

NAKBA

The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



Transjordan

At the time of the 1947 UN resolution to partition Palestine, the Jews had prepared a government, a police force, and an army to take control after the British withdrawal at the end of the Mandate; meanwhile the Palestinians had been prevented from taking any measures to govern themselves, and had been stripped of the means to form a military force. Transjordanian Prime Minister Tawfiq Abul Huda predicted that without intervention, either the Jews would disregard the UN Partition Plan and capture all of Palestine up to the River Jordan, or King Abdullah's rival Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini would return to Palestine and make a bid to become leader of a new Arab state.¹⁰



King Abdullah



Tawfiq Abul Huda

In January 1948, Abul Huda, accompanied by his Foreign Minister Fawzi al-Mulki and Transjordan's British commander of armed forces Glubb Pasha, traveled to London to meet with British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin. According to Glubb, the Transjordanian government proposed to send the Arab Legion across the Jordan when the Mandate ended to take control of that part of Palestine awarded to the Arabs which was contiguous to Transjordan. Glubb tempered this plan by reminding Abul Huda that the Arab Legion would not be able to hold the Galilee or the Gaza area. Bevin agreed with the proposal, adding that "it seems the obvious thing to do, but do not go and invade the areas allotted to the Jews." To this the Transjordanian PM replied that "we would not have the forces to do so, even if we so desired."¹¹

King Abdullah and the Zionist leaders began a series of communications through emissaries, culminating in meetings with Jewish Agency representative Golda Meir in 1947 and again in May 1948, only days before the British withdrawal from Palestine. By the time the Zionists declared statehood on 14 May, an understanding had been forged between the Jewish Agency and Transjordan.



Golda Meir

The initial fighting between the Arab Legion and Jewish forces was fierce in spite of the agreements between King Abdullah and the Zionist leadership. While the Arab Legion remained within the area designated as Arab in the UN Partition Plan as agreed, the Jewish troops attempted to push into the Arab-designated area towards Jerusalem. The former British fort at Latrun that controlled the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road was within the Arab area, and was held by the Arab Legion in the face of Jewish attacks. Meanwhile Jewish assaults on Jerusalem's Old City were repelled by Jordanian troops.



Habes al-Majali, under whose leadership Arab Legion forces repelled Jewish attacks at Latrun

Glubb Pasha placed a high strategic importance on holding Latrun and was reluctant to commit his limited resources elsewhere. The towns of Lydda and Ramle – which were deep inside the Arab state designated in the Partition Plan – were within easy reach of his troops, but protecting them would have left Latrun and the road to Jerusalem vulnerable to Jewish forces. He made a strategic decision to sacrifice the two towns after consulting with King Abdullah and PM Abul Huda.¹² The subsequent depopulation of Lydda and Ramle by Jewish forces and the expulsion of their populations across the lines of the Arab Legion earned Glubb and King Abdullah heavy criticism after the second truce of early 1949.

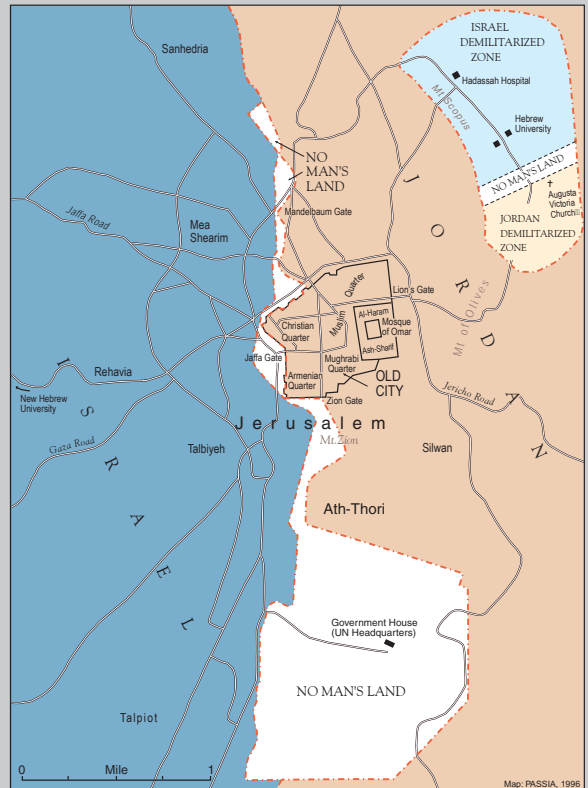


Glubb Pasha



Above: Generals Abdullah Tal of Transjordan and Moshe Dayan meet to discuss the partition of Jerusalem.

Below: The status of Jerusalem after 1949, with a UN-supervised no-man's land separating the two halves of the city.



Map: PASSIA, 1996

¹⁰ Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 136.
¹¹ John Glubb, *A Soldier with the Arabs*, London: H&S, 1957.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.142, 157.