

**Short Essay I: the Arab Defeat in the First Arab-Israeli War**

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For some, it was the First Arab-Israeli War; others describe the 9-month-long conflict between the recently established State of Israel and a military coalition of Arab States as the War of Independence or Nakba. Regardless of how the 1948 conflict is described, it cost the lives of thousands of Jews, Arabs, Palestinians, civilians, and military and set the scene for current conflicts in the region. The present paper describes the key factors that led to Arab defeat – or catastrophe – that can be summarized into consequences of colonial control, misaligned and diverging interests from all parties, and a permanent refugee crisis.

Despite being on the winning side of World War II, Great Britain was weak and unable to hold on to its empire, turning the question of the end of the British Mandate and Palestine over to the United Nations (Gettleman & Schaar, ch 5). Palestine, on the other hand, struggled with the long-lasting effects of colonial repression and the imminence of an uncertain future, particularly with the country's inability to solve internal disagreements. Cleveland & Burton (pg 266) claim, "There was no government of Palestine. Britain had failed to create political institutions in its mandate, instead leaving the Arab and Jewish communities to struggle for supremacy." Gentleman & Shaar (chapter 5) emphasize each stakeholder's hidden agenda regarding the increasing influx of (im)migrants. At the same time, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States refused to accept Jewish refugees, increasing the focus on Palestine. The Arab states found no evidence compelling enough to rectify Jewish suffering at Palestinian expense (Gettleman & Schaar, ch 5). They embraced the Palestinian cause in an unsympathetic world. The unorganized Palestinians, however, were suspicious of the Arab State's *good intentions* given that many Arab regimes, as Cleveland & Burton (pg 266) detail, were eager to gather domestic support by asserting their

newfound independence in foreign policy and dramatizing anti-imperialism – even if that meant actual military support.

On May 14, With High Commissioner Cunnigham's departure, David Ben-Gurion announced the independence of the State of Israel. Within 24 hours, Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese, Transjordan, and Iranian forces launched an attack on Israel on multiple fronts. However, if the Palestinian forces lacked coordination, so did the Arab States, as "each of the Arab states participating in the invasion in fact placed its own interests first" (Cleveland & Bunton, pg. 268). The Israeli forces, on the other hand, were "motivated by the belief that they were engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the very existence of a Jewish state" (Cleveland & Burton, pg 268). In summary, Israel had the motivation, the resources, and the support to fight for their newborn country post-Holocaust, solidifying the idea of a "War of Independence." All the Arab states – with the exception of King Abdallah's Arab Legion - were not only "poorly prepared, poorly equipped, and poorly led; they were also outnumbered" (Cleveland & Bunton, pg 267).

Shifting the war narrative from the Haganah and the Arab military to the civilians, more and more Arab Palestinians evacuated their lands, either due to Arab leaders' encouragement to flee or due to Israeli forces, culminating in more than 700,000 displaced Palestinians (Gettleman & Schaar, ch 5). What was considered a "normal reaction of a civilian population to nearby fighting" was transformed into a permanent mass exodus (Cleveland & Bunton, pg 268). These refugees sought asylum in "substandard housing in the crowded campus of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, or in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria" despite the UN General Assembly's Resolution #194 that called for the return of the Palestinians to their homes (Gettleman & Schaar, ch 5). The controversial – and often misinterpreted – Plan D was the Haganah's campaign against potentially hostile Arab villages, resulting in the "systemic expulsion of the Palestinian Arabs living within

the area allocated to the Jewish state,” with only 160,000 Arabs remaining within the borders of Israel (Cleveland & Bunton, pg 270).

Perhaps the most significant Arab defeat of 1948 was not losing the war itself in a “disaster” but replacing a problem with a bigger and more complex one at their own expense, now encompassing a Middle Eastern refugee crisis, regional political and humanitarian crisis, and a dubious reputation against the Israeli underdog image.

**Word count:** 708

## References

- Cleveland, W. L., & Bunton, M. (2009). *A History of the Modern Middle East* (4th ed.). Westview Press.
- Gettleman, M., & Schaar, S. (Eds.). (1997). *The Middle East and Islamic World Reader*. Grove Press.

## **Appendix A - LO Appendix**

**#il12001\_regionalconflicts:** The essay provides a comprehensive understanding of sources and ramifications of the First Arab-Israeli War and explores the consequences of colonial control, misaligned interests, and a refugee crisis. The essay includes a historical background starting from the British Mandate, unresolved internal disagreements in Palestine, conflicting agendas of various stakeholders, and the military dynamics that led to the Arab defeat. I also demonstrate a deep, holistic understanding of the conflict by presenting the Palestinian, Israeli, and Arab perspectives, arguing what could be the “real” Arab defeat.

**AI statement:** Although I used ChatGPT to summarize the main reasons why the Arabs lost the first Arab-Israeli war, I did not use this information in the essay. Instead, I read the books multiple times and wrote the entire essay myself.