

## CHAPTER III

**THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN PALESTINE\***

1. The Peel Commission declared in one of the final chapters of its report: "Neither Arab nor Jew has any sense of service to a single State . . . The conflict is primarily political, though the fear of economic subjection to the Jews is also in Arab minds . . . The conflict, indeed, is as much about the future as about the present. Every intelligent Arab and Jew is forced to ask the question 'Who in the end will govern Palestine?' . . . for internal and external reasons it seems probable that the situation, bad as it now is, will grow worse. The conflict will go on, the gulf between Arabs and Jews will widen." The report concluded with a reference to "strife and bloodshed in a thrice hallowed land."

2. It is nine years since the Peel Commission made its report. The recommendations were unfulfilled, but the analysis of political conditions remains valid and impressive. The gulf between the Arabs of Palestine and the Arab world on the one side, and the Jews of Palestine and elsewhere on the other has widened still further. Neither side seems at all disposed at the present to make any sincere effort to reconcile either their superficial or their fundamental differences. The Arabs view the Mandatory Government with misgivings and anger. It is not only condemned verbally, but attacked with bombs and firearms by organised bands of Jewish terrorists. The Palestine Administration appears to be powerless to keep the situation under control except by the display and use of very large forces. Even if the total man-power in police and defence services were only half what it is reputed to be, the political implications would still be deeply disturbing. It reflects the honest fear of experienced officials that tomorrow may produce circumstances in which military operations will be necessary.

3. Official data imply the gravity of the menacing problem. They show that, apart from those convicted of terrorist activity, the number of Jews held on suspicion averaged 450 during most of the year 1945 and was 554 at the end of the year. The aggregate of persons in the whole-time police and prisons service of Palestine in 1945 was about 15,000.

4. The financial tables provide additional evidence of the extent to which the energies and money of the government are devoted to the protection of life and property. About L.P.4,600,000† (\$18,400,000) was spent on "law and order" during the financial year 1944-45 as against L.P.550,000 (\$2,200,000) in health and L.P.700,000 (\$2,800,000) on education. Thus even from a budgetary point of view Palestine has developed into a semi-military or police state. But, pending a substantial change in the relations between the government and the Jews and the Arabs, the prospect of the kind of budget which characterises a settled, civilised, non-garrisoned and prosperous community is dark.

5. Arab political leadership is still in the hands of the small number of families which were prominent in Ottoman times, of which the most notable

\* During our visit to Palestine and in the preparation of this Report, we were greatly assisted by the two volumes of the *Survey of Palestine* which the Government compiled at short notice for our use, and which contain a great deal of new statistical and other information.

† A Palestine pound is equivalent to a pound sterling.

are the Husseinis. This family controls the most important of the Arab political parties, the Palestine Arab Party, which was formally organised in 1935. The objectives of this and of all Arab parties in Palestine are the immediate stoppage of Jewish immigration, the immediate prohibition of the sale of land to Jews, and the concession of independence to a state in which the Arab majority would be dominant.

6. There has been no evidence that the Arab notables who appeared before the Committee, and whom the Committee visited in several countries, did not reflect accurately the views of their followers. The Arabic press, for example, protests as vehemently as Arab spokesmen against a Jewish influx of any kind, even if the certificates for admission were confined to old men and women and to children rescued from German death camps. In short, absolute, unqualified refusal of the Arabs to acquiesce in the admission of a single Jew to Palestine is the outstanding feature of Arab politics today; and the newly-formed parties of the Left, based on the embryonic trade union movement, display as intransigent a nationalism as the old leaders.

7. An additional reason for the insistence of the Palestinian Arabs on immediate independence is their desire for full membership in the newly formed Arab League. The Arabs of Palestine believe themselves to be as fitted for self-government as are their neighbours in Syria and Lebanon who obtained their independence during the Second World War, and in Trans-Jordan which has since become an independent State. The formation of the Arab League has given Arab leaders in Palestine a greater confidence. They feel that the support of the whole Arab world for their cause has now been mobilised. Furthermore, the presence in the United Nations of five Arab States, one of which is a member of the Security Council, ensures that the Arab case will not go by default when the issue of Palestine is brought before the United Nations.

8. Just as the Arab political parties are unalterably opposed to Jewish immigration, the various Jewish parties, even though some criticise the idea of a Jewish State, are all united in their advocacy of unlimited immigration, of the abolition of restrictions on the sale of land and of the abrogation of the 1939 White Paper.

9. These parties accept the authority of the Jewish Agency which is recognised by Great Britain, according to the terms of the Mandate, as the instrument of Jews throughout the world. Article 4 authorises the Agency as follows:—

“An appropriate Jewish agency shall be recognised as a public body for the purpose of advising and co-operating with the Administration of Palestine in such economic, social and other matters as may affect the establishment of the Jewish national home and the interests of the Jewish population in Palestine, and, subject always to the control of the administration, to assist and take part in the development of the country.

“The Zionist Organisation, so long as its organisation and constitution are in the opinion of the Mandatory appropriate, shall be recognised as such agency. It shall take steps in consultation with His Britannic Majesty's Government to secure the co-operation of all Jews who are willing to assist in the establishment of the Jewish national home.”\*

10. At first the Agency gave the Palestine Government effective co-operation. With its large revenue, its able administrators, advisers and staff, and its manifold activities, the Agency became finally and still remains the most

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\* The Jewish Agency for Palestine was recognised in 1930 in lieu of the Zionist Organisation as the appropriate Jewish agency under the terms of the Mandate.

potent non-governmental authority in Palestine and indeed in the Middle East. The Peel Commission described it as "a government existing side by side with the Mandatory Government." The description is even more accurate today. The Agency is now generally believed to have unofficial, but none the less powerful, influence over Haganah—the so-called Jewish Army—the strength of which is estimated as over 60,000. The Jews credit the Agency with most of the improvements in Palestine since the first World War. Unquestionably it has been a tremendous power for good and has been indispensable to their protection and progress.

11. But the Agency has become so powerful and its prestige has been so far enhanced by its accomplishments, that its firm refusal to co-operate in carrying out the White Paper has caused the Government now to regard it as a distinctly dangerous influence. Viewed from the standpoint of the Palestine Government, it appears as a force for disunity, partly for reasons outside the Agency's control, partly by reason of its own activities. It has been a party to activities calculated to lead to estrangement between the Yishuv on the one hand and the Palestine Government and the Mandatory on the other, and to the consolidation of active resistance by the Yishuv to the Government's authority. These activities have undermined the authority of the Administration.

12. Many criticisms of the Jewish Agency have been made before the Committee in open and closed sessions, by Arabs and officials of the Palestine Government as well as by Agudath Israel and some individual Jews. The Agency's customary functions, which are centred on the establishment, maintenance and growth of a National Home for the Jews, were not condemned. That is easily explainable, for it has been one of the most successful colonising instruments in history. But the present relations between the Government and the Jewish Agency must be corrected if the general welfare is to be promoted and the cause of peace in that crucial area of the world is to be protected. Unless this is achieved, Palestine might well be plunged into a civil war, involving the whole Middle East.

13. Neither Jews nor Arabs have been included in the highest ranks of the Administration. British officials hold all the important positions. They exercise as much authority as in a country where the mass of the inhabitants are in a primitive stage of civilisation. District and local officials, Arab and Jew alike, bear only limited discretion and responsibility, even in their own communities. The Palestine Administration is blamed by Arabs and Jews alike for this situation.

14. In consequence of these conditions, the Holy Land is scarred by shocking incongruities. Army tents, tanks, a grim fort and barracks overlook the waters of the Sea of Galilee. Blockhouses, road barriers manned by soldiers, barbed wire entanglements, tanks in the streets, peremptory searches, seizures and arrests on suspicion, bombings by gangsters and shots in the night are now characteristic. A curfew is enforced, and the press of Palestine is subject to censorship. Palestine has become a garrisoned but restive land, and there is little probability that the tranquility dear to people of good will, Jews, Moslems, and Christian alike, will be restored until vastly better relations are established among the principal elements of the community, including the Administration. With that assured, the various groups could be united on the basis of those fundamentals which are common to civilized people who wish to live their own lives, undeterred and unterrified by the possibility that first one faction and then another will rise in open or covert rebellion against one another, or against the Government itself.