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How did the village of Dier Yassin come to be fought over in 1948?

The village of Dier Yassin was a small Arab village near Jerusalem that was attacked by Jewish fighters. Over 100 Arab townspeople were killed by Jewish paramilitaries. Because of the deaths, many of the remaining Arabs fled.

The fighting began when the Haganah launched Operation Dalet on 4th April. The aim of this was to capture the dozens of villages along the road from Jaffa to Jerusalem, in an effort to split the Arab State in two and capture Jerusalem. The Jews didn't like this plan, as the proposed partition endangered the prospect of a Jewish homeland. As the date of the partition drew nearer, the Jews and the Arabs both planned to make war on each other, and by April 1948, a full-scale civil war began. The Dier Yassin incident was just part of this war, which is also known as the First Palestine War. It is said to be partly to blame for the ever-growing Palestinian refugee issue, as many fled when Dier Yassin was attacked, and weren't allowed back.

Operation Dalet also involved the capture of several major towns that were meant to be part of the Arab State; Tiberias, Haifa and Jaffa. On 15th May 1948, the British mandate ended. The Jewish and Arab States now came into being. The Jewish State was called Israel. A day after this new State was made, and five neighbouring Arab countries sent armies to make war on Israel. What started as a civil war was now progressing to an international war, and was the first of many Arab-Israeli conflicts that rocked the Middle East in 1948.

The Arab-Israeli conflict had been going on for a long time before the attack on Deir Yassin. The conflict is mainly over a piece of land, or territory, known as Palestine. Both Jews and Arabs have strong claims to Palestine. According to tradition, they have one common ancestor; Abraham. From one of his sons came the Arabs, and from the other, came the Jews. The Jews claim they have a history there, and want back their holy city of Jerusalem. During the seventh century, the Arabs took over Palestine, and built many religious shrines. Jerusalem also became a sacred place for them.

After Britain defeated Turkey in World War I, the amount of Jewish immigration increased, and continued to do so over the 1930's. The Jews fled economic desperation and anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, and particularly Nazi Germany. By the late 1940's, a third of the population of Palestine were Jewish.

The UNSCOP report recommended that the British mandate should end. Jerusalem would be an international zone under UN control, and Palestine be partitioned into a Jewish state and an Arab state. Jews and Arabs should be linked in an economic union to help each other's trade. Both sides strongly opposed this proposal. The Arabs opposed the plan because at least 3000 Palestinians had been killed fighting for the Peel plan for partition from 1937-1939. The Arab State would have no direct access to the sea, because Jaffa, the main port, would be cut off from the rest. They were also angry, as most of the

fertile land would be part of the Jewish State. The UNSCOP plan also stated that the Jewish State would be larger than the Arab one, even though the Jews were only a third of the population, and owned less than one tenth of the land. The Jews opposed the plan, because if it went ahead, they would have a larger population density than the Arabs.

Source A is a Palestinian view of the Arab exodus from Palestine in 1948. It is an extract from a pamphlet written by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation in 1984. The source seems to be blaming the Israeli's for attacking the 'peaceful' village. The language used makes the attack look motiveless and evil. They use words such as 'murdered' and 'in cold blood'. When describing those killed, they say '154 men, women and children', which emphasises that innocent people were killed. They then go on to say that the bodies were mutilated, which makes the crime seem even worse: it is portrayed as an act of terrorism. By emphasising the horror of the attack, this makes the Palestinians claim to the land stronger. The first line says that the 'Zionists' attacked the village, which puts full blame onto them and tries to make them take responsibility. The PLO used the attack on Deir Yassin as an opportunity to blame the Israeli's for the growing Palestinian refugee issue. They claim it was the Israeli's plan 'to frighten the rest of the Palestinian population into leaving to avoid the same fate which they did in their thousands'. It then claims that the Palestinians who fled in fear 'were prevented from returning to their homes by Israel'.

Source A says that 'This Zionist force included elements from the Irgun led by Menachim Begin'. Menachim Begin later became the Prime Minister of Israel. The PLO will be trying to hint that Begin was directly involved in this 'terrorist' attack. By implying this, it may make people think that the attack was some sort of government policy, and that the government sanctioned these attacks. Therefore, the Palestinians could claim that the State of Israel is illegal, as it was founded on a war crime.

The source isn't very reliable in finding out about the attack on Deir Yassin, because it's main aim is to make the Israeli's look bad. The source is from a pamphlet by the PLO, which means it was made for the public to read. The pamphlet will make normal people think that the Israeli's are to blame, therefore more people will believe that the Arabs have the legal and moral right to Palestine. It is a form of Palestinian propaganda. Source A is a one-sided secondary source, which makes it less reliable than a primary source that showed both sides. It gives information on how many people were killed, and who the attackers were, but it doesn't even give a possible reason as to why the Israeli's might have attacked. This cuts down the reliability of the source, as we don't see the full picture.

However Source A isn't completely unreliable. It is written after the attack on Deir Yassin, so things would have calmed down, and the writers would have had a wider perspective of events since then. It is less bias than it could have been, had it been written directly after the attack, because if it was written then, the Arabs would have been a lot more angry. It contains a lot of facts that could have been checked, for example the number of deaths, and the date of the attack. This makes the source more reliable.

Source A is useful because we can see the Arab point of view clearly, and if we know that they wanted to make the Jews look bad, then the source is useful to see how they did that. There are lots of details, for example dates, number of deaths, and other details on the attack on Deir Yassin. Source A isn't very useful, because it focuses on the Israeli attack on Deir Yassin, and blames this attack for the growing Palestinian refugee problem, without taking a look at the wider conflict.

Source B is an Israeli view of the Arab exodus from Palestine in 1948. It is an extract from a statement to the UN, by Israeli's then foreign minister. It contradicts source A, as it says the Israeli's weren't to blame for the Palestinian refugee issue. They partly accept blame for the attack on Deir Yassin but say it was 'Jewish Dissidents' so therefore it wasn't a deliberate act of terror sanctioned by Israel.

In source B, the attack on Deir Yassin isn't mentioned in detail, for example there is no information on the number of deaths, or the date of the attack. However it does give the date of the British departure, and the Arabs attacking Israel. By writing the date for the Arab attack, it could be trying to make this attack seem more important than the Jewish attack on Deir Yassin. Source B claims that the refugees are a normal consequence of war, and it says 'already...hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs had left their homes and had become refugees as a result of the fighting that had taken place in the country'. The source then goes on to shift the responsibility of the refugees to the Arabs, as it says the number of Palestinian refugees 'swelled' after the 'regular Arab armies joined in the fighting'. They are passing the blame from themselves, to the Arab leaders, other countries, and other Armies.

The statement was made to the UN by Israeli's foreign minister. She was an important figure at the time; so many people would have believed what she said. The statement was made to the United Nations, who both sides wanted support from. Because of this, it was thought that no one would lie to the UN, as if anyone found out, it would make your side look really bad, and make the other side's claim to Palestine stronger.

Source B is reliable because it is official status, therefore trustworthy. It was also presented to the UN, which means it wouldn't have been able to contain lies or deliberately make the Palestinians look bad. It is also a secondary source, which means it can give a wider scope and perspective of what happened. However being a secondary source can also make source B unreliable. Years had passed since the attack, so there was time for errors, and stories could have been created that were untrue. The speech was designed to shift the blame for the refugee problem from the Jews to the Arabs, so we know that it would have been written in such a way that whoever read it would be led to believe the Jews weren't to blame.

Source B is useful, because like with source A, we know it has a purpose, which is to blame the opposite side. Knowing this we can see what the Israeli point of view was. They say that the attack was part of a war, and not a 'massacre' as the Arabs claimed. We know who wrote the source, and there are also details of the wider conflict, like the Arab attacks. This makes it different from Source A, which concentrates only on the attack on

Deir Yassin, and blames this attack for the refugee problem. Source B accepts some Jewish responsibility, which makes it a lot less one sided than source A. However the fact that the attack on Deir Yassin is mentioned in detail could mean that the Jews don't want to talk about it, as it may make them look bad. This makes the source less useful in trying to find out about the attack on Deir Yassin.

After the British mandate ended in May 1948, and the Partition plan was declared, both sides declared war on each other. Violence between the Arabs and the Jews started in December 1947, and grew in ferocity in the months to the end of May. The attack on Deir Yassin was seen as the worst incident, because of the huge number of Arabs killed by Jewish forces. The Jews captured the city of Haifa in April 1948. This city was meant to be part of the new Arab State in the new UN partition plan. On the final day of the British mandate, the Jews declared the state of Israel. They then waited to be attacked by neighbouring Arab countries. The Arab attacks started on 15th May, with an attack on a Jewish airport. Five Arab countries then attacked Israel. It was expected that the Israeli's would be easily defeated by the Arabs, but they fought, and ended up not only defeating the Arabs, but ending up with more land than they started with.

Both the Arabs and the Jews have different views on who was to blame for the growing Palestinian refugee problem after the attack on Deir Yassin in 1948. During 1948, over half of Palestine's Arab population fled their homes and farms. They and their descendants have since been living in refugee camps outside Israel. The Palestinians claim that the Jewish attack on Deir Yassin caused them to flee their homes for their own safety, and that this was the Jews plan, so they could seize the land for their own Jewish state. However the Jews claim that the Arab leaders told the Palestinians to leave, to make way for the Arab armies.

From the Jewish point of view, after the Holocaust, they just wanted back their holy land, and they deserve it after how they were treated, and after so many of their population was killed. The Arabs started the war, by attacking Israel, so they were only fighting back and defending their country. They claim that they didn't drive the Arabs out, but that they were told to leave by the Arab leaders to make way for the armies. They say that refugees are a normal consequence of war, therefore they can't be blamed for the Palestinian refugees. The attack on Deir Yassin was by Jewish Dissidents, so it wasn't a deliberate act of terror sanctioned by Israel.

From the Arab side, they claim that the Jews committed a war crime, as the attack on Deir Yassin killed innocent people. Therefore, the state of Israel is illegal, as it was founded on a war crime. The Jews say the attack was by Dissidents, but the Arabs say that as Menachim Begin was involved, it was a deliberate government policy.

Sources A and B are both Partisan sources. They are both strongly for their own cause, without considering the other side, however source B, which is written by Israel's foreign minister does accept a small part of the blame. The purpose of both sources is to make the other side seem bad, and make them look like criminals, so that their own claim to the land is stronger. If the other side are seen as terrorists, they will have no moral or legal

right to the land. Both sources are different interpretations of the same event. The Arabs see the attack on Deir Yassin as a cold blooded massacre, which made the refugee problem worse, whereas the Jews say the attack was by a group of dissidents, and that it was only one attack amidst a war which the Arabs started.

Both sources are useful in seeing how each side wants to make the other look bad, but they are not very useful in finding out why the attack on Deir Yassin happened, or the truth about how the refugee problem started and why it still continues. To do this we would need to look at more sources, both primary and secondary, and at some sources which show a balanced argument. This will help us get a clearer picture of the whole story, and find out why the village of Deir Yassin was attacked, and the truth about the continuing Palestinian refugee problem.