

AS JEWISH SETTLEMENT in Palestine burgeoned toward the end of the nineteenth century, it also gave birth to renewed manifestations of political violence. Although for the most part this was a nationally rather than religiously motivated struggle, we have chosen to review this period in light of the fact that the terrorist activities of some of the groups active during this time will serve as a link between the historical era of Jewish terrorism and modern-day Jewish terrorism. Many later perpetrators of terrorism were inspired by the Jewish struggle at the turn of the twentieth century and in fact refer to it.

Near the end of the Ottoman rule, these acts of violence were carried out primarily in self-defense by militias led by the Bar-Giora<sup>1</sup> and Hashomer<sup>2</sup> organizations. In view of the authorities' lassitude in defending Jewish settlements from the attacks of their Arab neighbors, these groups decided to resort to arms and take into their own hands the task of protecting their communities.<sup>3</sup> However, despite the determination of these groups, the option of engaging in systematic terrorism was not viable. These actions were an early indication of the differential attitudes of the various Jewish ideological streams to the use of violence. The leaders of the political left who enjoyed a dominant status at that time believed that violence should be exercised in an orderly fashion. This was the combat doctrine that they bequeathed to the Haganah organization and its military arm, the Palmach. Despite the informal nature of the relationships between members of the Palmach, which in due course became myth and later served as an example for many Israel Defense Forces (IDF) units, the organization assumed a paramilitary structure that was designed to form the blueprint for the future army of the sovereign Jewish state. The forces were divided according to military corps, including air force, marine, intelligence units and regional commands. The organization's higher ranks developed structured warfare doctrines intended to be of use in the struggle against the

violent Palestinian groups at the time.<sup>4</sup> The Palestinian groups were based in and operated from the villages and were dubbed gangs by leaders of the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine). In any event, although many of the Palmach operations can be described as guerrilla raids, it is difficult to pin down occasions in which the organization actually mounted campaigns of terrorism.

Among the right-wing movements, however, this was not the case. The Etzel (also known as the Irgun) and the Lehi (also known as the Stern Gang), formerly active as one group, drew their ideology from the Revisionist perspective of Ze'ev Jabotinsky.<sup>5</sup> This Zionist ideologue believed that a Judaized Land of Israel should include both banks of the Jordan River, and as early as the 1920s he had already demanded that the Zionist movement lead the campaign against the British Mandate authorities with a forceful hand.<sup>6</sup> The Etzel was founded in Jerusalem in April 1931 and steadfastly reflected the ideas of Jabotinsky, who regarded political violence solely as a means of achieving the goal of establishing a sovereign and democratic Jewish state.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the people of Lehi, which splintered off from the Etzel in June 1940, considered the use of violence and terrorism a crucial component in the evolution of the Jewish nation. Its objective was to enable the Jewish people to liberate themselves from the defeatist disposition that typified Jewish communities in the Diaspora.<sup>8</sup> Although the majority of the members of these two groups were secular, their ideology gave prominence to the affinity between religion and nationalism. Leaders of the groups tended to embrace Jewish mythology and to draw a direct line between the stories from the Bible and their own struggle for Jewish independence. Whereas the leaders of the Etzel resolved that the struggle against the British Mandate authorities was a holy war of duty against enemies of the Jewish people,<sup>9</sup> the Lehi faction went one step further. This group's teachings, which were influenced to no small degree by European fascism, also incorporated messianic elements. The "Essentials of Revival," Lehi's public platform, gave preeminence to the aspiration of building a Third Temple. Lehi leaders even declared themselves the successors to the Jewish zealots from the Second Temple era.<sup>10</sup> It therefore comes as no surprise that the doctrine of the Lehi organization—the smallest among the active underground groups in the pre-State of Israel era—became one of the principal sources of inspiration for future national-religious terrorist groups in Israel in the following decades.

Despite the essential differences in the reasons that led to the emergence of Jewish terrorism (and the features of the groups that committed this terrorism) during the British Mandate, it is possible to point out some similarities to the groups that operated after the founding of the state. The withdrawal of Avraham Tehomi and his colleagues from the Haganah organization in order to establish the Etzel on April 10, 1931, had an obvious political motivation. Tehomi and his people belonged to the Revisionist stream and found it difficult to accept the absolute authority of the leftist movements from the Haganah leadership. However, this was not the sole deliberation or main reason in their decision to break away.<sup>11</sup> The members of the founding core group of the Etzel were categorically opposed to the Haganah's post-1929 official policy. After the events of that year—the destruction of the Jewish settlement in Hebron—the Haganah chose a passive policy of self-restraint with the intention of demonstrating to the British Mandate authorities that the Jewish Yishuv had no interest in fueling the tensions with the Palestinian national movement.<sup>12</sup> Tehomi and his Jerusalemite associates concluded that it was no longer possible to continue to belong to a group whose worldview differed so greatly from theirs.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the structure of the Jerusalem group apparently had a role in the dynamics that led to their departure. The group led by Tehomi was a very condensed social network whose members saw themselves as belonging to one family that was exclusively responsible for the Jews' security in Jerusalem, and they devoted nearly all their time to this purpose. Most of them were veteran members who had known each other before immigrating to Eretz Israel from their connections in Odessa. Sometimes they were even called the Odessa Group. The tight bonds between members of the group prevented internal disputes or confrontations regarding the idea of splitting off from the Haganah. At the same time, they also fed an escalating internal dynamic within the group; its members would stir each other up in their resentment toward the policy of the Haganah organization.<sup>14</sup>

Directly after the declaration of their departure, members of the Jerusalem group made overtures to the Betar Movement and other political bodies of the civilian and religious right. In addition, by exploiting family and friendship ties, they were successful in recruiting additional youths and extending the reaches of their network.<sup>15</sup> The first five years of the Etzel's activities were devoted to shaping the network into an underground

with paramilitary features and heightening the ideological differences between them and the Haganah. Etzel activities focused primarily on the struggle against restrictions imposed by the British Mandate authorities on the immigration of Jews to Eretz Israel. Its members smuggled immigrants into the country by evading the coastal blockade and helping them blend in among the veteran population.<sup>16</sup>

The Great Arab Revolt (also known as the Great Uprising),<sup>17</sup> the most significant event up to that point in the crystallization of the Palestinian national movement, was the key factor that prompted the heads of the Etzel to adopt terrorist tactics as a strategy. While the Haganah leadership still clung to the policy of restraint,<sup>18</sup> as far as the Etzel were concerned, the only way to deal with attacks perpetrated by Palestinian terrorist networks against the Jewish population was to pay them back in kind. This meant that they would terrorize Palestinian citizens in the attempt to sow fear in their communities and weaken their support for the Arab Revolt.<sup>19</sup> The Etzel's first act of terrorism was the murder of two Palestinian workers in a banana grove in the Sharon<sup>20</sup> region on April 20, 1936.<sup>21</sup> Between 1936 and 1939, there was a noticeable escalation in the degree of sophistication and cruelty of both the Palestinian groups and the Etzel as they carried out actions aimed at harming large numbers of civilians. Subsequently, the number of victims increased on both sides. By the time the Arab Revolt began to flag in 1939, Etzel had become highly skilled in executing acts of terrorism. Over three years, the group carried out sixty operations that took the lives of more than 120 Palestinians and injured hundreds more.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the temporary lull in the violent struggle with the Palestinian national movement, Etzel activists did not remain idle. Irgun commanders directed the substantial experience their men had accumulated in guerrilla actions and terrorism toward a new target: the British Mandate authorities. The immediate basis for this was a new series of immigration and land acquisition restrictions imposed by Mandate authorities on the Jewish Yishuv.<sup>23</sup> Whereas terrorist acts against Palestinians focused mainly on civilians, attacks on the British aimed at targets with more symbolic significance. One reason was that the British presence in Eretz Israel was chiefly military and administrative, so civilians were not included in the circle of potential victims. Yet this was not the only motive. For the Etzel, it was also important to build up prestige among the Jewish public.<sup>24</sup> Among the more prominent operations of the Etzel at that time were attacks on income

tax bureaus and the Central Post Office in Jerusalem. However, the most notorious incident was the attack on the British Government Broadcasting House in the Melisende neighborhood in Jerusalem. After deciding to strike at this institution, the Etzel considered a forceful break-in but ruled out this option after discovering that the building was under continuous surveillance by British Army patrols. Therefore, it decided to plant an undercover agent disguised as a worker at the broadcasting station. In the early morning on August 2, 1939, the agent, whose code name was "Meir,"<sup>25</sup> made his way to the Royal Broadcasting House carrying three packages loaded with mines. The packages had been provided to him by his Etzel operators and were labeled "On His Majesty's Service." He also wore a jacket especially tailored for him containing a mine rigged to a stopwatch. After gaining entrance to the building with no particular difficulty, he hung his jacket on a coat hanger in the control room and placed the packages in the studio rooms. At 5:20 P.M., the mine in the control room exploded, killing a technician who was working there. Immediately afterwards, the packages in the studios blew up and one of the station's employees, May Weisenberg, who was broadcasting a youth program in English, was seriously injured and later died of her wounds. The building was severely damaged, and broadcasts were discontinued and relocated to the British broadcasting station in Ramallah.<sup>26</sup>

Etzel also targeted British police and army men known for their tough attitudes toward Jewish prisoners. The group's intention was to create a balance of terror with the Mandate authorities and force members of the police to reconsider their methods of interrogating Jewish detainees.<sup>27</sup> In particular, the assassination of Ralph Carnes by Etzel militants received wide publicity. Carnes was the head of the Jewish Division of the Palestine Police Force's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and, according to the Etzel, tortured detainees apprehended by the British police. Because the CID continued to ignore the demands of the Etzel leadership to halt the abuse of Jewish detainees, the Etzel command issued a death sentence on Carnes's head.<sup>28</sup> Directly after the decree, members of the Etzel began shadowing the officer. They discovered that he lived in the peaceful Gan Rehaviah quarter of Jerusalem and that a dirt path of some 100 yards, flanked by buildings in different stages of construction, had to be crossed in order to reach his home. With this information, the Etzel people concluded that the path leading to Carnes's house was an ideal location for

carrying out the assassination. The date set for the operation was August 26, 1939. On the night before the operation, members of the Etzel planted a high-powered electric mine on the path leading to Carnes's house. They made a small hole in the ground marking the exact location of the mine, and an electric wire was stretched from the mine to the foundations of an unfinished house nearby. In this empty building, Etzel member Haim Corfu hid on the day of the assassination. He was disguised as a police officer and was responsible for detonating the mine at the right moment by means of a battery connected to the electric wire. When Carnes and a colleague, Ronald Barker, head of the Arab Division of the CID, returned home in the evening, they did not notice an innocent-looking couple, Marti Gross and Tikvah Yisraeli, who stood at the entrance to the path. After Carnes walked past them, Marti removed his cap from his head. This was the sign for Corfu that Carnes was in fact the person walking along the path. When Carnes and Barker reached the area where the mine had been planted, Corfu connected the battery to the wire using a special push-button switch and the mine exploded, killing the two officers on the spot.<sup>29</sup>

After the incident, the British Army commander in Jerusalem ordered the immediate closure of all Jewish cafés and movie theaters in Jerusalem until further notice. In response, the Etzel headquarters issued a warning that "any detective who dares abuse a Jewish prisoner will be put to death."<sup>30</sup>

#### THE SPLIT BETWEEN THE ETZEL AND THE LEHI

World War II posed a tough challenge for the Etzel. While Mandate authorities in Palestine continued their heavy-handed policy toward the Jewish Yishuv, the British Army was also at the forefront of the struggle against Nazi Germany. The Irgun's decision was to suspend their campaign against the Mandate authorities as long as the British were engaged in the attempt to defeat the Nazi enemy.<sup>31</sup> High-ranking members of the Etzel even volunteered to join the British Army, and on May 20, 1941, David Razieli, commander of the Etzel, was killed in the line of duty. He was hit directly by a bomb dropped by a German fighter plane while leading a small unit of Irgun members on an intelligence mission near Fallujah in Iraq. Razieli's Etzel cell had been on assignment for the British Army.<sup>32</sup> The willingness of high-ranking Etzel members to join forces with the

Mandate authorities was a thorn in the side of some members of the Etzel, headed by Avraham (Yair) Stern. In June 1940, the dispute reached the stage where it became a personal crisis between Raziel and Stern.<sup>33</sup> The latter decided to leave the Etzel and to form a new group: the "Etzel in Eretz Israel," which in due course became known as the Lehi (the Hebrew acronym for "Fighters for the Freedom of Israel").

Despite its collaboration with the British, the Etzel was not idle. The group's leaders took advantage of the World War II period to further establish its institutions. Similar to the Palmach, it set up a general headquarters, which was to be in charge of operational commands situated according to geographic jurisdiction. In addition, staff units were founded. During these years, the Etzel developed the warfare doctrine that was to become its trademark: deploying small units specializing in urban warfare and surprise attacks.<sup>34</sup>

The home front of the struggle against the British was not neglected. The Lehi moved in to fill the vacuum left behind by the Etzel. However, Stern's plans and his people were not as productive. In the Lehi's early days, the organization consisted of a small group of militants who lacked operational experience.<sup>35</sup> Their initial actions were mostly failed attempts at robbing banks in order to finance their struggle. The inadvertent killing of two Jewish bystanders during one of these failed robberies in January 1942 led to a substantial fall in the group's morale.<sup>36</sup> To make matters worse, three police were killed—two of them Jewish—during an attempt to assassinate the commander of the CID in the Lod region on January 20 of that same year.<sup>37</sup> This incident evoked rage across the board in the Jewish Yishuv and led to a collaboration between the British authorities and the Jewish Agency in the effort to subdue the various Jewish undergrounds.<sup>38</sup>

By the end of January 1942, many Lehi militants had been caught and detained. One month later, Stern was also shot dead.<sup>39</sup> In the wake of these events, members of the group scattered in all directions, and the organization became almost completely inoperative. Eight months later, the group reorganized after two of its main activists, Yitzhak Shamir and Eliyahu Giliadi, escaped from detention. Shamir and Giliadi began to reestablish connections between members and prepare them for action.<sup>40</sup> In November 1943, Natan Yellin-Mor and Yisrael Eldad (Scheib) also fled from jail, a development that breathed new life into the group.<sup>41</sup> While Yellin-Mor helped his associates in their efforts to restore the operational capabilities of

the Lehi, Eldad devoted his time to authoring and circulating articles that were called cornerstones. Eldad's writings relied heavily on the mythology of the Jewish zealots and at the same time raised objections to socialist Zionism. They were adopted by Lehi members as their ideological doctrine and turned out to be quite effective in recruiting public support.<sup>42</sup> In due course, these writings became the unifying ideological base for the different Jewish terrorist groups in the sovereign State of Israel.

In February 1944, the Lehi made its comeback to the cycle of terrorism. However, once again, members of the group proved to be amateurs in comparison to their Etzel counterparts. The gunfire attacks they initiated against British soldiers in the streets of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem<sup>43</sup> led to another wave of arrests of Lehi members.<sup>44</sup> In early August 1944, the Lehi higher ranks sought to upgrade the level of their actions by carrying out a high-profile political assassination they hoped would make waves far and wide. The chosen target was British High Commissioner Harold MacMichael, whom the Lehi considered the main culprit responsible for what they perceived as the British government's ongoing abuse of the Jews and their rights.<sup>45</sup> However, this time they were unsuccessful; no less than seven attempts on MacMichael's life ended in failure.<sup>46</sup> Their first attempt consisted of planting a mine in a sewage pipe near the side exit of the church where MacMichael prayed every Sunday. However, despite the remote control mechanism installed the night before, on the day of the planned detonation, the mine simply refused to explode. It turned out that the wires connecting the mine to the detonating mechanism were faulty.<sup>47</sup> On another occasion, Lehi militants tried to shoot the commissioner near the government publishing house. They conducted numerous stakeouts of the location in order to gather intelligence about his routine. However, after raising the suspicions of some nuns who also interfered with the preparations, the Lehi leaders decided to call off the operation.<sup>48</sup> Additional plots were to attack MacMichael while he was taking the train or visiting a movie theater in Jerusalem; however, the capture of Lehi members several days before the appointed operation dates led to their cancellation in the fear that knowledge of the plans might reach the British.<sup>49</sup> After several more failed attempts, at last they resolved to attack the commissioner on the way to his farewell party that was to take place in Yaffo (Jaffa). The Lehi group decided that the ideal location for carrying out the assassination was on the road from Jerusalem to Yaffo. They planned to

position a small group of observers at the third mile on the highway from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv, where the road curved and cars had to slow down. This small group would signal to another cell of their members disguised as surveyors on the side of the road to put up a roadblock made of rocks. As the convoy slowed down, mines would be detonated and Lehi guerrillas would storm the convoy with automatic fire and hand grenades. If the commissioner still remained unharmed by this ambush, a third unit would spring into action a few hundred yards down the road from the first ambush.<sup>50</sup> However, on the morning of the target day, problems already began to crop up. The wires connecting the mines to the detonators at the side of the road got entangled and the Lehi people were not able to unravel them, so they decided to give up the idea of the mines. Then, at 4 P.M., an Arab laborer arrived at the scene and began to remove the pile of rocks prepared in advance for the roadblock. Instead of the roadblock idea, the Lehi people decided to launch smoke grenades in order to slow down the convoy. When the procession of vehicles finally appeared at 4:10 P.M., the militants threw smoke grenades and charged the vehicles. Several minutes later, the commanding officer of the operation, Yehoshua Cohen, gave the order to withdraw because he was sure they had been successful in their mission. It turned out that Commissioner MacMichael had suffered only light injuries thanks to his driver's initiative. The moment that the driver became aware of the smoke grenades, he diverted the car to the side of the road and escaped by driving down a dirt lane along the side of the mountain.<sup>51</sup> Only in late 1944, when Lord Moyne was assassinated, did the Lehi finally gain the public recognition it so keenly sought.

#### THE ASSASSINATION OF LORD MOYNE

Cairo is a sweaty, colorful, and noisy city and a stark contrast from gray, rainy London. Therefore it was not surprising that British emissaries in the Egyptian capital in the 1930s and 1940s longed for an island of peace that would help them forget their placement in the Middle East. The Zamalek neighborhood, a posh suburb of Cairo, provided them with the quiet they sought. On the afternoon of November 6, 1944, the peace and quiet was sharply disturbed. A volley of gunshots tore into the midday calm of the drowsy neighborhood. A car belonging to Walter Edward Guinness, minister resident in the Middle East on behalf of the British Empire, who was also known by his royal title, Lord Moyne, halted in front of his house.

Inside the car, Lord Moyne was engaged in conversation with his adjutant and his personal secretary and did not spot the figure quickly approaching his car.<sup>52</sup> At his side, the adjutant noticed something was amiss and instinctively lay across the back seat and shielded his superior with his body. In this way, he sealed his own fate. He was the first one to succumb to the shots from the gun of the assassin who opened the back door of the car.<sup>53</sup> However, the assassin did not intend to leave the vicinity until he had completed his mission. The second volley of shots was aimed directly at Moyne's body. After confirming the British minister's death, the assassin retreated and joined his partner, who was waiting for him at the entrance to the house. The two then mounted their bikes and quickly took flight in the direction of the Bollaack Bridge.<sup>54</sup> An Egyptian traffic officer who was stationed not far from the site of the murder heard the sudden commotion. The two youths riding fast on their bikes raised his suspicions, and he called them to halt. They ignored his shouts and rode even faster, but the officer did not lose his head. He drew his gun, aimed it at the retreating figures, and began to shoot. A bullet penetrated the back of one of the riders and cut short his flight. The second rider, who was unharmed and heard the cries of his accomplice, came back and tried to help him. Several officers summoned to the scene apprehended the both of them.<sup>55</sup>

In the investigation that followed, the perpetrators identified themselves as nineteen-year-old Eliahu Hakim, a Jew from Haifa, and Eliahu Beit-Tsouri, a twenty-two-year-old resident of Tel Aviv. Already in the first stage of the investigation, the two affirmed their membership in the Lehi and immediately confessed to the murder. The trial of Hakim and Beit-Tsouri was conducted in Cairo in the second week of January 1945 and captured the attention of the world media. Among other things, this was because the two stated peremptorily that they were not criminals and that the murder of Lord Moyne was a political action. Its aim was to censure the British authorities for breaking their promise to aid the Jewish people in establishing a sovereign entity in "Eretz Israel."<sup>56</sup>

The target of Lord Moyne was not chosen at random. The notion of assassinating a high-profile British figure in the Middle East had already been conceived by Avraham (Yair) Stern, leader of the Lehi, as far back as 1941 and three years before Moyne had even assumed his duties in this role. Its implementation was delayed because Richard Casey, Moyne's predecessor, was an Australian and Stern was keen on striking at an unmistakable

and distinctive symbol of the United Kingdom.<sup>57</sup> Lord Moyné was the embodiment of exactly what Stern and his Lehi associates despised. In his previous position as secretary of state for the colonies, he exhibited a persistent pro-Arab inclination and took great care in adhering to the policy of restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine.<sup>58</sup> As far as the Lehi were concerned, Lord Moyné's actions reflected his fundamental anti-Semitic leanings. The much-disputed actions of the British police in the winter of 1942 greatly increased the already existing hostility felt toward him.

In February 1942, British police forces broke into a small residential apartment on 8 Mizrahi Street in the Florentine quarter of Tel Aviv. According to police information, a woman by the name of Tova Svorai rented an apartment that was used as a hiding place for Stern.<sup>59</sup> During this operation, the Lehi chief was found hiding in a closet in the apartment. After confirming his identity, the police shot the unarmed Stern and killed him. A short while later, they smuggled his body out of the apartment and forced Stern's family to bury him on the same day.<sup>60</sup> The British police claimed that Stern had resisted arrest, and they had had no alternative but to shoot him. Although this version was not corroborated, the intelligence officers who propounded it were backed by high-ranking officials of the British Empire. One of the most prominent voices to praise the police's actions was that of the colonial secretary.<sup>61</sup> For the Lehi leaders, the die was cast. They decided to launch the operation in Cairo, Lord Moyné's home base, and not on one of his visits to Palestine because they believed it essential to send a signal to the British authorities that officials of the British Empire were not safe anywhere in the Middle East.

The operation in Egypt required an intelligence and logistic infrastructure. To this end, the Lehi relied on a network of Jewish collaborators who operated in Egypt from within the ranks of the British Army. The key figure of the network was Benjamin Gafner, ex-member of the Etzel who volunteered to serve in the British Army and was posted in Egypt. Gafner was able to lay the foundations of an intricate network of connections consisting of Jewish soldiers who ideologically identified with the Lehi. In its early days, the network's primary function was to distribute *The Hazzit* (*The Front*), the Lehi organ, in Egypt.<sup>62</sup> In addition, members made efforts to steal weapons from British Army depots and dispense them to activists in the underground. In the first half of 1943, network activity was slowed down because Gafner, the life and soul of the group, was assigned to a

special unit of the British Army whose task was to rescue pilots who landed in German-controlled territories. Gafner's unit rescued more than 500 soldiers of the Allied forces from behind enemy lines, and he received a medal of distinction.<sup>63</sup> In June 1944, Gafner returned from Europe and met with Yitzhak Shamir, one of the Lehi commanders. Shamir informed him of the plan in progress to assassinate Moyné and asked him to recruit a network of activists in Egypt for this purpose. Gafner gladly agreed to this mission and, upon his return to Egypt, began to make preparations. To his chagrin, a short while later he was instructed by his officers in the British Army to rejoin his unit in Europe. Having no other choice, Gafner transferred authority of the network to one of his closest friends, Yosef Sitner, of the British Royal Air Force who was serving in Egypt at the time as a bulldozer operator. Sitner made good on the trust put in him. He assigned members of the network to different cells while concealing the nature of the planned operation from most of the activists; he even made sure that the cells had no knowledge of each other. The main role of the network was to conduct a constant surveillance of Moyné's daily routine and relay information to the assassination plotters in order to help them establish the most opportune place and time for carrying out the operation.<sup>64</sup>

Late in the summer of 1944, Eliahu Hakim arrived in Cairo. Natan Yellin-Mor, Shamir's associate in the underground leadership, was responsible for assigning the mission to Hakim. Yellin-Mor had been impressed by Hakim's marksman skills and also assumed that because of his Lebanese origins and command of Arabic, he would find it easier to blend into the Egyptian milieu.<sup>65</sup> Hakim introduced himself to Sitner using the alias Yitzhak Cohen and was promptly incorporated into the Moyné stakeout assignment. In order to help him find his way around the streets of Cairo and at the same time remove any sign of suspicion, he was joined by a handsome woman introduced to him as "Yaffa." The two of them began to stroll the streets of the Egyptian capital, and to a typical bystander they appeared to be nothing other than a couple in love.<sup>66</sup>

The decision to carry out the assassination close to Lord Moyné's residence was Hakim's idea because he was apprehensive about the heightened military presence around the minister's office. On October 18, 1944, Beit-Tsouri joined Hakim. The Lehi leaders assumed that in order to complete the operation, more than one assassin would be necessary. Despite his youth, Beit-Tsouri had earned the respect of both the Etzel and Lehi organizations.

He had established his reputation in one of the Etzel operations before the split between the two undergrounds. In this operation, Beit-Tsouri, who had impressive technical skills, had noticed that one of the mines carried by his commander had been assembled incorrectly and was about to explode. He warned his commander, deactivated the mine, and saved several of his colleagues from death.<sup>67</sup> The Lehi leaders decided that the capable and cool-headed youth would be an ideal partner for Hakim.

On his way to Cairo, Beit-Tsouri received news that was a source of significant concern. Siner and other key figures of the network had suddenly been taken into custody by the British authorities, and the assassination planners feared the detentions were caused by an information leak about the operation.<sup>68</sup> Several days later, it turned out that the arrests had been a preemptive measure in anticipation of the upcoming convention of the first Arab summit, which was to take place in Egypt. Despite the collapse of their supporting network, Hakim and Beit-Tsouri decided to continue with the operation on their own.<sup>69</sup>

The trial of the two perpetrators began on January 10, 1945, and quickly developed into a gripping drama. Hakim and Beit-Tsouri, who confessed to the assassination, turned the hearings into a platform for slamming British imperialism and were even successful in winning the sympathy of Egyptian public opinion.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately for them, this success was not of much help as far as their verdict was concerned. On January 18, the two were found guilty and sentenced to death. However, this still did not signify the end of their struggle. Despite the custom of carrying out the verdict within three weeks of the day of its reading, political pressure was applied both within Cairo and outside to commute their sentence. Winston Churchill himself put an end to the whole affair. Churchill, who had been close to Lord Moyne, delivered a speech on February 27 before the British Parliament in which he emphatically demanded "that the implementation of the verdict that was issued in regard to people who were found guilty of political murder—be quick and exemplary."<sup>71</sup> Less than a month later, on March 22, Hakim and Beit-Tsouri were executed by hanging.

#### FROM THE SEASON TO THE UNITED RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

The assassination turned out to be a double-edged sword. For the British and the Haganah, this episode was a catalyst for strengthening operational ties intended to bring about the dissolution of the right-wing under-

grounds.<sup>72</sup> This period, also known as the Hunting Season, or Season for short, left a deep scar in the Israeli collective memory for many years. Haganah members not only desisted from granting refuge to people from the Lehi and Etzel, they gathered intelligence about them and in several cases even handed them over to the Mandate authorities.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Palmach fighters took part in the abductions and interrogations of members of right-wing undergrounds.<sup>74</sup> Members of the Lehi were the first to break under the pressure; they halted their activities a short while after the initiation of the Season.<sup>75</sup> The Etzel, on the other hand, continued its operations against the British until late February 1945. Menachem Begin, head of the underground who was forced to go into hiding, encouraged his people not to lay down their arms, but at the same time he instructed them not to aim their guns at the Yishuv leaders for fear of a causing a rift among the Jewish public that would never heal.<sup>76</sup>

By the winter of 1945, both sides were battle-weary. The Etzel had suffered blows that made it almost impossible to pursue its activities, and the Jewish Agency came under heavy public pressure and was accused of persecuting its political rivals.<sup>77</sup> Several months later, as the dimensions of the Holocaust of European Jewry began to unfold, together with the disappointment in the newly elected Labor government's decision to persist in the Mandate authorities' heavy-handed Jewish refugee immigration policy, the United Resistance Movement was established.<sup>78</sup> This was an umbrella movement that coordinated the actions of the Haganah, Etzel, and Lehi. Despite the rivalry between the different organizations, the Yishuv leadership realized that collaboration between all the factions would give the Zionist movement much greater leverage in the face of British and world opinion. With this in mind, leaders of the Haganah began to initiate negotiations between the different factions in August 1945, and in October of that year, the alliance was signed.<sup>79</sup>

Each of the underground groups sent a representative to the United Resistance Movement whose primary role was to approve actions devised by the different groups and to ensure that they conformed with the interests of the Jewish community in general. On June 29, 1946, 17,000 British soldiers raided Jewish settlements and arrested more than 2,700 members of the different undergrounds on what became known as the Black Sabbath.<sup>80</sup> The unprecedented wave of arrests and unearthing of weapon caches were a critical blow for the operative capacities of the Jewish undergrounds, especially

the Haganah.<sup>81</sup> Heads of the United Resistance Movement tasked the Etzel with the responsibility for a reprisal. The disastrous results of this operation ultimately led to the dismantling of the underground alliance. About one month after the Black Sabbath, on July 26, members of an Etzel cell disguised as Arabs infiltrated the kitchen of the Café La Regence at the lavish King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The hotel had originally opened its doors in 1931 and seven years later was transformed into the nerve center of the British Mandate authorities in Palestine. Members of the cell placed milk containers full of explosives in the southern wing of the hotel and then quickly left the vicinity. Despite the fact that the Etzel gave warning of the explosives, the hotel management was not able to evacuate all its occupants. The ensuing explosion caused the collapse of the southern wing of the hotel; and 91 Britons, Arabs, and Jews were buried under the ruins, and 476 more were injured. The leaders of the Haganah were shocked at the results of the operation and strongly condemned the Etzel.<sup>82</sup>

They equally frowned on Lehi organization activities, although these did not include an active part in the attack on the hotel. Several months earlier, however, leaders of the Haganah had already voiced a strong protest against the Lehi attack on the British Army base on Yarkon Street in Tel Aviv because British soldiers had been killed in their sleep. The attack had been carried out against the soldiers of the British 6th Airborne Division, who were also popularly called Kalaniot (Hebrew for "anemones") because of their red caps, and they were infamous for their strong-arm tactics.<sup>83</sup> They were sleeping in their tents when Lehi fighters set upon them with gunfire and grenades.<sup>84</sup> In their defense, the Lehi people argued that the soldiers had not been sleeping and that seven of their own members had been killed during the course of the gunfight. A British armored vehicle arrived at the scene several minutes later with reinforcements so that, in any event, the Lehi militants were forced to retreat in the direction of the Kerem Hareimanim (Yemenite Vineyard) neighborhood in Tel Aviv.<sup>85</sup> Condemnation of the Lehi operation was widespread, principally regarding the immoral disregard for "purity of arms" (the Hebrew expression for the reasonable or justifiable use of weapons). This incident increased the feelings among the United Resistance leaders that they were losing control over the amount of violence perpetrated by the undergrounds.<sup>86</sup> Finally, in the summer of 1946, and mostly because of the differences of opinion in the United Resistance Movement,

the short era of collusion between the assorted undergrounds came to an end.<sup>87</sup>

Not long after the United Resistance Movement disbanded, the Haganah and the British reached a ceasefire agreement. Nevertheless, the Etzel and the Lehi continued their activities with a vengeance. Among the more prominent operations of the Etzel in those months was the attempt to prevent the execution of three organization members, Meir Narkar, Avshalom Haviv, and Yaakov Weiss, by kidnapping two British sergeants.<sup>88</sup> The Etzel higher command hoped to force the Mandate authorities to reduce the verdict of the three in exchange for the release of the British abductees. After the Mandate authorities rejected the ultimatum and executed the three prisoners, the Etzel retaliated by hanging the two sergeants in a grove near Netanya.<sup>89</sup> Another major Etzel operation at that time was the raid of the Akko (Acre) prison on May 4, 1947. On that day, a convoy consisting of an army truck, two army vans in British camouflage colors, and two civilian vans set out for Akko. When they arrived at the port city, the truck and the two army vans made their way to the local market, not far from the ancient Ottoman fortress where the prison was located. The Etzel operatives were disguised as members of a British engineering army unit who had come to fix the telephone lines. They began to scale the ladders they brought with them and were able to climb onto the roof of the building next to the fortress. From this vantage point, using large hooks and ropes, they mounted explosive charges on the wall of the fortress. At the same time, another unit in one of the civilian vans took up position at the northern entrance to Akko. At 4:22 P.M., after the charges affixed to the wall had been detonated, this unit began to bombard the adjoining army complex with mortar fire. After the wall collapsed, there was a mass scramble of prisoners for freedom, and Etzel operatives collected their colleagues into waiting trucks and vans. Although twenty-seven members of the Etzel and Lehi succeeded in escaping, the incident claimed the lives of nine Etzel operatives.<sup>90</sup> More than 180 Arab prisoners took advantage of the operation to make their escape.<sup>91</sup>

#### THE PARTITION PLAN

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution on November 29, 1947, authorizing the partitioning of Eretz Israel and the establishment of two states, was warmly received by most of the Yishuv. The Lehi, on the other



hand, perceived it as a British conspiracy intended to shore up control over the Middle East.<sup>92</sup> The organization responded to the partition plan with a series of terrorist attacks, which included the bombing of the offices of the British shipping company in Haifa, shooting attacks on police in Jerusalem, and a brazen attack on the Astoria Café in Haifa. In the latter incident, which targeted British soldiers and police who frequented the café, three Lehi members equipped with machine guns and grenades stormed into the restaurant, began spraying gunfire in all directions, and then made their getaway in a car waiting outside for them.<sup>93</sup>

The British Army's preparations for the end of the military presence in Palestine and the Yishuv leaders' fear of a fresh outbreak of fighting with the Arabs once the Mandate was terminated prompted the underground movements to reconcile their differences. They decided once more to collaborate, this time within a military framework that in May 1948 became the IDF.<sup>94</sup> However, relations between the various groups again turned sour. In the case of Etzel, this was caused by the *Altalena* incident, in which the weapons ship bearing this name was sunk by the newly founded Israeli army on June 22, 1948, during the first break in the battles of the War of Independence.<sup>95</sup> To this day there are differences of opinion regarding the motives of the Israeli government in its decision to sink the ship. In addition to the Etzel members on the *Altalena*, the ship also carried weapons directly needed by the fledgling Israeli army, which was engaged in a tough war. At any rate, there is agreement about the way the events took place.<sup>96</sup> The ship and the weapons onboard had been purchased by the Etzel before the declaration establishing the state and integrating the Irgun into the IDF. When Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion realized that the ship was making its way to Israel, he demanded that Menachem Begin consign the weapons onboard to the army. Begin did not turn down the request but stipulated that when the armaments were divided, preference would be granted to the Jerusalem battalion, which consisted of members of his organization and other army units with a larger Etzel representation. Both sides dug in their heels while the ship continued its trip across the Mediterranean Sea. When the *Altalena* finally berthed off the Kfar Vitkin coastline, waiting Etzel operatives started unloading its weapons. Ben-Gurion insisted that they halt the unloading at once. In the meanwhile, Begin had arrived at the site, and the standoff between his Etzel militants and the soldiers of the Alexandroni Brigade who were surrounding them rapidly deteriorated into

an exchange of gunfire. At the end of this battle, six Etzel and two brigade members had been killed.<sup>97</sup> The ensuing ceasefire reached by both sides made it possible for Menachem Begin to board the ship at the head of a small force of Etzel members. He then set sail for the Tel Aviv shoreline, where he hoped to receive aid from his supporters. At the same time, Ben-Gurion would not agree to any compromise. Yigal Yadin, then chief of operations of the Israeli army, was put in charge of overpowering the group onboard the ship. IDF and Palmach units deployed along the Tel Aviv beach were given the order to open fire on the ship. Finally, in light of Begin's resolve not to surrender, Ben-Gurion gave the command to sink the *Altalena* with artillery fire. Begin and others abandoned the ship, which sank a short while later with ten Etzel members on board. In consequence, Begin ordered his people to refrain from violent confrontation with army forces, at any price. However, this did not stop Ben-Gurion from conducting a widespread wave of arrests of Etzel members and from dismantling all the organization units still operating in the army ranks.<sup>98</sup>

The Lehi was disarmed several months later in the wake of the assassination of the mediator on behalf of the United Nations Security Council, Swedish Count Folke Bernadotte.<sup>99</sup> The Swedish count was dispatched to the Middle East on July 24, 1948, with the aim of bringing the confrontation between the emergent State of Israel and the Arab armies to an end. His mediating efforts for both sides and his proposal to divide up the country and declare its parts as international sovereign areas was deemed by the Lehi as another imperialistic scheme designed to bolster the involvement of foreign powers in the region.<sup>100</sup> On Saturday, September 17, 1948, Lehi activists set up a roadblock of barrels and bricks on the street leading from Katamon and Talbia to the Rehavia neighborhood in order to block Bernadotte's motorcade. When the motorcade reached the barricade and was forced to stop, a white jeep (which had been stolen several days earlier from the United Nations forces) appeared with four young men with submachine guns.<sup>101</sup> Three of them got off the jeep and approached the first of the three cars in the motorcade. When they were unable to find Bernadotte, they proceeded to the second car, where two of them began to shoot at the count sitting inside. The third youth began firing in the air to deter passengers in the other cars from trying to prevent the assassination. After realizing they had killed the count, the perpetrators fled the scene.<sup>102</sup> In the attack, Bernadotte suffered fatal wounds and later died of his

injuries. The French United Nations observer who was sitting next to him, Colonel Serot, was also hit by the gunfire and died immediately.<sup>103</sup>

Despite the fact that an unknown organization called the Homeland Front took responsibility for the operation, security officials assumed it was the work of the Lehi.<sup>104</sup> The authorities' retaliation was severe. At first, the interim State Council drafted legislation that made it possible to apply force against terrorist organizations attempting to subvert the State of Israel (the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance).<sup>105</sup> Promptly afterwards, the Israeli government invoked the ordinance to declare the Lehi a terrorist organization, and in the weeks after Bernadotte's assassination, more than 200 Lehi members were held in administrative detention, including those who had already been conscripted to the Israeli army.<sup>106</sup> The Lehi leaders were arraigned and convicted of activity and membership in a terrorist organization, and the court established that only a terrorist organization with the experience, intelligence, and operative capacities of Lehi could have carried out the Bernadotte assassination.

However, several months later, just before the appointed date of the first official elections in the State of Israel, the government of Israel decided to grant amnesty to all Lehi prisoners on the basis of a state general order of pardon and the desire to embark on a new course with all civilians. In effect, all Lehi activists who had been arrested and imprisoned after the Bernadotte assassination were set free.<sup>107</sup> Yet the picture that evolved in the first years of the State of Israel showed clearly that this objective had not been met. A series of Jewish-instigated terrorist events made it clear that this type of terrorism was still alive and active.

#### THE ASSASSINATION OF ISRAEL KASTNER

In December 1949, an attempt was made to commit the first political assassination in the State of Israel. Avraham Zifati, a young Jew who was later found to be mentally ill, burst into the Kesssem Cinema in Tel Aviv where the Knesset was convening, pulled out a gun he had hidden in his clothes, and aimed it at the government plenum. But at the last moment, the ushers prevented him from carrying out his intention. Almost eight years later, on October 29, 1957, another young man suffering from mental problems, Moshe Dueik, tried to perform a similar deed. He threw a hand grenade at the government seats while the Knesset was in the midst of a debate and caused minor injuries to David Ben-Gurion and a number of

other ministers.<sup>108</sup> But these events were exceptions. Most Jewish terrorist incidents that took place after the establishment of the State of Israel were the work of social networks consisting of former Lehi members who rejected the social democratic characteristics of the new state and adhered to a combination of religious and nationalistic views. They argued for the predominance of Jewish religious and nationalistic values over universal democratic, social, and humanistic values. Some even promoted the idea of restoring the historic Kingdom of Israel. These people were alienated from the dominant political culture of the new state and were accustomed to an underground life of violent actions. They had difficulty abandoning their old ways and adjusting to the new reality, and this facilitated their slide into violent acts such as the assassination of Dr. Israel Kastner.

On Saturday night, March 3, 1957, Dr. Israel (Rudolf) Kastner returned to his home on Emanuel Avenue in northern Tel Aviv. He had finished another day's work as editor of the Israeli Hungarian-language newspaper *Ujkelet* and parked his car in front of his house. When he got out of his car, a tall young man in a gray suit approached and asked him, "Are you Dr. Kastner?" When he answered in the affirmative, the young man suddenly drew a pistol and pulled the trigger. The gun made an empty metallic sound but did not shoot. Kastner came to his senses and tried to take advantage of the misfire by fleeing down the sidewalk. In the meanwhile, the young man pulled the trigger again. This time the pistol fired, but the bullet missed its target and hit Kastner's car. The third bullet hit Kastner, penetrated his right hip, continued through the abdomen, and came to a stop in his left hip. Kastner collapsed only 12 feet from the entrance to his house. The assassin then ran to a jeep that was waiting for him at the street corner and was able to escape. The stunned neighbors who found Dr. Kastner lying on the ground immediately called for medical help, but this turned out to be futile. Despite a number of surgical procedures in the next two weeks, Israel Kastner died.<sup>109</sup>

More than any other event of the time, Kastner's murder exposed the deep ideological rift between the different sectors of Israeli society in those years. Almost a decade after the undergrounds had been dismantled and after all major institutions and political factions had been grouped together under the sovereign framework of the State of Israel, political violence, which was based on the traditional dispute between the nationalist right wing and socialist-Zionist left wing, continued to take its toll. Isser Harel, who at that time headed the Mossad and was chief of the Israeli intelligence

community, pointed out that Kastner's murder was the peak of political terrorism in Israel in the 1950s.<sup>110</sup>

Dr. Kastner was a wartime leader of Hungarian Jewry, and in 1944 he conducted secret negotiations with Adolf Eichmann to save Jews in his country. After the war, in the early 1950s, accusations were raised against Kastner for helping mainly his acquaintances and relatives and for hiding details of the "Final Solution" from the Hungarian Jews. The allegations were that by behaving as he did, he had prevented the possible rescue of many other Jews. The affair gained momentum between 1953 and 1955 in light of a series of political developments and a stepped-up criticism of Kastner, mainly by right-wing intellectuals.<sup>111</sup> The matter reached its peak when a slander suit was brought against Malchiel Greenwald, a member of the Mizrahi movement, after he distributed a pamphlet in Jerusalem in which he accused Kastner of treason against the Jewish people and collaboration with the Nazis.<sup>112</sup>

In a short while, the Greenwald slander trial transformed into severe accusations against the Zionist establishment and Hungarian Jewish leaders. With the help of a charismatic lawyer, Shmuel Tamir, the Kastner trial evolved into a public debate dealing with sensitive issues, such as the helplessness of European Jewish and Yishuv leaders during the war.<sup>113</sup> But above all, the legal arena served as an instrument for the Israeli right wing in buttressing the socialist political establishment, most of which had been part of the Yishuv leadership during the war. This changed the trial from a legal instrument that was supposed to determine whether Greenwald had relied on solid proof and conducted a systematic examination of his claims before putting them in writing into a legal debate over Kastner's guilt. After nine months of discussion that stirred up the emotions of a large part of the Israeli public, the court established that Malchiel Greenwald was not guilty of slander against Kastner. By so doing, the court actually adopted most of the allegations made against Kastner; as Judge Dr. Benjamin Halevy put it, "By accepting the 'gift' of the train [to freedom for those privileged enough to pay] . . . from the Nazis, Kastner sold his soul to the devil."<sup>114</sup> The outcome of the trial aroused a public storm and a hate campaign against Kastner, who was condemned as a traitor by factions of the Israeli right wing.<sup>115</sup> From this condemnation to the actual assassination, the road was not long.

On the night of the murder, the Shin Bet (General Security Service) had already been able to determine that the assassins were Revisionists,

former members of the Lehi. But the more interesting fact was the revelation that the assassination mastermind, Joseph Menkes, who had recruited Ze'ev Eckstein, the gunman, and Dan Shemer, the accomplice who had been waiting in the getaway car,<sup>116</sup> belonged to an underground group called the Kingdom of Israel. Five years earlier, this group had engaged in terrorism and had been known among the Israeli public by its more popular name, the Tzrifin Underground.<sup>117</sup>

#### KINGDOM OF ISRAEL (THE TZRIFIN UNDERGROUND)

The rainstorm that poured down on Tel Aviv on February 9, 1953, did not drown out the deafening explosion near the eastern wall of the Soviet Embassy building in Tel Aviv. The explosive charge contained more than 70 pounds of standard explosive material and caused great damage to the embassy and the adjacent buildings. The embassy housecleaner was severely wounded, and two of the embassy's employees, one of whom was the ambassador's wife, were lightly wounded.<sup>118</sup> The police inquiry found that unknown people had been able to get through the embassy fence and plant a bomb in the yard. On the same night, Isser Harel convened the higher ranks of the Shin Bet. After it became clear to him that they had no information about the identity of the people behind the incident, he asked them to investigate whether these people had formerly belonged to the Lehi. Harel assumed that only members of the Lehi had the operational experience to execute such a complex act of terrorism.<sup>119</sup> This had been witnessed four months earlier when a Lehi operative, Dov Shilansky, smuggled a bomb into the Jerusalem offices of the Foreign Affairs Ministry in protest against the reparations agreement with Germany. Shilansky was arrested at the last minute when alert police officers asked him to present an identifying badge and reveal the contents of the bag he was carrying.<sup>120</sup> However, despite intense efforts, Shin Bet people failed to track down the plotters of the operation, and the investigation came to a dead end.

Only four months later, Shin Bet investigators chanced upon a breakthrough that enabled them to get to the bottom of the affair. Near midnight on May 26, police officers guarding the building of the Romanian Church in Jerusalem, where the Israeli Ministry of Education was located, noticed two young Orthodox men who aroused their suspicions. The officers secretly followed them and let them get close to the building. When it seemed that the two men were about to climb over the fence surrounding the

church, the officers approached them and asked them to identify themselves. The two gave their names as Mordechai Freund and David Bloy. In a quick search of their belongings, the officers discovered explosives; more important, they found detailed lists of names and functionaries in the organization to which they belonged.<sup>121</sup> When the Shin Bet people went over the documents, they were able to identify the people named there. Almost all of them had been active in the Lehi at one time or another. On that night, arrests were carried out in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem on the basis of these lists, and soon an underground network was exposed.<sup>122</sup> It was called the Kingdom of Israel by its members but became known to the public as the Tzifin Underground.<sup>123</sup> This network had initiated a series of attacks against diplomatic institutions from Eastern European countries and a number of sporadic shootings against outposts of the Jordanian Legion along the border in Jerusalem.

The head of the network was a former Lehi man, Ya'akov Heruti. Together with two other Lehi people, Shimon Bachar and Yeshayahu Shar'abi, they concluded that, in light of the lack of response of the Israeli government to the increasing oppression of Jews in the Communist Bloc countries, it was necessary to take organized action against these countries in order to deter them from persecuting Jews. In a conversation we conducted with Heruti at his office, he told us that he and his colleagues had been deeply affected by the persecution of the Jews in Eastern Europe.<sup>124</sup> They were furious about the exclusion of Jews from public life in the Communist Bloc countries, which included barring them from cultural life, politics, society, and the academy.<sup>125</sup> An example of the latter was explicitly manifested in the physicians' trial in Moscow<sup>126</sup> and in the Prague trials (the Klementis-Slansky trial).<sup>127</sup> In more theoretical terms, Heruti's people perceived these developments as a direct attack against members of both their community (in the broad sense of the term) and their faith. In retrospect, this does not seem very different from European Muslims who identify with the suffering of Muslims in places such as Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan and are willing under some conditions to resort to violent and radical actions.

Soon after the decision to embark on the campaign, Heruti engaged other members who had served with him in the Lehi. In addition, he recruited a group of sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds who had been raised in Revisionist homes and from a young age had identified with the heroic

stories they heard from their parents about Lehi fighters. These young members admired Heruti and his associates and helped them mainly with intelligence gathering and logistics. At the same time, one member of the group, Ya'akov Blumenthal, had organized another clique of activists in Jerusalem, most of whom were Orthodox Jews. Two activists from this clique, who were working on their own, were the ones who were caught in the planned attack against the Ministry of Education. They wanted to protest the role of the Ministry of Education in the indoctrination and secularization of large numbers of religious Jewish immigrants from North African countries after they arrived in Israel.<sup>128</sup> Like many in their community, the two perceived this secularization process as a direct assault on the religious Jews' way of life and as an existential threat to the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel.

The fact that the Kingdom of Israel Underground was a social network of youths with a common background rather than a disciplined underground movement—as was the case with the Lehi and Etzel—demonstrates the essential change that had taken place in the structure and nature of the activities of Jewish groups engaging in terrorism. As we shall see, the network structure became the distinctive feature of most Jewish terrorist groups that were active after the establishment of the State of Israel. At the same time, these new groups abandoned the paramilitary organizational structure. The condensed network structure of the Kingdom of Israel demonstrated another fact that was manifested in future Jewish terrorist groups. It illustrated how radicalization processes concentrated in a small group can lead to violence, especially when there is imminent perception of an existential threat among group members and they also have suitable resources to execute their actions.<sup>129</sup>

#### BRIT HAKANAIM (COVENANT OF THE ZEALOTS)

The change in the structure of Jewish terrorist groups can be observed in another violent group that was operational in the first years after Israel's establishment: the Brit Hakana'im (Covenant of the Zealots). The emergence of the Brit Hakana'im underground can be traced to April 10, 1950, when a number of yeshiva students from the Porat Yosef Yeshiva in Jerusalem, including Rabbi Shlomo Lorentz (who later became a member of Knesset), and Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu (later on, the chief rabbi of Israel),<sup>130</sup> decided to establish a group on the basis of their religious beliefs.

The aims of their group were to struggle violently for the absorption of religious principles into everyday life in Israel and to fight against what they perceived as discrimination against the Orthodox community in Eretz Israel. They started recruiting other yeshiva students, whom they had known and anticipated would agree to join the group. At its prime, the group consisted of more than thirty-five yeshiva students.

To a great extent, the social impetus for the growth of Brit Hakana'im was the shock experienced by the ultra-Orthodox public after the establishment of a secular state in Eretz Israel. The new state promoted a principled and ideological framework that did not come from the original Hebrew sources of Israel. Members of the ultra-Orthodox public felt that only a Messiah who is a descendant of King David could be the founder of the Jewish sovereign state and the Third Temple, and therefore they regarded the nascent state as the desecration of a long-lasting Jewish tradition.<sup>131</sup>

A number of additional and central issues increased the polarization between the secular Jewish population and the religious one, motivating the members of Brit Hakana'im to act violently. First of all, as mentioned earlier, in the case of the Orthodox clique of the Kingdom of Israel group, there was the unpopular Israeli government policy insisting that the children of mostly religious or traditional Jewish immigrants who arrived after Israel's establishment were to study in the secular national education system. This provoked great anger among the religious and ultra-Orthodox public. Members of Brit Hakana'im perceived this as the initial stage in a culture war intended to put an end to the Orthodox world and therefore felt an obligation to fight against it.<sup>132</sup> According to Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, "We had started to receive bits of information about what was going on in the immigrant camps where it was forbidden to cover one's head and study the Torah. . . . I could not tolerate this kind of anarchy. . . . I believed that through the underground, I would be able to impose the life of the Torah in the country."<sup>133</sup>

In addition to the educational conflict, there was also the issue of the Sabbath, which increased tension between secular and religious people. Although the Orthodox public sometimes engaged in violent demonstrations in order to stop all public activity during the Sabbath,<sup>134</sup> there were also other violent secular counteractivities. For example, anonymous secular people attacked the Minister of Transportation, David Pinkas, in response to the Sabbath regulations he imposed (as a result of an oil short-

age, the government established that for two days a week there would be no traffic, and one of them was Sabbath).<sup>135</sup> Another matter that worsened the tension between the two publics was the issue of recruiting girls to the army. In the days before the establishment of Israel, an agreement had been reached between Ben-Gurion and the religious public leaders to the effect that every young girl whose religiousness had been confirmed would be exempt from army service. But when the IDF was established, the leaders of the country worked tirelessly to dissolve the agreement. Mordechai Eliyahu stated that "a few days after . . . the Knesset was about to discuss an amendment to the security service law. . . . I understood that we had to respond . . . that talking wouldn't help; we had to do more drastic things. The aim was that it be known in the Knesset that there are circles who object to the law."<sup>136</sup>

The issues outlined here created a feeling among many people in the ultra-Orthodox counterculture that in order to prevent the devastating secularization of the Jewish people, and primarily in order to maintain the nature of the ultra-Orthodox community, it was necessary to establish an alternative Jewish sovereign framework of a Halacha state (based on Jewish law). This revolutionary state of mind was accompanied by much agitation, especially among the youth of the ultra-Orthodox community, and led to the emergence of Brit Hakana'im, whose members believed that these religious issues were crucial principles. In order to uphold the character of the Jewish people, according to their beliefs, the only possible response was to take violent measures. In the documents displayed during the trial of its members, the underground raised two pretentious goals based on this viewpoint: "the establishment of an Orthodox regime, based on the principle of God's justice, a dictatorial regime with no democracy,"<sup>137</sup> and "imposing that all citizens live according to the Torah by influencing the existing governing system."<sup>138</sup>

Despite the attempt to devise a covert underground group, the Brit Hakana'im's weak point was its inability to convert the ideological principles that inspired its members into a revolutionary operative framework. To a large extent, this stemmed from the character of the members and social framework of the group. Although it maintained a sophisticated, illegal political culture whose roots came from life in the Diaspora, ultra-Orthodox society at the time did not aspire to conduct a violent struggle against the government. This is what existed in the Diaspora, and this was the situation

in Israel. Therefore, without an external supporting counterculture that would provide assistance to the group, its prospects of realizing its goals were low to begin with. In addition, group members and leaders suffered from a lack of experience in all things related to violent and clandestine activities.<sup>139</sup>

Brit Hakana'im initiated its violent actions in January 1951, aiming "to wipe out the desecrations."<sup>140</sup> On January 18, the group carried out a two-pronged action of setting fire to several private cars in north Jerusalem (because their owners drove on Sabbath) and putting bags soaked with oil in Egged's (the bus cooperative) garage in Jerusalem to protest public transportation on the Sabbath. Later on, in February and March 1951, twelve cars and taxicabs and a nonkosher butchery were set on fire,<sup>141</sup> in addition to a bomb attack on a restaurant that was open on the Sabbath.<sup>142</sup>

The group's most ambitious terrorist attack was supposed to be a bilateral action: planting a bomb in the Knesset on the day of the debate over the army recruitment of girls (the "Bride Operation") and setting on fire and destroying the archives of the recruitment office of the Ministry of Defense in Jerusalem (the "Watermelon Operation"). However, the group's leaders feared that such a drastic action would provoke a severe response by the state and put many human lives in danger.<sup>143</sup> It was decided nonetheless to launch the operation but with a minor change: a scare bomb, which would not cause loss of life.<sup>144</sup> After an early closure of the Knesset meeting, and before they had time to implement their plan, the group members were arrested by the Shin Bet, which had managed to infiltrate two agents into the underground network.<sup>145</sup> After extended investigations, most of the group members who had been arrested were gradually released, and only four central leaders were arraigned and prosecuted: Yehuda Rieder, Mordechai Eliyahu, Eliyahu Rafal-Rafael, and Noah Wermesser. All of them received sentences ranging from six months to a year in prison.<sup>146</sup>

Similar to the Kingdom of Israel, evidence demonstrated that this group was not an established organization. During the trial, Brit Hakana'im turned out to be a social network of friends and acquaintances, and the fact that they spent much time together had radicalized their attitudes. Moreover, they felt that their cherished resources were in danger, and this also led them to undertake violent measures.

These episodes of Jewish terrorism in the first years of the State of Israel can be regarded as birth pangs. Certain groups suffering in the past

from severe exclusion had difficulties liberating themselves from the old, illegal patterns of thinking that had been imprinted in them during the pre-state period. Indeed, after several years of adjustment, Jewish terrorism disappeared from Israeli politics and society. It raised its head again only after the Yom Kippur War in the form of two new movements: the Gush Emunim and Kahanist movements. Both belonged to the religious right side of the political map in Israel, although there were significant differences between them. The next two chapters are devoted to the Jewish terrorist groups that emerged from these two movements.

AMI PEDAHZUR & ARIE PERLIGER **JEWISH  
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