

# Report by the Chairman of the People's Directorate on the Political and Military Situation

## Sitting 1 of the People's Council

4 May 1948 (25 Nissan 5708)  
JNF House, Tel Aviv

**The Chairman, D. Ben-Gurion:** Gentlemen, on behalf of the National Administration I welcome the People's Council, which the Yishuv and the Zionist movement have charged with discussing the issues before us, namely: how to repel enemy attacks on the Yishuv and the revival of the Jewish people in its homeland, and how to organize and chart our national independence here as we establish the State of Israel.

First, we bow our heads and stand to attention in memory of those who fell, giving their lives bravely and loyally in defense of the homeland and national liberty. The People's Council conveys to the parents of our heroic defenders, and especially to their mothers, the Jewish people's appreciation of their grievous loss. To the mothers of these sons the Jewish people says: may God bless you. Those who fell are a new, sad and noble link in the long chain of two thousand years of history which binds the Jewish people to their land.

Gentlemen, the Council and the National Administration have two tasks: maintaining security and establishing a state. The question of security is not new to the Yishuv. Since its establishment seventy years ago, and throughout its existence, the Yishuv has assumed responsibility for its own defense. This was done within the limits of a government (Mandate) framework, whether friendly or not, which...was obliged to uphold the law and see to the security of its citizens. The security of the Yishuv was maintained through those decades by voluntary forces, each man having his appointed place and having been given elementary training and primitive equipment.

The question of security which has confronted us these past six months differs in essence from the one the Yishuv faced throughout the years. This time war has been declared on us, but now there is no government (Mandate) force which wants and is able to uphold the law and safeguard the citizens' lives. As long as it exists, the current Mandatory government is hostile and disruptive. The defense forces which we fostered and maintained for years were insufficient for the emergency which arose. In the midst of war we had to establish an army. We managed to train and equip our sons quickly, being obliged to fight constantly.

It is difficult to assess the debt the Yishuv and the Jewish people owe the local, voluntary defense forces which have existed all these years. Without them we could not have held out till today. However, in order to survive the new attacks by an army which has been trained and outfitted by the hostile regime of the Mandate Government, and in the face of constant incitement by Hitler's pupils and lackeys in the Arab world, our previous means of defense will not be enough. Although we did not have sufficient time to mobilize our full manpower potential or train it to fight under the new conditions, the first two stages of fighting are coming to an end. Our experience of the past five months should greatly encourage us. Despite our small numbers and lack of preparedness, we have not yet lost a single settlement....In contrast, about one hundred Arab towns and villages have been abandoned, and more than 150,000 Arabs have moved to the interior of the country or to neighboring Arab countries.

We may be coming to the end of the second stage of the fighting. The first stage, when our defense forces prevailed against local Arab gangs on highways and in towns, ended in total victory for us. Our urban settlements, including Jerusalem, remained intact, although that city suffered to the greatest extent of all Jewish settlements, being the focus of the assailants' fury.

In Jerusalem, government forces impeded Jewish defense from the start of the attack in December until the dreadful tragedy of Sheikh Jarrah, when the British army thwarted attempts by Jewish defenders to rescue the convoy of doctors, nurses and other professionals who were

going to their scientific and medical work at Hadassah Hospital and the University. Despite those attacks and the animosity of the government and its forces, even in Jerusalem our present political situation is far sounder than ever before. We are destroying the hostile bases, and although Jewish enclaves such as Yemin Moshe and Mekor Haim are attacked by night and day, they have not been—nor will they be—abandoned.

Nothing has given a clearer indication of the unbroken link between the Jews and their land than these battles. History has proved who is tied to this land and for whom it is a luxury which can easily be relinquished. To date, not one Jewish settlement, however remote, weak or isolated, has been abandoned. On the other hand, entire cities have been deserted by the Arabs. Tiberias and Haifa were simply evacuated after the first defeat, although the Arabs were not threatened with destruction or slaughter.

We must remember, however, that we have not yet begun to lay down our arms. It is still too early to boast of our achievements. A battle has just ended, and we are about to face the most dangerous stage of the fighting. We are confronting local forces and armed bands from neighboring countries as well as invasion by the regular armies of the Arab countries. Meanwhile, we are also witnessing a very strange invasion by the British army. After constantly proclaiming the date upon which the Mandate would end—in eleven or twelve days—and that of the army's final withdrawal, we are currently witnessing a strange drift of British armed forces in our direction. They are equipped with every kind of offensive weapons, including some never before seen in this country. It is not clear whether our successes have alarmed them, or whether they felt obliged to raise the spirits of the failing bands of Arabs, or even prepare the ground for an Arab invasion by weakening the Yishuv's defenses. The immediate future will tell. At all events, we must prepare for the worst.

Nonetheless, despite the boasts and threats of the Arab leaders, there are scattered signs of hesitancy. We know that some of the neighboring countries are not strong enough to allow themselves to send in their armies. Their regimes are shaky, resting on a small minority which rules only with the support of foreigners. Within these countries there are internecine struggles and it is doubtful that they would be able to send their armies here. We cannot rely on these political speculations, however, nor on internal opposition within these countries. When it comes to our defense, we can rely only on our own strength and our Father in Heaven.

The world which is organized within the U.N. is bound to a certain arrangement and its implementation. We appreciate what happened there. Even if there are some retractions from time to time, and the program is not executed as planned, the Jewish people will never forget the

goodwill of the thirty-three countries which last November recognized the right of the Jewish people to national independence and equal status among the nations of the world. But we cannot rely on these decisions alone, or even on the conscience of the world; we must rely on our own strength.

There are only a few days until the Mandate ends, although none of us can say confidently—despite the proclamations and legislation of the British parliament—that it will actually end on May 15 and that the government will remove its treacherous presence from our country. If the Mandate is extended it will certainly not be in order to help us or ensure our safety. We must therefore prepare all our energies and potential post haste for the immediate mobilization of thousands more men for fighting and for working. Time is of the essence.

We are faced with a partial vacuum, created by the disintegrating government—which we hope will soon be annulled—and concerning its obligations to the population and its responsibilities to the world. But a vacuum will not remain as regards the right to rule. British military rule still prevails in parts of the country. Army printing presses have prepared declarations and directives announcing unlimited, unconditional and independent rule by the army upon the termination of the Mandate. The British will evacuate only those places which they regard as not necessary for the army's security needs...

We must have no illusions. Once the Mandate is officially ended this country will be under military rule for an unknown period of time (they say until August 1, and some people believe this).

Meanwhile, a void will be created here as regards duties and services. We do not know what will be the outcome of the meeting America has called after retracting its support for the establishment of the Jewish state. Come what may, we must preserve the Yishuv and maintain services, so that this country will be able to absorb many thousands of immigrants, establish new settlements and develop our agriculture and industry at a quicker pace than ever before. Whether we are granted authority by others or not, we must prepare for Jewish rule.

The People's Council and National Administration constitute neither a parliament nor a government. We hope that there will soon be a free parliament in the State of Israel, based on democratic elections by all its Jewish citizens and those Arab citizens who choose to stay here. The government which will be elected then will be responsible to the democratic State of Israel.

The People's Council and National Administration meet the needs of the moment, enabling us to defend our borders and prevent the chaos which the Mandatory government has wantonly bequeathed this country, contrary to the U.N. resolution.

As the Supreme Command in an emergency, we may be unable to adhere to all the requirements of a democratic regime. At the moment

our principal concern is to fight for our survival and our freedom as a nation. This war must subordinate all our other needs and concerns. As soon as this conflict is resolved under our administration a free and authentic democracy will be established in the State of Israel.

Our battle is both a political and a military one. Until now we have been successful militarily while the enemy seems to have been successful politically. Although the U.N. resolution has not yet been overruled, it has been severely undermined.

A special session of the U.N. General Assembly has been called to reconsider the Palestine problem. The mere fact that a special session has been summoned reflects that an attempt is being made to overturn the previous decision. A new proposal for trusteeship, which the Yishuv and the Zionist movement has rejected, has been made.

According to our information, the initiators of the proposal have little chance of succeeding with their new idea, so a new proposal with the more attractive—though misleading—name of armistice has been submitted.

As you know, the Security Council established a committee of three consuls in Jerusalem, the chairman being the Belgian consul and the other two members being those from France and America. The committee's task is to mediate between the Jews and the Arabs. A special U.N. delegation may come here to negotiate the armistice.

We did not initiate this war. The request for a ceasefire should not be addressed to us, as was done only a few weeks ago by the High Commissioner. We said that the moment the Arabs stop firing throughout the country we would follow suit.

Yet the armistice proposal reflects no real intention of stopping the bloodshed in this country. If this were so we would all accept the armistice gladly. The object of the proposal before us now is to freeze the present situation and paralyze the Yishuv's actions designed to achieve independence and establish a state. It seeks to freeze the situation with regard to an even more serious issue—immigration.

The People's Council...will adopt the position of the Zionist Executive, which was acted upon earlier by the Jewish Agency, and that of the National Committee, namely, to reject unconditionally any armistice which entails paralyzing the activities aimed at achieving independence and encouraging Jewish immigration. We will not support a false armistice which will tie the hands of the Jewish defense forces and allow neighboring countries to invade and attack us at any moment. We insist that the conditions for an armistice are: a) the absence of political conditions limiting immigration or nation-building activities; b) the removal of foreign armed bands and the prevention of invasion by them. These criteria test whether the intentions of those who support the armistice are peaceful or not.

Since we are now on the eve of the most difficult and dangerous stage of our armed battle, we would like to make it clear to the Arab people and their leaders that no terrorism, acts of violence or threats will prevent the Jews from rebuilding their country, or deter those in the diaspora from returning to their land. As always, we seek peace. We want only to rebuild what has been ruined and make the desert bloom. We have no desire or need to take away what others have achieved. With our own hands we have created, and will create in the future, sources of life and livelihood in both town and country from what was abandoned and neglected. We have made those parts of this land which we have settled flourish. We can make the whole country thrive, and we are ready to work together with the free and independent Arab people to make the entire Near East prosper. We will not leave our homeland. We are sated with alienation and dispersion! Jewish immigration and settlement will be confined to the Jewish homeland and will not exceed its borders. We are prepared to cooperate with the peoples of the region in order to breathe life into the whole Near East, raise the standard of living and increase peace. We are prepared to make the Near East what it was in ancient times—a blooming and populated cultural center, a great human achievement.

But if you try to subdue us by force, and even though the U.N. or part of it succumbs to your threats, as some have already done, the Jewish people will not surrender! We stand fully-armed to defend our rights to our homeland and our independence. We are ready for peace as equals, as a nation in its own right, as a partner with equal rights in the alliance of Semitic peoples in the Middle East, and as a partner in the family of nations. But if anyone attempts to rob us of our rights by force, we will certainly answer with force! If the Palestine problem is to be settled by force rather than through international deliberations based on just and practical considerations, as the U.N. attempted to do last November, we shall mobilize all our might, and it shall decide!

To our great regret, some of the Jerusalem members of the People's Council could not get here today, the road from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv being impassable. The journey can be made only by air, but the weather has prevented our pilots from flying. We hope that this delay will not be protracted. In addition, some members of the National Administration were unable to participate in earlier sessions, when we made internal dispositions and discussed proposals, laws and directives to be submitted to the People's Council. For this reason, we are obliged to postpone the continuation of this session to tomorrow evening. We hope the weather will permit the twelve members residing in Jerusalem to fly here tomorrow, so that a session of the National Administration may be held tomorrow morning. The continuation of the sitting of the People's Council will be held here at eight tomorrow evening. I hereby close this sitting.