

PALESTINE -MUCH PROMISED LAND

By Frank Gervasi



Agricultural Jews have made their part of Palestine an area of rich citrus groves

As long as England polices Palestine with 32,000 soldiers, the Arabs won't dare attack the Jews. If she shifts enough of these troops, however, to other war fronts, you may look for another bloody war in the Holy Land

IN PALESTINE there is a phantom army. It isn't much of an army as armies go nowadays—10,000 men maybe, and most of them have never even shot a rabbit with a .22. This army never parades and it has no band. It lives only by night. Then it drills furtively behind the wind-sculptured dunes on the desert's edge. By day it merges back into the life of the streets and the fields of that new country.

This army's uniforms are overalls, denim shorts and shirts or whatever its soldiers happened to be wearing when they knocked off work. They are bronzed, determined men who work with hammers, saws, picks, shovels, plows, air drills or drive trucks. They are all Jews and to them Palestine is something more than a word in a headline, or an emotion, or a piece of land about the size of Vermont lying between the Mediterranean and the river Jordan. To them Palestine is an idea, a dream to be fulfilled.

Physically and morally they are hard men, in the way men become hardened by work and suffering. Long after curfew has sounded they drill in small detachments wherever they think they are reasonably safe from the spies of the Arabs or the vigilance of police patrols. They do the manual of arms with wooden guns, they march and countermarch and deploy in mock guerrilla war over sands still hot from the noonday sun, on rocks that bruise and cut them in the dark.

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Constant vigilance is the price of order in Palestine. Above, a detachment of Cameron Highlanders guards one of Jerusalem's streets

Despite precautions and the alertness of sentries, small bands are occasionally spotted. That means arrests, jail and the third degree. So far at least 500 have been arrested and sweated. But the British authorities haven't been able to find out where their real rifles and machine guns and grenades are hidden.

Existence of this secret army is the best possible proof that British policy in Palestine has not been successful in welding the objectives of two powerful faiths, Islam and Jewry, any more than the British have been able to solve the problem of Ireland, which in emotional and psychological aspects the Palestinian question closely resembles.

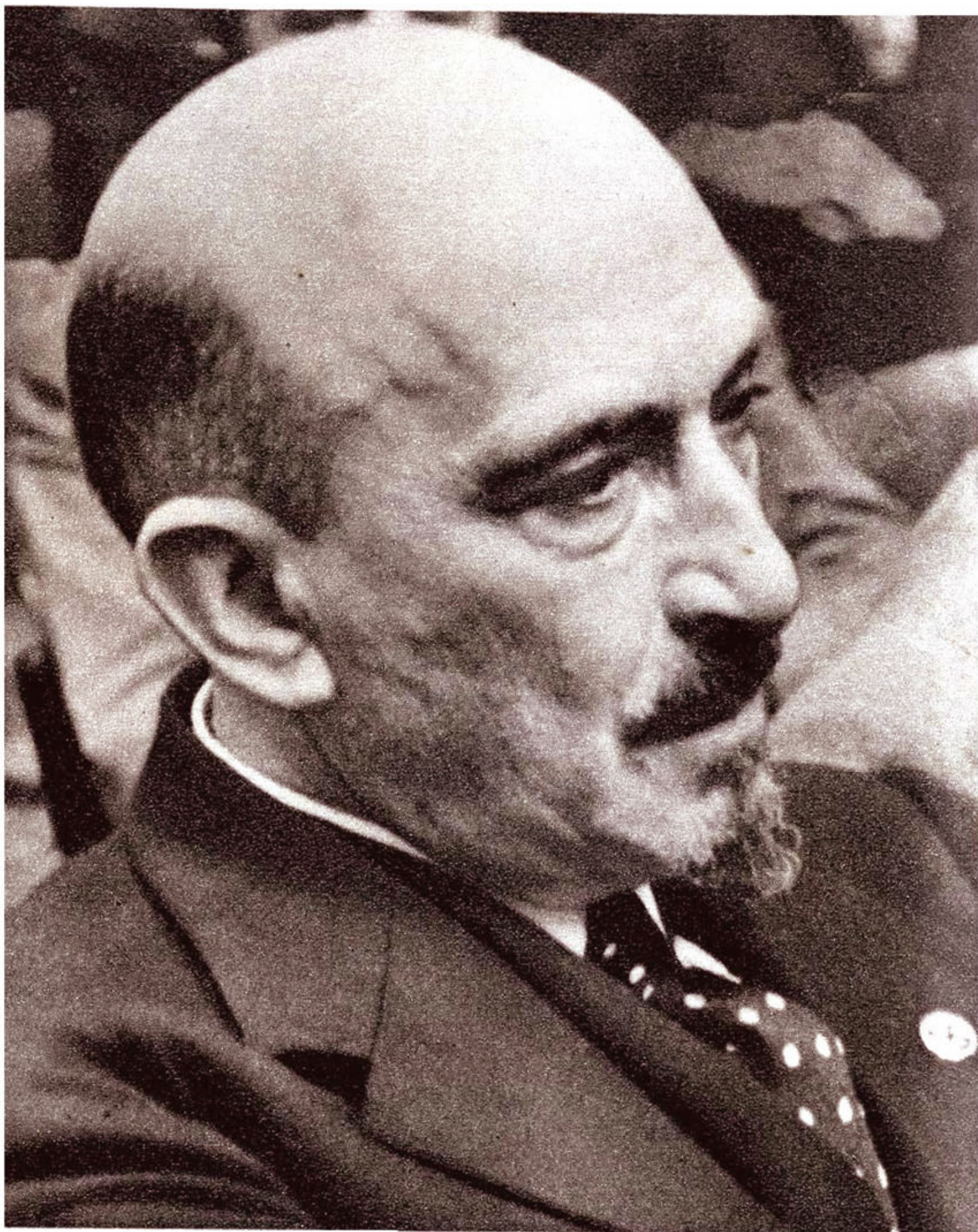
That the Jews, a nonbelligerent people who've been historically taking it instead of dishing it out, have resolved to have an army shows they expect trouble. They know that one day, on that soil that provided the stage for the noble and the ignoble of the Bible, with its glorious past, its turbulent present and uncertain future, they must fight the Arab for supremacy. For the Jew it is fight or perish in Palestine. The Jew, who never fought before, has decided to kill or be killed that his dream might live.

The Jew and the Arab have only one thing in common. They both know that Britain has undertaken to do the impossible in Palestine. The Bible promised Palestine to the Jews, the Koran gave it to the Arabs. Britain, with her infinite ability to compromise until the last possible moment, promised it to both the Arabs and the Jews.

Promises That Couldn't Be Kept

Just as relations between two human beings must inevitably collapse when they are founded on lies or half-truths, so must the present setup in Palestine break down or be radically revised if Arab and Jew are to live side by side in peace. Palestine began all wrong. Back in 1915 the Turks threatened the Suez

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Dr. Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization and statesman-leader of the Palestine Jews in their double fight with Britain and the Arabs

Canal, Britain's gate-valve from the Mediterranean to the East and India. Britain and her ally, France, decided to extend their imperial influence in the Near and Middle East by smashing the Ottoman Empire.

And this they did with the Arab revolt in the deserts, ably led by the romantic Colonel T. E. Lawrence. In a letter to the sheriff of Mecca, in 1915, Sir Henry McMahon, British commander in chief in Cairo, promised the Arabs independence, national and political autonomy over a wide area between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf as a reward for their help in breaking the back of the Ottoman Empire.

Until Jerusalem and Damascus fell and the Turk was beaten, the Allies of the first World War were secondary powers in the Mediterranean. Until General Allenby rolled across the Jordan with his pith-helmeted troops and the Holy City fell, the Allies were losing the World War, their shipping constantly menaced in the Middle Sea, their communications to the East in jeopardy.

It wasn't until after the last war that it was disclosed that Britain and France had made impossible promises to the Arabs, that between them, in the Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916, they had decided to divide the Arab lands in two spheres of influence.

In November, 1917, came the Balfour Declaration, which promised the Jews a "national home" in Palestine provided the religious and civil interests of the native populations were not violated. Britain established this Jewish home for two reasons. The first was that England, fundamentally a liberal nation and instinctively concerned with the difficulties of oppressed minorities, had a deep regard for the Jews and their problems and sincerely wanted to help them. Secondly England wanted the support of the financially powerful Jews of the United States.

But the lambs and the lions refused to play. The Arab resented the Jew who made the desert burgeon with oranges and fruits and vegetables just as the Bible said the children of Israel should do. Black-uniformed troops of Britain, with bayonets and bandoliers, guard the Wailing Wall to prevent the Jew from being massacred while he prays. Units of the Black Watch guard the Holy Sepulcher itself, for three faiths claim the Holy Land—Jewry, Christendom and Islam.

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Above, smuggling of Europe's Jewish refugees into Palestine has become a profitable business. These are herded in squalor on a tiny ship, waiting a chance to go ashore after Britain stopped immigration of Jews because of Arab protests.

That army of 10,000 Jews isn't as puny as it sounds. There are 6,000 other Jews who will join it. These are members of the Palestinian police force. They are called Supernumeraries. They are expert in the use of firearms. By the time the army is needed to protect the property and lives of 400,000 Jews, there will be others to join it, and Palestine, which already has a flag, will also have its legions.

While there are British soldiers in the Holy Land in sufficient numbers, as there are now that England is fighting Germany, there will be peace—a peace that is really more a truce. But these troops will not forever remain in the Holy Land. Never has England been able to spare enough troops to keep peace really. The British High Commissioner has pleaded for more and more soldiers to keep the Arab in check. It took 18,000 British Tommies and three years, from 1936 to 1939, to subdue the last native revolt. The rebellion might not have ended when it did had not England been faced with war with Germany. In January, 1939, at the London Arab-Jewish Conference, Colonial Minister MacDonald pleaded with the two groups to pipe down as war was just over the rim.

An Inevitable Conflict

While there are 32,000 British Dragoons, Yeomen, Tommies and Aussies in Palestine, the Arabs will not dare attack the Jews. But what happens when these troops are shifted to other sectors of the eventual Middle Eastern war theater, or, with the war ended, they sail for home? The Jews know. The Arabs will come down out of the hills again. Bombs will burst in the night, and bullets will whine. That's why the Jews have created an army.

Probably because she recognized the fact that she never has defined the territorial extent of the national home she promised the Jews nor the extent of the political home she promised the Arabs, Britain, ever since obtaining a League of Nations mandate over Palestine 22 years ago, has employed compromise in dealing with the two groups. Concessions were made to the Jews at the expense of the Arabs, and vice versa. To atone for the first big concession in favor of the Jews—the right to establish a homeland in the Holy Land—Britain placated the Arabs by restricting Jewish immigration, limiting the amount of land the Jews might buy from the Arabs.

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British troops, in an unrelenting search for terrorists, look for guns on passengers of a bus in Jerusalem

She took definite steps toward granting the Arabs some form of political autonomy.

These concessions the British have been obliged to make to combat Fascist-Nazi penetration in the disgruntled, anti-Semitic Arab world. Propaganda and money from totalitarian tills and guns from dictatorial arsenals were effective in uniting the native populations against the Jews.

The activities of authoritarian agents in the Near and Middle East were particularly effective during the 1936-1939 Arab revolt. This period coincided significantly with the golden era of dictatorship in Europe. The argument that Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini were unable to spread their anti-Semitic poison and their defiance of democracy because the natives lacked radios is absurd. I found radios in every Arab village I visited. Every local café had one, bought by the proprietors on the installment plan—from American, British or French dealers in Palestine, Lebanon or Syria.

Arabs gather every evening to listen to the sweet music from Bari and Berlin while they drink their coffee. They like the radio after they quit work in the banana plantations or potash plants down where the Dead Sea lies like a greasy blue puddle on the dun-colored desert near Jericho.

Arab chauffeurs, guides and businessmen proved to me that if the dictators had something more than mere anti-Semitism to offer, Britain might have a widespread native revolution on her hands. But the dictators are broke. It takes money to make an Arab fight—money, or religion.

"Hitler's right about the Jews," one Arab said. "We ought to kill them all. Look"—we were rolling along through the rich orange groves of the coastal plain—"The Jews own all this. Every piece of land that's worth having they own. That isn't right."

He was silent when I reminded him that, after all, the Arabs sold the land to the Jews and received good gold in return. After deep thought he said:

"Yes, but if the Jews continue to come in great numbers, there will be no land left . . . only this . . ." and he pointed to the deforested hills that flanked the road on the right. Farther on we came to where Arabs were plowing. They used a stick with a spike for a plowshare, or the sharp root of an olive curved by nature into a plow. The Jews use tractors.

"Maybe—" he said thoughtfully, "maybe we would be better off under the Turks. . . ."

I found many who think like him, who hate the British. They promised the Arabs freedom and self-government. They didn't get it. Arabs who share these opinions follow the leadership of the Mufti, Haj Amin Effendi al Husseini. He is the temporal and spiritual leader of Palestinian Arabs—and Britain's greatest enemy. He makes his headquarters in Bagdad, but his message comes into Palestine and penetrates into Transjordan, Iraq, Iran, the Yemen and Saudi Arabia with the migratory shepherds and the caravans, and it is a message well understood in that part of the world where to kill an infidel is to get an "M" in Mecca.

The Mufti is known among his intimates as "Red Beard." He has had some religious training and in 1921 was appointed chairman of the Supreme Moslem Council and Mufti of Jerusalem. He is a crafty, wily politician distinguished by two qualities—sincerity and perseverance.

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The exiled Haj Amin al Husseini, Arab leader, known as "Red Beard" to his followers. He is a famous diplomat and is now carrying on his anti-British activities from Lebanon

He hates the British. When he talks of them his beard bristles as though it were charged with static electricity. It was he who led the civil insurrection of 1936-1939. Caught, he was exiled. He doesn't mind taking money from any dictator or other agent for the overthrow of British rule. He wants money, arms—he promises nothing, is a friend to all enemies of England. He is a useful tool, therefore, of Germany and Russia and possibly even Italy.

His one supreme ambition is to be proclaimed Caliph of Islam. This would give him religious hegemony over all the Arabs of the Moslem country, forty million souls. The Caliphate was abolished with the death of its last great chief, King Hussein of Mecca, and there are now three aspirants—the Mufti, King Farouk of Egypt and King Ibn Saud of Arabia or one of his sons.

Of the candidates, 45-year-old Red Beard is the most likely to succeed if he obtains help from outside.

Traffic in Humans

Of this Arab antagonism for the Briton or, for that matter, for any white infidel, a reporter in Palestine becomes quickly aware. A walk through the dark souks, the fetid market places, or a visit to an Arab café, is enough. The resentment is as thick as the boiled coffee and sugar they drink. It is as obvious as the lack of the song of a bird in the wilderness—for there are no birds in Palestine, and the countryside is dead, bald, as though a great plague had settled down upon it, a plague of rock and sand. Only in the coastal plain and the region near Jerusalem, where brave and determined men have caused things to grow in an exhausted earth, is there life. Beyond the plain there is only death and hatred. The World War has brought to Palestine its first serious economic depression and has accentuated the Arab-

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Jewish population problem. There are about 800,000 Arabs to 400,000 Jews. This ratio of 2 to 1 is carefully maintained by the English at the insistence of the Arabs. As Nazism radiated outward from Berlin, the flow of refugees to Palestine increased and the economic situation, unemployment and relief have become acute.

Foreseeing an increase in the number of eligibles for settlement in the Holy Land with Germany spreading in Central Europe, the British government, in May, 1939, issued her famous white paper limiting to 75,000 the number who could enter for the ensuing ten years. The Jews protested. They demonstrated. A few Jewish heads were cracked by British billies in the streets of Tel Aviv and Haifa.

Wherever there is a British law, there is a Jew to circumvent it. As racial nihilism advanced through Czechoslovakia, Italy, Rumania, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Poland, the Jews of Palestine organized ways to bring in fellow refugees in spite of the regulations. A traffic in humans sprang up in the Mediterranean.

Secret organizations co-operated with pirate profiteers who owned Greek or Turkish ships. Together they worked out a racket that provided fabulous profits for a few and salvation for thousands. The refugees from the Nazi-Fascist areas filtered down to Greek or Turkish ports. There they were loaded onto the pirate boats, paying as high as \$400 per head for a passage normally costing \$60 in first-class cabins with bath. Their berths were in the dark, stinking holds of foul, unseaworthy tubs.

The ships sailed as near as they dared to the Palestinian coast at points where small boats from shore met them to take off their cargo of refugees. At first the British authorities, aware that these people, scared and sick and penniless, had nowhere else to go, closed their eyes to the traffic. But the Arabs screamed. Then the British had to do something. They banned the traffic, made it a criminal offense to aid the refugees. A coast-guard patrol was organized.

But the pirates were making too much money to be so easily discouraged. They obtained other ships and loaded these to the gunwales with passengers. On dark nights, they would beach the ships. There was nothing for the coast guard to do but rescue the refugees.

Men, women and children—often babies born on board without medical aid—were landed in Palestine without passports or any papers of identification. Most of the time they had no money, no clothes. Sometimes they swam ashore in bathing suits. At least 20,000 have come into Palestine illegally through the pirate traffic since the outbreak of the World War. This has meant for the Holy Land an oversupply of doctors, lawyers, dentists and engineers—you find their shingles in dismal rows in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Nablus, Haifa and Jaffa, in Hebrew and English characters.

The oversupply of doctors in Palestine is only matched by the oversupply of oranges, the other horn of the Palestinian dilemma. What mistakes the Jews have made in turning a wilderness into a garden lie in the one-crop system. Oranges grow easily in Palestine so ev-

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erybody planted orange groves. The industry flourished while the world was at peace, but with war the slats have fallen out of the orange market. There is no one to buy and there are no ships to carry what there is to sell and along the roadsides of Palestine oranges are rotting in heaps.

The orange represents three quarters of the total income from Palestinian exports. For 1939, the Holy Land sold \$22,080,000 worth of goods abroad. Of this sum about \$16,000,000 came from oranges. They sold 15 million crates in England, France and the Balkans last year. If this year 7 million crates are sold abroad the farmers will think they will have done very well indeed. You can buy six oranges each bigger than both your fists for one American cent. Farmers will pay you to take them out of the groves.

Thousands of Unemployed

England, Palestine's biggest market for oranges, has political fences to mend in Spain. England is buying Spain's entire orange crop this year, a sort of subsidy to help General Francisco Franco reconstruct the country he conquered and a sort of bribe to keep him friendly to England and therefore prevent German infiltration in the Mediterranean.

Palestinian growers are abandoning groves. Some of them are turning to raising wheat, potatoes and other more profitable crops. Others are so broke they can't afford to buy gas to run their tractors.

These conditions create unemployment and unrest. How many unemployed there are is a secret carefully guarded as much by the Jews themselves as by the British authorities, but it is significant that six thousand unemployed Jews had to be taken into the police force to keep them off the relief rolls.

The Jews do not hesitate to use the mental funk that unemployment creates to arouse anti-Arab and anti-British sentiment. Illegal pamphlets are being circulated throughout the Holy Land by agitators who prophesy that Jewish rights will be further trampled by England with creation of a national government wherein the Arabs will predominate on the basis of the 2 to 1 population ratio.

These pamphlets are printed and distributed by the Jewish Trades Unions and the Labor party. The boys are being kept at boiling temperature with appeals to their patriotism calling upon them to bely the charge the Jew can't or won't fight. How well this sort of agitation worked was seen when the British issued their white paper last May. Jews raided Arab villages and killed scores of natives. That had never happened before.

"The Old Man on the Hill"

The Arabs have their Mufti. The Jews have their Moshe Shertok. He's got stomach ulcers. He's about the Mufti's age, around forty-five. He came up from the labor ranks, a rowdying two-fisted fighter, and one of the cleverest diplomats in the Near East. He is director of the political department of the Jewish Agency and crown prince of

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venerable old Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the dynamo of Zionism and Father of Palestine. What Weizmann, the chemist-visionary, lacked, Shertok has—where Weizmann had brains and diplomacy Shertok has muscles and political perspicacity.

Another Jewish leader is David Ben Gurion. He's a labor leader and chairman of the Jewish Agency. The Jews call him the Robespierre of the Holy Land, and he looks like the French revolutionary with white mane and brooding black eyes. He is short, squat and seems to have been hewed from the gray-black rock that covers the Land of the Chosen. He has never liked Britain, but responsible Jews told me that he is probably on his way out, to be replaced by Shertok.

But Shertok and Ben Gurion both are planning to be ready for that still distant tomorrow when that army of 10,000 must fight. The day must come, Jews feel, when Britain must pay her debt to the populations of the Holy Land or lose her grip on the strategic Near East. If Britain's security in that region were not at stake, then, reasonably, she could continue to compromise, placate and stall. But this she cannot do.

Because the present High Commissioner, Sir Harold McMichael, a Colonial Office visionary, is the kind of man who thinks in terms of an eventual federation of Near Eastern States, each of them independent, the Jews of Palestine fear such a solution might mean a national government after the current war. Sir Harold is a brilliant, morose man who's word is the law in Palestine. He has had wide experience in the Sudan and Tanganyika. He is known as "The Old Man on the Hill," because his house is on a hilltop near Jerusalem and he is seldom seen in town.

If Sir Harold has his way—and his voice will be a loud one in any ultimate solution of the Jewish-Arab question—there will be a national government in which the Arabs will predominate, with Britain ruling the Arabs. Such a government would be based on population figures, so many delegates for so many thousands of inhabitants. The Jews would be in the minority and their future, their dream of a national home, imperiled.

Sir Harold believes too that the recommendations made by the British Royal Commission of 1937 should be put into effect. This commission suggested that Palestine be divided into two states, one Islamic, the other Jewish. Under this scheme Jerusalem, as important to the Jewish and Moslem faiths as it is to the Christian, should be neutral territory under British mandate.

A great scheme—but it won't work, the Jews say. It represents Zionism without a Zion. They want Jerusalem, although the territorial concessions, with unlimited immigration, were decidedly fair to the Jews.

The Arabs say it won't work either. They want Jerusalem too. Lots of people are going to be shot because, obviously, Britain cannot impose a plan for the solution of racial and religious antagonisms between two peoples against the separate wills of those peoples.

That's why there's a phantom army in Palestine.

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