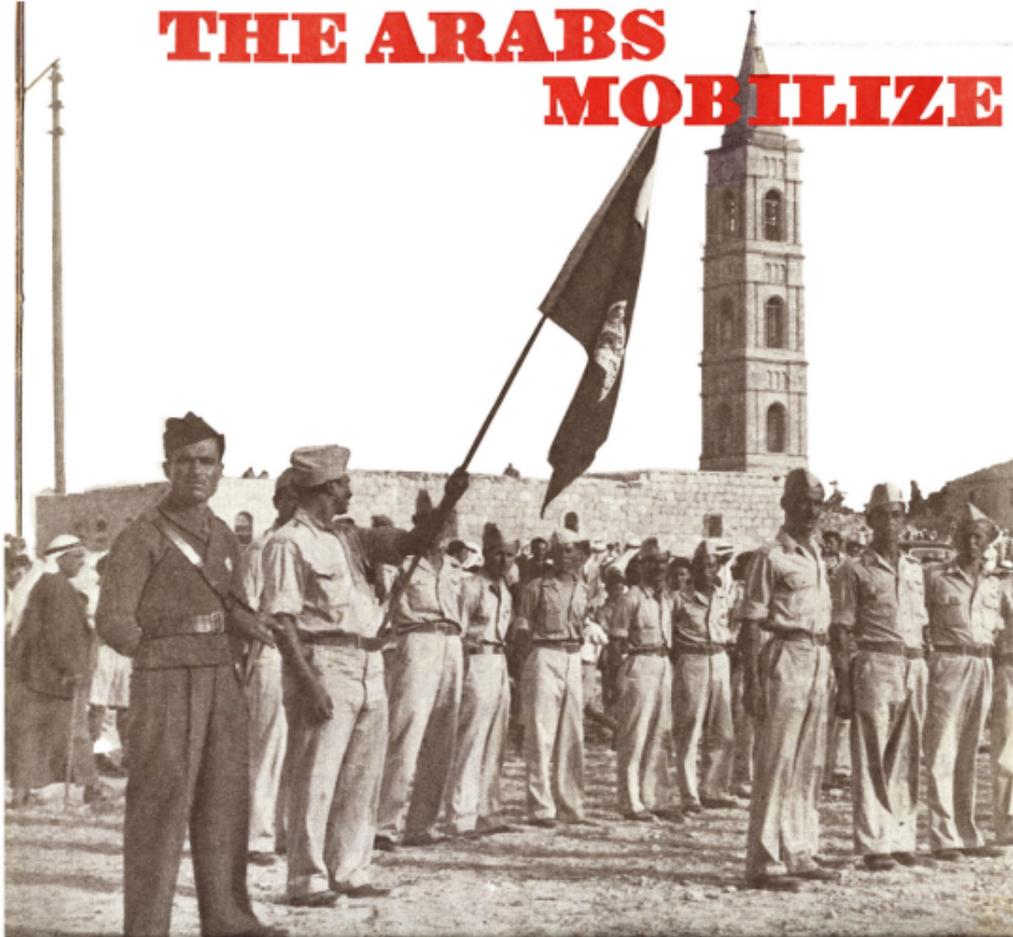


**THE ARABS
MOBILIZE**

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.

ARABS

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 holywar?

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-

ARABS

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 or as as the Jewish underground armies, Arab military groups, like the Futuwwa shown 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

ARABS

trade with Jews, Arab youth-movement leaders readily admit they are preparing for much bigger things.

"We believe in force," Mohammed Nimer el Hawari, thirty-eight-year-old leader of the Najjada, told me over coffee in his plainly furnished Jaffa headquarters the other morning. He affirmed that his men were receiving military training and that the Najjada (loosely translated the word means "rescuers") had a certain amount of arms, but he did not care to elaborate.

"We do not believe in justice after seeing the way the Western world interprets it," he continued. "We have had enough of high-sounding promises and ideals. The only way we'll get justice is to be strong ourselves; if we have might, then we can enforce our rights. We people of the East offered the world humility and got nothing. The only things that really talk today are material things—money and power. And force."

Hawari, a short, swarthy, barrel-chested fellow who looks like a high-school football coach and talks with the magnetic ardor of an evangelist, is too blunt to become a successful politician; he is already in hot water with Arab political leaders, who resent his independent attitude. But he is typical of an emerging middle-class Arab, who burns with patriotism like a torch and is blinded by his own flame.

"I want every Arab to have four wives" (all custom and the law allow), he says, "so we can breed sons to combat Jewish immigration." He himself has nine children by one wife and if he can swing it financially, he hopes to buy and wed three more.

Mohammed Nimer el Hawari was a boy of twelve when the Jews first started organized immigration into Palestine. His grandfather, a Bedouin herdsman, warned that to the Arabs no good would come of this move. Mohammed's father, a barber by trade, was the first of the Hawari family to build a stone house. When the Jews came they built stone houses even better than his father's. They bought Arab land and with furious industry they made the desert burgeon with orange groves where the camels and black goats of the Bedouins had wandered freely before. They erected schools and brought teachers and money to pay them from abroad.

The British had led the Arabs to believe, hadn't they, that they would be given their independence? What was this strange invasion, then, of European Jews with their shocking Western customs? Deep suspicion of the Jews and a restless distrust of foreigners, the British in particular, began to grow in Mohammed.

Condoned Massacre of Jews

He became expert at the Moslem law his elders taught him. He mastered mathematics and did some teaching in the Arab town of Gaza. He learned Western law in night

ARABS

school. His ambition and his vague feeling of insecurity drove him on and his resentment of the Jews increased. So when the Arabs massacred the Jews in Hebron in 1929, he helped.

"I hate this work," Mohammed tells his visitors now. "I hate the Jews and the British and the Americans as well. I have been forced to. If you come to my house and say to me, 'Move on, I am going to live here now,' then I must fight. And with much bitterness. I am ready to die but I do not want to commit suicide, and that is what we should be doing if we accepted Jewish immigration.

"Russia? I fight only in the interests of my country. I don't know which side, internationally, we may find ourselves on eventually. We are ready to co-operate with persons who understand us. We are independent."

There is proof, of course, that the Jewish contributions to Palestine's increased national wealth have been largely responsible for what additional schools, hospitals and social services the Arabs have received in the last quarter century. But Mohammed and his colleagues reject it as untrue or unimportant. The Najjada's motto of "Arab land for the Arabs" may be the rankest kind of chauvinism, but there it is, to be dealt with. Prime Minister Attlee once said that the disarming of local factions was the prerequisite to any settlement of the Palestine problem. This the Jews have stubbornly defied. The Arabs are busy acquiring more arms themselves, but so far, British authorities have refused to become excited about it and some of them here on the ground have said openly, "So long as the Jews stay armed, you can't blame the Arabs for being concerned about their own defenses, too."

On the other hand, accusations that the British army is systematically arming the Arabs can be almost invariably traced to deliberate smear propaganda or irresponsible barroom gaff. Few qualified sources deny, though, that now and then somebody, fancying himself as a sort of junior T. E. Lawrence or (more likely) succumbing to the pretty black-market prices, does a little private trafficking in guns and ammunition.

Where the Weapons Come From

Most of the Arabs' arms appear to be left over from desert warfare and have been collected and sold by enterprising individuals. It is also reported that a certain amount of smuggling of arms into Palestine continues from Trans-Jordan, the Lebanon and, mainly, from Egypt.

Unless there is some unseen loophole in the fine print of the Official Gazette, the Najjada and the Futuwwa are breaking the law by outfitting their members in military uniforms, but nobody seems particularly to mind. Questioned about it, one high British official replied that, for one thing, it was easier to keep track of organizations operating in the open than those underground.

Despite the lack of official alarm, some responsible Arabs look with sincere dis-

ARABS

approval on the growth of these nationalist movements and all that they imply. One young sociologist, educated abroad, and who, incidentally, is an official of the Palestine government, confessed he could not understand why the administration allowed them to exist. "What is the real purpose of organizations that combine military training with politics?" he asked. "I don't see how anything but trouble can come of this situation."

The Najjada and Futuwwa drill on the average once a week. They don't carry arms in public—it is a capital offense in Palestine—but they engage in target practice. Their instructors include Arabs who were NCOs and officers in the British army during the war.

The Najjada's schedule also includes physical training, courses in Arab wars and personalities and politics. There is even one course in "criminal investigation."

The Najjada, whose strength is something between ten and twenty thousand men ranging in age from sixteen to forty, is organized on a semimilitary pattern. Formations are called by the same names as those of the ancient Arab armies which fought the Persians and the legions of Rome.

Although Hawari denies it, the Najjada has had some connection with the Najjada of Lebanon, from which it borrowed some organization and training methods. Hawari, however, insists that the Najjada hasn't received a single piaster from outside groups. "Every member helps finance his training out of his own pocket," he explains. The result is that the Najjada, long on enthusiasm, is short on cash.

The Futuwwa, a youth movement which was suppressed when the Arab disturbances began in 1936, was revived a few months ago by Jamal Bey Husseini, cousin of the Mufti and acting chairman of the Arab Higher Committee, after Mohammed had rejected Arab party sponsorship.

Very recently under pressure, the Najjada yielded and with qualifications is coming under the wing of the Higher Committee, the chief Arab executive body of Palestine.

According to British Intelligence sources, the Futuwwa is neither so well trained nor so well disciplined as the Najjada. But with committee and Arab party backing (Jamal Bey Husseini is head of the Arab party as well as chairman in the Mufti's absence of the Higher Committee), it has more finances to draw from and more authority to lean on. This will probably allow it to eclipse the Najjada in the long run. Its strength today is in the neighborhood of 12,000. Its leader, Kamil Abdullrahman Arekat, is tall, dashing and handsome as the sheik hero of a desert movie. He is less impetuous than Hawari. "Training and discipline are what we need now," he says. "We must build from a strong foundation. It may take years instead of months for us to become strong but then we will be ready."

Interestingly enough, Arekat, who participated in the uprisings of the mid-thirties, was for some time an inspector in the criminal investigation division of the Palestine Police under the British. This has made him suspect with some Arabs.

ARABS

The most mysterious organization of all is the Moslem Brotherhood, ostensibly a religious group interested primarily in promoting Pan-Islam ideas, but unmistakably interested in Arab politics. It was started in Egypt—allegedly with the sympathy of certain Britishers keen on counteracting Communist influence in Egyptian trade unions—and its present leader or “supreme guide” is a forty-two-year-old Egyptian politician named Sheik Hassan al Banna. A Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood was started in the fall of 1945, and its membership is now said to be upward of ten thousand.

Gunfire at Night in Jerusalem

Sometimes at night, residents within the ancient walled city of Jerusalem have reported hearing the crackle of gunfire from the direction of the Mosque of Omar. The noise, apparently, was caused by the Brotherhood, which often opens its meetings by observing the Arab tradition of firing rifles into the air—technically an infraction of the law.

Because it is organized as a religious group, it does not need police permission to hold meetings and indeed, according to reliable reports, frequently convenes in the inviolable premises of the Mosque itself. Credible accounts relate that much time at these gatherings is consumed in fiery speechmaking, denouncing the British, Jews and Americans and extolling Arab nationalism.

The Brotherhood has a “mobile force” called the Jawalla, which is publicly described as a scout movement, but which actually is believed to be embryo shock troops. Some units of the Jawalla have already united with the Futuwwa.

Some Arabs, including young men educated abroad like my friend the Jaffa attorney, are beginning to feel that they face conditions which can't be alleviated with guns and Sam Browne belts. One such is the village of Magdal el Sadek. “And this place,” he said after he had picked it out at random one day to visit, “is one of our better communities. It is near the highway; farther back in the hills life is far worse.”

Magdal el Sadek sprawls carelessly across a hilltop overlooking the luxuriant coastal plain of Palestine near Jaffa.

The road up the hill from the Lydda highway is steep and dusty. The village, it was explained later, spent more than a thousand pounds to build it by government order and then was unable to get any asphalt surfacing, so in the winter rainy season it is virtually impassable. The main street is nothing more than an alley filled with rocks and dust and dung. Rectangular one-story stone huts with windows the size of those in prison cells rise in jumbled tiers on either side of the road. Here and there a tree struggles out of the rocks. Except for a power line which cuts across one edge of the village on its way to a Jewish lime quarry a couple of kilometers away, there is nothing to remind you of the twentieth century.

In the one-room first-aid station, the nearest approach to a hospital which the village had been able to manage for its 1,500-odd citizens, a half-dozen villagers told us about their life as we sipped “Irfeh,” a sweet tea bewitchingly spiced with cinnamon.

The village can scarcely live on the

ARABS

crops from its meager lands. Most of its menfolk are laborers on the highway or in an Arab stone quarry. The community has no telephone, no plumbing, no water and, except for the three or four houses which are allowed to tap the power line, no electricity. Not more than half a dozen dwellings can claim the luxury of even an old-fashioned privy; most people just use the great outdoors. Water has to be hauled from a well clear down the hill and across the highway a kilometer away. A Jew owns the well but he sells the water to the villagers cheap.

Looking out the open door of the aid station now you could see Arab women below toiling back up the incline with the tall metal canisters of water balanced on their heads.

"For a long time we have been trying to arrange to have the water piped up the hill," one of the elders said, "but the government has done nothing."

The town has no policeman. "The only time government officials come here," the spokesman said, "it is to collect taxes or investigate a killing. If it is a bad one the government sends three or four police to live in the village until things are quiet, and we are obliged to pay their rent and salaries while they are here."

The villagers themselves have built one school, but it is not enough. Somebody goes to Jaffa nearly every day and brings back a newspaper which is passed around among those who can read, and relayed by word of mouth to the rest.

The world comes to them through a funnel and, except for inflammable little items in the Arab press, not much gets through. They were disturbed at the news that the White House was urging the immediate settlement of 100,000 Jews in Palestine, but they had never heard of any American proffer of economic and financial assistance to the Arab world.

If they are a little bewildered, they can be pardoned. They know, of course, that independence is what they need as a bulwark against the encroachment of the Jews, because that's what their leaders have told them. Still, if it hadn't been for the Jews they would have no electric lights, and no water. They were not entirely ungrateful to the Jews for these accidental advantages.

The Magic of Hard Work

The view from the aid-station door was beautiful. The ground fell away so rapidly it gave you the sensation of looking at the coast from a high building. The blue-green Mediterranean laced the shore with thin, wavy strips of white embroidery. As the dry talcum-colored terrain leveled off on the plain, the magic of moisture brought it alive with the lush light green of banana trees and the cool, lacquered green of orange groves. Open, cultivated fields were scattered over the land in rich rectangles. The Arabs passed them on their way to Jaffa, every day.

Tasting the last cloying cinnamon sweetness of the Irfeh tea, you couldn't help thinking that here was the Arab problem. Not in Jerusalem or behind a guarded villa wall in Alexandria, but here in the village of Magdal el Sadek,

ARABS

which was so dazzlingly equipped with nothing. Had not the British and the Zionists, and the Americans too, for that matter, badly missed the point? If somebody had made a real, concerted effort to raise the Arab standard of living in Palestine over the past twenty-five years and bring it into some proportion with the beaverlike but synthetic progress of the Jews, mightn't things have been vastly different and the so-called Palestine problem not so insuperable? Was it too late now?

As we rose to go, one of the elders, in a long white robe, came over and shook my hand solemnly and then burst forth into an impassioned speech in Arabic, with an imploring look in his eyes. I nodded vigorously and thanked him for their hospitality.

Outside, I asked what the elder had said.

"He wanted to know," came the answer, "if it wouldn't be possible for your Mr. Truman to use his good offices with the government in Jerusalem to get the water piped up to the village from the well."

THE END

Collier's