

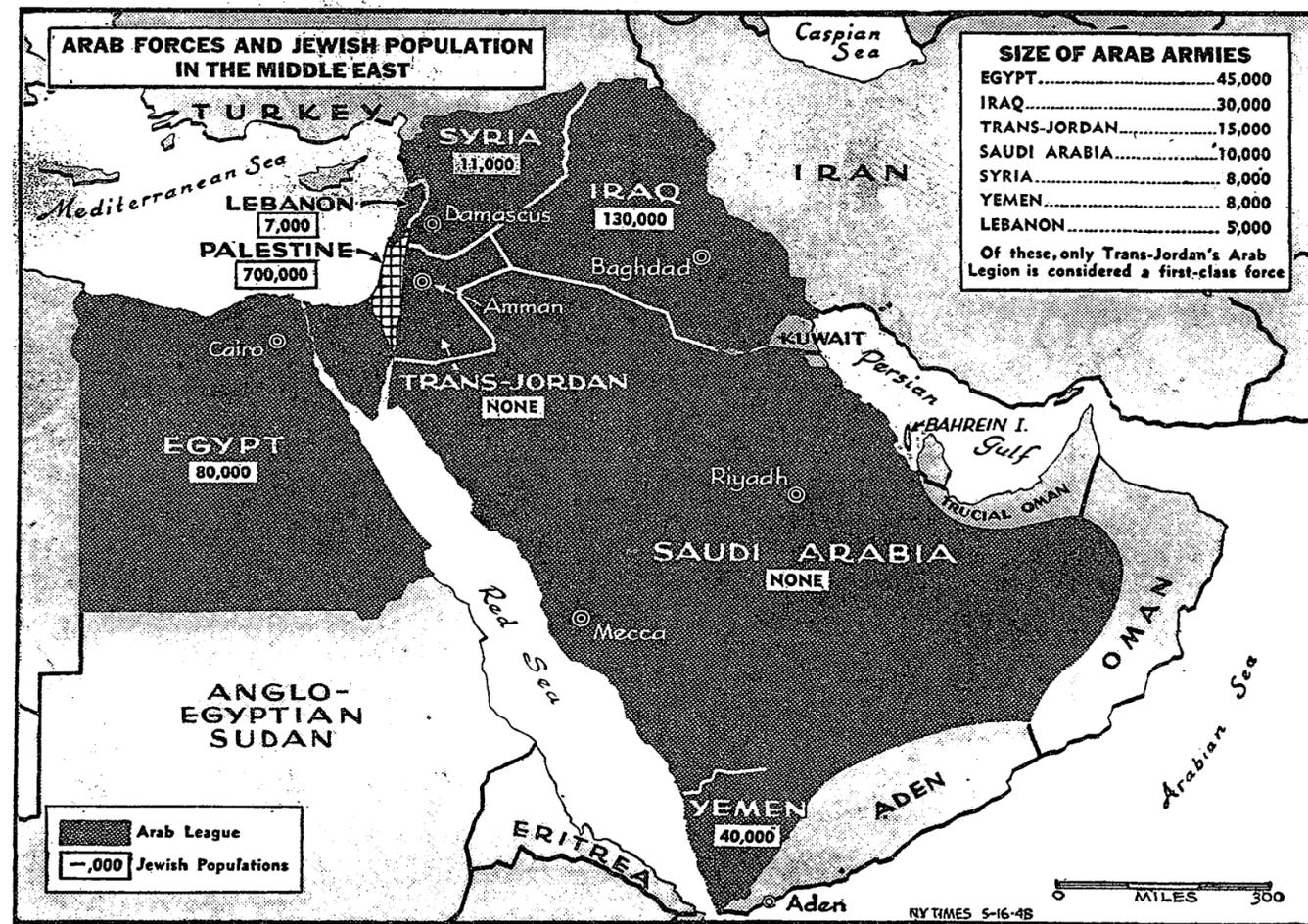
CONFLICT IN PALESTINE HAS WIDE REPERCUSSIONS

By HERBERT L. MATTHEWS Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

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THE PALESTINE ISSUE: BACKGROUND AND OUTLOOK



CONFLICT IN PALESTINE HAS WIDE REPERCUSSIONS

All the Big Powers and the Whole Middle and Near East Affected

By HERBERT L. MATTHEWS
Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

LONDON, May 15—For those immediately involved in the Palestine conflict, it is naturally a Jewish-Arab issue. Zionists want their national home and they are going to do their utmost to make it safe and flourishing. The Arabs, for obvious reasons, believe that a Zionist state in Palestine is a menace and they are going to try to eliminate it.

Were the world able, as Pontius Pilate was, to wash its hands of the conflict, or at least to stand by and watch it, there would be fewer anxious hearts in the chancelleries of the world and fewer heavy hearts among the Jews and their sympathizers in many countries.

Concern over Palestine has already spread far and wide. American sympathizers have involved themselves and to a certain extent their Government in Washington in Palestinian affairs. Jewish DP's in Germany, Austria and elsewhere—perhaps more than 100,000 of them—are eagerly awaiting the day when they can set sail for Palestine.

American and British financiers and business men think in terms of heavy investments, especially in oil, and do their best to safeguard their interests.

Oil is primarily thought of from the Arab side, although the great refinery in Haifa and the terminus of the pipeline there make it also a Jewish problem, since Haifa is now a Zionist city.

Arab World Involved

But what has galvanized world attention momentarily is the support to Palestinian Arabs from the Arab League and the Arab peoples of the Middle East. From the looks of things today they are all in a way to being sucked into the Palestinian vortex, since their only hope of defeating Zionist determination to set up an independent state is to help their Palestinian compatriots by force of arms.

In this way Trans-Jordan, Iraq, Syria, the Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Egypt are all swinging in greater or lesser degree into action. Ripples of this great movement are inevitably spreading throughout the Moslem world eastward into Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In short, the whole Middle East is caught up in a great struggle. But the Middle East is one of the most vital areas of the world from any point of view. Some observers, in fact, believe it to be the most dangerous region on the globe today from the point of view of future strategy and hence of future wars or threats of wars. When one talks of the Middle East today, one thinks in terms of the great powers of the world and especially of the three greatest—the United States, the Soviet Union and Great Britain.

Tragedy for Britain

So far as Britain is concerned the abandonment of the Palestine mandate was a tragedy—not only in terms of prestige and hopes but in terms of power politics. Until World War II Britain was the great Middle Eastern power.

In 1939 Britain held its mandate firmly with Arab friendship. Egypt was still more or less dominated.

The Suez Canal was a British channel. The Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean and India itself were British so far as power was concerned.

Those days are gone forever and Palestine, like other key points of the Empire, has been cast loose upon the stormy waters of contemporary world politics. Yet Britain officially insists that she will continue to be a power in the Mediterranean and Middle East.

A Government spokesman said that in the House of Commons only ten days ago.

They were brave words and they meant something, but observers wondered how far they could be implemented. Egypt has almost eliminated British control, although the Suez Canal is still held on a commercial lease. If Britain can retain her influence in Tripolitania, that would help a little, but no one knows yet what is going to happen to the Italian colonies.

The Sudan is still an Anglo-

Egyptian condominium, and the British are trying hard to keep it so, but British power there will not be what it was. Countries like Iraq and Trans-Jordan, where British alliances gave this country so much influence, are now largely independent. Iran is strengthened by American more than British backing.

There is Cyprus, to be sure, and Malta and Gibraltar still to show that Britain holds key points in the Mediterranean, but on the whole the fact must be faced that Britain's influence in the Mediterranean and Middle East, like her influence in Western Europe, can only be sustained with American support.

United States' Interests

If the Middle East (and Palestine is one key to the Middle East) is to be held for Western democracy it will have to be through American strength. Already the United States is heavily committed to help Greece and Turkey, both of which are intimately linked to the picture of which Palestine is a part.

American oil interests are a great factor in the situation and they spread out over the whole sensitive area from Iran to Saudi Arabia and Iraq down to the shores of the eastern Mediterranean.

However, the problem for the United States is both to help achieve a viable Zionist state and to retain enough Arab friendship or neutrality to safeguard and demakes Palestine a more delicate problem than a mere question of a Jewish-Arab struggle in political terms.

Middle Eastern oil is vital to European industry. Some day it may prove vital to American security—it is already very important from that point of view. One could demonstrate that ERP would fare very badly over the next four years if Arabian oil were subtracted.

The Greater Struggle

From that and other angles the Palestinian struggle branches out into the far greater struggle of the West versus the East, democracy versus totalitarianism. That is where the Soviet Union comes in, and she comes like the traditional bear, lumbering and clumsy but full of power.

Russia is in the Middle East already, not physically but with her usual fifth columns, her propaganda, her mischief-making and promises. The center of Russian politics is in Beirut. There are naturally agents everywhere.

One must always keep in mind the historic traditional weight of the Russian thrust down toward warm-water outlets. That old imperialism operates as strongly under today's Communists as it did under Peter the Great's generals and statesmen. Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India all have felt the constant threat of that pressure.

As Arab interest and Arab strength concentrate inward on Palestine, a sort of vacuum is being created all along the outer fringes.

Vacuums for Moscow

Russian statesmen love vacuums, especially along their frontiers and in possible spheres of interest. Disturbances and struggles outside their zones provide fruitful ground for the semination of Communist influence.

Palestine is going to be very disturbed for a long time to come. The great problem of the Western world is whether it can afford to allow that trouble to spread. Certain sensitive outer points of the disturbed area, like Iran and Turkey, are capable of bringing either war or something approximating it if the Russians press too hard.

All this naturally leads to the great question of what about the United Nations, since both the Security Council and the General Assembly have interested themselves, very much if very futilely, in Palestine. Britain nominally hands the problem over to the United Nations in giving up her Palestine mandate, so presumably one must expect the United Nations to keep on trying.