

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the internal struggle among the leading Palestinian families for the attainment of power, and leadership of the Arab national movement in Palestine. From the first years of the British mandate in Palestine, the traditional leadership of the Arabs was split between the Husseinis and the Nashashibis. The divisive nature of Arab leadership had its effect on the whole of the Arab national movement. In essence, that movement was never united or strong enough to confront its British and Zionist adversaries. However, part of this problem was the outcome of the existing social structure which was unproductive as well as rigid.

Nevertheless, Western influence in the form of secularism and modern development did have effect on the demography of Palestine many years before the British created it as a separate political entity. A new urban elite had come to being towards the end of the nineteenth century. During the mandate, this elite became politically influential, causing the traditional elites in the villages to feel resentful and insecure. Not until the 1930's was the urban elite able to dominate the politics of both the rural and urban populations and become in effect the national leadership of Arab Palestine.

The British, who naturally wanted to control the country, exploited almost every aspect of the demographic and social cleavages existing in Palestine. They encouraged the establishment of "peasant" type of political parties hoping such political organizations would prevent the union of rural and urban elites into what might become a viable and genuine national movement.

However, the rivalries between the Husseinis and the Nashashibis remained the British best hope for a weak and ineffective national movement. Unfortunately, the Palestinian Arabs could not escape their traditional rivalries. The Palestinian national movement fell victim to internal divisions and political fragmentation. At times, Arabs fought Arabs while their Zionist enemy confronted them with unusual stubbornness and determination to succeed in their ultimate goal of creating a Jewish state in Palestine.

In fact, the British policy of "divide and rule", succeeded and the rivalry between the two families took a sharp turn during the first decade of British mandate. These families manipulated all the ties of kin, class and patronage to win over new supporters. Unfortunately, the traditional leadership did not realize in the 1930's that the future did not belong to it for the Arabs would lose Palestine partly in 1948. A Jewish state would be established in most of the country and the rest would go under Jordanian and Egyptian rules. Worse yet, down this pipeline the future looked gloomier. The whole of Palestine would go under Jewish rule and there would be no assurances that stability in the region of peace might one day prevail.