

BRITISH SEEN IN ROLE AS PALESTINE MEDIATOR

They Await Chance to Act as Advisers, Thus Tightening Hold on Mid-East

By CLIFTON DANIEL
Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

LONDON, May 1—As the day approaches for the final surrender of Britain's authority in Palestine, the British are beginning to think that they may yet have a role to play in the settlement of the Jewish-Arab dispute over the Holy Land.

That does not mean that the London Government intends in any way to alter its decision to relinquish its Palestine mandate on May 15, withdraw British troops by Aug. 1 and refrain meanwhile from implementing any decision upon which Jews and Arabs have not agreed. Nor does it mean that the British intend to assume any responsibilities contrived for them by American statesmen.

What is in the back of British minds is that the opportunity for mediation may arise once all the parties have fully realized the futility of trying to resolve the Palestine problem without agreement. Freedom to take up that opportunity has been reserved by the Government's statement that, once Britain occupies in relation to Palestine the same detached position as the other powers, there might arise a new situation in which Britain might intervene.

The decision to liquidate the British administration in Palestine was not intended as a mere act of abdication. It was partly a result of frustration, but it also embodied the idea that by no other means could the Jews and Arabs and their supporters abroad be brought to their senses. It was Britain's way of knocking Jewish and Arab heads together.

Britain's New Opportunity

The possibility that now appeals strongly to British imaginations is that a few weeks or months of fighting may bring the Jews and Arabs to a realization of their folly, that it may result in a military stalemate, a balance of forces. One British expert believes that economic chaos alone will quickly force the Jews and Arabs to the point of compromise.

At that juncture, British officials reason, the British Government might intervene as a friend and guide of both sides to effect a *modus vivendi* that would restore order to the Middle East.

One informed Englishman, although probably too sanguine, expansively predicted this week that within six months the British would be negotiating an alliance between a Jewish state and its Arab neighbors. He happens to be that rarity among British Christians, a pro-Zionist, but others who are pro-Arab share his optimism.

These people are encouraged in their theory by Britain's experience in India, where there was first a slaughter and then peace, with Britain emerging with enhanced prestige. With the Indian precedent in mind, they would prefer that the Palestine belligerents first fight—at least until they have been convinced of the grave consequences of their intransigence.

No Retreat From Mideast

However, it is not in any sense favorable to British interests that there should be interminable battle in Palestine or that festering disorder should continue to disturb the Middle Eastern political balance. The Middle East, after all, remains the primary sphere of British influence where stability is desirable. It is inconceivable that the British, although they have chosen to quit Palestine, should abandon all concern and responsibility for the most aggravating of Middle Eastern problems.

Withdrawal from Palestine does not by any stretch of reasoning mean that Britain is beginning a voluntary retreat from the Middle East as a whole. On the contrary, it is most prayerfully hoped in Whitehall that by ridding itself of the stigma of an unpopular Palestine policy, the Government can partly restore its prestige and influence with the Arab states.

What influence remains is already being exercised in discreet

fashion to keep Arab tempers under control. Britain has been very firm in declaring that no regular armies of Arab states would be allowed into Palestine while this country was responsible for its security. That firmness has definitely dampened the rashness of some Arab hotheads.

There is also cause to believe that Sir Alex Kirkbride, British Minister in Amman, has been counseling King Abdullah of Trans-Jordan to restraint.

It is not at all certain that the British will continue to warn Trans-Jordan forces out of Palestine after British forces have evacuated. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin specifically declined in the House of Commons this week to make any promises, pending final determination of Palestine's future by the United Nations.

Mr. Bevin was apparently actuated by the thought that the partition of Palestine might be left in effect, in which case there might be no objection to the Arab Legion's entering the purely Arab areas of the Holy Land.

Hold Over Abdullah

Some British authorities contend in fact that it would be desirable for the Arab Legion to occupy Arab towns for the purpose of preserving law and order after the disintegration of the British police forces. Others would like to see King Abdullah, Britain's most loyal ally in the Arab world, increase his country's territory, strength and influence by annexing parts of Palestine.

It is probable that the Arab Legion could operate in Palestine without its British officers, who are reliably stated to constitute only 5 per cent of its officer personnel and are mainly employed in technical training tasks. But it is equally improbable that the Arab Legion could undertake sustained operations over a long period without British equipment, supplies and money.

Britain's hold over King Abdullah is, largely financial, although she also has powers of moral suasion and, under the treaty between the two countries, the legal right to demand that Trans-Jordan shall not do anything to create difficulties for the United Kingdom.

Britain's influence in other Arab states has been greatly reduced during the past decade. British counsel of restraint would be regarded with the gravest suspicions in Egypt and Iraq, which are undergoing a phase of violent anti-British agitation.

Nevertheless, until this week the Arab states had seemed reluctant to invade Palestine while the British Army was still on the scene. Responsible statesmen of Arab states are obviously well aware of the military risks, vast expense, technical difficulties and severe international sanctions that invasion might entail.

Arab Military Weakness

In the opinion of British military experts the so-called Arab "Liberation Army"—volunteer forces from outside Palestine, aided by peasant partisans inside the country—is incapable of preventing the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Public opinion in the Arab countries has realized this, and with the usual rowdy hullabaloo in the streets is demanding intervention by the regular armies.

The ensuing clamor, intensified by the resounding defeat of the Arab guerrilla forces in Palestine, has put the Arab governments into a panic and galvanized them into something resembling action. From this there has emerged a reported plan for the joint occupation of Palestine by two or more Arab armies. This show of determination, however, has not banished the difficulties inherent in a vast military operation by relatively untried troops of countries that are poor both in war resources and military leadership.

If the Jews do not become overconfident and overplay their potentialities there is a fair chance, in the opinion of many here, that they might contain the combined assault of the Arab armies.

PRINCIPAL FIGURES IN THE PALESTINE CRISIS

JEWISH LEADERS



Dr. Chaim Weizmann, likely to be first President of "Judea."

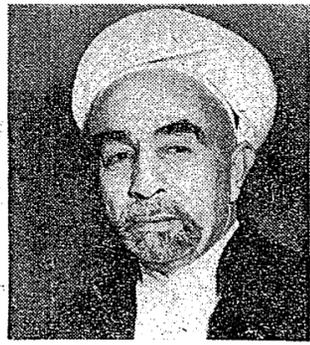


David Ben-Gurion, Premier and Defense Minister of new state.



Moshe Shertok, spokesman at the U. N. and Foreign Minister

ARAB LEADERS



King Abdullah of Trans-Jordan, head of strongest Arab army.



Haj Amin el Husseini, the Mufti, Arab spiritual leader.



Emir Faisal al-Saud, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia.



British engineers destroy a windmill in Jerusalem, which they said Haganah troops had been using as a pillbox.