

1948 Arab-Israeli War: Victory in Consolidation

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

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In the 1948 Arab-Israeli war the Israelis were able to consolidate gains due to the influx of materiel, adroit replenishment of personnel, and the centralization of military command under the IDF. Despite the explicit arms embargo imposed by the UN and prohibition on reinforcing their respective held fighting positions, the Arabs, as well as the Israelis, violated the terms of the ceasefire. The Israelis prepared more efficiently by employing concerted efforts to bring weapons and munitions from Czechoslovakia as well as drawing on global resources and integrating them on arrival. Also, unlike the Arab counterparts, the Israelis continued to receive an influx of recruits to backfill the much-decimated ranks following the first phase of the war. Finally, the Israelis developed and later maintained a loose but cogent unified command that allowed the flexibility to utilize forces on different fronts without the cumbersome support relationships.

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Abbreviations

ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
FM	Field Manual
HGS	Haganah General Staff
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
IZL	Irgun Zvai Leumi (Jewish paramilitary during the civil war)
JA	Jewish Agency
JP	Joint Publication
LEHI	Lohami Herut Yisrael (Jewish paramilitary during the civil war)
LOC	Line of Communication
LSCO	Large-Scale Combat Operations
UN	United Nations
UNGAR	United Nations General Assembly Resolution
UNSCOP	United Nations Special Committee on Palestine
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
US	United States

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Introduction

Regardless of the scale of the conflict that the enemy fought or the location of the combat operations, one aspect that remains constant for the US Army is that commanders on the ground must be ready and able to conduct consolidation of gains operations within their respective area of operations (AO). The time length and planning horizons for these operations may vary. Some will be only temporary, with governance and security of the region handed over to local authorities almost immediately, while other may last many years.¹ In the consolidation of gains, the US Army units must also look inwardly. Depending the phases of operations, Army units must continue to engage in reconstitution to return to or maintain combat power while in a theater. According to US Army Field Manual (FM) 4-95, *Logistics Operations*, intra theater reconstitution is “extraordinary actions that commanders take to restore degraded units to combat effectiveness commensurate with mission requirements and available resources.”² These reconstitution efforts in tandem with the consolidation of gains are at the heart of any successful operation while engaged in decisive action against an adaptable and agile enemy, regardless of whether the unit is conducting offensive, defensive, or stability operations.

Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, describes the concept of consolidation of gains as ubiquitously present throughout the range of military operations through the employment of decisive action, “the continuous, simultaneous combinations of offensive, defensive, and stability or defense support of civil authorities.”³ Despite the importance of reconstitution, the method of how the consolidation of gains intertwine with reconstitution efforts, the key players' actions and coordination between the two is neither

¹ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), VII-6.

² US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 4-95, *Logistics Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Print Office, 2014), 4-115.

³ US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Print Office, 2019), 3-1.

delineated nor conceptualized. By examining reconstitution and consolidation during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, this monograph will help address this challenge by providing a foundation on which to build such a concept.

The Israeli military efforts to synchronize consolidation of gains with the reconstitution of forces during the First Truce (June 11, 1948 –July 8, 1948) of the 1948 War provides a pertinent example of effective utilization, a pause in battle to synchronize consolidation of gains through the reconstitution of forces. This war required both sides to successfully conduct consolidation of gains and shaped the operational environment within a short window of time. The nascent Israel Defense Forces (IDF) benefitted immeasurably from its ability to do so. At the same time, the competing ideas, personalities, and agendas within the IDF illustrate the type of friction and uncertainty a commander must deal with while attempting to shape a disparate coalition. The Israelis were able to consolidate gains due to the influx of materiel, replenishment of personnel to backfill those lost in combat, and the centralization of military command under the IDF in short period of time. In contrast with US Army doctrine in intra-theater reconstitution operations which according to FM 4-95, *Logistics Operations*, are “generally ... conducted in a relatively low-stress environment,” similar efforts by the Israeli State displayed a dire urgency. Failure to accomplish them in the time allotted would have spelled disaster for the nation. This is akin to the challenges US Army commanders may face undertaking reconstitution during great power LSCO.

This study began by examining consolidation of gains through the perspective of current US doctrine, as well as period-specific frameworks. For the sake of historical background, the research proceeded by briefly describing the operational variables from an Israeli military perspective, following the declaration of a free and independent state of Israel in 1948 until the ceasefire on June 11, 1948. This contextual understanding provided the foundation of the study, and the discussion herein offers the conceptualization of salient key takeaways for possible future application. The second phase of this monograph research examined the period of truce between

June 11–July 8, 1948 and was the litmus test of the hypothesis. The focus of the monograph at this point shifted to analyzing the economic, military, and civil conditions set during the relative peace to bolster defenses and consolidate gains.

Finally, the study compared Israeli consolidation operations in 1948 to the current US doctrinal framework and identified gaps or inconsistencies based on real-world, LSCO in a resource-constrained environment. While this study considered consolidation and reconstitution among the Arab states during the 1948 War, the available space and time for this study limited the extent of this discussion.

Chapter One: Consolidation of Gains

In current US Army doctrine on large scale combat operations (LSCO), consolidation of gains indicates the necessity to seize and expand on operational successes by making transitory and temporary successes more permanent as well as setting conditions for peaceful and secure transition of the area occupied to local governance.⁴ It is a continuous effort throughout the range of military operations (ROMO) as it ensures the areas that land forces fought and occupied will allow for a secure environment from which to conduct support activities, including establishing a constant flow of sustainment. Consolidation of gains is also a form of exploitation concurrent with other ongoing offensive or defensive operations, thus minimizing the time required to achieve advantageous outcomes.⁵ Through consolidation of gains, the US Army can assure political and civil stability in regions already seized and reduce the enemy's ability to establish a foothold where to continue to resist behind the forward line of troops (FLOT), hence exploiting battlefield success.⁶

⁴ US Army, ADP 3-0 (2019), 1-35.

⁵ US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations, Change 1* (Washington, DC: Government Print Office, 2017), 1-66.

⁶ US Army, FM 3-0, 1-187.

Units begin to consolidate gains immediately after successfully reaching a threshold of control in a specific region and gain the ability to transition from the offense/defense to security and stability tasks. The conditions that separate offensive and defensive operations from those of consolidation of gains are typically a reduction of enemy's concerted force-on-force efforts. A variety of activities during these operations are conducted within a spectrum, prioritizing combined arms maneuvers to defeat remnant enemy forces, strongholds, and irregular forces that threaten the US Army and friendly forces consolidation area and activities performed therein. In the spectrum of consolidation of gains, conducting area security is traditionally of the most immediate importance.⁷ The operating environment might dictate a speedy transition to stability tasks such as humanitarian assistance, policing activities, and restoring infrastructure.⁸ At the same time, US Army forces must enable the LSCO effort through sustainment, repositioning, and reorganization of forces for continued activities in other areas. In all of this, time is of the essence. In the case of the Israeli defense plan during the 1948 War, the time available was only twenty days. Taking in consideration the limited functional infrastructure—shallow conventional military experience and narrow strategic depth—the Israeli fighters were able to utilize this time with uncanny efficiency.

Consolidation of gains is distinct from unit consolidation. Unit consolidation is the organizing and strengthening internally of units in favorable territory or position to then be used, in turn, against the enemy.⁹ It is in this consolidation period. the unit not only seeks a strong exploitation of success platform but also seeks to organize, re-task, and create necessary command and control relationships.¹⁰ Reorganization is an idea closely associated with

⁷ US Army, FM 3-0, 8-11.

⁸ US Army, FM 3-0, 5-116.

⁹ US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-90.1, *Offense and Defense, Volume 1* (Washington, DC: Government Print Office, 2013), 3-108.

¹⁰ US Army, FM 3-0, 8-30.

consolidation and a subordinate tenet to reconstitution. It includes actions and precautions taken by a commander to keep combat capability throughout operations enhancing the unit's freedom of action and operational reach. Consolidation and reorganization act in concert and allow the unit maximum combat power to seize the objective, exploit the initiative, and prepare for possible counter-attack on terrain of their choosing.¹¹ In tandem with reorganization actions, the other two elements of theater reconstitution are regeneration and rehabilitation.¹²

According to doctrine, theater reconstitution is the set of actions taken by commanders to restore combat effectiveness to otherwise degraded units as they relate to the current mission requirements. These tasks are regeneration, rehabilitation, and reorganization, and they are the activities conducted by all military organizational echelons within a theater of operations to bring about a return of credible and capable combat power from an otherwise degraded state. Doctrine assumes that they occur mostly under stress-minimal conditions. Inasmuch that the prospect that all three elements can occur concertedly under stress, the results of such actions under those conditions will likely render mediocre outcomes at best. Whether under enemy pressure or lesser levels of stress the activities of reorganization, regeneration, and rehabilitation are conducted in incrementally executed efforts.

The activities and efforts conducted by the IDF and Israeli government during initial force-on-force combat operations and the first UN-imposed truce show how, despite significant enemy pressure, deliberate programs of improvement in combat power may be effective. The case also demonstrates that a critical aspect of success in a sustained war is superiority in rehabilitating forces in all its forms through viable, efficient, and effective logistical, personnel, and morale measures. Two instances are the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in pre-State Palestine) and later the State of Israel, which conducted consolidation of gains in tandem with military

¹¹ US Army, FM 3-90.1, 3-115.

¹² US Army, FM 4-95, 4-115.

units' reorganization, reconstitution, and rehabilitation.¹³ The first deliberate consolidation effort occurred towards the tail end of the civil war against Palestinian Arabs. This coincided with the window of decreased activity by the British government until the complete withdrawal from Palestine, which included the *Yishuv* effort to seize as much territory as possible to consolidate one contiguous frontline, lasting roughly until May 15, 1948. The second deliberate consolidation effort took place during the first truce.¹⁴

Chapter Two: Background to the War

The 1948 Arab-Israeli War did not occur in a vacuum; it is a conflict that had been brewing in the backdrop of two world wars and between belligerents with fundamental differences. The British Mandate of Palestine failed to resolve these differences, which resulted in the 1947 United Nations resolution partitioning the shared territory. The relationship between the *Yishuv* and the Arab population had been tenuous for years before the proposed partition. Both sides believed they had a legitimate claim to Palestine, for a wide range of historical, ideological, religious, cultural, national, and economic reasons.¹⁵ The Arab League, composed of Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, made their intentions to reject the compromise known when they refused to visit with the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) in June-July 1947. Despite this, UNSCOP recommended the partition with the two-state solution, with an internationalized Jerusalem and all three linked in an economic union. The Arab League

¹³ Aviva Halamish, "Israel Studies an Anthology: The Yishuv: The Jewish Community in Mandatory Palestine," last modified September 1, 2009, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel-studies-an-anthology-the-yishuv>.

¹⁴ Netanel Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword: Israel's War of Independence 1947-1949*, ed. Jack Wincor (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, Putnam and Co., Ltd., 1961), 134.

¹⁵ Dan Kurzman, *Genesis 1948: The First Arab-Israeli War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 16-17.

remained vehemently opposed and affirmed their intention to defend Palestine from Jewish statehood, counter to the UN resolution.¹⁶

As the partition date approached and the British began to withdraw or abandon Palestine, violence between the Jews and Arabs intensified. Nationalistic fervor on both sides intensified, one stirred up by the prospect of independence and the other by the sense of encroachment and disenfranchisement. The Arab population would not permit a Jewish intrusion, and the Jews, after the Nazi-perpetrated holocaust of World War II and conviction of Palestine as their birthright, would not be pushed to the sea.¹⁷ With the significant increase of the Jewish population in comparison to their Arab counterparts, the ownership of the land through purchase and a determined leadership fed the Jewish people's determination to fight.¹⁸ On November 30, 1947, a day after the UN approved the partition, the civil war in Palestine started in earnest. Arab militants pursued a series of attacks on Jewish settlements, setting the tone with increased hostility in the months to come.¹⁹ On December 1, 1947, the Arab High Committee (AHC), the supreme executive body of the Palestine Arab community, convened a violent three-day general strike. Armed mobs descended on the Jewish areas of Jerusalem, destroying stores and wounding residents. The British Mandate police stood by and fighting continued throughout the Mandate territory until the British withdrawal.²⁰

The British withdrawal from Palestine on May 15, 1948 left a power vacuum. There was no law enforcement, no mail, and no essential services left functioning. Only a small British

¹⁶ Meron Medzini, "The Arab Reaction," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 13, 2000, accessed January 15, 2020, <https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook1/Pages/The%20Arab%20reaction.aspx>.

¹⁷ Kurzman, *Genesis 1948*, 16.

¹⁸ Efraim Karsh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Palestine War 1948*. (Oxford: Osprey, 2002), 25.

¹⁹ Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 78.

²⁰ Morris, *1948*, 79.

contingent was left in Jerusalem to protect the High Commissioner as he prepared to depart, and an enclave in the port city of Haifa to secure the speedy departure of forces from the region.²¹ The Arabs, on the other hand, had not been idle. In the first week of May, the Political Committee of the Arab League and the Chiefs of Staff of the Arab armies met to plan and prepare for the initial attack following the British departure.²² King Abdullah of Transjordan was appointed Commander in Chief, even if in name only, of the coalition,. He had no influence or any command and control authority throughout the war. Each country in the Arab coalition had its priorities and goals when it came to Palestine, degrading the unity of purpose vital to this type of campaign.

On the eve of the conventional war phase, May 12, 1948, the Arab League adopted a four-policy posture.²³ First, all the member states of the Arab League enacted a state of emergency. Second, the Arab States welcomed only women, children, and the elderly as refugees; all able-bodied males would have to fight. Third, every Arab was responsible for bearing the cost of maintaining its forces in Palestine. Finally, Arab foreign ministers were to exchange and keep each other informed on all aspects regarding the Palestine war. Regardless of initial successes early on, the Arab states never managed to produce a cohesive, coordinated offensive.²⁴

Upon receiving the report from the UNSCOP, Moshe Sharett, the head of the Jewish Agency (JA) delegation to the UN, had the task of convincing member nations to approve partition and grant Israel is legitimacy.²⁵ When the vote seemed unfavorable to Jewish interests and the United States was disinterested in statehood, the JA, at the eleventh hour, enlisted the

²¹ Chaim Herzog and Shlomo Gazit, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East from the 1948 War of Independence to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 46

²² Herzog and Gazit, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 47.

²³ David Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, distributed by T. Y. Crowell Co., 1971), 103.

²⁴ Morris, *1948*, 220.

²⁵ Kurzman, *Genesis 1948*, 11.

assistance of Chaim Weizmann. Dr. Weizmann, a Russian born scientist and early Zionist was not a diplomat by trade, but he did have the ear of President Truman and was the only man allowed a meeting to present the case for statehood, in which he succeeded.

In this period David Ben-Gurion led the *Yishuv* as a whole. His work for the Zionist movement started before World War II when, in 1935, he was elected chairman of the Zionist Executive, the directing body of Zionism and head of the JA.²⁶ As a result of this position he oversaw the *Haganah* (leading Jewish paramilitary organization).²⁷ During the 1948 War, two of his key concerns were transforming the Haganah into a proficient conventional army (IDF) and mobilizing Jews all over the world (*Diaspora*) to support and provide personal and financial support to the war effort.²⁸

During the road to war, the Jewish population stockpiled weapons and prepared themselves. The JA, with agents around the world, managed to procure many of the heavy and specialized equipment through back channels. Initial efforts to import small arms, homemade weapons, and ammunition in clandestine workshops, as well as confiscation of other paramilitary groups and British forces' firearms was productive, but only went so far.²⁹ At the onset of hostilities on May 15, 1948, approximately 60 percent of the Haganah fighters had a weapon.³⁰ Even with this accumulation of small arms, the *Yishuv* lacked the heavy weapons, armored vehicles, aircraft, and expertise, placing them at a disadvantage against the better equipped, professional armies of the Arab League.

²⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, s.v. "David Ben-Gurion," accessed February 12, 2020, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Ben-Gurion>.

²⁷ Karsh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 25.

²⁸ Ben-Gurion, *Israel, a Personal History*, 64.

²⁹ Uri Milstein, *History of the War of Independence*, ed. and trans. Alan Sacks, vol. 1, *A Nation Girds for War* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996-1998), 362.

³⁰ Morris, *1948*, 204.

The nascent Israeli state had to look outwards to individuals or nations willing to go against the United States and later UN-imposed embargo. Czechoslovakia turned out to be one of these nations. Czechoslovakia was the only state that officially sold equipment and expertise to the *Yishuv* and later the State of Israel. It was not a charitable drive for the Israeli cause that motivated Czechoslovakia, however, but rather a mutual economic benefit.³¹ In 1948 Israel received 85 percent of Czechoslovak total foreign military aid. The other 15 percent of weapons went to their customers' competition, the Arab nations. The illustration below (Table 1) depicts the purchase of weapons and equipment from Czechoslovakia in 1948. By the time the UN embargo commenced on May 29, 1948, Israel had its fill of small arms and ammunition bought and delivered via the foreign *Yishuv* cells in France, Czechoslovakia, Mexico, and the United States. In June, the Chief of Israelis' arms acquisition reported to the Ministry of Defense, "we have reached the saturation in small arms, and the heavy-arms are very useful."³²

Table 1. Czechoslovakians Arms Sales to Israel, 1948

<i>Type of Assistance</i>	<i>Dates of Availability</i>
Small Arms:	Stages:
Mauser rifles 470,000	1. End of March to early April
MG34 machine-guns 5,300	2. April 28 until second truce
ZB37 machine-guns 850	3. Pre-October offensive
7.92-mm 80 million	4. During 1949
Fighter aircraft I	May 16 -July 31
23 S-199 Messerschmitt	Air bombs, parachutes, radio, and other aircraft
Other weapon, ammunition, and equipment.	communication and air navigation equipment: May-September 1948
Fighter aircraft II:	Stages:
56 Spitfires	1. 3 towards the October offensive
	2. 10 at the end of December
	3. The rest throughout 1949 and 1950
Training of air and ground crews:	The training of 25 not completed
Training flight cadettes advance pilots on S199 and ground crews	10-12 pilots trained to fly 1949 Most other courses not completed

Source: Amitzur Ilan, *Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race: Arms, Embargo, Military Power and Decision in the 1948 Palestine War* (New York: New York University Press, 1966), 173.

³¹ Amitzur Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race: Arms, Embargo, Military Power and Decision in the 1948 Palestine War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 153.

³² Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 64.

In contrast, the Arab armies were well equipped, if not manned, to tackle the challenge posed by the Israelis. All the Arab armies were considered modern and well equipped: three of them (Egypt, Syria, and Iraq) had air force support; Egypt and Syria possessed tanks; and Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq had armored cars augmenting the armored capability brought to bear. All had modern artillery pieces provided mainly by Britain and were trained by British officers on how to use them.³³ Numerically, the opposing armies were severely unmatched, if not in manpower, but in weaponry, training, and “freshness” (the Israelis just having ended a five-month-long civil war successfully), which explained Britain’s certainty that Israel would be defeated promptly and decisively. While the Arab armies appeared to have the upper hand, the British supported their Middle Eastern allies, especially the Arab Legion, which was a part of the British order of battle for defense in the Middle East.³⁴

The conventional force-on-force confrontation of the Arab-Israeli War may have started on May 15, 1948, but the fighting between major participants commenced much earlier. On April 5, 1948, Haganah fighters launched Operation Nachshon, the first organized offensive to keep the road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem open.³⁵ Despite the diverging strategies and political objectives pursued by the various Israeli paramilitary groups, it was evident and recognized that a vital effort for the common good kept the road to Jerusalem open, and provided support to the Jewish fighters in the city. By the end of March, Jewish fighters had lost nine hundred personnel, with an additional 1,858 wounded.³⁶ Even with significant setbacks, reprisal murders of Jewish civilians, and the capture of the Etzion block by the Arab Legion (led by regular British officers),

³³ Herzog and Gazit, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 47-48.

³⁴ David Jay Bercuson, *The Secret Army* (New York: Stein and Day, 1984, 1983), 111; Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 136.

³⁵ Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*, 103.

³⁶ David Brog, *Reclaiming Israel's History: Roots, Rights, and the Struggle for Peace*, paperback ed. (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2018), 132.

the Israeli fighters managed to keep the road open and controlled most of Jerusalem as well as towns on the main supply artery to the city.

The battles between Palestinian and Jewish fighters for position to control key terrain were taxing both in terms of logistics and personnel. They strained the Israeli resources to the limit. This effort, however, was necessary to consolidate their situation and fight from a position of strength once the conventional Arab armies crossed the borders. From November 1947 until April 1948, the Haganah was on the strategic defensive while the Arab forces held the initiative, striking at will on military and civilian targets alike. The characterization of the fighting up to that point was that of limited skirmishes between small units, most of them partially trained paramilitary forces. By April, the Haganah went onto the offensive with a series of operations that ultimately crushed the Palestinian Arab resistance by mid-May.³⁷

Ben-Gurion and his cabinet were not so much concerned about the Palestinian Arab strength nor their fighting proficiency as they were with them actively operating on the home front when the war began.³⁸ Towards the end of the British Mandate, the *Yishuv* enjoyed basic advantages over Palestinian Arabs on the most important metrics of national strength: they had the advantage of being a common people with a powerful nationalistic drive. Also, they had ready trained military manpower, weapons, and weapons production (albeit small caliber at the onset of the war), economic power, industrious spirit, and, above all, unified and semi-coordinated command and control.³⁹ The *Yishuv* leadership and Haganah forces were keen on exploiting these advantages and consolidated their situation before hostilities against their Arab neighbors. When it was apparent the British would keep their word and leave Palestine, the order to Haganah

³⁷ Morris, *1948*, 78.

³⁸ Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*, 58.

³⁹ Morris, *1948*, 82.

commanders went out to capture strategic heights of possible Arab advance, capture nodes of common territory to extend Jewish territory, and “fill the void left by the British.”⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the situation of Jewish citizens living in Jerusalem worsened by the day. Once the resolution for partition was reached and territory in Palestine apportioned, the city of Jerusalem came under international trustee status with oversight by the UN.⁴¹ In practice, this meant that the Jews in the city were isolated and left to fend for themselves. Due to topography and geography, Jerusalem was the most isolated of the *Yishuv* urban centers. Not only was the approach to the city controlled by Arab strongholds, but the Jewish neighborhoods inside the city were also dispersed and non-contiguous, making the mass and concentration of forces for the defense even more challenging.⁴² Jerusalem, with its symbolic and cultural significance, had to be protected. Due to this isolation (sixty kilometers from Tel Aviv through a single access road), aggravated by a lack of local industry and infrastructure, it was necessary to bring supplies from outside. It is worth noting that the Jewish fighters incurred more losses in the fight over the access to Jerusalem than any other battle in the 1948 War.⁴³ By May 14, 1948, the day before statehood, Jerusalem was under attack by Transjordan’s Arab League, and artillery fire rained on the Jewish garrison, already desperate for food and supplies.⁴⁴ The establishment of the State of Israel occurred on a Friday afternoon, and the invasion began at midnight, eight hours after the creation of the state.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Jon Kimche and David Kimche, *A Clash of Destinies: The Arab-Jewish War and the Founding of the State of Israel* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), 117.

⁴¹ Eran Kaplan and Derek Penslar, *The Origins of Israel, 1882-1948: A Documentary History*. Sources in Modern Jewish History / David Sorkin, Series Editor (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 340.

⁴² Karsh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 35-36.

⁴³ Karsh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 37.

⁴⁴ Herzog and Gazit, *The Arab-Israeli War*, 47.

⁴⁵ Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*, 94.

The British were an even more significant actor in the region at the time preceding the 1948 War. As a matter of policy, the British Mandate military continued the systematic disarmament of the Haganah while mostly turning a blind eye to the Palestinian Arab militias aggression against innocent Jews.⁴⁶ This disparity in treatment by the British stand as a stark contrast of procedural attitude towards both sides during the preliminary fighting, and caused a significant handicap to the Jewish efforts to defend against Arab aggression. With the conflagrations escalating between Jews and Arabs, the British desire and interest to intervene between the groups diminished, and by the end of April 1948, they rarely interfered except when their interests were threatened or to secure lines of communication (LOC) to their dwindling bases.⁴⁷ Despite the British Mandate ending and the United States and subsequent UN embargo of weapons from all active participants of the war, the British government still found a reason and justification to continue the sale of arms to the Arab nations.⁴⁸

Chapter Three: Israel Repels the Invasion

The departure of the British from Palestine and the immediate transition of authority to the Jewish and Arab communities did not go the way the UN had projected. All governmental, public infrastructure and civil functions abruptly ceased, and the expected cooperation by British authorities did not materialize.⁴⁹ In contrast with this perceived blatant attempt to undermine a peaceful transition, Jewish authorities had put systems in place and measures to seize control from this void. It was in the wings of this intended chaos that on May 15, 1948, a concerted Arab League commenced their attack, crossing the thinly defended Israeli border at multiple locations.

⁴⁶ J.C. Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 292; Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword*, 48.

⁴⁷ Morris, *1948*, 78.

⁴⁸ Shlomo Slonim, "The 1948 American Embargo on Arms to Palestine," *Political Science Quarterly* 94, no. 3 (1979): 499, accessed January 15, 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2150455>.

⁴⁹ Slonim, "The 1948 American Embargo," 145.

Conditions on the ground were dire for Jewish forces, and its leadership recognized the existence of three critical vulnerabilities. With the initial battle lines being roughly equivalent to those delineated in the UN Partition proposal, twenty-seven Jewish settlements remained deep in Arab held control territory. The Negev, initially part of Israel in the partition, was also in the Arab sphere of influence, with an additional thirty-three settlements isolated. Ben-Gurion identified the protection of the Negev as vital for the security of Tel Aviv.

Finally, the city of Jerusalem and its Jewish inhabitants, was once again seized and cut off, mostly in control of the Transjordan-British trained and led Arab Legion, which shelled the Etzion bloc.⁵⁰ Despite the initially perceived advantages held by the Arab armies of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Transjordan, and Lebanon, there was dissent, contempt, and lack of unity of purpose amongst the allies. At the last minute, King Abdullah of Transjordan, by his request, was assigned Commander in Chief of the Arab armies, in name only.⁵¹ To compound to the challenge of de-unified command, the Arab leaders distrusted each other and refused to confide and coordinate their battle plans amongst themselves.⁵² The illustration below (figure 3) shows the proposed UN plan of partition and population distribution.

⁵⁰ Karsh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 35; Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 110.

⁵¹ Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword*, 144.

⁵² Kimche and Kimche, *A Clash of Destinies*, 148.

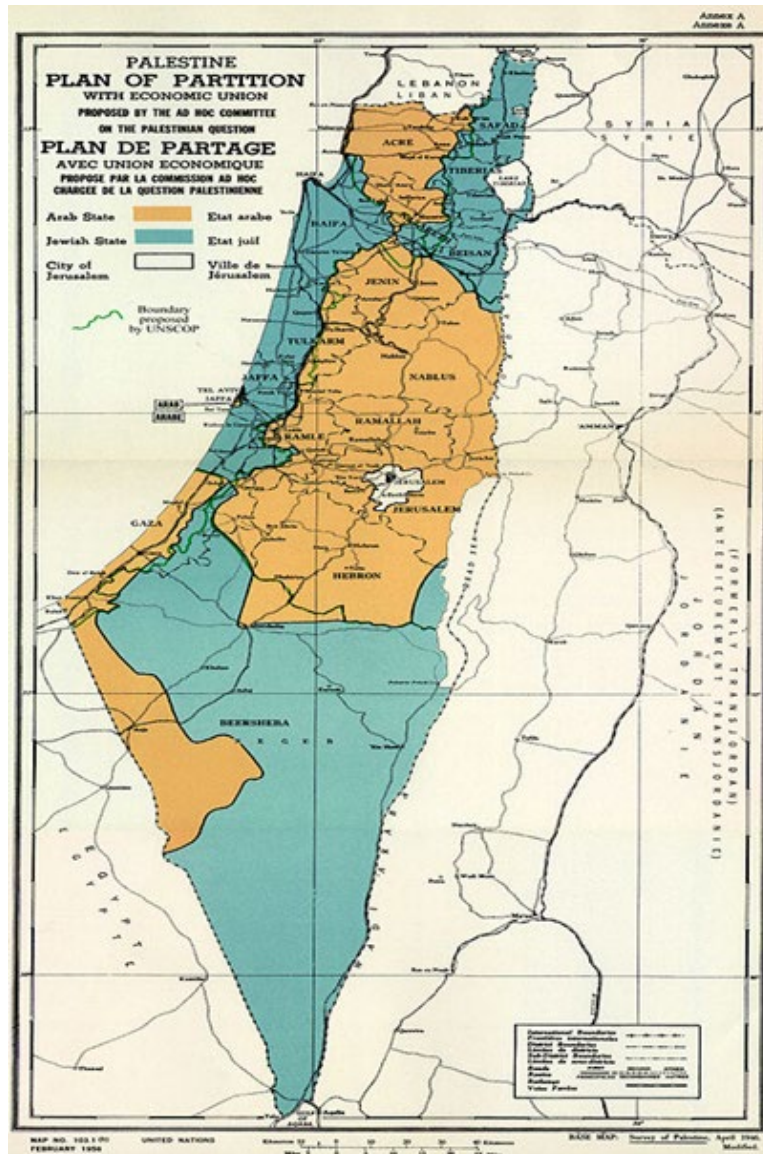


Figure 1. UNGAR 181 Partition Plan. United Nations Digital Library, Palestine: Plan of Partition Annex A to resolution 181 (II) of the General Assembly (New York: United Nations, 1947), accessed January 20, 2020, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/409073?ln=en>.

The combat operations that followed, between the initiation of hostilities by the combined Arab armies and the State of Israel from May 15, 1948 until the declaration of the first truce on June 11, 1948, were a series of back and forth operations on all fronts with no significant amount of ground taken or given from either side. The original Arab attack plan demanded a Lebanese thrust from the north down the coast, seizure of Haifa and Acre; a Syrian advance towards Nazareth, a Transjordanian attack to isolate Jerusalem (a number one priority), an Iraqi

forces advance towards Haifa, a link up with the Syrians, and the Egyptian Army to follow the coast northward towards Tel Aviv, diverting in its effort a majority of Jewish forces from Haifa.⁵³ Adding to the confusion, at the last minute the Lebanese army decided (albeit briefly) to not participate in the invasion and Jordan announced the alteration of their plan settling for the limited objective of seizing the Arab-Palestinian held the West Bank.⁵⁴ Even before hostilities began, the unified Arab façade was starting to show cracks under the strain brought to bear by a lack of overarching strategy and underestimation of a dug in and resilient enemy. Arab League military planners calculated that for their forces to be victorious in eliminating the Jewish State, at least five divisions with six squadrons of bombers and fighters were needed. At the offset of hostilities, the Arabs only had a fraction of that number and in varying degrees of readiness.⁵⁵ What began as an envisaged synchronized attack devolved almost immediately into an uncoordinated attempt to land grab by the Arab leaders.

In contrast, the Jewish strategy and overall objectives were simple and clear: survive the initial attack and protect the Jewish state as delineated by the UN Partition Plan.⁵⁶ Despite the significant challenge the Israeli leaders perceived as coming from all fronts, the issues which occupied them the most were the ongoing UN policy measures, embargo, and immigration, affecting both materiel and personnel influx into Israel.⁵⁷ Notwithstanding initial successes to introduce small weapons and ammunition via different clandestine methods, the IDF still lacked heavy weapons, aircraft, and specialized personnel to operate them. On December 5, 1947, merely a week after the approval of the Partition Plan at the UN, the US State Department announced a unilateral cessation of imports and licensing of all weapons and military equipment

⁵³ Kimche and Kimche, *A Clash of Destinies*, 150.

⁵⁴ Morris, *1948*, 189.

⁵⁵ Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword*, 142.

⁵⁶ Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword*, 196.

⁵⁷ Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*, 69.

to Palestine.⁵⁸ This action was followed by a UN-enforced weapons ban after conventional warfare began. The lack of military assistance from the United States and British governments meant that the IDF fought from a materiel position of disadvantage during the first stage of the war.

The political aims in implementing the embargo were different from the US perspective and the UN at large. The US intended with this move to quell and limit the extent of damage between both sides, implementing a neutralizing embargo which fell in tune with the 1939 “Neutrality Act.”⁵⁹ The British, however, understood that a propagated conflict in Palestine clashed with their interests in the region and affected their most ardent and staunchest Arab allies.⁶⁰ Hence, sales of arms and war materiel of any kind to Palestine belligerents ceased, but the existing, ongoing military equipment to Arab region partners carried on as agreed.⁶¹ This posture remained the British policy until the UN broader dictum forced them to stop all sales and shipping. The State of Israel, on May 14, 1948, had an ardent and enthusiastic immature army with no heavy weapons on hand. Of note, the Haganah High Command could count on effectives consisting of approximately 35,000 personnel, of which 25,000 were actual combatants. Other than an assortment of small weapons and limited ammunition, the Jews had sixteen *Davidkas* (heavy mortars of indigenous production) seventy-five anti-tank rifles, and four 65mm guns.⁶²

By June 1948, it was clear that the Arab attack had lost its momentum, with only the Arab Legion having achieved gains in the form of rudimentary control of Jerusalem and its surrounding areas and Egypt having a modicum of success.⁶³ Egyptian armored columns

⁵⁸ Slonim, *The 1948 American Embargo on Arms to Palestine*, 498.

⁵⁹ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 6-7.

⁶⁰ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 9.

⁶¹ Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 24.

⁶² Kimche and Kimche, *A Clash of Destinies*, 161.

⁶³ Don Peretz, *The Arab-Israel Dispute* (New York: Facts on File, 1996), 40; David W. Lesch, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 140.

managed to advance deep into the Negev desert, only to be stopped by the embryonic Israeli Ari Force's newly acquired three Avia S-199 fighter aircraft, thirty kilometers south of Tel Aviv, days before the truce went into effect.⁶⁴

For both sides, the embargo started to take its toll.⁶⁵ After twenty-eight days of fighting, it was clear to both sides that they needed a respite. The combination of an aggressive Israeli response in the form of stern defense and rabid counterattacks, the element of surprise, dismal Arab intelligence, and underestimation of Jewish resolve, as well as the exhaustion of Arab ammunition, slowed and stopped the Arab advances. With the trickling of weapons and raw recruits from overseas to the IDF during the initial stages of the conflict, procedures were not in place to absorb and distribute them to the front lines efficiently.⁶⁶ By the end of May, all sides of the conflict felt the pressure from the UN Security Council to come to a ceasefire and return to the negotiating table. British authorities, supportive of the Arab League until now, had realized that their best interest laid in following the cues from the United States, and both the Arab and Israeli Armies were suffering the lethargy and exhaustion that results from continued and relentless fighting.⁶⁷ For the exhausted Israeli warriors, this was a most auspicious truce, as General Moshe Carmel expressed, "It came to us like the dew from heaven."⁶⁸

Chapter Four: Dew from Heaven

Israel and the Arab League eventually agreed to the ceasefire, having severely spent their manpower, resources, and equipment severely after consecutive twenty-eight days of unrelenting

⁶⁴ Robert L. Gandt, *Angels in the Sky: How a Band of Volunteer Airmen Saved the New State of Israel* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2017), 115-116.

⁶⁵ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 64.

⁶⁶ Karsh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 62.

⁶⁷ Kurzman, *Genesis*, 445.

⁶⁸ Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 94.

fighting. Four weeks of respite were allotted to consolidate their respective positions and reconstitute their forces to the best of their ability. While negotiation and diplomacy were underway, the truce period set by the UN Security Council demanded participants to halt all military operations, cease the influx or movement of troops to strengthen or fortify positions of relative advantage, and stop all immigration, military training, and transport of military equipment to any area affected or adjacent to the region.⁶⁹ However, the UN planned and prepared poorly. The supervisory apparatus they established was too weak to ensure the continuous inspection of both Arab and Israeli seaports, airports, border boundaries, and other methods of entry.⁷⁰ Ben-Gurion had already foreseen the necessity of utilizing the truce to consolidate the Israeli position and conduct a complete overhaul of its armed forces as well as materiel utilization and the relief of Jerusalem, penning in his journal the priorities of efforts that were to come. By order of priority, these were feeding Jerusalem and its besieged Jewish population, stepping up weapons production, training officers and enlisted men, establishing new settlements as steppingstones to conduct further operations, and increasing immigration to gain raw recruit power.⁷¹ The situation in Jerusalem at the time of the truce was deemed the most precarious. A continuous threat from the Arab Legion and their successful isolation of the city by blockading the main (and only) road to Tel Aviv produced a dire shortage of arms and supplies. The Israeli cabinet suspected unless this situation were normalizing, the Jewish population in Jerusalem would lose the will to fight and commence flight en masse from the city.⁷²

⁶⁹ United Nations Mediator. *Palestine Question/Truce Observation (June 11 – July 9, 1948)-Mediator Report* (New York: UN, September 16, 1948), accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-184863/>.

⁷⁰ David Brook, *Preface to Peace: The United Nations and the Arab-Israel Armistice System* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1964), 86.

⁷¹ Ben-Gurion, *Israel, a Personal History*, 121.

⁷² Morris, *1948*, 267.

The fact that Israel lacked territorial consolidation depth was a primary concern and source of objection to truce implementation.⁷³ The UN established that, due to the limited number of observers on hand, they would position themselves in areas where that fighting had occurred, which in almost all cases was in Israeli held ports, borders, or airfields. The Arab nations suffered none of those constraints. In all, the sixty-eight posts occupied by UN observers were inadequate to provide oversight of such a complex operational environment. A second priority became the check on Jewish immigration and food supply to Jerusalem and Negev. Finally , a small United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) staff meant that only Tel Aviv was under surveillance by the time the aggression began anew on July 9, 1948.⁷⁴ In the illustration below (figures 4 and 5), the figure on the left show the initial Arab attack on 15 May. The illustration on the right is the IDF counterattack of July 9, 1948.

⁷³ Brook, *Preface to Peace*, 86.

⁷⁴ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 203.



Figure 2. Arab League attack/IDF counterattack May 15 - July 9, 1948. Philippe Rekacewicz, "The first Arab-Israeli war (1948-49)," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 1998, accessed February 7, 2020, <https://mondediplo.com/maps/middleeast1948>.

Notwithstanding the herculean effort by the JA to procure weapons abroad, the embargo caused unforeseen difficulties. The Haganah General Staff (HGS) had postponed massive arms deliveries until after the end of the British Mandate on May 15. The delay meant not only that the weapons were not readily available at the onset of the war, but the bulk of the heavy weapons imports arrived at Israel during the truce. Fortunately for the Israelis, the lack of an attempt from the Arabs to conduct a sea blockade and the dismal UN observatory capabilities worked in favor of the Haganah, and they proceeded to outmatch and outpace the regeneration of combat power

throughout the relatively peaceful four weeks.⁷⁵ King Farouk of Egypt expressed concern over the truce, and he was justified. He feared that during the ceasefire Israel was poised to receive much larger quantities of supplies and weapons than was expected against the warring Arab nations.⁷⁶ Unlike the Arab coalition's contrasting viewpoints in which they disagreed on how long the peace would last and if it should commence after four weeks or last indefinitely, the Israeli perspective was uncomplicated. They knew that the Negev had to be retaken and the city of Jerusalem could not stay in Arab hands.⁷⁷ It was not a matter of alternatives upon resumption of hostilities but the laying the groundwork in preparation for such certainty.

Israeli Consolidation of Gains

The Israeli government and its military pursued an aggressive consolidation of gains campaign to provide stability to a highly volatile region. Having agreed to a ceasefire, the Israeli leadership got on the way to fortify their presence and position in the land. They exploited the situation by quietly raiding and occupying lines and locations that gave them an advantage when the fighting recommenced. The *Yishuv* also solidified their control of the formerly held British agencies and gubernatorial offices from their mandate-era national institutions.⁷⁸ For the expansion of the settlements to fortify Jewish presence, Ben-Gurion ordered the go-ahead but informed his Cabinet that "this time we should maintain silence."⁷⁹ The humanitarian assistance provided to Jerusalem was a significant enterprise. Under UNTSO's plan, the city received enough provisions in the way of edibles and other necessities to last four weeks.⁸⁰ The Jewish

⁷⁵ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 183.

⁷⁶ Tal, *War in Palestine*, 275.

⁷⁷ Howard Morley Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time* (New York: Knopf, Alfred, 1976), 328.

⁷⁸ Morris, *1948*, 268.

⁷⁹ Morris, *1948*, 269.

⁸⁰ Kimche and Kimche, *A Clash of Destinies*, 203.

fighters managed to carve out of a rough system of dirt roads as an alternate path to Jerusalem. Aptly named the “Burma Road,” it continued to be utilized during the truce as a supplementary covert method to move supplies, weapons, and combatants into the city.⁸¹ When the utilization of this road broke with truce bylaws, the Israeli Foreign Minister Sharett argued, “your control measures cannot affect the supplies brought into Jerusalem via our new Burma Road, since it was in use since before the truce.”⁸²

The truce also brought a stabilization period for the leadership of the Israeli State to ascertain what type of government they wanted. This was particularly the case on military matters, and the way ahead politically on how to proceed in the running of the country. Power struggles between the leadership came to a head when a committee hearing on military affairs commenced to investigate the progress of the war and the decisions leading to failures in the battlefield. These efforts were an apparent blow to Ben-Gurion’s status as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, whose office made him the final authority on all military operations.⁸³ By the end of the truce, the new state adopted a streamlined army, based on the British model. This move included an unambiguous chain of command with a chief of staff in an advisory role to the Ministry of Defense and a centralized command and control apparatus to run the combined efforts of the Israeli military.

Israeli Defense Forces Reconstitution – Equipment

As mentioned previously, the acquisition, shipping, and distribution (to a limited extent) of heavy equipment started before the British Mandate of Palestine had finished. Those efforts, entities, and processes that the Israelis employed to receive said purchases took time. Jewish Agency agents purchased heavy equipment from tanks to airplanes wherever they could. During

⁸¹ Karsh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 62.

⁸² Kurzman, *Genesis*, 447.

⁸³ Kimche and Kimche, *A Clash of Destinies*, 207-209.

the truce, these agents purchased surplus military aircraft, and hired pilots who took off and were lost in transit, only to appear in airfields in Israel.⁸⁴ The French supported the Irgun (IZL) initially with weapons and permission to purchase until the embargo took effect. These accommodations included free arms, military bases to train, and transports.⁸⁵ The United States also, due to be the primary stockpile of armament after the war, was a major supplier of war stock to Israel, in spite of the State Department's ban.⁸⁶ Out of all the equipment bought illegally in the United States in 1948, only the carrier aircraft (nine C46 *Commandos*, one C69 *Constellation*, and two *Skymasters*) would make it to Israel before or during the truce.⁸⁷

Undoubtedly the most significant success by Jewish purchasing agents was the acquisition of military equipment from Czechoslovakia. The sale of weapons by this country to the Jews was a highly improvised affair, and it suited both parties' interests.⁸⁸ By the time of the truce, the streamlined acquisition and transportation of weapons and armaments efforts started in March 1948 had become commonplace, and processes to receive and integrate such equipment was efficient.⁸⁹ Transport through the land and sea lanes were a risky and complicated affair that required the assistance and ambivalence of many nations.⁹⁰ Czechoslovakia, for instance, had no access to the sea. Hence the JA had to establish relationships and shipping permits through Hungary, down the Danube to Vukovar, Yugoslavia. From there weapons and equipment had to be transported to an Adriatic port with the capacity to ship on to Palestine.⁹¹ Throughout,

⁸⁴ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 135.

⁸⁵ Kurzman, *Genesis*, 458.

⁸⁶ Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 34.

⁸⁷ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 94.

⁸⁸ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 157.

⁸⁹ Munya Mardor, *Haganah: Strictly Illegal*, ed. D. R. Elston (New York: The New American Library, 1964), 236.

⁹⁰ Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 36.

⁹¹ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 159.

government officials in communist countries had to be bribed, convinced, or cajoled to avoid red tape and endless bureaucratic obstacles. Once on the sea, the ships had to run a tightly executed blockade enforced primarily by the British Navy before arriving at safe harbors like Tel Aviv or Haifa.⁹² While ships like the *Nora* arrived at Tel Aviv before the onset of the fighting, other ships that crossed the Mediterranean were not so lucky.

Despite the challenges, through the ceasefire, log notes from the IDF General Staff show that the unloading of arms hailing from international ports continued at various undisclosed locations, away from UN observers prying eyes.⁹³ Israeli logistical planners realized that land and maritime lines of supply were hazardous methods by which to bring equipment into Israel. Hence, they required an airbridge.⁹⁴ The air bridge posed its own set of challenges. The territory held by Israel during the first phase of the war lacked depth, which meant that any airbase was either nearby the sea or front lines.⁹⁵ For this reason, the protection of the limited aircraft by the air transport command at its airbases became key to the immediate mobility requirement of the small Haganah and its limited equipment. The transportation missions of the Air Transport Command, with its associated utilization and maintenance of aircraft, never followed the prescribed regulations and bureaucratic standards set up by the Israeli government of the time. Mission requirements trumped the red tape. During the truce, with observers at every major Israeli port of entry, meant that any vessel or aircraft presumed to be carrying military equipment was liable to be attacked by the Egyptians (the only military with a credible air force) or the British for breach of the truce.⁹⁶ However, risk had to be assumed to infuse life into the IDF, which suffered from

⁹² Kimche and Kimche, *A Clash of Destinies*, 239.

⁹³ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 188.

⁹⁴ Ze'ev Drori, "Utopia in Uniform," in *Israel: The First Decade of Independence*, ed. S. Ilan Troen and Noah Lucas (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 593-613.

⁹⁵ Mardor, *Haganah*, 260.

⁹⁶ Katz, *Days of Fire*, 235.

materiel and supplies shortage , hence running the gauntlet at this point of the war was deemed justifiable.

The deception operations were a vital tool used by the Israeli forces to mask their movements of equipment into Palestine. On the sea, the cargo ships stayed out of the sight of UN observers while in port and unloaded track vehicles, heavy weapons, and ammunition by barge. When UN observers boarded a cargo ship brought to port, the number of consumables hiding the cargo was so vast that two-person teams could not go through them. The ship, *Borea*, arriving in Tel Aviv two days after the observers had commenced operations, brought ten French H35 tanks and several 75mm artillery pieces and ammunition on board. This delivery failed to appear in any official UN logbook of the time. By air, the Israeli had at least a dozen operational airfields into which *Balak* aircraft (DC4 and Constellation transport operations from Czechoslovakia) flew, all of them out of the purview of UN observers. In all, during the lull in hostilities, the IDF managed to fly or sail over three thousand tons of arms and ammunition, none annotated in the official UN record.⁹⁷

The distribution and employment of the weapons arriving in Israel also dramatically changed during the truce. On June 18, 1948, a week after the cease-fire began, Ben-Gurion called for a meeting with all the brigade commanders from all fronts.⁹⁸ One by one, they voiced their grievances and conveyed the obstacles they were facing. There was an urgent need for heavy weapons, artillery, and tanks to be able to go out of dug-in positions and stem the Arab armor advance through a mobile offense. The constant arrival of heavy weaponry addressed this problem. Additionally, the uneven distribution and allocation of resources to the different units caused added rancor among the troops.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 211-212.

⁹⁸ Ben-Gurion, *Israel, a Personal History*, 155.

⁹⁹ Ben-Gurion, *Israel, a Personal History*, 156.

Another concern was their current table of organization was not suited for military operations, and the most basic services at the company level were missing.¹⁰⁰ They lacked a centralized command and control (C2) system with its dependent logistical efforts based on a unified operating construct. The IDF General Staff and its Headquarters was coming into being and had not yet established the positive control on a fluid battlefield. Through a streamlined chain of command, the priorities for equipping and resupplying the force were based on a whole of government effort and in synch with an overall strategy.¹⁰¹ Though the truce, the IDF procured rifles sufficient to field forty battalions, more than enough for active duty, reserves, and settlements.¹⁰² Also, with two new brigades coming online, the Eighth Armored and Ninth (Oded) the original units holding the front received the newly-acquired arriving armor, followed by the new organized ones.¹⁰³ In the reorganization of the logistical effort, battalions no longer depended on higher HQs for quartermaster supplies, vehicles, and sustenance. Instead, the restructuring of the military establishment on a uniform scale became essential, each battalion responsible for listing their stock, the system of payment, and other administrative functions.¹⁰⁴ Finally, a marked advantage to the Israeli position was that the embargo only addressed military equipment brought from abroad, not the arms made in home soil. Ben-Gurion leveraged this loophole to his favor by transitioning the weapon industry from small arms and munition to heavy weaponry and specialized equipment.

In contrast to the successful consolidation of equipment conducted by the IDF, the Arab armies' efforts had petered out. Having failed on their initial blitz, very little was done on the way of resupply, their arms store ran low due to the embargo, and LOCs became overextended and

¹⁰⁰ Kurzman, *Genesis 1948*, 464.

¹⁰¹ Tal, *War in Palestine, 1948*, 285.

¹⁰² Kimche and Kimche, *A Clash of Destinies*, 204.

¹⁰³ Morris, *1948*, 268.

¹⁰⁴ Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword*, 254.

poorly managed.¹⁰⁵ The Jews were fighting no more than two hours from any given city or port of entry, allowing greater flexibility and responsiveness.

Israeli Defense Forces Reconstitution – Personnel

On May 15, 1948, the State of Israel lacked the personnel, training, and expertise necessary to confront the combined Arab conventional armies. The defense forces of Israel were a hodgepodge bunch, with very little in the understanding of traditional armored warfare, artillery employment, communications infrastructure, and high echelon organization.¹⁰⁶ Ben-Gurion believed that the Haganah, Israel's biggest paramilitary group, wanted for the equipment and know-how to defeat the Arabs, and the Palmach—the better trained subgroup within the Haganah—lacked the officers, experience, and clear objective focused on large scale conventional warfare.¹⁰⁷ Personnel shortages were also a challenge, considering the overwhelming population ratios of the Palestinians and surrounding Arab nations to the Jewish population.

The Haganah, with the assistance of the Bureau of Immigration, provided the Aliyah Beth ships for transportation of Jewish mass migration.¹⁰⁸ In the rapidly assembled transit training camps, the Haganah was busy, not only recruiting young men and women to its ranks, but also providing training and moral support to the refugees in preparation for the upcoming fight. During the truce, the arrival of Jewish people increased dramatically.¹⁰⁹ Upon arrival to Palestine, the immigrants had a choice where to settle: in the growing cities as Tel Aviv and Haifa

¹⁰⁵ Moshe Pearlman, *The Army of Israel* (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1950), 145.

¹⁰⁶ Herzog and Gazit, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 48.

¹⁰⁷ Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 20.

¹⁰⁸ Mardor, *Haganah*, 168.

¹⁰⁹ Kurzman, *Genesis 1948*, 447.

or joining a kibbutz (communal farm), which played a vital part in holding the line during the initial stages of the war.¹¹⁰

In other parts of the world where a Zionist federation existed, JA agents under the Zionist Executive continued the recruitment and hiring of volunteers to fight in Palestine.¹¹¹ Only the Zionist Executive, under the direction of the Jewish Agency Executive, had the authority to hire volunteers and focused its efforts explicitly to recruiting those with technical expertise or officers who had experience leading troops above company-grade. Two subagencies of the JA were Land and Labor and the Service Airways agencies.¹¹² The first was responsible for hiring all movement and maneuver specialists, from infantry to armor, communications to logistics. The second was responsible for all technical expertise in flying, maintaining, training, and organizing an air force. Jewish branches of veteran organizations were of interest and utilized in identifying war veterans. The HGS and later the IDF did not actively seek inexperienced and untrained green forces to come to their aid; they had plenty of raw human capital from the refugees and immigrant flowing from Europe after the British mandate ended, the *Gahal* (Overseas Recruitment Hebrew acronym) was of different stock than the *Mahal* (Overseas Volunteers).¹¹³

The prioritization of the allocation of forces after the truce was much different from that of the initial approach. Due to the respite allowed by the ceasefire, the prioritization of troops followed the same ideas as in the prioritization effort to allocated arms. Ben-Gurion's concern for Jerusalem and Moshe Carmel's disturbing reports of the Syrian Arab Liberation Army posture in central Galilee, extending from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, set the direction of the IDF in the next

¹¹⁰ Eli Tzur, "Mapam and the Immigrants," in *Israel: The First Decade of Independence*, ed. S. Ilan Troen and Noah Lucas (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 543-56.

¹¹¹ Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 53.

¹¹² Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 57.

¹¹³ Nir Arielli, "When Are Foreign Volunteers Useful? Israel's transnational soldiers in the war of 1948 re-examined," *Journal of Military History* 78, no. 2 (2014): 703-24.

fighting iteration.¹¹⁴ The Negev was given a lower priority with the overall objective of stabilization. Key to this effort was the IDF Settlement Branch and its efforts in arming and inclusion in the unified defense of the kibbutz system, which had acted as forward-line fortifications and observation posts. The creation of the IDF (*Tzahal*), with its command structure and coherent chain of command, missing in the early stages of the war, had a substantial positive impact on the prioritization forces effort.

On May 26, 1948, the Israeli Cabinet issued the Provisional Order 4 in which all land, naval, and air forces became part of the Israeli Defense Forces.¹¹⁵ Despite all paramilitary organizations being outlawed from that moment forth (LEHI, IZL), the amalgamation did not include the IZL contingent in Jerusalem. Those fighters continued to maintain their autonomy and identity as a separate paramilitary organization until later in the war. The ramification of the leadership struggle between military/political factions threatened to bring the State of Israel to the brink of civil war at the most inconvenient of times.¹¹⁶

On June 27, 1948, in a meeting with the Defense Minister, twenty-one senior officers, including the heads of the General Staff and leading commanders, were ordered to adopt a Hebrew name and take an oath of allegiance to the State of Israel.¹¹⁷ By June 29, 1948, all soldiers of the *Tzahal* took the same pledge of allegiance to the State, its legitimate authorities, ending once and for all the intra-partisan group dissidence and establishing a unifying moral obligation to the state.¹¹⁸ The next step was reshaping the IDF High Command.¹¹⁹ Ben-Gurion aptly perceived a push by Palmach leadership and the Mapam party to seize most of the brigade

¹¹⁴ Tal, *War in Palestine, 1948*, 285. Kurzman, *Genesis 1948*, 497.

¹¹⁵ Ben-Gurion, *Israel: Years of Challenge*, 45.

¹¹⁶ A. Joseph Heckelman, *American Volunteers and Israel's War of Independence* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1974), 44.

¹¹⁷ Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*, 192.

¹¹⁸ Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword*, 257.

¹¹⁹ Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 328.

commands, to include the main projected fighting force in the Latrun area of the Galilee front. Ben-Gurion instead attempted to appoint a commander with experience in the British Army and conventional mobile operations. However, in this case he was overruled, and Yigain Allon, a former Palmach leader, led *Operation Danny* to relief the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem line after the truce ended against Ben-Gurion's wishes.¹²⁰

The truce also allowed the increase of readiness at the tactical level. It provided the opportunity for the newly arrived volunteers to integrate into their respective units and conduct flight training for the incoming pilots.¹²¹ As with aircrews, the integration into the IDF of specialized tank crews and heavy equipment technicians was more expeditious than those of volunteers with little or no experience. Moreover, in the course of the fight, many of the junior officers of the Haganah had fallen. The respite allowed the exhausted forces to find suitable replacements and train as cohesive units, not piecemeal ensembles.¹²²

The training of the foreign volunteers in many instances commenced near their home station in places like the Bacher farm in South Africa or small training camps near Sathonay, France.¹²³ This preparation gave the inexperienced green fighters a fighting edge when arriving in Palestine. This need to train forces also extended to the native Haganah and other paramilitaries. There was no officer in the original Haganah with experience commanding anything above company-level tactical units.¹²⁴ The lack of training at the onset of the war was evident, many of the volunteers were given rudimentary training with wooden rifles and directly thrust in combat with 7th BDE under Shlomo Shamir.¹²⁵ Many of them died hours after reaching

¹²⁰ Yigal Allon, *The Shield of David: The Story of Israel's Armed Forces* (Lexington, MA: Plunkett Lake Press, 2015), Loc. 3983, Amazon Kindle.

¹²¹ Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 141.

¹²² Leslie Stein, *The Making of Modern Israel, 1948-1967* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 36.

¹²³ Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 68.

¹²⁴ Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 71.

¹²⁵ Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 114.

the Promised Land. The illustration below (figure 5) shows the different camps left behind by the British and US forces and used by the IDF for training and basing.

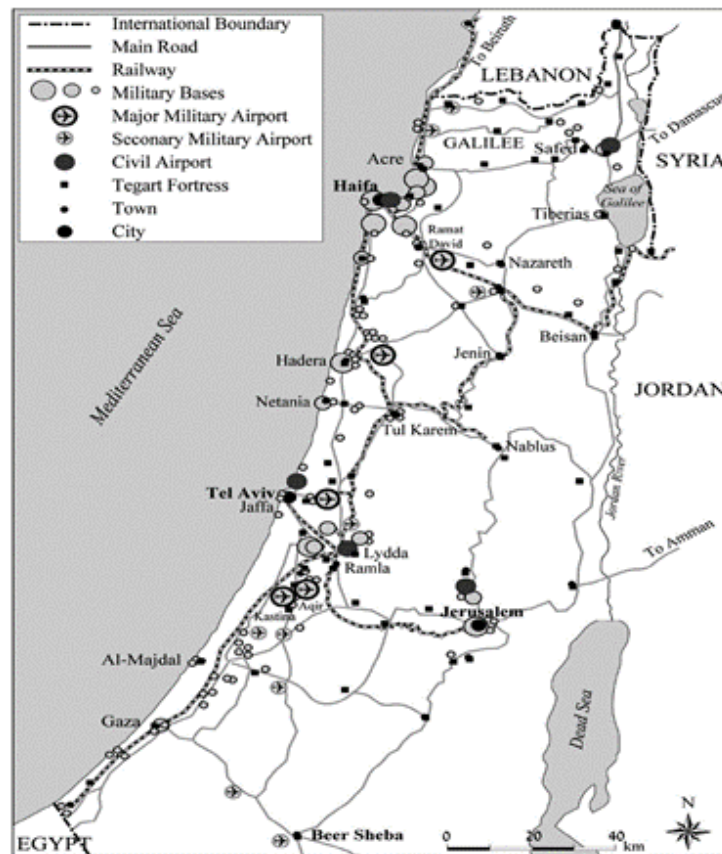


Figure 3. The use of former British military bases during and after the 1948 War. Arnon Golan and Amiram Oren, “The Use of Former British Military Bases during and after the 1948 War,” *Israel Affairs* 24, no. 2 (June 2018): 222, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2018.1429542>.

The last British contingent left Haifa on June 30, 1948, and the Israelis immediately seized the dock and other vital infrastructure.¹²⁶ The control of Haifa meant that, despite the Egyptian blockade, the Jews were now in a position to massively enter war materiel all along the Israeli coast. Besides the two main docks in Tel Aviv and Haifa, which boasted several UN observers, the IDF used the coastal city of Nathanya as a reception base for personnel and equipment.¹²⁷ From there, it took over the many training posts left behind by the British or

¹²⁶ Edgar O’Ballance, *The Arab-Israeli War, 1948* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1956), 134.

¹²⁷ Kurzman, *Genesis 1948*, 467.

Americans that the IDF utilized to train and, in turn, dispersed their forces. Tel Litvinsky was a former US Army camp sold to the JA that became a reception center for English-speaking volunteers.¹²⁸ At the beginning of the war, the Tel Litvinsky depot was also the station for the sole IDF armor brigade with its maintenance facility.¹²⁹

Despite the Israeli military re-organization and enactment of regulations at the higher levels and formalization of the front into four distinct regional fronts, the distribution and training of front line soldiers largely remained an ad-hoc affair.¹³⁰ Soldiers were recruited in training camps across Israel based on language skills or other necessary expertise. Others just quit the training camps and joined a convoy to different areas of fighting. Out of Israel's initial approximate forty thousand soldiers at the beginning of the truce, half had enlisted and not yet completed basic training.¹³¹ The IDF remedied this by sending part of their troops to train on new equipment as well as provide much-needed leave to combat soldiers who had been engaged in constant warfare for months on end.

Conclusion

In the 1948 war, the Israeli military executed consolidation of gains operations with skillful synchronicity of all stability and security tasks amidst a political turbulence and social quagmire through the depth of space and time. This permitted them to free and allocate forces when the time came at the decisive point. The IDF seized the offensive once peace negotiations broke down and was never relegated to a perimeter defense through the remainder of the war. In

¹²⁸ Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 100.

¹²⁹ Arnon Golan and Amiram Oren, "The Use of Former British Military Bases During and After the 1948 War," *Israel Affairs* 24 (February 6, 2018), 227, accessed February 04, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322970903_The_use_of_former_British_military_bases_during_and_after_the_1948_war.

¹³⁰ Moshe Rashkes, *Days of Lead: Defying Death During Israel's War of Independence* (New York: Apollo Publishers, 2018), 42-43; Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 146.

¹³¹ Tal, *War in Palestine*, 1948, 273.

this difficult time, the Israeli government conducted a total war, mobilized all national resources, and reconsidered strategic priorities, which allowed the IDF the operational reach necessary for victory.

When the first truce came into effect, the Arab armies still enjoyed military superiority in terms of weapons and ammunition, mainly in the form of aircraft, artillery, and armor.¹³² With the loss of steam in the initial thrust and the truce looming, the early advantage was lost. The appearance of similar weapons with a bigger and better-formed army turned the tide in what was to become the *Ten Day War* following the commencement of hostilities on July 9, 1948. When hostilities ceased on June 11, 1948, there was a combined force of approximately 60,000 combatants in Palestine (Jews and Arabs). By the time hostilities recommenced, numbers had surged to over 100,000 combatants.¹³³ Of these, and due in part to Ben-Gurion's conscription proclamation, about 60,000 were IDF while approximately 35,000 to 40,000 formed the combined Arab force.¹³⁴ The IDF came out of the truce as a better trained, equipped, refreshed, and established fighting force.¹³⁵ By the time the armistice was signed with the Arab nations (except Iraq which refused to sign) between February 24 and July 29, 1949, the casualty rate of 5,000 Israelis killed (civilian and military).¹³⁶ Considering that the *Yishuv* population at the start of the war was 600,000, the death toll vastly surpassed the casualty rates (proportionally) of Americans killed in World War II.¹³⁷

¹³² Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 71.

¹³³ Allon, *The Shield of David*, Loc. 3940.

¹³⁴ Nadav Safran, *Israel, the Embattled Ally* (Cambridge and London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978), 57; Ian J Bickerton. *Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History*. London, UK: Reaktion Books, Limited, 2009. Accessed February 4, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹³⁵ Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword*, 258.

¹³⁶ Ben-Gurion, *Israel: Years of Challenge*, 50.

¹³⁷ Heckelman, *American Volunteers*, 35.

In recent years, the US Army has pressed its formations to hone their battle tactics and refine their operational approach through the concept of Unified Land Operations (ULO) and focus on decisive action as the means to fight and prevail the foreseeable war.¹³⁸ Despite consolidation of gains and consolidation through reconstitution efforts as an important aspect of decisive action, it hardly has the same relevance than the more battle-focused operations.¹³⁹ During combat training events leaders at all levels often fail to give suitable consideration to the conscious efforts and deliberate push required to rebuild combat power, restructure units, and truly account for the effects of loss of materiel and personnel. In contrast, the Israeli civilian and military leadership understood - the key to their country's survival did not hinge on elaborate battle plans nor field commanders' genius in fighting decisive battles. Despite the importance of the factors mentioned above, the IDF's driving concern during the early stages of the war was the facilitation of a constant influx of personnel, integration of equipment, infusion of expertise, and the fusion of the disparate paramilitary organizations (often conflicting in purpose and methods) into a consolidated force under a unified command and control system, with a common strategy and vision.¹⁴⁰ It is for this reason that consolidation of gains with its derivative reconstitution efforts remained of vital importance to the State of Israel's survival.

The policies enacted by the Israeli government and the measures taken by the IDF offer insight into operations of the consolidation of gains and unit reconstitution. It highlights the importance of rehabilitation after achieving a stable environment in which to conduct them. If the Israelis had not pacified Palestine and neutralized the actions of Palestinian Arabs within their borders when the conventional war started, the *Yishuv* would have had to not only face the combined onslaught to their front, but also an agitated and far from cooperative population to their rear. By consolidating gains behind a contiguous line and utilizing the fortified settlement

¹³⁸ US Army, ADP 3-0 (2019), 3-1.

¹³⁹ US Army, ADP 3-0 (2019), 1-6.

¹⁴⁰ Arielli, "When Are Foreign Volunteers Useful? 703-24.

concept, the IDF was able to fight a perimeter defense and respond quickly to the piecemeal Arab offensive. The just in time arrival of foreign military assistance mixed with the shortened internal lines allowed the IDF brigades to maneuver through the battlefield quickly and respond to each crisis in turn. The established bases were far enough from the front line to allow for respite from combat operations as well as conducting the much-needed maintenance and refurbishment of their limited armor and artillery.

The first truce came at the most appropriate time and permitted the IDF to more freely receive, prioritize, and integrate equipment, and personnel without significant outside pressure as well as reshuffle of the whole command and control apparatus. Through this flexibility and after reconstitution tipped the advantage to the Israeli forces, the military was able to quickly shift combat power in the battlefield to address an adaptive enemy and defeat them in detail. The creation of a single higher army headquarters and the establishment of an unambiguous command structure streamlined the IDF's decision-making mechanism, as well as removed the diverse convoluted insular authorities in place early in the war. In addition, the effective use of mutually-supporting combined arms in pursuit of prioritized strategic objectives and accomplishment of beneficial, vital successes in multiple fronts later in the war were only made possible by the activities conducted by the IDF in the consolidation of the gains period during the first truce.

A fundamental lesson the US Army can learn from the 1948 War is the timing in which the consolidation efforts must transpire as it relates to the reconstitution of forces and acquisition of expertise, personnel, and equipment. As the Israeli case shows, these efforts should not commence at a pre-established time in between phases or during a lull in combat. Instead, as it was for the *Yishuv*, Haganah, and later the IDF leadership, planners and commanders should account for these efforts before the onset of hostilities. This preparation allowed the IDF to apply a concerted and deliberate effort to occur during the first truce and permitted the IDF to generate more combat power more quickly and effectively than the Arab military counterparts. By assuming the thrust to the sea and the eradication of Jewish resistance was to be swift and

decisive, the Arab armies failed to plan for reconstitution and regeneration efforts when the conflagration turned to a prolonged battle of attrition, which proved to be the case. The US Army cannot afford to make the mistake of the Arab armies in the 1948 War. It must not assume that a future war will be short and decisive. Therefore, if the US Army is going to prevail in future wars it must learn from the case of the IDF and lay the groundwork for consolidation of gains and reconstitution before operations commence.

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