



SPECIAL FEATURE

THE FALL OF HAIFA REVISITED

WALID KHALIDI

Almost fifty years ago, Walid Kbalidi published "The Fall of Haifa" in the December 1959 issue of the now-defunct Middle East Forum. On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the fall of Haifa on 22 April 1948, a major landmark in the Palestine war, JPS is republishing the article, long unavailable, to which Professor Kbalidi has added endnotes and an introduction.

INTRODUCTION

SINCE THIS ARTICLE was written almost a half century ago, an array of archival material has come to light, as have other important historical writings, including memoirs of participants in the events. These have added considerable detail to the story of the fall of Haifa, even as they have confirmed the 1959 article's major findings, which could be summarized thusly: (a) The all-out Haganah attack on the Arab quarters of Haifa on 21–22 April 1948 was part of a new, general military offensive to establish a Jewish state in Palestine by force of arms in the wake of the UNGA partition recommendation and in anticipation of the end of the British Mandate on 15 May 1948; (b) the attack was closely orchestrated between the Haganah high command and the most senior British commander in Haifa, Major General H.C. Stockwell, commander of the 6th Airborne Division (of World War II fame), whose headquarters were in Haifa; (c) Anglo-Zionist collusion continued throughout the two days of fighting and the subsequent Arab-Jewish negotiations, which Stockwell sponsored to elicit Arab acceptance of Haganah's surrender terms; (d) the mass exodus of Haifa's Arab population, which began on 22 April, was the spontaneous reaction to the ruthless combination of terror and psychological warfare tactics adopted by the Haganah during the attack; and (e) the Zionist/Israeli claim that the exodus of Haifa's civilian population was part of an Arab strategy to evacuate the country's Arab population in anticipation of the invasion of Palestine by the regular Arab armies on 15 May, or that it was in response to specific orders to that effect from the Palestinian leadership, is entirely without foundation.

The 1959 article places the conquest of Haifa within the context of a new general Zionist offensive launched at the beginning of April to pave the way for

WALID KHALIDI, a founder of the Institute for Palestine Studies and its general secretary, has taught at Oxford University, the American University of Beirut, and Harvard University.

the proclamation of the Israeli state by consolidating and broadening the areas under Zionist occupation and clearing them of Arabs, but it does not name the offensive. Two years later, this author uncovered its name and details: Plan Dalet, which was indeed a specific military master plan for the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948. The plan, which spelled out its guidelines and operational orders in meticulous detail, comprised a core of subsidiary operations for the conquest of given regions or towns, each with a specific code name; the conquest of the Arab quarters of Haifa was originally called Operation Misparayim, later changed to Operation Chametz. The implementation of each operation in Plan Dalet was assigned to one of the six brigades of the Haganah Field Force (KHISH), which could call upon the Haganah's strategic reserve (the three brigades of its strike force, the PALMACH) for assistance. Each of the KHISH brigades was assigned very specific tasks and targets, urban and rural, within and outside the borders of the UN-designated Jewish state, all within the framework and operational guidelines of Plan Dalet. The task of conquering Arab Haifa was the responsibility of the Haifa-based KHISH Carmeli brigade.*

A considerable part of the 1959 article was devoted to demonstrating the extent of Anglo-Zionist collusion with regard to the fall of the city, but at the time the author's analysis was to an extent conjecture, based on piecing together documents and accounts then available. Conclusive information confirming the collusion has emerged since then.

In late February 1948, two prominent Yishuv figures, Abba Hushi and Harry Beilin, asked to see General Stockwell in Haifa. Hushi was a powerful Labor leader with close ties to the Haganah, the military arm of the Jewish Agency,[†] while Beilin was the Agency's liaison with the British army in the city. Hushi began by saying that what they had come to discuss might seem "madness": Their request, bluntly laid out, was that "you hand the city over to us," since in any case Haifa had been assigned to the Jewish state by the partition resolution. Hushi added that a prolongation of the status quo could lead to "a confrontation between the Haganah and the British army." After absorbing the shock of this veiled threat, Stockwell asked for "time to think about it."[‡]

In the subsequent weeks, four meetings took place between the two sides. On 18 April, Stockwell asked Hushi and Beilin to come to his office. He informed them that he had consulted with his superior, General Sir Gordon McMillan, GOC (general officer commanding) of all British troops in Palestine, about their offer and was now ready to accept it. He was, however, concerned about "the

*The interested reader should refer to the author's article, "Plan Dalet Revisited," and its appendices, including the full text of Plan Dalet (published in English for the first time) and the operational orders to the KHISH brigades, *JPS* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), pp. 4-19 and 24-38. The original article, minus the appendices, was first published in the *Middle East Forum* in November 1961.

[†]The Jewish Agency was the highest Jewish political body and Britain's partner, according to the Mandate instrument, in the establishment of a Jewish national home.

[‡]Dan Kurtzman, *Genesis 1948* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1972), pp. 152-53.

lines of evacuation of the British army.” Hushi assured him that the Haganah would help him “keep and secure those lines.”* Apparently, neither side felt the need to verbalize that any threat to Britain’s troop withdrawal was expected not from the Arab but from the Jewish side: either from the Haganah itself or from the so-called dissident groups Irgun and Stern. Thus a deal was struck: Haifa in return for a secure British evacuation through Haifa Harbor.

The conversation then turned to specifics. Stockwell asked how much time the Haganah needed “to complete the capture of the whole city.” “Forty-eight” hours, came Hushi’s swift reply. Stockwell thought this was “pretentious” and that the Haganah could not do it in “less than a week.” Hushi then challenged the general to a wager: “. . . say, for a bottle of whiskey?” and wrote in a notebook “Stockwell—one week; I—24–48 hours.”† It is interesting to note that the mixed town of Tiberias, at the other end of the Plain of Esdraelon from Haifa, had fallen that same day—18 April. The Haganah offensive in Tiberias, the first against an Arab *town* under Plan Dalet, had been launched on 16 April; two days later, Tiberias was in Haganah hands. That day (18 April), British troops under Stockwell’s command had “provided” transportation to evacuate the entire Arab population of the town, numbering some 5,000 persons. This could only have been done on orders from Stockwell, and it must be seen within the context of his deal with Hushi.

The whiskey wager was apparently known and a source of considerable amusement to a restricted circle of senior Haganah and British officers. In his history of the 1948 war, *The Edge of the Sword* (which featured an epilogue by Major General Y. Yadin, Israel Defense Forces chief of general staff), Lieutenant-Colonel Netanel Lorch reports that “Stockwell had placed a bet with an acquaintance [sic] that it [the conquest of Haifa] could not be done in less than a week. He lost his bet—a bottle of whiskey.”‡ Nor were Hushi’s deals restricted to Stockwell. He also struck a bargain with Colonel Conquest, the British head of Haifa’s Criminal Investigation Department (the equivalent of the FBI). This was a “gentleman’s agreement” whereby Hushi would inform Conquest of any Zionist attempt to sabotage British shipping in Haifa harbor. “In return, Conquest guaranteed (sic) that Hushi would be allowed to retain control of Haifa.”§ For Benny Morris’s waffling on the negotiations with Hushi, see his *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 188 and pages following.**

Stockwell’s collusion during the fighting (21–22 April) and in the subsequent Arab-Yishuv negotiations over which he presided—not to mention his role in

*Kurtzman, *Genesis 1948*, pp. 152–53.

†Kurtzman, *Genesis 1948*, pp. 152–53.

‡London and New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1961, p. 98.

§M. Eldar, *Sbajetet 13* [in Hebrew], in *English Flotilla 13: the Story of Naval Commandos* (Tel Aviv, 1993) pp. 130–31, quoted in F. Liebreich, *Britain’s Naval and Political Reaction to the Illegal Immigration of Jews to Palestine 1945–46* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 333.

**Henceforth, Morris 2004.

the evacuation of Haifa's Arab population on the model of his evacuation of Tiberias's Arab population—is on ample display in the four memoranda sent by the Haifa Arab National Committee (ANC) to Stockwell between 22 and 25 April and in an aide-memoire summarizing the ANC's meeting with him during the same period. These documents, published by this author in 1998,* flesh out the dealings between the two sides, as well as Stockwell's stance during the crucial days following the Haganah assault. They also demonstrate the ANC's pathetic lingering trust in Britain's sense of fair play and readiness to be evenhanded.

It is interesting to see Benny Morris at work reconstructing the narrative in an effort to demonstrate Stockwell's "impartiality." Morris fails to mention Stockwell's 12-hour delay in granting the urgent request for an interview by Farid Saad, a member of the ANC, on 21 April,[†] and fabricates a request to Stockwell for surrender terms by the ANC itself on 22 April.[‡] There is in his account no mention of a crucial ANC memorandum to Stockwell earlier that day demanding British intervention to stop the bloodshed,[§] nor of Stockwell's threat to the ANC that 300–400 more Arabs would be killed unless they accepted Haganah's surrender terms,** nor of his refusal to give the Arab delegation to the talks with the Jewish side a 24-hour grace period.^{††} Morris also neglects to mention the Haganah's declaration on 23 April of virtual Jewish sovereignty in Haifa despite the Mandate's legal responsibility for all Palestine until 5 May^{‡‡} and the ANC appeal on 25 April to Stockwell to facilitate the return of the Haifa expellees.^{§§}

Additional information on Haganah terror tactics during the Haifa fighting comes from Haganah sources. A history of Haganah battles in Haifa in 1948 (with an introduction by Brigadier Moshe Carmel, commander of the Carmeli Brigade that captured the city) by Zadok Eshel informs us that in the lead-up to the all-out assault on 21 April, the Haganah sent car bombs (a Zionist innovation in Palestine from the late 1930s, pioneered by the Irgun) with payloads of

*"Selected Documents of the 1948 Palestine War," *JPS* 27, no. 3 (Spring 1998), pp. 86–93, 95–97, 98–99.

[†]See main article below.

[‡]For Morris's reconstruction, and for the fabricated surrender request, see Morris 2004, pp. 190 and pages following.

[§]For the 22 April ANC memorandum, see "Selected Documents of the 1948 Palestine War," *JPS* 27, no. 3, pp. 90–92.

**For Stockwell's threat, see "Selected Documents of the 1948 Palestine War," *JPS* 27, no. 3, pp. 95–97.

^{††}For Stockwell's refusal of grace period, see "Selected Documents of the 1948 Palestine War," pp. 95–97.

^{‡‡}Morris does not mention this crucial communiqué, which Murad (op cit. 96) quotes as follows: "In accordance with the powers vested in me, I hereby declare the establishment of Hebrew independent rule in the city of Haifa. Having defeated the Arab enemy, the Hebrew Haganah is in control of the entire city of Haifa, and is the constituted authority pending the establishment of permanent civilian rule by the Executive Committee of the General Council [of the Yishuv]. Moshe Carmel commander Carmeli Brigade." The text is translated from Murad's Arabic version by the author.

^{§§}For the ANC's appeal to facilitate the return of the expellees, see "Selected Documents of the 1948 Palestine War," pp. 98–99.

700 kilograms (about 1.5 tons).^{*} Even while the British army was still responsible for Haifa's law and order, the Haganah indiscriminately shelled, with impunity, the Arab town with batteries of twelve two-inch mortars firing simultaneously.[†] Mortar shells, particularly effective as terror weapons in urban warfare because of their inaccuracy and their parabolic trajectory over rooftops—to say nothing of the deafening sound of their explosion—were used extensively. Haganah ingenuity also took full advantage of Haifa's topography, notably the long staircases from the Jewish quarters on high ground to the Arab town below. Barrels fitted with car tires were filled with kerosene-soaked rags to which an ignition device was attached. These flaming “infernal machines,” as Eshel called them, were sent hurtling to the Arab quarters below, to the accompaniment of mortar barrages.[‡]

The intention and goal of the final assault on Haifa on 21 April are ironically embedded in its operational code names: Operation Misparayim and Operation Chametz. Misparayim, the name originally given to the operation, means “scissors,” a clear allusion to the intention to “slice” the Arab town into three sections, cutting each totally off from the others (which is in fact what happened[§]). But absent the full cooperation of the British, which the Haganah could not have anticipated when Misparayim was planned, such an operation could not have been carried out without an all-out clash with British troops still occupying Haifa, a situation to be avoided at all costs. Plan Dalet's initial assumption, then, was clearly that the conquest of Haifa would have to await Britain's troop withdrawal, which certainly would not be before 15 May, the last day of the Mandate, given Britain's paramount need to protect the Haifa harbor (through which its troop evacuation would have to take place). These assumptions dramatically changed with the deal struck between Stockwell and Hushi on 18 April, allowing Haganah to begin the conquest of the city in the time it took to move its forces into the positions vacated by the British troops. Taking into account the coordinated British and Zionist redeployments and the “24 to 48 hours” in which Haganah expected to be able to capture the Arab town, the operation could be finalized by 22 April, the eve of Passover. If such a scenario were to succeed, the impact of the victory on the Yishuv's morale would be electric, far surpassing the conquest of the modest town of Tiberias.

It was therefore only after the Hushi-Stockwell deal that the operation could be timed to coincide with the already-known date of Passover and renamed accordingly as “Operation Chametz,” the Hebrew word for “leaven.” The reference is to the unleavened bread that the Lord commanded the Israelites to eat during their flight from Egypt, a climactic event annually celebrated during the Passover feast. “For seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day

^{*}Zadok Eshel, *Haganah Battles in Haifa* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1978), pp. 65–66.

[†]Eshel, *Haganah Battles*, pp. 69–70.

[‡]Eshel, *Haganah Battles*, pp. 69–70.

[§]See main article, below.

you are to *clean all leaven out of your houses*, for anyone who eats leavened bread from the first to the seventh day shall be cut off from Israel.”* In Jewish tradition, on the night before the annual festival, the house is thoroughly searched for *chametz*, and all that is found is gathered together and burned before noon on the following day. A former chief rabbi of Israel, Mordechai Eliyahu, is quoted as saying, “If there is a crumb (of leaven) in the kitchen hiding in the corner, you should do *everything to remove it*. If need be, you should take a hammer and chisel and destroy the wall until the crumb comes out.”†

Benny Morris would have us believe that Misparayim and Chametz were the names of two separate operations, the former designed to “damage and shock” rather than conquer,‡ the latter to “break the enemy,” albeit with limited territorial aims. In his account, Stockwell’s “surprise” announcement to both the Haganah and the Arabs on the morning of 21 April that he intended to redeploy his troops that very day “triggered a hurried consultation” in Carmeli headquarters, with the unanticipated British redeployment necessitating the “broadening” of Misparayim’s aims during the “morning and early afternoon.” (It should be noted that the broadened aims, according to Morris, did not include conquest.§) Since 21 April coincided by sheer chance, in Morris’s account, with the onset of Passover, the new operation was called (apparently extemporaneously) “*Mivtza Biur Hametz* (Operation Passover Cleansing).” Morris leaves it at that, as if the new designation had merely quaint biblical resonance.**

When the article that follows was written in 1959, the Zionist myth of Arab evacuation orders was still at the center of Arab-Israeli polemics because of its implications for moral responsibility and its obvious relationship to the refugees’ right of return enshrined in UNGA resolutions to which the United States (along with the rest of the world) still subscribed. In 1961 this myth was finally laid to rest in the pages of the British weekly *The Spectator* in correspondence between this author and the Irish journalist Erskine Childers, on one side, and Jon Kimche, its principal Anglo-Zionist exponent at the time, on the other. The correspondence extended over more than ten weeks. Challenged to produce evidence for his claim of the orders, Kimche (and his reinforcements) were at a loss. In his earlier incarnation,†† Morris, to his credit, acknowledged

*Exodus 12:15; italics added.

†*The Boston Globe*, 20 April 1997.

‡Lorch (*The Edge of the Sword*, p. 98) categorically states that Operation Misparayim was for “the capture of the whole of Haifa.”

§Morris 2004, pp. 188–189.

**The implausibility of Morris’s claim that the designation “Chametz” for the Haifa offensive was extemporaneously concocted is underlined by the fact that the Haganah command had already planned a simultaneous operation of the same name for 22 April whose goal was to occupy and cleanse all the Arab villages surrounding Jaffa, a clear indication of the premeditated nature of the Haganah’s intentions for Haifa and Jaffa in accordance with Plan Dalet.

††Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–49* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 197 and pages following.

the absence of such orders. In his more recent odyssey to the right, however, he gamely maintains a rear-guard action by trying to prove that the Arab evacuation orders were not given up front, but somehow materialized *ex post facto* after the fighting in Haifa had ended and the exodus has already begun.*

THE FALL OF HAIFA

The following is the article as it appeared in Middle East Forum on December 1959. The endnotes have all been added, including publication details of the references mentioned in parentheses in the text. Headings and subheadings have been changed to improve continuity.

The all-out Zionist attack on Haifa began in the early morning of Wednesday, 21 April 1948, and ended the following day with the fall of the city into Zionist hands. Within a week, some 50,000 Arab inhabitants had been expelled. The attack was not an isolated phenomenon, nor was it a reaction to any local Arab initiative. It was an important phase of the general Zionist offensive begun on 1 April that was to pave the way for the proclamation of the State of Israel.

Until 1 April, the Zionists had confined themselves to sniping, mortar-shelling, and the planting of time bombs and booby-trapped vehicles in Arab urban areas, and to hit-and-run attacks in the countryside wherein several houses at a time would be blown up over the heads of their inhabitants. But the Zionists did not begin to seize and hold on to Arab territory until their new April offensive, which was motivated primarily by political considerations.

THE SETTING

By early 1948, time appeared to be running out for the Zionists. The British mandate was to end on 15 May, leaving a "juridical vacuum" in Palestine into which the UN Trusteeship proposal might well step in.¹ Of all the great powers, only the USSR still favored the November 1947 United Nations recommendation to partition Palestine into two states. The United States was now throwing its full weight behind the Trusteeship proposal. This seemed to be what the Arabs wanted and what even Britain itself coyly desired.

All this did not augur well for the Zionists. The moral "right" to found a Jewish state conferred by the UN partition decision had to be converted into facts if it were not to lose all practical significance. It was in the middle of March that Weizmann importuned President Truman for an interview, and Truman reluctantly agreed. We do not know what went on between the two men when they met, but it is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that some kind of a bargain was struck whereby Weizmann would create facts in Palestine while President Truman (himself never too happy about the Trusteeship proposal)

*Morris 2004, p. 197 and pages following; p. 269 footnote 95; p. 278 footnote 233.

would return to partition once the facts had been created.² Whatever transpired at the Truman-Weizmann meeting, there is no doubt that as the mandate neared its end on 15 May, the Zionists needed to create a military situation in Palestine that would stop the rot at the UN and face the world with a *fait accompli* once and for all.

This was the general political setting of the Zionists' new April offensive. More specifically, the offensive aimed at consolidating and broadening the areas under Zionist occupation by clearing them of Arabs and by linking them [i.e., the Zionist areas] more closely together. It was to this end that Operation Nachshon was launched on 1 April to carve out an adequate corridor from Tel Aviv on the coast to Jerusalem in the interior. This involved the occupation and destruction of a score of Arab villages and culminated in the Battle of Castel on 11 April.³ (The Dayr Yasin massacre by the Irgunists⁴ on 9 April was an integral part of Operation Nachshon.) As soon as the operation, which resulted in the expulsion of 10,000 to 15,000 Arab villagers, was concluded on 13 April, Operation Jephtha⁵ was launched to clear Eastern Galilee of Arabs and to link Tiberias with Safed. Operation Jephtha was inaugurated with the seizure of Tiberias on 18 April and the expulsion of its Arab inhabitants, about 4,500, a number that was swollen threefold by refugees from neighboring villages as Operation Jephtha proceeded.

The attack on Haifa on 21 April was the third major operation of the unfolding Zionist offensive. It was complementary to Operation Jephtha in Eastern Galilee insofar as it paved the way for the conquest of Western Galilee. Moreover, Haifa was the point at which the eastern and southern lines of Jewish colonies met; the one stretching across Esdraelon to Tiberias and Metullah on to the Lebanese border, and the other down the Sharon plain to Jaffa and thence to Jerusalem. Operations Nachshon and Jephtha secured the extremities, but unless the pivot Haifa was also secured these successes would be illusory.

Haifa was not coveted only for its relative importance, but as a prize in itself. It was the greatest Arab harbor in the Eastern Mediterranean after Alexandria. It was the terminal point of the oil pipeline from Iraq (and therefore perhaps an important bargaining lever with the Arabs). It was a key rail and road communication center. It was in close proximity to the "industrial belt" that skirted the bay of Acre.

To the Arabs, Haifa was an integral part of their country. Their aim was to see that it did not fall into Zionist hands, but the most they could do was simply to hold their ground. Their position at the foot of the Carmel ridge, with the Jewish quarters dominating them from higher ground, was precarious in the extreme. Though Arab villages such as Balad al-Shaykh in the east and Tireh in the south were near at hand, the strategic approaches to the city were completely dominated by Zionist settlements, such that reinforcements from farther afield could often reach Haifa only at suicidal cost to the Arabs themselves.

As soon as street fighting broke out in Haifa after the UN partition decision in November, Muslim and Christian residents of the city formed an Arab National

Committee (ANC). Its chairman was Rashid al-Haj Ibrahim, a benign 62-year-old gentleman who looked and felt out of his depth in the bewildering series of situations he was called upon to face.⁶ Broadly speaking, the ANC was politically responsible to the Arab Higher Committee (AHC) for Palestine,⁷ but militarily it depended for supplies on the Arab League Military Committee based in Damascus. On 28 December 1947, the ANC engaged a young and energetic lieutenant in the Arab Legion, Muhammad Hamad al-Huneidi, who resigned his commission to volunteer his services as the local commander. Huneidi acted under the ANC and was put in charge of all security matters. When he took over, the Haifa National Guard numbered 75 members armed with weapons ranging from rifles to wooden clubs and canes. By the time Huneidi was killed in action on 17 March, as he was returning from Lebanon with supplies, the National Guard had increased to about 350. Many of these were members of sporting organizations in Haifa, and some were ex-servicemen who had served with the British army on the Egyptian front during World War II. About half were part-timers, and the vast majority were from Haifa itself. Under Huneidi, the town was divided into ten security zones, each under a local defense group led by a person reporting directly to a central headquarters. The limiting factor was always arms supplies, and the most frustrating problem was obtaining the right ammunition to match the rich variety of rifles, which included not a few museum pieces. Huneidi was ably assisted by Yunis Naffa, a sanitary inspector in Haifa with a flair for military organization. Upon Huneidi's death, he temporarily took over command of the National Guard before the arrival of Huneidi's replacement.

In addition to security, the ANC looked after the general welfare of Haifa's Arab community. Quite early on, a system of rationing was introduced, and prices were monitored to prevent profiteering. Offenders were tried before special courts. These courts also came down heavily on Arab lawless elements who took advantage of the general confusion during outbursts of fighting to break into shops or houses. The ANC also collected regular contributions and supervised their expenditure. As the scale of fighting increased, the Committee became more and more preoccupied with such problems as identifying corpses, medical care for the wounded and disabled, and food and shelter for the destitute and orphans. Contact between the Haifa ANC and the Palestine AHC in Cairo was maintained through messengers and telephone conversations between Rashid al-Haj Ibrahim and Haj Amin al-Husayni, the mufti of Palestine and head of the AHC, in which the two gentlemen brushed up their Turkish in a valiant attempt to hoodwink the British CID⁸ and the Zionist espionage network. On 28 March, Captain Amin Izzeddin, a Lebanese Druze formerly of the Trans-Jordanian Frontier Force,⁹ arrived in Haifa as Huneidi's successor. With Izzeddin came reinforcements of approximately platoon strength (30–40 men). Though too small to affect the overall balance of power, the reinforcements were welcome in view of the heavy losses incurred in the ambush in which Huneidi had lost his life ten days earlier. Izzeddin retained Naffa as his second-in-command.

HAIFA AND THE MYTH OF THE “ARAB EVACUATION ORDERS”

For some inexplicable reason, the Zionists have chosen Haifa to support their myth that the Arab authorities had an organized plan to evacuate the Arab inhabitants of Palestine as a preliminary to the invasion of the country by the regular Arab armies when the Mandate ended on 15 May. The present writer discussed this myth at length in his article in *Middle East Forum* in July 1959.¹⁰ There is no point in covering the same ground here. But since the Zionists seem to base their case on Haifa,¹¹ it would seem relevant to ask why they single out Haifa. Haifa was not the first town to lose its Arab population; Tiberias had fallen three days earlier. Where are the evacuation orders for its Arab population? Nor was Tiberias the first locality to be occupied. Operation Nachshon, which preceded its fall, accounted for the occupation and destruction of a score of Arab villages and the expulsion of some 10,000 to 15,000 villagers. Where are the Arab evacuation orders in this case? Nor was Haifa the last Arab town to lose its Arab inhabitants before the end of the Mandate. There was Operation Jephtha, which began before (and continued well after) the fall of Haifa and “cleared the ground” between Tiberias and Safed, involving the conquest and evacuation of scores of Arab villages.

But to go back to Haifa: The specific directives not to leave the country addressed to the people of Palestine by the Arab League, the AHC for Palestine, and the Arab Liberation Army were referred to in this writer’s article mentioned above.¹² These directives applied to Haifa as much as they did to any other part of Palestine. Indeed, if anything, the AHC erred on the side of excessive zeal in opposing evacuation of whatever kind.

It is normal in all countries in time of war to evacuate women and children from endangered zones, particularly if the enemy’s *land* forces are nearby. But even this simple precaution the AHC would not countenance. This is clear from a copy of the telegram sent by AHC president Haj Amin to the AHC representative in Beirut on 3 March 1948.¹³ The telegram, which is initialed in its draft form by Haj Amin himself, reads: “The emigration of *children* and others from Palestine to Syria and Beirut is detrimental to our interests. Contact the proper authorities in Damascus and Beirut to prevent it, and inform us of the result.”¹⁴

But let us look more closely at the attitude of the Haifa National Committee. The Committee issued twelve communiqués between its formation and the fall of the city. These communiqués constituted its only public pronouncements and embodied all the orders and warnings it ever made to the Arabs of Haifa. The writer has been able to locate all twelve communiqués. The following are their contents:¹⁵

Communiqué 1 (6 December 1947) announces the formation of the committee and asks for the cooperation of all the Arabs. “Every Arab man and woman must be patient and display self-control. He must not listen to rumors. *He must stay at his post or at his work whenever an incident occurs.* This is both to insure his or her safety and to avoid confusion. The telephone numbers

of the committee are 3540 and 2167. All incidents must be directly reported. Finally, no Arab must attack a fellow Arab; old enmities must be buried; large gatherings in the streets, open spaces, or cafés are not allowed; children must not play in groups; profiteering and lawless acts will be severely punished.”

Communiqué 2 (10 December 1947) categorically forbids public gatherings and individual acts and attacks (against the Zionists). Children must be kept either at school or at home and must not be allowed to play in groups on the streets.

Communiqué 3 (12 December 1947) starts with the words “Beware of Fifth Columnists” and goes on to say that some “vile and criminal” individuals are disseminating false reports and rumors among the public “which are designed to help the enemy by spreading panic and confusion.” This Fifth Column “*has actually succeeded in its first round in influencing some people to leave their properties and houses, which have become an easy prey to the enemy who has seized and occupied them.*” The communiqué ends by urging all Arabs to oppose confusion and defeatism.

Communiqué 4 (14 December 1947) announces the formation of local sub-committees which are to be in charge of security matters in all quarters. “*These subcommittees are empowered to prevent people from abandoning their houses, particularly along the borders of the mixed Arab-Jewish areas.*” The committee warns against public gatherings and *calls upon tradesmen and shopkeepers to return to work.*

Communiqué 5 (16 December 1947) comprises 25 specific requests which are largely a repetition of what had been said earlier *viz.* warnings against public gatherings, instructions about how to get in touch with the committee in case of need, etc. Request no. 11 is: “*Carry on work as usual and do not neglect to open your shops and offices.*” Request no. 13 reads: “*Do not give in to warnings and threats and never desert your houses.*”

Communiqué 6 (27 December 1947) refers to recent victims of attacks and calls upon Arabs not to give in to the temptations of retaliation. It asks for closer cooperation with the local committees and states that it will be very strict with those who, by taking the law into their own hands, encourage brigandage. The committee urges the public “*each to apply himself to his work, the tradesman to open his shop, the laborer to carry on his work as usual.*”

Communiqué 7 (29 December 1947, after the Zionists had rolled down a barrel bomb¹⁶ from Hadar Ha Carmel): The committee prays for the victims of the barrel bomb and asks that all firing (begun after the explosion) should cease “in the national interest” and that the public resume work as usual.

Communiqué 8 (8 January 1948) is about rationing and profiteering.

Communiqué 9 (8 January 1948)¹⁷ is addressed to “employees in the oil companies, (British) army camps, and railways, to all Arab workers in Haifa and its district, and to Arab members of the police force and other Arab government officials.” The text is as follows: “The National Committee has undertaken to help you in all that pertains to your security and to safeguard your interests, both present and future. The committee believes that in no circumstances must

you give up your jobs or delay in the performance of your duties. Members of the police are particularly requested to remain at their posts and are warned against attempting to abscond with their weapons. *All must stay at their work. Those who leave their work not only harm themselves by losing their means of livelihood, but they also harm their nation, for they pave the way to the employment of foreigners in their places.* The committee believes that the country's resources must remain in our hands. But this can only be insured if the workers in the oil companies and army camps and the government employees and members of the police force *all remain at their posts.* This is their national duty and they must be fully aware of it. The committee would like to assure you that it is watching over your interests and is ready to give you all the necessary protection."

Communiqué 10 (1 March 1948) is a warning to lawless Arab elements. It announces the formation of a special security committee and special military and civilian tribunals to deal with offenders.

Communiqué 11 (18 March 1948) announces the death in action the day before of Lieutenant Huneidi, the garrison commander, and thirteen of his comrades and gives particulars of the time and place of the burial ceremonies.

Communiqué 12 (20 March 1948) triumphantly announces the American reversal of attitude on partition: "The Americans and their accomplices in support of partition (with the exception of Communist Russia) are in full retreat." The committee, however, warns that all is not over yet. "We must persevere in our work and beware of surprise attacks and treachery. We must hold firm to our positions." The communiqué, the last official Arab pronouncement to be made in Haifa before its fall, ends as follows: "The Committee would like to draw attention to the following points: (a) What has so far been achieved is only a preliminary victory; (b) we must avoid all clashes with the security forces and the army [i.e., the British] in the next phase. We must likewise continue our policy of not attacking government departments and installations. (c) We must avoid all individual acts. (d) *Everyone must maintain his position and carry out all instructions and orders given to him.* Long live Palestine, free, Arab, united, independent. Long live the memory of our martyrs."

These communiqués show too clearly for any comment the attitude of the Haifa ANC on the issue of evacuation. In his third letter to the *Jewish Observer and Middle East Review* (11 September 1959), Mr. Elias Koussa, formerly a member of the ANC in Haifa, states that "on or about 12 April 1948 the mufti [Haj Amin] strongly urged in my presence in Cairo a number of Haifa and Jerusalem Arabs to return home." In mid-April, also, the present writer accompanied his uncle, AHC secretary-general Dr. H.F. Khalidi, on his visit to Cairo after the Dayr Yasin massacre, as his private secretary. In this capacity, this writer took down Dr. Khalidi's memorandum dated 17 April 1948 to the Arab League expressing his views (and the AHC's) on the security of the major towns of Palestine. The memorandum stated that Arab defense in Palestine should be based primarily on the three mixed towns of Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa, which were under imminent threat of Zionist takeover. In the AHC secretary-general's

view, their fall would result *not only in the expulsion of their inhabitants, but also in the collapse of Arab resistance in all the neighboring rural areas*. He strongly recommended that a force of 1,500 trained men (soldiers in civilian garb), suitably equipped, immediately be dispatched to *each* of these cities. This, he warned, was the minimum force necessary to insure the protection of these cities and their inhabitants in the face of Zionist attack.

BRITISH COLLUSION

Another fundamental aspect of the fall of Haifa was the attitude of the British authorities. The Zionist attack was launched immediately after the British forces withdrew from their positions in the areas separating the Jewish from the Arab quarters of the city. Although both Jews and Arabs were formally informed of the withdrawal within an hour of each other on the morning of 21 April, there is evidence that the Zionists knew about the withdrawal plans well before the Arabs. They had assembled a striking force from all over the country, which they held in readiness above the Arab quarters so that the moment the British withdrew they could occupy the positions thus vacated. From these positions they launched a series of attacks that were clearly based on the assumption of British absence from certain positions and withdrawal to others.

There can be little doubt that the British at the time knew of the extent, striking power, and temper of the Zionist concentrations and could predict with certainty the consequences of their withdrawal on the Arab population below. It was the surprise element (an indispensable ingredient of success in military offensives) thus achieved, plus the priceless strategic positions gratuitously handed over by the British, that, added to the Zionists' devastatingly effective use of psychological warfare and the ruthlessness with which they pressed home their attacks, gave Haifa to the Zionists. Other factors were: Arab military weakness, the absence of a proper Arab civil defence organization, the tactical disadvantages of the Arab positions in the low-lying areas skirting the sea, and the departure of Amin Izzeddin. But these were subsidiary factors. The decisive factors were British-Zionist collusion or orchestration of effort and Zionist terrorism, both physical and psychological.

What evidence is there for this British-Zionist collusion? The most significant, perhaps, is the conduct of the British civilian and military authorities (particularly of the British Commanding Officer, Major-General Hugh C. Stockwell) during the actual attack, as will be seen below.

There is also the corroborative evidence of British conduct on other occasions, such as when they handed the most strategic complex of buildings in the heart of Jerusalem, jocularly known as "Bevingrad," over to the Haganah in the city just before the end of the Mandate. This last is described by a Zionist eyewitness, Harry Levin, in his diary (*Jerusalem Embattled*, p. 151).¹⁸

Within 10 minutes of the British evacuation, Bevingrad was completely under Haganah control: General Building, G.P.O.,

Anglo-Palestine Bank, Police HQ, Central Prison, Russian Compound—all of them, and without a single shot. Just like that; everyone thinking that the main clash would come here, Haganah streaming in at one end, Arabs at the other. . . . The street suddenly became deserted. It has happened.

The British are gone. Into the Zone a host of children started madly to drag sandbags. . . . Suddenly, already within, Haganah appeared. *They were there all the time.* J. told me the Zone OC agreed that joint British-Haganah patrols guard the Zone *last night* as a measure for deterring a last-minute Dissident¹⁹ raid. (Wonder whether the rumor of the raid was true or planted?) As their spells of duty ended British soldier and Haganah men ate, chatted, slept together.²⁰

There is also the testimony of Major R.D. Wilson, the official historian of the 6th Airborne Division in Palestine (of which Major-General Stockwell was commander). Wilson denies that the British warned the Zionists ahead of the Arabs, but he indicates British knowledge of the shape of things to come. In his book *Cordon and Search*—to which Stockwell wrote the introduction—Wilson states, “In *March* it became apparent that perhaps after all it might not be the Arabs who would open the offensive for the mastery of Haifa” (p. 176).²¹ Later he writes:

The Jewish-Arab struggle for domination of the town (Haifa) continued to intensify and *by April 19* it was obvious that an open battle was about to develop in which the British, by virtue of their relative weakness in numbers and their dispersion of troops, would be unable to play a decisive part. An assault by Jews or Arabs would no longer respect British lives, as the major issue would be the domination of the town through the defeat of their opponents. *In order to achieve this object, whichever side launched the offensive would require a number of tactical positions then held by British troops.* There would be heavy fighting and loss of life. (p. 191)

There is also the evidence of Menachem Begin, the leader of the Irgun. In his book (*The Revolt*, p. 165)²² Begin reports: “The British commander in Haifa announced the evacuation of his forces at the end of April. *The Haganah knew the date and mobilized its forces for the decisive clash.* At the request of the Haganah North Regional Commander, Irgun units, commanded by Amiel, also went into action and were ordered to capture a fortified enemy building dominating Hehalutz Street, the main artery of Hadar Ha Carmel.”

But it is really Jon Kimche, editor of *The Jewish Observer*, the official mouthpiece of the Zionist Federation of Britain, who lets the cat out of the bag in his review of Edward Atiyeh’s novel *Lebanon Paradise* in the *Jewish Observer* of

13 November 1953. In his novel, Atiyeh describes the fall of Haifa. This is what Kimche has to say: "They (Atiyeh's Arab characters) avow that the British told the Jews but not the Arabs that they proposed to evacuate the major part of Haifa. I always thought this charge was an Arab excuse or Arab propaganda. I now know that this version is correct: they were *not* told."²³

WEDNESDAY, 21 APRIL

It is now necessary to have a closer look at the two fateful days: 21 and 22 April. The 21st was a Wednesday. To the Arabs it looked at first like any other day. There was firing in the early morning in various parts of the town, but there was nothing unusual about that. It certainly could not have occurred to the Arabs in Haifa that this was to be their last morning in their homes.

The Benefits of Zionist Foreknowledge

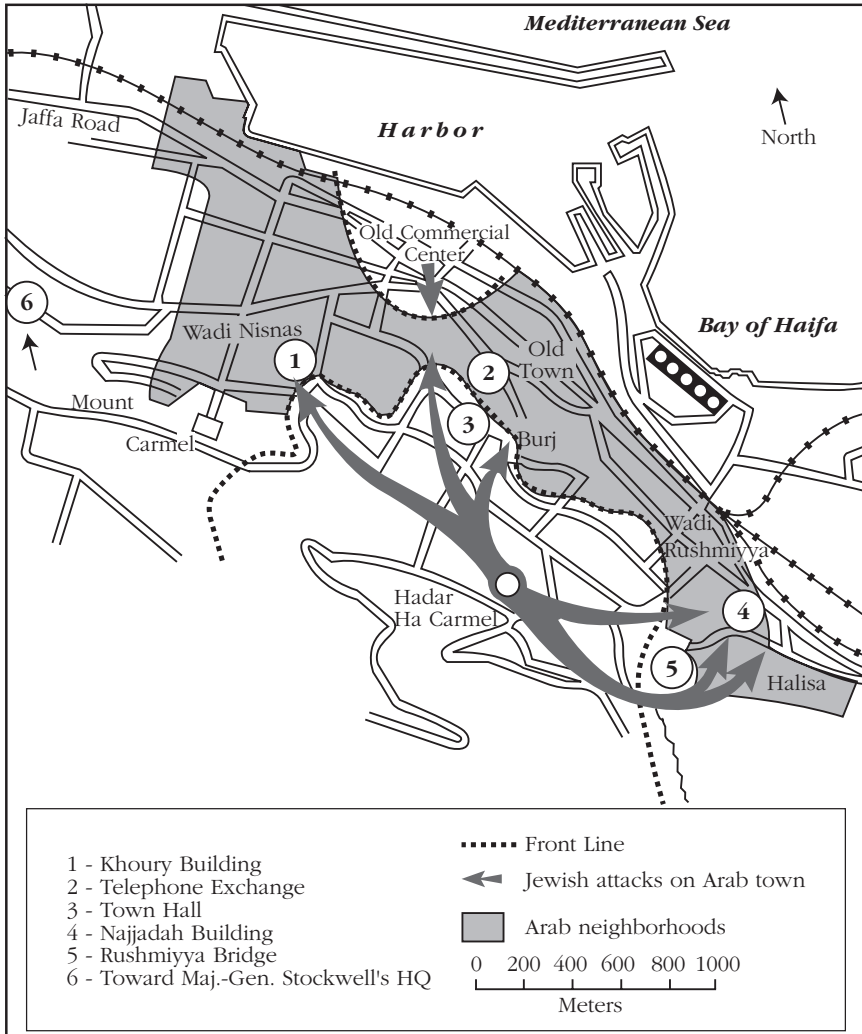
At 11:30 A.M. Major-General Stockwell, formerly commander of the 6th Airborne Division in Palestine and now officially designated GOC North Sector, invited Captain Izzeddin, commander of the Haifa ANC's National Guard, to his headquarters on Stella Maris Road.²⁴ Stockwell handed Izzeddin the following note (retranslated into English from the Arabic version):

In the last two weeks, clashes between Arabs and Jews have increased to a great extent. These clashes must stop if law and order is to be preserved in Haifa. I have no desire whatsoever to involve my troops or members of the police in these clashes. All I want is to secure the routes and sectors that I need to complete the British evacuation of Palestine in three months, via Haifa harbor. I am of course ready to help either side if I am asked, but my only aim here is the preservation of law and order. The roads that I need for the use of my troops are: . . . [there follows a list of roads in Haifa]. The sectors of the town that I also need are: . . . [there follows a list of Haifa quarters].

I have today informed the military and police authorities of the above and will see to it that they are not interfered with by either of the contesting parties. I am therefore asking the two parties not to hinder the work of the military and police authorities and will take all the necessary measures to ensure this. I should like the British evacuation from Haifa to be concluded smoothly and speedily. I hope that we will continue to have good relations with each other in the future and that I will be able to carry away with me the respect and friendship of both parties. 21 April 1948.

The significance of this note can best be understood with reference to the plan of the city. Broadly speaking, Haifa town lay on the northern slopes of the

Haifa, 21–22 April 1948—Operation Misparyim/Chametz



Carmel ridge facing the Bay of Acre. The most densely populated part lay east of Carmel Avenue between the harbor and Hadar Ha Carmel. Here there were two Jewish quarters: Hadar Ha Carmel and the areas adjoining Herzl Street on higher ground, and the commercial center farther down between Kingsway and Allenby Road. The Arab quarters (from east to west) were: Halisa, Wadi Rushmiyya, Burj, the Old Town, and Wadi Nisnas, all of which lay below Hadar Ha Carmel and between this Jewish quarter and the harbor. Wadi Nisnas and sections of the Old Town were situated between the two Jewish quarters.

Until their withdrawal as announced by Stockwell, the British had maintained control over the whole town. This they did by occupying tactical points roughly along the line of demarcation between the Jewish and Arab zones. In addition to these fixed points, the British used mobile armored columns to patrol

the main roads. In the entire month preceding the British withdrawal, there had not been a single British casualty in Haifa. According to the description by Wilson (p. 170) of the period prior to the withdrawal: "in spite of all the fighting that went on in Haifa the situation was never out of hand. The initiative was never lost [i.e., by the British]." At the time of the withdrawal, the British had in Haifa the 1st Guards Brigade, a troop of tanks and self-propelled guns from Chestnut Troop of 1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery, a squadron of 3d Hussars, and the Royal Marines in the harbor area. As to the Arab attitude toward the British forces, Wilson notes (p. 177) that "there was rarely any lack of cooperation on the part of the responsible Arab leaders following a deliberate [Arab] attack on troops. These they disliked as much as the British authorities and made genuine and helpful efforts to prevent their taking place, to bring the perpetrators to justice, and restore stolen arms and property."

The impact of the British withdrawal on the Arab position was catastrophic. The Zionist foreknowledge of the British withdrawal enabled them to occupy, at no cost to themselves, the commanding and key points along the demarcation line previously held by the British. This not only vastly strengthened their already preponderant position over the Arabs below, but also presented the Arabs with a new façade of fire to which they had to adjust themselves in the heat of battle. The Zionists, in their knowledge of the direction of the British withdrawal, could decide at leisure where their main thrust was to be and could plan and orchestrate coordinated attacks from both the commercial center near the harbor and from Hadar Ha Carmel. The Arabs of Haifa were entirely cut off from the outside world. British road blocks on the roads to Jaffa, Nazareth, Acre, and Jenin stopped and pushed back Arab reinforcements from the neighboring villages. Tactically, there was very little the Arabs could do. They could not counter-attack the commercial center by an outflanking movement from either the north or south. Nor could they outflank Hadar Ha Carmel from the west or east. A showdown was forced on the Arabs by the British at a time and in circumstances selected by the Zionists—and known by the British to have been so selected.

Thus, perhaps the least warlike urban population in the eastern Mediterranean was called upon to engage in a life and death struggle: facing an enemy entrenched in impregnable positions uphill and poised to pounce upon them, with their backs to the sea only 300 yards away, where crack units of the British army and Marines surveyed the scene with perhaps more than a flicker of professional curiosity. Above all, it was the element of surprise that counted. The psychological shock to the Arabs was all the more profound in that they had not felt any sense of urgency about Haifa. Their understanding and hope based on official British pronouncements was that the British would remain in Haifa for three months *after* the termination of the Mandate, since it was through Haifa's harbor that the evacuation from Palestine was to be channeled.

An interesting point is the vagueness in Stockwell's note about whether the withdrawal had already taken place or was still to take place. In fact, as Stockwell was handing the note to Izzeddin and going through the farce of handing a

similar note to the Haganah commander, the British forces had *already effected their withdrawal*, and the Haganah had *already* occupied the vacated strong points.

This is the testimony of Elias Koussa (letter to the *Jewish Observer*, 18 December 1953). It is also the testimony of Yaacov Solomon, a Jewish notable of Haifa who played a prominent role at the time (*Jewish Observer*, 11 September 1959). Writing on the subject, Wilson (p. 192) ambiguously talks of the Arabs and Jews being informed of the British plan “on the morning of the redeployment (21 April).” The Zionist historian Harry Sacher (*The Establishment of the State of Israel*, p. 242),²⁵ while agreeing that the withdrawal had already been effected, makes the point that Stockwell actually told this to Izzeddin, but offers no evidence for this statement.

When Izzeddin read the note given him by Stockwell, he was furious and strongly protested the action. He did not, as Kimche maintains (*Seven Fallen Pillars*, p. 219),²⁶ “welcome the General’s statement on behalf of the Arabs.” At about 12:30 P.M., immediately after the interview with Stockwell ended—and not (as many state) after the shooting had started—Izzeddin decided to report the matter personally to his commanders on the Arab League Military Committee in Damascus. Izzeddin has been accused of faint-heartedness. He was certainly guilty of miscalculation. He completely underestimated the extreme urgency of the moment, and his intention of convincing his superiors in Damascus of the seriousness of the situation and of rushing aid back to Haifa was overtaken by events. Still, although he had greater military experience than his civilian second-in-command Naffa, whom he left in charge of the National Guard, it is doubtful whether his presence in Haifa would have made much difference. There is no evidence from Arab eyewitness accounts that his departure (in fact known only to very few) had any general demoralizing effect.²⁷

Advancing Columns and Psychological Blitz

At 1:30 P.M. Farid Saad, a Haifa banker and member of the ANC, was invited to lunch at the house of Rafiq Beydoun, the senior district officer in the Mandate administration. Beydoun had also invited the British military commander of Haifa [General Stockwell!], the British superintendent of police, and Beydoun’s superior, the British deputy district commissioner, together with a number of Haifa notables.²⁸ Stockwell and the police superintendent excused themselves, but the deputy district commissioner, a Mr. Fitzpatrick, attended. According to Saad (*Al-Kulliyah*, April 1949), “On his arrival Mr. Fitzpatrick took me aside and hinted that the Army was *on the point of withdrawing* from the Arab quarters of the town, and that if I had the welfare of the Arab women and children at heart I should immediately contact the Jews and save innocent blood from being shed” (Saad had not yet heard of the Stockwell-Izzeddin meeting, and it is interesting that Fitzpatrick should have said that the British Army was “on the point of” withdrawing).

As they were talking, firing broke out. This was not the kind of firing that had become routine at that time of day, but rather, according to Saad, was “on a

hitherto unprecedented scale." In fact, the firing was connected to the capture of the Arab Najjadah building overlooking the Wadi Rushmiyya Bridge from the south, intended by the Zionists as the preliminary move before zero-hour, which they had set at sundown (Sacher, p. 243). The Zionist force succeeded in capturing the Najjadah building, but only after "a bitter fight from floor to floor" (Sacher, p. 243). And, once inside the building, the Zionist force "was besieged and under ceaseless Arab fire and most of the (Zionist) garrison was killed or wounded" (Sacher, p. 243). The strongest riposte to the attack on the Najjadah building came from the easternmost Arab quarter of Halisa, parts of which were on higher ground than the building. It was the din of this battle that Farid Saad and his friends heard at the luncheon.

The time was now 3 P.M. Farid Saad rang up the British district commissioner, the most senior British civilian official in Haifa, and "asked him whether he knew about the Army's evacuating the Arab part of the town." The commissioner, according to Saad, "pretended to know nothing of the matter." Saad then asked for the commissioner to arrange "an early interview" with Major-General Stockwell.

In the meantime, the Zionists were waiting for sundown. The commander of their joint Haganah-Irgun force was named (perhaps too aptly) Colonel Moshe Carmel. Carmel's plan was to send three columns into the Arab quarters from Hadar Ha Carmel and one column into the rear of the Arab positions in the opposite direction from the commercial center below. The right-hand column from Hadar Ha Carmel was to go through Halisa, past the bridge, and into Wadi Rushmiyya in the general direction of the harbor area. The center column was to drive down the Burj Road, while the left-hand column, composed of Irgunist forces (*The Revolt*, p. 165), was to go through Wadi Nisnas. The main idea was that the center column, the left-hand column, and the column attacking from the commercial center should all converge on Stanton Road. In this way, the heart of the Arab area would be cut, as it were, by three radii into three sectors sealed off from one another (Sacher, p. 242).

A few hours before sundown, from about 3 P.M. onwards, the Zionists launched what Kimche himself describes (*Seven Fallen Pillars*, p. 219) as "a psychological blitz." According to Kimche: "Loudspeaker vans and leaflets were distributed calling on the Arab population to stand by for an important announcement, to keep away from foreign volunteers, and to stay indoors." Arthur Koestler in *Promise and Fulfillment* (in the chapter entitled "David and Goliath," p. 207)²⁹ also describes this psychological blitz. "Haganah was using not only its *radio station* but also loudspeaker vans which blared their sinister news from the vicinity of the Arab *suqs*. They warned the Arab population to keep clear of the billets of the foreign mercenaries who had infiltrated into the town, warned them to send their women and children away before any new contingents of savage Iraqis arrived, *promised them safe conduct and escorts to Arab territory, and hinted at terrible consequences if their warnings were disregarded.*" After several hours of this, coming on top of the sound of the unusually severe battle for the Najjadah building, the Arab population of

Haifa became restless and panicky. Farid Saad had still not gotten his interview with Stockwell.

Six-thirty P.M. was zero hour. The Zionists opened up with heavy machine guns and mortars. The lower parts of the town were shelled indiscriminately [from Hadar Ha Carmel], while the four Zionist columns tackled the nearer Arab obstacles. According to Saad, “this was quite different from what we had been accustomed to.” According to Sacher (p. 243), the shelling “caused much terror and some destruction.” The psychological blitz was kept up simultaneously with the shelling, creating a strange cacophony of sounds. According to Kimche, (p. 219) “this procedure [i.e., the psychological blitz] was repeated throughout the evening until midnight.”

In the meantime the Zionist columns were not finding it altogether a walk-over. The progress of the right-hand column attacking Halisa “was slow, desperately slow” (Sacher, p. 243), and the position of the attackers already in the Najjadah building was becoming untenable. The center and left-hand columns had to fight their way, “often breaking from house to house” (Sacher, p. 243). The column from the commercial center also met with stiff resistance.

At 9 P.M. (i.e., two and a half hours after zero hour) the British district commissioner rang up Saad, who was still at Beydoun’s house, to say that Stockwell would see him at 9 A.M. *on the following day*. (Perhaps it is legitimate to wonder why Stockwell was delaying the interview with Saad for 12 hours?) At 9:30 P.M., Saad called a meeting at his house of the Arab notables of Haifa. In the meantime he had received from Naffa the text of the note given by Stockwell to Izzeddin that morning.

Already, crowds of panic-stricken civilians were leaving the houses that were in the path of the Zionist column from Wadi Nisnas and the quarters nearest to Hadar Ha Carmel. In their terror, some pushed their way into the British-controlled harbor area where, according to Koussa (letter to *Jewish Observer*, 18 December 1953), the British Navy was already “busy transporting” them to Acre. Indeed, according to Kimche (p. 219), “the Arab nerve broke shortly after dark and *the flight from the town assumed panic proportions even before general fighting had started.*”

In this atmosphere, the Arab notables met in Saad’s house “to discuss the contents of General Stockwell’s note and draft a reply” (Saad). The conference lasted well past midnight.

THURSDAY, APRIL 22

By 1 A.M. the memorandum in reply to Stockwell’s note was ready. The memorandum: (a) held Stockwell responsible for the situation in Haifa as from April 21; (b) assured Stockwell of the continued desire of the Arab National Committee to cooperate with the British in maintaining law and order in Haifa; (c) appealed to Stockwell to stop the massacre of Arabs; and (d) requested Stockwell, failing his readiness to intervene, to permit Arab reinforcements (already held back at the road blocks) to enter the town.

Unheeded Appeals

In the meantime, Halisa was still holding out against the right-hand column, and the column from the commercial center was still being delayed, but the center and left-hand Irgunist columns were making progress. According to Begin (p. 165), the Jewish forces “proceeded to advance through Haifa like a knife through butter. The Arabs began fleeing in panic, shouting ‘Dayr Yasin!’” At 3 A.M. Saad received a telephone call from the secretary of the ANC to say that the Jews had reached the heart of the Arab town (most probably Burj Road). Saad immediately contacted the British civil and military authorities “and appealed to them to restore order and put an end to the massacre of innocent Arab women and children, particularly,” as he naively adds, “because it was their duty to do so.” Saad’s appeals “went unheeded,” or rather, were heeded—but in an entirely different sense.

The situation for the Arabs was extremely serious, but all was not yet lost. The Khoury building, the key to the area south of Stanton Road, was resisting stoutly. The Telephone Exchange was still in Arab hands. Halisa still blocked the path of the right-hand column. The column from the commercial center was still making little progress. But according to Sacher:

... in the early hours of the morning when the issue was to him fairly clear, General Stockwell had got into touch with the Jewish Commander to ask on what conditions *he would accept the surrender of the town*. The fighting was still going on and the decision was *not so plain to Colonel Carmel as to General Stockwell*. However, he set out his conditions. (p. 243)

One need not be a military man to realize the significance of this move by Stockwell. No Arab had talked of surrender and no Arab had requested Stockwell to seek the Zionist conditions. Stockwell had not even bothered to meet the Arabs to find out their attitude the day before and had inexcusably delayed the interview with them until 9 A.M. on this day (Thursday). His message to Carmel was tantamount to an assurance (if such assurance were still needed) that Stockwell was prepared to go with him the whole way. Coming at the psychological peak of the battle (when many a battle is lost or won), it was a priceless intelligence tip and—to put it bluntly—an act of espionage at Arab expense. All this makes it difficult to see Stockwell other than as an accomplice in the fall of Haifa.

No doubt elated by Stockwell’s attitude, the Zionists redoubled their efforts. By 6 A.M. the situation had worsened disastrously, particularly in the town center. “The bitterest fighting,” according to Sacher, “was for the Khoury building. In the end the Jews had to burn it before the last of the Arab defenders retreated” (p. 243). At the same time as the Khoury building fell (about 7 A.M.), the Telephone Exchange was occupied. The Zionists made full use of the telephone

system to add still further to the confusion. Halisa fell soon afterwards, and the right-hand column was able to move abreast of the others across Wadi Rushmiyya. The Arabs, about 50,000 of them, were now crowded into the Old Town. The center and left-hand columns now converged on Stanton Road, and the column from the commercial center began to gather momentum.

At 6 A.M. Saad had contacted District Commissioner Law and asked him to use his influence with the military authorities to send some ambulances. By now there were about 300 Arab casualties.³⁰ But the request was refused. By 10 A.M. there was pandemonium in the Old Town. Refugees fleeing the path of the advancing columns converged on the Old Town: children in pajamas, men in old-fashioned nightshirts and undergarments, women carrying babies and bundles of household effects. All this time the mortar shelling of the area was kept up. To get an idea of the congestion, it must be remembered that the distance from Stanton to Kingsway was only some 500 yards across. An eyewitness, Issam Taha, describes the scene in the Old Town as follows:

We suddenly heard that the British Army in the harbor area was prepared to protect all who took refuge there. Thus we all flooded the lanes that were still in our hands toward the harbor. It was a terrible thing to try and make a passage for oneself. Hundreds of people blocked the narrow lanes and pushed and heaved against one another, each trying to save himself and his children. Many children, women, and old men fainted and were trampled by the surging crowds. It was like Judgment Day. As we were moving in this manner toward the harbor a rumor spread that the Jews had cut off the roads leading to the harbor. We turned about in utter terror. People around me were shouting, cursing, sobbing, and praying. In an instance another rumor spread that the road to the harbor was clear. Once again we began pushing in the direction of the harbor. . . . At the harbor entrance British policemen helped to carry our children. But there was a wild rush for the boats and many people were drowned in the process.³¹

Another eyewitness, Abd al-Quzuk, saw Zionist flags suddenly appear “here and there” on the roofs of Arab houses as the Zionists moved closer.³²

Trying to Impose the Haganah’s Surrender Terms

Against this background, an Emergency Committee of five Arabs was formed for the interview with Stockwell, which had to be delayed an hour (until 10 A.M.) because of the difficulty of reaching his headquarters. In addition to Farid Saad, the committee members were Elias Koussa (a lawyer), George Mu’ammar (a lawyer), Victor Khayyat (an American citizen of Arab descent and honorary consul of Spain in Haifa), and Anis Nasr (a judge of the district court). Stockwell refused to accept the memorandum the Arab notables had drafted the night

before at Saad's house. According to Saad, Stockwell said "he would neither interfere to stop the fighting nor allow outside Arab reinforcements unless we accepted the principle of a 'truce'."³³ The Arab delegates asked Stockwell to put this in writing, which he did. The text, signed by the five Arabs and countersigned by Stockwell, reads as follows (retranslated from the Arabic version):

We, the undersigned, have met today in the presence of Major-General Stockwell, Brigadier Johnson, the District Commissioner and the British Consul. We asked the GOC to use his influence to help the Arabs and stop the Jewish attack. He replied that he was not prepared to clash with either of the two contesting parties and that he would not allow the Arab armed forces to enter town to help its Arab inhabitants. He was only prepared to act as a peace intermediary if the Arabs accepted in principle the conditions of the truce.³⁴

The Arab Emergency Committee thereupon asked Stockwell what the truce conditions were. Stockwell disappeared and, according to Saad, "ten minutes later returned with a printed copy of the Jewish conditions." These were (as retranslated from Arabic):³⁵

1. All military equipment and weapons to be handed over within three hours at (a list of places follows).
2. All foreign males to be surrendered within 24 hours in order to be repatriated under Haganah supervision.
3. All Nazis and Europeans in Arab ranks to be surrendered. [There were in fact none.]
4. The military equipment in (1) to be handed over to the British but later to be handed over by the British to the Haganah before May 15.
5. A 24-hour curfew during which Arab houses would be searched for arms.
6. The trial of all persons possessing arms after that.
7. The removal of all road blocks and obstacles in the Arab quarters.
8. After the curfew things to go back to normal, and the Arabs to become citizens with the same rights as the Jews.
9. All further meetings between the two sides [i.e., Arab and Jewish] to be held at the Town Hall.

The Arab delegates tried hard to convince Stockwell to modify these conditions, but he refused. The time was now just before 12 noon. It was agreed that a meeting should take place at 3:30 P.M. at the Town Hall which would also be attended by representatives of the Zionists. The fighting in the meantime continued. There were still a few pockets of resistance outside the Old Town, but the fighting was mostly on the fringes of the Old Town itself. The surge of the refugees toward the harbor and their transport to Acre by British craft went on uninterrupted.

The conditions of the “truce” involved decisions on matters of principle which the Emergency Committee felt it could not decide by itself. Elias Koussa, the liaison officer of the Haifa ANC, was asked to get in touch with Damascus. At about 12 noon, Koussa “personally delivered to the Syrian Consul at Haifa, Mr. Thabet al-Aris, a telegram to the Syrian Government setting out the terms of the proposed truce, *a description of the panicky flight of the Arab inhabitants*, and asked for instructions. Nothing was received [in reply] in spite of repeated wireless reminders.”³⁶

As the Emergency Committee despaired of receiving advice from Damascus,³⁷ a general meeting of all leading Arabs still in town was called at the house of Victor Khayyat. Those assembled included the five members of the Emergency Committee as well as Raja Raiss (landowner), Muhammad Yahya (lawyer), Dr. Michel Jebara (medical doctor), Nazmi Anabtawi (a district officer), Fuad Khayyat (landowner), Jad Suweidan (merchant), Said Suweidan (merchant), and others, totaling more than thirty in all. At 1 P.M., soon after the men had assembled, it was learned that the British military authorities had sent two ambulances to pick up the Arab dead and wounded (eighteen and a half hours after the start of the Zionist attack). This was presumably a reward to the Arabs for agreeing to meet at the Town Hall.

The atmosphere at Khayyat’s house was one of gloom and foreboding. After much argument and soul-searching, it was agreed that a special delegation should attend the meeting in the Town Hall in the hope that it could modify the truce conditions demanded by the Zionists. The delegation consisted of the five members of the Emergency Committee along with Ahmad Abu Zeid (harbor contractor) and Shaykh Abdul Rahman Murad (the mufti of Haifa). At 3:30 P.M. the delegation was taken in five British armored cars to the Town Hall, where it was greeted with whistles and jeers from the Jewish crowds assembled at the entrance. The British side was represented by the same people who had attended the meeting in the morning led by Major-General Stockwell. Arab witnesses, especially Koussa, single out Shabtai Levy as the member of the Zionist delegation who was genuinely moved by the plight of the Arabs.

The meeting as envisaged by Stockwell and the Haganah was not called to negotiate a settlement. The Arabs were merely supposed to say “Yes.” It was a question of unconditional surrender. The Arab delegates found it impossible to accept this. When the Arabs persevered in their attitude, Stockwell said: “If you don’t sign this truce I shall not be responsible if three or four hundred more (Arabs) are killed by tomorrow.” Victor Khayyat asked him: “What are you trying to do? We know Shabtai Levy, Jacob Solomon, and all these people. We are old friends.” General Stockwell said: “If you are old friends, I understand that I can withdraw and that my services are no longer required.” Khayyat pleaded, “Please, General,” as Stockwell and his staff left the room (*Jewish Observer*, 11 September 1959, Khayyat’s testimony). In Mr. Kimche’s description of the scene at the Town Hall (*Seven Fallen Pillars*, p. 220), he writes that “there was a happy holiday mood about the entire affair. The Jews were proud and

happy, *the Arabs pleased that it was all over and the British popular with both sides—a rare and strange event.*”

It was now about 5 P.M. With Stockwell's withdrawal, the Arab delegates asked for an adjournment of an hour and a half.³⁸ During that time they returned to the general meeting still assembled at Khayyat's house. Again and again the argument came back to the question of Britain's responsibility. The British were formally responsible for the Arabs of Haifa until 15 May. To agree to unconditional surrender, in their view, would be to absolve the British of their responsibility for the series of events beginning at midnight the previous day and set the seal of final approval on the Zionist *fait accompli*. The Arabs still hoped that the British would return to their responsibilities in Haifa. They repeated their appeals, asking for guidance from Damascus. But Damascus had nothing to say. According to Koussa (*Jewish Observer*, 11 September 1959) “the Arab Committee inferred from the silence that the Arab states were overwhelmed by the catastrophe and had no answer.”

Stampede to the Harbor

But an answer there had to be, for the Haganah and Stockwell were waiting at the Town Hall. In the meantime, the Zionist column from the commercial center had finally fought its way through the Old Town and linked up with the other columns. The state of panic and confusion in the Old Town had reached its climax, and there was a continuous mass stampede for the sea. According to Wilson,

While the Arabs were in full flight they were engaged by the advanced Jewish posts which inflicted a number of casualties on them. The British police did great work in restoring some measure of order outside the *suq* and minimizing the effect of panic, and the Royal Marines were equally outstanding in the port. *The latter had three officers wounded by Jewish fire as they sought to control the stream of refugees.* (p. 193)

The Zionists had also begun rounding up young [Arab] men for “interrogation.” Arab corpses were thrown into the thus-far unaffected residential quarters west of Carmel Avenue to frighten the middle-class Arab inhabitants remaining there. According to Koussa (*Jewish Observer*, 11 September 1959), the American consul, Mr. Aubry Lippincott, “saw the marks of floggings on the bodies of a number of Arabs.” Inside the Old Town, a most serious problem had arisen because of the dead bodies lying about. Eyewitness accounts say that volunteer Arab squads dug communal graves for Christian and Muslim Arabs because of the difficulties of identification. The wounded remained a terrible problem, as the two ambulances sent by the British were hopelessly inadequate. In the over-congested harbor area, the problems of shelter, feeding, and medical care began to emerge. The Arab patients from the Government Hospital clambered out of their beds in their pajamas to join the crowds in the harbor area.

At 7:30 P.M. the Arab delegation minus Shaykh Murad returned to the Town Hall. General Stockwell was as insistent as ever that they should sign the “truce.” It appeared that he was most anxious to get such a document into his hands. One could surmise that, the Haifa tragedy having far exceeded anything that he had anticipated, he might have hoped that such a document signed by the Arabs would have allowed him to represent the results of his folly as a negotiated Arab-Jewish settlement benignly presided over by himself. (We now know how worked up in London Foreign Secretary Bevin and Prime Minister Attlee had become over Haifa on this very day, and how Bevin had told Field Marshall Montgomery, then chief of the Imperial General Staff, that “he had been let down by the army.”)³⁹

However, the Arab Emergency Committee, according to Koussa (*Jewish Observer*, 18 September 1959),

told the General and the people attending the conference at the Haifa Town Hall that *since the Arabs were panic-stricken and running away through the harbor area, and since General Stockwell was unwilling to intervene*, all they could do was to ask the General to take the steps necessary to ensure sufficient transport for these people and their household effects and let them go to the Arab countries.

This request was made absolutely at the initiative of the five persons concerned who were self-nominated but were not acting under any orders or instructions from the Arab states or elsewhere. The British authorities had refused to interfere. We had no means of contacting personally the Arab authorities to obtain clear instructions. Even the Syrian and Egyptian consuls refused to give us any advice. Thus, on the spur of the moment we had to find a way out of the situation in which General Stockwell had placed us. We either had to accept the truce or have another 300 or 400 Arabs killed. We thought that the only way out was to ask the General to provide us with eighty trucks daily to transport our properties. We knew well enough he could not provide this transport and hoped he would eventually resume control of the town, drive out the Haganah forces from the Arab quarters they had occupied, and enable the panicky Arabs crowded into the port area to return home. He did neither, and so the flight continued.

Kimche toured the Arab *sug* that day (*Seven Fallen Pillars*, p. 220): “I walked later through the *sug* and saw the state of disorder in which the Arabs had left their homes, often not bothering to pick up silver and valuables which they could easily have carried in their hands.”

This is what the Zionists call a calculated policy sponsored by the Arab League and the Palestine Arab Higher Committee to evacuate the Arabs of

Palestine as part of a carefully worked-out strategy to facilitate the entry of the Arab regular armies at the end of the British Mandate.

NOTES

1. With the spread of fighting and the breakdown of law and order in Palestine following the UNGA partition resolution in November, the U.S. administration in late February 1948 began moving away from that "solution" in favor of a UN Trusteeship over Palestine to be established when the Mandate ended.

2. The Zionist leadership, both in Palestine and in the United States, was deeply disturbed by the seeming American retreat from partition. Chaim Weizmann, the veteran British Zionist leader who was to become Israel's first president, arrived in the United States on 4 February 1948 to try to meet President Truman to shore up U.S. support for partition. Truman had been so incensed by the high-pressure tactics of the U.S. Zionist establishment in early 1948 that he was adamantly refusing to meet any Zionist leader, including Weizmann. Only the personal intervention of his old friend and business partner Eddie Jacobson finally persuaded him to meet Weizmann (secretly) on 18 March at the White House. Truman later wrote "And when he [Weizmann] left my office I felt he had received a full understanding of my policy and that I knew what he wanted." Because Truman had not told his secretary of state, General George C. Marshall, about his meeting, the U.S. ambassador to the UN that very same day announced the new Trusteeship policy, which Truman had already approved, requesting the Security Council to suspend work on the partition plan and to call a special session of the General Assembly to work on a trusteeship plan. Despite the prior clearance, Truman was furious. "I don't understand this. How could this have happened. I assured Chaim Weizmann . . . he must think I'm a shitass." See David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), pp. 598-612; Meyer W. Weisgal and Joel Carmichael, *Chaim Weizmann: A Biography by Several Hands* (London: Weiden, Feld, and Nicolson, 1962), pp. 282-301 and 304-306.

3. We now know that Operation Nachshon was the inaugural operation of Plan Dalet. The corridor between Tel Aviv

and Jerusalem that was to be carved out by the operation passed through Arab-populated territory assigned to the Arab state by the UN partition resolution. Attacks were simultaneously launched from the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem ends. The pivotal battle (3-11 April) for the Arab village of Castel, the neighbor of Dayr Yasin, was at the latter end.

4. Irgun, with its ally the Stern Gang, led the attack, but the Haganah provided logistical and combat support. See author's *Dayr Yasin* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1999 in Arabic; forthcoming in English); and Yehuda Slotsky, *Sefer Toldot HaHaganah* (Tel Aviv, 1972), pp. 1560 and pages following.

5. The operation is better known under the name "Yiftah" (literally, "he opens"), the Hebrew form of Jephtha, a Biblical Hebrew warrior. Operation Yiftah, also part of Plan Dalet, was implemented by Palmach units (the striking force of the Haganah) and effectively cleansed the entire Tiberias and Safed districts of some 100 Arab villages. See Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains* (Washington: IPS, 1992), pp. 426-547.

6. The author here confesses to a total misreading of the character and personality of Rashid al-Haj Ibrahim and has since tried to make amends by editing this remarkable man's memoirs and publishing them with a long introduction. See *Al Difa' 'an Haifa wa Qadiyyat Filastin: Mudbakkarat Rasbid al-Haj Ibrahim 1891-1953* (Beirut: IPS, 2005). Also, al-Haj Ibrahim in 1948 was not 62 but 58 years old.

7. The AHC, outlawed by the British in October 1937, was reestablished under Haj Amin al-Husayni's chairmanship in 1946. Haj Amin, a fugitive since 1937, was banned by the British from entering Palestine for the duration of the Mandate. His main base when he returned to the Middle East in 1946 from the Axis countries after World War II was Cairo, but during 1948 he also operated from AHC offices in Beirut and Damascus.

8. Criminal Investigation Department; the British equivalent of the FBI.

9. Not to be confused with Transjordan's British-led and financed Arab Legion. The TJFF was a gendarme force of Palestinian Arabs created by the British to patrol the frontier with Transjordan.

10. Walid Khalidi, "Why Did the Palestinians Leave," Reprinted in *JPS* 36, no. 2 (Winter 2005), pp. 42-54.

11. See Jon Kimche, *Seven Fallen Pillars* (London, 1950), pp. 219 and 221, and Harry Sacher, *Israel: The Establishment of a State* (London, 1952), p. 44.

12. Walid Khalidi, "Why Did the Palestinians Leave," pp. 42-54.

13. Walid Khalidi, "Why Did the Palestinians Leave," pp. 42-54.

14. The italics in this quotation, and in all the quotations throughout this article, are those of the author.

15. For the full Arabic texts of the twelve communiqués, see Rashid al-Haj Ibrahim's memoirs, *Mudbakkarat Rashid al-Haj Ibrahim*, pp. 342-356.

16. For barrel bombs, see introduction.

17. Communiqués 8 and 9 both appeared on the same day.

18. London: Victor Gollancz, 1950.

19. The reference is to Irgun and the Stern Gang.

20. The date of this diary entry is 14 May 1948. The fact that the Haganah and British troops were operating joint patrols on the eve of Britain's departure underlines the extent of the collusion.

21. Aldershot, U.K.: Gale and Polden, Ltd., 1949.

22. New York: Schuman, 1951.

23. Kimche was in a position to know as he was extremely well connected to the Haganah and Yishuv leadership.

24. Captain Izzeddin was accompanied to the meeting by his deputy, Yunis Naffa, and by George Mu'ammara, a prominent landowner and the Arab liaison with the British military. See Shaykh Abdul Rahman Murad, *Safabat 'an Haifa* (Damascus, 1991), p. 81.

25. London: George Widenfeld and Nicolson, 1952.

26. London: Sacker and Warburg, 1950.

27. In his eagerness to demonstrate Izzeddin's cowardice, Morris (2004, pp. 192-193) strenuously takes issue with me over Izzeddin's motives for leaving for Damascus. He takes at face value a Haganah broadcast in Arabic (a psycho-

logical warfare gambit) on 22 April that Yunis Naffa, Izzeddin's deputy, had fled the city. Morris is apparently unaware that Izzeddin tried to return to Haifa with reinforcements (Murad, op cit., p. 83). Murad, the mufti of Haifa, does criticize Izzeddin's departure, but on grounds of "miscalculation" (op cit., p. 83); both Murad and Rashid al-Haj Ibrahim (2005, p. 109) are full of praise for Naffa's conduct and courage in the absence of Izzeddin.

28. The very fact of the invitation to this social event, extended to the leading figures of the Mandate in Haifa, shows how little aware the Arab leadership was of what was in store for them.

29. *Promise and Fulfillment: Palestine 1917-1949* (London: Macmillan, 1949).

30. In *Cordon and Search*, Major R.D. Wilson puts the Arab casualties at 100 killed, 200 wounded, and Jewish casualties at 20 killed, 40 wounded (p. 193).

31. Quoted in Muhammad Nimr al-Khatib, *Min Athar al-Nakba* (Beirut, n.d. [1950?]), p. 276. Translated by the author.

32. Quoted in Khatib, *Min Athar al-Nakba*, p. 278.

33. According to Sacher, Stockwell himself had referred to the contemplated arrangement as surrender. See the quote from Sacher above (Sacher, op cit., p. 253). Benny Morris also acknowledges that "truce" was a euphemism for surrender; see *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 277, note 217.

34. For the full text, see "The Fall of Haifa" in "Selected Documents on the Palestine War" *JPS* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1998), p. 93.

35. For the full text of the conditions, see "The Fall of Haifa," pp. 93-95.

36. This is a passage from a letter dated 15 July 1956 sent by Koussa to Kimche of the *Jewish Observer* in reply to an article on Haifa by Kimche, but Kimche did not publish it at the time. Interestingly, Kimche left out of the letter which Koussa sent him on 29 August 1959—and which he did publish in the *Jewish Observer* on 11 September 1959—a reference to Koussa's earlier letter. [This footnote, alone among all the others, was part of the original text.—*Ed. Note*]

37. The SOS sent via the Syrian Consul did have a considerable impact, though

(inevitably) only in the diplomatic field. The Syrian president protested to the British ambassador and alerted the Lebanese government to protest to their British ambassador, while Azzam Pasha, the secretary-general of the Arab League, showed the Syrian consul's telegram to the British ambassador in Cairo and protested against the "ongoing" Jewish "massacre" of the Arab population in Haifa; see Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, pp. 194–95 and p. 277 note 22. These remonstrances had their effect at the highest levels of the British government in London (see note 33), but developments on the ground in Haifa moved too fast for any timely intervention.

38. The author was in error here. What the Arab delegation had asked for was a

24-hour grace period, which Stockwell refused. The hour and a half is what he consented to. This is the testimony of Murad (op cit., p. 95), who was the one to have insisted on the 24-hour grace period at the Town Hall meeting.

39. Field Marshall Montgomery took such umbrage at Bevin's remark that he demanded that the "insult" be formally withdrawn. Bevin, Montgomery said, "had made a proper mess of the whole business [Palestine] and . . . now he was trying to make the Army the scapegoat . . . If they wanted to sack me, it would be OK by me. I could say a jug-full in the House of Lords about the Government's handling of the Palestine situation." See *Memoirs of Field Marshall the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein* (London: Collins, 1958), p. 473.



View from Mount Carmel of Wadi Nisnas and the Port of Haifa, with the "German colony" on the left, n.d. (*Haifa: Transformation of a Palestinian Arab Society 1918-1939*, Institute for Palestine Studies)