

movement, significant intellectual and historical shifts have colluded to prevent its re-emergence. Firstly, bi-nationalism was a product of the same intellectual environments that produced 19th- and 20th-century European nationalisms themselves, which asserted that the world was divided into distinct peoples defined by shared language and territory. Its principle of duality sought to acknowledge the reality of two peoples in Palestine while eliminating the standard nation-state's numerical determination of power according to majority and minority. However, after 1948 and 1967, as favor for a single-state solution migrated from being the living motivating force of a small Zionist far-left to being the polemical watchword of a non-Zionist and anti-Zionist far left, it also assumed the usual characteristics of a non-nationalist liberalism. This is the background behind the early-'90s post-Zionist call for Israel to be a "state of all its citizens." This has produced a strange polemical situation in which two sides

each perceive the other as atavistic: The post-Zionists see the entire Zionist spectrum, from parties such as Yahad to Yisrael Beiteinu, as imprisoned by an obsolete 19th-century nationalist vision, while Zionist ideology continues to regard assimilationist liberalism as precisely the outdated worldview that Zionism originally emerged to correct. Meanwhile, the original religious underpinnings of the bi-nationalist idea have been phased out and replaced with a thoroughgoing secular framework. This may have contributed to the current reputation of the single-state solution as the solution nobody wants. If there is to be a renewed "bi-nationalism," in the sense of an approach to living together based on the reality of two peoples sharing the land, it will likely be forced to draw on the resources of Judaism and Islam. Here too, both skeptics and adherents to conventional wisdom should be asked to defend the record of their own purportedly sober and realistic approaches to conflict resolution.



## Israel's War of Liberation, 1944-1948

YISRAEL MEDAD

**T**he founding myth of the Herut movement, which in 1973 evolved into the Likud and, with a plurality of Knesset seats in 1977, facilitated Menachem Begin's ascendancy to the position of Prime Minister of Israel, was that in its pre-state form — as the Irgun underground — it had expelled the British from Mandate Palestine. This claim was derided by the hegemonic socialist Zionist factions that dominated Israel's political scene until 1967. They treated the Irgun and the Lehi (another militant Zionist group) derisively as "dissidents." For decades, Israel's schoolchildren never read that in early 1944 an armed revolt was declared against the mandatory regime, ultimately, over the course of four years, forcing the British to leave. Oddly enough, it was the British government, in a white paper published on May 15, 1948, that had recorded the circumstances that forced it to decide to bring to an end its mandate and to prepare for the withdrawal from Palestine of all British forces. In this official version, we read that:

*...84,000 troops, who received no cooperation from the Jewish community, had proved insufficient to maintain law and order in the face of a campaign of terrorism waged by highly organized Jewish forces equipped with all the weapons of the modern infantryman. Since the*

*war, 338 British subjects had been killed in Palestine, while the military forces there had cost the British taxpayer 100 million pounds. The renewal of Arab violence on the announcement of the United Nations decision to partition Palestine and the declared intentions of Jewish extremists showed that the loss of further British lives was inevitable...[The] continued presence there of British troops and officials could no longer be justified. As the British admitted, they were forced to surrender their mandate because of what Winston Churchill referred to in early 1947 as a "squalid, senseless war."*

What was obvious to England's Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin in 1946-48 was consistently denied for decades after Israel's establishment: Without the armed underground resistance against the British regime in the Land of Israel, initiated and led by the Irgun and Lehi and, during November 1945 to July 1946, joined by the Haganah (another paramilitary group that later became the Israel Defense Forces) and the Palmach (the Haganah's elite strike force), the State of Israel could not have been established at that time. Moreover, if the establishment of the Zionist state had been predicated solely on the creation of more kibbutzim and the bringing in of ships with "illegal" immigrants from Europe — even

Yisrael Medad is the director of information resources at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem and co-editor, with Harry Hurwitz, of *Peace in the Making: The Menachem Begin-Anwar Sadat Personal Correspondence*.


with all of Chaim Weizmann's diplomacy and Ben-Gurion's bluster — delays might have resulted in losing the window of opportunity, and Israel might not have come to be.

Already in 1944, as the recent research of Dr. Meir Zamir, professor of Middle Eastern studies at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev has revealed, Britain was promising Syria that they would not support an independent Jewish state; rather, Britain would support the unification of Transjordan, Lebanon, and Syria into a "Greater Syria." France was furious when it found out about this treachery. Two things happened: First, in a meeting held on October 6, 1945, with Marc Jarblum, head of the Zionist organization in France, Charles de Gaulle stated that "the Jews in Palestine are the only ones who can chase the British out of the Middle East." Second, France provided guns, ammunition, and other military supplies bound for Palestine. The weaponry was sent on the Altalena, the Irgun arms ship, which was shelled on Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's order on June 22, 1948 off Tel Aviv's beach.

Zamir's work demonstrates that Menachem Begin's declaration of a revolt in February 1944, even without knowing exactly what Britain's post-war policies and machinations were intended to be, proved, with hindsight, the better strategy. Had Ben-Gurion united the Haganah and Palmach with the Irgun and Lehi in 1944, rather than forming the United Resistance Movement only in November 1945 (after the

French informed him of the British intentions), the entire political situation might have been different. Even despite his ignorance of the British betrayal, Begin possessed the better vision.

To be clear, the Irgun was not the sole player in the drama of Britain's last years in Palestine. Begin, along with the Lehi, never asserted exclusive responsibility for Britain's withdrawal. But their underground work — the explosion at the mandate secretariat's offices in the southern wing of the King David Hotel, the Acre Prison break, and the hanging of two sergeants in retaliation for the hanging of three Irgun fighters — served as catalysts, along with the ships from Europe, the establishment of kibbutzim, and the constructing of a pioneer society, for the creation of Israel in the political and diplomatic arena.

Thanks to recent research as well as to the Likud party's centrist position within the Israeli political spectrum, the years of 1946-1948 in Israel are now being understood in a new way. Before, the official view of Zionists and leading Jewish intellectuals was that the Irgun was "extremist" and "fascist," and that the dissidents practiced "terror." Even Albert Einstein weighed in, writing in April of 1948 that "...the Terrorist organizations build up from our own ranks. I am not willing to see anybody associated with those misled and criminal people." Now, however, these matters can be judged in a more reasoned manner that justifies the armed resistance of the Irgun and the Lehi as a war for liberation from foreign rule. 

## History and Mythmaking: A Response

DAN HELLER

In his essay, Yisrael Medad takes to task Labor-Zionist leaders who dominated the early decades of Israeli politics for actively suppressing the Israeli public's memory of the Irgun and Lehi's role in the military struggle for the creation of the Jewish state. The battle over the place of these groups in the national memory of Israel was just one front in a larger war waged since the mid-1920s between Labor Zionists, who were at the helm of the Haganah, and the Revisionist Zionist movement — from which Lehi and the Irgun emerged — over the ideologies and tactics that would bring about a Jewish state in Palestine. Although their disagreements were many — Revisionists, for example, vehemently rejected the socialism of Labor Zionists, who in turn claimed that the Revisionist movement's economic policies and authoritarian style were fas-

cist — it was their debates between the First and Second World War about the efficacy of armed conflict for creating a Jewish state that proved the most incendiary. During the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, Labor Zionist leaders promoted a policy of *havlaga* (restraint) against Arab attacks, while members of the Irgun launched reprisals that targeted Arab civilians.

Between 1944 and 1948, relations between the Haganah, the Irgun, and Lehi changed both frequently and dramatically. In 1944, when the Irgun declared an armed revolt against the British, the Haganah, which had relied on the British army for much of its training and ammunition, confiscated the weapons of Irgun members, interrogated them, and turned several of them over to the British police. With the end of the Second World War, however, the

Dan Heller is a doctoral candidate in Stanford University's history department. He is currently writing a dissertation on the history of the Betar youth movement in Poland.