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Thesis Question: to what extent was the Yishuv's policy in the Arab Israeli War of 1948 one of territorial expansion and expulsion of the native Arab population?

### Section D

The Arab Israeli War of 1948 reflected and continued the conflict between the Jews and the surrounding Arabs, both within and outside of the Palestinian territory. In the early stages of the war, nearly all perspectives concur on the Hagana's explicit defensive strategy against the Palestinian Arabs. However, some sources indicate that the Yishuv changed strategies after the first months of war with the purpose of going on the offensive, expelling the Arabs, and ultimately controlling territory outside the allotted UN partition territory designated for Israel. Other sources claim that the Hagana was forced to implement an offensive campaign in order to firmly establish transportation routes between urban centers, protect isolated Jewish settlements, and prepare for an impending invasion of Arab troops. While the evidence available from the war corroborates the Hagana's change in strategy from defensive to offensive, it also indicates that the Hagana intended only to secure transportation routes, Jewish settlements, and prepare for other Arab countries to invade the territory. Extreme terrorist groups (such as LHI and IZL ) did commit horrendous acts against Arab populations, but these acts were ultimately not the main driving force behind the mass exodus of Palestinian Arabs.

By the end of the year 1947, the UN partition resolution was released, and preliminary acts of violence were beginning in Palestine. According to the Institute for Middle East Understanding, the Jewish leadership had no intention of following the UN partition plan and was instead planning to take over the Palestinian territory by force<sup>1</sup>. Jewish paramilitary groups such as IZL and LHI intensified

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1 "The Nabka, 65 Years of Dispossession and Apartheid," Institute For Middle East Understanding, last modified 8 May 2013, accessed 21 November 2014, <<http://imeu.org/>>.

their attacks against Arabs and British soldiers early on in the conflict, thus clearly displaying an unprovoked offensive strategy from the beginning of the war<sup>2</sup>. Already by December of 1947, only two months into the war, 75,000 Palestinian Arabs were displaced from their homes.

The statements above from the Institute for Middle East Understanding are not wholly accurate and do not reflect the entire situation during the war. As claimed by Benny Morris, the Yishuv accepted the UN partition resolution and, for the first months of the war, held a purely defensive position against Arab attacks<sup>3</sup>. Acts of Arab aggression were met with limited retaliation on the part of the Hagana, although other groups such as IZL and LHI were too difficult and extremist to control. And while it is true that tens of thousands of Palestinians had left their homes by the end of 1947, it was less due to Israeli aggression than a host of other factors: most of the Palestinian leaders had fled the territory in late 1947, leaving the Palestinian people without leadership or organization; the Arab economy was debilitated from the start of the conflict, in part from the lack of organization and preparation surrounding economic policy; and the Palestinian Arabs, including most other people on both sides of the conflict, initially believed that the conflict would only last a matter of weeks, after which they could move back to their homes<sup>4</sup>. Even when the Hagana implemented the new Plan Dalet, the large majority of Palestinian exodus was not due to forced expulsion, but instead preceded confrontation with the Jews. Of the confrontations and forced removals of Palestinians, Plan Dalet was often interpreted at the local level, allowing more extreme actions towards Palestinians. Ultimately, however, there was no coherent plan on the part of Israel to uproot the existing Palestinian population.

The civil war that began the Arab Israeli War of 1948 began with Palestinian violence in reaction to the U.N. Partition plan, and ended with the Hagana's offensive strategy in the implementation of Plan Dalet. While the Yishuv did take over territory outside that allotted to the formation of the Jewish state by the end of the war, which inherently led to a mass exodus of

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2 Ibid.

3 Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, 98-100.

4 Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1992, 84-85.

Palestinian Arabs, there was no predetermined attitude held by the Yishuv to accomplish this. Instead, through a combination of largely unprovoked Palestinian evacuation and Hagana preparation for the impending foreign Arab invasion, the State of Israel formed with more territory and fewer Palestinian Arabs than intended.