

# Lehi (militant group)

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**Lehi** (Hebrew pronunciation: [ˈlexi]; **Hebrew**: ל"ח, sometimes abbreviated "LHI"), officially the **Fighters for the Freedom of Israel** (Hebrew: לוחמי חרות ישראל, romanized: *Lohamei Herut Israel*) and often known pejoratively as the **Stern Gang**,<sup>[10][11][12][13]</sup> was a **Zionist paramilitary militant** organization founded by **Avraham** ("Yair") **Stern** in **Mandatory Palestine**.<sup>[14][15][16]</sup> Its avowed aim was to evict the British authorities from Palestine by use of violence, allowing unrestricted **immigration** of **Jews** and the formation of a Jewish state. It was initially called the **National Military Organization in Israel**,<sup>[17]</sup> upon being founded in August 1940, but was renamed Lehi one month later.<sup>[2]</sup> The group referred to its members as **terrorists**<sup>[18]</sup> and admitted to having carried out acts of terrorism.<sup>[14][19][20]</sup>

Lehi split from the **Irgun** militant group in 1940 in order to continue fighting the **British** during **World War II**. It initially sought an alliance with **Fascist Italy** and **Nazi Germany**.<sup>[21]</sup> Believing that Nazi Germany was a lesser enemy of the Jews than Britain, Lehi twice attempted to form an alliance with the Nazis, proposing a Jewish state based on "nationalist and totalitarian principles, and linked to the German Reich by an alliance".<sup>[21][22]</sup> After Stern's death in 1942, the new leadership of Lehi began to move towards support for **Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union**<sup>[17]</sup> and

## Fighters for the Freedom of Israel

לוחמי חרות ישראל



The hand represents the Lehi **salute**, with only two raised fingers on the right hand to represent the "If I forget thee / O Jerusalem...may my right hand forget its skill" (**Ps. 137:5**) pledge. The acronym "Lehi" is written below the hand.<sup>[1]</sup>

<b>Also known as</b>	Stern Gang Lehi
<b>Leader</b>	<b>Avraham Stern</b> <sup>[a]</sup>
<b>Foundation</b>	1940
<b>Dissolved</b>	1948
<b>Split from</b>	<b>Irgun</b>
<b>Country</b>	<b>Mandatory Palestine</b> <b>Israel</b>
<b>Allegiance</b>	<b>Yishuv</b>
<b>Newspaper</b>	<i><b>Hamaas</b></i> (weekly) <sup>[4][5][b]</sup>
<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Revisionist Zionism</b> <b>Anti-imperialism</b> <sup>[6]</sup> <b>Anti-Arab sentiment</b> <b>Anti-British sentiment</b> <sup>[7]</sup>
	<b>From 1944:</b>

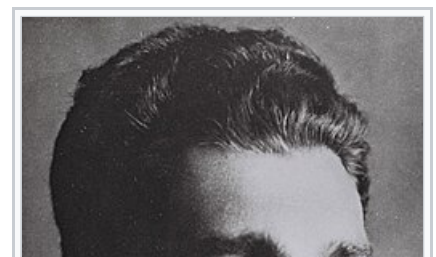
the ideology of [National Bolshevism](#), which was considered an amalgam of both right and left.<sup>[23][21]</sup> Regarding themselves as "revolutionary Socialists", the new Lehi developed a highly original ideology combining an "almost mystical" belief in [Greater Israel](#) with support for the Arab liberation struggle.<sup>[17]</sup> This sophisticated ideology failed to gain public support and Lehi fared poorly in the [first Israeli elections](#).<sup>[24]</sup>

In April 1948, Lehi and the Irgun were jointly responsible for the [massacre in Deir Yassin](#) of at least 107 Palestinian Arab villagers, including women and children. Lehi assassinated [Lord Moyne](#), British Minister Resident in the Middle East, and made many other attacks on the British in Palestine.<sup>[25]</sup> On 29 May 1948, the government of Israel, having inducted its activist members into the [Israel Defense Forces](#), formally disbanded Lehi, though some of its members carried out one more terrorist act, the assassination of [Folke Bernadotte](#) some months later,<sup>[26]</sup> an act condemned by Bernadotte's replacement as mediator, [Ralph Bunche](#).<sup>[27]</sup> After the assassination, the new Israeli government declared Lehi a terrorist organization, arresting some 200 members and convicting some of the leaders.<sup>[28]</sup> Just before the first Israeli elections in January 1949, a general amnesty to Lehi members was granted by the government.<sup>[28]</sup> In 1980, Israel instituted a military decoration, an "award for activity in the struggle for the establishment of Israel", the [Lehi ribbon](#).<sup>[29]</sup> Former Lehi leader [Yitzhak Shamir](#) became [Prime Minister of Israel](#) in 1983.

## Founding of Lehi

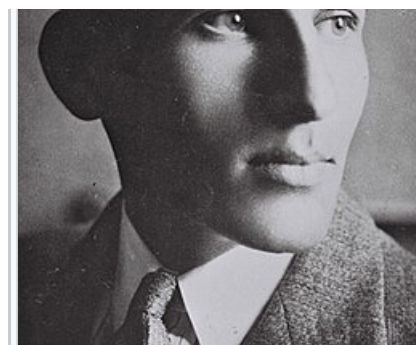
Lehi was created in August 1940 by [Avraham Stern](#).<sup>[2]</sup> Stern had been a member of the [Irgun](#) (*Irgun Tsvai Leumi* – "National Military Organization") high command. [Zeev Jabotinsky](#), then the Irgun's supreme commander, had decided that diplomacy and working with Britain would best

	<a href="#">National Bolshevism</a> <sup>[8]</sup>
<b>Political position</b>	<a href="#">Syncretic</a> <sup>[9]</sup>
<b>Notable attacks</b>	<a href="#">Killing of Lord Moyne</a> <a href="#">Cairo–Haifa train bombings</a> <a href="#">Deir Yassin massacre</a> <a href="#">Killing of Folke Bernadotte</a>
<b>Size</b>	Fewer than 300 members
<b>Part of</b>	<a href="#">Jewish Resistance Movement</a>
<b>Opponents</b>	 <a href="#">British Empire</a>
<b>Battles and wars</b>	<a href="#">Israeli–Palestinian conflict</a> <a href="#">Intercommunal conflict in Mandatory Palestine</a> <a href="#">Jewish Revolt in Palestine 1947–48</a> <a href="#">Palestine Civil War</a> <a href="#">1948 Palestine war</a> <a href="#">1948 Arab–Israeli War</a>
<b>Flag</b>	
	<b>Succeeded by</b> <a href="#">Fighters' List</a> <a href="#">Semitic Action</a>



serve the Zionist cause. [World War II](#) was in progress, and Britain was fighting [Nazi Germany](#). The Irgun suspended its underground military activities against the British for the duration of the war.

Stern argued that the time for Zionist diplomacy was over and that it was time for an armed struggle against the British. Like other Zionists, he objected to the [White Paper of 1939](#), which restricted both Jewish immigration and Jewish land purchases in Palestine. For Stern, "no difference existed between [Hitler](#) and [Chamberlain](#), between [Dachau](#) or [Buchenwald](#) and sealing the gates of Eretz Israel."<sup>[30]</sup>



Avraham Stern

Stern wanted to open Palestine to all Jewish refugees from Europe and considered this to be the most important issue of the day. Britain would not allow this. Therefore, he concluded, the [Yishuv](#) (Jews of Palestine) should fight the British rather than support them in the war. When the Irgun made a truce with the British, Stern left the Irgun to form his own group, which he called *Irgun Tsvai Leumi B'Yisrael* ("National Military Organization in Israel"), later *Lohamei Herut Israel* ("Fighters for the Freedom of Israel"). In September 1940, the organization was officially named "Lehi", the Hebrew [acronym](#) of the latter name.<sup>[2]</sup>

Stern and his followers believed that dying for the "foreign occupier" who was obstructing the creation of the Jewish State was useless. They differentiated between "enemies of the Jewish people" (the British) and "Jew haters" (the [Nazis](#)), believing that the former needed to be defeated and the latter manipulated.<sup>[31]</sup>

In 1940, the idea of the [Final Solution](#) was still "unthinkable", and Stern believed that Hitler wanted to make Germany *judenrein* through emigration, as opposed to extermination.<sup>[30][32]</sup> In December 1940, Lehi contacted Germany with a proposal to aid German conquest in the Middle East in return for recognition of a Jewish state open to unlimited immigration.<sup>[30]</sup>

## Goals and ideology

Lehi had three main goals:

- To bring together all those interested in liberation (that is, those willing to join in active fighting against the British).
- To appear before the world as the only active Jewish military organization.
- To take over [Eretz Yisrael](#) (the Land of Israel) by armed force.<sup>[34]</sup>



Lehi commemoration in [Petah](#)

Lehi believed in its early years that its goals would be achieved by finding a strong international ally that would expel the British from Palestine, in return for Jewish military help; this would require the creation of a broad and organised military force "demonstrating its desire for freedom through military operations."<sup>[35]</sup>

Tikva. Half-clenched fist, in reference to Psalms 137:5.<sup>[33]</sup>

Lehi also referred to themselves as 'terrorists' and may have been one of the last organizations to do so.<sup>[18]</sup>

An article titled "Terror" in the Lehi underground newspaper *He Khazit (The Front)* argued as follows:

Neither Jewish ethics nor Jewish tradition can disqualify **terrorism** as a means of combat. We are very far from having any moral qualms as far as our national war goes. We have before us the command of the **Torah**, whose morality surpasses that of any other body of laws in the world: "Ye shall blot them out to the last man."

But first and foremost, terrorism is for us a part of the political battle being conducted under the present circumstances, and it has a great part to play: speaking in a clear voice to the whole world, as well as to our wretched brethren outside this land, it proclaims our war against the occupier.

We are particularly far from this sort of hesitation in regard to an enemy whose moral perversion is admitted by all.<sup>[20]</sup>

The article described the goals of terror:

- It demonstrates ... against the true terrorist who hides behind his piles of papers and the laws he has legislated.
- It is not directed against people, it is directed against representatives. Therefore it is effective.
- If it also shakes the *Yishuv* from their complacency, good and well.<sup>[20]</sup>

**Yitzhak Shamir**, one of the three leaders of Lehi after Avraham Stern's assassination, argued for the legitimacy of Lehi's actions:

There are those who say that to kill Martin<sup>[c]</sup> is terrorism, but to attack an army camp is guerrilla warfare and to bomb civilians is professional warfare. But I think it is the same from the moral point of view. Is it better to drop an atomic bomb on a city than to kill a handful of persons? I don't think so. But nobody says that President Truman was a terrorist. All the men we went for individually – Wilkin, Martin, **MacMichael** and

others – were personally interested in succeeding in the fight against us.

So it was more efficient and more moral to go for selected targets. In any case, it was the only way we could operate, because we were so small. For us it was not a question of the professional honour of a soldier, it was the question of an idea, an aim that had to be achieved. We were aiming at a political goal. There are many examples of what we did to be found in the Bible – Gideon and Samson, for instance. This had an influence on our thinking. And we also learned from the history of other peoples who fought for their freedom – the Russian and Irish revolutionaries, Giuseppe Garibaldi and Josip Broz Tito.<sup>[36]</sup>

## Relationship with fascism and socialism

Unlike the left-wing Haganah and right-wing Irgun, Lehi members were not a homogeneous collective with a single political, religious, or economic ideology. They were a combination of militants united by the goal of liberating the land of Israel from British rule. Most Lehi leaders defined their organization as an anti-imperialist movement and stated that their opposition to British colonial rule in Palestine was not based on a particular policy but rather on the presence of a foreign power over the homeland of the Jewish people.<sup>[38]</sup>

Avraham Stern defined the British Mandate as "foreign rule" regardless of British policies and took a radical position against such imperialism even if it were to be benevolent.<sup>[38]</sup> In a pamphlet entitled *18 Principles of Rebirth*, Stern noted the need to "solve the problem" of the "alien population" and called for the 'conquest' of Palestine. It also emphasized the need to gather the Jewish Diaspora into a new sovereign state, revive the Hebrew language as a spoken language, and build a Third Temple as a symbol of the 'new era'.<sup>[37]</sup>

In the early years of the state of Israel, Lehi veterans could be found supporting nearly all political parties and some Lehi leaders founded a left-wing political party called the **Fighters' List** with Natan Yellin-Mor as its head. The party took part in the elections in January 1949 and won a single parliamentary seat. A number of Lehi veterans established the **Semitic Action** movement in 1956 which sought the creation of a regional federation encompassing Israel and



The *18 Principles of Rebirth*, the ideology of Lehi as laid out by Avraham Stern, notes the need to "solve the problem" of the "alien population".<sup>[37]</sup>

its Arab neighbours<sup>[39][40]</sup> on the basis of an anti-colonialist alliance with other indigenous inhabitants of the Middle East.<sup>[41]</sup>

Some writers have stated that Lehi's true goals were the creation of a totalitarian state.<sup>[42]</sup> Perliger and Weinberg write that the organisation's ideology placed "its world view in the quasi-fascist radical Right, which is characterised by xenophobia, a national egotism that completely subordinates the individual to the needs of the nation, anti-liberalism, total denial of democracy and a highly centralised government."<sup>[43]</sup> Perliger and Weinberg state that most Lehi members were admirers of the Italian Fascist movement.<sup>[35]</sup> According to Kaplan and Penslar, Lehi's ideology was a mix of fascist and communist thought combined with racism and universalism.<sup>[44]</sup>

Others counter these claims. They note that when Lehi founder Avraham Stern went to study in fascist Italy, he refused to join the *Gruppo Universitario Fascista* for foreign students, even though members got large reductions in tuition.<sup>[45][verification needed]</sup>

## Political racism

According to Yaacov Shavit, professor at the Department of Jewish History, Tel Aviv University, articles in Lehi publications contained references to a Jewish "master race", contrasting the Jews with Arabs who were seen as a "nation of slaves".<sup>[46]</sup> American journalist Sasha Polakow-Suransky writes that "Lehi was also unabashedly racist towards Arabs. Their publications described Jews as a master race and Arabs as a slave race." Lehi advocated mass expulsion of all Arabs from Palestine and Transjordan,<sup>[47]</sup> or even their physical annihilation.<sup>[48]</sup>

In contrast, a number of Lehi veterans, including co-leader Nathan Yellin-Mor, went on to establish the *Semitic Action* movement which sought the creation of a regional federation encompassing Israel and its Arab neighbours<sup>[39][40]</sup> on the basis of an anti-colonialist alliance with other indigenous inhabitants of the Middle East.<sup>[41]</sup> Yaakov Yardaur, another former Lehi militant, was a strong advocate for equal rights for Arab citizens of Israel.<sup>[49]</sup>

## Evolution, tactics and organization

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Many Lehi combatants had received military training. Some had attended the Military Engineers School in Civitavecchia, in Fascist Italy.<sup>[50]</sup> Others received military training from instructors of the Polish Armed Forces in 1938–1939. This training was conducted in Trochenbrod (Zofiówka) in Wołyń Voivodeship, Podębin near Łódź, and the forests around Andrychów. They were taught how to use explosives. One of them reported later: "Poles treated terrorism as a science. We have mastered mathematical principles of demolishing constructions made of concrete, iron, wood, bricks and dirt."<sup>[50]</sup>

The group was initially unsuccessful. Early attempts to raise funds through criminal activities, including a bank robbery in Tel Aviv in 1940 and another robbery on 9 January 1942 in which Jewish passers-by were killed, brought about the temporary collapse of the group. An attempt to assassinate the head of the British secret police in [Lod](#) in which three police personnel were killed, two Jewish and one British, elicited a severe response from the British and Jewish establishments who collaborated against Lehi.<sup>[51]</sup>

Stern's group was seen as a terrorist organisation by the British authorities, who instructed the Defence Security Office (the colonial branch of [MI5](#)) to track down its leaders. In 1942, Stern, after he was arrested, was shot dead in disputed circumstances by Inspector [Geoffrey J. Morton](#) of the [CID](#).<sup>[52]</sup> The arrest of several other members led momentarily to the group's eclipse, until it was revived after the September 1942 escape of two of its leaders, [Yitzhak Shamir](#) and [Eliyahu Giladi](#), aided by two other escapees [Natan Yellin-Mor](#) (Friedman) and [Israel Eldad](#) (Sheib). (Giladi was later killed by Lehi under circumstances that remain mysterious.)<sup>[51]</sup> Shamir's codename was "Michael", a reference to one of Shamir's heroes, [Michael Collins](#). Lehi was guided by spiritual and philosophical leaders such as [Uri Zvi Greenberg](#) and [Israel Eldad](#). After the killing of Giladi, the organization was led by a triumvirate of Eldad, Shamir, and Yellin-Mor.

Lehi adopted a non-socialist platform of anti-[imperialist](#) ideology. It viewed the continued British rule of Palestine as a violation of the Mandate's provision generally, and its restrictions on Jewish immigration to be an intolerable breach of [international law](#). However they also targeted Jews whom they regarded as traitors, and during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War they joined in operations with the [Haganah](#) and [Irgun](#) against Arab targets, for example [Deir Yassin](#).

According to a compilation by Nachman Ben-Yehuda, Lehi was responsible for 42 assassinations, more than twice as many as the Irgun and Haganah combined during the same period. Of those Lehi assassinations that Ben-Yehuda classified as political, more than half the victims were Jews.<sup>[53]</sup>

Lehi also rejected the authority of the [Jewish Agency for Israel](#) and related organizations, operating entirely on its own throughout nearly all of its existence.



Wanted Poster of the [Palestine Police Force](#) offering rewards for the capture of Stern Gang members: [Jaacov Levstein](#) (Eliav), [Yitzhak Yezernitzky](#) (Shamir), and [Natan Friedman-Yelin](#)

Lehi prisoners captured by the British generally refused to employ lawyers in their defence. The defendants would conduct their own defence, and would deny the right of the military court to try them, saying that in accordance with the Hague Convention they should be accorded the status of prisoners of war. For the same reason, Lehi prisoners refused to plead for amnesty, even when it was clear that this would have spared them the death penalty.<sup>[54]</sup> [Moshe Barazani](#), a Lehi member, and [Meir Feinstein](#), an Irgun member, took their own lives in prison with a grenade smuggled inside an orange so the British could not hang them.<sup>[55]</sup>

## Activities and operations during World War II

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### Wartime contacts with Italy and Nazi Germany

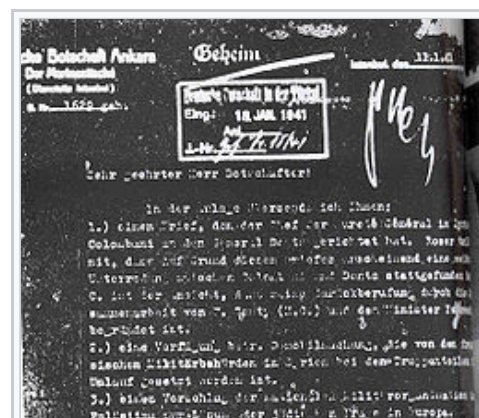
#### Italy

In mid-1940, Stern became convinced that the Italians were interested in the establishment of a fascist Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>[56]</sup> He conducted negotiations, he thought, with the Italians via an intermediary Moshe Rotstein, and drew up a document that became known as the "Jerusalem Agreement".<sup>[57][58]</sup> In exchange for Italy's recognition of, and aid in obtaining, Jewish sovereignty over Palestine, Stern promised that Zionism would come under the aegis of Italian fascism, with Haifa as its base, and the Old City of Jerusalem under Vatican control, except for the [Jewish quarter](#).<sup>[59]</sup> In Heller's words, Stern's proposal would "turn the 'Kingdom of Israel' into a satellite of the Axis powers."<sup>[60]</sup>

However, the "intermediary" Rotstein was in fact an agent of the Irgun, conducting a sting operation under the direction of the Irgun intelligence leader in Haifa, Israel Pritzker, in cooperation with the British.<sup>[61]</sup> Secret British documents about the affair were uncovered by historian Eldad Harouvi (now director of the Palmach Archives) and confirmed by former Irgun intelligence officer [Yitzhak Berman](#).<sup>[61]</sup> When Rotstein's role later became clear, Lehi sentenced him to death and assigned Yaacov Eliav to kill him, but the assassination never took place.<sup>[58][62]</sup> However, Pritzker was killed by Lehi in 1943.<sup>[58]</sup>

#### Nazi Germany

Late in 1940, Lehi, having identified a common interest between the intentions of the new German order and Jewish national aspirations, proposed forming an alliance in World War II with [Nazi Germany](#).<sup>[21]</sup> The organization offered cooperation in the following terms: Lehi would rebel against the British, while Germany would recognize an independent Jewish state in Palestine/Eretz Israel, and all Jews leaving their homes in Europe, by their own



will or because of government injunctions, could enter Palestine with no restriction of numbers.<sup>[31]</sup> Late in 1940, Lehi representative **Naftali Lubenchik** went to **Beirut** to meet German official **Werner Otto von Hentig**. The Lehi documents outlined that its rule would be authoritarian and indicated similarities between the organization and Nazis.<sup>[31]</sup> **Israel Eldad**, one of the leading members of Lehi, wrote about Hitler "it is not Hitler who is the hater of the kingdom of Israel and the return to Zion, it is not Hitler who subjects us to the cruel fate of falling a second and a third time into Hitler's hands, but the British."<sup>[63]</sup>



Stern also proposed recruiting 40,000 Jews from occupied Europe to invade Palestine with German support to oust the British.<sup>[21]</sup> On 11 January 1941, Vice Admiral Ralf von der Marwitz, the German naval **attaché** in **Turkey**, filed a report (the "Ankara document") conveying an offer by Lehi to "actively take part in the war on Germany's side" in return for German support for "the establishment of the historic Jewish state on a national and totalitarian basis, bound by a treaty with the German Reich."<sup>[57][64][65]</sup>

According to Yellin-Mor:

Lubenchik did not take along any written memorandum for the German representatives. Had there been a need for one, he would have formulated it on the spot, since he was familiar with the episode of the Italian "intermediary" and with the numerous drafts connected with it. Apparently one of von Hentig's secretaries noted down the essence of the proposal in his own words.<sup>[66]</sup>

According to Joseph Heller, "The memorandum arising from their conversation is an entirely authentic document, on which the stamp of the 'IZL in Israel' is clearly embossed."<sup>[67]</sup> Von der Marwitz delivered the offer, classified as secret, to the German Ambassador in Turkey and on 21 January 1941 it was sent to Berlin. There was never any response.<sup>[68]</sup> A second attempt to contact the Nazis was made at the end of 1941, but it was even less successful.<sup>[69]</sup> The emissary Yellin-Mor was arrested in Syria before he could carry out his mission.<sup>[70]</sup>

This proposed alliance with Nazi Germany cost Lehi and Stern much support.<sup>[71]</sup> The Stern Gang also had links with, and support from, the **Vichy France Sûreté's** Lebanese offices.<sup>[72]</sup> Even as the full scale of Nazi atrocities became more evident in 1943, Lehi refused to accept Hitler as the main foe (as opposed to Great Britain).<sup>[7]</sup>

## Assassination of Lord Moyne

*Further information:* [Walter Guinness, 1st Baron Moyne § Assassination](#)

On 6 November 1944, Lehi assassinated [Lord Moyne](#), the British Minister Resident in the Middle East, in [Cairo](#). Moyne was the highest ranking British official in the region. Yitzhak Shamir claimed later that Moyne was assassinated because of his support for a Middle Eastern Arab Federation and anti-Semitic lectures in which Arabs were held to be racially superior to Jews.<sup>[73]</sup> The assassination rocked the British government, and outraged [Winston Churchill](#), the British [Prime Minister](#). The two assassins, [Eliyahu Bet-Zuri](#) and [Eliyahu Hakim](#) were captured and used their trial as a platform to make public their political propaganda. They were both found guilty and executed. In 1975, their bodies were returned to Israel, with Egypt exchanging them for 20 Arab prisoners, and given a state funeral.<sup>[74][75]</sup> In 1982, postage stamps were issued for 20 [Olei Hagardom](#), including Bet-Zouri and Hakim, in a souvenir sheet called "Martyrs of the struggle for Israel's independence."<sup>[76][77]</sup>

## Post war terrorist campaign and insurgency

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As a group that never had more than a few hundred members, Lehi relied on audacious but small-scale operations to drive its message home. They adopted the tactics of groups such as the [Socialist Revolutionaries](#) and the [Combat Organization of the Polish Socialist Party](#) in Czarist Russia,<sup>[78]</sup> and the [Irish Republican Army](#). To this end, Lehi conducted small-scale operations such as individual assassinations of British officials (notable targets included [Lord Moyne](#), CID detectives, and Jewish "collaborators"), and random shootings against soldiers and police officers.<sup>[79]</sup> Another strategy, adopted in 1946, was to send bombs in the mail to British politicians. Other actions included sabotaging infrastructure targets: bridges, [railroads](#), telephone and telegraph lines, and [oil](#) refineries, as well as the use of vehicle bombs against British military, police, and administrative targets. Lehi financed its operations from private donations, [extortion](#), and [bank robbery](#). Its campaign of violence lasted from 1944 to 1948. Initially conducted together with the Irgun, it included a six-month suspension to avoid being targeted by the [Haganah](#) during the [Hunting Season](#), and later operated jointly with the Haganah and Irgun under the [Jewish Resistance Movement](#). After the Jewish Resistance Movement was dissolved, it operated independently as part of the general [Jewish insurgency in Palestine](#).<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

### Tel Aviv car park raid

On 25 April 1946, a Lehi unit attacked a car park in [Tel Aviv](#) occupied by the British [6th Airborne Division](#). Under a barrage of heavy covering fire, Lehi fighters broke into the car park, shot soldiers they encountered at close range, stole rifles from arms racks, laid mines to cover the retreat, and withdrew. Seven soldiers were killed in the attack, which caused widespread outrage among the British security forces in Palestine. It resulted in retaliatory anti-Jewish

violence by British troops and a punitive curfew imposed on Tel Aviv's roads and the closure of places of entertainment in the city by the British Army.<sup>[79]</sup>

## British police station in Haifa

See also: *Lehi bombing of Haifa police station*

On 12 January 1947, Lehi members drove a truckload of explosives into a British police station in [Haifa](#), killing four and injuring 140, in what has been called 'the world's first true truck bomb'.<sup>[80]</sup>

## Operations in Europe

Following the bombing of the British embassy in Rome, in October 1946, a series of operations against targets in the United Kingdom were launched. On 7 March 1947, Lehi's only successful operation in Britain was carried out when a Lehi bomb severely damaged the British Colonial Club, a [London](#) recreational facility for soldiers and students from Britain's colonies in Africa and the West Indies.<sup>[81]</sup> On 15 April 1947 a bomb consisting of twenty-four sticks of explosives was planted in the Colonial Office, [Whitehall](#). It failed to explode due to a fault in the timer. Five weeks later, on 22 May, five alleged Lehi members were arrested in Paris with bomb making material including explosives of the same type as found in London. On 2 June, two Lehi members, Betty Knouth and Yaakov Levstein, were arrested crossing from [Belgium](#) to [France](#). Envelopes addressed to British officials, with detonators, batteries and a time fuse were found in one of Knouth's suitcases. The British Security Services identified Knouth as the person who planted the bomb in the Colonial Office. Shortly after their arrest, 21 letter bombs addressed to senior British figures were intercepted. The letters had been posted in Italy. The intended recipients included [Bevin](#), [Attlee](#), [Churchill](#) and [Eden](#).<sup>[82]</sup> Eden carried a letter bomb in his suitcase for a whole day, thinking it was a Whitehall pamphlet that he would read later in the day. He only realized it was a bomb after being warned by the police, who were informed by MI5.<sup>[83]</sup>



Knouth was also known as Gilberte/Elizabeth Lazarus. Levstein was travelling as Jacob Elias; his fingerprints connected him to the deaths of several Palestine Policemen as well as an attempt on the life of the British High Commissioner. In September 1947, a Belgian court sentenced Knouth to one year in prison and Levstein to eight months in prison for illegally transporting explosives with intent to commit a felony.<sup>[84]</sup> In 1973, [Margaret Truman](#) wrote that letter bombs were also posted to her father, U.S. President [Harry S. Truman](#), in 1947.<sup>[85]</sup> Former Lehi leader Yellin-Mor admitted that letter bombs had been sent to British targets but denied that any had been sent to Truman.<sup>[85][86]</sup>

## Death threat against Hugh Trevor-Roper

Shortly after the 1947 publication of *The Last Days of Hitler*, Lehi issued a death threat against the author, [Hugh Trevor-Roper](#), for his portrayal of Hitler, feeling that Trevor-Roper had attempted to exonerate the German populace from responsibility.<sup>[87]</sup>

## Cairo-Haifa train bombings

*Main article: [Cairo–Haifa train bombings 1948](#)*

During the lead-up to the [1948 Arab–Israeli War](#), Lehi [mined the Cairo–Haifa train](#) several times. On 29 February 1948, Lehi mined the train north of [Rehovot](#), killing 28 British soldiers and wounding 35. On 31 March, Lehi mined the train near [Binyamina](#), killing 40 civilians and wounding 60.

## Attempted Nablus terror attack

[Shlomo Sand](#) writes that as a method of applying pressure on Arab villagers to abandon their settlements, Lehi planned a terror attack on [Nablus](#) and its Arab city headquarters; Lehi fighter Elisha Ibzov (Avraham Cohen) was captured with a truck filled with explosives on his way to the city. Lehi fighters in return abducted four adult villagers and youth from al-Sheikh Muwannis with no connection to Ibzov's capture and threatened to kill them. As rumours spread that they were already murdered, panic set out in the villagers and the settlement became increasingly abandoned, despite the eventual release of the hostages<sup>[88]</sup>

## Deir Yassin massacre

*Main article: [Deir Yassin massacre](#)*

One of the most widely known acts of Lehi was the attack on the Palestinian-Arab village of [Deir Yassin](#).

In the months before the British evacuation from Palestine, the [Arab League](#)-sponsored [Arab Liberation Army](#) (ALA) occupied several strategic points along the road between [Jerusalem](#) and [Tel Aviv](#), cutting off supplies to the Jewish part of Jerusalem. One of these points was Deir Yassin. By March 1948, the road was cut off and Jewish Jerusalem was under siege. The Haganah launched [Operation Nachshon](#) to break the siege.

On 6 April, the Haganah attacked [al-Qastal](#), a village two kilometres north of Deir Yassin, also overlooking the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road.<sup>[89]</sup>

Then on 9 April 1948, about 120 Lehi and Irgun fighters, acting in cooperation with the Haganah, attacked and captured Deir Yassin. The attack was at night, the fighting was

confused, and many civilian inhabitants of the village were killed.<sup>[90]</sup> This action had great consequences for the war, and remains a cause célèbre for Palestinians ever since.

Exactly what happened has never been established clearly. The Arab League reported a great massacre: 254 killed, with rape and lurid mutilations. Israeli investigations claimed the actual number of dead was between 100 and 120, and there were no mass rapes, but most of the dead were civilians and admitted some were killed deliberately. Lehi and Irgun both denied an organized massacre. Accounts by Lehi veterans such as Ezra Yakhin note that many of the attackers were killed or wounded, assert that Arabs fired from every building and that Iraqi and Syrian soldiers were among the dead, and even that some Arab fighters dressed as women.<sup>[91]</sup>

However, Jewish authorities, including Haganah, the Chief Rabbinate, the Jewish Agency, and [David Ben-Gurion](#), also condemned the attack, lending credence to the charge of massacre.<sup>[92]</sup> The Jewish Agency even sent a letter of condemnation, apology, and condolence to King [Abdullah I of Jordan](#).<sup>[93]</sup>

Both the Arab reports and Jewish responses had hidden motives: the Arab leaders wanted to encourage Palestinian Arabs to fight rather than surrender, to discredit the Zionists with international opinion, and to increase popular support in their countries for an invasion of Palestine. The Jewish leaders wanted to discredit Irgun and Lehi.

Ironically, the Arab reports backfired in one respect: frightened Palestinian Arabs did not surrender, but did not fight either – [they fled](#), allowing Israel to gain much territory with little fighting and also without absorbing many Arabs.<sup>[94]</sup>

Lehi similarly interpreted events at Deir Yassin as turning the tide of war in favour of the Jews. Lehi leader [Israel Eldad](#) later wrote in his memoirs from the underground period that "without Deir Yassin the State of Israel could never have been established".<sup>[95][96]</sup>

The Deir Yassin story did not much sway international opinion.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> It did increase, not only support but pressure on Arab governments to intervene. Abdullah of Jordan was now compelled to join the invasion of Palestine after [Israel's declaration of independence](#) on 14 May.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## Assassination of Count Folke Bernadotte

*Further information:* [Folke Bernadotte § Assassination](#)



Female Lehi fighters in 1948



Although Lehi had stopped operating nationally after May 1948, the group continued to function in Jerusalem. On 17 September 1948, Lehi assassinated UN mediator Count [Folke Bernadotte](#). The assassination was directed by [Yehoshua Zettler](#) and carried out by a four-man team led by Meshulam Makover. The fatal shots were fired by [Yehoshua Cohen](#). The [Security Council](#) described the assassination as a "cowardly act which appears to have been committed by a criminal group of terrorists".<sup>[97]</sup>



UN mediator Count [Folke Bernadotte](#) was assassinated by *Lehi* in [Jerusalem](#) in 1948.

Three days after the assassination, the Israeli government passed the Ordinance to Prevent Terrorism and declared Lehi to be a terrorist organization.<sup>[98][99]</sup> Many Lehi members were arrested, including leaders [Nathan Yellin-Mor](#) and Matityahu Shmulevitz who were arrested on 29 September.<sup>[98]</sup> Eldad and Shamir managed to escape arrest.<sup>[98]</sup> Yellin-Mor and Shmulevitz were charged with leadership of a terrorist organization and on 10 February 1949 were sentenced to 8 years and 5 years imprisonment, respectively.<sup>[100][101][102]</sup> However the State (Temporary) Council soon announced a general amnesty for Lehi members and they were released.<sup>[100][103]</sup>

## The Lehi trial and the Fighters' Party

Between 5 December 1948 and 25 January 1949, Yellin-Mor and Shmulevitz were tried in a military court on terrorism charges.<sup>[105]</sup> The prosecution accused them of the murder of Bernadotte, though they were not specifically charged with it.<sup>[105]</sup> Senior officers of the IDF, including [Yisrael Galili](#) and [David Shaltiel](#), told the court that Lehi had hindered, rather than assisted the fight against the British and the Arabs.<sup>[105]</sup>



Declaration of Lehi as a terrorist organization, September 20, 1948<sup>[104]</sup>

While the trial was in progress, some of the Lehi leadership founded a USSR-leaning political party called the [Fighters' List](#) with Yellin-Mor as its leader.<sup>[106]</sup> The party took part in the [elections in January 1949](#) with Yellin-Mor and Shmulevitz heading the list.<sup>[106]</sup> The trial verdict was handed down on 10 February, soon after the Fighters' List had won one seat with only 1.2% of the vote.<sup>[106]</sup> Yellin-Mor was sentenced to 8 years and Shmulevitz to 5 years imprisonment, but the court agreed to remit the sentences if the prisoners agreed to a list of conditions.<sup>[106]</sup> The Provisional State Council then authorised their pardon.<sup>[106]</sup> The party disbanded after several years and did not contest the [1951 elections](#).<sup>[107]</sup>

In 1956, some Lehi veterans established the [Semitic Action](#) movement, which sought the creation of a regional federation encompassing Israel and its Arab neighbours<sup>[39][40]</sup> on the basis of an anti-colonialist alliance with other indigenous inhabitants of the Middle East.<sup>[41]</sup>

Not all Lehi alumni gave up [political violence](#) after independence: former members were involved in the activities of the [Kingdom of Israel](#) militant group, the 1957 assassination of [Rudolf Kastner](#), and likely the 1952 attempted assassination of [David-Zvi Pinkas](#).<sup>[108][109][110][111]</sup>

## Publications

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Lehi produced a range of publications containing unabashedly racist literature referring to Jews as a "master race" and Arabs as a "slave race".<sup>[46][112]</sup> Prominent publications included [Hamaas](#) (Ahe Action), a weekly publication,<sup>[113]</sup> as well as the monthly [HaKhazit](#) (The Front),<sup>[20]</sup> daily [Mivrak](#) (Telegram), and [BaMahteret](#) (Underground).

## Service ribbon

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In 1980, Israel instituted the [Lehi ribbon](#), red, black, grey, pale blue and white, which is awarded to former members of the Lehi underground who wished to carry it, "for military service towards the establishment of the State of Israel".<sup>[29]</sup>



## "Unknown Soldiers" anthem

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The words and music of a song "Unknown Soldiers" (also translated "Anonymous Soldiers") were written by Avraham Stern in 1932 during the early days of the Irgun. It became the Irgun's anthem until the split with Lehi in 1940, after which it became the Lehi anthem.<sup>[114]</sup>

## Prominent members of Lehi

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A number of Lehi's members went on to play important roles in Israel's public life.

- Shaltiel Ben-Yair, explosives expert, organised together with Amos Kenan the assassination attempt against the Transportation Minister in 1952<sup>[115]</sup>
- [Eliyahu Bet-Zuri](#), executed in 1945 for his part in the assassination of Lord Moyne



underground radio station  
(1948)

- [Geula Cohen](#), member of the Knesset
- [Israel Eldad](#), leader in the Israeli national camp
- [Boaz Evron](#), left-wing journalist
- [Maxim Ghilan](#), Israeli journalist, author and peace activist
- [Eliyahu Giladi](#), killed in 1943 by his Lehi comrades for arguing in favour of committing acts considered too extreme even by them
- [Uri Zvi Greenberg](#), Israeli poet and journalist
- [Eliyahu Hakim](#), executed in 1945 for assassinating Lord Moyne
- [Amos Kenan](#), writer
- [Baruch Korff](#), Orthodox rabbi
- [Yitzhak Shamir](#), Israeli prime minister 1983–1984 and 1986–1992
- [Avraham Stern](#), leader and ideologist
- [Shimon Tzabar](#), author, painter, mycologist and anti-Zionist activist
- [Yaakov Yardeur](#), lawyer and advocate for equal rights for the [Arab citizens of Israel](#)
- [Natan Yellin-Mor](#), member of the Knesset 1949–1951, leftist advocate of peace with Arabs.<sup>[116]</sup>

## See also

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- [List of Lehi operations](#)
- [List of Lehi members](#)
- [Jewish insurgency in Palestine](#)
- [Roy Farran](#), letter bomb incident

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### Notes

- <sup>^</sup> After Stern's murder in February 1942,<sup>[2]</sup> [Nathan Yellin-Mor](#) became a member of the Lehi's guiding triumvirate, with [Israel Eldad](#) as chief of Lehi's propaganda and [Yitzhak Shamir](#)<sup>[3]</sup> as chief of operations.
- <sup>^</sup> Other publications by the Lehi included the daily *Mivrak*, the monthly *HeHahzit*, and *BaMahteret*.
- <sup>^</sup> T.G. Martin was a British police sergeant who had previously arrested Shamir and who was assassinated by Lehi in retaliation.

### Citations

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- <sup>^</sup> "Yitzhak Shamir, Israel's modest, hardline ex-PM, dies at 96"‏<sup>[</sup>[↗](#)<sup>]</sup>. *The Times of Israel*. Archived<sup>[</sup>[↗](#)<sup>]</sup>

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104. <sup>^</sup> "For the purposes of Regulation 8 of the Emergency Regulations – Prevention of Terrorism – 5748–1948, the Provisional Government has decided to declare that the group of people known as 'Freedom Fighters of Israel' and the members of the so-called 'Homeland Front' are terrorist organizations. By order of the provisional administration. Ze'ev Sharaf (Government Secretary)."
105. <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> Heller (1995), pp. 261–266
106. <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> <sup>d</sup> <sup>e</sup> Heller (1995), pp. 265–267
107. <sup>^</sup> Heller (1995), pp. 279–284
108. <sup>^</sup> Baram, Daphna (10 September 2009). "[Amos Keinan: Controversial Israeli journalist, writer and artist](#)"<sup>↗</sup>. *The Independent*. Archived<sup>↗</sup> from the original on 12 September 2009. Retrieved 8 November 2009.
109. <sup>^</sup> Melman, Yossi (13 August 2009). "[Time bomb](#)"<sup>↗</sup>. *Haaretz*. Retrieved 8 September 2009.

110. <sup>^</sup> [Segev, Tom](#); Arlen Neal Weinstein (1998). *1949: The First Israelis* [↗](#). Macmillan. pp. 230–231 [↗](#). ISBN 0-02-929180-1.
111. <sup>^</sup> Pedahzur, Ami, and Arie Perliger (2009). *Jewish Terrorism in Israel*. Columbia University Press. pp. 31–33
112. <sup>^</sup> Sasha Polakow-Suransky, "The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa", p. 107
113. <sup>^</sup> [Khalidi, Walid](#). (1971). *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem Until 1948*. Institute of Palestine Studies. p. 606. ISBN 0-88728-155-9.
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115. <sup>^</sup> Melman, Yossi (13 August 2009). "Inside Intel / Time Bomb" [↗](#). *Haaretz*.
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