

The
IRON WALL

Israel and the Arab World

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PROLOGUE

The Zionist Foundations

IN 1907 YITZHAK EPSTEIN, a Russian-born teacher who had settled in Palestine, published an article entitled "A Hidden Question" in the Hebrew periodical *Ha-Shiloah*. Its subject was the attitude of the Jews toward the Arabs of Palestine. "Among the grave questions raised by the concept of our people's renaissance on its own soil," wrote Epstein, "there is one that is more weighty than all the others put together. This is the question of our relations with the Arabs." This question, he added, "has not been forgotten, but rather has remained completely hidden from the Zionists, and in its true form has found almost no mention in the literature of our movement."¹ Epstein's anxiety was brushed aside by the majority of his Zionist contemporaries. But the hidden question came back to haunt the Zionist movement and the State of Israel throughout the first fifty years of its existence.

ZIONISM AND THE ARAB QUESTION

The Zionist movement, which emerged in Europe in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, aimed at the national revival of the Jewish people in its ancestral home after nearly two thousand years of exile. The term "Zionism" was coined in 1885 by the Viennese Jewish writer Nathan Birnbaum, Zion being one of the biblical names for Jerusalem. Zionism was in essence an answer to

the Jewish problem that derived from two basic facts: the Jews were dispersed in various countries around the world, and in each country they constituted a minority. The Zionist solution was to end this anomalous existence and dependence on others, to return to Zion, and to attain majority status there and, ultimately, political independence and statehood.

Ever since the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C. and the exile to Babylon, the Jews yearned to return to Zion. This yearning was reflected in Jewish prayers, and it manifested itself in a number of messianic movements. Modern Zionism, by contrast, was a secular movement, with a political orientation toward Palestine. Modern Zionism was a phenomenon of the late nineteenth-century Europe. It had its roots in the failure of Jewish efforts to become assimilated in Western society, in the intensification of antisemitism in Europe, and in the parallel and not unrelated upsurge of nationalism. If nationalism posed a problem to the Jews by identifying them as an alien and unwanted minority, it also suggested a solution: self-determination for the Jews in a state of their own in which they would constitute a majority. Zionism, however, embodied the urge to create not merely a new Jewish state in Palestine but also a new society, based on the universal values of freedom, democracy, and social justice.

The father of political Zionism and the visionary of the Jewish state was Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), a Hungarian-born Jew who worked as a journalist and a playwright in Vienna, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Herzl was an assimilated Jew with no particular interest in Judaism or Jewish affairs. It was the virulent antisemitism surrounding the Dreyfus Affair in the early 1890s, which he covered as the Paris correspondent of a Vienna daily newspaper, that aroused his interest in the Jewish problem. He concluded that assimilation and emancipation could not work, because the Jews were a nation. Their problem was not economic or social or religious but national. It followed rationally from these premises that the only solution was for the Jews to leave the diaspora and acquire a territory over which they would exercise sovereignty and establish a state of their own.

This was the solution advocated by Herzl in the famous little book he published in 1896, *Der Judenstaat*, or *The Jewish State*.² The Jews, he insisted, were not merely a religious group but a true nation waiting to be born. The book provided a detailed blueprint for a Jewish state but left open the question whether the site for the proposed state should be Palestine, on account of its historic associations, or some vacant land in Argentina. The publica-

tion of *The Jewish State* is commonly taken to mark the beginning of the history of the Zionist movement. It firmly identified the author's name with political Zionism, with the view that the Jewish question was a political question with international ramifications and that it therefore needed to be attacked in the forum of international politics. This was in contrast to the practical Zionism of Hovevi Zion, the Lovers of Zion, who had started in 1881 in a number of Russian cities, against the background of persecution and pogroms, to promote immigration and settlement activities in Palestine. The publication of *The Jewish State* also catapulted Herzl into a position of leadership in Jewish affairs, a position he retained until his death in 1904.

In line with his explicit political orientation, Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress, in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland. The congress was initially scheduled to take place in Munich because it had kosher restaurants. But the leaders of the Munich Jewish community declined to act as hosts, arguing that there was no Jewish question and that the holding of a congress would only supply ammunition to the antisemites. The Basel Program stated, "The aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law." By adopting this program the congress endorsed Herzl's political conception of Zionism. The Basel Program deliberately spoke of a home rather than a state for the Jewish people, but from the Basel Congress onward the clear and consistent aim of the Zionist movement was to create a state for the Jewish people in Palestine. To his diary Herzl confided, "At Basel I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. Perhaps in five years, and certainly in fifty, everyone will know it."³

The publication of *The Jewish State* evoked various reactions in the Jewish community, some strongly favorable, some hostile, and some skeptical. After the Basel Congress the rabbis of Vienna decided to explore Herzl's ideas and sent two representatives to Palestine. This fact-finding mission resulted in a cable from Palestine in which the two rabbis wrote, "The bride is beautiful, but she is married to another man."

This cable encapsulated the problem with which the Zionist movement had to grapple from the beginning: an Arab population already lived on the land on which the Jews had set their heart.⁴ The received view is that the Zionist movement, with the exception of a few marginal groups, tended to ignore the Arabs who lived in Palestine and constituted what came to be called the Arab question. Some critics add that it was this ignorance of the Arab

population by the Zionists that prevented the possibility of an understanding between the two national movements that were to claim Palestine as their homeland. It is true that the majority of the early Zionists exhibited surprisingly little curiosity about the land of their devotions. It is also true that the principal concern of these Zionists was not the reality in Palestine but the Jewish problem and the Jewish association with the country. It is not true, however, to say that the Zionists were unaware of the existence of an Arab population in Palestine or of the possibility that this population would be antagonistic to the Zionist enterprise. Although vaguely aware of the problem, they underestimated its seriousness and hoped that a solution would emerge in due course.

Herzl himself exemplified the Zionist tendency to indulge in wishful thinking. He was certainly aware that Palestine was already populated with a substantial number of Arabs, although he was not particularly well informed about the social and economic conditions of the country. He viewed the natives as primitive and backward, and his attitude toward them was rather patronizing. He thought that as individuals they should enjoy full civil rights in a Jewish state but he did not consider them a society with collective political rights over the land in which they formed the overwhelming majority. Like many other early Zionists, Herzl hoped that economic benefits would reconcile the Arab population to the Zionist enterprise in Palestine. As the bearers of all the benefits of Western civilization, the Jews, he thought, might be welcomed by the residents of the backward East. This optimistic forecast of Arab-Jewish relations in Palestine found its clearest expression in a novel published by Herzl in 1902 under the title *Altneuland* (*Old-Newland*). Rashid Bey, a spokesman for the native population, describes Jewish settlement as an unqualified blessing: "The Jews have made us prosperous, why should we be angry with them? They live with us as brothers, why should we not love them?"⁵ This picture, however, was nothing but a pipe dream, a utopian fantasy. Its author completely overlooked the possibility that an Arab national movement would grow in Palestine in response to the Zionist drive to transform the country into a Jewish national home with a Jewish majority.

In defense of Herzl it should be pointed out that at the end of the nineteenth century Palestine was a province of the Ottoman Empire, and an Arab national movement was only beginning to develop there. Still, his preference for playing the game of high politics was unmistakable. His most persistent efforts were directed

at persuading the Ottoman sultan to grant a charter for Jewish settlement and a Jewish homeland in Palestine. But he also approached many other world leaders and influential magnates for help in promoting his pet project. Among those who granted him an audience were the pope, the king of Italy, the German kaiser, and Joseph Chamberlain, the British colonial secretary. In each case Herzl presented his project in a manner best calculated to appeal to the listener: to the sultan he promised Jewish capital, to the kaiser he intimated that the Jewish territory would be an outpost of Berlin, to Chamberlain he held out the prospect that the Jewish territory would become a colony of the British Empire. Whatever the arguments used, Herzl's basic aim remained unchanged: obtaining the support of the great powers for turning Palestine into a political center for the Jewish people.

In its formative phase, under the direction of Herzl, the Zionist movement thus displayed two features that were to be of fundamental and enduring importance in its subsequent history: the nonrecognition of a Palestinian national entity, and the quest for an alliance with a great power external to the Middle East. Bypassing the Palestinians was the trend in Zionist policy from the First Zionist Congress onward. The unstated assumption of Herzl and his successors was that the Zionist movement would achieve its goal not through an understanding with the local Palestinians but through an alliance with the dominant great power of the day. The weakness of the Yishuv, the pre-Independence Jewish community in Palestine, and the growing hostility of the Palestinians combined to make the reliance on a great power a central element in Zionist strategy. The dominant great power in the Middle East changed several times in the course of the twentieth century; first it was the Ottoman Empire, after World War I it was Great Britain, and after World War II it was the United States. But the Zionist fixation on enlisting the support of the great powers in the struggle for statehood and in the consolidation of statehood remained constant.

CHAIM WEIZMANN AND THE BRITISH CONNECTION

The chief architect of the alliance between the Zionist movement and Great Britain was Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952). The charter that Herzl had unsuccessfully sought from the Ottoman Turks

was secured by Weizmann from the British in 1917 in the form of the Balfour Declaration. Weizmann forged the alliance with Britain and made it the cornerstone of Zionist policy in the course of a long and distinguished career that spanned the first half of the twentieth century.

Born in Russia, Weizmann went to university in Berlin and Geneva and was active in the Zionist movement from its inception, attending some of the early congresses. In 1904 he moved to London and took up a faculty post in chemistry in the University of Manchester, but in the middle of World War I he transferred to London to direct a special laboratory the British government had created to improve the production of artillery shells. In London he promoted the Zionist cause by making contacts and converts in the highest political circles. His remarkable skills in diplomacy and persuasion swiftly carried him to the top. In 1920 he was elected president of the World Zionist Organization, and he was to retain this office, with an interruption from 1931 to 1935, until 1946. When the State of Israel was created, he served as its first president until his death in 1952.

One of Weizmann's early contributions was to resolve the ongoing dispute between the political Zionists and the practical Zionists. The political Zionists, following in Herzl's footsteps, gave priority to diplomatic activity to secure international support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The practical Zionists, on the other hand, stressed the organization of Jewish immigration to Palestine, land acquisition, settlement, and the building of a Jewish economy there. The debate was not just about means but about the true meaning of Zionism. At the Eighth Zionist Congress, in 1907, Weizmann presented a new term, "synthetic Zionism," and argued that the two approaches supplemented each other, representing, in effect, two sides of the same coin. The policy implication of the new term, that the two approaches should be practiced simultaneously, seemed to satisfy both factions.

Most of Weizmann's own efforts were directed at enlisting the British government's support for the Zionist project in Palestine. He had no direct knowledge of the Arab problem and no distinctive policy of his own for dealing with it. In general it seemed to him that the Arabs of Palestine were not a separate political community with national aspirations of its own but a tiny fraction of the large Arab nation, and he also expected that economic self-interest would temper their opposition to Zionism. About the moral superiority of the Jewish claim over the Arab claim to a homeland in Palestine, he never entertained any doubt.

To a very great extent Weizmann's attitude toward the Palestine Arabs was shaped by his broader strategy of gaining British support for Zionism. The deeper and more complex his negotiations with the British government became in the course of World War I, the less attention he paid to the local difficulty with the Palestine Arabs. To elicit British support for what he ambiguously termed a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, he minimized the danger of organized Arab resistance. In making his case, however, he appealed not only to the British imperial interest in having a friendly nation in a region of great strategic importance but also to British idealism. His efforts were crowned with success when, on 2 November 1917, Foreign Secretary Arthur J. Balfour wrote to Lord Rothschild a letter that said,

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by the Jews in any other country.

The Balfour Declaration, as this letter came to be known, represented a major triumph for Zionist diplomacy. At the time of its issue, the Jewish population of Palestine numbered some 56,000 as against an Arab population of 600,000, or less than 10 percent. Considering that the Arabs constituted over 90 percent of the population, the promise not to prejudice their civil and religious rights had a distinctly hollow ring about it, since it totally ignored their political rights. Britain's public promise to the Jews could not be reconciled either with its earlier promise to Hussein the sharif of Mecca to support the establishment of an independent Arab kingdom after the war in return for an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire or with the secret Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 to divide the Middle East into British and French spheres of influence in the event of an Allied victory. These irreconcilable wartime promises returned to haunt Britain on the morrow of the Allied victory. As far as Weizmann was concerned, however, the Balfour Declaration, despite all its ambiguities and limitations, handed the Jews a golden key to unlock the doors of Palestine and to make themselves the masters of the country.

In the aftermath of the war, Weizmann's attitude toward the Palestine Arabs continued to be governed by the need to retain

British backing for the fledgling Jewish national home. Having sponsored a Pan-Arab movement under the leadership of the sharif of Mecca during the war, Britain had no sympathy with the idea that the Arabs of Palestine formed a distinct political entity. Its policy was to make the Hashemite princes, the sons of the sharif of Mecca, rulers of semi-independent Arab states. Prince Faisal, commander of the Arab revolt against the Turks, became the king of Syria, but after the French ejected him from their sphere of influence, the British procured for him the Iraqi throne. Abdullah, his elder brother, was appointed ruler of the emirate of Transjordan, created by Britain in 1921. Iraq and Transjordan thus became the two main pillars of Britain's empire in the Middle East in the aftermath of World War I (see map 1).

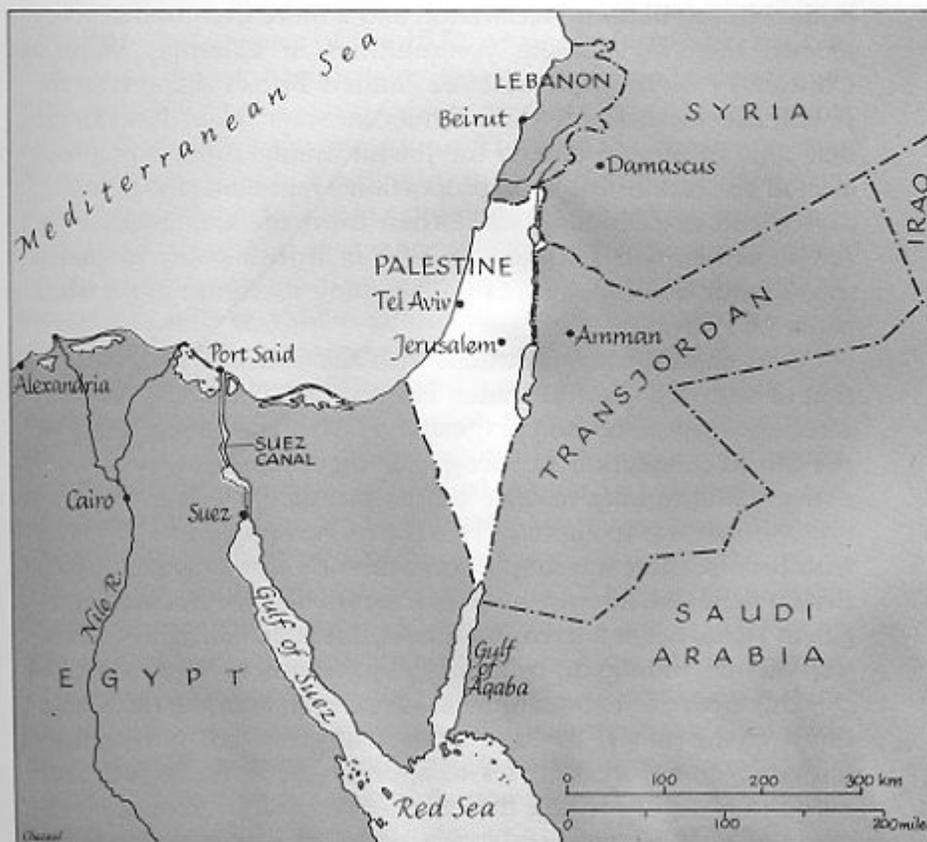
It took Weizmann no time at all to orient himself on the new map of the Middle East. Taking his cue from the British, he disregarded the claims of the Palestine Arabs and strove to reach agreement with the Hashemite rulers of the neighboring Arab countries. This was the basis of the agreement he signed with Faisal on 3 January 1919. It endorsed the Balfour Declaration and envisaged "the most cordial goodwill and understanding" between Arabs and Jews in realizing their national aspirations in their respective territories in Palestine. The agreement had a very short life, however, because it ran counter to public opinion in the Arab world. Whether or not Faisal had the authority to sign an agreement affecting the Palestine Arabs in the first place, he was forced by his own nationalist followers to declare that the separation of Palestine from Syria was not acceptable and that Zionist aspirations for a state clashed with Arab ideas. In Arab eyes the main result of the Weizmann-Faisal intermezzo was to identify Zionism as the ally of British imperialism in the Middle East and as an obstacle in their own struggle for self-determination.

In the period 1918-20 the Zionists put forward their own maximalist interpretation of the Balfour Declaration. They wanted international recognition of the Jewish claim to Palestine, and they wanted the Jewish national home to stretch across both banks of the river Jordan. When Weizmann was asked at the Paris peace conference what was meant by a Jewish national home, he famously replied, "To make Palestine as Jewish as England is English." He was careful, however, not to speak openly in terms of a state, so as not to give substance to the charge that the Jewish minority planned to make itself master over the Arab majority. Although a Jewish state with a Jewish majority was his ultimate and

unchanging aim, he believed in working toward this goal in a gradual, evolutionary, and nonprovocative fashion.

Weizmann's policy toward the Palestine Arabs is usually described as moderate, but it was moderate in style much more than in substance. Although patient and prudent and willing to listen to the Arabs, he was uncompromising in his defense of Jewish interests in Palestine. He was prepared to accept the Arabs as partners in running Palestine through an elected council based on parity between the two communities, but he did not accept them as equal partners in negotiations on the future of the country. According to him, these negotiations had to be conducted exclusively between Britain and the Jews.

Small wonder that Jewish-Arab relations deteriorated seriously after the Balfour Declaration was issued. Weizmann's assumption



The Middle East after World War I

that the Palestine Arabs would remain politically passive and that the Arab-Jewish conflict would find its resolution on the social and economic plane turned out to be mistaken. A Palestinian national movement emerged in the interwar period, partly in response to the Zionist challenge. Under the leadership of Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, the Palestinian national movement became not only active but aggressive in its opposition to Zionism. The mufti systematically rejected all the compromise proposals put forward by the British, instigated riots and disturbances against the Jews, and led a full-scale revolt in 1936–39 against the British authorities and their Jewish protégés.

Weizmann turned out to be equally mistaken in his assumption of the essential identity between British and Jewish interests in Palestine. Mounting Arab resistance, with occasional outbursts of violence, forced Britain to reassess its own wartime commitments to Zionism. The result was a gradual retreat from the promise embodied in the Balfour Declaration and a more evenhanded policy toward the two warring communities in Palestine. Winston Churchill's white paper of 1922 limited British support for the Jewish national home in three significant ways: it laid down for the first time economic criteria for Jewish immigration, it proposed elected institutions based on proportional representation instead of parity, and it excluded Transjordan from the area available for Jewish settlement. This adverse shift in British policy continued throughout the interwar period, reaching its climax in the white paper of 1939.

Weizmann's disappointment with the British was as bitter as that of any other Zionist leader. His response, however, was characteristically prudent and pragmatic. Having staked everything on the British connection, he recognized that there was now no alternative to continuing reliance on the mandatory power if the national home was to survive. This is why he opposed a showdown with Britain: there was simply no way the Zionists could impose on Britain their own interpretation of what the Balfour Declaration entailed. His advice was to continue to build the Jewish national home step by step, immigrant by immigrant, settlement by settlement.

This advice did not command unanimous assent in the Zionist camp. In the early 1920s, against the background of growing Arab militancy and British moves to appease the Arabs, voices were raised in favor of revising the official policy of the Zionist movement. The most powerful voice was that of Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky.

ZE'EV JABOTINSKY
AND REVISIONIST ZIONISM

Ze'ev Jabotinsky (1880–1940) was an ardent Jewish nationalist, the founder of Revisionist Zionism, and the spiritual father of the Israeli right. Born in Odessa to a liberal Russian Jewish family, he worked as a journalist in Rome and Vienna and at an early age began to devote his outstanding skills as a writer, orator, and polemicist to the Zionist cause. During the First World War he persuaded the British to form Jewish volunteer units within the British army and himself served as an officer in the Zion Mule Corps in Egypt.

In 1921 Jabotinsky was elected to the Zionist Executive. From the very start he was at odds with Chaim Weizmann, whose principal sparring partner he remained for the rest of his life. In 1923 he resigned from the Zionist Executive, charging that its policies, especially its acceptance of the 1922 white paper, would result in the loss of Palestine. At successive Zionist congresses Jabotinsky established himself as one of the great orators of his day and as the chief spokesman for the opposition. He formed a new party, the World Union of Zionist Revisionists in 1925, and the youth movement Betar. After a decade in opposition to the official leadership of Zionism, he and his group seceded from the movement altogether and established the New Zionist Organization, which elected him as its president. Jabotinsky strongly opposed the partition of Palestine. Growing militancy led him to take over the leadership of the dissident military organization, the Irgun. He died in America in 1940 on a mission to organize Jewish participation in the Allied war effort. Jabotinsky was an exceptionally talented and versatile man, an original thinker and ideologue, and a powerful political leader. His followers worshiped him, while his enemies detested him with equal passion.

Although the Revisionist movement was dominated to a large extent by Jabotinsky and his ideas, it was not a one-man show. It gained significant grassroots support in the 1920s, during a period of crisis in the history of Zionism. The Balfour Declaration had inspired great hopes that Zionism would be speedily fulfilled with the help of Great Britain, but Britain's postwar policy produced a mood of disappointment and disillusion in the Yishuv. Jabotinsky tapped into this mood to build his movement and to articulate the ideology of Revisionist Zionism.

One of the paradoxes of this phase in Zionist history is that there was no fundamental difference between Jabotinsky and Weizmann regarding the role of Great Britain. Both men, in different ways, were disciples of Theodor Herzl in that they both assumed that the support and protection of a great power were absolutely indispensable in the struggle for statehood. Jabotinsky's strong pro-Western orientation stemmed from his distinctive worldview. He rejected the romantic view of the East and believed in the cultural superiority of Western civilization. "We Jews have nothing in common with what is denoted 'the East' and we thank God for that," he declared. The East, in his view, represented psychological passivity, social and cultural stagnation, and political despotism. Although the Jews originated in the East, they belonged to the West culturally, morally, and spiritually. Zionism was conceived by Jabotinsky not as the return of the Jews to their spiritual homeland but as an offshoot or implant of Western civilization in the East. This worldview translated into a geostrategic conception in which Zionism was to be permanently allied with European colonialism against all the Arabs in the eastern Mediterranean.

The root cause of Jabotinsky's dispute with the official Zionist leadership was his conception of the Jewish state. He laid down two principles that formed the core of the Revisionist Zionist ideology and its political program. The first was the territorial integrity of Eretz Israel, the Land of Israel, over both banks of the river Jordan within the original borders of the Palestine mandate. The second was the immediate declaration of the Jewish right to political sovereignty over the whole of this area.

This maximalist definition of the aims of Zionism once again raised a question: Did the Arabs of Palestine constitute a distinct national entity and, if so, what should be the Zionist attitude toward them and what should be their status within the projected Jewish state? Jabotinsky's answer is contained in two highly important articles he published in 1923 under the heading "The Iron Wall." They gave the essence of Revisionist theory on the Arab question and provided its fighting slogan. The first article is entitled "On the Iron Wall (We and the Arabs)." It begins on a personal note in which Jabotinsky engagingly described his emotional attitude to the Arabs as one of "polite indifference." But he went on to reject, as totally unacceptable, any thought of removing the Arabs from Palestine. The real question, he said, switching to a philosophical mode, was whether one could always achieve peace-

ful aims by peaceful means. The answer to this question, he insisted, depended without a doubt on the attitude of the Arabs toward Zionism, not on Zionism's attitude toward them.

Jabotinsky's analysis of the Arabs' attitude led him to state categorically, "A voluntary agreement between us and the Arabs of Palestine is inconceivable now or in the foreseeable future." As most moderate Zionists had already found out, there was not the slightest chance of gaining the agreement of the Palestine Arabs to turn Palestine into a country with a Jewish majority. This was because they regarded their country as their national homeland and wanted to remain its sole owners. Jabotinsky turned sharply against those Zionists who portrayed the Palestine Arabs either as fools who could be easily deceived by a watered-down version of Zionist objectives or as a tribe of mercenaries ready to give up their right to a country in exchange for economic advantage: "Every indigeneous people," he wrote, "will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement. This is how the Arabs will behave and go on behaving so long as they possess a gleam of hope that they can prevent 'Palestine' from becoming the Land of Israel."

Having explained the logic of Palestinian hostility to Zionism, Jabotinsky turned to the policy implications. One option, he noted, was to offer the non-Palestinian Arabs money or a political alliance in return for their agreement to Jewish control of Palestine. This option was rejected for two reasons. First, it would do nothing to modify the implacable hostility of the Palestinian Arabs to Jewish colonization. Second, to pledge Jewish money and political support to the Arabs of the Middle East would be to betray the European colonial powers, especially Britain, and this would be a suicidal act. Jabotinsky therefore concluded,

We cannot promise any reward either to the Arabs of Palestine or to the Arabs outside Palestine. A voluntary agreement is unattainable. And so those who regard an accord with the Arabs as an indispensable condition of Zionism must admit to themselves today that this condition cannot be attained and hence that we must give up Zionism. We must either suspend our settlement efforts or continue them without paying attention to the mood of the natives. Settlement can thus develop under the protection of a force that is not dependent on the local population, behind an iron wall which they will be powerless to break down.

This, in a nutshell, was Jabotinsky's policy regarding the Arab question: to erect an iron wall of Jewish military force. On the need for an iron wall, he claimed, there was agreement among all Zionists. The only slight difference was that "the militarists" wanted an iron wall constructed with Jewish bayonets, whereas "the vegetarians" wanted it built with British bayonets. But they all wanted an iron wall. Constant repetition of Zionist willingness to negotiate with the Arabs was not only hypocritical but harmful, and Jabotinsky regarded it as his sacred duty to expose this hypocrisy.

Toward the end of the article Jabotinsky went to some length to dispel any impression his analysis might have given that he despaired of the prospect of reaching an agreement with the Arabs of Palestine:

I do not mean to assert that no agreement whatever is possible with the Arabs of the Land of Israel. But a voluntary agreement is just not possible. As long as the Arabs preserve a gleam of hope that they will succeed in getting rid of us, nothing in the world can cause them to relinquish this hope, precisely because they are not a rabble but a living people. And a living people will be ready to yield on such fateful issues only when they have given up all hope of getting rid of the alien settlers. Only then will extremist groups with their slogans "No, never" lose their influence, and only then will their influence be transferred to more moderate groups. And only then will the moderates offer suggestions for compromise. Then only will they begin bargaining with us on practical matters, such as guarantees against pushing them out, and equality of civil and national rights.

The article concluded with a profession of faith that peaceful co-existence between Arabs and Jews in Palestine would be possible, but only as a result of the construction of an impregnable wall:

It is my hope and belief that we will then offer them guarantees that will satisfy them and that both peoples will live in peace as good neighbors. But the sole way to such an agreement is through the iron wall, that is to say, the establishment in Palestine of a force that will in no way be influenced by Arab pressure. In other words, the only way to achieve a settlement in the future is total avoidance of all attempts to arrive at a settlement in the present.⁶

Moderate Zionists criticized the article, especially on the grounds that it was written from an immoral standpoint. Jabotinsky therefore wrote a second article, entitled "The Morality of the Iron Wall," in which he turned the tables on his critics. From the point of view of morality, he held, there were two possibilities: either Zionism was a positive phenomenon, or it was negative. This question required an answer before one became a Zionist. And all of them had indeed concluded that Zionism was a positive force, a moral movement with justice on its side. Now, "if the cause is just, justice must triumph, without regard to the assent or dissent of anyone else."

A frequent argument against Zionism was that it violated the democratic right of the Arab majority to national self-determination in Palestine. Jabotinsky responded that the Jews had a moral right to return to Palestine and that the enlightened world had acknowledged this right. He then turned to the argument that the method of the iron wall was immoral because it tried to settle Jews in Palestine without the consent of its inhabitants. He pointed out that since no native population anywhere in the world would willingly accept an alien majority, the logical conclusion would be to renounce altogether the idea of a Jewish national home. Even to dream of a national home would then become immoral. The article concluded with an assertion of the morality of the iron wall: "A sacred truth, whose realization requires the use of force, does not cease thereby to be a sacred truth. This is the basis of our stand toward Arab resistance; and we shall talk of a settlement only when they are ready to discuss it."⁷

Although "On the Iron Wall" became the bible of Revisionist Zionism, its real message was often misunderstood, not least by Jabotinsky's own followers. For him the iron wall was not an end in itself but a means to the end of breaking Arab resistance to the onward march of Zionism. Once Arab resistance had been broken, a process of change would occur inside the Palestinian national movement, with the moderates coming to the fore. Then and only then would it be time to start serious negotiations. In these negotiations the Jewish side should offer the Palestinians civil and national rights. Jabotinsky did not spell out in this article what precisely he meant by "national rights," but other pronouncements suggest that what he had in mind was political autonomy for the Palestinians within a Jewish state. What does emerge from the article is that he recognized that the Palestine Arabs formed a distinct national entity and that he accordingly considered them en-

titled to some national rights, albeit limited ones, and not merely to individual rights.

In the realm of ideas Jabotinsky was important as the founder of Revisionist Zionism. In the realm of politics his impact was much greater than is commonly realized. For it was not only Revisionist Zionists who were influenced by his ideas but the Zionist movement as a whole. "On the Iron Wall," in the words of one perceptive observer, should be treated as "a forceful, honest effort to grapple with the most serious problem facing the Zionist movement and as a formal articulation of what did become, in fact, the dominant rationale for Zionist and Israeli policies and attitudes toward the Arabs of Palestine from the 1920s to the late 1980s."⁸

The Zionist movement was not a monolithic political movement but a collection of rival political parties, the largest being the Labor Party, which was inspired by Marxist ideas and socialist ideals. One fundamental difference between Labor Zionism and Revisionist Zionism related to the use of force. Labor Zionists were reluctant to admit that military force would be necessary if the Zionist movement was to achieve its objectives. Jabotinsky faced up to this fact fairly and squarely. He went further in suggesting a reversal of the Zionist order of priorities. Labor Zionists wanted to proceed toward statehood by immigration and settlement and accorded a lower priority to the building up of a military capability. Jabotinsky never wavered in his conviction that Jewish military power was the key factor in the struggle for a state. It was the Labor Zionists who gradually came around to his point of view without openly admitting it. So in the final analysis the gap was not all that great: Labor leaders, too, came to rely increasingly on the strategy of the iron wall.

DAVID BEN-GURION AND THE TRIUMPH OF PRAGMATISM

Labor Zionism's shift toward the premises and strategy of the iron wall is best illustrated by the career of David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), the builder of Yishuv's military power and the founder of the State of Israel. Born as David Green in Plonsk, Poland, he developed at an early age a passionate commitment to socialism and Zionism and in 1906 left for Palestine to work as a farmhand. He was initially active in the socialist Zionist Po'ale

Zion party, which joined with other groups to form Ahduth Ha'avodah in 1919 and merged with Hapoel Hatza'ir in 1930 to form Mapai, the Israeli Labor Party. He quickly rose to positions of political prominence in the trade union movement, the Labor Party, and the Zionist movement. From 1921 to 1935 he served as the secretary-general of the Histadrut, the General Federation of Labor in Palestine. In 1935 he was elected chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive and held this post until the State of Israel was born in 1948. From 1948 until his retirement in 1963, except for one short interval, he served as Israel's prime minister and minister of defense.

Throughout his long political career Ben-Gurion was involved deeply and continually in the Arab question. He often spoke out on the subject and published countless articles and books. Sifting through this material, however, is a largely futile exercise because a wide gulf separated his public utterances on the Arab question from his private convictions and because he was, above all, a pragmatic politician. Ben-Gurion's public pronouncements in the 1920s and early 1930s tended to conform to the labor movement's official position, which held that the Arabs of Palestine did not constitute a separate national entity but were part of the Arab nation and that, moreover, there was no inherent conflict between the interests of the Arabs of Palestine and the interests of the Zionists. Zionism's only conflict, so the socialist argument ran, was a class conflict with the Arab landowners and effendis, and this conflict would be resolved when the Arab peasants realized that their true interests coincided with those of the Jewish working class.

Privately Ben-Gurion did not share this class analysis or its optimistic forecast. What distinguished his approach to the Arab problem was unflinching realism. Already as an agricultural laborer he recognized the problem's acuteness. His fears and anxieties deepened when he realized that Arab opposition was grounded in principle and that it amounted to an utter rejection of the entire Zionist enterprise. Thus, at a very early stage in his career, Ben-Gurion came to the conclusion that the conflict between Zionism and the Arabs was inescapable and that it presented a formidable challenge.

Ben-Gurion's appreciation of the strength of Arab opposition led him to seek the support of an external power in order to compensate for the weakness of the Zionist movement. His orientation on a great power was practical rather than ideological. In the

course of his career he advocated an Ottoman, a British, and an American orientation. Changes in orientation were dictated by the rise and fall in the influence of these great powers. When Britain supplanted the Ottoman Empire as the dominant power in Palestine, he followed Chaim Weizmann in advocating an alliance with Britain. Indeed, for Ben-Gurion an alliance with Britain was an indispensable condition for the success of Zionism. He regarded cooperation with Britain as more important than cooperation with the Arabs. Many of the proposals he made to the Arabs were made not out of real conviction but in order to please the British. The British wanted a Jewish-Arab understanding, so Ben-Gurion wanted to be seen to be working toward this end even when his proposals had no chance of being accepted by the Arabs. An anti-imperialist alliance with the Arabs was completely out of the question as far as he was concerned, although socialist ideology pointed in that direction.

The Arab Revolt, which broke out in April 1936, marked a turning point in the evolution of Ben-Gurion's attitude toward the Arab problem. For the first time he acknowledged openly the national character of the Arab opposition to Zionism. There is a great conflict, he told the Jewish Agency Executive on 19 May 1936. "We and they want the same thing: We both want Palestine. And that is the fundamental conflict."⁹ Because ideologically less hidebound than his colleagues, he was willing to admit that in political terms they were the aggressors while the Arabs were defending themselves. But recognizing the deep-rooted character of the Arab Revolt did not incline him toward negotiation and compromise. On the contrary, it made him conclude that only war, not diplomacy, would resolve the conflict.

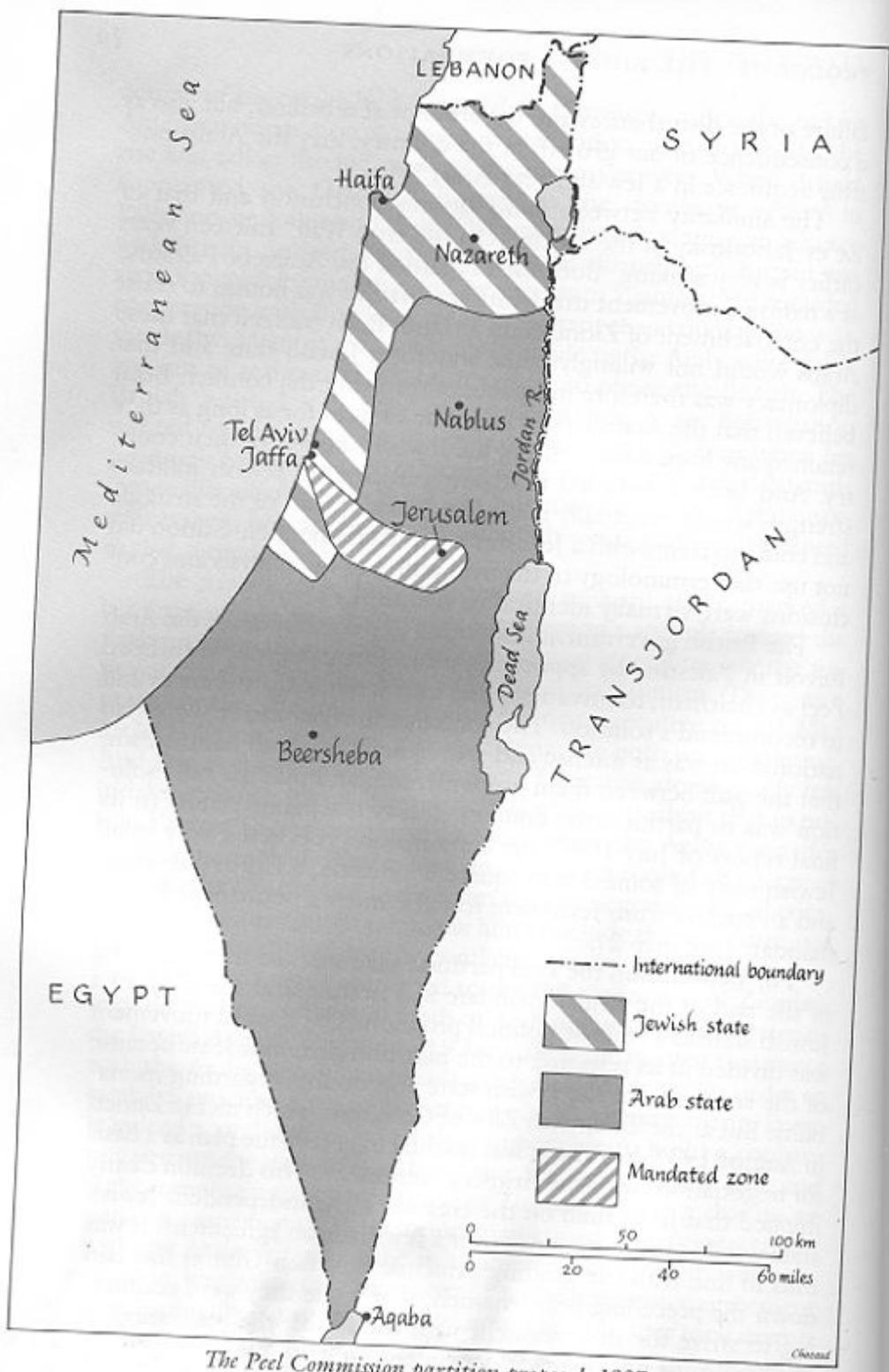
Ben-Gurion was committed to the full realization of Zionism regardless of the scale and depth of Arab opposition. In a letter to the Jewish Agency Executive of 9 June 1936, he insisted that peace with the Arabs was only a means to an end: "It is not in order to establish peace in the country that we need an agreement. Peace is indeed a vital matter for us. It is impossible to build a country in a permanent state of war, but peace for us is a means. The end is the complete and full realization of Zionism. Only for that do we need an agreement." Ben-Gurion maintained that an agreement with the Arabs regarding the final objective of Zionism was conceivable, but only in the long term: "A comprehensive agreement is undoubtedly out of the question now. For only after total despair on the part of the Arabs, despair that will come not only from the

failure of the disturbances and the attempt at rebellion, but also as a consequence of our growth in the country, may the Arabs possibly acquiesce in a Jewish Eretz Israel."¹⁰

The similarity between Ben-Gurion's conclusion and that of Ze'ev Jabotinsky in the article "On the Iron Wall" thirteen years earlier is very striking. Both men regarded the Arabs of Palestine as a national movement that by its very nature was bound to resist the encroachment of Zionism on its land. Both realized that these Arabs would not willingly make way for a Jewish state and that diplomacy was therefore incapable of resolving the conflict. Both believed that the Arabs would continue to fight for as long as they retained any hope of preventing the Jewish takeover of their country. And both concluded that only insuperable Jewish military strength would eventually make the Arabs despair of the struggle and come to terms with a Jewish state in Palestine. Ben-Gurion did not use the terminology of the iron wall, but his analysis and conclusions were virtually identical to Jabotinsky's.

The British government responded to the outbreak of the Arab Revolt in Palestine by appointing a royal commission, with Lord Peel as chairman, to investigate the causes of the disturbances and to recommend a solution. The commission concluded that Jewish nationalism was as intense and self-centered as Arab nationalism, that the gulf between them was widening, and that the only solution was to partition the country into two separate states. In its final report of July 1937, the commission proposed a very small Jewish state of some 5,000 square kilometers, a large Arab state, and an enclave from Jerusalem to Jaffa under a permanent British mandate (see map 2).

For Ben-Gurion the Peel partition plan marked the beginning of the end of the British mandate in Palestine and the birth of a Jewish state as a realistic political program. The Zionist movement was divided in its response to the partition plan, not least because of the small size of the Jewish state and doubts regarding its viability. But at the Twentieth Zionist Congress, which met in Zurich in August 1937, a decision was reached to accept the plan as a basis for negotiations with the British government. This decision clearly implied that from then on the creation of an independent Jewish state would take precedence over a Jewish-Arab agreement. It was thus in line with the guiding principle that Ben-Gurion had laid down the preceding year—namely, that while they were continuing to strive for an agreement with the Arabs, the realization of Zionism must not be made dependent on it.



The Peel Commission partition proposal, 1937

Chesed

The leaders of the pro-partition camp were Chaim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion, and Moshe Shertok, the head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, who was to change his name to Sharett and become the first foreign minister of the State of Israel. Their main argument in favor of partition was that establishing an independent Jewish state even in a small part of Palestine was a more promising avenue for the realization of Zionism than any of the alternatives. Weizmann held that the Jews would be fools not to accept the Peel plan even if the Jewish state was the size of a tablecloth. But whereas Weizmann accepted partition as part of a continuing pro-British orientation, Ben-Gurion lost faith in Britain and valued the Peel plan for the opportunity it offered to build up the independent power of the Jewish community in Palestine.

Although Ben-Gurion accepted partition, he did not view the borders of the Peel commission plan as permanent. He saw no contradiction between accepting a Jewish state in part of Palestine and hoping to expand the borders of this state to the whole Land of Israel. The difference between him and the Revisionists was not that he was a territorial minimalist while they were territorial maximalists but rather that he pursued a gradualist strategy while they adhered to an all-or-nothing approach.

The nature and extent of Ben-Gurion's territorial expansionism were revealed with startling frankness in a letter he sent to his son Amos from London on 5 October 1937. There Ben-Gurion professed himself to be an enthusiastic advocate of a Jewish state, even if it involved the partitioning of Palestine, because he worked on the assumption that this state would be not the end but only the beginning. A state would enable the Jews to have unlimited immigration, to build a Jewish economy, and to organize a first-class army. "I am certain," he wrote, "we will be able to settle in all the other parts of the country, whether through agreement and mutual understanding with our Arab neighbours or in another way." Both his mind and his heart told Ben-Gurion, "Erect a Jewish State at once, even if it is not in the whole land. The rest will come in the course of time. It must come."¹¹

The majority of Zionists followed Ben-Gurion in opting for partition and a Jewish state. At the Twentieth Zionist Congress, in Zurich, the arguments for and against partition were examined exhaustively. It was the first major public debate on partition and also the most serious and searching one in the history of Zionism. With so much at stake, both camps presented their case with great passion and conviction. The naysayers advanced three main argu-

ments: the Promised Land of the forefathers and the Bible must not be compromised; the Yishuv was not yet ready to stand on its own feet; and Britain must be held firmly to its commitments under the Balfour Declaration and the mandate. Two hundred and ninety-nine delegates voted in favor of Ben-Gurion's proposal, 160 voted against, and 6 abstained. The debate thus ended with a strategic decision to support partition and the creation of a Jewish state in part of Palestine. At the end of the congress, Ben-Gurion presented himself for reelection as chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive for the specific purpose of working toward the establishment of a Jewish state. He was to devote the next ten years of his life to a single-minded pursuit of this goal.

THE STRUGGLE FOR STATEHOOD

The struggle for statehood was accompanied by many disagreements, but these were more about tactics than about the long-term goal. Ben-Gurion's own commitment to statehood did not waver in the face of Arab opposition or British prevarications. Having taken the initiative in proposing partition in 1937, the British government began to retreat from partition with the approach of World War II. The support of the Arab states and the Muslim world generally was much more crucial for Britain in the conflict with the Axis powers than the support of the Jews. A white paper of 17 May 1939 abruptly reversed British support for Zionism and for a Jewish state. It condemned the Jews to a status of permanent minority in a future independent Palestinian state. So the Zionist movement was driven to develop its own military power, through the paramilitary organization called the Haganah (which in Hebrew means defense), in order to combat Arab resistance. Having subscribed to a defensive ethos that had served it so well on the public relations front, it adopted a policy based on force in order to counter the use and the threat of force by its Arab opponents. The offensive ethos that had always been embedded in the defensive ethos had in any case become more prominent following the outbreak of the Arab Revolt.

At the same time the Yishuv mounted its own active resistance to the policy of the white paper that restricted Jewish land purchase and Jewish immigration to Palestine. The outbreak of World War II in September 1939 placed the Yishuv in an acute dilemma:

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it was behind Britain in the struggle against Nazi Germany but at loggerheads with Britain in the struggle for Palestine. A way out of the dilemma was found, however, succinctly summed up in Ben-Gurion's slogan: "We will fight with the British against Hitler as if there were no white paper; we will fight the white paper as if there were no war."

During the war Ben-Gurion became ever more assertive about the Jewish right to political sovereignty, while denying this right to the Arab majority in Palestine. His solution to the Yishuv's demographic problem involved the migration to Palestine of two to three million Jews immediately following the end of the war. The Arab problem, he claimed, paled in significance compared with the Jewish problem because the Arabs had vast spaces outside Palestine, whereas for the Jews, who were being persecuted in Europe, Palestine constituted the only possible haven. He thus came to treat the Arab problem as merely one of status for the Arab minority within a state with a large Jewish majority.

The new concept of a Jewish state over the whole of Palestine found expression in the so-called Biltmore Program. At an extraordinary meeting of the American Zionists, attended by both Weizmann and Ben-Gurion, in the Biltmore Hotel in New York in May 1942, a resolution was adopted urging "that Palestine be constituted as a Jewish Commonwealth integrated in the structure of the new democratic world" after World War II. With this resolution the Zionist movement for the first time openly staked a claim to the whole of mandatory Palestine. The goal of a Jewish-Arab agreement was not abandoned, but it was now clearly expected to follow rather than to precede the establishment of a Jewish state or commonwealth.

The Biltmore Program was adopted before the full scale and the horror of the Nazi campaign for the extermination of European Jewry became known. Zionist leaders assumed that at the end of the war there would be millions of Jewish refugees in Europe whose plight would strengthen the case for a large Jewish state in Palestine. None of them foresaw the Holocaust, the most calamitous event in the annals of Jewish history, in which six million Jews would perish. In the end, however, the tragedy of European Jewry became a source of strength for Zionism. The moral case for a home for the Jewish people in Palestine was widely accepted from the beginning; after the Holocaust it became unassailable. The poet Robert Frost defined a home as the place where,

if you have to go there, they have to let you in. Few people disputed the right of the Jews to a home after the trauma to which they had been subjected in Central Europe.

A much tougher kind of Zionism was forged in the course of World War II, and the commitment to Jewish statehood became deeper and more desperate in the shadow of the Holocaust. On the one hand, the Holocaust confirmed the conviction of the Zionists that they had justice on their side in the struggle for Palestine; on the other, it converted international public opinion to the idea of an independent Jewish state.

Ben-Gurion embodied the "fighting Zionism" that rose out of the ashes of World War II, and he wrested the leadership from the hands of Weizmann, who still adhered to "diplomatic Zionism" and to the alliance with Britain. Against Weizmann's advice the Zionist conference of August 1945 decided on a policy of active opposition to British rule, and in October an armed uprising was launched. The Haganah was instructed to cooperate with the dissident groups spawned by the Revisionist movement. The main group was the National Military Organization (the Irgun), which began to direct its operations against the British administration in Palestine after the publication of the white paper in 1939. Later that year, when the Irgun called off its campaign against the British, a split took place. The more militant wing, led by Avraham Stern, seceded from the Irgun to form *Lohamei Herut Yisrael* (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel), better known as *Lehi*, after its Hebrew acronym, or the Stern Gang. The Stern Gang was so hostile to the British that it sought contact with the Axis powers in order to drive the British out of Palestine. Although its members never exceeded three hundred, the Stern Gang was a considerable thorn in the flesh of the British. Between November 1945 and July 1946, the three underground organizations joined arms in what became known as "the movement of the Hebrew revolt."

A massive British military crackdown forced the Zionist leaders to call off the Hebrew revolt, and they instead tried to drive a wedge between Britain and the United States on the diplomatic front. Britain sought American support for its plan for self-governing Jewish and Arab cantons, a plan categorically rejected by the Zionists. To get America on their side, members of the Jewish Agency Executive decided in August 1946 to agree to consider the establishment of a Jewish state on an adequate part of Palestine. This decision signified the abandonment of the Biltmore Program and a return to the principle of partition. The decision was viewed

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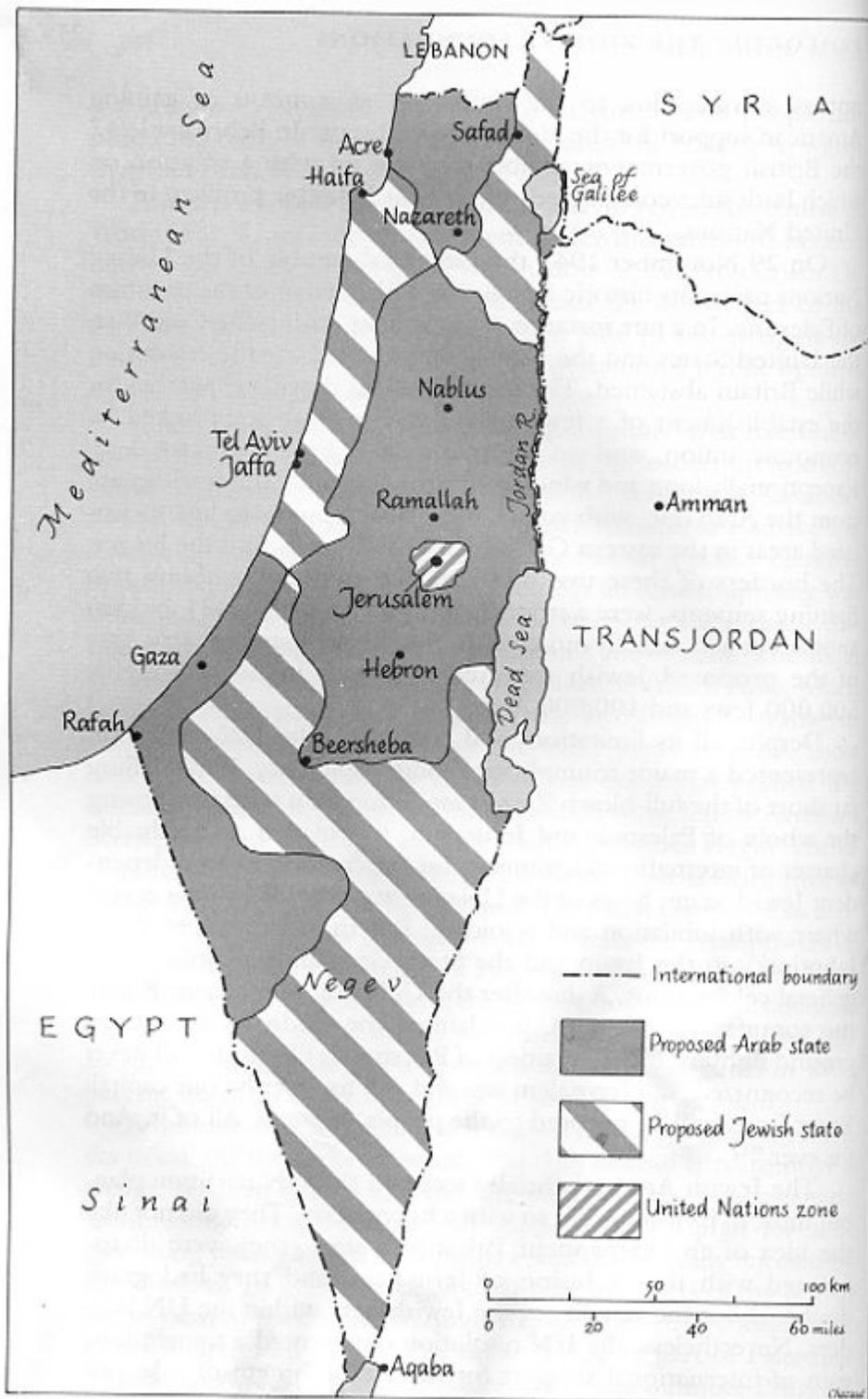
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not as a concession to the Arabs but as a means of gaining American support for the idea of a Jewish state. In February 1947 the British government, unable to come up with a solution on which both sides could agree, referred the Palestine problem to the United Nations.

On 29 November 1947 the General Assembly of the United Nations passed its historic Resolution 181 in favor of the partition of Palestine. In a rare instance of agreement during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union voted for the resolution while Britain abstained. The resolution laid down a timetable for the establishment of a Jewish state and an Arab state linked by economic union, and an international regime for Jerusalem. Exceptionally long and winding borders separated the Jewish state from the Arab one, with vulnerable crossing points to link its isolated areas in the eastern Galilee, the coastal plain, and the Negev. The borders of these two oddly shaped states, resembling two fighting serpents, were a strategic nightmare (see map 3). No less anomalous and scarcely more viable was the demographic structure of the proposed Jewish state, consisting as it did of roughly 500,000 Jews and 400,000 Arabs.

Despite all its limitations and anomalies, the UN resolution represented a major triumph for Zionist diplomacy. While falling far short of the full-blown Zionist aspiration for a state comprising the whole of Palestine and Jerusalem, it provided an invaluable charter of international legitimacy for the creation of an independent Jewish state. News of the UN vote was greeted by Jews everywhere with jubilation and rejoicing. But the followers of Ze'ev Jabotinsky in the Irgun and the Stern Gang did not join in the general celebrations. A day after the UN vote, Menachem Begin, the commander of Irgun, proclaimed the credo of the underground fighters: "The partition of Palestine is illegal. It will never be recognized. . . . Jerusalem was and will for ever be our capital. Eretz Israel will be restored to the people of Israel. All of it. And for ever."¹²

The Jewish Agency officially accepted the UN partition plan, but most of its leaders did so with a heavy heart. They did not like the idea of an independent Palestinian state, they were disappointed with the exclusion of Jerusalem, and they had grave doubts about the viability of the Jewish state within the UN borders. Nevertheless, the UN resolution represented a tremendous gain of international support for the establishment of a Jewish state—hence their decision to go along with it.



The United Nations partition plan, 1947

The Palestine Arabs, who unlike the Jews had done very little to prepare themselves for statehood, rejected the UN partition plan out of hand. The Arab Higher Committee, which represented them, denounced the plan as "absurd, impracticable, and unjust." The Arab states, loosely organized since 1945 in the Arab League, also claimed that the UN plan was illegal and threatened to resist its implementation by force. On 1 December the Arab Higher Committee proclaimed a three-day strike, which was accompanied by violent attacks on Jewish civilians. The UN vote in favor of partition thus provided not just international legitimacy for creating Jewish and Arab states but, unintentionally, the signal for a savage war between the two communities in Palestine.

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