

The War in Palestine

Both Sides Have Strong Resources, But Long Strife Would Strain Them

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WASHINGTON, May 19—The Palestine fighting—for a long time guerrilla in character—has now developed into full-fledged war.

The war, as yet, is a minor one, but it is nevertheless war and it could involve, if the full force of the opponents were employed, more than 300,000 men.

Today, only a fraction of that number are involved. Israel's fighting forces—some 35,000 full-time, trained personnel, backed up by part-time static defense forces of militia type numbering about 50,000 and aided by more than 7,000 men of Irgun Zvai Leumi and the Stern Gang—actually outnumber the Arab forces invading Palestine.

The Arab regulars, who have invaded Palestine or are poised on its frontier, probably number no more than 20,000 to 30,000 men, according to a compilation of available reports here. To this number must be added the somewhat battered units of the Arab irregulars—totaling fewer than 15,000—who, until May 15, bore the brunt of the Arab struggle.

Handicaps Burden Arabs

The Arab invaders represent as yet only a fraction of the organized military strength available to the seven states of the Arab League, and a much smaller fraction of the total Arab manpower. The regular military and semi-military forces of Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Trans-Jordan and Yemen total about 223,000 men, but of this number no more than 115,000 to 120,000 are regular troops; the rest are quasi-military, like the 60,000 nomadic tribesmen of Saudi Arabia.

Most of these troops, however, are required for police and garrison purposes in their home countries, and the rivalries between the Arabs are so strong, the discontent in some of the states is so considerable, the fear of revolt so real and the problem of supply so difficult that it is very unlikely that the Arabs will be able to put more than half—at most—of their regular forces into the field in Palestine.

The Arab regular forces that so far have moved into Palestine, or are poised on its borders, apparently are organized about as follows:

Lebanese Army—Some 2,000 men,

organized in four infantry battalions, reinforced by a few armored cars, some 105-mm. guns and two troops of cavalry.

Syrian Army—Approximately 3,000 to 4,000 men, organized in about four infantry battalions, a mechanized battalion (trucks and armored cars), three batteries of 75's and two troops of armored cars.

Iraqi Army—About 2,000 men, organized in a mechanized combat team.

Trans-Jordan's Arab Legion—Some 8,000 to 10,000 men, organized in one motorized infantry division, two independent infantry brigades and one artillery regiment with British 25-pounder guns, supported by engineer, signal and service units.

Egyptian Army—About 8,000 men, organized in two brigades.

Yemen and Saudi Arabia, whose organized regular troops number no more than a total of 5,000 to 10,000, are not represented in the invading armies, although some Arabs from both these states may be included in the 13,000 Arab irregulars who have been fighting in Palestine for some months.

Egypt's Air and Naval Aid

In addition to these ground forces, Egypt has a very small coastal-patrol navy and a small air force and Syria has a handful of training planes. The planes that have been bombing Tel Aviv since May 15 are Egyptian and probably of the American training plane AT-6 type. These planes carry, in a sort of jerry rig, fifty-pound bombs, slung under the wings.

The Egyptian Air Force is believed to have more than forty training planes, more than a score of transport aircraft, half a dozen light bombers of the obsolete British Anson type and fewer than sixty British Spitfire fighters, plus some liaison and miscellaneous types.

Israel's regular forces—the Haganah, plus Irgun Zvai Leumi and the Stern Gang—number more than 40,000 men, backed up by at least 50,000 militia. The latter is used for police work and the static defense of fixed towns and areas. So far, about 2,000 to 3,000 men appear to comprise the largest unit yet used by the Haganah in any single operation.

The Israeli forces are well

equipped with small arms, rifles, automatic arms and heavy machine guns, mortars up to three inches in size and 20-mm. anti-tank guns. They have some armored cars and homemade armored trucks. The few planes are trainers or liaison aircraft, but it is believed that American B-25-type bombers and some fighter planes are, or soon will be, on their way to Palestine for use by the Haganah.

Additional reinforcements of men and matériel from Europe are expected to go to Palestine by sea now that the British blockade has been lifted. The Egyptian Navy does not have the strength to stop this movement and the Egyptian Air Force can harass and handicap Israeli reinforcement but cannot stop it.

Advantages on Each Side

As of today the Israeli forces in Palestine are definitely stronger in numbers, leadership, discipline and organization and in reserve stocks of light armament and ammunition. The Arabs are stronger in artillery, light armor and planes, but they are short in ammunition and reserve stocks of equipment.

In any long-range struggle both sides will experience major difficulties with that old bête Noire of the military art—logistics. The Israelis, mostly concentrated in cities, probably will eventually have to import most of their food, as their agricultural regions will be exposed to Arab guerrilla activities. The Israeli water supply also is vulnerable. The Arabs do not suffer from this disability, since they live off the country—in so far as food is concerned.

The prospects, as yet, are impossible to assess, for the military and political situation—particularly the latter—is too volatile. But it begins to look as if the war in Palestine must involve considerable blood-letting on both sides before there is much hope of a settlement.