

Was the Irgun a Terrorist Organisation?

Rob Klein asked a very interesting question in a [Comment](#) on [Part 2](#) of our [Short History of Israel](#).

Did the Irgun begin as a terrorist organization or did it turn into one later? I read somewhere it started out more like the Haganah. Is it fair to call it terrorist?

We sympathise with the thrust of this question. We have to admit that our calling the **Irgun** a terrorist organisation is, in a sense, unfair, especially in today's climate when the media are unwilling to apply the term 'terrorist' even to organisations whose sole reason for existing is to murder innocents, and which rejoice and vie with each other over the sadistic cruelty of their violence. By comparison, the Irgun were mere apprentices, mere part-time amateurs at the business of **murder**. We hope we have made it clear in our History that the Irgun, in sharp contrast with terrorist organisations of today such as the PLO, Al Qaeda and Hamas (or with the fedayeen at the time), did not have the murder of innocents as its purpose or even as its principal tactic, that the great majority of its activities were not murderous, and that it saved thousands of lives.

Having said all that, though, we must also say (and here the Irgun would, we are sure, be the first to agree) that fairness is not always the overriding moral concern. In this case, we think it is more important to retain a decent use of language. If an organisation sometimes, occasionally, commits acts of terrorism, not as an aberration or in the heat of battle but as a deliberate and continuing policy, then even if it also does many good things, it should be called a terrorist organisation. We would not want to see Hamas designated non-terrorist because it also funds hospitals.

One should perhaps also say that the overall objective of the Irgun, which was essentially to try to mitigate the effects of anti-Semitic violence and mass murder by making immigration to Palestine available to Jews, was an overwhelmingly right one. Also, the degree of provocation – the impending Holocaust, British complicity, and relentless Arab mass murder – under which the Irgun made the decision to commit terrorism was arguably unsurpassed in history. Nevertheless the Haganah had a similar overall objective, and lived through the same terrible history under the same provocation, yet did not choose terrorism. Its policies remained true to its name

(‘defence’) and to its ideals. We think – despite the unfairness which we recognise – that it is right to reflect that difference in the terminology we use.

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What did the British do?

"One should perhaps also say that the overall objective of the Irgun, which was essentially to try to mitigate the effects of anti-Semitic violence and mass murder by making immigration to Palestine available to Jews, was an overwhelmingly right one. Also, the degree of provocation ♦ the impending Holocaust, British complicity"

What did the British do?

by [Trace Element](#) on Wed, 05/14/2003 - 12:12 | [reply](#)

What the British did

They were the ones who stopped the immigration and I also seem to recall that they banned Jews from carrying guns, I can't remember offhand whether they slapped the same ban on the Arabs.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 05/14/2003 - 17:20 | [reply](#)

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It is interesting, how we as humans always find a way to rationalize and justify the wrongs we commit, no matter how wrong they may be. I think that as members of the human race we need to change this, we must be more honest about ourselves and history. Only by being honest and coming to grips with the truth can we begin to maybe change things and build a better world for all humankind. In this article we see the phrases, "mitigate the effects of anti-Semitic violence", "Also, the degree of provocation – the impending Holocaust, British complicity, and relentless Arab mass murder...", all as a means to justify what the Irgun did. The Irgun was a terrorist organization and did commit many crimes just like the Arab terrorist did. Terrorism is terrorism no matter who does it. The Arab terrorist who terrorize the new settlers were wrong just like the Irgun that terrorizes the Arabs were wrong. Only with truth can we prevail. Please, let us be honest and say it as it is instead of painting a nice picture by trying rationalize, justify the evil acts we commit. When will we learn?

Juan Rodriguez

by a reader on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 03:23 | [reply](#)

Listen, If irgun was a terror

Listen, If irgun was a terrorist organization

than so is hamas, plo, Islamic jihad etc.
they should be called so in the media and not militants.
second of all these terrorist are widely accepted and supported by the arab world. the Irgun was often condemned by the jewish agency and the jewish people who lived in israel pre 1948 and after 1948 Ben-Gurion bombed the 'Altalena' an Irgun ship that transported weapons and had many people on board. the bombing resulted in many casualties.
thirdly, the irgun was anti-british and tried to minimize civilian casualty unlike hamas, islamic jihad and plo
before many of their operation they warned and told their plans to minimize civilians hurt. they were ordered specifically not to hurt anyone who surrenders unlike al-queda and hamas who execute anyone who falls in their hands, especially if they are jewish.
so don't compare between them, because if you do, you can also say that Washington was a terrorist, and that the US Army is the biggest terrorist group out there because texas, new mexico and california are 'occupied territories' and dallas, st. antonio, houston, and los angeles are all illegal settlement build by the americans to steal mexican land.
btw the wall separating the US and mexico is also an 'apartheid wall' designed to 'steal land'

by a reader on Fri, 12/17/2004 - 00:56 | [reply](#)

don't dress it up

Any combatant who does not display their identification (Uniform) and is a member of a recognised regime or governments's armed forces . Who attacks an armed representative of any nation with the intent of killing or wounding them is a terrorist. I recall the incident in the orange grove as an example.

by a reader on Wed, 01/05/2005 - 12:38 | [reply](#)

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