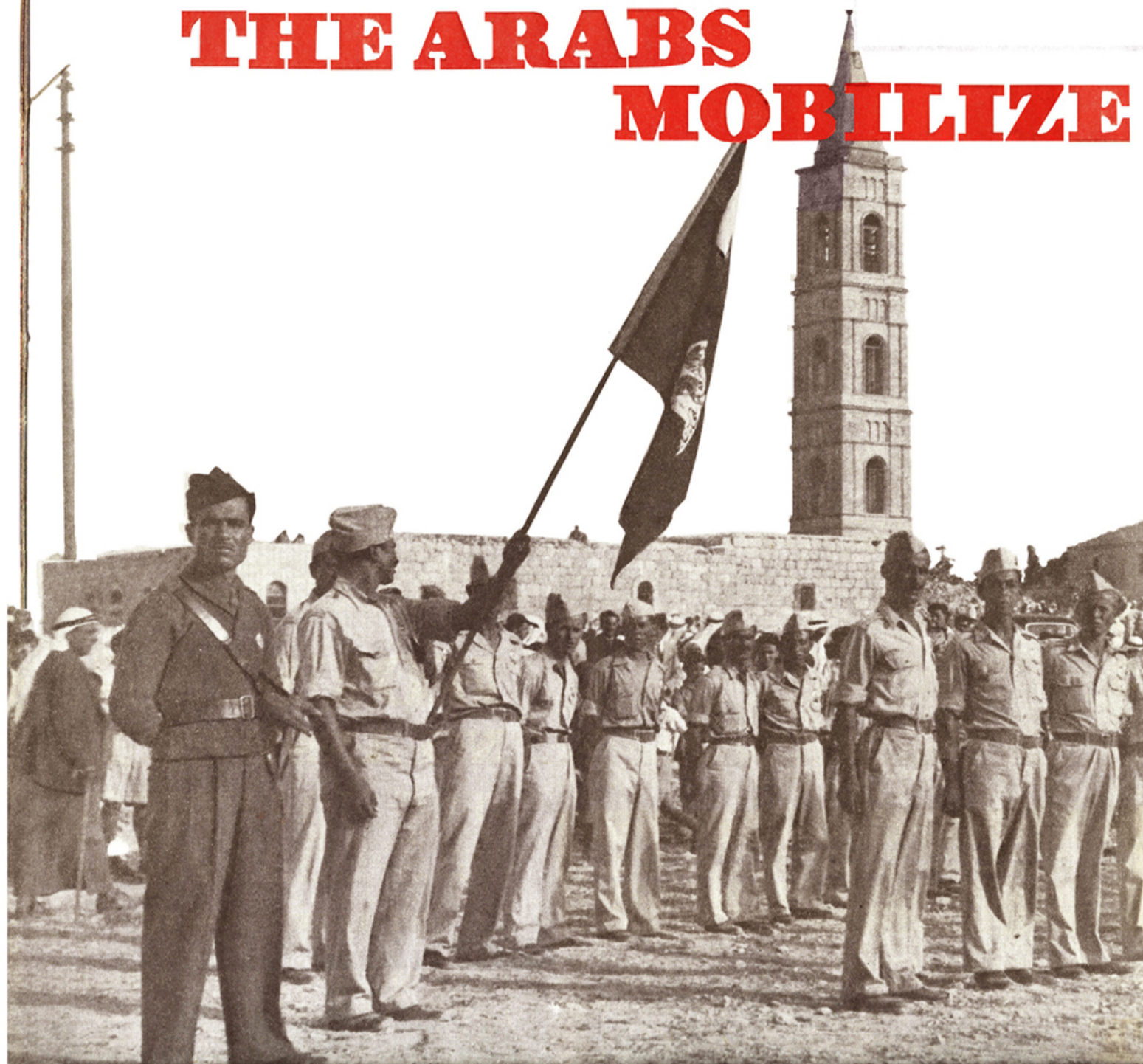


THE ARABS MOBILIZE



In Palestine, Arab leaders are hotting up the fires of nationalism, building military organizations. But the real answer to their troubles can be found in a village called Magdal el Sadek

BY EDWARD P. MORGAN

THE market place in Jaffa, Palestine's largest city, boiled with noise and activity. Formations of black flies droned around the freshly killed beef carcasses hanging in the open doorway of a butcher store. A tall, ageless Arab Negro, dressed in a cream-colored skull cap and a long black coat, stood on the curb hawking toasted pistachio nuts from a charcoal brazier. Fruit stands were piled high with emerald-green grapes, melons and voluptuous fresh dates.

A barefooted woman emerged from an alley, clutching three squawking children by the necks. A man in a striped robe exploded through the crowd on a backfiring motorcycle, his pink cotton headdress billowing behind him like a magic carpet. On the crossbar between his legs he balanced a bunch of bananas. A little boy with a long stick swore expertly at a burly man swaying down the street under two huge cans of kerosene.

In a shaded sidewalk café, a group of Arab elders, solemn and dignified as philosophers, sipped tiny cups of spiced Turkish coffee and sucked the long silver-tipped stems of their water pipes. The noon sun had burnished the sky a brittle blue, and on the hill a minaret rose gracefully against the flat horizon of the sea beyond, like a solitary chess piece. From his office window, a young European-educated Arab attorney in a red fez gazed down sadly on the scene. "I suppose all this would look alluring on a travel poster," he said. "To me it is an awful eyesore. Look closely there and you can see the accumulated filth and backwardness of centuries.

"That woman's feet are decayed with disease. Those old men's eyes are not dimmed by age—they're clotted with trachoma. Not a handful of people down there can read or write. It was not so very different under the Turks. I'm ashamed to say I could not advise you to walk the streets after dark with more than a piaster in your pocket. There are plenty of people more interested in your purse than in your life. The other day a murderer bought himself out of jail for four hundred pounds.

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Places Blame on the British

“My answer is that the British have not lived up to their responsibilities. In twenty-five years as the mandatory power, they could have gone a long way toward civilizing us. They have done almost nothing.”

The attorney was somewhat carried away, perhaps, by his own emotions, but the fact is that today an angry, reckless kind of Arab nationalism is spreading in Palestine in an atmosphere of corrosive bitterness. Mistaken or not, the Arabs are openly afraid that Zionism will engulf them if Jewish immigration is unchecked, but they are secretly envious of Jewish progress.

Currently, violence in this unhappy land is almost exclusively an affair between Jewish terrorists and the British army. But speculation about the “Arab revolt” is endless.

If the 650,000 Jews win autonomy, will the Arabs start a modern holy war?

In terms of the immediate future, there is no more prospect of a Moslem army storming the country than there is of the waters of the Dead Sea suddenly rising to swallow up the dusty old hills of Judea. That doesn't mean, however, that the Arabs intend to hold their fire indefinitely. There are indications that unless some fairly successful attempt is made to placate them, some Arab factions may themselves attempt a little sniping at convoys, the blasting of bridges and puncturing of oil pipe lines.

And as the problem of Palestine becomes more entangled in international politics and the composing of British-Jewish-Arab differences longer delayed, the framework of organized Arab resistance is being slowly spun like a spider web. “And sitting in Egypt,” a British agent was overheard to remark, “you even have the spider.”

From a guarded high-walled villa in Alexandria, Haj Amin el Husseini, exiled fifty-three-year-old Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, craftily directs the affairs, spiritual and political, of 1,200,000 Palestinian Arabs. (Although the Egyptians and the British agreed he should not engage in politics, a stream of Arab party officials moves back and forth between Alexandria and Jerusalem almost every day of the week.) This fabulous man, a reputed descendant of the only daughter of Mohammed, the Prophet, and who once cherished the dream of becoming the caliph of a Mediterranean Moslem kingdom, is still one of the strongest Arab figures alive.

The fact that the Mufti fled for his life from the British in 1937 during the Arab revolt and has remained in exile ever since only enhances his halo of martyrdom. The fact that he was the feted guest of Mussolini and Hitler during the war, that he applauded Axis victories for the news reels and allegedly collaborated with the Nazis to hasten them, only confirmed to the faithful his wiliness as a politician, because they are convinced that Arab freedom was his one consuming ob-

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jective the whole time.

When, last spring, he escaped from France and flew with mysterious ease to Egypt, Arabs in Palestine literally week.

Arab politics are shot through with internal strife but the drive for independence holds all factions outwardly together, and for the moment, the Mufti is more valuable *in absentia* as a "symbol of sacrifice," than he would be on the spot. At political rallies, Arab party leaders are apt to challenge the crowd with such questions as, "Are you ready?" "Are you prepared to defend yourselves?" Then the fellah, the poor peasant farmer, and the Bedouin tribesman of the hills may go home, haul a rusted rifle out of a well and prepare. They may not be precisely sure for what, but it is in the name of the Mufti, and they know the soil of their lands is sacred.



Though they are not yet as strong as the Jewish underground armies, Arab military groups, like the Futuwwashown here on parade at the Arab village of Tour near Jerusalem, are forming up, attracting more and more volunteers. If they don't get what they want, they may start a guerrilla war.

Appraisal of Armed Forces

In the Mufti's web, the strands of potential organized resistance include two rival "youth organizations," the Najjada and the Futuwwa and "mobile elements" of the secret Moslem Brotherhood, which is a sort of Middle Eastern Ku Klux Klan. The precise figures of their strength are elusive, but combined they may comprise something like 50,000 men and boys. However, even if the British army were not involved (which it would be) in case of Arab-Jewish disturbances, it is generally agreed that this Arab force would be no match for the well-trained, well-disciplined and well-armed Haganah, the "illegal" but undissolved Jewish home guard—probably 80,000 strong.

"This time, however," an Arab politician is likely to remind you, "we shall have the whole Arab League behind us." Furthermore, if the Arabs decide on violence again, they would strike as guerrillas, which makes it misleading to try to measure army against army.

While their present public activities are limited largely to parades, policing football games and the unofficial searching of citizens suspected of breaking the Arab boycott against