3 The Insurgent Challenge

Writing in 1920 on the nature and components of successful rebellion, T. E. Lawrence offered the following assertion on the relationship between the insurgent and the civilian population on whose behalf he was fighting: 'Rebellions can be made by 2 percent active in a striking force and 98 percent passively sympathetic.'[1] Drawn from his own limited experience of fomenting rebellion in Arabia, this and Lawrence's many other generalisations remain controversial, and cannot be accepted at face value. Rarely, if ever, have insurgents acquired the passive sympathy of the entire population; even in the great national liberation struggles, such as in Algeria, sympathy was not universal, and insurgents often had to enforce the passive cooperation of the people.[2] At first glance, the Jewish insurgency in Palestine appears to have been the exception that proves the rule. It would be easy to gain the impression from pro-Zionist sources that the Jewish community supported the insurgents wholeheartedly. A more critical appraisal suggests otherwise; that throughout the period the use of violence remained a divisive issue of significant proportions within the Zionist movement, and within the Jewish community in Palestine and elsewhere. That said, the Jewish insurgency exceeded Lawrence's formula in one respect; the insurgent movements collectively comprised substantially more than 5 per cent of the Jewish population in Palestine. Like that larger community, however, the Jewish underground was divided on the issues of methods and legitimacy of violent rebellion. These divisions were reflected in the different organisational structures, strategies and tactics of the three 'illegal armies'. Moreover, these different approaches to rebellion exerted a significant influence on the course of the insurgency.

ORGANISATION AND STRATEGY OF THE INSURGENT GROUPS

Three separate insurgent organisations were involved in the campaign: the Haganah (Defence); the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organisation) and the Lochmei Heruth Israel (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel) or Lechi. The Haganah was the largest of the three, with some 45 000 members in 1946.[3] Although the Haganah traced its historical roots to the self-defence units formed before 1914 to protect Jewish settlements, it was formally established in 1921, at the instigation of the Histadruth (the General Jewish Federation of Labour). Some units engaged in active operations against Arab rebels in 1938. During the Second World War the Palmach (Striking Companies) were created to assist the British in the event of a German invasion of Palestine. Once the threat receded the Palmach was retained on active service by the Haganah, being based on the kibbutzim (collective agricultural settlements) where it could continue military training in conjunction with farming. Other members of the Haganah were trained by the British for service with special forces in Europe and North Africa; some later served in the Jewish Brigade which fought in Europe in 1944–45.[4]

Although created initially by the Histadruth, the Haganah had evolved by the end of the war into the military arm of the Jewish Agency, which had been created under the Palestine Mandate to advise and cooperate with the Palestine administration in matters related to establishment of the Jewish national home.[5] During the Second World War a new command structure was established for the Haganah, in which the Histadruth, which dominated politically the Jewish Agency Executive, shared command and control with the Political Department of the Agency. The Haganah's security committee was responsible for general policies and finances, but delegated some of its political and all of its administrative authority to the National Command. Moshe Sneh of the Agency was Commander-in-Chief, with seven command members as his assistants. The general staff, responsible for technical and educational affairs, reported directly to Sneh. Funds raised in Palestine or abroad for the Haganah were held in the Keren Hayesod (Palestine Foundation Fund). By 1945 it appears that strategic command of the Haganah rested solely with the Agency's political department, which issued orders directly to the Commander-in-Chief.[6]

The Haganah was organised as a territorial militia. Most served in the Him (Guard Force), a poorly trained force intended solely for protection of rural settlements. The smallest formation was a post of three to six men. Four to eight posts constituted a sector or platoon; two or more sectors a region or company; and from two to nine regions, a district or battalion. The Him had basic intelligence, communications and medical services, as well as arrangements for mutual support of adjoining settlements. The Hish (Field Force) included 4600 men in mobile formations controlled by district commanders. The Palmach, the elite force of the Haganah, totalled by early 1945 some 1500 men, also deployed on a territorial basis: individual platoons were based on a kibbutz; adjoining platoons formed companies; and adjoining companies, battalions. The conventional military structure notwithstanding, the Palmach was a guerrilla army, and this was reflected in its training in sabotage, covert operations and rigorous physical and weapons training. Promising members were put through the NCO's course which covered small unit leadership, urban combat, resistance techniques, international politics and the opposition in Palestine (the security forces and the other underground groups). After a minimum of six months service as a section or deputy platoon commander, an NCO attended the officer's training course. This training system, combined with a reserve organisation, was designed to allow the Palmach to expand rapidly in an emergency. By the end of the war it had four battalions.[7] After 1945 the organisations expanded considerably; the Haganah expanded to 43 000–45 000, including 8000 in the Hish. The Palmach increased to 2000–3000. The Palmach and the Hish played the most active role during the Haganah's period of opposition to the government.

The political attitudes and objectives of the World Zionist Organisation (WZO), as expressed through the Jewish Agency, determined to a large extent the strategy of the Haganah. During 1945–46 the Haganah operated according to a strategy it called 'Constructive Warfare'. It was designed to persuade the British government to change its Palestine policy, especially immigration policy; it was not intended to be a strategy for a war of independence. It was, moreover, a compromise. It was supposed to satisfy both the militant elements in the Haganah and the Zionist movement, who wanted to take action against the British, and the moderates, who were opposed in principle to the use of terrorism. The strategy involved three related tactical techniques, with distinct but mutually

supporting political objectives. First, the Jewish Agency and the Haganah would carry out illegal immigration operations, to save the remnants of European Jewry and to increase the Jewish population of Palestine. These operations would serve also as a propaganda weapon in the political battle to terminate the White Paper policy. Secondly, illegal settlements would be established in prohibited areas, to ensure footholds in strategically vital areas and, again, to expose the injustices of the White Paper. Finally, the Haganah would conduct military operations called Maavak Tzamud (Linked Struggle). They would be carried out either to protect directly the landing and dispersal of illegal immigrants, or would be directed at any branch or aspect of the Palestine administration involved in the prevention of illegal immigration. This allowed a wide variety of military targets: roads and bridges, patrol boats and naval vessels; police stations, radar stations and airfields. Such attacks also would undermine the security of the British position in Palestine, precluding its effective use as a military base.[8]

The strategy had obvious weaknesses, largely the product of the Agency's reluctance to sanction the use of force. Inclined to be cautious, the Agency leaders, according to one critic, tended to test British reactions after each incident to see if they had been pressured sufficiently; consequently, there were long periods of inaction between many operations. The Haganah took pains to reduce casualties, often to the extent of giving warnings of impending attack in order to allow British personnel to evacuate intended targets.[9] The British, of course, just as often refused to evacuate, or chose to defend the target, so casualties on both sides were inevitable. Some critics found artificial the distinction between the Haganah's 'constructive' operations and the 'destructive' acts of the Irgun and the Lechi, observing, 'One cannot draw the line between various kinds of violence'.[10] Such distinctions were even harder to draw so long as the Haganah was cooperating with the more violent Irgun and the Lechi, as was the case in 1945–46. The British government, in any case, would be unable or unwilling to see in the Haganah's actions anything less than a terrorist campaign to overthrow the government of Palestine. As Elizabeth Monroe has observed: 'Armed resistance instinctively produces in an imperial power an unwillingness to capitulate to violence'.[11] From the very first Haganah action the British government demonstrated just such tenacity. But for nearly a year the strategy of constructive warfare allowed the Zionist movement to apply military pressure to the

British government in concert with political pressure without having to acknowledge responsibility for the military dimension of the campaign.

The Irgun Zvai Leumi had an estimated strength in 1945 of approximately 1500.[12] It shared the same historical origins as the Haganah, but was created in 1931 when a group of Haganah members left the parent organisation in a dispute over the issue of socialist politicisation in the Haganah. They seized an arms cache and founded Haganah B, which became subsequently associated with the right-wing Zionist–Revisionist Party. It remained a politically unstable organisation throughout the decade: in 1937 as many as half of its members returned to the original Haganah and in 1940 the leadership split over the issue of cooperation with the British during the war. A minority opposed to cooperation left to form a new group, which became the Lechi. The Irgun languished until Menachem Begin became commander in late 1943.[13] He immediately reorganised the Irgun into a secret revolutionary army. He severed the group's connexions with the Revisionists to ensure both security and the Irgun's ability to determine its own political programme. Begin was the head of the High Command, which controlled both the political and military policies and activities of the Irgun. A general staff was responsible for administrative functions: planning; intelligence; ideology and propaganda; regional commands; secretariat; quartermaster; finance; and medical services. The operational forces came jointly under the planning section and the regional commanders, and consisted of squads, platoons, companies and divisions. According to Begin, the organisation never had more than 30 or 40 full-time members, relying heavily on part-time volunteers, who eventually numbered in the thousands. Eitan Haber estimates that by 1947 the Irgun had 600 to 1000 'operational' members, with some 5000 in reserve. The Irgun financial section, Keren Habarzel (Fund for Iron), collected funds from sympathisers, as well as authorising 'expropriations' (robberies). By 1946 the Irgun had also created some ten front organisations in the United States to generate financial assistance from the wealthy American Jewish community. In 1946 the Irgun also established a headquarters in Europe to carry out recruiting, fund-raising and operations. Although small in size in comparison with the Haganah, the Irgun played a major role in the insurgent campaign; some historians would ascribe to it a decisive role.[14]

The principle political objective of the Irgun was the establishment

of an independent Jewish state, incorporating both Palestine and Trans-Jordan. The Irgun's ideology rested on three assumptions: first, that every Jew had a natural right to enter Palestine freely; second, that the creation of a Jewish state presupposed the existence of an armed Jewish force; and third, that every Jewish group and every foreign power supporting the Jewish right to independence would be considered an ally. A majority Jewish population, created by large-scale immigration, was also an essential precondition to independence.[15]

The Irgun's military strategy was to initiate a 'Liberation War . . . a just war, which is conducted by an oppressed people against a foreign power that has enslaved it and its country'.[16] This liberation war was to prepare the Irgun for the 'opportune moment' to seize power: when the British had been defeated either in the insurgent campaign or in a war with another power.[17] Eitan Haber states that Begin followed the Clausewitzian maxim that war is politics by other means, and the Irgun's strategy bears this out: the continuous liberation war would be accompanied by political action, propaganda, economic warfare, and would be 'internationalised' in order to win the support of foreign governments.[18] The Irgun regarded this strategy as one of total war, requiring the mobilisation of the whole Jewish people, using political as much as military weapons:

> Total War does not mean only bearing arms. We will not honour the rules of His Majesty's Government. We will not obey its laws. We will not pay taxes. We will not recognize the authority of British officials. We will ignore the dictates of their courts. We will set aside the injunction prohibiting us from settling on the land . . . . We will create a provisional Jewish Government which will direct this war, integrate all our activities, and embody our aspirations.[19]

Begin states that his liberation strategy was based on the assumption that the British government, owing to political tradition and Britain's situation in 1945, would be unwilling and unable to rule Palestine by excessive force in the face of determined opposition. Drawing on the current example of the rebellion in Greece, an Irgun pamphlet concluded: 'The English commander is not free to suppress the rebellion in a sea of blood.'[20] Convinced that the British attached great importance to political and moral factors in governing their colonies, the Irgun concluded that it could defeat the British by humiliating them:

> The very existence of an underground, which oppression, hanging, torture, and deportation fail to crush or weaken must, in the end, undermine the prestige of a colonial regime that lives by the legend of its omnipotence. Every attack which it fails to prevent is a blow to its standing. Even if the attack does not succeed it makes a dent in that prestige, and that dent widens into a crack which is extended with every succeeding attack.[21]

Begin believed that once the revolt began Palestine would come to resemble a 'glass house'; the world's attention would be focused on Palestine and the events within. This close and constant scrutiny would allow the Irgun to disseminate its political message through its actions while protecting the Irgun from an extreme British response. Thus the military and political roles of the Irgun were inseparable; the Irgun would act as its own political spokesman. J. Bowyer Bell has accurately described this as a strategy of leverage.[22]

The Irgun's strategy shared some common aspects with that of the Haganah: both employed military and political action to put pressure on the British government; in both cases raising the political and military costs of law enforcement in Palestine was central to the application of leverage. The Irgun commanders felt that 'each operation should be planned with an eye to major effects and to this end we should make Britain itself our central objective'.[23] The strategies diverged on the matter of the means to achieve independence. The Haganah's strategy envisaged a negotiated solution, in which constructive warfare was simply a pressure tactic and not the sole means of achieving the desired objective. The Irgun rejected a negotiated settlement; its aim was to achieve independence by inflicting a political/military defeat on Britain, forcing her to withdraw from the Mandate, and seizing power upon that withdrawal. Inevitably then, the Irgun's strategy required a higher level of violence and intensity of conflict.

This crucial difference in the two strategies was reflected directly in the participation of the two groups in acts of violence. During the period of cooperation, 1945–46, the Haganah and the Palmach were directly involved in conducting eight military operations. The Irgun and the Lechi together carried out more than 30 during the same period. Once the cooperation ended, the latter groups executed more than 280 operations between September 1946 and July 1947.[24]

The Lechi was the smallest organisation, numbering some 250 to 300 in 1944.[25] The group had carried out operations almost from

the moment of its break with the Irgun in 1940. By 1942 most of the members, including their leader Abraham Stern, had been arrested or killed by the police and those who remained alive, both in and out of prison, began to reorganise the group. They adopted the structure of a secret terrorist society: members were grouped in cells of three with vertical lines of communication and command from a three-man central committee. Recruitment was very selective to ensure loyalty and security: prospective members sponsored by two established members were subjected to lengthy covert surveillance and interrogation in secrecy. Once accepted they returned to the large cities where they lived under assumed identities. To protect itself from informers, the Lechi established an intelligence service which penetrated the Palestine police and built up a file on police anti-terrorist agents. It also extended into the British army and the administration. The 'Fighting Division' included personnel, training, planning and logistics branches. There was also a propaganda department and a separate radio station. The Lechi financed itself by means of door-to-door fund-raising campaigns, protection racket extortion and bank robberies. Initially the Lechi established cells in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa, but branches were eventually extended to Cairo, Britain and Europe, with front organisations in the United States. At the end of October 1943, 21 members of the Lechi escaped from Latrun detention camp, putting the group on a solid footing. Although never officially appointed, Nathan Friedman-Yellin was recognised as the head of the central triumvirate, responsible for propaganda and external contacts and negotiations. Yitzak Yizernitsky took over administration, organisation and operations. Dr Israel Sheib was the ideologist, giving lectures to the members and running the underground newspaper.[26] The Lechi was very active in the insurgent campaign. It demonstrated a capability for inflicting casualties and damage far out of proportion to its size.

In his study of the Lechi, Gerold Frank has stated that the group had no political line or ideological consistency save for a single political objective – an independent Jewish state.[27] The evidence suggests that this is an over-simplification. Granted that the Lechi's political programme was abstruse, it does not defy explanation; rather it must be examined in relation to the influence of the Lechi's founder Abraham Stern, both before and after his death. Even before he died Stern had come to view the Lechi's struggle for national independence as part of a larger war against British imperialism in the Middle East.[28]

Stern emigrated to Palestine from Poland in the early 1920s. A brilliant scholar at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, he later studied in Italy where, according to one analyst, he became captivated by Mussolini's fascism and returned to Palestine with an ambition to recreate not just the state of Israel in Palestine, but to build a vast fascist Hebrew empire from the Euphrates to the Nile. Stern was not a Zionist in the strictest sense of the word: he believed that the Jewish state had never ceased to exist; it would be recreated by massive Jewish immigration from the diaspora and a war of national liberation by the combined forces of Zionists outside Palestine and a 'Hebrew Liberation Front' fighting inside Palestine. Although Stern's colleagues in the Irgun agreed that a Jewish state would have to be created by force, they were not as fanatical as Stern and it was this that led to the split in 1940: Stern believed that with Britain at war the Irgun should push for independence.[29] J. Bowyer Bell writes:

> When the split came in the summer of 1940, few were surprised. It had been obvious for years that Stern would not wait on events, could not compose his soul, and sought a means to act. He attracted about him impatient, driven, desperate men who also distrusted politics and believed in deeds.[30]

From a political point of view this impulse to action was self-defeating. According to Geula Cohen, a former member of the group, 'Lechi never had a chance to formulate its beliefs into a systematic program'.[31] The Lechi launched into operations immediately, and Cohen feels that when Stern was killed in 1942 much of the group's political direction died with him: 'Of all the principles he set down on paper only the purely tactical ones – those committing us to an all-out struggle against British imperialism in the Middle East . . . remained part of our program. The visionary aspect of Yair's thought faded into the background.'[32] When Friedman-Yellin took over in 1943, independence remained the primary objective, but the struggle was increasingly couched in anti-imperialist terms. Lechi doctrine stated that the British remained in Palestine to protect their own economic interests, particularly those related to oil. The Lechi, therefore, would render the military bases useless by constant threat of attack and undermine the economic interests by sabotage of the oil refineries and the pipeline. There is no question that this frankly Marxist–Leninist interpretation was intended to appeal to the Soviet Union; according to Cohen, Stern

himself had believed that the Lechi should ally itself with the Soviets in removing British influence from the area.[33] By 1947 the Lechi's 'foreign policy' favoured neutralisation of the Middle East, thereby removing both the British imperialist threat to the Soviet Union and the cause of communal strife. The Lechi emphasised that Britain was the common enemy of both Jews and Arabs, and that all who struggled to expel the British were natural allies. Peaceful cooperation and economic development would follow expulsion of the British.[34] Eitan Haber has suggested, nonetheless, that the Lechi's leaders were not as doctrinaire as this policy might suggest, and Y. S. Brenner goes further by highlighting differing views within the organisation: the left hoped to achieve a radical socialist state, while the right tended to regard the anti-imperialist line as an expedient tactic for acquiring external support.[35] The Soviet Union, however, apparently took no notice, and supported the mainstream Zionist movement.

While ideology thus determined the selection of major targets, the Lechi's methods were the product of Stern's own attitudes and examples. Even before he left the Irgun he had urged the adoption of tactics of 'indiscriminate terrorism'. He felt that if the Irgun was at war it should attempt to inflict maximum damage for minimum losses. Once the Lechi was acting on its own Stern advocated 'individual terrorism', a technique borrowed from the writings and experience of the European anarchist movements, whereby the assassination of key individuals was supposed to bring down the whole government structure.[36] Stern's death apparently reinforced this concept: Brenner says that the Lechi became obsessed with revenge for his death, which they vented against policemen and, convinced they would meet the same fate if captured, they carried arms at all times so as to avoid capture by killing as many policemen as possible, dying in the attempt.[37] Freidman-Yellin defended these tactics in an interview published in 1946, pointing out that since the British used every means to combat the Lechi, they had to use every means to fight back.[38] The Lechi believed that such actions would serve also to dramatise their cause, the battle of the weak against the strong:

> Such acts will render the government weak and ineffectual. Such acts will have powerful echoes everywhere. Such acts will prove to the authorities that they cannot enforce law and order in Palestine unless they keep vast forces here at the cost of thousands of pounds.[39]

The Lechi shared with the Irgun only the objective of creating an independent Jewish state by force of arms. Furthermore, the Lechi's strategy did not lend itself to cooperation with the Haganah. Deliberate personal violence was antithetical to the doctrines of the Jewish Agency leaders. It may be for that very reason that Brenner feels the Lechi gained respectability from the period of unified struggle since, however the Agency leaders felt, the Haganah used methods which appeared indistinguishable from those of the Lechi. Moreover, on its own, this very small organisation could not hope to achieve its objectives; in cooperation with the Haganah and especially with the Irgun, the Lechi's strategy contributed to the deterioration of the security situation in Palestine, to what one author called 'the dialectic of repression, resistance, terror and reprisal'.[40]

THE UNITED RESISTANCE MOVEMENT, 1945–46

Given the differing political and military perspectives of the three groups then, a united front against the British was not inevitable. In fact, from September 1944 to May 1945, the Haganah made a concerted effort to reduce the effectiveness of, if not to eliminate, the other two organisations. From February through November 1944, the Irgun and the Lechi had conducted a joint terrorist campaign which culminated in the assassination of Lord Moyne, the British Minister Resident in the Middle East.[41] The campaign alarmed the Jewish Agency. Coming at a time when the British government was considering a settlement of the Palestine question favourable to the Jews, the offensive was ill-timed. Chaim Weizmann, President of the WZO and a moderate who believed in close cooperation with the British, felt that the terrorist campaign caused a major setback for the Zionist movement:

> The harm done to our cause by the assassination of Lord Moyne and by the whole terror . . . was not in changing the intentions of the British Government, but rather in providing our enemies with a convenient excuse and in helping to justify their course before the bar of public opinion.[42]

It was noted in Chapter 1 that after the murder of Lord Moyne the partition plan was shelved and British support for the idea of a Jewish state waned. Furthermore, the Jewish Agency felt the Irgun

and, to a lesser extent, the Lechi constituted threats to the Agency's leadership of the Jewish political community. The Irgun encouraged activist members of the Haganah to defect and join the Irgun. The result of this anxiety was a power struggle, known as 'the Season', in which the Jewish Agency and the Haganah cooperated actively with the British security forces in identifying, locating, arresting and interrogating members of the Irgun. The Lechi succumbed very quickly to pressure and agreed to suspend operations on the understanding that in the absence of a favourable settlement the Haganah and the Lechi would launch a joint campaign. The Irgun suffered significant losses in 'the Season' and conceded defeat in April 1945, when it called for an end to 'fratricidal strife' and the creation of a united front against the Palestine and British governments.[43]

The real impetus for a united resistance campaign came from the Jewish Agency and the Haganah. Seeing the Agency's proposals rebuffed by the British government in the spring of 1945 and a British policy decision postponed by the new government in the summer, Haganah militants, disillusioned with the negotiating process, urged the Agency to allow active opposition to the government. Once again, members of the Palmach began to defect to the Irgun. A formal truce was arranged between the underground groups and the Jewish Agency proposed amalgamation for a campaign to extract concessions from the British. The Irgun agreed readily to the concept of a united front but rejected amalgamation with Haganah; Begin feared the Irgun would be unable to renew the revolt if the Agency or Haganah decided to cease operations. The three groups reached a general agreement by mid-October, although it was not formally ratified until 1 November, after the first joint operation. Under the agreement the Haganah took command of the Tenuat Hameri Ha'ivri (United Resistance Movement), but each group retained its independent existence. The Irgun and the Lechi could propose operations, which would be approved in general terms by a three-man high command representing each of the groups. Joint conferences were to be held every fortnight, and operations officers would meet before every operation. The Irgun and the Lechi were permitted to carry out 'expropriations' without prior approval. Samuel Katz observed later: 'The limitations were blatant, but the great object had been achieved. The whole people was at war.'[44]

Although most Israeli historians are loathe to admit it, the United

Resistance Movement's campaign manifested all of the features of political terrorism as it is now defined:

> . . . the threat or use of violent criminal techniques, in concert with political and psychological actions, by a clandestine or semi-clandestine armed political faction, whether government or non-government, with the aim of creating a climate of fear and uncertainty, wherein the targeted opposition will be coerced or intimidated into conceding to the terrorists some political advantage.[45]

As noted earlier, the Haganah's adoption of such methods was controversial, and not without its political costs. It tended to undermine the otherwise unassailable moral position of the Haganah and its political sponsors by involving and associating them with reprehensible acts of violence. This dilemma was to come to a head in July 1946 with the Irgun's bombing of the King David Hotel. For the duration of the campaign, the real beneficiaries – politically and strategically – were the Irgun and the Lechi. Lacking the powerful overt political organisations which 'fronted' for the Haganah, they could not have exerted by themselves the kind of coordinated political and military pressure that was possible in alliance with the Haganah. Moreover, the alliance conferred a measure of respectability and legitimacy upon the two groups, who in fact represented unpopular political minorities within the wider Zionist movement. Far from being the united 'people's war' acclaimed by Samuel Katz, it was an uncomfortable marriage of political and military convenience that barely survived its first joint operation.

The first 'armed propaganda' operation of the United Resistance Movement took place on the night of 31 October/1 November 1945. The Palmach damaged two police launches with limpet mines at Haifa and sank a third at Jaffa. The Haganah attempted to sabotage the railway system at hundreds of locations across Palestine. The Irgun attacked Lydda railway junction damaging locomotives and buildings and causing thirteen casualties among members of the security forces and railway staff. A Lechi bombing caused serious damage to the oil refineries at Haifa.[46]

The political objective of this 'single serious incident' was to warn the British government that further violence could be expected if it did not deal satisfactorily with Jewish demands. It was also meant to raise the morale of Palestinian Jews. According to Nicholas Bethell, the operation had the desired effect on the Jews of Palestine,

although some Agency leaders were concerned that the British might respond with an all-out attempt to disarm or disband the Haganah.[47] The British were certainly warned by the operation but it did not dissuade the government from its intended course. Upon receiving reports of the incidents Bevin met with Weizmann and Moshe Shertock (from the Agency's headquarters in London) and warned them that he regarded the violence as a declaration of war. If that was what the Agency intended, he advised them, then the British government would cease its efforts to find a solution; it would not negotiate under the threat of violence. George Hall, the Colonial Secretary, issued a public statement along similar lines, if more moderate in tone: unless the violence ceased, he warned the underground, 'progress in relation to Palestine will be impossible, and the further steps we had in mind in our endeavour to settle this difficult problem will be brought to nought'.[48] So the operation succeeded in angering the government but did not affect its policy decisions: arrangements went forward to establish the Anglo-American Commission. The military response in Palestine was low key: a road curfew and some small-scale searches. Owing to the government's desire for a peaceful settlement, the Chiefs of Staff advised against instituting a major search for arms or attempting to disarm the Haganah. For similar reasons no action was taken against the Jewish Agency.[49]

The most significant effect of the operation was its impact on the resistance movement itself. The first operation had taken place without Agency approval because the Executive had refused to allow the Political Department to act. They did not cancel the action, however, and insisted only that in future the Executive should be advised of forthcoming operations in order to be able to exercise a veto. The Agency's caution produced confusion. Begin states that the Irgun's operation at Lydda had been approved on the understanding that the guards were to be overcome without using weapons. The Haganah, however, apparently failed to coordinate their plans with those of the Irgun; the railway sabotage was carried out before the Irgun arrived at Lydda, so the guards were alerted and the Irgun encountered resistance. Thirteen members of the security forces and the railway staff were killed or wounded in the attack. The Lechi operation, on the other hand, was not approved by the United Resistance Movement because it went beyond the strategic objectives of the front. The Lechi refused to cancel the operation, however, because it had been planned long

before the establishment of the resistance movement; agents and explosives had been planted at the refinery, so the operation had to be carried out before they were discovered. In the event the Lechi team bungled the operation, inflicting as much damage on themselves as on the refinery. The resistance command blamed the Agency Executive for the mistakes of the first coordinated operation, claiming that if they had approved the resistance agreement the casualties at Lydda, and the refinery attack itself, could have been prevented.[50] Nearly a month passed before the Haganah carried out another operation. Although the machinery of coordination remained in place – the high command continued to exercise approval of Irgun and Lechi operations – the Haganah never again attempted a coordinated strike with the other two groups. So the resistance movement was united in name only. Independent operations continued through the winter.[51]

On 25 April 1946 between 25 and 30 members of the Lechi attacked the 6th Airborne Division car park in Tel Aviv. They killed seven soldiers and stole twelve rifles before escaping. Geula Cohen says the objective of the raid was solely to steal the rifles and equipment, but the British felt that murder was the first priority and the capture of arms only a secondary consideration. Cohen might well be correct: under the terms of the resistance agreement the Lechi was permitted to carry out 'freelance' raids for arms. But it is hard to ignore the fact that Lechi doctrine condoned and even encouraged the premeditated killing of members of the security forces, and the Lechi had officially 'declared war' on the Palestine Administration in February 1946. Eyewitness accounts of the attack, moreover, indicated that there was no attempt to avoid inflicting casualties even when no resistance was offered.[52] If the attack was intended to generate a harsh British response it had a measure of success. Troops searched part of the city and placed it under curfew. Major-General Cassels, the divisional commander, publicly rebuked the mayor of Tel Aviv for alleged complicity of the Jewish community in the attack. Small groups of soldiers engaged in reprisals on two Jewish communities.[53]

The Lechi attack produced several significant effects. First, it hampered peaceful resolution of the Palestine problem by reinforcing British intransigence at the diplomatic level: as noted in Chapter 2, the incident may have swayed official opinion against implementation of the Anglo-American Commission report, and prompted Attlee to insist on disarming of the Jewish 'illegal armies'. Second, it

contributed to the deterioration of the security situation by souring relations between the security forces and the Jewish community. Finally, it enhanced the credibility of insurgent propaganda by provoking reprisals which could only bring the security forces into disrepute. In short, the attack was a success. That success probably persuaded the insurgents to respond in kind to the British diplomatic and military moves by escalating the level of violence. But it is not at all clear that the Haganah or its political masters had foreseen the possible consequences of escalation.

Between 10 and 18 June 1946, the insurgents launched a major offensive. On 10 June the Irgun mined three trains. The Palmach sabotaged eight road and rail bridges along the Palestine border on the night of 16/17 June. The following day the Lechi destroyed a locomotive and several buildings in a raid on the Haifa railway workshops. On the 18 June the Irgun kidnapped six army officers in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.[54] Army headquarters attributed the attacks to a series of events: the escape of the Mufti of Jerusalem (the Palestinian Arab leader) from France to the Middle East; Bevin's Bournemouth speech; the death sentences pronounced against two Irgun members; and the alleged discovery of British plans to liquidate the Haganah. *Kol Israel*'s (*Voice of Israel* – the Haganah's underground radio station) broadcast on 18 June referred to Bevin's speech and Begin later confirmed that the kidnappings were carried out on his orders to prevent the execution of his men. His explanation is credible; it coincides with Irgun doctrine. The Lechi attack on the railway workshops was in keeping with their strategy of striking at British economic targets. The explanation of the Haganah's operations, however, requires closer scrutiny. The destruction of railway bridges could not be related directly to British efforts to prevent illegal immigration. Rather, as Moshe Brilliant suggested in a 1947 article, the operations were intended as a warning to Britain not to transfer troops or installations to Palestine from Egypt or elsewhere in the Middle East. There is considerable evidence to support this interpretation. First, on 7 May the British had announced their intention of moving the Middle East base to Palestine. Second, rendering Palestine untenable as a military base was central to the Haganah's strategy. Third, on 12 May *Kol Israel* issued a warning that the resistance movement would make every effort 'to hinder the transfer of British bases to Palestine and to prevent their establishment in the country'.[55] Fourth, the operation showed every indication of detailed planning: sabotage on such a

scale was a major operation and the damage inflicted suggests that the bridges were properly reconnoitred in advance to determine where charges should be placed and how well each bridge was protected. The attacks involved many men – 30 in the attack on the Allenby bridge alone. Diversionary attacks were carried out in some areas and roads were blocked by mines. Intelligence analysts suspected that the assault teams might have travelled some distance to reach their targets and would have required local guides, medical support, food and refuge. They concluded that the operation against the bridges bore the hallmarks of 'major planning on a country-wide scale'.[56] Finally, in a rare display of prescience, British intelligence estimates had predicted before the end of May that terrorism was likely to resume in June, on a larger scale than before. All the information at their disposal pointed to a resumption of terrorism, and they correctly identified the bridges as possible targets.[57] It is clear, therefore, that the Haganah had planned the attack on the bridges long before the Mufti's escape, Bevin's speech, or the discovery of the British plans, all of which appear to be unnecessary justification after the fact. Nonetheless, GHQ Middle East Forces were probably correct in concluding that the revival of terrorism could be attributed also to:

> a steady increase in anti-British feeling and a growing belief among the terrorists that their recent inactivity, far from aiding the Zionist cause, was bringing disaster upon it . . . . the terrorists feel, and probably rightly so, that the temper of the Yishuv is more propitious to such terrorist activity now . . . due to the increasing fear that the Anglo-American Commission's report will not be implemented.[58]

The June offensive produced serious consequences: on 29/30 June the security forces raided the headquarters of the Jewish Agency and arrested several hundred members of the Agency and the Haganah. The resistance movement responded with the sabotage bombing of the King David Hotel, the headquarters of the administration, on 22 July. Ninety-two people were killed and 69 people injured in the explosion and large sections of the administration were damaged or destroyed. The British replied with another large search, encompassing the entire city of Tel Aviv.[59] Considerable controversy has surrounded the bombing of the King David Hotel. The Irgun accepted responsibility for the operation, yet it is clear now that the Haganah approved the bombing in general, if not

specific, terms as an action of the United Resistance Movement. Begin says the Irgun had first proposed the attack in the spring of 1946 but it was not approved by the resistance high command until 1 July, after the British search operation. He says the attack was both a reprisal for the British action and an attempt to destroy documents captured by the British during their search of the Jewish Agency headquarters. Israel Galili, at that time the Haganah operations officer, refutes Begin's interpretation. He claims that the Haganah had planned long before the British search to destroy the King David as a political gesture. He concedes that Operation AGATHA triggered the action, but rejects as 'nonsensical' the idea that the bombing was intended to destroy documents that might embarrass the Jewish Agency. Both explanations are plausible. Galili is probably correct that the documents were not the prime concern, since the British had already spent three weeks examining them. But whether the attack was a direct reprisal for Operation AGATHA or a deliberate act of 'propaganda of the deed', the King David Hotel was a legitimate target under the terms of the United Resistance Movement.[60]

The bombing, however, produced severe repercussions in the Zionist movement. The moderates had been reasserting their influence since the British operation against the Agency. Shortly thereafter Weizmann met with Zionist leaders and threatened to resign, making public his reasons for doing so, if they did not suspend all armed actions by the Haganah and the Palmach. The Haganah succeded in getting the Irgun to postpone the King David operation several times, but it was not cancelled. In the wake of the disaster the resistance movement collapsed in confusion and recrimination. After the Irgun publicly claimed responsibility for the attack, leaders of the Agency and other bodies called the operation 'a dastardly crime perpetrated by a gang of desperadoes' and urged the Jewish community to 'rise up against these abominable outrages'.[61] Begin claims that despite the incident joint resistance planning continued, but from August 1946 the Haganah confined its activities solely to illegal immigration and, as Samuel Katz observes, 'took no further part in the armed struggle against the British'.[62] The British had not completely crippled the Haganah's military capability, but the Haganah's military retreat was accompanied by a political one on the part of the Jewish Agency. At meetings in Paris in August they rejected the British provincial autonomy plan, but countered with a proposal for the creation of

a Jewish state in a partitioned Palestine. This significant departure from the Biltmore Program was nothing short of a concession to British force.[63]

The Irgun was damaged by the sequence of events as well. Quite apart from having to accept the blame for the King David bombing, the Irgun was outflanked strategically and politically by the collapse of the United Resistance Movement. J. Bowyer Bell states that Begin recognised that Ben-Gurion stood to gain the most from the Irgun's activities:

> He could now hold firm as the British produced one unsatisfactory solution after another, confident that the Irgun would continue to engender chaos within the Mandate. The political benefits of the Irgun's military campaign would then fall into the lap of the Jewish Agency, fast becoming a state-in-waiting.[64]

In other words, the Irgun had unwittingly become the military arm of the Jewish Agency. With the Haganah out of the war, the Agency could continue the deal with the British with a clear conscience. Yet if the Irgun's strategy of leverage succeeded, the Agency – not the Irgun – would inherit the political victory.

TERRORISM UNLEASHED, 1946–47

Following the collapse of the United Resistance, insurgent activity escalated: 286 incidents during the next 11 months (up to 31 July 1947) compared with 78 during the United Resistance period.[65] Freed from the constraints imposed by the Jewish Agency and the Haganah, the Irgun and the Lechi compensated for their lack of political strength with sheer volume of activity. Every action tended simultaneously to render Palestine ungovernable by normal means, and to demonstrate that fact to the world. The actions of the Irgun and the Lechi thus represented a combined assault on Britain's ability to control Palestine and the legitimacy of its efforts to do so.

During this period the insurgents concentrated their attacks mainly on the security forces. Consequently, most of the more than 600 casualties suffered by the British in Palestine occurred between September 1946 and July 1947. Road mining was the most common and lethal form of attack. It almost invariably inflicted casualties upon the occupants of the vehicle, since precautions and counter-measures were never completely successful. The insurgents who

planted the mines usually escaped undetected.[66] The increased attacks were the result of a conscious shift in strategy by the Lechi leadership, who concluded that it would be more cost-effective to attack members of the security forces, since policy-makers like Lord Moyne could be replaced from other parts of the empire. Nathan Yalin-Mor (Friedman-Yellin) claims that the road mining broke the morale of the British army in Palestine:

> They were afraid to leave their barracks so they had to stay there night after night, month after month. It was very bad for morale. And the casualties spread unrest among British families in England. They started demanding the evacuation of British troops. It had a political effect. That was the purpose.[67]

Yalin-Mor's self-serving claims are exaggerated. There is no evidence to support his assertion that soldiers were afraid to leave their barracks. There is no question that the attacks and casualties made the soldiers angry, but not all formations reported low morale. Of those that did, confinement to barracks – which was never a permanent condition – was only one factor; suspension of leave programmes and disruption of mail service from Britain were also important aspects of the problem.[68]

The Irgun and the Lechi supplemented this general war of attrition with selective attacks on the intelligence and security apparatus. Military and police intelligence officers were assassinated and police stations attacked and bombed. Quite apart from raising the human and financial costs of law enforcement, these attacks helped to neutralise the intelligence services. By December 1946 insurgent attacks had driven the police from foot patrols on the streets, forcing them to patrol in armoured cars, further alienating them from the public and their sources of information and cooperation. The attacks also produced reprisals which served to undermine the legitimacy of the administration by lending credibility to insurgent propaganda claims that Palestine was a police state.[69]

The Irgun abducted members of the security forces and other British personnel on three occasions between December 1946 and July 1947. In December a military court had sentenced two Irgun members to receive, in addition to their prison sentences, 18 strokes of the cane. The Irgun warned that they would retaliate in kind if the sentences were carried out. After the first flogging the Irgun abducted and flogged a British army major and three sergeants. The Irgun warned that the next time they would respond with

gunfire. On the orders of the High Commissioner the Chief Secretary remitted the second flogging sentence. Then on 24 January 1947 Cunningham confirmed the death sentence on Dov Gruner, an Irgun member captured in an attack on a police station in April 1946. The Irgun warned that it would carry out executions in reply, turning Palestine into 'a bloodbath' if Gruner was hanged. To give credibility to their threat they kidnapped Tel Aviv District Judge Ralph Windham and a British businessman. The cabinet in London refused to set aside the sentence but Cunningham postponed it, ostensibly pending an appeal to the Privy Council. Judge Windham and the businessman were then releasd.[70]

Although it did not involve kidnapping, the Irgun's attack on Acre Prison on 4 May 1947 bears mentioning here, since it was carried out in response to the execution of Dov Gruner and three other insurgents on 16 April. Forty-one Irgun and Lechi members, along with 214 Arabs, escaped in the daring rescue operation, but four of the freed insurgents and four attackers were killed and 13 captured. According to Begin, the Irgun carried out the floggings because it regarded the sentences of the court humiliating and degrading to the Jews. The other hostages were seized simply to stop the hangings. When this failed in April because strict British security measures precluded capturing British personnel, the Irgun carried out the dramatic prison raid. Begin regarded this last operation as a failure because of the casualties and arrests of his own men: 'It was our duty to pay the hangman in precisely his own coin. And we did not succeed.'[71] The British did not believe the Acre operation had been planned and executed in the brief period following Gruner's execution and Eitan Haber suggests that the Irgun had more than just retaliation in mind. He notes that in the latter half of April the rebellion was at a standstill and Begin, convinced that the British would cave in under slightly more pressure, insisted on more activity. The operation against Acre would serve both the immediate needs of releasing men from prison and the long-term strategy of leverage against Britain.[72]

Finally, in July 1947 the Irgun captured Sergeants Martin and Paice of Field Security and held them as hostages against the death sentences passed on three insurgents. Searches failed to locate the sergeants and their captors and on 29 July the Palestine government carried out its executions. Two days later the two sergeants were found hanging from a tree near Nathanya. They were booby-trapped and an officer was wounded as the bodies were recovered. An Irgun

poster explained that Martin and Paice had been executed not in reprisal but following a trial by an underground court, which found them guilty of illegal entry into the Jewish homeland, membership in a criminal organisation – the British army – illegal possession of arms, espionage and conspiracy.[73]

Although Begin never states it in his book, the intention to undermine the law enforcement process was implicit in all of these actions. Twice in the space of one month the Irgun could claim that it had forced the government to retreat from enforcement of the decision of its courts in Palestine. Moreover, it appears that these incidents contributed in a significant way to the asset-to-liability shift which eventually persuaded the British government to leave Palestine. Remission of the second caning sentence caused considerable controversy within the government and Creech-Jones conceded that the government was humiliated by the successful kidnappings and other terrorist acts. An editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* concluded that the evacuation of non-essential personnel in February 1947 which followed the kidnappings was a tacit admission that terrorism had succeeded in making Palestine ungovernable and raised the status of the Irgun's campaign to that of an armed revolt, which it could claim as a victory.[74] Colonel Gray, Inspector-General of Police, later confided to an Israeli journalist that he felt the floggings, the Acre Prison break and the hanging of the two sergeants were the events which shook the government sufficiently to persuade them to think about relinquishing the Mandate:

> In 1947 Britain was still an empire, and an empire . . . cannot allow itself one thing: to lose prestige and become a laughing-stock . . . . When the underground killed our men, we could treat it as murder; but when they erected gallows and executed our men, it was as if they were saying, 'We rule here as much as you do', and that no administration can bear. Our choice was obvious. Either total suppression or get out, and we chose the second.[75]

The insurgents also carried out more than 90 attacks against targets of economic importance. Most of the operations consisted of attempts to mine the railway, resulting in damage or derailment of more than 20 trains. Five major railway stations were bombed or attacked. Railway traffic was disrupted and delayed to a considerable extent from October 1946 to August 1947, with a resulting loss of commercial revenue, and higher costs imposed by damage inflicted

by the insurgents. There were 12 attacks on petroleum industry targets, consisting mainly of sabotage of the oil pipeline. The Lechi carried out the most costly single operation on 30/31 March 1947 when they destroyed 16 000 tons of petroleum products in the Shell Oil Company installations at Haifa. These attacks were, of course, an important element in the Lechi's anti-imperialist strategy and they achieved a measure of success. First, they increased the already heavy financial burden of the Palestine government by raising both the direct and indirect costs of security. Second, the attacks forced the security forces to divert troops from offensive operations to defensive tasks which posed no threat to the insurgent organisations themselves.[76] Tactically, then, this form of economic warfare was very efficient.

Simultaneously with escalation of the campaign inside Palestine, the Irgun extended its terrorist operations to Europe. On 31 October 1946, the Irgun planted a large 'suitcase bomb' at the British Embassy in Rome, causing extensive damage. The Irgun claimed that the embassy was bombed because it was directly involved in preventing Jewish immigration into Palestine. Furthermore, the Irgun warned that the attack on the embassy was the beginning of an international campaign against the British. Certainly the bombing marked the commencement of a major propaganda offensive obviously intended to gain support for the Irgun around the world and to bring the threat of terrorism closer to the British domestic audience, heretofore isolated from the direct effects of the war in Palestine.[77] However, the immediate consequences were disastrous for the Irgun. Following the attack, British and American security forces assisted the Italian police in the search for the terrorists while the two governments exerted diplomatic pressure on the Italian government to exercise greater control over the refugee camps thought to be the centre of resistance activity. By the end of December 1946 the Italian police had arrested 21 members of the Irgun, including the chief of international operations, Ely Tavin. The actual perpetrators of the crime, however, had escaped. The Irgun was forced to regroup and in March 1947 moved its international headquarters to Paris. The Irgun conducted only one other international operation of a similar scale, an unsuccessful attempt in April 1947 to blow up the Colonial Office in London.[78] The Lechi also carried out international terrorist operations, in the form of a variety of attempts to kill senior British politicians such as Bevin. However, apart from a series of letter bombs mailed from

Italy to Britain in June 1947, most occurred in the post-independence period, and thus fall outside the scope of this study.[79]

'CIRCLE BEYOND CIRCLE': INSURGENT PROPAGANDA

The Jewish insurgent groups assigned considerable importance to the role of propaganda in furthering their strategies. As will be shown, insurgent propaganda had three tasks: first, to promote the political objectives of the insurgents; second, to undermine the legitimacy of British rule in Palestine; and third, to protect the insurgents from severe repression. Many insurgent military operations were undertaken specifically to produce these propaganda effects. This is now recognised as a central aspect of all effective insurgent strategies, particularly those which rely upon terrorism. Insurgent groups invariably are small and weak relative to the power and resources of the state they confront. If they are to succeed, they must appear to be stronger, better organised and more widely supported than they are in fact.[80] 'Avner' of the Lechi conceded this in respect of his group: 'With the feeble reserves at the disposal of the Lechi, a continual bluff was necessary.'[81] Propaganda alone could not have altered the 'correlation of forces' in Palestine. It was necessary to combine the insurgents' message with insurgent actions – the technique called 'propaganda of the deed'.[82] Inevitably, this meant increasingly violent insurgent actions for, as Brian Jenkins has observed:

> The publicity gained by frightening acts of violence and the atmosphere of fear and alarm created cause people to exaggerate the importance and strength of the terrorists and their movement. Since most terrorist groups are actually small and weak, the violence must be all the more dramatic and deliberately shocking.[83]

By Jacques Ellul's criteria, the Jewish insurgents were trying to achieve the impossible: to influence outsiders – onlookers, not participants. He has defined propaganda as 'a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization.'[84] In other words, propaganda's task is essentially internally directed: to bind people to a movement and to commit them to action on its behalf. In a revolutionary

situation, it can be employed in this way to induce individuals to endure sacrifices for a cause. This is obviously important in the context of insurgency, and the Jewish underground was no exception. Both the Lechi and the Irgun employed internally directed propaganda, such as oaths and rituals to bind the new recruit, speeches, exhortations and calls for personal bravery and sacrifice or martyrdom to maintain morale in the face of difficult circumstances, such as trials and executions.[85] Yet, there was considerably more to insurgent propaganda than that. Where Ellul's definition appears to fall short in respect of the Jewish underground is his assertion that propaganda is largely ineffective when directed to a foreign country or against the enemy. At the very least, he suggests that it may not be possible to judge its effectiveness in a revolutionary situation, in a police state or in a foreign country, owing largely to the lack or imprecision of feedback to the propagandist.[86] If the Jewish insurgents were aware of such limitations they did not show it. Starting with their own members, they spread their message outward to a variety of audiences. In fact, their approach appeared to mimic that described by T. E. Lawrence in his account of the Arab revolt in the First World War. He assigned an order of priority to the task of propaganda, starting with his own soldiers:

> We had to arrange their minds in order to battle just as carefully and as formally as other officers would arrange their bodies. And not only our own men's minds, though naturally they came first. We must also arrange the minds of the enemy, so far as we could reach them; then those other minds of the nation supporting us behind the firing line, since more than half of the battle passed there in the back; then the minds of the enemy nation waiting the verdict; and of the neutrals looking on; circle beyond circle.[87]

In Palestine each of the insurgent organisations maintained its own propaganda branch, which included an illegal radio station and at least one underground newspaper.[88] One correspondent described the extensive propaganda effort:

> Thousands of copies of secret, illegal Jewish leaflets and bulletins issued by clandestine organizations, are distributed every day in Palestine . . . . Secret literature floods the post, leaflets are pasted surreptitiously on hoardings and vacant wall spaces, 'pamphlet bombs' . . . explode in busy streets at night and shower their printed pamphlets far and wide in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa.[89]

The insurgents could rely on a measure of moral support from the legal Palestine press. The news media deplored violence but there was little disagreement on the basic objective of Zionism: the creation of an independent Jewish state. Even the two English language newspapers, *The Palestine Post* (daily) and *The Palestine Tribune* (weekly), were Zionist in editorial content. The Jewish population was served by 11 Hebrew daily newspapers, 18 weeklies and 45 others which appeared fortnightly or less frequently. These tended to be affiliated with particular political parties or groups within the Jewish community and thus were divided along the same political lines as the insurgents themselves. So each group had its sympathisers and detractors in the legal press.[90]

The insurgents also carefully cultivated close relations with the international news media, particularly that of the United States, where the large, wealthy and influential pro-Zionist Jewish community was served by a sympathetic news media. Twenty of the 24 national English language periodicals were sympathetic to the Zionist cause, and the pro-Zionist Yiddish press reached approximately one-third of all American Jewish families. The Jewish Agency sponsored two English-language press services in Palestine, and in 1945 all but one of the British daily newspapers employed Jewish correspondents in Palestine.[91]

In addition, the insurgents created front organisations or used existing lobbying or fund-raising groups to spread their political message in the United States. Here the Haganah was at a distinct advantage, linked as it was through the Jewish Agency to the WZO. With branches in many countries and representatives of the stature of Chaim Weizmann, the WZO could plead the Zionist case in influential circles while denying any knowledge of, connection with or support for Haganah violence. As noted earlier, the Haganah's channel to the American Jewish community was the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). The Irgun had withdrawn from the WZO before the war and, regarded along with the Lechi as dissidents, they were isolated from the mainstream of American Zionism. Nonetheless, through the efforts of Peter Bergson (Hillel Kook) the Irgun had created as many as ten front organisations in the United States by 1946. The largest of these, the American League for a Free Palestine (ALFP), had a membership of only 35 000. In 1946 the Lechi established its own American front, the Political Action Committee for Palestine.[92]

Some of these organisations operated on a large scale: in 1943/44, alone, the ZOA distributed more than a million leaflets and

pamphlets to libraries, community centres, editors, journalists, writers and educators. In 1945, ZOA news releases were reprinted in 4000 newspaper columns.[93] The ALFP ran a continuous newspaper advertisement campaign: from October 1945 through September 1947 the ALFP placed 120 advertisements in American newspapers, of which 81 were in New York papers. The ALFP also conducted a mailing campaign to influential individuals, consisting of at least 21 separate mailings from February 1946 through August 1947. Furthermore, in the United States and Europe the Irgun and the ALFP published *The Answer*, the Irgun's monthly propaganda magazine.[94] Both inside and outside of Palestine, therefore, the insurgents had substantial propaganda resources at their disposal which they employed to subject Palestine, Britain, Europe and the United States to a sustained propaganda barrage.

In his study of revolutionary propaganda Maurice Tugwell has identified the common propaganda themes employed by insurgent groups.[95] The Jewish insurgents presented many of these themes in a manner which reflected the different strategies of the three organisations. The central theme of the Haganah's and the resistance movement's propaganda was that the White Paper policy was illegal because it violated the terms of the Palestine Mandate and was, therefore, the sole cause of violence in Palestine.[96] This theme legitimised all acts of resistance, particularly those undertaken in support of illegal immigration. Furthermore, it allowed the resistance movement to explain all its actions in terms of self-defence. In a deposition to the Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry the resistance movement claimed that:

> Our path is not the path of terror . . . . if there is terrorism in this country, it is terrorism from the authorities. If . . . the British Government sends out reconnaissance planes and destroyers, operates well-equipped radar stations and builds special police posts along the coast, if it uses airborne troops and mobile police to hound out the so called illegal immigrants . . . . then it is terrorism against us. And when we attack these things we do nothing more than defend ourselves against Government terror.[97]

Shlomo Katz, writing for American audiences, developed this theme further by stating that the Haganah had been forced into the struggle against its will and that British terror was responsible for the close cooperation between the Haganah and the Irgun.[98] As a corollary the resistance movement propagated a second major

theme: the futility of British operations against a united national resistance movement. Emphasising that the British were fighting not just an underground organisation but a whole people, this line of argument claimed that the British must do justice to the Jews or destroy them. Continued refusal to meet Zionist demands would only strengthen resistance. Richard Crossman, a pro-Zionist parliamentarian who had served on the Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry, lent credibility to this theme when he stated in parliament that the military commanders in the Middle East had expressed doubts about their ability to defeat the resistance movement: 'They said: "Frankly, you can't do it if the whole community is one hundred per cent behind the resistance movement. You can do what you like but you will never get far if it has the support of the people."'[99]

Having thus explained and justified its use of violence in general terms, the resistance movement disseminated a third major propaganda theme, which might be called 'atrocity propaganda'. This theme equated British policies and actions with Nazism and anti-Semitism.[100] British activities in Palestine provided the insurgents with various opportunities to use it. After riots in Tel Aviv in November 1945, Meyer Levin, an American correspondent, accused the British soldiers of deliberately shooting 20 young children. He claimed that the soldiers had expressed publicly their desire to 'pop off' some children and that they sang the Nazi *Horst Wessel* while doing so. Levin's initial news report was revived two months later as an article in the American Jewish journal *Commentary*.[101] Major search operations such as AGATHA and SHARK, in 1946, were denounced as Nazi-style pogroms complete with screenings, mass arrests and wanton brutality and destruction.[102]

On several occasions insurgent attacks caused reprisals or other lapses of discipline by members of the security forces and insurgent propagandists were quick to seize upon these as British atrocities. These incidents included alleged anti-Semitic remarks by senior British officers, and the mysterious bombing of the Jewish Agency press room in March 1947, which the Agency attributed to the police.[103] Following the Irgun's bombing of the King David Hotel, General Barker, the GOC, issued a harsh non-fraternisation order to the troops. The insurgents quickly published the document which concluded with an undeniably anti-Semitic statement to the effect that by obeying the order the soldiers would be punishing the Jews 'in the way the race dislikes as much as any, namely by striking at

their pockets'.[104] The 'Farran Case' provided the insurgents with some of their most credible and dramatic atrocity propaganda. On 6 May 1947 Alexander Rubowitz, a youthful member of the Lechi, was abducted by an unknown assailant while distributing propaganda literature in Jerusalem; he was never seen again. Within a short time suspicion focused on Captain Roy Farran, who was running covert operations for the police. Accusations appeared in *The Palestine Post*, and American newspapers reported the rumours that were circulating in Palestine: of fascists in the ranks of the police, and of a secret police counter-terrorist cell operating independently of the police high command. Allegations of police abuses became so pronounced that the government established a special office to handle complaints. Farran then compounded the problem: he fled to Syria and demanded political asylum, thereby turning what had been an internal problem into an international incident. Farran eventually turned himself in for trial, but through the summer American newspapers continued to print lurid stores about the case, implying conspiracy and torture.[105].

For sheer drama and propaganda effect, however, illegal immigration by sea was unmatched. Regardless of the outcome, every incident was newsworthy, which made the tactic a valuable propaganda weapon. If a landing succeeded, it could be portrayed as a victory for the resistance, and as a defeat for the White Paper policy and the legitimacy of British rule. Every ship intercepted, boarded and seized by the British provided opportunities for atrocity propaganda. The immigrants invariably resisted, often violently, requiring the British to use force to take control of the ships, and to subdue, disembark, tranship or intern the passengers. The ensuing clashes between the wretched refugees, many of whom were recent victims of the Holocaust, and robust British soldiers armed with tear gas and axe handles could not have been scripted and staged better for atrocity propaganda.[106] Two such incidents were noteworthy for their propaganda value: the 'La Spezia affair' and the 'Exodus'.

On 4 April 1946, Italian authorities intercepted 1200 Jewish refugees travelling in a convoy of 37 illegally-acquired British army trucks. They had intended to go to the port of La Spezia, where two schooners would embark them for Palestine. The Italians placed them on board one of the ships under guard, while negotiations began with regard to their disposal. The Jews quickly began to exploit the incident for its propaganda value. They announced a

hunger strike, and threatened to commit suicide at a rate of ten per day. They also said they would sink the ship with all on board if they were not allowed to sail to Palestine. The Vaad Leumi (the representative body of the Jewish community in Palestine) met on 11 April, and called a general strike three days later. Thirteen Jewish leaders began a fast in sympathy with the immigrants at La Spezia. The affair produced a flurry of propaganda in the Zionist press in Palestine, but one *Kol Israel* scriptwriter apparently got 'carried away' with enthusiasm: while negotiations were underway to resolve the stand-off, *Kol Israel* announced that the ship had sunk with the loss of all aboard. In fact, the incident ended as a Jewish victory. British Labour Party leader Harold Laski visited the detainees at La Spezia and promised to intercede on their behalf with Bevin. He did so, and the Foreign Secretary agreed to let the immigrants in, a few at a time. By the end of May, all had reached Palestine.[107] The incident had placed Britain in an impossible position; if the government stood fast on its immigration policy, it courted a political and moral disaster. By giving way, it undermined the legitimacy and credibility of that policy. For the Jews, the timing could not have been better. Fortuitously or not, the affair unfolded as the Anglo-American Commission was meeting in Lausanne to prepare its report.

In mid-June 1947, the *President Warfield*, an American steamship purchased by the Haganah, sailed to the French port of Sète, where it embarked 4493 illegal immigrants. As they all possessed valid Colombian passports, the French government did not intervene and allowed the vessel, renamed *Exodus 1947*, to sail on 11 July,[108] The British decided to make the *Exodus* a test case of their new policy of 'Refoulement' – returning illegal immigrant ships to their ports of embarkation.[109] In a message to High Commissioner Cunningham, the Colonial Office advised:

> Consider successful return of *President Warfield*'s immigrants to France is likely to have a most important effect on the future of illegal immigration. Not only should it clearly establish the principle of refoulement as applied to a whole shipload of immigrants, but it will be most discouraging to the organisers of the traffic if the immigrants in the first ships to evade the British blockade in weeks end up returning whence they came.[110]

The French government had agreed to their return to Sète, but would accept them only if they disembarked of their own accord.

It was essential, the Colonial Office noted, to handle this affair as delicately as possible with regard to the French, in order to ensure their future cooperation in such matters. It was not easy to handle the *Exodus* delicately. The ship was prepared to resist and in the boarding operation on 18 July, during which one destroyer rammed the vessel, three Jews were killed and several injured. The ship's master believed that he could beach the ship and put most of the passengers ashore, but the Haganah representative aboard overruled him. The first priority, he was told, was the operation's political impact on world opinion, and this would best be achieved by letting the British take the *Exodus* into Haifa where foreign journalists and UNSCOP representatives could witness the transhipment and observe the results of the boarding operation. As the *Christian Science Monitor*'s correspondent noted at the time, 'The Jews here believe that one "illegal" ship may be worth 10 million words in helping to convince the Committee'.[111] At Haifa, the damage from the fight for control of the ship was clearly visible, but the transhipment operation, observed by Judge Sandstrom, Chairman of UNSCOP, proceeded without incident. Nonetheless, the Zionist propaganda mills worked overtime to achieve maximum effect from the operation. A broadcast from the *Exodus* during the boarding had said that one immigrant was dead, five dying and 120 wounded. The ship was said to have been rammed from three sides and was in danger of sinking. Palestine's pro-Zionist press had a field day with the story, and the Yishuv observed a three-hour general strike in sympathy.[112]

Had the British merely repeated the routine of previous transhipment operations, interning the immigrants in Cyprus, that might have been the end of the story. But, in keeping with the new policy, the three transhipment vessels took the illegals back to France, arriving at Port de Bouc on 29 July. The French, true to their word, agreed to accept any of the passengers who disembarked voluntarily. But the Haganah had second-guessed the British, and were waiting, prepared to discourage the immigrants from leaving the ships. In this they had nearly complete success; only 130 disembarked. The remainder waited on the ships to see what the British would do next. The stand-off lasted until 21 August, and as time passed the British weapon was gradually turned against the British themselves. What should have been a British victory became a propaganda nightmare and a defeat.[113]

It is quite apparent the Cabinet had failed to think through their new strategy – no one, it seems, had anticipated that the immigrants might refuse to disembark and, without the cooperation of the French, it was impossible to compel them to do so. Thus, while the ships sat at Port de Bouc, the Cabinet tried to find a solution to the dilemma. They agreed that they could not be sent back to Palestine or to Cyprus. Creech-Jones looked into the possibility of transferring them to a British colony. Bevin examined the question of sending them to the British Zone of Germany. The Cabinet eventually concluded that the British Zone was the only place where there was accommodation and where it was politically possible to send them:

> The fact is that we have no alternative but to send these people to the British Zone. If we were to take them to Cyprus now, we should have suffered a major defeat in our campaign against the traffic in illegal immigrants, the consequence of which might be intolerable for the Palestine Government.[114]

The point is that the British had already suffered a major political defeat without having to send the immigrants to Cyprus. Since the government admitted that there was room for the immigrants on Cyprus, and the transfer of illegal immigrants from two other ships at the end of July attested to this fact, Zionist propagandists attributed the decision to carry the *Exodus* immigrants to Germany to Bevin's personal vindictiveness. American Jews reacted with rallies, press conferences and propaganda.[115] Significantly, British newspapers levelled some of the harshest criticism at the government. Calling it 'An Act of Folly', the *Manchester Guardian* wrote:

> The Government has not so much credit left in the world that it can afford to squander it in acts of premeditated folly. Yet how else can one describe the threat to take the Jewish refugees who are now . . . at Port de Bouc . . . to the British Zone of Germany.[116]

The paper concluded that the policy of refoulement had failed, that the British had badly underestimated the courage and fanaticism of the Jews and the ability of Zionist propagandists to misrepresent British policy. It found contemptible the Foreign Office attempts to justify the decision. The final disembarkation at Hamburg on 8 September, accompanied by violent resistance, did nothing to enhance the already tarnished British reputation and the *Exodus* affair, although consigned to history in fact, lived on in Zionist propaganda and fiction.[117]

Throughout the period the Haganah, in keeping with its strategy, was careful to describe its operations in terms of a 'struggle' and not as acts of war. This was not the case of the Irgun and the Lechi, both of which declared war against Britain early in 1946.[118] After the collapse of the resistance movement they continued to use many of the propaganda themes employed by the Haganah, particularly those referring to British atrocities, but there were also significant differences. The central theme of the Irgun's propaganda, based on its basic political assumptions, was that the Jews possessed the historic title to Palestine and thus had the inalienable right to immigrate freely thereto. Implicit in this theme was the idea that the British presence was not just a cause of violence but was inherently and manifestly illegal. It was this illegal occupation of the Jewish homeland that justified the Irgun's war of national liberation. As a corollary, the Irgun's propaganda stated that the group did not recognise the authority of the British administration in Palestine. Members of the Irgun, brought to trial for terrorist offences, used the proceedings to deny the jurisdiction of the British courts.In July 1947 the Irgun took this idea to its logical conclusion: in reply to British executions of members of the group, the Irgun hanged the two sergeants they had kidnapped. The announcement issued to justify the action claimed that an 'underground court' had found the sergeants guilty of the same charges for which the British had executed members of the Irgun.[119]

A second major Irgun propaganda theme glorified the armed struggle and especially those members of the Irgun who paid the supreme sacrifice. The evidence suggests that apart from an obvious role in maintaining the internal morale of the Irgun, this scheme was designed specifically to gain sympathisers and financial support in the United States. It was probably most highly developed in the ALFP production of Ben Hecht's play 'A Flag is Born'. Described as a 'skillful portrayal of underground heroism' which glamourised the Irgun's leaders, the play had a successful run on Broadway before going on tour to many American cities. Hundreds of congressmen, government officials and foreign diplomats attended the Baltimore performance. The play was more than just a propaganda weapon; the ALFP solicited financial contributions after each performance.[120] Ben Hecht continued to exalt the actions of the Irgun in a dramatic fashion. In May 1947 several major American newspapers published an ALFP advertisement entitled 'Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine'. Hecht's 'letter' told the Irgun:

> Every time you blow up a British arsenal, or wreck a British jail, or send a British railroad train sky high, or rob a British bank, or let go with your guns and bombs at the British betrayers and invaders of your homeland, the Jews in America make a little holiday in their hearts.[121]

The letter created a sensation; hundreds of other newspapers reprinted it as news, giving the Irgun an unexpected propaganda bonus.[122] This same heroism theme was employed to equate the Irgun's struggle with that of the Irish and of the Americans. One advertisement stated: 'Your dollars can help a relentless fighting force – built of the same hardy stuff and filled with the same inspiration as those freedom-loving "rebels" of 1776 – march on to liberation.'[123] The Irgun and its American front organisations undoubtedly expected that such appeals to American heritage, patriotism and anti-colonialist sentiment would command widespread support.

For all their bravado, however, the Irgun remained a minority influence in American Zionist politics. The mainstream, which supported the Haganah, still attracted most of the attention and money. This fact may go some way toward explaining the Irgun's attack on the British Embassy in Rome and the propaganda theme which emerged from it. As noted earlier, by October 1946, when the Irgun and the Lechi were trying to increase pressure on Britain, the Jewish Agency had proposed a partition plan and was preparing to denounce terrorism in exchange for the detained Jewish leaders. The Irgun commanders may have concluded that a dramatic show of force, such as an attack on a British embassy, would demonstrate the strength and determination of the Irgun in relation to the apparent weakness of the Agency and the Haganah. Furthermore, it could convey the impression that the Irgun was stronger and more widespread than it was in fact.The propaganda offensive which followed the bombing in Rome appears to have been directed primarily at Britain, although the political message would not have been lost on American audiences. It attempted to convey the image of a widespread all-powerful Irgun. The communiqué accepting responsibility for the attack stated that 'the attack against the British Embassy in Rome is the opening of the military campaign of the Jews in the Diaspora . . . . let every Briton who occupied our country know that the arm of the eternal people will answer with war everywhere and with all available means until our sorrowing

country is liberated and its people redeemed.'[124] The Irgun gave the communiqué to American correspondents together with an open letter to the Italian premier explaining the Irgun's case. On 14 November 1946 Samuel Merlin, 'political spokesman' for the Irgun, stated in an interview:

> if the Irgun say they are going to attack Britons outside Palestine they will do so . . . . the bombing of the Rome Embassy was the first step. There will certainly be others. They will carry the war into Britain. Precautions being taken against the arrival of Irgun . . . are therefore futile.[125]

In fact, this was a bluff entirely without substance since, as noted earlier, the Italian authorities quickly rounded up the Irgun's international terrorist network, including the ringleader.[126] Nonetheless, as will be shown, the threat of international terrorism did have the desired impact in Britain, if not in America.

The Lechi's central propaganda theme was that they were fighting not just for national liberation but also against British imperialism in the Middle East. Two subsidiary themes flowed directly from this one. First, the Lechi claimed that the Jews and the Arabs did not have a valid quarrel. Their communal differences were a product of British imperialism and would disappear after Britain was removed from the area. The Lechi insisted that the liberation of the Jews would benefit the Arabs, so they should join the Jews in a joint struggle against Britain. Second, the Lechi argued that the British presence was a threat to the Soviet Union, which desired only security in the region. Neutralisation of the Middle East would serve both Jewish and Soviet interests; consequently, the Lechi would gain Soviet sympathy and support for its anti-imperialist struggle.[127] Like the Irgun, the Lechi opposed partition, favoured unlimited Jewish immigration into Palestine, and refused to recognise the authority of the British administration. In relation to the latter, the Lechi members who were brought to trial went a step further than their Irgun counterparts: they not only rejected the legal jurisdiction of the courts but demanded to be treated as prisoners-of-war, even though they made it equally clear that they did not consider themselves bound by the laws governing conduct in war. Moreover, their ideology gave a curious twist to their relations with the press. British journalists were seen as instruments of the government, part of the enemy, and agents of the police. Contact with them was to be avoided. But, this did not prevent the Lechi from getting its message across, particularly in the United States.[128]

DEEDS AND PROPAGANDA: ASSESSING THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF INSURGENT ACTIONS

Neither terrorist insurgency nor propaganda were new phenomena in 1945. Terrorism had played a central role in the anarchist movements of Europe at the turn of the century and in the Irish rebellion. The major powers had considerable experience of propaganda from the two world wars. The Jewish insurgents demonstrated considerable skill in combining the two activities into a single weapon which, used with exceptional timing in a 'media-intensive' environment, exerted a measurable political impact.

By the time the insurgents launched their campaign, most of the general principles of effective propaganda were well established. First, propaganda is almost exclusively an offensive weapon. Second, credibility is essential, so propaganda must be consistent with verifiable facts, upon which judgements can be made. Third, propaganda should be the servant, not the master, of policy. Fourth, propaganda cannot prevail against fundamental social trends and attitudes. Instead, it should attempt to incorporate and use them to further the objectives of the organisation. Fifth, speed is essential since the first story on any incident will command the most attention. Finally, propaganda must be continuous to be effective.[129]

Generally speaking, the insurgents adhered to most of the basic principles of effective propaganda. First, they used it almost solely as an offensive weapon against Britain, forcing the British government to defend its policies and actions. The insurgents rarely found it necessary to defend their own actions, which they justified *a priori* by attacking the British presence in Palestine. Second, British policy and operations provided sufficient evidence to give factual credibility to insurgent propaganda. The insurgents were free to interpret the facts in the way which best served their objectives. The Irgun had apparently the most credible propaganda: one American correspondent stated that his newspaper had advised him that he could accept the Irgun's statements as fact, but that he should always check the accuracy of statements by the Haganah. Thus, the Irgun was able to portray disastrous operations, such as their attack on Acre Prison, as heroic and successful actions.[130] Third, the insurgents did not attempt to prevail against fundamental trends and attitudes; rather, they incorporated them into their propaganda and used them as weapons. Within the Palestinian Jewish community there was general agreement on the desirability of creating an independent Jewish state; the insurgents and their political constituents disagreed

only on the question of the social and political shape of the future state. In the United States insurgent propaganda appealed to American patriotism and a climate of anti-British and anti-colonialist sentiment. Finally, the insurgents were skilful propagandists: they usually presented their case quickly, clearly and continuously.

That is not to say that they were flawless propagandists. According to George Kirk, their tactics were inclined to be heavy-handed and patently transparent, especially when addressing American audiences: 'At the most effective moment some incident, comparatively unimportant in itself, would suddenly be taken up, echoed and distorted through scores of publicity channels, and would then be allowed to drop when it had served its purpose.'[131] Tugwell feels, moreover, that there was a tendency for propaganda to lead policy, in violation of one of the basic principles of effective propaganda.[132] It may be fair to suggest that the decision of the WZO congress in December 1946 not to negotiate with the British government was a product of prevailing extremist propaganda which had declared Britain to be an enemy. Furthermore, insurgent propagandists were inclined on occasion to overplay their hand, the 'La Spezia Affair' being a case in point. Finally, the need to disseminate propaganda to several 'target audiences' produced conflicting messages. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the insurgent propaganda concerning the 'Arab question'. The Lechi called for a joint Jewish–Arab struggle to remove British influence from the Middle East. The Haganah insisted that Jewish claims to Palestine outweighed those of the Arabs. The Irgun denied that the Arabs had any claims to Palestine at all.[133] Christopher Sykes concludes that, in general:

> it became a Zionist habit to speak not only in two but several voices, to run several lines of persuasion at the same time. The result was to debauch the movement with propaganda to an extraordinary extent so that the Zionists, preoccupied with higher truth at the expense of the yet more essential lower truth, got a not undeserved reputation in the world for chronic mendacity.[134]

In order to determine the extent to which propaganda furthered the objectives of the insurgents it is necessary to analyse its effects on the various 'target' audiences. This process, Ellul feels, remains an imprecise art. The propagandist is unable to predict with certainty how each individual will react to his propaganda. Furthermore, when propaganda is directed against a foreign country, or when it

is operating in a police state or a revolutionary situation, it may not be possible to judge effectiveness. Conclusions as to the success of propaganda, therefore, are inclined to be tentative.

First, it appears that the insurgent groups succeeded in maintaining their internal cohesion and commitment. The behaviour of the insurgents in the courts, in particular their refusal of clemency in the face of the death sentence, was ample testament to high morale – the product of successful 'integration' propaganda. The police experienced great difficulty in penetrating the insurgent groups themselves and there were few informers. Captured insurgents rarely 'cracked' under interrogation. Even Churchill himself was moved to express admiration for Dov Gruner, who refused to appeal for clemency in January 1947, in spite of a sentence of execution.[135] Ellul concludes that propaganda may be considered successful when 'attitudes learned by propaganda begin to prevail over the "natural" attitudes that are man's second nature'.[136] Although it is by no means clear what he means by 'natural attitudes' it might be fair to suggest that he feels propaganda would be successful once prevailing social beliefs (such as the instinct for survival or self-preservation) have been transformed from thought to some kind of action desired by the propagandist. In the context of insurgency Lawrence's criterion for successful propaganda is more lucid: 'We had won a province when we had taught the civilians in it to die for our ideal of freedom: the presence or absence of the enemy was a secondary matter.'[137] By either standard, insurgent propaganda was successful within the groups themselves. Moreover, this sense of loyalty and commitment extended to the next circle, the Yishuv – the Jewish community of Palestine. By combining basic Zionist assumptions with atrocity propaganda and themes of moral righteousness, martyrdom and justification of violence, the insurgents isolated the security forces from the Palestinian Jewish community and insulated themselves from police penetration. This was one aspect of what Begin meant when he appealed to the Jews to build 'a protecting wall' around the insurgents.[138] Although many of the Yishuv disapproved of terrorism, they refused to cooperate with the security forces in apprehending the insurgents. Instead they either treated the security forces with undisguised hostility or, as one writer graphically recounts, ignored them:

> Soldiers walk about the streets . . . . But nobody says a word to them. People pass by them as if they did not exist. Military

> vehicles pass in the streets . . . . Like the armed soldiers and the ever-present barbed wire, they too, are ignored. Two different worlds seem to coexist here, the military and the civilian, and each appears to disregard the other.[139]

The effectiveness of this mobilisation and integration propaganda had a significant impact on insurgent operations and British security efforts; the insurgents were able to operate virtually with impunity. They could plan operations without fear of compromise, thereby gaining the advantage of surprise. Furthermore they could be certain that the Yishuv would offer little or no assistance to the British authorities in their efforts to identify and arrest members of the insurgent groups. In short, it ensured that initiative passed to the insurgents and that the British lost control of events in Palestine.

Second, the evidence seems to suggest that despite the profusion of conflicting viewpoints, insurgent propaganda succeeded in neutralising the Palestinian Arabs while the Jews attempted to remove Britain from Palestine. The Arabs did not interfere with the insurgent campaign against the British; in fact, the Lechi claimed to have had some Arab members.[140] Through most of the period under study the Arabs confined their activities to organising their opposition to the Jews; they became actively involved in the conflict only when, in August 1947, it became apparent that a British withdrawal and the partition of Palestine were likely.

Third, insurgent propaganda achieved a measure of success in the United States. American public opinion, while not necessarily pro-Zionist, opposed British policy and actions in Palestine. Every detail was scrutinised, every mis-step criticised, adding yet another layer to the 'protecting wall' of publicity around the insurgents. The Truman administration rarely wavered from its basically pro-Zionist public stance, although it is difficult to know for certain to what extent this was a result of Zionist propaganda rather than political opportunism. The ZOA's financial contributions to Palestine's Jewish community quadrupled between 1945 and 1947. The ZOA leadership encouraged the militant stance taken at the WZO Congress in December 1946 and the president of the ZOA publicly endorsed a Revisionist boycott of British goods in New York in March 1947. The Irgun increased substantially its American support, owing chiefly to Peter Bergson's energetic propaganda campaign. By the summer of 1947 the ALFP claimed a membership of 140 000 and a budget of $7 500 000.[141] Nevertheless, the insurgents may have overplayed

the propaganda in the United States; there were indications in 1947 that it might be losing its appeal. In April the Palestine Resistance Committee, a coalition of ten Irgun front organisations, was dissolved because it had failed to raise sufficient funds. The ALFP then took over as the sole fund-raising organisation. The British Ambassador suggested that Hecht's 'Letter to the Terrorists' was in fact an attack on the indifference of American Jews to the Irgun's struggle, as indicated by the failure of the Palestine Resistance Committee. And while American newspapers continued to report the deteriorating situation in Palestine, some commentators began to question the American role in the dispute. *The Christian Science Monitor* went so far as to suggest that President Truman had been unduly influenced by minority pressure groups. In any case, British diplomats perceived growing sympathy for the difficulties facing the British people coupled with concern that Britain might be forced to abandon its commitments, leaving a power vacuum in crucial areas, the Middle East among them. They noted with satisfaction that in 1947 the *Congressional Record* devoted little space to the Palestine issue.[142]

Certainly, there is every indication that Zionist propaganda, combined with political pressure, had a negative effect on President Truman himself. He resented the heavy-handed techniques of the Zionists and became little more than a reluctant participant in the Palestine débâcle. It may be fair to suggest, however, that it was a measure of the success of such propaganda in the United States that the President felt trapped in this way; that to do anything else would be to risk political suicide. It is by no means clear that such a fate was a foregone conclusion, but the reality was irrelevant. What was important was the perception of the political stakes, and that perception effectively neutralised the administration as an effective objective arbiter between Britain, the Arabs and the Jews. Instead, it confined the American role to that of a 'spoiler', a political 'force multiplier' that indirectly aided the insurgents from the sidelines by making Britain's task politically impossible.

Finally, it remains more difficult to assess the effects of insurgent propaganda on the British. On the one hand, propaganda aimed at the security forces apparently elicited no response, and other forms of harassment and abuse just made them angry. After all, once they were being killed in steadily increasing numbers, the soldiers could not be expected to accept the insurgent propaganda line that the Jews had no quarrel with them but only with the British govern-

ment.[143] Eitan Haber, a sympathetic biographer, feels that one of Begin's few real mistakes in the propaganda war was the charge sheet which accompanied the hanging of the two sergeants. He thinks that no one could take the charges seriously or justify the 'retroactive and fabricated sentences'.[144] On the other hand, Irgun had every reason to be satisfied with the psychological impact of the bombing in Rome and the ensuing propaganda campaign. The apparent ease with which the Irgun's supporters travelled around Europe created an atmosphere of anxiety in Britian. Unaware that the Irgun had few sympathisers and no organisation in Britain, the London tabloid headlines proclaimed 'Irgun Threatens London'. The security services increased the protection of government buildings and took special precautions for the opening of parliament.[145] Although some British newspapers had concluded by March 1947 that Britain was losing the battle for the control of Palestine, it is not readily apparent that insurgent propaganda alone had any effect on British policy and decision-making. Creech-Jones said later that he recognised that Jewish propaganda attempted to 'maximise the trouble and difficulty' for the British government. He states that the immigration and security issues became 'irresistible', but believes that Bevin felt constrained to maintain his course of action, in spite of the personal attacks on himself.[146] Bevin's biographer, however, suggests that anger and frustration had so clouded British judgement by the end of July 1947 that the government blundered in its handling of the *Exodus* incident and played into the hands of the propagandists working against them. He concludes that the virtually simultaneous reactions to the *Exodus* and to the hanging of the two sergeants broke the will of the British public and the government (including Bevin himself) to remain in Palestine 'a day longer than was necessary . . . .'[147]

Neither action nor propaganda alone would have been sufficient to undermine British rule in Palestine. It was a singular achievement of the Jewish insurgents that they were able to combine the two so effectively. In this they demonstrated considerable skill and an unerring sense of timing. But they were assisted by factors over which they exerted only partial influence: the desire of many peoples to make amends for the injustice done to the Jews; the political and moral constraints on Britain's use of its forces in 'imperial policing'; and the daily news coverage which made Palestine the first conflict of the 'information age'. It was this last factor which allowed the

insurgents' propaganda to transcend the limits visualised by Ellul, and to influence the course of the conflict through the opinions, decisions and actions of observers and participants, 'circle beyond circle' outside the frontiers of Palestine.

4 Cordon, Search and Explain: The British Response to the Jewish Insurgency

> Sometimes you got a terrorist, sometimes you got something you weren't looking for; more often you got nothing.
>
> *Major-General Anthony Farrar-Hockley*[1]

In 1943 R. G. Casey, then Minister of State Resident with Middle East, warned the British Cabinet not to think that it could rely solely on military force to maintain order in Palestine.

> It need not be supposed that we can safely sit tight and rely simply on retaining a large military force in Palestine to suppress impartially any disorders that may arise. In a complex situation like that of Palestine, military force is an admirable *preventative* against disturbance of internal security, but it is little use as a cure . . . . It will have failed in its first purpose if it ever has to be used. The extreme Zionist leaders would not be deterred by a display of military force alone, lacking any indication of the policy which it was stationed in Palestine to implement. They would rely on the obvious political embarrassment in London and Washington which would be entailed in ordering British . . . troops to 'put down a Jewish rebellion' or even to fire on Zionist demonstrations. However inconsistent with the actual facts of the situation today in Palestine, there is a body of opinion amongst members of the British and American public which regard the Jews in Palestine as an 'oppressed' and 'defenceless' people. The entire force of the world-wide Zionist propaganda machine would be mobilized, in these circumstances, to present events in Palestine

> in this convenient emotional light and so to paralyse any effective action by security forces whose only *directive* was to 'maintain order'.[2]

If Casey's warning had any impact on the Cabinet, it certainly is not apparent from their deliberations on the subject of Palestine. Rather, the historical record shows Casey to have been vindicated; his dire prognosis was borne out in fact. The Zionist movement crafted and deployed an effective insurgent strategy of combined military and political actions designed to place the British at maximum disadvantage. The British government's intention, however, was only 'to keep the peace' in Palestine and it assigned the army the principal role in this regard.[3] To this end the government committed formidable resources, only to see the insurgents flourish, internal order disintegrate, and British efforts to explain their own actions fall on deaf ears at home and abroad. The course of events unfolds in this chapter.

SECURITY FORCES ORGANISATION

(a) Command and Control

The civil authority remained paramount throughout the 1945–47 period. At no time did the military displace or supersede the authority of the High Commissioner. Even when statutory martial law was imposed temporarily upon several cities in 1947, the process did not involve a military takeover of civil administration.[4] The High Commissioner, from November 1945 Sir Alan Cunningham, a retired general, was the senior civilian official, responsible for policy and administration. Under him the apparatus of civil administration consisted of an Executive Council, an Advisory Council, the Secretariat (government departments and civil service), and a geographically-based district administration.[5] Appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the High Commissioner reported to the Secretary through the Colonial Office. Constitutionally responsible for the internal administration of British colonies and protectorates, the Colonial Office traditionally tended to follow the lead of the senior British official on the spot, giving them a relatively free hand in running the colony or territory.[6] However, as this chapter will make clear, the special problems of Palestine tended

to circumscribe Cunningham's freedom of action as the British government took the lead in deciding the future of Palestine.

The senior military commander was the General Officer Commanding (GOC) British Troops in Palestine and Transjordan, who in September 1945 was Lieutenant-General J. C. D'Arcy. He was succeeded in 1946 by Lieutenant-General Sir Evelyn Barker; his successor, as of February 1947, was Lieutenant-General G. H. A. MacMillan. During the war Palestine had been a 'rear area', so in 1945 its command structure was 'administrative'. The country was divided into three military sectors: 15 Area in the north (HQ Haifa); 21 Area in the south (HQ Sarafand); and 156 Sub-Area (HQ Jerusalem) in the east. The GOC was permitted to delegate a large degree of responsibility to the area (and later, divisional) commanders. From the autumn of 1945 the field formations and units took responsibility for internal security. Area headquarters retained only an administrative role, overseeing static units and installations. The GOC also had under his command the Palestine police; this made him, in effect, commander of all the security forces.[7] As such, he had to serve two masters simultaneously: the civil authority in Palestine, to whom he was responsible for maintaining law and order; and his military and political superiors in London. Since the latter and the High Commissioner did not always agree on matters of security policy, as will be made clear later in this chapter, the GOC increasingly found himself at odds with one or the other.

A Central Security Committee, the mandate of which covered the entire range of security policy matters, had been established to facilitate cooperation in this field between the civil authorities and the security forces. It met weekly, chaired by the High Commissioner, and consisted of the Chief Secretary, the Inspector General (IG) of Police – the head of the Palestine police force – the senior officer of GSI (military intelligence), and the Defence Security Officer (the senior representative in Palestine of MI5, the security service). Curiously the GOC, who commanded all of the security forces, including the police, was not a member. Nevertheless, he attended as required, which was often. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that his views were not heard or given serious consideration. The Central Committee's counterpart at the district level, by contrast, was chaired by the local (area) military commander, and included the District Commissioner (his political adviser), the District Superintendent of Police, the Area Security Officer, and a military intelligence officer. Their recommendations were forwarded for approval to the higher committee.[8]

In order to enforce the law and to maintain internal security, the security forces had at their disposal extensive powers under the Defence (Emergency) Regulations 1945. Under these regulations the area commanders were designated Military Commanders; they alone had the authority to use the powers under the regulations although, of course, in practice enforcement was delegated to members of the security forces. Activities declared unlawful in the regulations included membership in the underground organisations, illegal immigration, possession of weapons or explosives, acts of violence involving weapons or explosives, sabotage of transport or communications, training or drilling, possession of military information, and 'endeavouring to influence public opinion in a manner likely to be prejudicial to the public safety'.[9] To deal with such activities, the security forces were able to arrest persons without warrant on 'reasonable' suspicion of having committed an offence under the regulations, to detain them without trial for up to one year, to impose curfews, to restrict access to any area declared to be 'closed', to enter, search and seize any premises, place, or vehicle, and to order the forfeiture or destruction of any building or land from which an act of violence or other offence was launched.[10] Additionally, District Commissioners were given censorship power – to prohibit publication of a newspaper or any proclamation or notice.

These were powerful regulations, although not unprecedented in British administration, particularly in the colonies. They conferred upon the security forces distinct advantages in the effort to maintain internal security by streamlining both the range of offences and the powers to deal with them, as well as permitting delegation of enforcement power to the security forces as a whole. Yet, the advantages did not accrue exclusively to the security forces. Politically, the regulations represented a two-edged weapon. Like all emergency powers, they were open to abuse and to partisan or otherwise selective enforcement. Even applied judiciously, they were excessive and smacked of a 'police state'. Consequently, while they strengthened the hand of government to respond to unrest, they simultaneously undermined its legitimacy. As noted earlier, insurgent propaganda played skilfully on 'state terror' themes and, however exaggerated, the image prevailed among Britain's critics at home and abroad.

(b) The British Army

As an administrative 'rear area' during the war, Palestine had accumulated a large number of military installations and a sizeable garrison. But most of these had no 'operational' role and, as such, contributed nothing to the internal security of the country. Indeed, it could be argued that their presence was a clear liability. Politically, they were the focus for nationalist (Arab and Jewish) discontent; militarily, they provided the insurgents with a myriad of targets – too many to protect effectively – and an almost inexhaustible source of weapons.

Consequently, the burden of internal security duties fell upon the field formations, which comprised a relatively small proportion of the estimated 100 000 troops in Palestine. As of 1 November 1945 these formations consisted of two divisions (one infantry, one airborne) and an independent infantry brigade. Together they were able to field 29 infantry battalions, four armoured regiments, eight artillery regiments, plus divisional arms and services and two imperial formations – the Arab Legion and the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force – under command. By 6 August 1947, the number of divisions had increased to three with the addition of an armoured division, but the infantry component – the mainstay of the counter-insurgency operations – had declined by one-fifth to 23 battalions.[11] Given that the divisional services troops fulfilled support as opposed to line functions, and that units were rarely – if ever – up to strength owing to the demobilisation process, it is unlikely that the number of 'combat' troops available for operations ever exceeded 25 000 during the 1945–47 period.

From late October 1945 until January 1947, the geographic distribution of internal security responsibilities remained unchanged. With the exception of the period December 1945 to March 1946, when it was in Egypt for reorganisation, the 1st Infantry Division was assigned to 15 Area, the northern sector of Palestine. Each of its three brigades looked after a particular area: Haifa, Galilee and the northern frontier, and the southern part of the sector. From January 1946, Major-General R. N. Gale was the divisional commander.[12] The 6th Airborne Division, under the command of Major-Generals E. L. Bols (1945, 1947) and A. J. H. Cassels (1946), was responsible for 21 Area, southern Palestine. One brigade was assigned to each of the sub-sectors: Lydda (which included the city

of Tel Aviv), Samaria, and Gaza.[13] Throughout the period Jerusalem District (156 Sub-area) remained a separate eastern sector, with a single brigade as its internal security garrison.[14]

When the two divisions exchanged areas of responsibility in January 1947, both they and their sectors underwent some reorganisation. Jerusalem sector remained unchanged, but the northern sector was reduced in size, Gaza District became the southern sector, and a new central sector was created out of Lydda, Samaria, and a former southern portion of Haifa District. Both divisions lost one brigade each to demobilisation at that time. From January to June 1947, elements (one brigade and divisional artillery) of the 3rd Division were assigned to the southern sector. In June, the 1st Armoured Division, with two brigades, replaced the 3rd in the south.[15]

(c) The Palestine Police and the Judiciary

Notwithstanding the GOC's control of all security forces and the British army's substantial presence, the Palestine police force was the principal law enforcement and security force in Palestine. Founded in July 1920, the force consisted of some 20 000 regular and auxiliary personnel during the 1945–47 period. Exact organisation and size fluctuated constantly. The senior officer was the Inspector General (IG), who in 1945 was Captain J. M. Rymer Jones; he was replaced in March 1946 by Colonel W. N. Gray, who remained until the end of the Mandate. Under the IG were a Deputy and three Assistant IGs, the latter responsible for administration, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and Police Mobile Force (PMF). For operations, Palestine was divided into six police districts: Jerusalem, Haifa, Lydda, Galilee, Samaria, and Gaza. Each district was run by a superintendent, and the regular police carried out most of their routine work at this level, operating from more than 100 police stations and posts across the country. The district superintendents reported directly to the Deputy IG. The CID was responsible for police intelligence work, and its Political Branch, under an assistant superintendent, played the leading role in counter-insurgency operations. More will be said of this later. Each district had its own CID detachment. The Assistant IG for administration looked after transport, communications, stores, personnel and welfare, pay and discipline, as well as being responsible for the traffic detachments and auxiliaries.[16]

The force included a number of specialised units which bear some explanation. The PMF was one of these. It was a paramilitary 'gendarmerie', formed in 1944 to provide the regular police with some internal security 'muscle' at a time when the British army had few troops to spare for such duties. It consisted of nearly 2000 men organised like a motorised infantry battalion and equipped with armoured cars, lorries, motorcycles, machine guns and mortars. However, it had only a short existence, being disbanded in the summer of 1946, owing largely to the fact that the regular police needed the PMF manpower for routine tasks and the increased army presence in Palestine obviated the requirement for its specialised skills. Nevertheless, during its two-year existence, it did contribute to the counter-insurgency effort.[17] There was a port and marine section of the police which operated motor launches in the anti-smuggling role, and also carried out patrols and other operations to counter illegal immigration.[18] There were several auxiliary police units which carried out certain tasks in order to free the regular police for more important duties. The largest of these was the Jewish Settlement Police, a government-financed uniformed force of 12 800 grouped in ten companies each under a British police inspector. Their task was to protect Jewish settlements and they were equipped with an assortment of small arms. The Railway Protection Police was another British-administered Jewish force which guarded stations, blockhouses, and vulnerable points on the Haifa–Lydda line. Temporary additional constables were enlisted for six months under the same conditions, regulations and pay as the regular police and were assigned to general guard duties. In 1945 this force consisted of 1650 Arabs and Jews.[19]

As in Britain, the Palestine police were responsible to the courts for enforcement of the laws. In the case of Palestine this meant not only the normal civil and criminal laws, but also the laws promulgated under the Defence Emergency Regulations. Palestine had a British-style civilian judiciary with supreme, district and magistrate's courts, but cases relating to internal security were heard before military courts, staffed by military officers rather than civilian judges. They could award the death penalty for illegal use of firearms or for sabotage of communications or power facilities. There was no appeal from military court judgments and other courts could not challenge or otherwise call into question the orders or proceedings of military courts. The GOC alone could confirm or commute death sentences.[20]

(d) Intelligence Services

Owing to the paucity both of documentary sources and proper scholarship, the picture of British intelligence organisation in Palestine remains incomplete. What follows here should be considered an approximation.

As noted earlier, the Political Branch of the Palestine CID was the lead agency for counter-insurgency intelligence. In November 1946, the Political Branch consisted of 80 policemen and clerical staff out of a total CID establishment of 627. It consisted of three operational 'desks' (Jewish, Arab, and European Affairs) and a records branch. The Jewish Affairs section, headed by Assistant Superintendent (now Sir) Richard Catling, was itself sub-divided into three sub-sections: political intelligence, terrorism, and illegal immigration. Most of the branch was concentrated at headquarters in Jerusalem, but there were detachments in every district as well.[21]

Of equal importance was the Defence Security Office (DSO), the local 'station' of the British Security Service (MI5). Charged with 'Defence of the Realm' against espionage, subversion and sabotage, both in Britain and in its territories overseas, MI5 had developed the Defence Security Offices through the 1930s into an effective system of local security intelligence collection and assessment in those territories. In the immediate post-war period, MI5 reached a demarcation agreement with the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), which allowed the Security Service to operate without restriction in British or former British territories,[22] of which Palestine was one. There, in 1945–46, the Defence Security Officer, Sir Gyles Isham, directed a staff of eight to ten intelligence officers at headquarters in Jerusalem, with four to six Area Security Officers stationed in the major urban areas: Jerusalem, Jaffa (including Tel Aviv), Haifa, Gaza and Nablus. The DSO's task was counter-intelligence; in this regard it was responsible for the security of British personnel, installations and information. It was also to maintain a close liaison with both police and army intelligence. It reported to the E2 (Overseas) Division of MI5 in London.[23]

The British army had its own intelligence staffs in Palestine, but they were not normally involved in collecting intelligence independently; instead, the army relied on the Palestine police to provide tactical intelligence on the insurgents. The head of GSI, the army headquarters intelligence branch, was Lieutenant-Colonel The

Hon. (now Lord) Martin Charteris.[24] Army formations and units, from division to battalion level, maintained their own small intelligence staffs. The army's Field Security Sections, part of the Intelligence Corps, played a more active, visible security intelligence role. Their responsibilities included: controlling civilian access to military formations and installations; security of materials and information; vetting and dismissal of civilian labour; civil–military relations and monitoring of rumours and anti-British propaganda; and gathering useful background information or intelligence for the local brigade or divisional headquarters. Field Security were often called upon for operational or special intelligence tasks. Field Security personnel were also supposed to serve as liaison between commanders and staffs in formations and GSI, Defence Security, civil and military police. A section normally consisted of a captain and at least 13 other ranks and was virtually self-contained; it could operate independently or attached to a field formation. In Palestine, five sections were operating at any one time. Three had permanent geographic mandates corresponding approximately to the military sectors, while the other two were integral to the army divisions and moved with them.[25] The Special Investigation Branch of the Royal Military Police, though not an intelligence organisation, bears mentioning since within the context of investigating criminal offences within army installations and units the branch conducted some intelligence work related to internal security.[26]

Of the myriad of 'theatre-level' intelligence organisations which developed in the Middle East during the war, only one, the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC) appears to have been directly involved in the counter-insurgency campaign in Palestine. Based at Fayid in the Canal Zone, the CSDIC had been established in 1940 for in-depth interrogation of prisoners and spies captured in the theatre. In February 1946, army headquarters in Palestine gave permission for GSI and the CID to use the centre jointly for interrogation of captured insurgents. It was a small unit, at least in the post-war period: in August 1947, its establishment was only three officers, and ten other ranks. In 1946, its commander was Major W. B. Sedgwick.[28]

(e) Propaganda

From the earliest years of the Mandate the Palestine government had recognised the influential and, at times, inflammatory role of

the press in Palestine politics. At first the government attempted to restrict the information available to the public and until 1927 the CID controlled the press. In 1928, however, the administration decided that it could play a role in influencing public opinion and so established a press bureau in the Secretariat. In 1938 it became the Public Information Office (PIO).[29] By the end of the war the Palestine government was convinced that:

> information services had become a normal function of Government and the special conditions of Palestine made it more than ever necessary that every effort should be made to develop and maintain good relations between the Government and the public and, in particular, the press.[30]

The PIO performed a dual role: first, public relations, by serving as the link between the government and the population; and second, propaganda, to help maintain internal security and to promote the war effort. It fulfilled this dual role by the following means. First, the PIO conducted a sustained public information campaign through the distribution of publications and government information in all three languages, mobile cinema vans, and reading rooms in Tel Aviv and Jaffa. Second, the Office arranged press conferences: weekly for the Public Information Officer and monthly for the Chief Secretary of the government. Third, the PIO served as distribution agent for the British Ministry of Information (MOI). Fourth, it provided press facilities, including the issuing of press cards and a press service relying mainly on Reuters, the MOI and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The PIO also prepared news broadcasts and provided maps and photographs for local newspapers. Finally, it administered press legislation, newspaper rationing, and (during the war) censorship.[31]

As of August 1945, the PIO was organised into a Secretariat, which included the Public Information Officer, his deputy and a special adviser, and two administrative/operating sections. Section One consisted of the Assistant Accountant, Technical Services (films, exhibits, displays, most reading centres), Rural Relations, the Haifa Office, and the Press Section, which prepared bulletins for broadcast, and articles and other materials for the local press. Section Two included the Accountant, Publications and Distribution (the PIO's own material), the Lydda District Office (including reading centres in Jaffa and Tel Aviv), and was responsible for subordinate staff in all sections. British Assistant PIOs directed the

Press Section, Lydda District, and Publications and Distribution. Palestinians ran Technical Services and Rural Relations.[32] The Palestine government also had at its disposal the Palestine Broadcasting Service which in 1945 became an independent government department (having been under the Postmaster during the war). It worked closely with the PIO. From December 1945, it had two transmitters at Ramallah and studios in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. At that time there were in excess of 55 000 licenced radio receivers in Palestine, although the listening audience was probably much larger, since communal listening was encouraged particularly in the rural areas. The PBS broadcast in English, Arabic and Hebrew.[33]

For presenting its case overseas the Palestine government was dependent upon the resources of the British government and, on paper at least, these were extensive. At war's end the British government still had at its disposal the formidable Ministry of Information, but that arrangement changed quickly. Eager to bring information expenditure into line with overall government spending, eliminating in the process the odious system of government 'control' of information, the Labour government announced in December 1945 that it would replace the MOI in 1946 with a non-ministerial Central Office of Information (COI). The COI was to provide information, material and publicity advice, and services for government departments at home and abroad. Unlike the MOI, however, it was not responsible for governmental or departmental information policy and was not specifically represented by one minister at Cabinet level.[34] Thus, it was not an offensive propaganda weapon in the pattern of the wartime MOI or the Political Warfare Executive; after all, Britain was no longer at war.

Efforts to coordinate information policy were confined to the domestic arena – overseas information was the joint responsibility of the Foreign, Colonial and Dominion offices. The Colonial Office had the smallest information operation. In the immediate post-war period its activities were confined to relations with the print and broadcast media in the UK, and to acting through the colonial information departments. The Foreign Office, by contrast, made a conscious effort at this time to organise itself for peacetime propaganda. In 1946 it took over many of the Ministry of Information's overseas posts and absorbed their staff. The wartime system of having press attachés assigned to the Foreign Office from the MOI was replaced by the recruitment of Information Officers from within the ranks of the regular Foreign Service. These, of

course, formed the core of the British Information Services (BIS). Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, a career diplomat with wartime propaganda experience, created an Information Police Department (IPD) with staff largely drawn from the MOI. The IPD supervised the work of and provided 'guidance' to the information officers at diplomatic posts, and provided the Foreign Office with specialised expertise to assist the execution of foreign policy. By these means it was to alert Foreign Office staff and policy-makers to the 'propaganda dimension' of policy. As such, it was the branch of the Foreign Office with the primary responsibility for overt propaganda abroad. The News Department provided the Foreign Office's official outlet to the news media – both domestic and foreign – in London, and thus to their audiences. It was responsible for press conferences, background briefings, and the issuing of official statements and communiqués.[35]

The External Services of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had emerged from the controlled wartime posture with its reputation for integrity and credibility abroad very much intact. In the immediate post-war period the BBC's leadership were striving to balance their newly gained editorial independence with the corporation's acknowledged role as a promoter of the British view. The BBC was not expected to act as an official 'voice' of the British government or to engage in uncritical advocacy of its policies. Instead, the government's White Paper on Broadcasting, issued 2 July 1946, emphasised the corporation's independence in preparation of programmes for foreign audiences, and the need to ensure 'complete objectivity' in news bulletins in order to maintain the BBC's reputation for telling the truth. Nevertheless, the External Services was encouraged to obtain from the Foreign Office 'such information about conditions in these countries and the policies of His Majesty's Government towards them as will permit it to plan its programmes in the national interest.'[36]

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Strategic policy- and decision-making with respect to the Palestine campaign can be divided into two distinct phases. The first, from November 1945 to November 1946, involved efforts to influence the political position of the Jewish Agency. It was carried out against the backdrop of Anglo-American diplomatic efforts to resolve the Palestine problem, and was characterised by levels of security forces

activity which fluctuated according to the fortunes of diplomacy as much as in response to the activities of the insurgents. The second phase, which began in November 1946 and continued until the end of July 1947, consisted largely of efforts to maintain order, as diplomatic means were exhausted and insurgent activity escalated. Approximately half-way through this period the British government abdicated responsibility for deciding Palestine's future. Insurgent and counter-insurgent operations fed a cycle of rising violence and increasingly repressive sanctions. Both phases were characterised by prolonged debates about the merits of particular operational policies, which will be examined in sequence.

As early as May 1945 senior officials in Palestine were urging the British government to do away with the Jewish Agency, which they regarded as a powerful rival political power, and hence as a threat to the authority of the Mandatory government. The British government, however, was reluctant to act against the Agency, because it was a legitimate integral part of the Mandate.[37] Once the violence commenced in the autumn, the issue came up again. Both the Palestine administration and the British government were convinced, on the basis of intelligence and the Agency's refusal to cooperate against the insurgents, that it was implicated in the violence.[38] In November 1945 the Chief Secretary advised the Colonial Office of his misgivings regarding the Jewish Agency:

> I will leave to you to judge whether the demeanour and activity of the Agency and its leaders during the past three years have been consistent with those obligations and responsibilities [imposed on the Agency under Article 4 of the Mandate] . . . . It is becoming difficult to the verge of impossibility for us unfortunates out here to deal with these people.[39]

The government did not act on his information, however, perhaps because it was at that time involved in delicate negotiations with the American government concerning the creation of the Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry.

The High Commissioner concluded, after insurgent attacks in December 1945, that action should be taken against the Agency. In Cunningham's view, it had rejected the legitimacy of the Palestine administration, had refused to cooperate with the government in suppressing terrorism, and was in fact financing it. He suggested that the security forces occupy the Agency's headquarters and place

certain members under police supervision.[40] The Cabinet, however, opposed any such action because they felt it would strengthen the hand of the extremists in the Zionist movement and undermine that of the moderates, producing at the very least widespread disorder. Further, they believed it would produce an unfavourable reaction in the United States and render impossible effective work by the Anglo-American Commission. The Colonial Secretary suggested that Cunningham merely reduce contact with the Agency as a demonstration of the government's displeasure. On the advice of the Chiefs of Staff Committee the Cabinet rejected for the same reasons a wholesale search for arms. The Chiefs of Staff had advised the Cabinet that a search at that time would be militarily counter-productive: a substantial search would not produce worthwhile results. They concluded that the most promising plan would be to conduct a search for arms as a secondary operation when action was taken to arrest the leadership of the Haganah and the Palmach. In any case there should be no search until insurgent activity made such a course of action 'obviously justifiable and necessary'.[41]

There were, therefore, sound political and military reasons for postponing any significant operations against the Jewish Agency and the insurgents. By June 1946, however, the government had to weigh these reasons against significant developments in the political and military situation. First, the report of the commission of inquiry had recommended that the Jewish Agency resume at once cooperation with the Palestine administration in the suppression of terrorism. Such cooperation was not forthcoming. The insurgent attacks in June represented a major escalation in the level of violence, which the High Commissioner feared would continue unless drastic action were taken. Cunningham, moreover, felt that the recent violence showed that extremist elements had taken control of the Agency which, in turn, controlled the Haganah. The Cabinet concurred in his assessment, concluding that it could tolerate no longer a situation 'in which the authority of the government was set at nought'.[42]

Second, both the High Commissioner and the CIGS expressed fears that troops in Palestine might get out of hand unless the government took firm action against the insurgents.[43] Their fears were hardly groundless. Following the attack on the airborne car park in April, Generals D'Arcy and Cassels warned Cunningham that failure to take firm action might result in reprisals by the troops themselves. Cassels recalls:

> When I went to see the High Commissioner was I allowed to do anything positive? . . . The answer is 'No' – a few roadblocks here and there and the odd curfew but no more. All very frustrating and . . . it was not all that easy to keep the . . . Airborne soldiers under control when they saw their comrades being murdered.[44]

The High Commissioner approved only a curfew and road restrictions and, as the generals had predicted, some of the paratroopers engaged in a brief reprisal against a Jewish settlement. After the kidnappings in June a British officer shot and killed a Jew who had jostled him on the street. Against the background of these incidents Cunningham warned the Cabinet that 'any hesitancy in action as result of kidnappings and shooting at officers will have serious effect on morale of troops who have already been tried very highly'.[45]

The army commanders may be justly criticised for either neglecting to instil professional discipline among their troops or attempting to blackmail the government into using draconian measures. In any case, confronted by these compelling arguments the Cabinet authorised the High Commissioner to take such steps as he considered necessary to break up the illegal military organisations, including a search of the Jewish Agency's headquarters and the arrest of its members.[46] The decision produced significant consequences for the counter-insurgency campaign. First, the principal political objective of the operation clearly was to split the Zionist movement in such a way as to isolate and neutralise the more extreme elements, thus allowing the moderates to regain control. Cunningham had long felt that it might be possible to produce such a division and General Barker was convinced the security forces could do so, so long as they struck principally at the Palmach, the Haganah leadership and the extreme elements in the Jewish Agency and did not try to neutralise and disarm the Haganah as a whole.[47] General Gale, then commanding the 1st Infantry Division, dissented; he felt mass arrests might produce the exact opposite of the desired and anticipated effect, a leadership vacuum which would be filled by the extremists.[48]

In the short term, Barker and Cunningham were correct. Chaim Weizmann temporarily reasserted his authority over the Zionist movement, forced Moshe Sneh to resign as Haganah commander, and the Haganah and Palmach to suspend offensive operations. After rejecting further armed resistance the Jewish Agency accepted

in principle the idea of establishing a Jewish state in a partitioned Palestine. Nonetheless, the British government was unable to exploit politically these developments. In his public statement on Operation AGATHA, Cunningham had emphasised that the Jewish Agency was not being closed or proscribed and that 'the door of negotiation and discussion is not shut'.[49] Jewish politicians, however, appreciated that their cooperation was essential to a negotiated peaceful settlement of the Palestine question and they withheld such cooperation by refusing to participate in the London conference on Palestine unless their detained leaders were released. Of necessity this made progress at the conference almost impossible and in October 1946 the government felt induced to suspend the policy of general searches as a gesture of good faith in negotiations with the Agency over the resumption of political cooperation.[50] Thus, while Operation AGATHA allowed the British government to apply a degree of pressure on the Jews, it gave more significant leverage to the Jewish political community to use as a weapon against Britain.

Furthermore, even if the Cabinet had valid political reasons for taking action there was no sense in doing so unless it would restore law and order. The principal military objective of Operation AGATHA was to break up the insurgent organisations. This would be possible only if the security forces possessed sufficient intelligence on the underground groups, for experience had demonstrated that large searches based on little or no information were not cost-effective. But General Barker advised the Cabinet that the dearth of intelligence on the Irgun and the Lechi would confine the security forces to arresting members of the Haganah and the Palmach. Such action, he warned, would not stop terrorism; in fact it might increase after the operation.[51] In the event, he was correct: by September 1946 the rate of terrorist incidents had increased substantially above that of the previous ten-month period. It is possible to suggest several reasons why this occurred: the disruption of the resistance movement freed the Irgun and the Lechi from all constraints previously applied by the Haganah. Detention of the Zionist leaders precluded obtaining the cooperation of the Jewish public in gathering intelligence on the extremists. Furthermore, the High Commissioner commuted the death sentences which had resulted in the kidnappings,[52] thereby demonstrating that the insurgents, not the government, determined which laws would be enforced.

In his brief to the Cabinet, General Barker had warned them that it would be impossible to subjugate the Jews to force indefinitely;

a political solution was required.[53] When it ordered Operation AGATHA, however, the Cabinet appeared to appreciate only the urgency of the immediate security crisis and not the long-term political implications of the proposed action. Consequently, Operation AGATHA contributed not to the pacification of Palestine but to a substantial deterioration in the security situation. By the end of the year the opportunity for a negotiated settlement had passed. The British government was forced to choose between governing Palestine by coercion or abandoning the Mandate altogether.

Field-Marshal Montgomery was one of those who believed that a more 'robust' policy was long overdue. Prior to taking up his post as CIGS, he had visited Palestine during the insurgents' June offensive and told General Barker that 'this was no way to carry on. The Army must press for a decision to re-establish authority.'[54] Cunningham later told Creech-Jones that the Field-Marshal had expressed his opinion before he had seen the situation and that he had pressed his views with such vigour that General Paget wrote personally to Alanbrooke, the retiring CIGS, to inform him that there was no truth in Montgomery's allegations.[55] There may be several reasons why Montgomery took this view. By his own account he felt Britain should fight to retain its position in the Middle East, which he regarded as a vital base for strategic reserves.[56] He was undoubtedly irritated to see the 6th Airborne Division, the élite formation of the proposed Imperial Strategic Reserve, tied down on internal security duties. Moreover, it is clear that the nature of this counter-insurgency campaign escaped him possibly, as Cunningham suggests, because of his experience in the pre-war Arab revolt:

> There is, of course, no comparison between that situation and the present. Moreover, I have seen a telegram to CINCMELF to the effect that as a soldier he must not be concerned with politics and must visualise matters from a purely military angle. I need hardly comment on this in so far as Palestine is concerned.[57]

Cunningham's point was well taken. The two campaigns were manifestly different with regard to the organisation of the rebels, the nature of the fighting, and the counter-measures the security forces were permitted to apply.[58] It is clear that Montgomery did not understand this, and his suggestion that the army need not take political factors into account tends to confirm Alun Chalfont's assessment that 'the political situation in the Middle East was

altogether too complex for Montgomery'.[59] Yet it must be emphasised that the Field-Marshal was not alone in these attitudes; as Chapter 5 will make clear, they were common to the army as a whole. His views are important, however, because as CIGS Montgomery was in a position to influence security policy in Palestine. He began to play an active role in this regard in November 1946, with important consequences.

The Field-Marshal had dissented on the decision to release the detained Jewish leaders and regarded the current peacekeeping role as appeasement. In the wake of the increasing attacks on the security forces and the railways and the police reprisals, the IG of the Palestine police told Montgomery, 'We must beat terrorism or it will beat us.'[60] Colonel Gray's comment undoubtedly reinforced Montgomery's own misgivings about the wisdom of the current security policy. On 20 November, Montgomery told the COSC that in his opinion the policy of appeasement had failed. The suspension of searches and release of detained leaders had not produced any improvement in the security situation; instead, the situation had deteriorated: casualties were increasing and the police were still under-strength. He felt that the government should issue a new directive to the High Commissioner to use the forces at his disposal to maintain strict law and order. He repeated these points in the Cabinet Defence Committee meeting that afternoon, adding that he felt the army had lost the initiative it had gained in June and that the defensive attitude had seriously increased the strain on morale. The Field-Marshal felt that strain had caused the police reprisals and that the problem could spread to the army. Pressed by the Prime Minister as to what further measures were required, Montgomery replied that the army had been prevented from searching for arms or from acting on intelligence received prior to incidents. The committee asked the Colonial Office and the War Office to examine the conditions regarding the use of the armed forces in Palestine.[61]

Cunningham rejected Montgomery's allegations and asked that the inference be withdrawn. There were, he said, no limitations on the use of the armed forces. He explained that the operations in June had not gained the initiative against the terrorists, nor had that been the intention; they had only driven a wedge between the terrorists and the Haganah, who were now quiescent. The High Commissioner explained that discussion generally resolved most questions of civil–military relations where opinions were at variance.

Neither he nor General Barker could suggest any changes in the decision-making process and both agreed that the government should encourage the Jews to deal with the insurgent problem themselves while it tried to improve police methods.[62]

At the end of November the CIGS visited the Middle East again. He found a ready ally in General Sir Miles Dempsey, CINC Middle East Land Forces. Dempsey disputed Cunningham's assertions on the use of the army and on the state of civil–military relations in Palestine. He also favoured immediate searches and the imposition of collective fines on communities where incidents had occurred.[63] Cunningham opposed such measures which, he felt, amounted to a policy of reprisals:

> I should say with the examples of Ireland and even the Arab rebellion before me, I am dead against reprisals as such. The question of the morale of the troops is constantly in my mind and is a factor which I am constantly emphasising to HM Government, but I am sure that you will agree that it would not be right to take action which would imperil imminent political solution to this thorny problem, which alone can bring peace to this country, for the sake of the morale factor alone.[64]

As General Barker did not attend the conference, Cunningham faced Montgomery and Dempsey alone on these issues. It was an unequal contest. Montgomery carried with him all the authority of his position and was quite prepared to exploit it; moreover, he could count on Dempsey to support him wholeheartedly. The CIGS had nothing but contempt for Cunningham and his policies, which he regarded as 'gutless and spineless',[65] and minced no words in telling the High Commissioner so:

> I have told Cunningham that it is my opinion that his methods have failed to produce law and order in Palestine and that it is my opinion that he will have no success unless he organises his police force in a proper way and uses the police and army properly and adopts a more robust mentality in his methods to keep the King's peace.[66]

Faced with such a formidable united front, Cunningham had little choice but to agree, against his better judgement, that the most effective counter-insurgency plan would be to confine the minimum number of troops to defensive tasks and to employ the largest

number in a mobile offensive role to seize and maintain the initiative. However, Dempsey and Montgomery were persuaded that the constraints imposed upon the army by the existence of an armed population, the immense task of guarding the railway, and the inability to take action without accurate intelligence, were so great that it was not possible to carry out the proposed plan.[67]

Privately, however, Cunningham dissented from the imposed consensus. In separate cables sent subsequently, he told Creech-Jones that he thought the army would not be effective even if it was allowed to develop its 'full power' in maintaining law and order and would, in any case, antagonise the large proportion of the population who were otherwise opposed to terrorism. At the same time, he believed that 'unleashing' the army was still a credible threat. Cunningham warned Jewish leaders that only he stood between them and the army and that if the violence continued he would stand aside and 'free' the army. They replied that the insurgents had agreed to a truce during the Zionist congress and the High Commissioner responded by suspending a proposed series of searches which would have been instituted following further incidents.[68]

Cunningham was correct in his assessment of the limitations on the effectiveness of the army. Given the poor state of intelligence, which will be examined in Chapter 5, there was little more the army could do without becoming a political menace; the mobile role envisaged by Montgomery would be sufficient to antagonise the Jewish population but was likely to fall short of coercing them into cooperation with the security forces. Such a role was, in any case, inappropriate to this largely urban conflict. Montgomery did not grasp the essential point that numbers, mobility and firepower were not the decisive elements in this conflict. The insurgents did not operate in large formations; cells of two or three men planned and carried out the operations and dealing with these was a matter for the police, not the army. The Field-Marshal appears, in any case, to have been misinformed with regard to certain factors which influenced his judgement of the situation. The police reprisals were the product of a combination of factors of which strain was only one element. These factors did not pertain to the army; as will be shown in the next chapter, despite poor living conditions and the demands of continuous operations, army morale was comparatively good. He was correct that the army had been prevented from searching for arms specifically, but Cunningham was not solely

responsible for this policy: the Cabinet had rejected such action a year earlier on the advice of senior military commanders.

Cunningham, for his part, may be criticised for undue optimism or naiveté. A political solution to the Palestine problem was by no means imminent in November 1946. And while police reform was required, cooperation of the Jewish population and official bodies was equally essential and was not likely to be forthcoming. By late autumn 1946 the 'hardliners' were on the ascendancy within the Zionist movement. The moderates in the Jewish Agency had been discredited by agreeing to renounce terrorism in exchange for the detainees but without extracting any changes in British immigration policy or Palestine policy in general. In either case, without a solution or a policy change favourable to the Jews the police would not receive the cooperation from the Jewish public that was vital to defeat terrorism.

As the Colonial Office and the War Office prepared their cases for the Prime Minister, Cunningham, Barker and the Colonial Office found themselves supporting a minority viewpoint. They stressed that if the government desired a political settlement then it must do all in its power to strengthen those opposed to terrorism, with whom a settlement would be negotiated. Hence, military action would have to remain restricted to direct attacks on insurgents when encountered, immediate searches in the vicinity of incidents or preventive action based on sound intelligence concerning proposed insurgent operations.[69] The War Office view hardened along Montgomery's lines:

> . . . viewed from a military standpoint the policy of appeasement has failed. The restoration of law and order can depend only on the adoption of a consistent and vigorous policy in dealing with disturbers of the peace. Such a policy is not in force. If we are to prevent the present situation in Palestine from getting out of hand, strong military preventive action must be taken in Palestine at once.[70]

Montgomery believes that the flogging incidents at the end of December persuaded the Prime Minister to concur with him when the Cabinet Defence Committee discussed security policy on 1 January 1947.[71] The results of the meeting appear to support Montgomery's claim. Ernest Bevin and Albert Alexander, the Minister of Defence, supported a tough policy and Montgomery himself challenged Creech-Jones' assertion that restraint had produced results. The CIGS said that all the information at the army's disposal indicated otherwise. The Field-Marshal wanted to flood the country with mobile troops to restore confidence in authority and to make things difficult for the insurgents. Montgomery won his case; the committee directed Creech-Jones, Alexander and Cunningham to draw up a new directive to the High Commissioner. Since it involved a change of policy it would be submitted to the Cabinet for approval.[72] Two days later Montgomery, Creech-Jones, Cunningham and two Colonial Office officials met to draft the directive. The CIGS pressed his case in even stronger terms: he advocated 'turning the place upside down' to disrupt the population and to persuade them to cooperate with the authorities against the insurgents. Montgomery welcomed the opportunity to draw the Haganah out for a battle, claiming he had succeeded with such measures against the Arabs before the war. Enthusiastically he offered the whole strength of the British army, bringing in reinforcements from Egypt or Germany. Cunningham feared that this would destroy any hope of a political settlement and Creech-Jones observed that war with the Haganah meant war with the whole Jewish nation. Montgomery replied that he thought the British government would have to enforce partition against the wishes of the Jews and the Arabs. He then asked Cunningham if he was prepared to give the GOC a free hand to carry out the new directive. Cunningham replied that he was not so prepared, since he had to take the political aspect into account.[73] It was a telling point, but its subtlety and significance was lost on Montgomery.

In spite of the obvious disagreement, the draft directive was sent to Cabinet, where Creech-Jones did not oppose it further. He explained that the army wished to have the power to conduct searches anywhere at any time and to be free to increase patrols in dangerous areas. Montgomery added that recent searches without specific evidence had been very effective. The Cabinet approved the directive, which instructed the High Commissioner to take all possible steps using the security forces at his disposal to establish law and order. They were not to conduct reprisals, but were to take the offensive and seize the initiative. The directive advised the High Commissioner that 'such action as you may take to implement the policy outline . . . above will receive the full support of His Majesty's Government'.[74]

This was surely nothing less than a 'blank cheque', significant both in its results and in revealing how the complex interactions of

events, decisions and personalities changed the way in which the British government directed the war. Though not mentioned in the discussions, insurgent operations undoubtedly influenced the Cabinet's decision: three days earlier the Lechi had bombed the Haifa District police headquarters, causing considerable loss of life. Furthermore, the High Commissioner's decision to remit the second caning sentence aroused considerable controversy, just as the policy debate reached a climax. In a telegram to Dempsey which was later withdrawn because it caused so much 'concern in high places', Montgomery said leniency was a weak and thoroughly bad policy which could only make things worse for the government and the security forces. He told Dempsey to take this up with the High Commissioner.[75] Sir Winston Churchill echoed these sentiments in the House of Commons debate on Palestine at the end of January:

> You may remit a sentence of caning because you do not like that form of punishment, you may remit it because you have a tender heart, you may remit it because some new circumstance has arisen since the magistrate or tribunal gave the decisions, but you do not remit it because a British major . . . and three sergeants are caught and subjected to that punishment, and because you are afraid it may happen to some more . . . . This is the road of abject defeat.[76]

The policy debate also reflected personalities. Montgomery and Cunningham were at odds. Cunningham appeared to be indecisive, while the Field-Marshal's views conveyed the impression of strength. Major-General Pyman, Dempsey's Chief of Staff, felt that there would not be a more robust and 'enlightened' policy until Cunningham was replaced. He reminded a colleague that the High Commissioner's wartime record suggested a lack of resolve: 'You will remember that he gave in at Sidi Rezihg in December 1941 forty-eight hours too soon.'[77] Montgomery was justified in criticising Cunningham for rescinding the caning sentence under duress, but at least the High Commissioner appreciated the political dimension of the conflict; the Field-Marshal did not. In a message to Pyman the CIGS stated that, once started, the new policy would have to be carried through 'firmly and relentlessly and despite world opinion or Jewish reaction in America'.[78] This appears to confirm Cunningham's recollection years later:

> Lord Montgomery . . . deals only with the military side of the problem. I had to deal with it from all angles. From this wider point of view it seemed and seems to me that the main effect of Lord Montgomery's intervention was to bedevil it still further . . . . What he forgets is that there was a civil government in being, and that the military means had to be dovetailed into political requirements.[79]

Montgomery was a professional soldier and it is hard to fault the Field-Marshal for trying to cope with the problem in the only way his profession had shown him. Yet even his military judgements were misguided or, at the very least, ill-advised. There was nothing to be gained by doing battle with the inactive Haganah when the Irgun and the Lechi were carrying out the attacks. Furthermore, contrary to his understanding, the successful searches in January 1947 had been based on accurate intelligence.

The Cabinet's approval of the new directive to the High Commissioner indicates that one result of the insurgency process was that Cunningham and Barker found themselves overruled in or excluded from operational policy-making, which occurred now at a higher level. The distance, both physical and intellectual, that separated the Cabinet from the situation on the ground in Palestine enhanced existing misconceptions about the objective of security force operations. Montgomery correctly grasped that the 'militarised' political situation would be resolved by force, not by negotiation. What he, and perhaps some of his Cabinet colleagues, did not comprehend fully were the costs that politics imposed on Britain's use of force. By the end of February 1947 the government had decided to turn over to the United Nations the responsibility for resolving the Palestine problem. Given that Cabinet policy tended to narrow the security forces options to a limited range of collective and selective coercive measures – martial law and covert special operations – the timing could not have been more inauspicious. Both options involved increased repression and potentially more violent methods. At a point when international attention would be focused on Palestine, this meant increased political risks. Britain's methods would be subject to scrutiny and criticism. Moreover, if these measures failed to restore order, the insurgents would have demonstrated conclusively Britain's inability to govern Palestine. Its authority shattered, all that would remain for Britain, in the absence of a political settlement, would be abdication and withdrawal. Neither Montgomery nor his political masters appear to have grasped the potential implications of their increasingly aggressive counter-insurgency policy.

Security force commanders, on the other hand, went into the 1947 offensive with some misgivings. Martial law could not be imposed on Haifa because of the need to keep the port, refineries and British businesses functioning. The plan for Jerusalem was regarded as an unsatisfactory last resort.[80] General Dempsey insisted that martial law be imposed for as long as was necessary to produce satisfactory results in terms of arrests, with or without the assistance of the public. He regarded a fortnight as the absolute minimum because:

> the employment of the army on such a scale as this is a serious and weighty matter and has been put into effect only after the most careful thought and preparation. To call off the present operations too soon would make it appear that we regarded the recent outrages and our consequent action as comparatively trivial matters and it would in my view be a very grave mistake.[81]

Even Montgomery, whose insistence on tough measures had induced the new offensive, expressed doubts about the ability of the security forces to restore the situation. In a message to Dempsey, he reflected: 'It is useless for us to go into back History and to say that if only we had tackled the problem initially with proper will power and determination we would never have got to the present situation. All this is of course very true. The point now is whether we can handle the business.'[82] He concluded that the security forces could deal with the situation provided that the politicians permitted them to do so and there were sufficient troops for the task.

In the event, he was correct for the short term. Coercion produced a degree of cooperation from the population and, as noted in Chapter 3, the arrests that ensued sharply reduced the level of violence during the next quarter of 1947. But it would be three months before this was obvious and the Cabinet, concerned with immediate results, was not impressed. General Gale had stated at the outset that martial law would continue until terrorism was 'eradicated'.[83] Not only had terrorism continued within and outside the controlled areas, martial law had proven as damaging economically to the administration as to the Jewish community. Moreover, the Cabinet believed that lifting martial law after such a short period conveyed an impression of weakness which would encourage only further resistance. The apparently inconclusive results led the Cabinet to conclude that extending martial law over the whole country would not be effective. The High Commissioner opposed it

because the army had advised him that imposing martial law throughout the country would have no extra effect against the insurgents and, in any case, there were insufficient troops to do so. Cunningham added pointedly that the army could not be expected to secure the whole country when it could not defend even itself from attack. Moreover, both he and the Colonial Secretary believed that the experience of martial law had demonstrated that the Palestine government could not afford the economic hardship ensuing from a country-wide withdrawal of services.[84] The Chiefs of Staff concurred. They felt that the security forces could not govern the country and continue internal security operations as well. Their report recommended, first, that civil government continue, making wide use of the High Commissioner's powers under the emergency regulations. Second, the security forces should intensify pressure against the insurgents by the usual methods. Third, the government could re-impose martial law for limited periods when and where necessary and, finally, summary military courts should be established with the power to impose the death penalty for specific offences. The Cabinet approved the report subject to further consideration of the recommendation concerning military courts.[85]

In the aftermath of Operation TIGER and the hanging of the two sergeants in July 1947, debate resumed on the efficacy of martial law. However, a whole new set of considerations confronted the Cabinet. First, Arab–Jewish communal violence had erupted recently on a large scale. Early in August 1947 Cunningham advised Creech-Jones: 'I cannot guarantee that the situation will not deteriorate to such a degree that the Civil Government will not break down and as you know it is by no means clear how much longer I can keep the Civil Service working under conditions such as exist at present.'[86] Second, Britain was in the midst of an economic crisis and on 30 July the government ordered an increase in the rate of demobilisation.[87] Third, when India and Pakistan became independent on 15 August much of the justification for Britain's Middle East strategy simply evaporated. At the same time the United Nations Security Council upheld continuation of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty. British troops would be able to remain in the Canal Zone, and in September the British government announced that the major supply base for the region would be transferred to Kenya.[88]

Against this background the politicians and military commanders considered the options remaining for Palestine. On 3 August, General Sir John Crocker, C in C Middle East Land Forces, advised

the War Office that the troops in Palestine were sufficient to impose martial law on only one area at a time and that even if the situation demanded more, the application of martial law over the whole country would delay planned deployments; it was therefore to be avoided. Nonetheless, he argued forcefully against any further reduction in troop strength, otherwise it would become difficult to fulfil even limited obligations in Palestine, quite apart from any other commitments in the Middle East. With the support of the Cabinet Defence Committee, Montgomery hastened to assure Crocker that his forces would not be reduced further.[89] At the same time Cunningham sent an equally gloomy assessment to Creech-Jones. He explained that while martial law was the only remaining option, it would not stop terrorism and would place a strain on the army without improving its ability to deal with the situation. Nonetheless, he would hold it in readiness; Creech-Jones endorsed his views.[90] The government in London, however, was also disillusioned with the result of martial law. One senior Colonial Office official pointed out that Cunningham's views on martial law were contradictory and that in any case it would damage the administration and British prestige.[91]

Following a conference with the GOC Palestine, General MacMillan, on 7 August, Crocker informed Cunningham that in view of potential difficulties in Egypt (related to the decision to remain in the Canal Zone) there would be no reinforcements available for Palestine.[92] On 30 August, the British government announced further reductions in the size of the armed forces, accompanied by reduced defence spending. By early September, the War Office and the Colonial Office had agreed that it would not be possible to impose martial law on Palestine as a whole.[93] The implications of these arguments could scarcely be lost upon the government: even without attempting to enforce a solution the security forces were insufficient and were incapable of maintaining order. Owing to force reductions and commitments elsewhere they could not be reinforced. Finally, Palestine was no longer essential as a base area. Under such circumstances the British had no viable option but to withdraw. On 20 September the Minister of Defence advised the Cabinet that, even in the absence of an Arab–Jewish agreement, there were sufficient forces to maintain order during an immediate withdrawal.[94]

The following section of this chapter shows how strategic decision-making translated into operations 'on the ground' in Palestine.

SECURITY FORCES OPERATIONS: THE BATTLE FOR CONTROL

The strategic policy debates in Palestine and London exerted a profound influence on the course of operations in Palestine. The nature and tempo of the operations changed in accordance with shifts in strategic direction. Consequently, it is possible to identify in retrospect four distinct phases of operational activity during the two-year period. First, from October 1945 to the end of June 1946, the security forces carried out a peacekeeping role, involving searches and security operations. The second phase, from 29 June to early September, was characterised by a major offensive against the insurgents, including two division-size search operations. The security forces returned to peacekeeping in the third phase, which continued until the end of February 1947. During the final phase, from March through August, the security forces went on the offensive again, this time employing martial law and special operations.[95] Each of these phases will be examined in turn.

First Peacekeeping Phase

On 21 October 1945, all army formations deployed to their operational locations and tasks: protection of land lines of communication, airfields and other vulnerable points, and prevention of illegal immigration by land and sea. The 3rd Parachute Brigade deployed on the outskirts of Tel Aviv where it took responsibility for internal security in Jaffa District, potentially the most troublesome area. In spite of these preparations the security forces were caught completely by surprise when the insurgents launched their offensive on 31 October. The troops spent most of the night 'dashing around the countryside' and captured only one insurgent. On 1 November, the GOC imposed a road curfew and formations mounted roadblocks to enforce it. Similar scenarios were repeated many times during the next two years.[96]

A fortnight later Jews rioted in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in protest against the announcement of the Anglo-American inquiry. This provided the army with the first major test of its internal security doctrine for Palestine. The security forces quickly brought Jerusalem under control, but spent five days restoring order in Tel Aviv.

Trouble began with a general strike on 14 November: a peaceful demonstration in the afternoon deteriorated into attacks on government buildings. By the time troops arrived mobs had nearly overwhelmed the police. At 18.40 hours 'C' Company 8th Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, advanced into Tel Aviv in slow-moving lorries with horns blaring, bayonets fixed, and signs in three languages warning 'Disperse or We Fire'. The troops cleared Colony Square and took up positions blocking the roads into it. The crowd, now numbering in the thousands, stoned the soldiers, inflicting some serious casualties. After repeated warnings by a magistrate using a loudhailer went unheeded, an officer directed selected marksmen to fire several rounds to disperse the crowd. The mob withdrew but continued to wreak havoc in other parts of the city. At 20.40 the remainder of the battalion arrived and after an hour they had restored order in the city. The following morning mobs violated a curfew and attacked businesses. After consultations with the divisional commander, Brigadier Lathbury moved two more battalions into Tel Aviv and by evening the city was quiet once more. Further reinforcements, another battalion and two armoured car regiments, arrived on 16 November. Before dawn on the 17th troops distributed a government proclamation which directed all citizens to behave in an orderly manner and warned that the government would take all measures necessary to maintain order. Gradually the curfew was relaxed and on 20 November the soldiers returned to their camps. Six Jews were killed in the rioting and 60 wounded. Twelve soldiers were wounded, and 30 treated for slight injuries. Operation BELLICOSE, as the task was named, was a tactical success: order was restored and no rioting on this scale occurred again during the next two years. Owing to the casualties, however, it was undoubtedly a propaganda success for the Jews.[97]

Commencing with operations at Givat Hayim and Rishpon at the end of November, the security forces conducted more than 55 searches before the end of June 1946. These had two objectives: to capture wanted persons – insurgents or illegal immigrants – and/or to seize illegal caches of arms, explosives, military equipment or documents.[98] A typical search of a rural settlement took place at Yemini in northern Palestine early in 1946. Following the derailment and robbery of a train on 12 January, the 9th Infantry Brigade first mounted four roadblocks while an aircraft surveyed the scene of the incident. The commander of the 3rd Infantry Division, Major-General 'Bolo' Whistler, visited the site in the afternoon and,

following consultations with the DSP, ordered the brigade to cordon and search Yemini commencing at dawn the following morning. Armoured units provided the outer cordon consisting of mobile patrols between the roadblocks. Four battalions shared responsibility for the inner cordon. Two companies from one battalion provided the search and clearance troops, while elements of another erected and guarded the 'cage' (holding area for suspects) and provided a reserve. All troops were in position just before dawn. At 06.00 the brigadier, the DSP and their escort drove into the settlement and ordered the *Mukhtar* (the village headman) to parade all males aged 16 to 45 years and all females aged 16 to 30 years. The *Mukhtar* and the inhabitants cooperated fully. The search began at 07.00 and finished two hours later. At 10.25 the police took 16 suspects to Athlit for further questioning, the cordons withdrew, and residents returned to their homes.[99]

Rural settlements like Yemini could be isolated and searched easily, but the urban areas of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa did not lend themselves to such large operations. Cities offered the insurgents unlimited opportunities to escape and hide, to blend in with the population, or to observe and ambush the security forces. The old city of Jerusalem, with its network of streets and alleys, passages and stairways, was almost impossible to police, patrol, or isolate effectively. Thus, urban searches tended to be small unit operations against specific targets. In January 1946, police supported by one platoon of soldiers carried out a typical operation, a search of eight houses in one sector of Jerusalem.[100]

Following the car park murders on 25 April 1946, the 2nd Parachute Brigade conducted a much larger search operation in Tel Aviv. The insurgents attacked at 20.45 and withdrew into the Yeminite section of the Yarkon quarter of the city. At 22.30 the security forces imposed a curfew and the 6th Battalion, the Gordon Highlanders, cordoned that section of Tel Aviv. Elements of the Police Mobile Force with the 5th Parachute Battalion and an engineer squadron in support, initiated the search at 05.30 on 26 April. When the operation ended at 12.05 the police had questioned 1491 persons, and had detained 79 although there was no proof that they had taken part in the attack. The police also recovered a quantity of military equipment and plans for an attack on Athlit immigration clearance camp.[101]

Security operations – patrols, roadblocks, raids and guard duties – were a constant aspect of internal security in Palestine. Unlike

searches, which had a definite beginning and conclusion, security operations were endless. There were many vulnerable points which had to be protected: military installations and government buildings, the railway, Haifa port and oil refinery, water reservoirs and pumping stations, transportation links, and police stations which were under-manned or vulnerable to attack. In addition, troops constantly patrolled their sectors on foot and in vehicles. Patrols served two functions. First, they allowed the soldiers to become familiar with their areas of responsibility, thereby increasing the flow of background information to the intelligence staffs. Second, they restricted the insurgents' freedom of movement and increased the chances of their being captured. This was particularly important in the large cities. Roadblocks were important for similar reasons. They were intended to interfere with insurgent freedom of action by preventing them from concentrating for operations or apprehending them as they attempted to escape from the scene of an incident.[102]

The security forces in Jerusalem demonstrated the effectiveness of continuous urban security operations. In January 1946, the 185th Infantry Brigade was involved in improving the fixed wire defences of government offices, police and brigade headquarters, and other vulnerable points. In addition, 'during the time troops were not actively engaged in curfew patrols and searches, a large proportion were still patrolling the streets in consequence of the "war of nerves"'.[103] On the instructions of army headquarters, the patrols conducted a series of minor security operations, including sudden identity and baggage checks of pedestrians and passengers on public transportation. The army instituted a new system of emergency roadblocks which were mounted for short intervals on two occasions. Streets were patrolled constantly, and snap searches of houses and flats were so frequent that Jews commented that every Jewish house in Jerusalem had been searched at least once; the army acknowledged that their comments 'corresponded closely to the truth'.[104] The high degree of vigilance produced results. On 14 and 15 January the police received intelligence reports indicating that the insurgents were about to launch further operations; at the same time they noticed a self-imposed curfew in specific Jewish areas of the city, around the Palestine broadcasting studios in particular. The security forces acted on the warning by completing additional wiring and by mounting extra foot patrols and mobile escorts for police cars in the appropriate areas of the city. The anticipated action occurred on 19 January when a mobile patrol encountered insurgents near

the broadcasting studios. A firefight ensued and, on hearing the shooting and explosions, troops established the pre-designated emergency roadblocks. This prevented the escape and permitted the capture of some of the insurgents. Subsequent searches produced further suspects, a large arms cache, and valuable intelligence.[105] This was one of the rare occasions when the security forces were able to develop background information into operational intelligence and to follow it up with appropriate operations. When this occurred the outcome was never in doubt, a factor which obviously impressed the insurgents; they conducted no further operations in Jerusalem until June.

The army and the police continued to work together in this manner throughout February and March. Their perseverance was rewarded again in March when the discovery of an arms cache was followed up by a security force raid which netted 30 suspected insurgents and led to 30 more arrests the following week.[106] When the 31st Infantry Brigade took over responsibility for Jerusalem at the end of March, it maintained the pressure: 46 foot patrols and mobile night patrols in April; 34 night patrols in May. In addition, the forces carried out raids on Jewish cafes, railroad stations, suspect houses, and persons under police supervision. These operations induced a long period of relative quiet in Jerusalem, but they were so effective as to be almost counter-productive: after the middle of May the security forces discontinued some patrols and roadblocks and removed the guard on the King David Hotel despite warnings of impending insurgent activity.[107] By relaxing their vigilance at this time the security forces played right into the plans of the insurgents who were preparing the next wave of attacks, which included targets in Jerusalem.

The security forces also maintained a series of mobile patrols in Haifa – four per night, each lasting 14 hours and covering 60 to 100 miles through the streets of the city. In April they were reduced in scale, number and length. At the same time the army switched from using static roadblocks, which had proven unproductive and expensive in terms of manpower, to using highly mobile roadblocks which would remain in one place for an hour or two, then switch to another location. In this way they intended to 'keep the possible "evil doer" guessing and give the impression of having more roadblocks in use than previously'.[108] As in the case of Jerusalem, Haifa was almost free of incidents and the security operations eventually produced results: on 17 June 1946 troops mounted four

roadblocks around the city minutes after the attack on the railway workshops. The fleeing insurgents ran into one of these blocks and the entire group was killed or captured.[109]

Tel Aviv, on the other hand, was largely ignored by the security forces. Until autumn 1946 no troops were based permanently in the city; instead the battalion based at Sarona in the suburbs maintained a company on-call to support the police at short notice. The security forces did not maintain continuous patrols and troops deployed into Tel Aviv only for specific search operations.[110] As a result the insurgents conducted more operations there and in Jaffa (which was subject to the same security arrangements) than in the other large cities. There were sound reasons, however, for maintaining a low profile presence in Tel Aviv. In order to base troops in Tel Aviv in large numbers, the army would have had to requisition housing, which would have further antagonised the population of the completely Jewish city. Moreover, bases in rural areas were easier to defend from attack.

Rural security operations produced mixed results owing to the inability of the forces to control vast areas of open country. In the northern sector, the 1st Guards Brigade adopted a scheme for establishing quick-reaction roadblocks following incidents. Sited close to camps and police posts, however, they were obvious and easily avoided, though they ensured that the insurgents would have to approach targets and retreat by long cross-country routes. In April these roadblocks were supplemented by observation posts, snap road checks, and 'snooping patrols' by the 1st King's Dragoon Guards armoured regiment, valuable in maintaining a visible presence and creating 'an uncertain factor to be reckoned with in any plans laid down by lawbreakers'.[111] Sometimes these operations produced results: on 3 April 1946 aerial reconnaissance located a group of insurgents retreating across country following attacks on the railway. Troops and police quickly blocked all avenues of escape and captured 30 insurgents with weapons, explosives and equipment.[112] More often than not, however, the limitations of rural security operations were painfully obvious: in June 1946 army headquarters issued specific warnings about insurgent operations anticipated for the 16th against lines of communication. Formations conducted snap road checks and carried out reconnaissance of railway bridges, to no avail; the insurgents attacked their targets and most evaded capture.[113]

In his review of the situation in the Middle East at the beginning

of 1946, General Sir Bernard Paget, Commander in Chief Middle East Forces, stated that in Palestine, 'the Army has not yet initiated any offensive action: any fighting that has been done has been carried out in support of police operations.'[114] This peacekeeping phase ended in June when, in response to the insurgent offensive, the security forces took action against the Jewish Agency and the Haganah.

First Offensive Phase

The security forces' action took the form of a major search and arrest operation, code-named AGATHA. The operation had two tactical objectives: first, to occupy and search the Jewish Agency headquarters and other buildings suspected of being the headquarters of illegal organisations; and second, to arrest as many members of the Palmach as possible, as well as certain members of Jewish political bodies believed responsible for the recent upsurge of insurgent activity. The success of the operation depended upon surprise, so the security forces took strict precautions to ensure secrecy: all conferences were held away from headquarters and senior officers attending removed their distinctive red hatbands; written orders were kept to minimum, circulated in sealed envelopes to officers on a restricted list. Only brigade staffs, police superintendents and a few trusted members of their staffs were briefed before the morning of 28 June. Battalion and company commanders were briefed during the day at 'O' groups disguised as informal meetings of officers lower in rank than usual. The other ranks were not informed until late in the evening. The army made every effort to convey the impression that life was carrying on as normal; a large number of senior officers appeared on the 28th at the Jerusalem horse show. Troops in armoured regiments prepared their vehicles for an inspection, unaware that they were in fact preparing for a major operation.[115]

Commencing at 04.05 hours 29 June, parties of Royal Signals troops, escorting civilian personnel who had not been told of the operation and who were brought directly from their homes, occupied all exchanges and suspended all telephone communications across Palestine for more than three hours. This was sufficient to prevent telephone transmission of any warning of the impending operation. The GOC imposed road curfews in four districts and complete

curfews in the main cities.[116] At the same time some 10 000 troops and 7000 police deployed to their operational targets, the three main cities and 30 rural settlements. In the cities parties of troops and police equipped with CID 'Black Lists' arrested wanted persons, generally at their homes. In addition, in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv they searched the premises of the Jewish Agency, the Histadruth and other organisations, in some cases forcing entry and blowing safes with explosives. Rural settlements were cordoned and searched in the usual manner. Police carried out interrogation and identification and sent suspects to Athlit or Latrun detention camps. However, Jewish anticipation of the operation and the alleged discovery of plans prevented the security forces from achieving complete surprise.[117]

Because the Jewish Agency was a legal organisation, and because the Haganah made only modest efforts to conceal its activities, information on the two organisations was of high quality. The security forces knew whom to arrest and where to look for evidence, arms and equipment. By 1 July the police had arrested 2718 persons; many had been detained for resisting searches and were released after a short time. Seven hundred persons were placed in long-term detention, including four members of the Jewish Agency Executive, seven Haganah commanders, and about half of the Palmach membership. Other members of the Agency, the Histadruth, and the Va'ad Leumi (National Council) were held, but Moshe Sneh, the Haganah Commander in Chief, evaded arrest. In the Agency files the police found evidence implicating the organisation in the activities of the resistance movement, as well as quantities of government documents revealing the extent of subversive penetration of the administration. Troops seized nine tons of documents in Tel Aviv alone.[118] At Mesheq Yagur, a settlement near Haifa, troops discovered 33 arms caches containing over 500 weapons and a large quantity of munitions. The Haganah did not have many such armouries, so the loss was a serious blow to the resistance movement.[119] During the course of Operation AGATHA the security forces encountered only light resistance, mainly of a passive nature, and casualties were few.[120]

In mid-July the army returned to routine security operations, but following the bombing of the King David Hotel troops searched parts of Jerusalem and the police arrested 376 persons on whom they had been keeping a close watch.[121] The government directed

further that the security forces institute an intensive search for members of the Irgun and the Lechi, so for the second time within one month the army and the police carried out a large-scale operation: code-named SHARK, it involved cordoning and searching the entire city of Tel Aviv. The airborne division was the conducting formation, with four brigades and supporting arms and services under command, amassing a total force of 21 000 troops. Operation SHARK posed unique problems. First, as in the case of AGATHA, secrecy was essential, the insurgents certainly expected some major response. But unlike the previous operation the whole force had to be concentrated on one target. It would not be possible to camouflage troop deployments by dispersing units in all directions. Second, the army would be responsible not only for searching all buildings and screening all persons in the city, but also for maintaining essential services to the population for the duration of the search. Third, to be effective, the search had to be launched as soon as possible, despite the fact that the army had no plans for an operation of this magnitude. Finally, there was very little intelligence upon which to act against the Irgun.[122]

Before dawn on 30 July signals troops disrupted the telephone service while the four brigades converged on Tel Aviv by different routes. They drew a cordon around the city, isolating it from north to south, before the columns passed through into Tel Aviv. Police and navy launches patrolled the waterfront. Troops had imposed a 36-hour curfew before most inhabitants were awake. The brigades then laid inner cordons dividing the city into four sectors, and then sub-divided their sectors into battalion areas. The thorough nature of the operation was its unique feature: troops and police searched every building on every street from roof to cellar, then escorted all but children and the elderly to battalion screening teams, who identified and interrogated some 100 000 people. Approximately 10 000, mostly males aged 16 to 60 years, were sent for further screening at brigade level where CID officers checked the identity of each person against photographs and descriptions of wanted persons. When the operation ended on 2 August the police sent 787 persons to detention camp, including Yitzak Yizernitsky (now Shamir), a member of the Lechi's leadership triumvirate. They failed to identify Friedman-Yellin, however, and missed Begin who was hiding behind a false wall in his apartment. Troops found five arms caches, the largest hidden in the basement of the Great Synagogue.

Essential services worked smoothly: curfew was lifted briefly in the evenings to allow the population to obtain food and other necessary services within their restricted sectors.[123]

The British offensive ended with battalion-size searches at Dorot and Ruhama in August and Operation HAZARD, the imposition of a curfew in Tel Aviv, in early September.[124] With the exception of deployments to protect the railway in November, HAZARD was the last large-scale operation until the end of 1946.

Second Peacekeeping Phase

Up to the middle of November most operations were small-unit actions. The 2nd Parachute Brigade carried out a series of snap searches, road checks, and searches of houses and blocks of flats, usually employing no more than one or two platoons in conjunction with the police. Battalions conducted two cordon and search operations. In a major shift in deployment policy the brigade maintained one company at police headquarters in Tel Aviv for immediate employment on anti-terrorist operations. To counteract the effects of road mining, the 1st and 2nd Parachute Brigades established a road curfew at night, restricting movement to specific routes, and mounted mobile patrols, mobile and static roadblocks, and off-road foot patrols. The 9th Infantry Brigade, on duty in Jerusalem, carried out security operations in the usual manner.[125]

In the middle of November the security forces launched Operation EARWIG to protect the railway from sabotage that had brought rail operations to a halt. EARWIG consumed large numbers of troops on purely defensive guard duties throughout the whole length of the railway in Palestine. In southern Palestine the whole airborne division, with the exception of several reserve battalions, was deployed on this task protecting 70 miles of track. The division divided its sector into three zones, each assigned a different density of troops according to the degree of danger. Small observation posts linked by patrols were established 500 to 1000 yards apart in the most hazardous areas, which were also patrolled at night. Every morning the company responsible for a given sector inspected the line with the railway gangs before trains were allowed to pass. Aircraft also surveyed the line at first light. The army was employed in this manner for a month, though the numbers were reduced after the first fortnight. EARWIG was successful: sabotage ceased and normal rail service was gradually restored.[126]

The tempo of operations increased in response to the flogging incidents of 29 December 1946. Between 30 December and 3 January 1947 the airborne division carried out seven brigade-size searches in Tel Aviv and its suburbs. More than 10 000 people were screened and 191 arrested or detained. In addition, troops found small quantities of arms and explosives. They achieved a higher degree of success when they returned to small-unit operations. Operation OCTOPUS, 7–17 January, consisted of a series of raids on specific areas of known insurgent activity, guided by accurate intelligence. Supported by snap searches and mobile roadblocks, the raids netted 90 persons, of whom a much larger proportion than usual was detained in custody. In Rishon Le Zion alone the security forces arrested 12 members of the Irgun, including three important members.[127]

Operations ceased for about one week in the middle of January while the two divisions exchanged areas, but resumed as soon as the formations redeployed.[128] The 1st Guards Brigade, now assigned to the turbulent Lydda district, continued the OCTOPUS scheme through February while the 9th Infantry Brigade carried out a similar programme in Jerusalem. The 3rd Parachute Brigade found Haifa quiet, but there were more targets to protect; the naval depot, the oil refinery and the pipeline.[129] The kidnappings at the end of January 1947 disrupted these routines almost immediately. The 8th Infantry Brigade cordoned and searched Petah Tiqva and the 9th Infantry Brigade carried out two battalion-size searches in the Jewish quarters of Jerusalem. The abductions resulted in additional duties for the security forces; they assisted in the evacuation from Palestine of non-essential British personnel, and the concentration of the remainder in protected security zones, which became known as 'Bevingrads'. This meant providing static guards, patrols and mobile reserves for a purely defensive mission.[130] But it also marked the end of this peacekeeping phase; the decks were being 'cleared for action.'

Second Offensive Phase

On 3 March 1947, following a large number of incidents, the Palestine government imposed statutory martial law on Tel Aviv and its suburbs and on a Jewish sector of Jerusalem, with the

intention of putting an end to terrorism in those areas. The process involved joint military–civilian administration of the affected areas, withdrawal of public services, and the imposition of certain restrictions on the activities of the population within those areas. For the duration, military courts replaced civil courts and heard military, civil and criminal cases.[131] Even so, the military were not a 'law unto themselves' in the martial law districts. The High Commissioner always had the authority to overrule the GOC and his subordinates.

The controlled area of Jerusalem covered a Jewish quarter where many incidents had recently occurred. It included both rich and poor neighbourhoods and a business and shopping area, which facilitated feeding the population and bringing pressure to bear equally on a cross-section of the community. One battalion with an armoured car troop in support controlled and administered the area. Tel Aviv posed a problem of greater magnitude: the martial law area covered some 50 square miles, enclosing a population of more than 300 000 people. The 1st Guards Brigade was the conducting formation with four additional battalions, an armoured regiment, and supporting arms and services under command. Most of these were deployed on the long cordon around the controlled area. The operation was carried out in four phases: imposition of a strict curfew; cordoning the area; publication of regulations and issuing of passes; and gradual relaxation of the curfew and restoration of near normal living conditions.[132]

Martial law imposed a dual responsibility on the security forces. First, they had to carry out security operations within the controlled areas; second, they had to administer these areas, by far the more demanding task. In Jerusalem the martial law headquarters staff included advisers in all fields of civil affairs, and the commander met daily with seven elders representing the interests of the community. Owing to its size and scope the Tel Aviv operation, aptly code-named ELEPHANT, required a larger and more formal organisation. On the third day of martial law Brigadier Moore appointed a civil advisory council empowered to make immediate decisions necessary to fill the administrative gaps created by martial law. The council included representatives from all essential services and the security forces. It met four times during the operation, dealing with problems related to food distribution, health and sanitation, welfare, public works and unemployment.[133] Martial law ended at noon on 17 March. Daily searches in the controlled area of Jerusalem had resulted in the detention of 129 persons and the

discovery of a mine assembly factory, but had not produced new information on the insurgents. Troops in Tel Aviv had conducted four major as well as many smaller searches. In all the security forces made at least 60 arrests, including 24 members of the Irgun and the Lechi. Although martial law did not eliminate terrorism – incidents occurred even in the controlled areas – the arrests were apparently a major blow to the insurgents; during the next quarter of 1947 the rate of insurgent operations declined by more than 50 per cent.[134]

On the day martial law was lifted Captain Roy Farran, a highly decorated veteran of the Special Air Service Regiment (SAS), and Alistair McGregor, a former member of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), arrived in Palestine to conduct special operations against the insurgents. They selected two squads of ten men each from the ranks of the police and commenced operations at the beginning of April, after only a fortnight's training. The nature and results of their operations remain something of a mystery. Richard Clutterbuck claims that, acting on a pattern of intelligence built up gradually by covert surveillance, Farran's squad 'eliminated' as many insurgents in six weeks as a battalion employing cordon and search operations. Farran's claims are more modest: he states that his squad worked 'round the clock' for two months, 'watching, following, listening and occasionally making an arrest.'[135] Only one operation has been described in any detail: Farran's squad 'borrowed' a laundry delivery van detained at a bogus roadblock and, acting on intelligence from an informer, used the van as camouflage – allowing the squad to capture an insurgent courier and some of his contacts. They later returned the van with an apologetic explanation to the driver.[136] Obviously it is not possible to assess the effectiveness of the squads on the basis of such scant evidence. But it is worth noting that during this time the insurgents attempted to assassinate more plainclothes policemen than usual, a development which suggests that the activities of the squads made the insurgents nervous of police surveillance and hence 'trigger happy'. The squads were probably on the right track, but Farran's cover was blown before they could produce significant results.[137]

The security forces carried out 63 search operations from May through July 1947, apart from the special operations or the application of martial law.[138] The army imposed martial law on Nathanya in July in response to the abduction of the two Field Security sergeants. Operation TIGER was intended to permit a thorough search for the missing soldiers and to prevent a recurrence

of terrorism within the controlled areas. From 13 to 27 July the 1st Guards Brigade, with two additional battalions and an armoured regiment under command, maintained a tight cordon around the city. A civil affairs advisory council was established the day before the operation commenced, but the administrative problems were not as formidable as those of Tel Aviv, since the controlled area of Nathanya contained only 15 000 persons. Daily searches led to the capture of 18 wanted persons and economic pressure was brought to bear on the community, but TIGER was nonetheless unsuccessful: it did not coerce the population into cooperation with the security forces and did not result in the recovery of the missing sergeants. General Gale, moreover, was not convinced that the operation would prevent a recurrence of terrorism in the area.[139]

The security forces maintained the offensive, however. On 5 August they arrested some 70 members of the Revisionist Party, including the mayors of Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan and Nathanya, and occupied the headquarters of Betar, the Revisionist youth organisation. The government detained these persons because it was believed they had information about the insurgents which they had not disclosed. But detention produced no results: the detainees refused to divulge any information, and though the police felt they had arrested two persons directly involved in the murder of the two sergeants, there was insufficient evidence on which to bring them to trial.[140]

With that the offensive phase and the counter-insurgency campaign itself came to an end. While the British government and the United Nations deliberated the future of Palestine, the Jews and the Arabs initiated the next stage in the struggle: between 8 August and 30 September there were more than 25 incidents of communal violence; by contrast there were only 13 attacks on the security forces during that period.[141] After the British government announced in September its intention to withdraw from Palestine, the security forces increasingly found themselves trying to keep the peace in a bitter communal conflict in which they were only an unwelcome third party.

SECURITY FORCES OPERATIONS: THE BATTLE FOR LEGITIMACY

Devising a propaganda campaign to support the British position in Palestine was by no means an easy task. First, the campaign would

have to reach at least five targets: Jews and Arabs in Palestine, the British domestic audience, Jewish audiences outside Palestine, and interested and influential persons in the United States. Second, responsibility for propaganda was divided between the government of Palestine and the British government. The difficulties encountered in developing and coordinating such a campaign are discussed in the next chapter. What follows here is an explanation of what the British attempted to accomplish, however imperfectly.

In June 1945 the Ministry of Information's Overseas Planning Committee established the aims and objectives of the British government's propaganda plan for Palestine. The aims, set out in an appreciation, were to maintain internal security in Palestine and to create an atmosphere conducive to a settlement of the problem by promoting good relations between the British, the Arabs and the Jews. The committee acknowledged, however, a crucial constraint on this programme: 'Until H.M.G. makes a new declaration of policy with regard to Palestine, it is undesirable that our publicity should attempt to cover future developments.'[142] A separate paper noted that while it was undesirable to push separate propaganda lines to the Jews and the Arabs, different approaches were necessary. Propaganda to the Jews would have to convince them that the British government cared about their fate; both communities, however, would have to be reminded constantly of Britain's obligations under the Mandate.[143]

It is now clear that from the outset the focus of British propaganda efforts – both offensive and defensive – was on the target audiences outside Palestine. The High Commissioner, concerned about being unable to prevent inaccurate news reports abroad, proposed that the Public Information Office provide local correspondents with informal preliminary 'handouts' containing the first confirmed details of any incident. He also suggested that the PIO distribute these to the MOI to brief the British press. The Colonial Secretary agreed in principle, but for reasons which are not clear, the MOI declined to cooperate.[144] Throughout the campaign the PIO issued its own communiqués as incidents occurred, but it was not until August 1947 that the Central Security Committee decided that the PIO should 'colour' its reporting to emphasise successful security forces operations.[145] By then, of course, it was too late to make a difference, even if that were possible.

For the army, conducting operations 'in the glare of publicity' was a new problem. There was nothing in the internal security manual to explain the propaganda implications of unrestricted news

coverage. Generally speaking, the army responded to the propaganda problem by trying to protect its image. Such arrangements as were made tended to be *ad hoc*, defensive, and oriented toward the external, as opposed to local, audience. First, the army attempted to deny the insurgents material with which to make propaganda. Formation commanders explained to their troops the aims and effects of propaganda. They told them to set aside preconceived notions and prejudices and to treat Arabs and Jews equally and without malice. Consistent with the principle of minimum force, commanders urged their soldiers to avoid unnecessary provocation or embarrassment in search operations and to handle carefully incidents involving illegal immigrants. They were to avoid initiating incidents such as reprisals, which were likely to cause press comment, and above all, they should not lose their 'sense of proportion'.[146]

Second, the army encouraged good relations with the press. The security forces gave all possible assistance to the accredited correspondents consistent with safety and operational security. Public relations officers were appointed to sector, brigade and divisional headquarters to assist the press. Correspondents were permitted to move freely through curfew and restricted areas and to accompany the troops on operations. They were allowed on several occasions to visit internment camps.[147] Third, the army attempted to 'manage' news coverage of events in Palestine. Army instructions emphasised the need for speed and accuracy in passing of information; it was essential to 'beat Reuters' in order to prevent or correct inaccurate news reports.[148] One staff officer suggested that the army should try to influence reporting by providing the press (via the PIO) with information before the insurgents did. He felt:

> It is the first 'hot news' that captures the headlines . . . . They will use the first story they get . . . . Our object must be, therefore, to provide the material basis of a story within a few minutes of the start of an incident . . . . It should usually be possible for this HQ to produce a story for the PIO of what is happening . . . sufficient to give the right angle to the story.[149]

Until 1947, however, officers were forbidden to give interviews to the press. It was decided then that the senior military commander on the scene of an operation could give an interview or answer questions from the press. Officers concerned were encouraged to give the fullest possible account of the operations, but were to confine their remarks to statements of fact that the correspondents could check; they were not to comment on policy or express opinions.[150] Finally, the security forces tried to jam or locate and capture the insurgents' illegal radio stations. In January and February 1946 army radio direction-finding units fixed the location of *Kol Israel* on several occasions, but troops and police who converged on the sites never captured the transmitter or its crew. They did, however, locate and seize the Lechi radio station and its staff in Tel Aviv. Begin claims the Irgun's station was never silenced.[151]

The British government's campaign to counteract insurgent propaganda overseas, particularly in the United States, was largely defensive and low-key. It began at the end of November 1945 when the High Commissioner complained to London about the flood of propaganda concerning the search at Givat Hayim. He felt that both British policy and the internal situation in Palestine would suffer unless vigorous steps were taken to deal with the propaganda. Cunningham's views were passed to Washington but the British Ambassador, Lord Halifax, did not appear to take the problem seriously. He felt that misrepresentations were not widespread and that the few newspapers which had violently distorted facts were, in any case, incorrigible. On the occasion of any future incidents he stated that the embassy would issue an appropriate communiqué through the BIS. Moreover, the embassy and the BIS would continue to give information privately to press and radio commentators in order to put across the British view of operations in Palestine. In the case of Givat Hayim, however, British reports from the scene varied considerably on crucial details. Insurgent propaganda thus scored a significant victory when the British government accepted the Zionist version of events despite some obvious inconsistencies.[152]

There was a brief change in policy in May 1946: following the car park murders in Tel Aviv the Foreign Office urged the Washington embassy to 'move from the defence to the attack' by using reports of such incidents as the basis for a propaganda offensive.[153] In principle this probably made sense, but in practice official British statements would carry little weight amongst Britain's American critics. Moreover, in this specific case it was already too late by at least a fortnight. Insurgent propagandists had turned a potential disaster for the resistance movement into an embarrassment for the British by skilfully exploiting British excesses in response to the murders: the divisional commander's public rebuke to the mayor of Tel Aviv and the brief reprisal by British troops against a Jewish settlement. Any propaganda advantage the British might have gained

from the Lechi attack vanished as the Jewish press castigated General Cassels, linking his attitude to the reprisals. General Cassels himself later conceded that he had achieved nothing by his public statement 'except more British press adverse comments and a spate of letters from American Jews'.[154] So the Foreign Office directive was not only too late; it was completely out of touch with the realities of the propaganda war.

Following Operation AGATHA in June 1946, the British Ambassador, now Lord Inverchapel, felt that the principal British propaganda aim in America should be 'to remove the Palestine issue from the headlines' by allowing the current agitation to subside and by refraining from further public statements. He did, however, favour continued efforts by BIS to influence the American press.[155] Through 1946/47 British diplomats also protested, without success, to the State Department about advertisements soliciting funds for the insurgents. The Foreign Office, however, criticised the embassy for not pressing the issue with sufficient vigour. Commenting on a memorandum sent to the State Department in December 1946, one official said:

> This is a lamentably weak document. One would have thought that as three previous protests have gone unanswered, we could, without really upsetting Anglo-American relations, point out that the financing of rebellion on the territory of a friendly power was just the least bit steep?[156]

The British did not ask for suppression of the advertising; they tried instead to persuade the American government to remove the tax-exempt status of contributions to the organisations concerned. By September 1947 the issue was still unresolved and all that British persistence had achieved was a statement from the Truman administration asking Americans not to engage in activities likely to cause violence in Palestine.[157] At the embassy's request the Foreign Office attempted to keep them informed of British plans for Palestine, to enable the officials in Washington to anticipate and respond effectively to criticism. Even so, certain limitations may have hampered the efforts of British diplomats in America to present their case effectively. In February 1947, the embassy felt that British officials had been misquoted on several occasions and thus decided that they should not speak in public on the Palestine issue; consequently, numerous invitations to do so were refused. The

Foreign Office disagreed with this policy, pointing out that:

> it seems to be an unfortunate development at a time when the other interested parties must be intensifying their propaganda . . . . It seems to be more than ever necessary that misrepresentations of British policy should be answered as effectively as possible.[158]

The embassy insisted, however, that its staff and the BIS were more effective in putting the British case personally, in letters to and conversations with influential persons. The ambassador lifted the ban on public speaking in April but by August even the embassy staff had come to doubt the value of their propaganda techniques. They concluded that insurgent propaganda was effective and wondered if they were doing enough to counter it. They could not afford to place full page newspaper advertisements like those of the ALFP; conversations and replies to letters were valuable, but they reached only a few people; briefing correspondents was effective, but by this time many American newspapers were reluctant to print anything that sounded pro-British. The embassy requested more information on Palestine, including statistics on terrorist incidents, casualties and illegal immigration, but did not receive a reply until September 1947.[159]

Propaganda counter-measures directed at the British audience showed even less drive or imagination than efforts in America. It may be fair to suggest that once British soldiers were being killed such measures were unnecessary because the British population tended to sympathise with the army in such difficult circumstances. Nonetheless, the Palestine government and the army attempted to correct or forestall what they considered misleading or sensationalist accounts in British newspapers. The High Commissioner's view, however, that an eyewitness account of events by a senior British officer would provide 'an adequate rejoinder to wilful distortions' suggests a certain naiveté on his part, since critics would not find such an account unbiased. The British government made statements in the House of Commons, either in reply to questions or on the occasion of major developments, such as Operation AGATHA in June 1946. In July 1946 the government published a White Paper on terrorism which provided evidence implicating the Jewish Agency in the resistance movement.[160] The Foreign Office, with the assistance of Passport Control, the security service and the Palestine

government, made a concerted effort to harass and keep under surveillance the ALFP's European representatives. After his speeches in London and Rome, Irgun spokesman, J. J. Smertenko was denied re-entry into Britain. Peter Bergson's Palestinian citizenship was revoked and the British government persuaded the Italian government to suppress *La Riposta*, the ALFP's propaganda magazine.[161]

During the period 1945/47 the British and Palestine governments conducted only one well-organised and effective propaganda campaign: a recruiting campaign for the Palestine police. At the end of November 1945 the Chief Secretary suggested that the existing recruiting campaign – then confined to the armed forces and not producing the desired results – be expanded to include the general public, using all the methods of modern publicity. The Colonial Office approved the idea in principle in January 1946, but there was considerable reluctance to begin the campaign at that time. The government did not want to attract too much attention to the Palestine problem, nor did it wish to introduce too many men into the force rapidly without providing adequate training. Furthermore, as noted earlier, the government felt that the army would be responsible for controlling major disorder in Palestine, so police manpower was not regarded in London as an urgent problem.[162] In June 1946, however, the deteriorating situation in Palestine and a shortage of 3000 policemen forced the government to act. A two-month publicity campaign prepared by the Palestine government began in June. The Colonial Office, the War Office, and the COI assisted the Palestine government in securing advertising space, even at the expense of recruiting for the armed forces. The campaign commenced in early June with advertisements in 40 provincial newspapers. Later this expanded to 80, supplemented by letters to 1350 headmasters of public and secondary schools and a recruiting slide presented at 400 cinemas and 50 theatres. The campaign was renewed in September and November 1946 and again in January 1947; by that time it included national Sunday newspapers and some national magazines.[163] The recruitment propaganda, which was produced originally in 1945, was criticised for not telling the whole truth about service in the police: it stressed the reputation of the force as a 'body of picked men' chosen for their high standards of character, education and physical fitness; it said nothing about the dangers, the fact that effective training had all but ceased, and problems such as equipment shortages.[164] Nonetheless, the recruiting campaign was a major success. The first week of advertising produced

2000 inquiries and by the end of September the Colonial Office had received some 6000 applications. The large majority were rejected for a variety of reasons, but the monthly intake of recruits increased steadily: from 62 in June 1946 to a peak of 395 in December, by which time more than 1200 recruits had been selected and intake to the force had outstripped wastage. Enquiries and applications continued to increase until July 1947.[165]

Both in effort expended and in results achieved this single endeavour contrasts sharply with the overall British propaganda campaign for Palestine, in which the government violated every principle of effective propaganda. In this regard, the negative comparison with the insurgents' efforts is striking. Where the insurgents went on the offensive, the British remained defensive. Where insurgent propaganda appeared credible, the British seemed inconsistent. Where the insurgents were quick to exploit the propaganda value of an incident, the British were slow on the uptake. Finally, where the insurgents were unrelenting in hammering home their message, the British havered, apparently uncertain whether they should be saying anything about Palestine at all. It is by no means certain that a more robust effort might have regained for Britain the 'moral high ground' in this struggle. The insurgents started out with a clear advantage in that domain, and the British response never seriously challenged it. All that can be said with certainty is that the lacklustre propaganda campaign all but ensured that Britain would lose the battle for legitimacy virtually by default.