

## SELECTED DOCUMENTS ON THE 1948 PALESTINE WAR

SELECTED AND ANNOTATED BY WALID KHALIDI

The 1948 Palestine War, whose fiftieth anniversary occurs this year, fell into two major phases: the first, the civil war phase, began soon after the United National General Assembly (UNGA) partition resolution of 29 November 1947 and lasted until 15 May 1948, the formal end of the British Mandate. The second, the regular war phase, lasted from 15 May (when the State of Israel was also declared) until the various Arab-Israeli armistice agreements were concluded in 1948-49. Most Western literature on the Palestine War deals with the second phase, while the predominant single image of the war in the Western mind is that of a tiny, poorly armed and pacific Israel attacked in its cradle and without provocation by the overwhelming force of the regular armies of the neighboring Arab states.

In fact, of the two phases, the first was the more climacteric and decisive. It was during this phase that the vastly larger forces at the disposal of the Jewish Agency, infinitely better armed, organized, and led than anything the Palestinians possessed, launched their long-prepared and contemplated major offensive under Plan Dalet. The timing of the offensive (the first week of April 1948) took advantage of the already advanced stage of disintegration of British rule, although Britain was to remain the sovereign power in the land until 15 May. The objective of Plan Dalet was the establishment by force of arms of the Jewish state in the Jewish and Palestinian lands assigned to it by the UNGA partition recommendation and the conquest of as much additional territory (particularly Jerusalem) as possible.

Strikingly unavailable to the Western reader has been contemporaneous material reflecting Palestinian or Arab conditions and perspectives during this first phase of the 1948 Palestine war. The following nine documents pertain to the last days of the Mandate from the end of March onward. They have been chosen for their intrinsic worth and because they reflect widely differing perspectives. Except for the second document, which has already appeared in print in Arabic, the others have not to the best of my knowledge appeared before in extenso in either English or Arabic.

Read in sequence with my introductory notes and footnotes, they afford insights into several key aspects of the first phase of the 1948 war: the asymmetry in the balance of power between the two sides, contemporaneous Arab perspectives of this balance of power, the ignominious behavior of the British authorities, the disarray in Palestinian and Arab military organization (but also the dedication and courage of the Palestinian guerrillas), the military strategy and tactics of the Haganah and the "dissident" Irgun, the cause of the Palestinian exodus, the death

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throes of the Palestinian communities of Jaffa and Haifa, the true attitude of the Jewish authorities to the exodus from the latter city, the methods by which the Jewish authorities implemented the UNGA partition resolution, and the circumstances that inevitably led to the intervention of the regular Arab armies after 15 May 1948.

The documents selected are as follows:

***The Military Situation in Palestine on the Eve of Plan Dalet***

“A Brief Report on the Situation in Palestine and Comparison Between the Forces and Potential of Both Sides,” by General Ismail Safwat, General Officer Commanding, Arab League Military Committee, Damascus, to Jamil Mardam Bey, Prime Minister of Syria and Chairman of the Palestine Committee of the Arab League, 23 March 1948 ..... 62

***The Fall of Qastel and the Death of ‘Abd al-Qadir***

An Eyewitness Account by Bahjat Abu Gharbiyya Extracted from *The Memoirs of a Freedom Fighter, 1916-49*, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, 1993 (in Arabic) ..... 72

***The Fall of Haifa***

Arab National Committee of Haifa, Letter to General Stockwell, Military Commander, North Sector, Haifa, Concerning His Statement of Withdrawal, 22 April 1948 ..... 90

Arab National Committee of Haifa, Aide-Memoire of the Meeting Between General Stockwell and the Arab Representatives, 22 April 1948 ..... 92

The Haganah Command, Terms for a Truce Between Jews and Arabs in Haifa, 22 April 1948 ..... 93

The Arab National Committee of Haifa, Letter to General Stockwell Summarizing His Position at the 22 April Town Hall Meetings, 23 April 1948 ..... 95

Arab National Committee of Haifa, Letter to Haifa Mayor Shabatai Levy, 23 April 1948 ..... 97

Arab National Committee of Haifa, Letter to General Stockwell, 25 April 1948 ..... 98

***The Fall of Jaffa***

Report to Fawzi Qawukji, Commander of the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) Central Front, from Captain Michel Issa, Head of the Ajnadin Battalion, 6 May 1948..... 99

## THE MILITARY SITUATION IN PALESTINE ON THE EVE OF PLAN DALET

"A BRIEF REPORT ON THE SITUATION IN PALESTINE AND COMPARISON BETWEEN THE FORCES AND POTENTIAL OF BOTH SIDES," BY GENERAL ISMAIL SAFWAT, GENERAL OFFICER COMMANDING, ARAB LEAGUE MILITARY COMMITTEE, DAMASCUS, TO JAMIL MARDAM BEY, PRIME MINISTER OF SYRIA AND CHAIRMAN OF THE PALESTINE COMMITTEE OF THE ARAB LEAGUE, 23 MARCH 1948.

*As the political situation in Palestine deteriorated following the UN Special Committee on Palestine's recommendation of partition on 3 September 1947, the Political Committee of the Arab League Council based in Cairo appointed a Technical Committee of military experts to report on the military situation in the country. In the wake of the UN partition vote on 29 November 1947, the Technical Committee was transformed into the "Military Committee" in overall charge of military matters in Palestine. Headquartered near Damascus, the committee had as its mandate to "ascertain the defense needs of Palestine" and coordinate Arab efforts within that framework. General Ismail Safwat, the former Iraqi chief of staff who had dominated the Technical Committee, was made its chairman.*

*Fighting between Jewish and Palestinian forces broke out in the wake of the partition vote. The Palestinians were loosely organized in an irregular force called Jihad Muqaddas (Holy War) under 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, a charismatic and highly popular guerrilla leader and nephew of Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the exiled leader of the Arab Higher Committee—the highest Palestinian political body. The Military Committee, while reflecting the Arab League's antipathy for Hajj Amin and by extension for the forces allied to him, at the same time was sincerely and deeply skeptical on principle of the efficacy of guerrilla action. Its position, repeatedly expressed in reports, memoranda, and oral presentations to the Arab League's highest bodies, was that only the regular Arab armies could counter the Zionist onslaught.*

*In his efforts to mobilize the Arab states, General Safwat wrote a series of escalating reports noting the growing Zionist military strength and Arab weakness and stressing with increasing urgency the need for a massive and coordinated Arab effort. His first report, dated 9 October 1947, recommended, among other things: the immediate recruitment, training, and arming of Arab volunteers; the deployment near Palestine's borders of regular Arab troops; the establishment of an overall general Arab command; and the allocation of money and the dispatch of arms in set quotas. The League countries balked at Safwat's recommendations. Money was sent to the Military Committee, but an overall general command was not set up and rifles and arms were supplied far below the quotas set out for each country.*

*But volunteers did begin to arrive in Damascus, numbering about 1,000 by the end of December 1947. Another Iraqi, General Taha Hashimi, a former prime minister then in exile in Syria, was appointed inspector general to supervise, in conjunction with the Military Committee, recruitment and mobilization. A training center was set up near Damascus, and the volunteers were organized*

into the "Arab Liberation Army" (ALA). ALA units began entering Palestine as of early January. By February, the total number of volunteers trained and organized by the Military Committee was about 5,000: 800 Palestinians, 3,000 Syrians, 300 Lebanese, 800 Iraqis, 50 Egyptians, and 34 Yugoslav Muslims.

The document reproduced below is Safwat's fourth report to the Arab League's Palestine Committee, formed shortly after the partition resolution to take overall charge of affairs relating to Palestine. The Palestine Committee comprised representatives of the League member states, mainly at the level of prime minister or foreign minister, and was chaired by Jamil Mardam Bey, prime minister and later defense minister of Syria. Throughout the report, distinction is made between "volunteers," meaning men recruited by the Military Committee and formed into ALA units, and "guerrillas," meaning members of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni's Jihad Muqaddas. The report was submitted on 23 March 1948 but not considered by the Arab League Council until 10 April. By that time, the Haganah's Plan Dalet had already been launched. The report was translated by Jenab Tutunji and Walid Khalidi.

[Stationery letterhead: General Command of the Palestine Forces]

To: His Excellency, Chairman of the Palestine Committee<sup>1</sup>

From: The General Command

Date: 23 March 1948

This report is to complete previous reports and verbal explanations presented to the Political Committee of the Arab League during the meetings ending 15 January 1947 and 2 February 1948.

## **I. Armed Forces**

### *A. Jewish Forces*

We have received no information to contradict our previous information that Jewish forces in Palestine number no less than 50,000 fighters, which is the combined strength of the Haganah, Stern, and Irgun. Half these forces were fully armed, equipped, and combat ready several months ago, while the other half was then in the process of being armed and equipped and was to be ready to join its units shortly. By now it is probable that this second half has completed its preparations, and we can safely assume that the entire force is now ready to take part in battle whenever the time comes.

It should be noted that the Haganah forces include the Palmach armored formation, estimated to have 5,000-6,000 combatants. This is a highly trained mobile formation which the Jews themselves consider an elite commando force.

The latest information indicates that in the last few days—i.e., after the recent fighting began—the Jews have organized local forces from among the colonists. Called "Local Defense Forces," these have been distributed among the colonies to

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1. Syrian prime minister Jamil Mardam Bey.

defend them against Arab attacks. Such forces are estimated to be about 20,000-strong, almost a third being young women.

### *B. Our Forces*

Our forces currently consist of the following:

1. Regular units (or, more accurately, semiregular units) consisting of volunteers from various Arab countries who have completed their training at the Qatana camp.<sup>2</sup>

2. Regular (or semiregular) units or contingents consisting of volunteers from specific areas, such as the Druze and Circassians, most of whom had previously served in regular armies.

3. Armed groups of Palestinian guerrillas [*mujahidin*] enlisted on a full-time basis and receiving regular pay.

The total of the units and contingents mentioned in paragraphs 1 and 2 above is about 5,200. Of these, some 4,000 have already entered Palestine, including contingents from Jabal Druze. Contingents from Majdal Shams al-Din<sup>3</sup> are about to



**ALA troops stationed in central Palestine, March 1948. (*Before Their Diaspora*, Institute for Palestine Studies)**

enter Palestine. The remaining units are still undergoing training and are in the process of formation. The plan is to form a reserve force out of these remaining units and to deploy them in the area of Tubas village in central Palestine.<sup>4</sup>

2. The Military Committee's training camp near Damascus.

3. A Druze village in Syria.

4. Tubas village is about 20 kilometers northeast of Nablus.

The total number of Palestinian guerrillas registered up to now is about 2,500. This raises the total of our combat forces to no more than 7,700 fighters, though we intend to increase the number of registered Palestinian guerrillas to 5,000–6,000 if the requisite arms and equipment become available.

It is clear from the above figures that there is no comparison between our forces and the Jewish forces, and that the difference between them is vast.

## ***II. Weapons***

### *A. Light Arms*

The Jews possess great quantities of light weapons such as rifles and machine guns as well as inexhaustible supplies of ammunition. All these are of good modern make, either British or American.

Our side possesses only a few thousand rifles of various makes—French, British, Canadian, German, and Austro-Hungarian. Most are antiquated and unfit for modern warfare. For some weapons, such as the Canadian and Austro-Hungarian rifles, no ammunition at all is available. Our machine guns, few in number, are not much better than our rifles in terms of compatibility and age and are totally unsuited to the requirements of modern military organization. As for ammunition, our supply is extremely limited whereas the battles and constant skirmishes require unlimited quantities. If we do not receive adequate stores of ammunition very soon, there is no doubt that the catastrophe of the total expenditure of our present supply will soon be upon us, rendering our rifles no better than walking sticks.

### *B. Mortars*

The Jews have large quantities of mortars and are using them in almost every battle, especially against our garrisons in Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem, and elsewhere.

We have only a very small number of mortars, no more than fourteen, which we took from the Syrian army and gave to some units. But the town garrisons do not possess a single mortar, although they are in dire need of such artillery to enable them to withstand the Jewish attacks that are intensifying by the day.

### *C. Light Field Artillery*

We do not know how many field guns the Jews have. It is not far-fetched to assume that they have sufficient quantities but have not yet used them, as so far there has been no great need for them and in order not to draw in British forces.

As for our forces, we possess eight old cannons of various makes with limited ammunition. These are quite inadequate and lacking in ancillary equipment and have been assigned to the Northern Command.<sup>5</sup> At present, we are unable to use them for fear of British intervention.

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5. The Military Committee divided Palestine into three zones. The Northern Front, under Adib Shishakli (later to become president of Syria) comprised the Galilee. The Central Front, under the Lebanese officer Fawzi Qawukji, included the rest of the country except the Negev (the Southern Front), theoretically under the Egyptians, and the Jerusalem area, which was under 'Abd al-Qadir Husayni's command.

#### *D. Armored Cars and Tanks*

The Jews have a large number—in the hundreds—of armored cars, some of British manufacture and others made in Palestine. They are using armored cars intensively in almost every battle, in patrols, in protective convoys and communications. They also have a not insignificant number of light tanks, mostly made in Palestine (tractors converted into tanks). They have made only light use of them so far, but our guerrillas saw them in action when the Jews attacked Faluja and destroyed a number of buildings.<sup>6</sup> The latest reports indicate that the Jews have 150 armored cars and 100 tanks in Tel Aviv alone.

As for us, we have neither armored cars nor tanks and not a single antitank or antiarmor weapon.

The ready availability of such weapons to the Jews and their total unavailability to our side have begun seriously to affect the activities of the volunteers and the guerrillas. This lack has particularly affected the morale of the civilians in our cities and villages, such that we are being deluged by appeals for help from everywhere.

#### *E. Aircraft*

That the Jews have aircraft has been established beyond a doubt. We do not know their precise number or their makes. What we do know is that they purchased twenty-one aircraft from the British army,<sup>7</sup> and it is not far-fetched to believe that they have others as well. Up until a short time ago, they were using these planes for communications and reconnaissance. Recently, however, they have fitted the planes with machine guns and are using them to attack the guerrillas from the air. Still, their use in combat remains very limited at present, a fact that we attribute to Jewish fear of British intervention.

### **III. Capabilities and Morale**

#### *A. Jewish Forces*

We have not yet been able to assess the Jewish forces' level of training and fighting capability, as our forces have not yet engaged them in wide-scale battle. However, it is clear beyond a doubt that several thousand fighters among the Jewish forces have served in European armies and the U.S. armed forces. Moreover, several years ago, the Jews began giving intensive military training to their young men. It would thus be foolhardy to underestimate their training and capabilities. Furthermore, they have demonstrated an excellent capability in demolition, which requires precision and technical expertise.

Concerning Jewish morale, events indicate so far that it is not high and that Arab morale is better in terms of courage and valor (except for a few Jewish ter-

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6. On 14 March 1948, Haganah armored cars attacked Faluja, a village in southern Palestine some 40 kilometers northeast of Gaza, killing thirty-seven villagers and demolishing a number of buildings, including the municipal building and post office.

7. These light Auster planes were purchased in early January 1948.

rorists whose convictions make them impervious to the fear of death in the pursuit of their objectives).<sup>8</sup>

#### *B. Our Forces*

The level of training among the volunteer units is less than middling, and their fighting capabilities are low due to the dearth of officers: some units and subunits are commanded either by retired officers or youths or noncommissioned officers. Furthermore, military discipline is very weak, as can be expected among units composed of volunteers who do not feel bound by rules and regulations and who are not subject to the punishment that would be normal in regular armies.

As to the guerrillas, whether full-time salaried fighters or those participating on an occasional basis out of a sense of patriotic duty or under the force of necessity or circumstance,<sup>9</sup> they have no military capability.

Nonetheless, morale in both the volunteer units and the guerrilla groups can be said to be good, seeing as the Arabs still tend to look down upon and depreciate the Jews. The Arab sense of patriotism also makes them courageous in battle. Otherwise they would not have been able to hold out against the deadly weapons of the Jews.

#### ***IV. Military Plants, Workshops, and Maintenance Facilities***

The Jews have many factories of various sorts where they manufacture armored cars, light tanks, small arms ammunition, mortars, and spare parts for all their weapons. They also have numerous fully equipped maintenance facilities for their vehicles and weapons, which are run by engineers, technicians, and skilled workers.

Our side has nothing of the sort, not even a single small repair shop. At the moment, we are using repair shops belonging to the Syrian army to make necessary repairs, but this entails considerable difficulties, especially in terms of transporting weapons and vehicles back and forth from Palestine to Damascus. This involves loss of time and delay of operations.

#### ***V. Transport***

There is no comparison between the numerous means of transport available to the Jews and our own meager and weak capabilities in this domain.

#### ***VI. Reserves and Reinforcements***

A. If the Jews declare a general mobilization of all males and females between the ages of eighteen and fifty-five, they can mobilize a large reserve force in Palestine, especially in view of the fact that most Jewish immigrants are able-bodied young men, the proportion of children or old people among them being

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8. Before the launching of Plan Dalet in early April 1948, fighting had gone relatively well for the Palestinian guerrillas, who appeared to have the upper hand on the interurban roads and in the countryside.

9. Palestinian townsmen and villagers often joined the fighting near their homes on an improvised and voluntary basis, returning home after each engagement.



small.<sup>10</sup> Considerable reinforcements are available to the Jews from overseas, particularly from Cyprus<sup>11</sup> and the Black Sea Coast<sup>12</sup> and various countries of Europe and the Americas, where tens of thousands of would-be immigrants are waiting impatiently for the day to immigrate and are totally prepared to do so at the first opportunity.

The Jews can also bring large quantities of arms and equipment including heavy arms, aircraft, and tanks into Palestine within a very short period if the embargo is lifted. If they are free to import what they need, they can do so with the help of the influence of world Jewry and the vast sums of money at their disposal. Even at present, despite the arms embargo and all the restrictions and obstacles in their path, they are able to use their wide influence and their excellent capabilities to continue to smuggle arms and equipment into Palestine. The shipments that were discovered and confiscated in America, France, and Iran are only the tip of the iceberg.<sup>13</sup>

B. Considering the difficulties we experienced in enlisting a few hundred Palestinian volunteers, and given that a not insignificant number of those receiving training ran off to join on their own the forces that were entering Palestine,<sup>14</sup> and given that others rebelled before completing their training and returned to where they had come from, it is clear that we have no hope of recruiting large numbers of Palestinian volunteers even though the Arabs in Palestine far outnumber the Jews.

As for the Palestinian guerrillas who have enlisted on the basis of regular pay and certain conditions,<sup>15</sup> they are more numerous and it is easier to recruit them, but they are of limited usefulness within a narrow sphere. And even these guerrillas do not number more than a few thousand, if one sticks to facts rather than fanciful exaggerations.

As for the volunteers from the various Arab countries, it is possible to recruit, though with some difficulty, a few thousand more on condition that we obtain the necessary arms and means to train and equip them. It should be borne in mind,

10. Haganah had organized the movement of illegal immigrants since the mid-1930s. As of the partition plan, its criteria for their selection, as spelled out in the official *History of the Haganah*, was that they be "young and ready upon disembarkation at Tel Aviv to join immediately the combat units of Haganah" [*Toldot HaHimaduvu* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Publishing, 1983), p. 1463].

11. It was to camps in Cyprus that the British navy transferred the illegal Jewish immigrants taken off the vessels they intercepted en route to Palestine. At the end of 1947, some 35,000-40,000 were interned there.

12. On New Year's Day, 1948, 15,000 illegal Jewish immigrants from Romania were brought to Farmagusta on board the *Pan York* and the *Pan Crescent*. These two ships, intercepted by the British, had sailed from the Bulgarian port of Balçik on the Black Sea. Safwat probably had this case in mind.

13. For the American shipment, Safwat is probably referring to the discovery on 3 January 1948 of 65,000 pounds of TNT destined for Haganah being loaded aboard a Palestinian-bound freighter at a Jersey City pier.

14. Many Palestinian volunteers, not wanting to wait for orders, left the training camp early to join ALA forces sent into Palestine.

15. Principally, that they serve in their own regions of Palestine.

however, that the volunteers and guerrillas need a large number of officers to lead them. So far, we have not been able to obtain more than a very small number of officers, mostly from the Syrian army.

So much for personnel.

With regard to arms and equipment, the situation is far worse, and there is even more cause to expect failure and disappointment. The Arab countries have so far not delivered what they promised in terms of arms and equipment, even though the quantities set were for emergency aid only, not as arms sufficient for sustaining long-term combat.<sup>16</sup>

Concerning arms purchases from overseas, we have not received a single delivery as yet, and, considering the numerous obstacles in the way, we have no idea how successful our contacts have been and when any deliveries can be expected. In this connection, we must stress what we said before, that the quantity of ammunition available to us is about to run out given the daily consumption in the constant battles. Unless we take the necessary measures immediately, the inevitable result will be catastrophe.

#### ***VII. The Situation of the Jewish Colonies***

It has become clear that all Jewish colonies, large and small, are well fortified. They are surrounded by barbed wire and strong emplacements. Many of them have bunkers for mortars and machine guns and are strongly defended. Events have shown that it is impossible to overcome and occupy the colonies with light arms. Furthermore, the proximity of these colonies to one another, the communication links between them, and the possibility of their rescue with armored cars and Jewish lorried forces make it impossible to isolate and besiege them individually. Finally, British army units tend to intervene quickly whenever the situation of any particular colony becomes critical.

#### ***VIII. The Situation of Our Garrisons***

We have established static garrisons in the cities where the danger is greatest. However, these garrisons are conspicuously weak everywhere, particularly since, possessing only antiquated rifles and hand grenades and a few machine guns each, they come under attack from Jewish armored cars, mortars, and machine guns. I am dubious about their capacity to hold out against attack from the Jewish forces, which are superior both in equipment and in numbers, were it not for the British units that intervene whenever battles intensify and fighting reaches a certain level.

#### ***IX. The Internal Situation in Palestine***

A. As we made clear in our memorandum 7/S of 11 March 1948 addressed to your Excellency, there are armed forces and groups in various parts of Palestine that have no contact with the General Command. The commanders leading these

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16. Quotas set by the Military Committee for rifles, for example, were 2,000 each for Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, and 1,000 each for Transjordan and Lebanon. By 8 February 1948, neither Saudi Arabia nor Transjordan had delivered a single rifle, Egypt had delivered 300, Iraq 1,260, and Lebanon 550. Only Syria had fulfilled its full quota of 2,000.

groups have not communicated with headquarters and do not recognize it, claiming to have been appointed by a certain party and insisting that they take orders only from that party.<sup>17</sup> These groups are using force to compel people to recognize them and to obey their orders and wishes.

This situation has led to a rise in factionalism and local alliances among Palestinians and has pitted them against one another. The latest reports indicate that some Palestinians are arming not to fight the Jews but to prevail over their Arab opponents or to defend themselves against those Arabs they consider their enemies—and this at a time when there is the most pressing need for unity and for the closing of ranks.

We have exerted every possible effort and shown all forbearance and tolerance in trying to end this painful situation, but all our efforts have been futile. Thus the situation is worsening and becoming more alarming each day, and its continuation will surely lead to the gravest consequences and the worst possible outcome.

B. Differences among Palestinians and the increasing factionalism among them have facilitated the spread on a wide scale of certain rumors that are not compatible with the interests of Palestine. It cannot be excluded that these rumors may lead to the actual intervention of certain parties,<sup>18</sup> which will pose dangers to the General Command and create problems from which only the enemy will benefit.

Note: We hope that the agreement recently reached [with Hajj Amin] that all guerrilla forces be placed under the General Command will, if carried out in good faith, address these potential dangers and lead to unity and solidarity.

### *X. Comparative Summary*

It is clear from the above comparison that the Jews at present enjoy significant superiority over us in terms of manpower and arms. This being the case, the following question comes to mind: Why have not the Jews embarked on wide-scale operations and struck as hard as they could at the Arabs, considering that they have the forces necessary to do so?

I believe the answer can be summarized as follows:

1. Despite the fact that skirmishes and battles have begun, the Jews at this stage are still trying to contain the fighting to as narrow a sphere as possible in the hope that partition will be implemented and a Jewish government formed; they hope that if the fighting remains limited, the Arabs will acquiesce in the fait accompli. This can be seen from the fact that the Jews have not so far attacked Arab villages unless the inhabitants of those villages attacked them or provoked them first.<sup>19</sup>

2. Their fear of the intervention of British forces prevents them from using large forces or heavy arms on a wide scale.

3. The Jews expect that—following the end of the Mandate, of course—the Arab countries will mobilize large forces to wage major battles and significant op-

17. Hajj Amin al-Husayni.

18. Safwat was most probably referring to King Abdallah of Transjordan, whose relations with Hajj Amin were exceedingly strained.

19. This is inaccurate, as is clear in Safwat's own report (section II.D above).

erations. They therefore consider it to be in their interest to save the strength of their basic forces for the anticipated battles.

In addition to the above considerations, the position of the Jews has not become critical yet, and their military position does not require resort to significant force.<sup>20</sup>

This is the situation at present. Nor is there anything to indicate that our side will have superiority in the days and months ahead unless the regular armies of the Arab states intervene with the full force of their armaments and equipment. The last five months have amply demonstrated that if we continue to operate on the current scale, we will remain weak and allow the Jews to retain their vast superiority. This becomes very clear if we consider what the Jews are receiving and can expect to receive from overseas in terms of unlimited reinforcements and aid, as we pointed out in an earlier report and in Section VI above. At the same time, the current situation seems to indicate that the Arab states will continue to limit their support and assistance to the level they have provided to date, which is insignificant in view of the severity of our situation and the reality that faces us.

### ***XI. The Current Military Situation***

It is our duty not to be complacent or rely on what is being reported in the Arab press, which amounts to charlatanism and wildly exaggerated claims. Despite the fact that the Jews have only used a small part of their forces, the operational initiative lies with them in most parts of Palestine. Our relatively stronger garrisons in Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Haifa are strictly on the defensive, and I doubt their ability to hold out against the Haganah, which is being held back only by fears of British intervention. As for the other smaller garrisons, they can be easily overrun if attacked by large Jewish forces. This weakness of our garrisons is not due only to the small number of fighters defending them, but also to the inadequacy of the weapons—a few old rifles of various makes and a very small number of machine guns—and the shortage of ammunition.

As for our forces deployed in various other regions, they do not have sufficient strength either in numbers or in weaponry to be able to undertake any serious action on a large scale, and they have restricted their activities so far to surrounding and harassing some of the colonies.

Although deployed, it is doubtful that these forces will be able to undertake any serious or significant actions as long as they are so short on arms and officers.

### ***XII. Conclusion***

A. Our forces in Palestine—whether trained volunteers or armed Palestinian guerrillas—cannot achieve a decisive military victory. All they can do is prolong the fighting for a certain period in accordance with the reinforcements they receive and the arms available to them.

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20. Safwat could not foresee that the Jewish forces would go on the all-out offensive before the end of the Mandate, as they did within less than two weeks of this report, when Plan Dalet went into operation on 5-6 April 1948.

B. Preventing the formation of a Jewish government and compelling the Jews to submit to Arab demands requires a force at least equivalent to their own. And that is impossible, given the level at which we are operating.

C. We are still of the opinion, which we expressed previously, that if we wish to achieve a decisive military victory, the regular armies of the Arab states must intervene in the fighting with the full force of their armaments and equipment.

D. The regular Arab armies have many logistical deficiencies. Unless these shortcomings are promptly addressed and mobilization takes place forthwith, they will not be ready to act when the Mandate expires, and we will lose the race against time, as we have lost it in the past.

[signed]

Ismail Safwat

Major General

Commander in Chief of the Palestine Forces

G.O.C. (general officer commanding), Military Committee

## THE FALL OF QASTEL AND THE DEATH OF 'ABD AL-QADIR

AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT BY BAHJAT ABU GHARBIYYA EXTRACTED FROM *THE MEMOIRS OF A FREEDOM FIGHTER, 1916-49*, INSTITUTE FOR PALESTINE STUDIES, BEIRUT, 1993 (IN ARABIC).

*The Palmach attack on the strategic Palestinian village of Qastel on 3 April 1948 heralded the launching on 6 April of Operation Nachshon, the first operation of Plan Dalet, the Haganah's military plan for securing the state assigned to the Jews by the UN partition plan and for conquering as much of the area assigned by the plan to the Arabs as possible. The specific goal of Operation Nachshon was to occupy and cleanse the Palestinian villages on both sides of the Jaffa-Jerusalem road, thereby assuring the Jewish forces' access to Jerusalem from the coast and at the same time splitting the central mass of the state assigned to the Palestinians under the UN plan. Officially, by accepting partition, the Jewish Agency also had accepted the exclusion of Jerusalem (which was to be placed under UN trusteeship) from the Jewish state. In fact, as Operation Nachshon and the Battle of Qastel show, this was only a verbal stance.*

*By the time Operation Nachshon was launched, units of the ALA had been deployed in northern and central Palestine, and operations were theoretically under the ALA command and coordinated by the Arab League Military Committee in Damascus. The Jerusalem area, however, was placed by the Military Committee under the command of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, the Palestinian guerrilla fighter and leader of the Palestinian irregulars, the Jihad Muqaddas. An ALA company about 120-strong stationed in Jerusalem was also under 'Abd al-Qadir's command.*

*The following is an eyewitness account of the fighting at Qastel and the death of 'Abd al-Qadir by Bahjat Abu Gharbiyya. Abu Gharbiyya, a school teacher in Jerusalem originally from Hebron, had fought with 'Abd al-Qadir during the*

1936-39 rebellion against the British and was part of his Jihad Muqaddas formed in the wake of the partition resolution. In later years, he was a member of the Palestine National Council. The account is taken from his memoirs *Fi Khidamm al-Nidal al-'Arabi al-Filastini: Mudhakkarat al-Munadil Bahjat Abu Gharbiyya (1916-49) etc.* [The memoirs of a freedom fighter, 1916-49], published in Arabic by the Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, in 1993. The text that follows was translated by Walid Khalidi.

The village of Qastel lies at a distance of ten kilometers west of Jerusalem on a strategic summit overlooking the Jerusalem-Jaffa road. The height of the summit is 750 meters above sea level, whereas the road that passes by Qastel, skirting the village in a semicircular fashion, is only 500 meters above sea level. The only other location on the outskirts of Jerusalem of comparable military significance is the summit of the Nabi Samweel village northwest of the city.

At the top of Qastel are to be found the house of the *mukhtar*, a small mosque, a cemetery, and the remains of an ancient fort; indeed, the village's name derives from the Latin "Castellum," which means "fort." The ground slopes down from the summit in terraces toward the north, south, and east. On the western side is situated a thick forested area, while to the southwest there is a lower summit with no buildings on it. To the east of Qastel, looking toward Jerusalem, lies the Jewish colony of Motsa and the Jewish sanatorium Arza. The Jewish colony of Qiryat Anavim (the former Palestinian village of al-Dilb) is one kilometer to the west, and a short distance beyond is the Jewish colony of Ma'ale Hahamisha.<sup>1</sup> The large Jewish quarry of Eliyesher lies to the south, at a distance of 1.5 kilometers.

In 1948, Qastel was a small village whose population did not exceed 300. There was no military garrison there, though some of the villagers owned their own rifles.

On Saturday, 3 April 1948, a large Palmach force in armored cars and supported by mortars occupied Qastel after a short engagement with the villagers. After occupying the village, the Palmach expelled all the inhabitants and proceeded to fortify it with barbed wire and bunkers of reinforced concrete. They surrounded it with mine fields and used it to store large quantities of explosives and military equipment. Although the British had issued clear orders to both sides not to appear armed on the Jerusalem-Jaffa road—an order they repeatedly enforced upon the Arabs—their forces in the neighborhood did not intervene to prevent the Jews from occupying Qastel and expelling its inhabitants.

The occupation of Qastel aroused great concern in Jerusalem and the surrounding villages, as well as in Damascus and the other Arab capitals. 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, commander of Jerusalem, was at the time on a visit to the Military Com-

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1. Both Qiryat Anavim and Ma'ale Hahamisha, together with Neve ilan a little farther to the west, were Palmach bases. The forces stationed in them accompanied the Jewish convoys from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem along the stretch of road from the latter to Bab al-Wad in the west. A vast underground depot connecting Qiryat Anavim to Ma'ale Hahamisha was one of Palmach's major arms storage installations.

mittee in Damascus. As soon as he heard news of the fall of Qastel, he sent us a brief order: "Reoccupy Qastel. Qastel is Jerusalem." At the same time, he urged the Military Committee to supply him with the weapons he needed, which had become even more essential after the fall of Qastel and the urgent need to recover it from the Jews.

The Palestinian forces of 'Abd al-Qadir in the Jerusalem area moved toward Qastel. Some came from the headquarters of 'Abd al-Qadir in Birzeit and the villages of Ramallah district. Others, under the command of Subhi Abu Jbara, took up positions in the village of Kolonia just east of the Motsa colony to cut off contact between the Jewish forces in Qastel and in Jerusalem. Others, under the command of Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh, came from the Jerusalem garrisons in Qatamon<sup>2</sup> by way of the village of 'Ayn Karem south of Qastel, and still others under the command of Abdallah al-Umari arrived from the village of Bayt Safafa southeast of Jerusalem. Forces also came from the village of 'Ayn Karem itself under the command of Khalil Mannun, from the Old City of Jerusalem under the command of Hafiz Barakat, and from the village of Abu Dis east of Jerusalem under the command of Kamil Urayqat.<sup>3</sup> Supervising all these operations and coordinating between them was the lawyer Anwar Nusseibeh,<sup>4</sup> secretary of the National Committee in Jerusalem.

On 4 April, the Palestinian forces began an offensive from the south against the Jewish forces in Qastel. Fighting continued throughout the 4th and 5th of April, with the Arab forces occupying considerable ground. On 6 April, the Palestinian forces occupied the Jewish Eliyesher quarry and blew up its military fortifications and installations.

But the Jews brought in reinforcements and counterattacked. They advanced from the neighboring colonies to prevent our reinforcements from reaching their destination. A Jewish plane attacked our positions around Qastel. On the 6th of April, Jewish forces occupied the Palestinian villages of Dayr Muheisin and Khulda lying to the west of Bab al-Wad where the road starts climbing eastward.<sup>5</sup> They were able to break through our defenses on the main Jaffa-Jerusalem road and got a convoy of reinforcements comprising forty large trucks through to Jerusalem. Our situation at Qastel became critical, and Kamil Urayqat was wounded and had to return home to his village Abu Dis. We began to run short of ammunition, and

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2. Qatamon was a Palestinian residential quarter in West Jerusalem.

3. A senior lieutenant of 'Abd al-Qadir and father of Saeb Urayqat (Erakat), the current Palestinian Authority negotiator.

4. Later Jordan's ambassador to London and defense minister, he is the father of Sari Nusseibeh, president of al-Quds University.

5. These were the first villages to fall under Operation Nachshon, the first operation of Plan Dalet. Their capture was synchronized with the capture of Qastel and the other villages on the main Jaffa-Jerusalem road lying on the stretch of this road from Bab al-Wad eastward to Jerusalem.

our appeals for help to the ALA and the Transjordanian Arab Legion forces nearby went unanswered.<sup>6</sup>

In the meantime, our leader, 'Abd al-Qadir, was in Damascus trying to persuade General Safwat and his colleagues to supply us with the arms he had requested. He appealed to the Arab leaders then in Damascus, particularly Riad al-Solh, prime minister of Lebanon; Azzam Pasha, secretary general of the Arab League; and Ahmad Sharabati, the Syrian defense minister. In addition to the efforts of these gentlemen, Hajj Amin al-Husayni and other members of the Arab Higher Committee also tried to sway the Military Committee.<sup>7</sup> Despite all these efforts, the Military Committee continued to claim that it did not have the weapons. When 'Abd al-Qadir asked for some of the artillery that had been supplied to Qawukji, the Military Committee persisted in its refusal. It also refused 'Abd al-Qadir's request that Qawukji's artillery be ordered to come to Qastel's aid.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, the talks in Damascus became extremely tense. On the evening of 6 April, with the two sides exchanging bitter recriminations, 'Abd al-Qadir strode out of the meeting in a state of extreme anger and frustration, shouting in the faces of the members of the Military Committee: "You're all traitors, and history will record that you lost Palestine!"

Early on Wednesday, 7 April, at 5 A.M., my brother Subhi woke me up. He had just arrived from Damascus, where he had been treated for wounds he had suffered when shot at from the Jewish quarter in the Old City and from which he was still recovering.<sup>9</sup> The injury had affected his memory and his speech, but he was able to tell me that he had come with 'Abd al-Qadir and a number of fighters. I immediately asked whether they had brought any weapons with them. He said he did not know. But I understood from him that 'Abd al-Qadir was at the house of his brother Farid Bey al-Husayni, which was close to my house in Herod's Gate.

I immediately went to Farid Bey's house and found Awad al-Tarmasawi, 'Abd al-Qadir's personal bodyguard, standing at the entrance. I asked him about the weapons they had brought with them, particularly as 'Abd al-Qadir had promised me some before leaving for Damascus. Awad said they had brought nothing but their own personal weapons and some British and German ammunition, as well as a few arms for some individuals who had asked for them. I was shocked and could not believe what I had heard, although I knew that Awad was a brave and trustworthy fellow. "Where is Abu Musa<sup>10</sup>?" I asked. "He is resting, asleep. We've been

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6. The ALA forces referred to here were part of the central sector under Qawukji. The Arab Legion at the time was under the direct command of the British forces in Palestine, and some of its units were stationed near Bab al-Wad close by.

7. Hajj Amin al-Husayni, banned by the British from entering Palestine, constantly commuted between Cairo, Beirut, and Damascus.

8. See Safwat's report, section II.C.

9. Haganah and Irgun had garrisons in the Jewish quarter inside the Old City, which they used as a base for their operations.

10. That is, 'Abd al-Qadir, so called after his father, Musa Kazim Pasha al-Husayni, the elder statesman of Palestinian politics in the 1920s and early 1930s. 'Abd al-Qadir also is the father of Faisal Husayni, the Palestinian leader in East Jerusalem.



travelling all night. We left Damascus very late. He said he wanted to sleep two hours." I was extremely upset. 'Abd al-Qadir had promised that he would bring machine guns, antitank weapons, mortars with their shells, and sufficient ammunition for our mixed assortment of rifles—British, German, French, Italian—as well as ammunition for our American Browning machine guns.

Two hours later, I returned and Awad told me that 'Abd al-Qadir was expecting me. I went in and greeted him, noticing his state of extreme agitation. He immediately said, "I want you to do something no one else can. I want you to go to Kamil Urayqat. He has, I am told, captured an armored car and some machine guns after the battle with the Haganah near Kfar Etzion.<sup>11</sup> These belong to headquarters and are not anybody's personal property. I want you to get them." He did not say why he wanted them immediately nor anything about what had happened in Damascus. Our meeting lasted only a few minutes, and there was no opportunity to engage him in conversation. I said I would do what he asked and left. I sensed he had cut short our meeting to avoid embarrassing questions about his promise to bring arms from Damascus. Given his mood, I did not want to broach the subject since I already knew that he had returned empty-handed.

I immediately went to Kamil Urayqat at Abu Dis. I found him in bed, recovering from the wounds that he had suffered at Eliyeshar quarry the day before. His wounds were not serious enough to require hospitalization, but he was clearly exhausted. We were friends despite disagreements between us. Kamil had not heard about 'Abd al-Qadir's arrival from Damascus. It took me a long time, including eating lunch with him, before I could get round to the matter of the Jewish armored car. But I succeeded in my mission. The armored car was in excellent condition. And the machine guns were six in number, of different makes the likes of which we did not have. The Haganah soldiers, who had surrendered to our men, had tampered with all of them before handing them over, but the damage was repairable. I drove the armored car to Farid Bey's house in Jerusalem but was told that 'Abd al-Qadir had left for Qatamon. I telephoned Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh's headquarters in Qatamon only to be told that Ibrahim and 'Abd al-Qadir had already left for Qastel.

Meanwhile, the Jews had been active in my sector of Jerusalem. Because of its importance, 'Abd al-Qadir had given me strict orders not to leave it and not to take part in any operations outside it. So I decided I would wait until the next morning and then play it by ear.

That night, the 7th of April, 'Abd al-Qadir reached the site of the destroyed Eliyeshar quarry after a strenuous cross-country trek and occupied it. There he rallied his men. What follows is the version of events as related to me three days later by Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh as he lay wounded in an improvised field clinic at

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11. The Kfar Etzion bloc, between Bethlehem and Hebron, comprised four Jewish colonies and had strong Haganah garrisons that dominated the road between Hebron and Jerusalem. On 27 March, a large Haganah convoy returning to Jerusalem was ambushed by Jihad Muqaddas guerrillas. Seventy Haganah soldiers were killed, and British troops intervened to arrange for the surrender and rescue of the survivors.

Herod's Gate, which I had set up in the house of Ismail Bey al-Husayni. Later, this was to become Orient House.

Abu Dayyeh told me how they had drawn up a plan for the recapture of Qastel and organized themselves into three groups. The plan was to begin the battle with shelling from our mortars. Hafiz Barakat was to lead the right wing, approaching from the southeast. Harun Ben Jaziyah, the Transjordanian bedouin fighter, was to lead the left wing, approaching from the southwest. Ibrahim was to lead the center.

'Abd al-Qadir himself took up his command post at the Eliyesher quarry at a distance of 1.5 kilometers from the summit of Qastel. He did not allow anyone to stay with him at his post except for a few elderly administrators. He even ordered his personal bodyguard, Awad, to accompany Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh because he [Awad] had a Bren machine gun in good working order.

At midnight, when it was pitch black, Abu Dayyeh told me, our fighters began to shell Qastel with the four mortars they had. Two were two-inch mortars, and two were three-inch. They depended mostly on the latter because of their longer range, but one of them was of local make and did not fire unless the trigger was pulled from a distance by a cord attached to it.

Once they had fired the few shells they had, the fighters—about 200 in number—moved in under the cover of machine gun fire. The men were not trained in night fighting, and the shelling was not heavy and therefore not very effective. Nevertheless, the Jews realized the seriousness of the attack and, being themselves trained in night fighting, withdrew from the lower reaches of the village to its summit in a defensive tactic known as the “uncrushable nut.” They were concentrated around the *mukhtar's* house, a solid building with very thick walls, and in the adjacent mosque and cemetery. The mosque and *mukhtar's* house dominated the slopes around the summit. The withdrawal of the Jews from the lower slopes enabled our fighters to enter the village and reach very near to the top of the summit, except for the right wing which fell behind. The left wing tried to storm the mosque in a bold move but was repulsed, suffering losses in martyrs and in wounded, thus reducing its role in the fighting. The center under Abu Dayyeh got very close to the cemetery and the *mukhtar's* house but was unable to storm these positions. After a while, his men got pinned down and could advance no further. He prepared an attack with two mines, each containing 40 kilograms of TNT. These were carried by four of his men to blow up the *mukhtar's* house. They managed to climb over the outer wall surrounding the house, but as they advanced toward it, were all killed.

At this stage, the offensive ground to a halt. Our fighters needed to save ammunition so they reduced their fire, and the attack turned into a desultory exchange of shots through the night. With the approach of dawn, there was a danger that our positions would be exposed, threatening catastrophe because of the enemy's dominating position at the summit. Moreover, reinforcements from the colonies west of Qastel were continually reaching the Jews at the summit via the forest. At this stage, Ibrahim sent a messenger to 'Abd al-Qadir explaining his critical situa-



**'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni (standing center) poses with some of his men in Jerusalem, February 1948. Among those with him are his bodyguard, Awad al-Tarmasawi (kneeling, second from left), Kamil Urayqat (standing third from left, next to 'Abd al-Qadir), Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh (kneeling third from left), and 'Abd al-Halim al-Gilani (kneeling fifth from left). (*Before Their Diaspora*, Institute for Palestine Studies)**

tion and asking him to order Barakat on the right flank to advance toward the summit to increase the pressure on the enemy and force them to withdraw.

Abu Dayyeh does not know what happened after that, but many reports confirm that 'Abd al-Qadir left his command post at about this time and entered Qastel, intent upon reaching the right wing force to urge it to advance. It is reported that those who were with him cautioned him not to enter the village in these circumstances, but he brushed them aside and insisted on going in alone. As dawn broke and more reinforcements reached the Jews via the forest, Abu Dayyeh's position and that of his men became increasingly untenable. There were many losses in dead and wounded, and he himself was severely wounded. When the right wing did not advance, he decided to pull back. Upon reaching the command post at the quarry, he was told that 'Abd al-Qadir had entered the village in the direction of his force, to which he replied: "He did not reach me. I have not seen him."

By now, it was clear that 'Abd al-Qadir was missing or surrounded in the village. Frustration overcame the fighters. They could not advance against the village in the daytime and were running low on ammunition, so they sent messengers in every direction, appealing for help to save 'Abd al-Qadir.

Messengers swiftly left for Jerusalem, Ramallah, Hebron, Ramla, and all the surrounding villages, urging fighters to rally and to bring reinforcements to Qastel. From Jerusalem came the ALA garrison commanded by Jamal Rashid,<sup>12</sup> the contingent under my own command from Herod's Gate, and the contingent commanded by Muhammad 'Adil Najjar from Wadi Joz quarter in the north of the city. Fighters from the villages east of Jerusalem came under the command of Rashid Urayqat. The special guards of the Haram came under the command of Hajj 'Abd al-Majid al-Madani. From Hebron came a contingent under the command of 'Abd al-Halim al-Gilani, and from Ramla a contingent from Hasan Salameh's forces.<sup>13</sup> The total number of the fighters assembled exceeded 500.

It was thus that, on the morning of Thursday, the 8th of April, a messenger had arrived urging me to rush to the rescue of 'Abd al-Qadir who "was surrounded in Qastel." I was shocked, and set out quickly after giving orders to my forces in Musrara and Saad al-Said<sup>14</sup> not to leave their positions under any circumstances and to remain in the highest state of alert. I gathered together thirty of my best fighters at Herod's Gate and took with me two Browning machine guns and four Bren machine guns. Before I set out, Dr. Mahdi al-Husayni and his wife along with a male nurse who worked in his clinic, all dressed in white robes with Red Crescent arm bands, asked to accompany me to Qastel.

We climbed aboard the armored car that I had taken from Urayqat and a large lorry. I drew up my plan based on my long familiarity with the terrain around Qastel, which I knew intimately from scouting and school expeditions. I decided to approach Qastel from the north via the villages of Biddu and Bayt Surik. Traveling this road by vehicle, I could get there more quickly, increasing the element of surprise; the other forces, I knew, would be approaching from the south via the usual route from Qatamon to 'Ayn Karem—a rugged road impassable except by jeep.

We set out at 10 A.M. Those accompanying me included Lieutenant Shafiq Nashashibi of the Herod's Gate force, the martyr Ismail Sharabati (an excellent marksman with his Browning machine gun), the martyr Mrawweh Saadeh, Lieutenant Yahya Zawawi, the martyr Said Abu Tayr, and the driver of the armored car, Ali Abu Ghannam.

When we reached Biddu, I stopped for a while to consider the possibility of taking the road to the nearby Jewish colony of Ma'ale Hahamisha. My initial thought had been to dash through the colony using the "disguise" of our Jewish armored car and then onto the main Jaffa-Jerusalem road to approach Qastel from the northwest. My colleagues thought this plan very hazardous and prevailed

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12. An able young Iraqi officer.

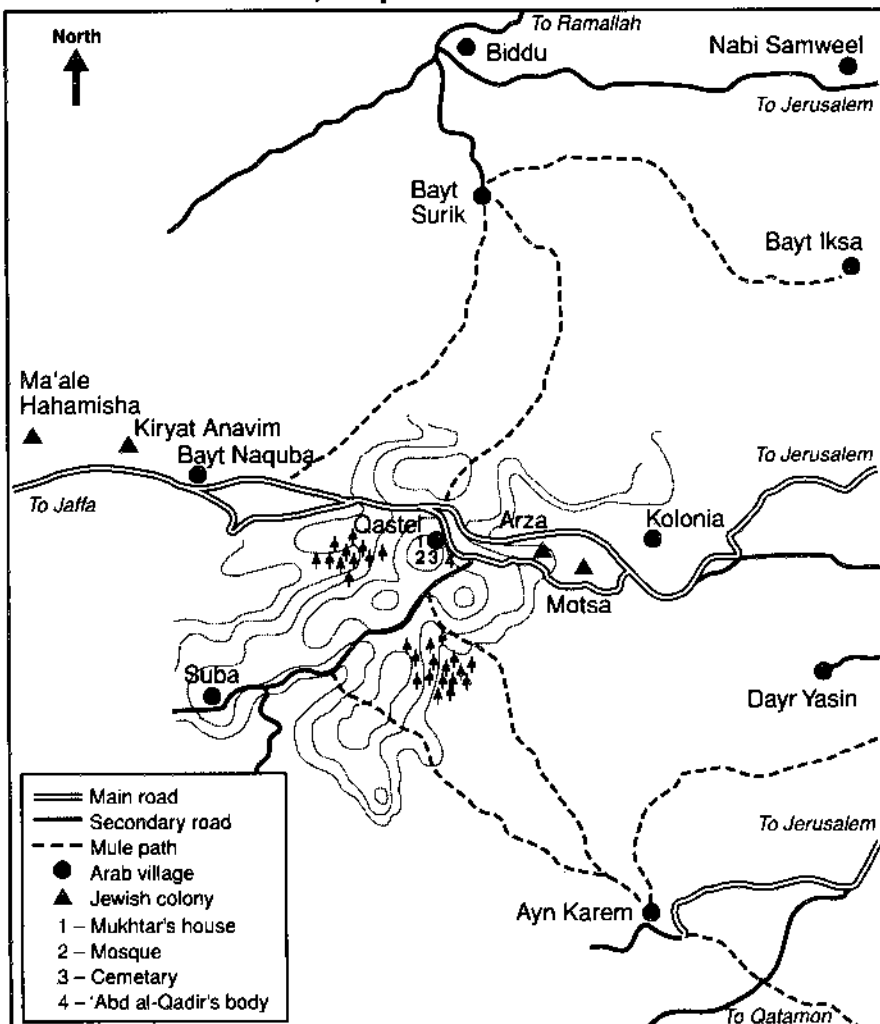
13. Hasan Salameh, the second senior commander of Jihad Muqaddas after 'Abd al-Qadir, was killed in action on 2 June 1948. His sector covered the towns of Lydda and Ramla in the coastal plain as well as the villages between them and Jaffa. He was the father of Ali Hasan ("Abu Hasan") Salameh, the PLO intelligence officer assassinated by the Israelis in Beirut in January 1979.

14. Palestinian residential quarters in East Jerusalem lying between the walls of the Old City and Shaykh Jarrah in the north.

upon me to abandon it. Instead, we continued on our way to Bayt Surik, which is about 1.5 kilometers due north of Qastel. The route to Qastel, however, was unpassable by vehicle so we set off on foot, joined by villagers from Bayt Surik.

No sooner had we started out than someone came shouting that the village of Nabi Samweel was under attack by a Jewish force that had just attacked the village of Bayt Iksa east of Bayt Surik. Nabi Samweel, some 3 kilometers northeast of Bayt Surik, was on the most strategic height north of Jerusalem. Its importance was greater even than that of Qastel because it dominated the entire surrounding countryside and its occupation would greatly strengthen Jewish control of Qastel itself. Without delay, we climbed back into the armored car and the lorry and drove off to Nabi Samweel. When we got there, we found no Jewish forces and no fighting but met some of the Bayt Iksa villagers who had just repulsed a devastating attack on their village in which most of its houses had been blown up by the Jews. Returning to Bayt Surik, we proceeded on foot toward Qastel.

### Qastel and Environs, 8 April 1948



The villagers of Bayt Surik had warned us that we would come under heavy fire from the Jewish forces controlling the approaches to Qastel from the north. But I ignored their warnings, and we advanced on foot with all our machine guns blazing. The plan succeeded. The intensity of our fire and our approach from the north took the Jews by surprise, given that hundreds of fighters were simultaneously attacking Qastel from the south.

Our approach from the north had cut off Jewish reinforcements from both the east and the west. Presently the Jewish force on Qastel summit, under the twin attacks from north and south, began withdrawing westward through the forest but still within range of our fire. Many of them were killed, and as we entered Qastel from the northwest through the same forest, we saw more enemy dead, in one place as many as eleven very close together. We reached the summit where we met our comrades attacking from the south. There I met my friend Muhammad 'Adil Najjar and his men from Wadi Joz. We were exhilarated. Qastel was in our hands. Our losses were few. Enemy bodies were scattered everywhere.

Our joy was short-lived. Someone came with the news that 'Abd al-Qadir's body had been found. It lay on the southeastern side of the village in front of a house about 100 meters from the *mukhtar*'s house. I was stunned. I sat on the ground in great distress and was overcome by a sense of dread about what the future now held. I ordered my men not to go to see the body of their leader out of concern for their morale. I stayed there for a long time with Muhammad Najjar next to me and my men surrounding me. Our loss in 'Abd al-Qadir was irreparable. He was the standard around which the fighters rallied.

Presently word arrived that the fighters were withdrawing from Qastel on a wide scale to accompany 'Abd al-Qadir's body, which was being transported to Jerusalem. The sight of this mass exodus of fighters was truly terrifying and threatened to demoralize my men, but they remained with me nonetheless. After a while Anwar Nusseibeh appeared. He greeted us and presented his condolences. At the same time he expressed his strong disapproval of the mass withdrawal of the fighters and their abandonment of Qastel after all the sacrifices that had been made to recover it, including the loss of our leader. He asked me what I intended to do. I said: "I'm staying here." He said: "You're not well, your wounds haven't healed. You still have bandages around your chest and stomach. You should order your men to stay put but go back to Jerusalem yourself." I said I couldn't do that, but would stay with Muhammad Najjar and our men. He asked what he could do for us. I said: "Three things: Food, ammunition, and a relief force to take over from us tomorrow morning."

Qastel was now deserted except for about forty men—my own and those of Muhammad Najjar. A messenger arrived from 'Abd al-Halim al-Gilani, leader of the Hebron rebels in 1937–38. The messenger said: "Abu Zaydan ['Abd al-Halim] has sent me to say that he and his men from Hebron are close to your positions. Let us know if you are in trouble." I asked him where his forces were, and he replied: "In Suba." I thanked him but was secretly annoyed at my old comrade in arms: here we were, all alone now, and he had his men in Suba five kilometers away.

Clearly, we had only ourselves to depend on, so we went into action. I gave a series of orders. First, that two fortified positions, each with a Browning and two Brens, be prepared—one to face the main road and repel any attack from the east, from the direction of Jerusalem, and the other to face the main road and repel any attack from the west, from the direction of Jaffa. Second, I ordered that all the houses of the village as well as the nearby caves be searched before nightfall to make sure that none of the enemy was hiding there. Third, I asked that the road to Suba be blocked with boulders to prevent the Jews from advancing along it in armored cars; fourth, that a trench be dug around the command post in the middle of the cemetery at the top of the village next to the *mukhtar's* house and the mosque.

Muhammad Najjar and I then went round the village to see that our orders were being carried out. We came upon a large Jewish armored car in excellent condition that the Jews had been forced to abandon when it sank in the mud. Some ALA soldiers who had not left were strenuously trying to free it to take to Jerusalem. Some of them knew me well and pleaded with me to allow them to continue, having received strict orders from their commander to take the armored car with them. I relented. After an hour or so, they succeeded in pulling it out and set off in the direction of Suba, where I later learned that 'Abd al-Halim requisitioned it from them.

We found tens of tons of barbed wire and a large room chock full of an explosive powder, yellow in color. The bodies of the enemy were scattered here and there, but we did not have the time to count, much less bury them. Every now and then a Jewish armored car would approach and soldiers would let themselves out of a trap door in its belly to pick up the corpses within their reach.

Throughout this time, a three-inch mortar was continuously shelling us from Motsa colony, while two planes circled above us and dropped locally made bombs. We did not suffer casualties from the shelling or the planes because we were dispersed throughout the village. But the appearance of the planes did have a demoralizing effect. It symbolized the enemy's superior power, for here they were, using planes while the country was still under British rule with some fifty days to go until the end of the Mandate. Their use of air power in these circumstances made clear to us Britain's open partisanship in favor of the Jews, though we did not know at the time that the British had actually sold the Jews twenty-two planes, including the two that were attacking us at that moment.<sup>15</sup>

Night fell, and it was very dark. The stillness was broken every now and then by mortar shelling and bombs from the planes, as well as by our intermittent return of machine gun fire against Motsa and the Dilb colony (Qiryat Anavim) to demonstrate our presence in Qastel. At about nine o'clock that night, two donkeys loaded with food and ammunition reached us from 'Ayn Karem, sent by Anwar. This raised our morale. A little later, we were joined by an Egyptian officer and three fighters with a Bren machine gun. They were all deserters from ALA units in the

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15. The British army sold these planes (light Austers) to the Jews in early January 1948.

north<sup>16</sup> and had come to support the fighters in Qastel. Had I not known one of them personally, we would have been suspicious. Their entry into Qastel that dark night was an extremely dangerous venture: but for the courage and self-control of our men, they would have been killed. But their arrival was welcome, particularly as the Egyptian had a wonderful sense of humor, which helped reduce our anxiety.

About midnight, while Muhammad Najjar and I were at the command post in the trench, the quiet of the night was interrupted by heavy machine gun fire from our own eastern and western positions. I sent a runner to both positions, and he returned quickly to report that three Jewish armored cars were approaching from Motsa (i.e., from the east) and another three from Qiryat Anavim (i.e., from the west). I immediately ran to the first position in the east and saw the three armored cars approaching us with their headlights on. They did not seem concerned by our firing and did not return it. I ordered my men to stop firing and to send an ambush party with grenades to halt their advance. When we stopped our firing, the armored cars turned off their headlights, and we could see nothing after that. I then ran to the Western bunker, and sure enough, three armored cars were advancing, also with their headlights on. When we stopped firing, they, too, turned them off.

I calculated that the armored cars were reconnoitering to ascertain our strength but would probably not attack from that direction; rather, I thought, they might be intending to approach via the Suba road. Whatever the case, I thought, the enemy would attack at the first light of dawn either to reoccupy Qastel or at least to evacuate their dead. I immediately sent a patrol along the Suba road to find out if the armored cars were trying to approach that way. The patrol returned without seeing any armored cars, so I assumed that they were not coming that way. Nevertheless, I sent a runner to Suba with the following message for al-Gilani: "Bahjat and his men are surrounded in Qastel and call on you to help." The runner did not return, and neither 'Abd al-Halim nor any of his men showed up.

Suddenly, all hell broke loose at a strategic height three kilometers to the east of us on the other side of a deep ravine. I knew the place well. It was the village of Dayr Yasin. The village came under continuous attack in three waves until the morning. To the west, the planes were bombing without respite the villages of Saris and Bayt Muhaiser.<sup>17</sup>

At daybreak, we looked toward Jerusalem. We could see the road descending at Lifta toward us in the direction of Kolonia. On the road tens of vehicles were heading our way with their lights on. We began to count: one, two, three, up to 130. One hundred thirty vehicles—three times the total number of our men! We were alone. No reinforcements, no replacements. Everyone was in Jerusalem preparing to take part in 'Abd al-Qadir's funeral. Was this a Jewish convoy going from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv, or was it a force coming to recapture Qastel?

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16. These were deserters from Qawukji's ALA units in the central sector.

17. These villages lay on the main Jerusalem-Jaffa road east of Bab al-Wad some 7 kilometers west of Qastel. The attack on them was part of Operation Nachshon.



Soon enough, the vehicles reached the village and stopped, extending virtually along the entire semicircular road skirting Qastel. We fired all our machine guns at them in one go, and hellfire broke out against us. Shells were raining on us from at least ten three-inch mortars. We had to get out of their range, so we had to take the difficult decision to withdraw. We had no alternative, so we pulled back from the Qastel summit to a lower hill about 400 meters to the southwest. Here, we took up positions in trenches already dug while the shelling of Qastel summit continued.

Presently the shelling stopped. A large Jewish force advanced on foot through the western forest toward the *mukhtar's* house and the mosque—the latter destroyed in the course of the intense shelling. This was a golden opportunity for us, as the enemy was now exposed to our fire. We saw a number of them fall, but for a while they did not return our fire since their main objective at this stage was to occupy the summit of the village and to clean it up. After a while, another large



**'Abd al-Qadir's funeral at the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, 9 April 1948. (*Before Their Diaspora*, Institute for Palestine Studies)**

group of Jews advanced from the east of the village toward the southwest, trying to cut off our line of retreat to 'Ayn Karem. Again we had to take the difficult decision to withdraw southward toward 'Ayn Karem, but by now the planes reappeared and started bombing us as we retreated. We tried to hide under trees and bushes on our way and eventually broke free and got to 'Ayn Karem. As we reached it, we heard the enemy blowing up the houses of Qastel. It was thus that Qastel again fell into the hands of the Jews, while hundreds of armed men from

every quarter took part in the funeral to honor their commander, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni.

Did 'Abd al-Qadir die a suicidal death? No, he did not. What he tried to do was to recapture Qastel as quickly as possible, and at whatever cost, because of the great importance he attached to it from the military and morale points of view and because he felt that the Military Committee in Damascus had in a sense dared him to recapture it.

All those who knew 'Abd al-Qadir are well familiar with his bravery in battle and his personal indifference to danger. Everyone knows that guerrilla commanders in wars of national liberation, unlike commanders in regular armies, personally lead their men into battle. I have often seen him standing upright under heavy fire, deliberately defying danger to instill courage in his men.

And did the British kill him, as some have suggested? The only British who took part in the battle were three army deserters who were under Abu Dayyeh's command.<sup>18</sup> He confirmed to me that they could not possibly have seen 'Abd al-Qadir enter the village or known about it because they were with him personally throughout the battle, constantly fighting alongside him. When Ibrahim was wounded, one of the three was also wounded, temporarily losing his sight after being hit by shrapnel.

The Jews claim that they found and recognized the body of 'Abd al-Qadir after his martyrdom. This is a lie. When our men found his body, his personal weapon, an English Sten submachine gun with a silencer, was in his hand. His notebook and papers were in his breast pocket. Nothing had been touched.

We arrived in Jerusalem on the afternoon of Friday, the 9th of April, after the funeral service was over. I did not have the honor of bidding him a final farewell. The depressing effect of the recent events—Qastel, Dayr Yasin, Kolonia,<sup>19</sup> and the martyrdom of 'Abd al-Qadir—was palpable. Morale in Jerusalem had sunk very low. Our own sadness was compounded when we learned that runners had arrived during the funeral to announce: "Bahjat is surrounded at Qastel," but to no avail.

Thousands had attended the funeral. It was an impressive event, but the participation of hundreds of armed men was, quite rightly, the object of harsh criticism and disapprobation. Prayers were performed over his body at the Haram al-Sharif following the Friday prayers, and he was buried near al-Aqsa Mosque. May God have mercy on his soul.

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18. Some half dozen British soldiers deserted their units to join Jihad Muqaddas to avenge the death of comrades killed by Irgun and Stern. After 'Abd al-Qadir's death, a rumor spread that the desertions were part of a British plot.

19. On 12 April, in a surprise predawn attack carried out by Palmach units from Qiryat Anavim, Kolonia was captured, its inhabitants expelled, and all its houses blown up. For an eyewitness account, see Harry Levin, *Jerusalem Embattled* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1950), pp. 64-67.

## THE FALL OF HAIFA

*Plan Dalet went into implementation in the countryside on 5-6 April with Operation Nachshon. The first city to be attacked under the plan was Tiberias. It fell on 18 April. Next on the Haganah list was Haifa. The noninterference of the British Army (which was supposed to maintain law and order until the end of the Mandate on 15 May) in the fighting in Tiberias and its evacuation of the Arab population was a great and welcome eye-opener to the Haganah Command.*

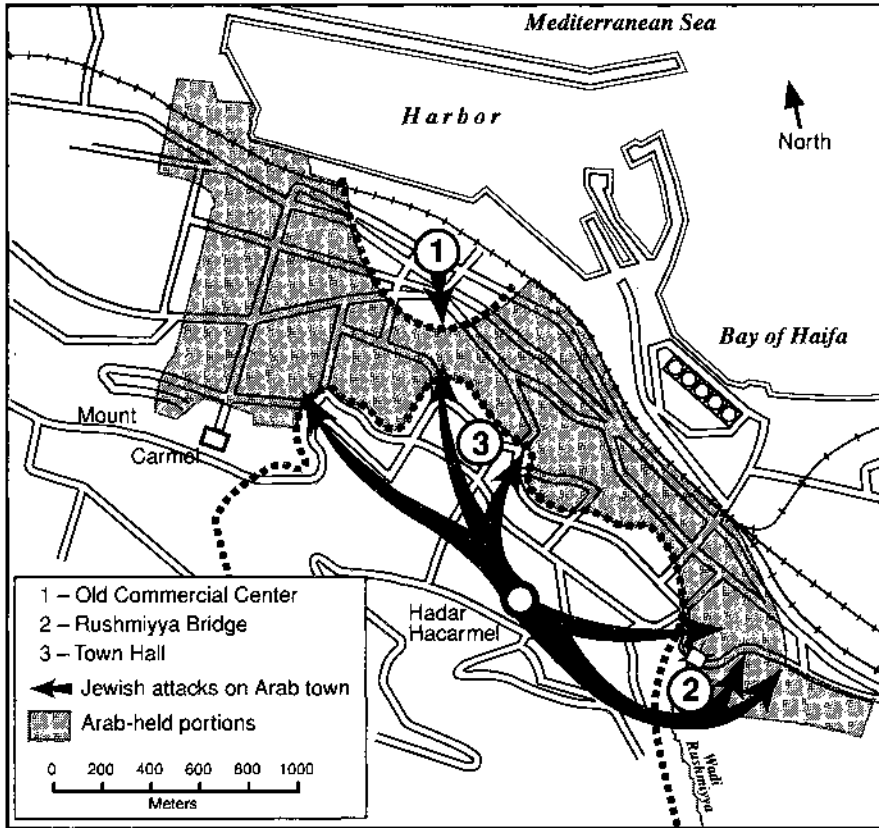
*Already a plan for a massive attack against the Arab quarters of Haifa, Operation Misparayim ("Scissors"), had been prepared. But the position of Haifa differed from that of Tiberias, though both cities were included in the Jewish state by the UN partition decision. Haifa was the principal port of Palestine and the city where the British forces withdrawing from the rest of the country were to converge and assemble for embarkation to Britain. Indeed the British government had repeatedly stated that for logistical reasons its military evacuation of the country could not be completed by 15 May and that some of its forces would remain in Haifa and its vicinity until 1 August. Moreover, in explaining its withdrawal plans to the Arab governments, Britain had also stated that the withdrawal movement would be from "south to north" via Haifa. The Haganah's dilemma in Haifa was that, unlike the case of Tiberias, an operation on the scale of Misparayim would bring it into direct confrontation with the British army, which patrolled the borders and no-man's-land between the Arab and Jewish quarters of the city.*

*Haganah's concern on this score was resolved on 18 April, when Major General Hugh C. Stockwell, British Commander, North Sector, Haifa, summoned to his headquarters Harry Beilin, the Jewish Agency liaison officer with the British army in the city. This was the same day that Tiberias had fallen and its Arab population was evacuated by the British army. Unquestionably, this momentous event was uppermost in Stockwell's mind, as it must have been in Haganah's. To the surprise of Beilin and the Haganah Command (to whom Beilin reported the meeting with Stockwell), the general informed Beilin that he intended immediately to begin withdrawing his forces from the borders and no-man's-land between the Arab and Jewish quarters in Haifa and that the withdrawal would be completed by Tuesday, 20 April. Stockwell is reported to have walked over to a large wall map of Haifa and asked Beilin if the Haganah could capture the Arab quarters.*

*Haifa had a population of 140,000, a little over half of which was Jewish. The Arab portions of the city stretched along the seafront from northwest to southeast for about 3,500 meters, overlooked and dominated by the modern Jewish quarters on the higher slopes of Mount Carmel (Hadar Hacarmel). The Arab quarters were 1,000 meters at their widest, the average width between the Jewish quarters and the sea ranging from 350 to 400 meters. At a point close to the commercial area near the harbor (where a Palmach company was secretly based, its members masquerading as port laborers), the major northwest and*

southeast portions of the Arab city were linked by a wasp's waist barely 200 meters wide. Contact by land for the Arab community with the rest of Palestine was via Rushmiyya Bridge in the southeast (see map).

### Haifa, 21 April 1948



There was no ALA garrison in Haifa, only citizen volunteers, though the commander (the only trained officer in Haifa), Amin Izz al-Din, a Lebanese, was an ALA appointee of the Military Committee in Damascus. He had taken up his post only three weeks before, on 27 March. The garrison was about 450 strong, armed with British and French rifles, mostly of World War I vintage, and chronically short of ammunition. The entire garrison possessed only fifteen sub-machine guns, an essential weapon in urban warfare.

In contrast, Haifa was the home and recruiting base of the 2,000-strong Carmeli or Second Brigade, one of the seven brigades of KHISH, the field army of the Haganah. The Carmeli Brigade had armored cars, two-inch and three-inch mortars, machine guns, Sten and Thompson submachine guns, rifles, and grenades—all in plentiful quantities and with virtually unlimited supplies of mortar shells and ammunition. The brigade also used two weapons in Haifa nicknamed *Davidkas* and *Barak Bullets*. The first were heavy mortars with sixty-pound

shells, the latter converted oil barrels and spherical sea mines filled with explosives and rolled down on the Arab quarters from the higher Jewish areas. Both the Davidkas and Barak Bullets were inaccurate, but because they created indiscriminate destruction and exploded with tremendous noise, their psychological effect against civilians was devastating.

With foreknowledge of British intentions and withdrawal plans and a green light from Stockwell, the Carmeli Brigade went into action. The scope of *Misparayim*, originally conceived as a massive hit-and-run offensive against major Arab targets in the city, was now revised to produce a repetition of the Tiberias outcome: permanent occupation of the Arab quarters and the evacuation of their inhabitants. By this time, Passover (which fell that year on 24 April) was approaching, so *Misparayim* was renamed *Bi'ur Hametz* ("Cleaning the Leaven") to celebrate it and to reflect the operation's new scope.<sup>1</sup>

On Wednesday, 21 April, General Stockwell summoned sequentially to his headquarters representatives of the Haganah Command and the Arab community formally to notify them of his intention to withdraw from the border areas. Stockwell's notification took the form of a written statement evenhandedly addressed to both parties, which he read out and distributed to each at their respective meetings. The text of the statement was:

*To those in charge of Arab and Jewish affairs in Haifa:*

*During the past few weeks many clashes have occurred between Arabs and Jews. These clashes should cease and peace and order be restored in Haifa.*

*I have no intention of letting the [British] army or police interfere in any way in Arab-Jewish clashes.*

*I intend to protect those streets and areas required for the evacuation of British forces within the coming three weeks via the port of Haifa.*

There followed a long list of roads, arteries, and city quarters to which he would withdraw his forces, which by elimination clearly indicated the exact areas from which he was withdrawing.

But while the Haganah representatives, with whom Stockwell met at 10 A.M., knew that the withdrawal had already been completed by sunset the previous day, Tuesday 20 April, this was the first indication the Arab side had of what was afoot. Captain Izz al-Din, accompanied by George Mu'ammam, the Arab Liaison officer with the British army, immediately grasped the implications of the statement when Stockwell read it out. Upon emerging from the 11 A.M. meeting, Izz al-

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1. According to *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, "No *hamez* (leaven) is to be found in the house or owned during Passover (Ex. 12:15, 19). On the night before the festival, the house is thoroughly searched for *hamez* (Pes. 1:1). All leaven found in the house is gathered together in one place and burned on the following day before noon."

*Din went straight to Damascus to alert the Military Committee of what had transpired, handing over command of the Arab garrison to his deputy, Yunis Naffa, a Palestinian sanitary engineer with no military experience whatsoever.*

*At 10:30 A.M., even as Stockwell was reading his statement to the Haganah representatives, the Carmeli Brigade had issued its orders to begin Bi'ur Hametz by moving into positions vacated by the British and attack Arab positions at the Rushmiyya Bridge area. The trap on the Arab quarters was thus to be closed, preventing both exit and the arrival of Arab reinforcements.*

*The cumulative effect of the weapons used by Haganah continuously from 10.30 A.M. on Wednesday, 21 April, throughout the day and night and well into the evening of 22 April was compounded by the psychological bombardment of continuous broadcasts in Arabic from the Haganah Qol Ha Megen (Voice of the Defender) and loudspeakers on trucks urging the immediate evacuation of women and children. In fact, according to the Palestine Post, the precursor of the Jerusalem Post, the broadcasts had started as early as Monday, 19 April, i.e., the day after the Beilin-Stockwell meeting.*

*A great deal is made by Israeli historians, including liberal revisionists, about the attitude during the crisis of the Jewish mayor of Haifa, Shabatai Levy. At the second of the two Town Hall meetings held on 22 April, Levy did make a poignant appeal asking his Arab colleagues to reconsider their request—made under the weight of the Haganah attack and mounting civilian casualties—to evacuate the Arab population with adequate protection. But Levy did not reflect Haganah policy, and the principal representative of the Jewish side was not Levy but "Motki" Maklef, operations officer of the Carmeli Brigade. When General Stockwell, after Levy had spoken, turned to Maklef for his views on the Arab evacuation, his answer was: "This is their business, and they have to decide."*

*But whatever words were spoken at this meeting, it was Haganah actions that counted. The orders to the attacking units on 21 April were "to kill any Arab you encounter . . . set on fire all flammable objects . . . and force open doors with explosives." The Carmeli Brigade's full force was unleashed on a civilian population of some 75,000 crowded into an area no more than 1.5 square kilometers. When the Haganah Command learned that the Arab authorities were calling upon the civilians to gather for shelter in the old market place, three-inch mortars, according to the official history of the Carmeli brigade, were ordered to shell the market place. "When the shelling began and shells fell inside the market a great panic ensued. The crowd broke into the port and pushing aside the police who guarded the gate it stormed the boats and began to flee the city." A contemporary Arab report described the scene at the port as follows: "Men stepped on their friends and women on their own children. The boats in the port were soon filled with living cargo. The overcrowding in them was horrible. Many turned over and sank with all their passengers."*

*Commenting to the colonial secretary in London on Haganah conduct, General Cunningham, a World War II veteran and high commissioner in Palestine, wrote on 30 April 1948: "Recent Jewish military successes (if indeed operations*

*based on the mortaring of terrified women and children can be classed as such) have aroused extravagant reactions in the Jewish press."*

*Stockwell's conduct in Haifa took the British government in London (as it took all Arab capitals) by surprise. Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin was furious with the army authorities and accused them of letting him down. The personal intervention of Prime Minister Clement Atlee was required to restore relations between Bevin and Field Marshall Montgomery, the chief of the Imperial General Staff and Stockwell's boss.*

*The six memoranda that follow, originally written in English and reproduced here for the first time, record the death throes of Haifa in the period from Wednesday, 21 April to Sunday, 25 April. The signatories were members of the Arab National Committee (ANC) of the city, an emergency body formed, as in other Arab cities after the UN partition resolution, to oversee the evolving situation. They were businessmen and lawyers, innocent of military affairs.*

**ARAB NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF HAIFA, LETTER TO GENERAL STOCKWELL, MILITARY COMMANDER, NORTH SECTOR, HAIFA, CONCERNING HIS STATEMENT OF WITHDRAWAL, 22 APRIL 1948.**

*From the time Haganah launched its ground assault and throughout the day of Wednesday, 21 April, repeated attempts by members of the ANC to secure an urgent appointment with General Stockwell were rebuffed. Finally, at 9:30 P.M., Stockwell agreed to meet an ANC delegation, but only the next morning, Thursday the 22nd, at 10 A.M. By that time, tens had been killed and many wounded, while thousands of women and children had fled their homes in panic.*

*The following letter, responding to the redeployment statement (quoted in the introductory note above), which Stockwell read out and then gave to the Arab representatives at 11 A.M. the previous day, was drawn up by the signatories at an emergency meeting held at 6 A.M. Thursday, 22 April in preparation for the meeting with Stockwell to be held several hours later. It was handed to Stockwell at that meeting.*

ARAB NATIONAL COMMITTEE  
HAIFA  
22nd April, 1948.

To: The Military Commander  
North Sector  
Haifa

Dear Sir,

1. The Arab National Committee of Haifa have had the opportunity of considering the contents of your note of the 21st instant, delivered to the Officer Commanding the Arab National Guard at Haifa regarding the maintenance of peace and order in the town pending the final evacuation of His Majesty's Forces from Palestine.

2. The Committee note with deep concern that it is your intention to ensure the preservation of tranquility in those parts of the town defined in the aforesaid note<sup>2</sup> leaving the remaining parts open to disorder and chaos. They feel bound, in the circumstances, to place on record a strong protest against this action which is, in their opinion, a flagrant violation of the declared policy of His Majesty's Government to be responsible for the maintenance of peace and order up to and including the 15th day of May, 1948, the date on which the Mandate will come to an end. They are convinced that your attitude is harmful to Arab interests since it places their compatriots at a great disadvantage and exposes them to grave danger arising from the unceasing shooting by Jewish snipers from posts dominating Arab quarters. The painful events of last night when the Jews indiscriminately fired at and bombarded the Arab hospital and Arab residential quarters in the old city, Wadi Nisnas and the eastern parts of the town resulting in considerable casualties, dead and wounded, are irrefutable proof of the wrongfulness of your policy which constitutes a breach of the legal and moral responsibilities of the Government to preserve peace and order, and to protect the lives and properties of the inhabitants. We say without hesitation that upon you lies the sole responsibility for the cold-blooded and brutal murder of innocent persons by the Jews, the perpetration of which was encouraged, and indeed induced, by the arrangement described in your aforesaid note.

3. It is hardly necessary for the Committee to emphasize that they have always been sincere and earnest in their policy to assist the authorities in the preservation of peace and order in the town. Ample proof of the honesty of their intention and of the sincerity of their aim is to be found in the numerous appeals which they made to the Arab inhabitants of the city, and in the publications which they distributed from time to time among the Arab community. British Administrative Officers, Police and Military Officers, will, doubtless, confirm to your good self this assertion; and the Committee entertains no doubt that their attitude in this respect leaves nothing to be desired. In almost all the clashes of which complaint is made in your note the Jews were aggressors, and the Arabs replied in self-defense.

4. The Committee venture to suggest that if it be the sincere desire of the authorities to ensure peace and order in the town pending the final departure of His Majesty's Forces from Palestine, all places where clashes between Arab and Jews are likely to occur should be sufficiently guarded by military patrols, day and night. In particular it is essential that the areas of Allenby, Hijaz, Nazareth and Iraq streets should be included in the scheme outlined in your note. The exclusion of these roads from the contemplated arrangement will, the Committee apprehends, afford ample opportunities for the Jews to launch bloody attacks upon innocent Arabs residing and carrying business in those quarters. Indeed, the events of the last 12 hours have fully justified their apprehension. It is to be observed that the scheme fully protects the thoroughfares, predominately Arab, used by the Jews in

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2. This refers to the city quarters to which Stockwell was redeploying his troops.



the ordinary course of their trade, and deprives from such protection the roads frequented by the Arab inhabitants in the course of their trade and daily work.

5. We wish to assure you, notwithstanding the regrettable occurrences of last night, of our unflinching readiness to adhere to the policy which we have hitherto adopted and followed, to co-operate with the authorities for maintaining peace and order in the whole town of Haifa. But we feel unable to do so if the important Arab quarters mentioned in the preceding paragraph hereof, remain excluded from the protection envisaged in the scheme described in your note of the 21st instant.

6. We trust that you will be able to reconsider the matter in the light of the representations herein contained and take such immediate action as may be necessary to ensure the maintenance of complete order and peace throughout the town, and to prevent any further aggression by the Jews upon the Arab community. We have reported the events now occurring in Haifa to the Arab States,<sup>3</sup> stressing the malafides of the British Authorities here, particularly in view of the refusal of those authorities to render any assistance for the rescue of women and children in spite of the repeated early requests made by Mr. George Mu'ammar, the Arab Liaison Officer, and Mr. Farid Saad, a member of this Committee, to the military and civil authorities of the town.<sup>4</sup>

Yours faithfully,

Victor A. Khayat	Farid Saad
George Mu'ammar	Elias Koussa
Anis Nasr	
THE ARAB NATIONAL COMMITTEE	
OF HAIFA	

P.S. We feel distressed and profoundly aggrieved by the lack of sympathy on the part of the British Authorities to render aid to the wounded although they have been requested to do so. Many persons suffering from serious wounds lying in streets and buildings are left unattended; and attempts by the Arab medical services to render the necessary help were frustrated by Jewish snipers. There are instances where drivers of ambulances and nurses have been shot at and wounded whilst performing this human act.

**ARAB NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF HAIFA, AIDE-MEMOIRE OF THE MEETING BETWEEN GENERAL STOCKWELL AND THE ARAB REPRESENTATIVES, 22 APRIL 1948.**

*The aide-memoire summarizing the gist of the talks between the signatories and General Stockwell at their meeting at 10 A.M. on 22 April was written by the*

3. This was done via the consuls of Egypt, Transjordan, Lebanon, and Syria in Haifa.

4. At 5 A.M. earlier that morning, 22 April, George Mu'ammar, the liaison officer with the British army in Haifa, had pleaded with the army to send ambulances to rescue those wounded in the Haganah bombardment that had preceded the attack on the Wadi Rushmiyya bridge area. When the appeal was refused, he appealed for British troops to escort Arab ambulances. This, too, was rejected.

*delegation while the meeting was still in progress. It was given to Stockwell to read and sign in recognition of its accuracy, which he did.*

FROM: The Arab Executives of HAIFA

We, the undersigned, have today met General Stockwell in the presence of the District Commissioner of HAIFA, the British Consul and Brigadier Johnson on the subject of the massacre by Jews of Arabs in the town of HAIFA now taking place. He informed us that he was unable and therefore not prepared to fight the Jews and put an end thereto and that he was not willing to allow Arab Armed Men to enter the town to help the Arab inhabitants. He was primarily interested in safeguarding the routes and areas occupied by the Army. He further suggested that he could intervene with the Jewish Authorities for a Truce. He will only intervene if we agree to negotiate a Truce.

(signed. . . )

Victor A. Khayat  
Farid Saad  
Elias Koussa  
George Mu'ammad  
Anis Nasr

22 Apr. 48

Seen

H. Stockwell

**THE HAGANAH COMMAND, TERMS FOR A TRUCE BETWEEN JEWS AND ARABS IN HAIFA,  
22 APRIL 1948.**

*After General Stockwell signed the aide-memoire recording his refusal to intervene in the fighting unless the ANC delegation agreed to negotiate a truce with the Haganah, the delegation, desperate to stop the bloodshed and destruction, asked him to obtain Haganah's truce terms.*

*According to Farid Saad, a senior member of the delegation, the general retired with his aides on the pretext that he wanted to contact the Jews. He returned within fifteen minutes to read from a typed sheet the text of the following document.*

*The delegation raised many objections and insisted that the agreement should contain an article indicating that the truce did not imply recognition of the jurisdiction of the Haganah or any change in the political status of the country, which technically was still under British Mandatory sovereignty. Stockwell made a note of this demand, promising to confer with the Jews. The most striking feature of the document, in addition to its being one of unconditional surrender in every sense of the word, was the role assigned in it to the British army in disarming the Arab population on behalf of the Haganah.*

*It was agreed that a meeting would take place at the Town Hall at 4 P.M. the same day (Thursday, 22 April) between the ANC delegation and Jewish repre-*

*sentatives. The meeting would be attended by Stockwell and would discuss the truce terms.*

Haifa, 22.4.48

TERMS OF THE HAGANAH COMMAND  
FOR A TRUCE IN AND APPLICABLE TO HAIFA  
BETWEEN JEWS AND ARABS.

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1. COMPLETE DISARMING OF ALL ARAB ARMS, INCLUDING WEAPONS OF ALL KINDS, ALL EXPLOSIVES, MILITARY VEHICLES AND OTHER MILITARY EQUIPMENT WITHOUT EXCEPTION.

2. ALL ARMS WITHIN THE ABOVE DESCRIPTION, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF LICENSED ARMS, A LIST OF WHICH WILL BE SHOWN TO THE HAGANAH BY THE DISTRICT COMMISSIONER, HAIFA, MUST BE DELIVERED BY 12.00 HOURS, 23RD APRIL, 1948, AT THE FOLLOWING PLACES OF ASSEMBLY. THIS TIME LIMIT MAY BE EXTENDED TO 17.00 HOURS, 23RD APRIL, 1948, AT THE DISCRETION OF THE G.O.C., NORTHERN SECTOR.

(i) NEAR THE RUSHMIYA BRIDGE OPPOSITE THE OFFICES OF THE EASTERN MOSLEM COUNCIL;

(ii) CORNER OF STANTON STREET AND BOURJ;

(iii) ENTRANCE TO OLD BUSINESS CENTRE;

(iv) EGGED STATION, CARMEL AVENUE.

THESE WILL BE HELD IN TRUST TO THE HAGANAH AND HANDED TO THEM AT THE DISCRETION OF THE G.O.C., NORTHERN SECTOR NOT LATER THAN MIDNIGHT 15/16 MAY, 1948.

3. REMOVAL FORTHWITH OF ARAB ROADBLOCKS AND FREEDOM OF TRAFFIC UNDISTURBED WILL COMMENCE FORTHWITH UNDER SUPERVISION OF THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES.

4. ALL FOREIGN ARAB MALES WILL CONCENTRATE AT PLACES OF ASSEMBLY TO BE FIXED BY HAGANAH AND WILL LEAVE PALESTINE WITHIN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS UNDER MILITARY CONTROL.

5. EUROPEAN NAZIS WILL BE DELIVERED TO MILITARY.<sup>5</sup>

6. A TWENTY-FOUR HOUR CURFEW WILL BE IMPOSED BY THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES ON ARAB QUARTERS AND HOUSES TO ASSURE COMPLETE DISARMING.

7. NON-DELIVERY OF ARMS WITHIN THE TIME SPECIFIED WILL BE TREATED AS AN OFFENCE AND WILL BE PUNISHABLE.

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5. There were none, but this was a good propaganda gimmick.

8. AFTER THE HOUSE CURFEW EACH PERSON IN HAIFA WILL BE FREE TO CARRY ON HIS NORMAL BUSINESS AND WAY OF LIVE.

9. ALL PERSONS WILL CARRY ON THEIR WORK AS EQUAL AND FREE CITIZENS OF HAIFA.

10. ANY JOINT MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE TOWN HALL.

11. THIS TRUCE COMES INTO EFFECT IMMEDIATELY.

**THE ARAB NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF HAIFA, LETTER TO GENERAL STOCKWELL SUMMARIZING HIS POSITION AT THE 22 APRIL TOWN HALL MEETINGS, HAIFA, 23 APRIL 1948.**

*In preparation for the Town Hall meeting set for 4 P.M. of 22 April, the ANC delegation, upon leaving General Stockwell's headquarters at 12:15 P.M. that same day, called for a general meeting of Haifa Arab notables to discuss the situation. The meeting was held at the house of Victor Khayat, transport being provided by British tanks because of the continuing battle.*

*The delegation reported on their talks with Stockwell. The assembled asked Yunis Naffa, the deputy garrison commander, how long resistance could last. He declined to discuss security matters publicly. An agonizing discussion followed on the pros and cons of accepting the truce terms read earlier by Stockwell. There was consensus that the uppermost consideration should be to stop the ongoing killing of innocent citizens. The delegation was authorized to sign any agreement it considered warranted by the circumstances.*

*The Town Hall meeting was held as scheduled at 4 P.M. It was attended on the Jewish side by the mayor, Shabatai Levy; a representative of the Jewish Agency; and "Motki" Maklef, operations officer of the Carmeli Brigade and Haganah's representative. Stockwell read the terms of the proposed truce, which were virtually identical with those he had read in the morning at his headquarters.*

*The ANC strongly protested the terms as unfair and destructive of Arab political rights. A heated discussion followed. The Arabs asked that a condition be added to the effect that the agreement did not imply recognition of the jurisdiction of the Haganah or any change in the political status of the country. Upon the Jewish rejection of this request, the delegation asked for a twenty-four-hour adjournment to consult the Arab governments on such a momentous issue. Both Stockwell and the Jews refused. At this point, Stockwell said emphatically that the delegation must sign the agreement as it stood that same evening if they wanted to avoid 300-400 additional casualties. After repeated and insistent requests for an adjournment to consult their Haifa colleagues, Stockwell granted an adjournment until 7 P.M. that same evening.*

*Upon leaving the Town Hall, the delegation returned to Victor Khayat's house to brief the general meeting of notables on what had transpired. There was another agonizing discussion in the light of Stockwell's dire warning uttered in the presence of the Haganah representative. The assembled renewed their authorization to the delegation to do what it thought necessary given the extreme gravity of the situation and to sign the agreement if there was no other alternative.*

*Meanwhile, operation Bi'ur Hametz continued in full swing. As Moshe Carmel, commander of the Carmeli Brigade, reports, the British had asked him for a cease-fire to create a "conducive atmosphere" for the 4 P.M. Town Hall meeting but "we did not think it suitable to do so, and the battles continued."*

*On the way to the 7 P.M. meeting at the Town Hall, the members of the delegation conferred among themselves and, despite the "authorization" from the general meeting at Khayat's house, decided that they could not themselves assume the tremendous national responsibility of endorsing an agreement that did not contain an article about Haganah jurisdiction and the political status of the country.*

*Upon entering the Town Hall meeting, they declared their inability to endorse the proposed truce agreement and requested the evacuation of Haifa's Arab citizens (which in any case had been ongoing under duress the whole day) because of Stockwell's refusal to protect their lives and properties.*

*It was after hearing this that the mayor, Shabatai Levy, made his moving speech asking the delegation to reconsider its decision and the exchange took place between Stockwell and Maklef mentioned in the general introductory note above. At the end of this second Town Hall meeting, it was decided to hold a meeting at 11 A.M. the following day, Friday, 23 April, to discuss evacuation arrangements.*

*The following document was composed by the delegates prior to the 11 A.M. meeting the following day to put on record Stockwell's position at the Town Hall meetings of 22 April. The letter was handed to Stockwell at the 23 April meeting. As he refused to receive it, it was given instead to the district commissioner.*

THE ARAB NATIONAL COMMITTEE

HAIFA

23rd April, 1948.

To: The Military Commander  
North Sector, Haifa.

Dear Sir,

1. We submit this note by way of confirmation of the statement which you made to us at the meeting in the town hall of Haifa, on Thursday the 22nd instant, to wit,

(a) that unless the Arabs accept the terms of the Haganah Command for a truce in Haifa, the murderous attack by the Jews upon the Arab quarters will be renewed resulting in some 300-400 casualties, in dead and wounded; and

(b) that you are neither able nor prepared to take any effective measure to prevent the contemplated assault.

2. We wish to reiterate our statement at that meeting that while the removal of the Arab inhabitants from the town is voluntary and is being carried out at our request,

yet the request was to the greatest extent prompted by your refusal to take any action to protect the lives and properties of those residents.

Yours faithfully,  
 Victor A. Khayat  
 Farid Saad  
 Elias Koussa  
 Anis Nasr  
 George Mu'ammār

Copy to: The District Commissioner, Haifa.

**ARAB NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF HAIFA, LETTER TO HAIFA MAYOR SHABATAI LEVY,  
 23 APRIL 1948.**

*The meeting to discuss evacuation arrangements was held as scheduled at 11 A.M. on 23 April. Present at the meeting, in addition to the Arab delegation, were senior British military and civilian officials, including Stockwell, the district commissioner, and officers representing the army, navy, and police. Also present was C. H. Marriott, Stockwell's British éminence grise (who had just been appointed consul and whose area of expertise had been Latin America), and Shabatai Levy and other Jewish representatives.*

*Before discussing evacuation plans, the delegation registered its strong protests at the continuing acts of gratuitous violence against the departing Arabs by the Carmeli Brigade and the Stern and Irgun (which the Haganah had allowed to participate in Bi'ur Hametz): the shooting of unarmed civilians, firing on ambulances and paramedics, stealing of cars, breaking into homes and the wholesale looting of their contents, the arrest of a large number of civilians whose fate remained unknown, and the prevention of people from entering their homes. Stockwell promised to take corrective action, but nothing was done about any of the violations.*

*The following letter was handed to Shabatai Levy at this meeting in his capacity as mayor. It indicates the delegation's attempt to limit the scope of the evacuation. Despite Levy's good intentions, nothing came of the memorandum.*

THE ARAB NATIONAL COMMITTEE  
 HAIFA  
 23rd April, 1948.

Dear Mr. Shabatai Levy,

In connection with the proposed removal of the Arab inhabitants from Haifa, we shall be glad if you will let us have a written assurance by your good self and by the Jewish authority concerned that:

(a) every Arab remaining in the town will enjoy full freedom of business and residence, and will not be molested nor fettered by any measures whatever subject to the requirements of peace and order of the town which will be endorsed equally to all Arab and Jewish citizens;

(b) the properties of the Arab inhabitants leaving the town will be adequately protected; and

(c) all religious establishments will be safeguarded, and no encroachments thereon will be allowed.

Yours faithfully,  
 Victor A. Khayat  
 Farid Saad  
 Elias Koussa  
 George Mu'ammar  
 Anis Nasr

Copy to: The District Commissioner, Haifa.  
 The Military Commander, North Sector, Haifa.

**ARAB NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF HAIFA, LETTER TO GENERAL STOCKWELL,  
 25 APRIL 1948.**

*This document records Haganah's continuing failure to honor its commitments even under the truce agreement. It also indicates the ANC's last desperate and somewhat pathetic attempts to minimize the scope of the evacuation and if possible even to reverse it. There was little response from Stockwell.*

HAIFA ARAB EMERGENCY COMMITTEE  
 HAIFA  
 25th April, 1948.

To: The Military Commander  
 North Sector, Haifa.

Dear Sir,

1. We wish to invite your attention to three matters of vital importance to the Arab community of Haifa, and trust that you will see your way to take the necessary measures to ensure the early remedy of their complaint.
2. It would appear from the note dated the 21st instant, which you delivered to the Officer Commanding the Arab Civil Guards, that the reason for the exclusion of the quarters predominantly Arab from the area for which you assume responsibility of preserving peace and order was the frequency of clashes between Arab and Jews. These clashes have finally ceased on the 22nd instant. We submit that it is only fair and just that you should now assume control of the whole town and be responsible for the assistance of peace and order therein in conformity with the declared policy of His Majesty's Government. The adoption of this measure will secure the removal of members of the Jewish forces from Arab quarters, and will, doubtless, help to restore a feeling of confidence and of safety to the Arab inhabitants minimizing the number of Arab evacuees.
3. The second complaint is the organised and systematic looting of Arab properties. Houses and business premises have been virtually emptied from all movables, and many Arab families have been deprived of all their belongings save the

clothes which they now wear. The Arab hospital in the old town have [*sic*] been broken into and all surgical and medical equipments stolen.

4. Thirdly, the Jews prevent all Arab persons from circulating in Arab quarters on various pretences. This action tends to intensify the feeling of mistrust in the innocence and honesty of the Jewish measures, and to nullify the efforts of this Committee to pacify their compatriots.

5. We have repeatedly requested the Jewish authorities to put an end to this state of affairs, but all our endeavours have, unfortunately, proved to be futile. We cannot but hold the British Authorities, civil and military, responsible for this lamentable condition, and we feel that it is within your power to put matters in order.

Yours faithfully,  
 Victor A. Khayat  
 Farid Saad  
 E. N. Koussa  
 George Mu'ammam  
 Anis Nasr

Copy to: The District Commissioner, Haifa.  
 His Worship the Mayor of Haifa.

## THE FALL OF JAFFA

REPORT TO FAWZI QAWUKJI, COMMANDER OF THE ARAB LIBERATION ARMY (ALA) CENTRAL FRONT, FROM CAPTAIN MICHEL ISSA, HEAD OF THE AJNADIN BATTALION, 6 MAY 1948.

*If Haifa was the second city after Tiberias on Haganah's list, Jaffa was the third. In fact, the operation planned against Jaffa had from the beginning been dubbed "Bi'ur Hametz." However, the "leaven" to be cleansed in the Jaffa "Bi'ur Hametz" was not as yet the population of Jaffa itself, but of the Arab villages surrounding it: Saqiyah, al-Khairiyya, Yazur, Salameh, Abu Kabir, and Tal al-Rish.*

*Haganah's relative coyness with regard to Jaffa was prompted largely by the deployment of the British army in the vicinity of Jaffa-Tel Aviv and the unlikelihood of there being a Jaffa "Stockwell," particularly as Jaffa was part of the Palestinian state according to the UN partition resolution. Hence, Jaffa's fate was to be death by strangulation rather than frontal assault. According to the official history of the Haganah, Jaffa "would be forced to surrender once the British left on 15 May." And indeed, the British army in the Jaffa-Tel Aviv sector was on the alert after the furor that Stockwell's conduct had aroused in the British cabinet.*

*But Haganah's plans against Jaffa did not reckon with the plans of its rival, the Irgun, whose headquarters and the bulk of whose forces were in neighboring Tel Aviv, where its leader Menachem Begin resided.*

*Relations between Haganah and the Irgun were fundamentally a function of the competition for political influence in the Jewish state-to-be between the "Left"*



and the "Right," which they represented respectively. The most dramatic and politically rewarding arena for this competition during this first phase of the 1948 war was "military" action against the Palestinians, as it had been against the British in the immediately preceding phase. Already a gruesome victim of this competition had been Dayr Yasin on 9 April.

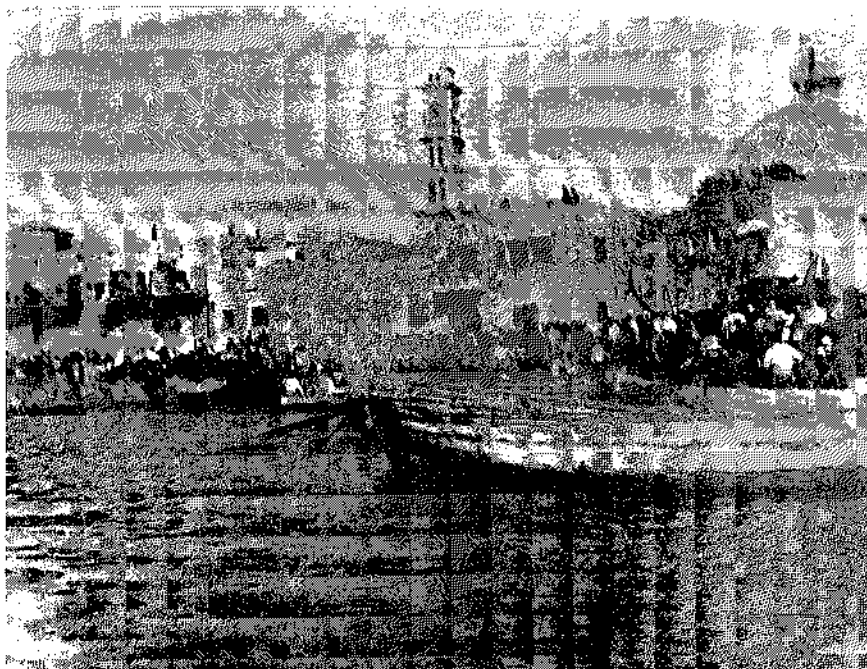
Begin was aware of Haganah's plans with regard to Jaffa. He had his own Hametz plans. He decided to go for an all-out frontal assault in the expectation that the British, judging from their conduct in Haifa, would not dare take him on. He, too, planned it to coincide with Passover on 24 April but could only launch it on the 25th. Having seized a vast quantity of mortar shells from a British army train, he began a relentless and indiscriminate bombardment of the residential and commercial quarters of the city, which he maintained round the clock for the next three days and nights. Simultaneously, he launched an east-to-west land attack with 600 men against the narrow neck of a Jaffa neighborhood Manshiyya, which jutted northward along the sea and was surrounded by Tel Aviv on the north and east.

Resistance in Manshiyya was stubborn and fierce. Unable to advance into it throughout the day and night of 25 April, the thrust of the assault was changed southward in the direction of Jaffa proper, but here, too, an all-day assault during 26 April was halted. By the evening of the 26th, Begin was ready to call off the land operations against Jaffa while continuing his relentless bombardment of the city's residential and commercial quarters. But his lieutenants prevailed on him to renew the assault against Manshiyya. Resistance here continued throughout the day of 27 April, but some progress was made by nightfall. Continuing the attack through the night, the Irgun was finally able to make a breakthrough to the sea by 7 A.M. of the 28th, severing Manshiyya from the rest of the city. Thereupon the Irgun started mopping up the quarter and looting it. In the words of the Anglo-Jewish journalist Jon Kimche, "Everything that was moveable was carried off from Jaffa—furniture, carpets, pictures, crockery and pottery, jewelry and cutlery. The occupied part of Jaffa [i.e., Manshiyya] was stripped . . . what could not be taken away was smashed. Windows, pianos, fittings and lamps went in an orgy of destruction."

At this point, the British intervened after a warning to the Haganah authorities in Tel Aviv. On 29 April, they shelled the Irgun headquarters in a Tel Aviv suburb and machine gunned from the air the Irgun units in Manshiyya, forcing them to retire. Ironically, a British-Haganah agreement allowed joint patrols of their forces to take Manshiyya over from the Irgun. That same day, 29 April, Bi'ur Hametz, delayed because of the Irgun land operations, was launched by the Haganah, tightening the noose round Jaffa proper. The villages fell like ninepins under the assault of units from three Haganah brigades, the Kiryati, the Alexandroni, and the Givati. An Irgun-Haganah agreement concluded on the 28th put the former under Haganah command for this operation.

But all was not smooth sailing for Bi'ur Hametz. The Jaffa garrison, comprising 350 fighters of the ALA and a local Palestinian force of some 250 civilian volunteers, made its last stand when it counterattacked on the 29th to reoccupy

*the eastern suburb of Jaffa, Tal al-Rish, two kilometers away. In this battle, according to the official history of the Haganah, the Givati brigade lost 33 dead and 100 wounded. But it was too late. The civilian population, mass panicked by the continuing mortar bombardment, was leaving in droves, demoralizing the fighters at Tal al-Rish and elsewhere. The British interfered with Bi'ur Hametz only to the extent of forcing the Haganah to allow a land escape route on the main Jaffa-Jerusalem road for the fleeing civilians who had not already escaped by sea.*



**Jaffa port, late April 1948. With the land routes cut off by the Haganah, tens of thousands of the citizens of Jaffa fled by boat to Gaza and Egypt; scores were drowned. (*Before Their Diaspora*, Institute for Palestine Studies)**

*Meanwhile, responding to the desperate SOS's sent by the Jaffa National Committee, the Commander of the ALA's Central Front, of which Jaffa was part, had ordered an ALA unit to the city. The Ajnadin battalion, a Palestinian force led by a daring young Palestinian officer named Michel Issa, arrived on the 29th, fresh from the heat of battle north of Jerusalem, where it had borne the brunt of the Haganah and Palmach assault on Nabi Samweel on 23 April. This assault was part of Operation Yevussi, which aimed at capturing the strategic heights commanding the northern approaches of Jerusalem to make possible the conquest of those parts of the city still in Arab hands. Clearly, the Haganah Command had planned simultaneous massive attacks on the three major Palestinian cities of Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem to coincide with and celebrate Passover, a detail that has not been taken note of in the published literature of the 1948 war. It was*

*Issa's forces that were responsible for thwarting the northern thrust of the Yevussi operation.*

*Michel Issa's report, addressed to Fawzi Qawukji, the popular Lebanese officer in charge of the ALA's Central Front, records the last days of Jaffa as an Arab city, from the time of his arrival to his departure with the remnants of his battalion a week later. It was translated by Walid Khalidi.*

[Letter head: Headquarters, Arab Liberation Army, Northern Front, the Commander]

To: His Excellency the Commander of the Central Front<sup>1</sup>

Subject: The Jaffa Garrison

Date: 6 May 1948

From: Captain Michel Issa

1. At 12 hours noon, 28 April 1948, I received your order to proceed to Jaffa with my battalion<sup>2</sup> plus a platoon from Hittin Battalion<sup>3</sup> to reinforce the Jaffa garrison.
2. At the time of the receipt of this order, Ajnadin was deployed in the villages of Biddu and Nabi Samweel.
3. After considerable efforts to secure the necessary transport and petrol, I was able to reach Jaffa with my battalion at 6.00 hours on 29 April. With support from a unit commanded by Major Mahdi, I got through dangerous points along the way.<sup>4</sup>
4. Upon arrival in Jaffa, I found the city in a state of great panic as a result of the great pressure on it by the Jews on the northern front.
5. The commander of the Jaffa garrison, Major Adil Najmuddin,<sup>5</sup> ordered me to send immediately two platoons to the northern front, which I did.
6. I received a copy of your orders to Major Najmuddin to hand over the garrison of the city to me.

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1. Following the formation by the Arab League of the Arab Liberation Army (ALA), Palestine was divided into three sections: the Northern Front, comprising the Galilee; the Southern Front, comprising the Negev; and the Central Front, comprising the rest of the country. While the Southern Front was theoretically under the Egyptians, the Northern and Central Fronts were in principle under the command of the Arab League Military Committee in Damascus headed by General Ismail Safwat. In fact, however, the situation was far more complex, and the Palestinian guerrilla forces of the Jihad Muqaddas under the Arab Higher Committee (led by Hajj Amin al-Husayni) controlled much of the rural areas. The commander of the Central Front to whom this report is addressed was Fawzi Qawukji.

2. Ajnadin Battalion (like other ALA battalions named after early battles of Islam) was 250 strong. It was made up of Palestinians recruited from the TJFF (the Transjordanian Frontier Force), a force trained and officered by the British to patrol the frontier between Palestine and Transjordan and which the British disbanded in January 1948 following their decision to leave Palestine.

3. Another ALA unit comprising three companies and a total of 500 men, mainly Palestinian.

4. Mahdi was an Iraqi ALA officer. His help would have been required given the tightening Haganah circle around Jaffa.

5. An Iraqi ALA officer.

7. Major Najmuddin declined to hand over the garrison of the city, upon which I sent you the following telegram dated 30th April 1948:

TO FAWZI.<sup>6</sup> CC: MILITARY COMMITTEE.<sup>7</sup> ADIL REFUSES TO HAND OVER THE GARRISON AND IS LEAVING THE CITY WITHOUT DOING SO STOP GARRISON HAS COLLAPSED, ITS ARMS ARE DISPERSED STOP CITY AND GARRISON IN STATE OF COMPLETE CONFUSION STOP ATTITUDE OF ADIL NEGATIVE AND POSSIBLY PLEASED WITH STATE OF AFFAIRS STOP HIS TROOPS HAVE LOOTED SEVERAL SHOPS STOP NO ONE CAN CONTROL SITUATION WITHOUT SUPPORT OF REGULAR FORCES STOP 80 PERCENT OF POPULATION HAS LEFT CITY AND THE FLOOD OF DEPARTURE IS CONTINUING IN TRAGIC FASHION STOP NATIONAL COMMITTEE UNABLE TO CONTINUE FUNCTIONS BECAUSE OF LACK OF RESOURCES [SIGNED] MICHEL

8. Morning, 1st May 1948: Just learned that Major Adil, his Iraqi troops, and the Yugoslavs<sup>8</sup> are waiting in their vehicles at the entrance of the city, determined to leave. I prevented them from doing so unless there is a proper handover of the garrison.

9. Noon, 1st May 1948: Major Adil, with all the Iraqis and Yugoslavs, were able to leave by sea without my knowledge, and I sent you the following telegram dated 1 May 1948:

TO FAWZI: ADIL LEFT CITY BY SEA WITH ALL IRAQIS AND YUGOSLAVS STOP AFTER MORE DEPARTURES TODAY, CITY ALMOST DESERTED BY INHABITANTS STOP THE ABILITY OF THE CITY TO PROVIDE FOR WHAT IS LEFT OF THE GARRISON WILL END TOMORROW STOP THE BRITISH COMMANDER HAS ORDERED A CEASE-FIRE UNTIL THE MIDDLE OF THE CURRENT MONTH<sup>9</sup> STOP IF THE JEWS DO NOT OBEY THE ORDER I HAVE NO FORCES ADEQUATE TO HOLD THEM BACK STOP THE INFECTION HAS SPREAD TO AJNADIN STOP I AWAIT YOUR URGENT INSTRUCTIONS [SIGNED] MICHEL

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6. Qawukji, commander of the Central Front.

7. The Arab League Military Committee headquartered near Damascus.

8. The ALA Jaffa garrison under Najmuddin, comprising 350 fighters, was made up of about 325 Iraqis, the rest being "Yugoslavs"—more accurately, Bosnian Muslims who had fought in Yugoslavia during World War II.

9. Since the Mandate was to expire and the British forces to leave the country on 15 May, the British commander was trying to arrange for a cease-fire only until that date.

10. The remainder of the garrison have fled with their weapons, except for a minority who handed their weapons and ammunition over to me.<sup>10</sup> This was after they saw Major Adil and his comrades depart.

11. On 2nd May I sent you the following telegram:

TO FAWZI. CC: MILITARY COMMITTEE. MOST OF GARRISON IS NOW GONE AND A GOOD PART OF AJNADIN STOP THE JEWS DOMINATE THE EXIT ROAD FROM JAFFA TO RAMLA STOP CIVILIAN LIFE HAS COME TO AN END STOP CIVILIANS AND DESERTING MEMBERS OF GARRISON ARE LOOTING HOUSES AND STORES STOP I DO NOT HAVE AN ADEQUATE FORCE TO PREVENT THIS STOP ONLY 20 PERCENT OF DOCTORS AND HOSPITAL STAFFS ARE STILL AT THEIR POSTS STOP CONDITION OF PATIENTS AND WOUNDED IN HOSPITALS VERY SAD STOP WE ARE FINDING GREAT DIFFICULTY IN BURYING THE DEAD STOP I URGENTLY DEMAND EXPLICIT AND CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS [SIGNED] MICHEL

12. Evening of 2nd May: I called for a meeting of the remaining members of the Municipal Council and the National Committee to discuss our predicament and suggested to them that we declare Jaffa an Open City<sup>11</sup> on my own personal responsibility for whatever consequences may result from this decision. Their agreement was unanimous. The following day in the morning of 3rd May the members of the Municipal Council and the National Committee asked me to send the following telegram:

TO THE MILITARY COMMITTEE: NO GARRISON IS LEFT IN JAFFA STOP MOST OF ITS INHABITANTS ARE GONE STOP THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT ADVISES THAT WE DECLARE JAFFA AN OPEN CITY AND AWAITS YOUR RESPONSE BY TOMORROW MORNING STOP PLEASE RESPOND [SIGNED] GARRISON COMMANDER, MEMBERS OF MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, MEMBERS OF NATIONAL COMMITTEE

13. Morning of 4th May: I got in touch with the British District Commissioner<sup>12</sup> in the company of members of the Municipal Council and National Committee. I asked him to contact the Jews and propose the declaration of Jaffa as an open city

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10. In addition to the ALA force under Najmuddin, the Jaffa garrison included local civilian volunteers, loosely allied to the Jihad Muqaddas, numbering about 250 and under the command of Saleh Nazer.

11. A city that is undefended and therefore not to be attacked, like Paris during World War II.

12. The representative of the Civil Administration, still theoretically in control of Palestine until the Mandate was to end on 15 May.

on condition that Arabs and Jews remain within the municipal boundaries of Jaffa and Tel Aviv respectively, with each side undertaking not to attack the other until 15th May even if Arabs elsewhere in the country attack Jews in other parts of Palestine.

14. Morning of 5th May: Informed that the Jews have accepted these conditions in principle and referred them to the Jewish Agency to draft the final text of the agreement.

15. 15.00 hours 5th May: Left Jaffa with 50 troopers, all that was left of Ajnadin,<sup>13</sup> and proceeded to Ramallah. The British army helped in my departure.

16. Succeeded in taking out with me largest possible quantity of arms and ammunition during the two days of 4th and 5th of May 1948.

17. Conclusion: The following in my opinion are the reasons for the collapse of the Jaffa Garrison.

(a) Continuous shelling with mortars of the city by Jews for four days beginning 25th April, which caused inhabitants of city, unaccustomed to such bombardment, to panic and flee.

(b) The mass panicked departure of the inhabitants demoralized the garrison.

(c) Failure of Jaffa Garrison commander to reassure the population and rally the garrison troops, which indicated to everybody the garrison's inability to protect the city against attacks from the Jews.

(d) The spread of defeatist rumors by anarchistic elements, which exploited the confusion.

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13. About an equal number of Ajnadin had left the city the day before on orders from Issa, taking with them arms and ammunition.