

NAKBA

The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



The Arab Liberation Army

The Arab leaders in Cairo, Riyadh and Damascus were keen to prevent Transjordan's Arab Legion under Glubb Pasha from entering Palestine and securing new lands to come under King Abdullah's rule, but they were reluctant to send their own troops into combat before the British withdrawal. The Arab League therefore organized volunteers into the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) under the leadership of Fawzi al-Qawukji to try to pre-empt the Jordanian maneuvers.



Fawzi al-Qawukji was a Syrian who had served many different masters in the region, including Ottoman, French, and Iraqi forces. His talent for self-publicity had earned him a reputation as a successful military leader in spite of frequent displays of incompetence and duplicity which would be repeated throughout the armed conflict of 1948. His appointment as head of the ALA was a political one, as his well-known enmity for Hajj Amin al-Husseini tallied well with the Arab leaders' unwillingness to see the emergence of an autonomous Palestinian state under the Mufti's rule. It suited the Zionists too; for the



Fawzi al-Qawukji

rest of the military engagement, Qawukji's primary focus was to hinder the efforts of the Mufti's *Jihad al-Muqaddas* army, all the while giving the impression to the outside world of conducting a successful campaign against the Zionists. His reports of resounding victories over the Jews where none had occurred did nothing to help the Palestinian cause in the conflict, and his treacherous refusal to resupply the Palestinian irregulars at the battle of Qastel may have lost them that battle and the life of Abdul Qader Hussein, their most capable commander.



Abdul Qader Hussein (center) with his commanders just before the battle of Qastel, April 1947, in which they were betrayed by Qawukji's ALA.

Egypt

The Egyptian leadership was ambivalent about committing troops to Palestine from the outset. The majority among them opposed the concept: Prime Minister Noqrashi Pasha because of its implications in the context of the enduring British military presence in Egypt, the army generals for military strategic reasons, and certain members of the Senate because of the consequences for their good relations with Egypt's Jewish community.



Abdel Aziz al-Saud of Saudi Arabia, Azzem Pasha of the Arab League and King Farouk of Egypt.

Fearful of the threat posed by the Hashemite bloc of Transjordan and Iraq, the Egyptian focus was on containing King Abdullah rather than on defeating the Zionists. The overwhelming majority of the Egyptian street, however, was calling for Egypt to come to the aid of their Arab brethren in Palestine, in large part due to the efforts of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was a powerful support for the Palestinian cause in mobilizing public opinion and influencing decisionmakers. Encouraged to do so by Aziz Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, who had his own personal rivalry with the Hashemites, King Farouq committed his forces to the conflict in Palestine.



Egyptian PM al-Nahhas (r) speaks to the Arab League's Azzem Pasha, with Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia in the background



Leader of the Muslim Brotherhood Sheikh Hassan al-Banna (with beard) in a rally in support of Palestine with Syrian MP Mardam Bey (center) in Cairo in 1945.