The 1947 U.N. Partition Plan

After World War II, escalating hostilities between Arabs and Jews over the fate of Palestine and between the Zionist militias and the British army compelled Britain to relinquish its mandate over Palestine.

The British requested that the recently established United Nations determine the future of Palestine.

On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly voted and accepted the partition resolution, by 33 votes against 13.

The plan called for the partition of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and the other Arab. The UN partition plan divided the country in such a way that each state would have a majority of its own population, although some Jewish settlements would fall within the proposed Palestinian state and many Palestinians would become part of the proposed Jewish state.

The territory designated to the Jewish state would be slightly larger than the Palestinian state (56 percent and 43 percent of Palestine, respectively) on the assumption that increasing numbers of Jews would immigrate there.

According to the UN partition plan, the area of Jerusalem and Bethlehem was to become an international zone.

The Zionist leadership publicly accepted the UN partition plan, although they hoped somehow to expand the borders allotted to the Jewish state. But the Palestinian Arabs and the surrounding Arab states rejected the UN plan and regarded the General Assembly vote as an international betrayal before launching a coordinated attack against the Jews, only days after the adoption of the UN partition plan.

On May 15, 1948, the British evacuated Palestine, and Zionist leaders proclaimed the state of Israel.

Neighboring Arab states (Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq) then invaded Israel claiming that they sought to “save” Palestine from the Zionists.

In fact, the Arab rulers had territorial designs on Palestine and were no more anxious to see a Palestinian Arab state emerge than the Zionists.

During May and June 1948, when the fighting was most intense, the outcome of this first Arab-Israeli war was in doubt. But after arms shipments from Czechoslovakia reached Israel, its armed forces established superiority and conquered territories beyond the UN partition plan borders of the Jewish state.

In 1949, the war between Israel and the Arab states ended with the signing of armistice agreements. The country once known as Palestine was now divided into three parts, each under separate political control: the State of Israel encompassed over 77 percent of the territory, Jordan occupied East
Jerusalem and the hill country of central Palestine (the West Bank) and Egypt took control of the coastal plain around the city of Gaza (the Gaza Strip).

As a result of these events, the Palestinian Arab state envisioned by the UN partition plan was never established.

>> For Additional Reading:

UN Resolution 181
unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253

BBC
news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/middle_east/israel_and_the_palestinians/key_documents/1681322.shtm