel, Jewish military role. It was based upon the Haganah. It is recalled that the Jewish underground had won a certain unspoken recognition from the mandatory government during the guerrilla uprising of the late 1930s. The tacit understanding broke down in May 1939, however, with the issuance of the White Paper. The Haganah determined afterward to concentrate its efforts on the secret refugee immigration. Yet the war erupted before this decision could be carried out. After several weeks of indecision, the underground command ultimately followed the Jewish Agency's lead of cooperating with the war effort; but at the same time it maintained its clandestine training activities. As a result, the British viewed Jewish professions of loyalty with skepticism. Shortly after the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, forty-three of the Haganah's best officers were arrested, among them Moshe Dayan and Moshe Carmel.

They were given tough sixteen-month sentences, and it was only upon Churchill's accession as prime minister half a year later that the forty-three were released, together with two other groups that had been jailed for possessing arms.

Once the military situation turned against Britain, however, following the blitzkrieg of 1940, the government tentatively eased its policy toward the Haganah. Indeed, with France out of the war and Syria in Vichy hands, a method had to be devised to block possible avenues of German invasion into the Middle East. Senior Haganah officers thereupon were invited to collaborate with the British in preparing lists of bridges and tunnels that were vulnerable to sabotage in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and Iran. Other joint efforts followed. In early spring of 1941, Rommel's Panzerarmee launched its operations in the Western Desert and the Nazi infiltration of Syria became more overt. Haganah cooperation was urgently needed. Unfortunately, the Jewish defense force was still at less than full strength. Its best instructors and hundreds of its fighters had enlisted in the British armed services, and the training of its civilian reserves was restricted mainly to weekends. The "professional" soldiers at its disposal were only a few dozen veterans of Sadeh's commando groups and of Wingate's Special Night Squads, while the reserves alone would hardly have been effective in the event of a combined Arab-Axis attack. The need soon became evident for a permanently mobilized Jewish task force. Such a unit accordingly was established by the Haganah in May 1941, and classified as the Palmach (Plugot Machaz—Strike Companies). One of its purposes was the defense of the Yishuv against Arab bands that inevitably would harass Jewish towns and settlements the moment the British retreated from Palestine. More importantly, if and when Axis armies entered the country, the Palmach would be employed to attack the enemy whenever possible, disrupt his communications, sabotage his transport and airfields. The commander of the new elite force, not surprisingly, was Yitzchak Sadeh. As in the 1930s, the veteran night fighter immediately set about recruiting the Haganah's ablest young men, mainly from the kibbutzim.

Even as Sadeh and his company commanders were organizing the Palmach, the military situation suddenly worsened in the Levant. It was plain that the British had no choice but to strike across the northern frontier quickly before the Germans ensconced themselves in Syria. Yet, in advance, scout forces were urgently needed to reconnoiter the enemy terrain. It was at this point, then, that the British entered into negotiations with the Haganah leadership, and specifically with Sadeh, who agreed to provide the manpower. In early summer, 1941, nearly one hundred Palmach troops were made available for special duty. A number of these, Arabic-speaking Jews, were charged with infiltrating Syria at night and penetrating various Arab towns to gather information and to mine key bridges and crossroads. The operation was successful. A second Palmach venture was not. British intelligence recruited twenty-three of Sadeh's best men for an amphibious mission to demolish the oil refineries at the Lebanese port of Tripoli. The vessel was detected offshore and sunk with the loss of all lives.

The climactic joint effort worked perfectly, however. On the eve of the Allied invasion of Syria, June 8, 1941, Palmach volunteers were needed for a final reconnaissance of Vichy positions. Sadeh chose two companies for the task. Their officers were the

commander's favorites, Moshe Dayan and Yigal (Peicovitch) Allon. The troops were divided into twelve squads. Two of these units guided the advancing Australians; others cut wires, ambushed Vichy patrols guarding bridges over the Litani River, blew culverts, and sabotaged roads. In the attack on Iskanderun, Dayan showed exceptional bravery, capturing twelve Vichy troops (later, in an exchange of fire, he lost an eye).

Elated over this accomplishment, Sadeh pressed the Haganah leadership to supply the Palmach with its own bases for additional training. The request was granted, and two camps were established at the kibbutzim of Ginnosar and Beit Oren. They were quite primitive, without tents or decent sleeping accommodations. Worse yet, funds were lacking to maintain the troops. Eventually the Palmach youths worked in the kibbutzim to "earn" the right to serve as a quasi-permanent mobilized force. From these rural bases, their availability was soon to be exploited again. Indeed, collaboration between the British and the Jews reached its peak at the most threatening phase of the Middle Eastern fighting, as Rommel bore down on Alexandria in the summer of 3942. The British set about fortifying northern Palestine and the Judean mountain range. The Zionist defense machinery in turn was rapidly enlarged, as a broadened recruitment effort was launched equally for the British army and the Haganah reserves. At the same time, British staff officers began organizing the Palmach units into a special task force to meet the developing Nazi threat.

The strategy that was devised, the "Carmel Plan," actually was worked out entirely by the Jews, by Sadeh and Dr. Yochanan Ratner, a Technion professor who served on the Haganah command. It was to establish an enclave in the Carmel Range to which the entire Yishuv could be moved if necessary, there to live out months or even years of Nazi occupation in a state of siege. The population would be governed by a Jewish military administration, supplied by RAF planes and British submarines and by its own agricultural resources. An enlarged Palmach force would defend the redoubt, using former Allied arsenals as well as a variety of its own miniature industries and workshops. Eventually the Carmel enclave would become a major guerrilla base from which attacks could be launched against the Axis occupation troops, disrupting enemy communications and supply lines. This elaborate Haganah scheme of defense plainly did not reflect the mentality of a ghettoized European Jewry, nor even of European nations already under the Nazi heel; it was rather the militant approach of a totally new Zionist community. With considerable admiration (if some doubt), then, the British approved the plan. British general staff intelligence coordinated the training operations. German-speaking and Arabic-speaking Jews were picked for selective espionage and sabotage work. As the operation gradually expanded, 725 Palmach recruits were chosen, and other Jewish underground members were allowed to work in open collaboration with British officers.

The Carmel Plan was never set into motion. In July 1942, Rommel's forces were hurled back at al-Alamein, and four months later driven out of Libya altogether by a reorganized Eighth Army under the command of Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery. By then in any case the joint effort with the Jews was becoming a source of discomfiture to the mandatory government; Zionist spokesmen already were making

pointed contrasts between the Jewish and Arab war efforts. Once the danger to Palestine ebbed in the autumn of 1942, therefore, the British closed the various Palmach training bases, allowed the "German Platoon" and the "Arabic Platoon" to dwindle, and even demanded lists containing names and addresses of Palmach members. The alliance finally ended in bad blood when the British army appropriated the weapons it had distributed earlier to the Palmach. Whereupon Palmach units broke into a government arsenal several days later and reclaimed the guns. The British in turn relegated the Haganah to its former illegal status.

Refusing dissolution, however, the Jewish defense force simply became an underground once again. Indeed, its numbers swelled to 21,000 men and women. The Palmach also remained intact in various scattered kibbutzim, training secretly, even organizing a clandestine naval program (Pal-Yam) and developing a rudimentary air arm under the façade of a tiny aviation club. By then, too, having worked closely with the British, the Haganah (and Palmach) leadership understood better the ways in which a European regular army functioned, and what its strengths and limitations were. For example, the British command structure was maintained intact, but several of its more tradition-bound procedures were discarded. Palmach section commanders were taught to rely less on orders than on their own initiative. Sadeh and his colleagues laid their emphasis on unconventional tactics—initiative, surprise, and preemptive attack. Few underground movements elsewhere managed to achieve quite this degree of military sophistication. The training and mobilization effort had served a vital wartime purpose for Jews and British alike. After the war it would serve a Zionist political and military purpose exclusively.

TRAGEDY AND RESCUE

To the Yishuv, the cause of Jewish rescue abroad was no less critical than the survival of the Jewish National Home itself. For more than a year after the issuance of the 1939 White Paper, a limited clandestine exodus to Palestine still flowed from central and eastern Europe. Inasmuch as the Germans themselves encouraged this migration at the outset (Chapter IX), the British viewed it as a fifth column, one that ideally fostered the Nazi purpose of arousing the Arabs and undermining the security of Palestine. As a result, it became the mandatory's tactics at all costs to prevent the refugees from landing and to intern them elsewhere in the British Commonwealth. The rigorous application of this policy after the war began, when the absorption of as many as 100,000 Jewish fugitives might have been accomplished without Arab knowledge, suggested an unwritten decision on the part of mandatory officials to abort the growth of the Jewish National Home. In support of this decision, Colonial Secretary MacDonald terminated all further land sales to the Jews on February 28, 1940. Soon the Jews were confined to a new Pale of Settlement embracing barely 5 percent of western Palestine.

During the spring of 1940, too, even as the question of Jewish recruitment in Palestine was being discussed, the Colonial and Foreign Offices emphasized repeatedly the importance of placating the Arabs. On May 25, the Iraqi foreign minister, Nuri es-

Saïd, demanded that London issue a clear and unambiguous statement guaranteeing the Arabs self-government in Palestine once the war ended. Nuri observed that such an assurance would go far to counteract Axis propaganda in the Middle East. Accepting this view, London on June 12 submitted a draft of a public statement asserting that "the policy of His Majesty's Government for Palestine continues to be that laid down in the White Paper of May 1939," and that it was Britain's intention "when the war ended … [quickly to] permit the various stages of constitutional development to follow one another on the lines which the White Paper lays down." Had it not been for Churchill's personal opposition, the cabinet would have approved the draft forthwith. Instead, on July 3, 1940, a shorter declaration was issued stating only: "His Majesty's Government do not see any reason to make any change in their policy for Palestine as laid down in May 1939, and it remains unchanged." A few months afterward London decided to proceed with the next step in the White Paper program, the appointment of a number of Palestinian (that is, Arab) heads of departments. The move was cut short only at the last moment by an unforeseen development, the sinking of the refugee vessel *Patria* in Haifa harbor.

On this aging transport in November 1940, the mandatory authorities had loaded some 1,900 recently arrived, illegal Jewish immigrants. The government's intention was to carry the refugees away to Mauritius Island in the Indian Ocean, where they would be interned at least for the duration of the war. Determined to sabotage the transshipment, the Haganah in turn arranged to blow a small leak in the vessel's hull, forcing the disembarkation of the passengers. On November 25, the explosion went off, but the ship sank almost instantly, with the death of 240 Jews and a dozen British policemen. Only a month after the *Patria* tragedy, the SS *Atlantic*, another obsolescent vessel, reached Haifa with 1,600 new European refugees. In this case, the British transshipped the passengers to Mauritius without incident. A few weeks later the SS *Salvador* docked at Haifa with an additional 350 fugitive Jews—and was ordered to return to Bulgaria. The ship capsized in the Turkish Straits, leaving only seventy survivors. As the British wartime naval blockade gradually tightened, immigration by sea came to an end.

A later incident occurred, however, which became for the Yishuv the very symbol of Britain's unrelenting wartime policy toward the refugees. On December 16, 1941, the SS *Struma* entered the harbor of Istanbul and dropped anchor. It was an unseaworthy vessel of 180 tons. Several weeks before, it had departed the Rumanian port of Constanta and limped along the Black Sea coast with Palestine as its goal. Now, with its engine malfunctioning and its hull leaking badly, the *Struma* was forced to anchor for repairs. The ship was packed with 769 refugees for a voyage across the high seas. Unable to proceed farther, the Jews implored the Turkish government for sanctuary. The appeal was turned down. Barred from going forward and unwilling to return, the *Struma* passengers remained in Istanbul harbor for two months, suffering from hunger, overcrowding, and mounting panic. The Jewish Agency implored the British to allow the refugees entrance to Palestine, if only for transshipment later to Mauritius. Once this approval was forthcoming, the Turks would surely allow the Jews to disembark and

entrain for the Levant. The mandatory government refused. Eventually, on February 24, 1942, the Turks ordered the *Struma* towed out of the harbor. Five miles beyond the coastline the ship foundered and sank with the loss of 428 men, 269 women, and 70 children. The horrified reaction of Palestine Jewry was at least partially echoed in other Allied countries. Even in Britain, the tragedy was angrily debated in the House of Commons. A few other isolated vessels remained to test British obduracy. One of them, the *Pencho*, was similarly lost at sea, although most of its passengers were rescued.

By then the motive for escape was not merely to avoid persecution. It was to remain alive. The first, unconfirmed reports of Nazi mass killings were made by Thomas Mann, the émigré German novelist, in a series of BBC broadcasts in December 1941 and January 1942. In August 1942, Washington received an account of the gas chambers and crematoria from the Polish government in exile. Soon other reports were forthcoming from World Jewish Congress and Jewish Agency officials, who had learned of the killings from transferred Polish war prisoners arriving in Palestine. It is of note that the State Department reacted by imposing a ban on the further transmission of such news through diplomatic channels. When funds were solicited by Jewish organizations for possible rescue efforts, the answer from both Washington and London was that the money would fall into enemy hands; or that it would relieve Germany and its partners of the legal burden of supporting all their inhabitants. In February 1943, Admiral William Leahy, President Roosevelt's chief military liaison officer, vetoed a safe-passage proposal that would have allowed some 10,000 Jewish refugees to move from occupied Europe via Spain to North Africa; ostensibly shipping could not be provided. The following month, Bulgaria sensed the shifting tide of war and attempted to disassociate itself from the "Final Solution" (Hitler's euphemism for the destruction of European Jewry); the Sofia government expressed a willingness to allow Jewish departure for Palestine. When Washington raised the question with London, however, it was Foreign Secretary Eden who blocked action. "If we do that then the Jews of the world will be wanting us to make a similar offer in Poland and Germany," Eden explained. "Hitler might well take us up on such an offer and there simply are not enough ships … in the world to handle them." Besides, "Hitler would be sure to sneak his agents into the group." In December 1943 the State Department finally authorized the transfer of rescue funds to Rumania and Vichy France, provided the British supplied the necessary certificates. But once more Eden objected, alluding to "difficulties of disposing of a considerable number of Jews."

The furthest either Allied government appeared willing to go was to send representatives to an international conference in Bermuda, in April 1943, to study methods of dealing with the refugee question. At the gathering, about a dozen remote islands were mentioned as possible refugee sanctuaries, among them British Guiana, Mindanao, and Sesua in the Dominican Republic. Palestine was omitted from consideration. No other government expressed a willingness to open its doors. Ultimately Bermuda proved as much an exercise in futility as the Évian Conference of 1938. In January 1944, therefore, Roosevelt authorized the establishment of a war refugee board to negotiate asylum for Nazi-persecuted minorities in Europe. Yet the

board's representative, Ira Hirschmann, achieved his one limited success in persuading the British to open Palestine's doors to a few thousand Soviet Jewish refugee children who had been interned under wretched conditions in Turkey.

It was in 1944, too, in one of the most bizarre episodes of the war, that a possibly dramatic opportunity for large-scale Jewish rescue was forfeited. Until early that year Admiral Miklos Horthy, the regent of Hungary, had jealously guarded from Germany his nations right to handle its own "Jewish problem." Then, on March 19, the Nazis occupied Hungary. The following month Joel Brand, a member of the Hungarian Jewish Rescue Committee, was summoned to a meeting with Adolf Eichmann, who had arrived in Budapest personally to supervise the "Final Solution" in Hungary. Eichmann presented Brand with an astonishing offer. He was willing, he declared, to allow Hungary's 800,000 Jews exit on condition that the Allies supply Germany with 10,000 trucks, 1,000 tons of coffee, and 1,000 tons of soap. Although shaken and incredulous, Brand discussed the proposal with his colleagues in the Rescue Committee. They, too, were skeptical. Even if the offer were sincere, the Allies would surely refuse Germany war matériel. On the other hand, it was evident that conversations with Eichmann had to be prolonged, if only to stay the Nazi executioner's hand. But Eichmann's hand was not to be stayed. Early in May he began sending off 12,000 Hungarian Jews a day for liquidation. On the thirteenth of the month, he had Joel Brand flown to Turkey in a German courier plane, with orders to make known the offer of "blood for goods" to Jewish and British representatives.

On May 14, Brand met with Jewish Agency officials in Istanbul. Learning to his dismay that these men had no authority to negotiate for Jewish lives, he immediately entrained for Palestine. He got as far as Aleppo before British detectives hustled him off the train for interrogation. Finally he was transferred to Cairo, where he was kept under virtual house arrest. On one occasion, Ira Hirschmann, the American war refugee board representative, was allowed to interview Brand. Hirschmann then carried the information back to Washington. If war matériel could not be supplied, he pleaded, at least the formalities of negotiations should be initiated with the Nazis. But if the State Department gave even limited consideration to the proposal, it was soon stopped short by London. The British released word of Eichmann's offer to the press and simultaneously repudiated the "brazen attempt to blackmail His Majesty's Government." On their own, then, two Jewish Agency emissaries, Ehud Avriel and Menachem Bader, prepared to fly to Portugal early in July to make contact with Nazi agents. The British denied permission for their trip. By this time, fully 434,000 Hungarian Jews had been shipped to Auschwitz and murdered. The remainder were saved—when the Red Army entered Hungary.

Whatever was accomplished in the way of rescue was less through British sufferance than by Jewish underground efforts. The Haganah managed to smuggle a few thousand Middle Eastern Jews into Palestine by organizing an "underground railroad" through Iraq and Transjordan. Rescue camps were established secretly along Bedouin caravan routes, with the Arabs bribed to transport their disguised Jewish passengers. In this way, some 4,000 Persian and Iraqi Jews eventually were infiltrated into Palestine during

1942 and 1943. Still another Jewish response to Axis terror was to participate in a series of clandestine rescue operations in northern Italy and the Balkans. The project had its origins in the unexpectedly heavy losses suffered by American bombers during the 1943 raids on Rumania's Ploesti oil refineries. In light of these reverses, the British were convinced that additional intelligence information was needed on German defenses in the Balkans. Whereupon the Haganah leadership offered the British a proposal of its own. It was for Jews with connections in those lands to be parachuted into Europe, where they might serve a double function as intelligence agents and as organizers of resistance among the hostage Jewish communities. After some hesitation, the British approved the plan. Subsequently, thirty-two Palestine Jewish volunteers were accepted for the mission, three of them women. The British trained them in a special camp in Cairo.

Nine of the parachutists were dropped into Rumania, three into Hungary, two into Bulgaria, three into Italy, six into Slovakia, nine into Yugoslavia. All were natives of those countries; all spoke the languages fluently and had relatives there. Of the thirty-two, seven died with the Jews they attempted to rescue. Channa Szenes was the best-known of the agents, a Hungarian Jewish girl who had left her family to settle in Palestine as a chalutzah in 1934. Now, ten years later, she was seized by the Hungarian police within days of reaching Budapest, tortured by the Gestapo, then executed. Another woman, Chaviva Reik, helped form a Jewish underground unit in Slovakia and established a transit camp for escaping Russian war prisoners and Allied airmen. She also was caught and executed, together with two other parachutists. Enzo Sereni, the oldest member of the group, had been born and raised in Italy, where his father was personal physician to the king. An early immigrant to Palestine, Sereni was one of the first to volunteer for the parachute mission. He was dropped into Italy in May 1944, caught at once, imprisoned by the SS, and killed in Dachau. While several parachutists managed to transmit intelligence data to the British, and even arranged for the rescue of Allied fliers through Partisan territory in Yugoslavia, the mission had only limited practical success in organizing Jewish resistance in Hungary and the Balkans. But together with other Jewish wartime operations, at least, the rescue project was incorporated into Zionist folklore and nourished the longing for Jewish independence.

ANGLO-ZIONIST DIPLOMACY DURING THE WAR

Even as the Zionists mobilized their limited resources to breach the immigration blockade, their representatives in London explored methods of solving the refugee question within the framework of a larger Palestine agreement. At the beginning of the war, the Jewish Agency leadership remained committed to the original 1937 partition plan. They may have been encouraged in their demand for sovereignty by a remarkable proposal first mooted in September 1939 by the British world traveler H. S. John Philby, a friend of Ibn Saud. Philby's idea was for the whole of Palestine to be allocated to the Jews, who in turn would make £20 million available to the Saudi ruler for the purpose of resettling Palestine Arabs in his kingdom. It was expected that the hint of Ibn Saud's

primacy among other Arab leaders would be a major inducement to the desert monarch. Although skeptical, the Zionists were willing to have Philby explore the idea. In January 1940 the Englishman traveled to Arabia and discussed the plan with his royal friend. Ibn Saud was cautiously interested. So was Churchill, who first learned of the scheme from Weizmann in 1940 and discussed it briefly again with the Zionist leader in March 1942. Evidently the prime minister gave the suggestion tentative approval, for Lord Moyne, later to become minister-resident in Cairo, met with Ibn Saud in December 1942 to pursue the question further. Lacking a firm Allied endorsement, however, the Saudi ruler declined to commit himself. Nor did he react favorably when approached on the subject by an American representative, Colonel Halford Hoskins, late in 1943 (this page).

If the Philby proposal fell through, Weizmann and his colleagues nevertheless took heart from Churchill's reaction. The prime minister clearly had lost none of his traditional sympathy for Zionism. On April 18, 1943, he vigorously endorsed Weizmann's appeal to modify the White Paper. "I cannot agree that the White Paper of 1939 is 'the firmly established policy of His Majesty's present Government,' " he said. "I have always regarded it as a gross breach of faith." Ten days later Churchill circulated a note to the cabinet challenging the right of the Arab majority to deny Jewish immigration into Palestine. At his orders, a special cabinet committee to reexamine the future of Palestine was organized on July 12, under the chairmanship of Herbert Morrison and including Oliver Stanley, Lord Cranbourne, and Leopold Amery. By October of that year the group had reached a consensus, although postponing its formal report until December 20. The Morrison Committee offered partition as the best solution to the Palestine imbroglio and suggested that the government promote an association of Levant nations, consisting of a Jewish state, a Jerusalem territory (under a British high commissioner), some three-fifths of Lebanon, and a "Greater Syria," to include Syria itself, Transjordan, southern Lebanon, and the Arab-inhabited areas of Palestine.

The plan was generous to the Jews. Churchill liked it. Although a public announcement would have to be deferred until after the war, the prime minister revealed the scheme's general outline to Weizmann at a luncheon in October 1943, at which Clement Attlee, leader of the Labor opposition, was present. "When we have crushed Hitler," Churchill said emphatically, "we shall have to establish the Jews in the position where they belong. I have an inheritance left to me by Balfour and I am not going to change. But there are dark forces working against us. Dr. Weizmann, you have some very good friends. For instance, Mr. Attlee and the Labour Party are committed on this matter." "I certainly am," Attlee agreed. A year later, on November 4, 1944, the prime minister again received Weizmann and promised unreservedly to find an acceptable Palestine solution after the war. According to Churchill, the immigration of one and a half million refugees over ten years and the immigration of 100,000 to 150,000 orphans immediately were reasonable guidelines. So was the partition plan, which he hinted would be a "good" one from the Jewish viewpoint.

Despite their grief at the unfolding tragedy in Europe, none of the Zionist leaders could doubt by then that they had in Churchill a man whose friendship warranted the fullest loyalty. Even the militant Ben-Gurion shared that judgment. Evidence of the

prime minister's good intentions, moreover, was his determination to force through the issue of a Jewish brigade before the war ended. Upon the invasion of Italy in the autumn of 1943, the front line shifted north from the Arab countries. It was a much simpler matter by then to justify Zionist participation in the struggle for Europe, where millions of Jews were being exterminated by the enemy. On July 12, 1944, therefore, Churchill sent a memorandum to the war secretary, instructing him to begin organizing a Jewish army group forthwith. "I like the idea of the Jews trying to get at the murderers of their fellow countrymen in Central Europe, and I think it would give a great deal of satisfaction in the United States…." In subsequent weeks, the plans were worked out in detail with the Jewish Agency, and on September 29 the prime minister himself made the announcement to the House of Commons:

> I know there is a vast number of Jews serving with our forces and the American forces throughout all the armies, but it seems to me indeed appropriate that a special Jewish unit of that race which has suffered indescribable torment from the Nazis should be represented as a distinct formation among the forces gathered for their final overthrow. I have no doubt that they will not only take part in the struggle but also in the occupation which will follow.

In October, the War Office appointed Brigadier Ernest Benjamin as commanding officer of the brigade. A Zionist banner was approved, together with a blue-and-white shoulder flash inscribed with the Shield of David. A recruiting and training program was launched, and early in 1945 the 3,400 Palestinian members of the brigade were shipped off for combat duty in Italy, where they were attached to the British Eighth Army. As it turned out, this Jewish fighting force represented the one important political accomplishment of Zionist diplomacy during the war. Equipped with its own staff services and artillery support, it became the training ground where hundreds of Palestinian officers and NCOs first mastered logistics, organization, and tactics on a brigade scale. The experience added of course to the Haganah reservoir of trained fighting men in the event of a postwar struggle against the British or the Arabs. But in 1944, Weizmann and other moderates of Zionism preferred to regard the brigade as harbinger of a significant change in British policy toward the Yishuv.

THE RISE OF JEWISH MILITANCY

The expectation was premature. Churchill's wartime gestures of friendship were steadfastly resisted, and frequently undermined, by the traditionally pro-Arab element within the Foreign Office and the mandatory administration. On the one side, the prime minister continued to urge a reevaluation of attitude toward the Zionists, with a strong bias in favor of partition. On the other, Richard Casey, Britain's minister-resident in Cairo, transmitted a memorandum to Whitehall on June 17, 1943, giving details of Jewish secret military organizations (this page) and warning that London hardly could repudiate its White Paper assurances to the Arabs without turning the whole of Arab opinion against Britain. In October of the same year, moreover, Eden urged a reconsideration of the Morrison Committee's scheme of partition, and delay in resolving

the Palestine issue until hostilities ended. There was no need to incur Arab wrath prematurely, he explained. The War Cabinet accepted this argument and agreed to hold off a final decision. In the meantime, Eden was reminded by his ambassadors in Cairo and Baghdad that Palestine served as an indispensable link in the British defense system, one that under no circumstances should be abandoned after the war.

At the beginning of June 1944, therefore, the Colonial Office suggested an alternative to partition. It was for the establishment of a Palestinian state under the aegis of the United Nations but "supervised" by a British high commissioner. Jewish immigration could be resumed, but fixed at a number small enough to ensure continuing Arab numerical preponderance. On September 26, 1944, unwilling yet to abandon its earlier proposals, the special cabinet committee on Palestine—the Morrison Committee—allowed minor revisions of its original report but continued to stand fast on partition. Eden and his Foreign Office colleagues, on the other hand, repeated their view that a division of Palestine would not alleviate Arab fears, particularly if the Jews encouraged large-scale immigration. And there the matter rested, frozen at dead center.

If the Zionists lacked detailed knowledge of this impasse within the British government, they were perfectly capable of judging its results. Churchill's assurances of a favorable postwar solution were gratifying, and the eventual approval of a Jewish brigade hardly less so. But in the meanwhile the gates of Palestine remained tightly closed, and the arrival of survivors from Nazi Europe had trickled to a stop. It was at the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942 that the *Struma* tragedy occurred. Then, a few weeks later, came authoritative information on the Nazi "Final Solution." As has been seen, the response of the Allied nations to this unfolding horror was to close their doors more tightly. Visa regulations in the United States were tightened on the grounds that enemy agents might be traveling as disguised refugees. In April 1942 seven Latin American countries denied entrance altogether to fugitives from Axis-dominated Europe. Turkey, the most likely way station out of the neutral Balkans, denied all transit rights and even adopted a thinly disguised policy of internal racism. To Ben-Gurion and his colleagues in the Jewish Agency, promises and expressions of goodwill from Western governments seemed increasingly meaningless.

It is of note that as late as May 1940, Ben-Gurion, like Weizmann, had not closed his mind to various compromise solutions of the Palestine question. As chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, he had been willing to consider a partition scheme as a framework for discussions, even a limited binational state allowing parity between Arabs and Jews. It was not the magnitude of the Jewish tragedy alone that transformed Ben-Gurion into an uncompromising advocate of Zionist sovereignty. In 1942 he visited the United States and there felt "the pulse of her great Jewry, with its five millions." The visit, his first in many years, was an apocalyptic experience. Ben-Gurion experienced at last, in depth, what he felt to be his people's latent strength. It was only after this first wartime visit to America that he began discussing with his colleagues the notion of a Jewish state in Palestine "as a means of moving millions of Jews [there] … after the war, at the fastest possible rate." He was convinced, too, that with the immolation of European Jewry (the full extent of which was not yet revealed), any fundamental

alteration of the official—and more moderate-Zionist program would have to receive American Jewish endorsement. At Ben-Gurion's initiative, then, an emergency Zionist Conference to formulate postwar goals was convened at the Hotel Biltmore in New York from May 9 to May 11, 1942. It was attended by six hundred delegates, the majority Americans, but including also several European Zionist leaders and three members of the Agency Executive, among them Weizmann and Ben-Gurion himself. The accumulation of Jewish grievances against the British was ventilated, and a forthright resolution was passed insisting on nothing less than the establishment of Palestine "as a Jewish Commonwealth integrated in the structure of the new democratic world...."

Privately, Ben-Gurion and his associates were committed to rather less than a demand for Palestine in its entirety. They were in fact quite willing to accept the territorial limitations of partition. What no longer was negotiable was Jewish self-rule, a position the Agency leadership had been unwilling to adopt earlier for fear of antagonizing the Arabs and the British. This time Ben-Gurion had achieved his purpose; he had won firm support for a maximalist program. He hinted, too, that violence would be used to achieve it if necessary. "To be ready, also, for another way, the way of armed struggle. ... Our youth must be prepared to do everything possible when the right moment comes," he declared on May 16, 1942, in a memorandum to the Jewish Agency. In fact, it is doubtful whether the Zionist militants achieved much by announcing this unequivocal program. They erred if they assumed that the Yishuv's participation in the Allied war effort, even when contrasted with the Arab record of pro-Nazi activity, invested their movement with the extraordinary bargaining power it had briefly—and under unique circumstances—enjoyed in World War I. Regardless of the economic and political strength Ben-Gurion and others detected in American Jewry, the Zionists were considerably less than a powerful international force. The wounds of the unfolding holocaust in Europe were crippling. Friends and enemies alike regarded the Jews simply as a desperately beleaguered race. Far-ranging manifestoes appeared altogether ill-suited to their current plight.

Moreover, Ben-Gurion's interpretation of statehood was sharply at odds with that of Weizmann. The difference was not immediately apparent. During the partition debate of 1937, after all, Weizmann had been the first to advocate a state, albeit one comprising less than the whole of Palestine. "We shall have on our hands [at the end of the war] a problem of at least three million people," he wrote later, in 1941. "Even on purely financial grounds a Jewish state is essential in order to carry out a policy of such magnitude." In an article published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1942, Weizmann added that a Jewish state was also a "moral need and postulate, a decisive step towards normality and true emancipation." Repeatedly he predicted that an Arab federation and a Jewish commonwealth would emerge at the end of the war, and he anticipated intimate cooperation between them. The "Biltmore Program," therefore, hardly signified a repudiation of Weizmann's position. Indeed, the formula adopted at the emergency conference in New York actually had been devised by Meyer Weisgal, one of Weizmann's closest political aides.

Yet Weizmann regarded the program essentially as a statement of intent, with the

time of its implementation left open. Unshakably gradualist, the Zionist elder statesman continued to think in terms of an uninterrupted flow of Jewish immigrants who slowly might become a majority and establish an autonomous entity in Palestine. Ben-Gurion, on the other hand, discerned in the Biltmore Program an end at last to irresolution and equivocation on the Zionist purpose. The vote in New York for him was a mandate for statehood immediately, thereby opening the gates of Palestine to hundreds of thousands of immigrants within a very short time span. Afterward, upon returning from the United States, Ben-Gurion explained his views to the Yishuv, winning broad public support for his approach, emphasizing that a maximalist demand would project Jewish claims before the council of nations at just the moment that other peoples would also be submitting their desiderata. It would be better, he insisted, to ask for too much than for too little. At its meeting of November 19, 1942, the Zionist Actions Committee accepted the Biltmore Program overwhelmingly. Weizmann meanwhile remained in New York, and was unable as a result to ensure the Yishuv's approval for his own gradualistic interpretation of the Biltmore formula. Exhausted, still crushed by the death in action of his younger son, an RAF pilot, the aging Zionist leader was becoming an increasingly remote figure to Palestine Jewry. In the developing collision of views between himself and Ben-Gurion, it was Weizmann who was losing out.

The British proved curiously sluggish in appraising this new Jewish mood. Nor did they detect the growth and strength that animated Palestine Jewry's emerging militance. In the years between the two wars, however, the Yishuv had grown from 85,000, or 10 percent of the total population of the country, to 560,000 in 1946, or about 32 percent of the total. Jewish agriculture had been dramatically expanded. From 1939 to 1947, ninety-four new villages were founded, half of them during the war, raising the total of Jewish settlements to 348, with a population of 116,000. Between 1937 and 1943 alone the number of Jewish industrial workers more than doubled, from 22,000 to 46,000. The value of Jewish industrial production increased nearly fivefold, from P£7.9 million in 1937 to P£37.5 million in 1943.

This radical alteration of the Zionist economic structure in Palestine, and its implications for Jewish self-confidence, were virtually ignored by the mandatory administration. Thus, early in 1943, Sir Harold MacMichael, the high commissioner, broadcast a message to the country explaining the government's postwar economic blueprint for Palestine. It stressed the nation's essentially agricultural character and the importance of weeding out the mushroom industries that had sprung up on wartime prosperity. Emphasis henceforth would be placed on raising the living standards of the Arab community, MacMichael declared. Ben-Gurion and his colleagues in the Agency were outraged by this broadcast. The Arabs had done virtually nothing for the war effort, after all; and if the economy of the Yishuv had developed, it had done so in support of the Allied cause. The Zionists also regarded the plan as a thinly disguised scheme for limiting the Yishuv's absorptive capacity. The next day Ben-Gurion gave the Agency's uncompromising response: "Our program is the maximum development of this country in agriculture, in industry, and on the sea, in order to prepare for a maximum immigration within the shortest possible period of time." He warned that the Jewish

emphasis under all circumstances would be on "development," not "reconstruction."

Shortly afterward, as if to give tangible expression to Ben-Gurion's challenge, members of the Jewish underground infiltrated several British military bases and made off with quantities of light arms and ammunition. The reaction of the mandatory government was to launch police searches of increasing range and severity, bearing down on the contraband Jewish arms traffic in captured Axis weapons and sentencing Jewish smugglers to heavy prison terms. General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson recalled in his memoirs that by January 1944 the Jewish Agency

> … was in some respects arrogating to itself the powers and status of an independent Jewish government. It no longer attempted to deny the existence of arms caches, but claimed the right not only to hold arms for self-defense but to resist any attempt on the part of lawful authority to locate them. It was, in fact, defying the Government, and to that extent rebellion could be said to exist.

Wilson did not exaggerate. Beyond control of the Jewish Agency itself there emerged a number of activist splinter groups, limited in number but fanatical in purpose, that were unwilling any longer to accept Zionist discipline at a time when Jews were being exterminated in Europe and the British were barring the doors of Palestine to survivors. The technique adopted by these militants was violence, "the tragic, futile, un-Jewish resort to terrorism," wrote Weizmann, who encountered this phenomenon upon returning to Palestine in 1944. The most ungovernable faction in the emergent underground movement was the "Fighters for the Freedom of Israel," known simply as the Lech'i (for its Hebrew initials). Consisting of barely three hundred members, the Lech'i was one of a handful of Jewish paramilitary organizations that sprang up during or immediately following the Arab insurrection of 1936–39. Its founder, Avraham Stern, a blond, Polish-born Jew in his early thirties, a teacher and poetaster, had briefly studied classics at the University of Florence and had been decisively influenced there by what he saw of Fascist tactics and of Mussolini's intense Anglophobia. He was soon convinced that Britain's presence in the Middle East was inimical to the future development of the Jewish National Home and that henceforth all emphasis should be placed on an anti-British rebellion. No other Jewish underground group was willing yet to go that far, not even the Irgun Z'vai Le'umi (this page).

After the outbreak of war, however, Stern moved even further to the Right. In 1941 he attempted to make contact with Otto von Hentig, the German emissary in Vichy Syria, in the hope of striking a deal against the British in Palestine. His overtures were contemptuously ignored. Desperate for funds, Stern and the Lech'i were soon reduced to occasional bank robberies. In January 1942 a Sternist bomb attempt meant for a British intelligence officer instead killed two Jewish police inspectors. A few weeks later, Stern was shot dead by the police. Far from ending the Lech'i's militancy, these events seemed to impel its remaining members to acts of even greater desperation. Although a number of the Sternists were Oriental Jewish youngsters from the slums of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, many were east Europeans whose families were being destroyed by the Nazis. Their hatred of the British transcended reason or control. One of the killers of

Lord Moyne, for example (this page), Eliahu Chakim, watched the sinking of the *Patria* in Haifa harbor, and the memory of this tragedy never left him.

After 1942 the Lech'i, under its new leaders, Nathan Friedmann-Yellin and Dr. Israel Scheib, concluded that violence was the one method capable of driving the British from Palestine. Thus, extorting funds from Jewish shopkeepers, the Lech'i soon engaged in indiscriminate shootings of British police. Not infrequently, Lech'i members were themselves shot down in gun battles. The attacks mounted in intensity. So did British retaliation, with mass arrests, curfews, and the imposition of the death penalty on those carrying weapons. Still the underground campaign went on, and once included an unsuccessful murder attempt against the high commissioner, Sir Harold MacMichael, on August 8, 1944. Three months later, the Lech'i perpetrated its most audacious crime. It took place in Cairo and was directed against Lord Moyne, the British minister-resident. Walter Edward Guinness, first Baron Moyne, was a millionaire-owner of the Guinness beverage company, a gentle and widely respected man. He had briefly directed the Colonial Office after Lord Lloyd's death in 1941, and in January 1944 became minister of state for the Middle East. The Zionists regarded him as an enemy from his days as colonial secretary; and perhaps, also, for his coldly negative reaction to Eichmann's barter offer for Hungarian Jewry. On November 6, less than forty-eight hours after Weizmann's friendly and reassuring luncheon with Churchill in London, two Sternists shot Moyne fatally as he was leaving the British residence. The youths were placed on trial in Cairo on January 10, 1945, and were swiftly convicted and hanged.

With few exceptions, the Zionist community was horror-stricken by Moyne's assassination. A shaken Weizmann, in London at the time of the killing, promised Churchill that Palestine Jewry "will go to the utmost limit of its power to cut out this evil from its midst." Ben-Gurion endorsed these words by issuing a passionate appeal to the Yishuv "to cast out all members of this underground gang and deny them shelter and assistance…." Thereupon the Haganah launched a full-scale attack against Etzel (Irgun) and Lech'i members alike, denouncing them to the British police. But the damage to the Zionist cause was already far-reaching. In a statement before the House of Commons ten days after the assassination, Churchill uttered a sharp warning against terrorism in Palestine. "If our dreams for Zionism are to end in the smoke of an assassin's pistol," he said, "and the labours for its future produce a new set of gangsters worthy of Nazi Germany, many like myself will have to reconsider the position we have maintained so consistently and so long in the past." For England, the Moyne assassination was a revelation of the seething bitterness within Jewish Palestine. Although the episode was repudiated by the Jews no less than by the British, it terminated the collaborative period of government promises and Jewish credulity. Jewish goodwill had come to an end. British patience was now similarly to be exhausted.