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IRAQI ROLE IN ARAB-ISRAELI WARS IN PALESTINE

Abstract

History books have had different assessments on the role of Arab countries toward the Zionist Movement's control of Palestine and declaring establishment of Israel in 1949. This paper suggests that Iraq's position was against the control of the Zionist Movement on Palestine. The three-chapter paper has adopted the historical approach to prove the validity of this hypothesis: Chapter 1 addresses the conditions of Palestine under the British Mandate (1917-1947); Chapter 2 deals with the official and popular Iraqi position toward the Jewish expansion in Palestine during the British Mandate; and Chapter 3 is devoted to discussing Iraq's contributions to the Arab-Israeli wars. The paper concludes that Iraq has taken a supportive stand to the Palestinian rights; but the Iraqi army's contribution to Arab-Israeli wars was limited because of the Arab and Iraqi political decisions, which weakened the important Iraqi role in the Arab-Israeli 1948 and 1967 wars.

Keywords: The 1948 War, the Six-Day War, Iraqi Army, Palestine, the establishment of Israel.

Introduction

Most major historical transformations have, to some extent, occurred through the actual use or the threat of use of military force. This is what has clearly happened in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although it has not only been a sole military conflict, but an all-encompassing, multidimensional conflict; where historic complications, religious sensitivities, political conflicts, cultural differences, societal tensions, economic boycotts, and international alliances have been interacting in open forms of coercion; however, "armed violence" has played a central role in shaping the features and developments of the conflict over half a century – from the late 1940s to early 21st century – without likeliness of diminishing in the foreseeable future.

From the early beginnings of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it was clear that the armed force would play an unavoidable role in its management. Regardless of whether the UN resolution No. 181 of 1947 on the partition plan for Palestine could be a solution to the problem or not, the parties' perception of the dispute did not merely focus on "strategic interests" on which compromise could be reached, but rather on "fundamental values" that could not be compromised. Therefore, Israel as a state was not established on the Palestinian territories except after it engaged in several wars, most prominently:

- The Arab-Israeli war in 1948, Known as the "Nakba" and as "War of Independence" in Israel, resulted in the eviction of a large number of Palestinians from their homes. The war broke out after announcing the creation of Israel on May 15, 1948, where forces of five Arab countries, namely Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq, attempted to enter "Israel" to prevent its establishment on the land of Palestine; where the military operations continued until January 1949;
- The 1967 war, known in Arab countries as the "Naksah" (setback), and in Israel and the international literature as the "Six-Day War", where the Israeli forces took control of the rest of the Palestinian territories, namely Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The war represented a multi-dimensional disaster in the Arab memory, where some Arab armies, including the Iraqi army, had participated.

However, prevailing assessments indicate that Arab military performance in all regular armed rounds between Arabs and Israel, specifically in the wars of 1948 and 1967, was so poor that it raised chronic question marks in this regard.

The Problem: Palestine engaged in the two wars of 1948 and 1967, in order to preserve the Palestinian land and stop the Zionist project in the region, which starts from Palestine – amid various assessments by history books that have addressed the role of Arab armies in general, and the seriousness of their role in the protection of Palestine in particular.

Questions: The study proceeds from a basic question: What is the Iraqi role in the Arab-Israeli wars in Palestine?

Hypothesis: The study assumes that there is a positive but ineffective Iraqi position in the Arab-Israeli wars.

Significance: The significance of the study lies in:

- 1- To provide useful information to decision makers and researchers in this regard.

2- To provide the Arab Library with resources for the Iraqi role in the Arab-Israeli wars in Palestine.

Methodology:

1- Historical approach:

It is an approach that believes that the formulation of international policies and relations must pass through the knowledge of historical relations between the two parties through a corneal monitoring of events and highlighting the Iraqi role in the Arab wars¹.

2- The national-interest approach:

This approach considers that the pursuit of the national interest of the State is the ultimate and continuous objective of its foreign policies, in the sense that the national interest is the fulcrum or the main driving force².

Tools: The study relies on Arab and foreign sources and references.

Range:

- The spatial range: Palestine
- The time range: 1948-1967
- The objective range: The Iraqi Role in the Arab-Israeli Wars in Palestine

Previous Studies:

1- Abdul Hakim, Lafi, "The American Role in the Arab-Israeli Wars" (1948-1982), unpublished Master Thesis, Islamic University, Gaza, Palestine, 2011:

This study included five chapters, addressing the American role in supporting the establishment of Israel, through highlighting the US supportive position towards Israel in the wars of 1948 and 1967. The study also deals with the American position during the tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956. The study reached some findings, most notably, that the United States played a role in supporting Israel during its wars with Arab countries in 1948 and 1967.

2- Ali, Al-Jayani, "Iraq and Arab Politics" (1963-1968), Master Thesis, Mosul University, Mosul, Iraq, 2009:

This study focuses on the Iraqi efforts in the run-up to the 1967 war, known as the Naksa (set-back) and the efforts exerted by Iraq during the war, as well as highlighting Iraq's official and popular attitude towards the outcome of the war.

3- Mahmoud Al-Me'amari, "Iraq and Arab Issues in the Arab League (1945-1967), Master Thesis, Institute of Arab Research and Studies, Egypt - Cairo, 2008:

The study highlights the stages of the establishment of the Arab League and the priorities of the Arab League during that period (beginnings). The study also focuses on the Iraqi attitude – within the Arab League – towards Arab movements for liberation from the French and British colonialism, as well as the Arab-Israeli conflict.

¹ Ismail, Mqlad, "International Political Relations, A Study in Fundamentals and Theories", 4th Edition, (Cairo: Public Library, 1991), p. 14.

² Ibid. p. 23

Terms:

1- The Zionist Movement:

Roger Jaroudi defines Zionism as “a colonial nationalist political doctrine that dates back to 19th century European nationalism and the political movement,” adding that “it is a heresy that wants to make religion a political tool that aims at sanctifying it through a literal and selective reading of God's words. Defining Zionism, George Antonius says it is “a nationalist movement rather than a religious one aimed at establishing a Jewish state in Palestine based on worldly power, supported by the known characteristics of ownership and sovereignty.” Zionism takes its name from Mount Zion, one of the seven mountains upon which the city of Jerusalem was built. Mount Zion is the mountain on which the children of Israel camped to thank God for surviving the ancient Egyptians, and where their king David saw in his dream a luxurious structure that his son Solomon later built³.

2- The 1967 Naksa (setback) War:

The 1967 Naksa (setback) War, also called the Six-Day War, is a short bloody conflict that took place in June 1967 between Israel and a number of Arab countries, namely Egypt, Syria and Jordan after years of diplomatic friction and skirmishes between Israel and its neighbors. The Israeli army launched pre-emptive airstrikes that paralyzed the air force of Egypt and its allies. Israel then launched a successful ground offensive and captured the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip from Egypt; the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan; and the Golan Heights from Syria. The brief war ended with a ceasefire following UN intervention⁴.

3- The 1948 Nakba War:

The 1948 Nakba War, known in Arab countries as the Palestine War or the Nakba, and in Israel as the War of Independence, broke out after announcing the creation of Israel on May 15, 1948, where forces of five Arab countries, namely Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq, attempted to enter "Israel" for preventing its establishment on the land of Palestine; and the military operations continued until January 1949, when it was clear that Israeli forces took control of the theater of operations. The war virtually confirmed the partition of Palestine, the exodus of more than 400,000 Palestinians from their homes to become refugees, and the continuation of Arab-Israeli conflict in its current form⁵.

The Study Parts:

Chapter I: Situation in Palestine (1917-1947)

First Topic: Situation in Palestine before the Advent of Britain

Second Topic: Palestine under the British Mandate

Chapter II: Iraqi position on Jewish Expansion in Palestine (1917-1948)

³ Jawad Al-Tabai, The Zionist Movement Definition, Conditions of Establishment, Basic Objectives, Civilized Dialogue - Issue: 3051 - 7/7/2010.

⁴ History.Com Editors, Six-Day War, Updated: Aug 21, 2018.

⁵ Hassan al-Badri, Quantum and Quality in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, International Politics, No. 50, October 1977, pp. 195-196.

First Topic: The Official Position

Second Topic: The Popular Position

Chapter III: Iraq's Contributions to Arab-Israeli Wars in Palestine

First Topic: Iraqi Role during Arab-Israeli War in 1948

Second Topic: Iraqi Role during Arab-Israeli War in 1967

Conclusion

References

Chapter I

The Situation in Palestine from 1917 to 1947

First Topic: The Situation in Palestine immediately before the advent of Britain

The European support of Jews in Palestine dates back to the late Ottoman period, between 1840 and 1914 AD. The European countries exploited the weakness of the Ottoman Empire and established consulates in Palestine; where the United Kingdom opened a consulate in Jerusalem in 1838, followed by Prussia (Germany) in 1841, France in 1843, the United States in 1844, Austria in 1848, Russia in 1858; and then inauguration of consulates in Jerusalem was pursued by many other countries afterwards. Also, evangelical missionaries also went to Jerusalem, increasing the influence of Christians and Jews; and European influence penetrated the country under the pretext of protecting the Christian communities and the Jewish minority. Jews and Christians held prominent positions, with respect to jobs, as well as economic and cultural areas, which led to a wide gap between Muslims on the one hand and Christian and Jewish minorities on the other⁶, although the population of Palestine in 1915 was 689,275, including 83,000 Jews and 17,000 non-Arab Christians.⁷

With the access of Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II to power in 1876, that is, in the stage of the severe decline of the Ottoman Empire, he sought to pay attention to Palestine through reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem, and building schools, and institutions for industry, commerce and education. However, the successive defeats suffered by the Ottoman Empire on the Balkan front and the loss of more territory distracted the Sultan from pursuing his interest in Palestine⁸.

Then, the Zionist movement exploited the preoccupations of the Ottoman Sultan to begin secretly and gradually applying the idea of "settlement" in Palestine since 1881, because of the restrictions imposed by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II on the settlement of Jews in Palestine. However, they were able through various twisted ways to establish 17 settlements until 1897; the year when the first Zionist Congress was held in Basel, Switzerland⁹.

During the First World War (1914-1918), the whole region was exposed to three major events that had a significant impact on the Arab countries in general and Palestine in particular, namely:

⁶ Adi, Manna, "The History of Palestine in the Late Ottoman Era," (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1999), p. 186.

⁷ Areih, I. Avnery, "The Dispossession of Jewish and Arab Settlements 1878-1948," (Amman: Galilee Publishing House, Palestinian Studies and Research, 1986), p. 27.

⁸ Zakaria, Sinwar et al., "Studies in the Palestinian Cause," i, (Gaza: Dar Al-Arqam, 2014), p. 29.

⁹ Girgis, Sabri, "History of Zionism," Vol. 1, (Nicosia: PLO Research Center, 1986), p. 123.

1) The Hussein-McMahon Communications (1915)

Henry McMahon was British High Commissioner in Egypt. He had been authorized by his government to carry out correspondence and negotiations with Hussein ibn Ali, a member of the Hashemite family who was the emir of Mecca during the First World War, in attempt to attract Arab support against the Ottoman Empire. He sent five letters to Hussein and received five replies in return.

Sharif Hussein was said to be a direct descendant of Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him), as belonging to the Hashemite family. Sultan Abdul Hamid II had brought him closer to him in Istanbul; keeping him away from Mecca because of his tendencies of independence and his promotion of the idea of the return of the Islamic Caliphate to the Arabs. During World War I, he began his correspondence with McMahon, taking advantage of Arab hatred of Turks at the time due to alleged "Turkishization" policy as well as the massacres said to be carried out by Djemal Pasha, the Ottoman governor Syria in 1915, in addition to his (Hussein's) personal ambition to become a Caliph or King of the Arabs¹⁰.

Britain was aware of the differences between the Arabs and the Ottoman Empire through its spies scattered in the region. So the United Kingdom sought to exploit the Arabs to stand by its side in World War I against the Ottoman Empire, by announcing Arab revolt in order to weaken the role of the Ottoman Empire in the war. with a view to accelerating its elimination¹¹.

In his letters, Sharif Hussein committed himself to the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire and the liberation of Arab regions, such as: Hijaz, Jordan, and Syria and rid them of Ottoman rule with the help of Britain. In return, Henry McMahon, in his letters to Sharif Hussein (the Damascus Document or the Damascus Protocol), committed to:

1- Britain promises to support the Arabs to establish a unified Arab kingdom on the Arab-Asian parts; with its northern borders starting from Mersin to Adana, the Indian Ocean in the south, Iran in the east, and the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea as its western borders.

2- Britain is committed to cooperate with this future state economically and militarily.

3- Britain promises to work to abolish foreign privileges.

4- To give Britain special privileges with regard to economic affairs¹².

Sharif Hussein then proclaimed the Great Arab Revolt, starting from Hejaz with forces under leadership of his son, Faisal, who succeeded in liberate Hijaz, eastern Jordan, and Syria, where-as Britain occupied Palestine and Iraq.

2) Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916)

The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), a secret convention made during World War I between Great Britain and France, with the assent of imperial Russia, for the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, contradicts the McMahon-Hussein agreement and the Arab nationalist aspirations, as it provides for the division of Arab-Asian regions in the Fertile Crescent into French and British spheres of influence, with establishment of a special international system in Palestine.

¹⁰ Akram, Zeaiter, "The Palestinian Cause", (Cairo: Dar Al Maaref, 1955), p. 37.

¹¹ Zakaria, Sinwar, et al., op. Cit., P. 30

3) The Balfour Declaration

The Balfour Declaration was a public statement issued by the British government on 2 November 1917, stating that the British Government is pleased to consider the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. This declaration contradicts the McMahon-Hussein agreement and the Arab nationalist aspirations, in addition to lacking any legal validity for the following reasons:

- 1- Britain granted land that it does not own, namely Palestine, because the Balfour Declaration was issued on 2 November 1917, while the British occupied Palestine on 9 December 1917.
- 2- The Balfour Declaration did not mention the word "Arabs", whether Muslims nor Christians, but rather the phrase of "non-Jews in Palestine", although the Arabs, both Muslims and Christians, made up 93% of the population of Palestine at the time, while the Jews then constituted a minority of only 7%. How come that a declaration be issued in favor of the minority at the expense of the majority?!
- 3- The Balfour Declaration was issued to a rich Jewish man, Rothschild, who did not have any legal personality but for being a wealthy Jew.
- 4- Britain promised in the Hussein-McMahon agreement that Palestine will be part of the independent Arab state after the end of World War I, but the United Kingdom broke its promises and pledges to the Arabs¹³.

Second Topic: Palestine under the British Mandate

With the advent of British General Allenby to Palestine in 1917, the Palestinian territories were placed under British military administration or occupation until 1920. Britain divided Palestine into "states" and continued to apply Ottoman laws until 1920, when British laws were adopted. Britain also placed indigenous Palestinian Arabs and the Jewish community under civil administration. The United Kingdom then was keen to preserve the interests of the Zionist movement through several things, including:

- 1- British commitment to establish a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine, in accordance with Arthur Balfour's declaration on 2 November 1917¹⁴;
- 2- Selection and appointment of Herbert Samuel, a Jewish Briton as the first High British Commissioner in Palestine (1920-1925).
- 3- The British Mandate in Palestine adopted a policy aimed at establishing a Jewish state "Israel", such as granting Jews the right to buy land from Arabs, in addition to supporting and encouraging Jewish immigration. Britain also encouraged Jewish economic projects, where the Jewish settlements increased from 50 in 1920 to 256 settlements in 1947¹⁵.

¹² Abdul Wahab, Kayyali, "The Modern History of Palestine", i 10, (Beirut: Arab Institute for Studies and Publishing, 1990), p. 75.

¹³ Telephone interview, 16-11-2018 with Dr. Abdul-Karim Shubir.

¹⁴ Beverley Milton Edwards, "Contemporary Politics in the Middle East", (Cambridge: polity press, 2011), p. 40

¹⁵ Interview with Palestinian historian Osama Abu Nahl, via telephone, on 5-11-2018.

4- Britain exploited its control over many Arab countries, most prominently Egypt and Iraq, where some 483,000 Jewish immigrants / settlers moved to Palestine under the British Mandate, including 8-10% from Arab countries¹⁶.

As a result of the British practices that supported the Jewish minority in Palestine, meeting the ambitions of the Zionist movement and the wealthy Jews in Europe, the Muslim population made many protests against the British policy in Palestine, including:

1- Revolution of the shrine of the Prophet Moses in 1920, which was a protest against the formation of a Jewish military organization known as "Haganah" led by Ze'ev Jabotinsky¹⁷.

2- Jaffa Revolution (1921), after a problem between the Zionists among themselves on the anniversary of the Labor Day in 1921, where a group of Zionist communists fled to Jaffa, chased by a group of labor Zionists; but the Zionists then clashed with the Arabs in the Arab city of Jaffa¹⁸.

3- Al-Buraq Revolution (1929), which took place after a march of Jews in Jerusalem surrounded by a number of armed Zionists reached al-Buraq (the present-day Western Wall) carrying Zionist flags and singing their Zionist national anthem, the Hatikva, or "the Hope". They also chanted slogans offensive to Islam and Prophet Mohamed (such as "Mohamed died and left only girls behind) and claiming Jewish ownership of the wall of Al-Buraq (such as "The wall is our wall"). Then there were violent confrontations between Arabs and Jews, which left a large number of Jews dead. The United Kingdom decided to call in additional troops from Egypt to quell the revolution; a large number of young Arabs were arrested; and Mohamed Jamjoum, Atta al-Zeer (from Hebron) and Fouad Hijazi (from Safed) were executed. After that, the British occupation authorities formed the Shaw Committee in September 1929 to investigate the causes of the revolution, which determined that the direct cause was the Jewish demonstration at the Buraq Wall (Western Wall)¹⁹.

The First Conference for Palestinian Scholars in Jerusalem (1935): The first conference for Palestinian scholars was held in 1935 in Jerusalem and was attended by 500 of judges, muftis and imams from all over Palestine, announcing the prohibition of the sale of an inch of the land of Palestine to the Jews, adding that the seller, the broker and the mediator would go through religion (become renegades), and should not be buried in Muslim cemeteries. They also demanded putting an end to the immigration and settlement of Jews in Palestine, stressing the need to inform Arab and Muslim leaders and kings about the conditions of Palestine²⁰.

4- Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Revolution (1935): Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam revolution (1935) began with interest in weapons training and raising public awareness of the threats to Palestine. In 1935, the al-Qassam cells began resistance in Jenin, Nablus and Tulkarm. Howev-

¹⁶ Hanadi Hani Mohammed Ismail, *The Palestinian State Model of Institution Building in the Establishment of the State*, Unpublished Master Thesis, (Nablus: An-Najah National University, 2012), p. 21.

¹⁷ Zakaria, Sinwar, "Zionist Haganah Organization", unpublished doctoral thesis, (Cairo: Institute of Arab Research and Studies, 2006), p. 45.

¹⁸ Zakaria, Sinwar, et al., op. Cit., P. 34

¹⁹ Kamel, Khella, "Palestine and the British Mandate," 2nd edition, (Tripoli: General Establishment for Publication Distribution, 1982), p. 318.

²⁰ Zakaria, Sinwar, et al., op. Cit., P. 36

er, Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam was martyred in clashes with the British forces in the wilderness of Ya'bad, Jenin district on 20 October 1935²¹.

5- The Great Palestinian Revolt (1936-1939): With continued British support for Jewish minorities and increasing Jewish immigration rates, the Great Palestinian Revolt started in April 1936 after a national committee was formed in Nablus, which declared a general strike. Then, other national committees were formed in other Palestinian cities to manage the strike, which covered all aspects of life. Britain tried to stop the strike but failed despite attempts to arrest Palestinians and eradicate their homes. Also, Prince Abdullah, the emir of West Jordan, tried to persuade the revolutionaries to stop the strike but failed²².

However, the strikes were suspended after the intervention of Iraqi Foreign Minister Nouri al-Said along with King Abdul Aziz Al Saud and Prince Abdullah of East Jordan. After the Arab leaders received promises from Britain that it would spread justice in Palestine, the three Arab leaders asked the Palestinians to stop their comprehensive strike which had continued for nearly six months²³.

It is noteworthy that Iraq was present in the Great Palestinian Revolt (1936-1939), where the Baghdad Radio broadcast military technical instructions on how the Palestinian mujahideen would address the electrified fence surrounding the Jewish settlements; and Iraqi employees donated part of their salaries in favor of the Palestinian cause – and with the outbreak of the Rashid al-Gaylani Revolution in Iraq, the Iraqi interest in Palestine increased, which created a state of anxiety for both Britain and the Jews over al-Gaylani's policy²⁴.

²¹ Ibid. p. 36

²² Ibid. p. 37

²³ Ibid. p. 39

²⁴ Telephone interview, on 15-11-2018, with Dr. Mohammed Siam, prof. of contemporary history.

Chapter II

Iraqi Position on Jewish Expansion in Palestine (1917-1948)

Introduction

The religious, cultural and historical ties between the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples cannot be ignored, which constituted a motivation for the existence of an Iraqi position, whether at the official or popular level, towards what was going on in Palestine²⁵. Also, the Iraqi fears of Jewish expansion cannot be ignored due to several reasons, most prominently:

First: The Zionist dream that their state "Israel" will extend from the river to the sea: The Zionist movement had sought to find an outlet in Iraq since it was formally established in 1897 at the Basel Conference in Switzerland, where the Zionist Jews presented all their ambitions and future directions, most prominently was building a Jewish state. This conference recognized that Greater Israel would extend from the Euphrates to the Nile. Thus, Iraq fell within the so-called "promised land"²⁶. The Israelis believe that there are a number of factors that require them to seek influence in Iraq, most notably the religious factor; as Iraq is home to religions, apostles and prophets, and that shrines of many apostles and prophets who had been sent to the children of Israel are in Iraq²⁷. The religious factor was one of the key foundations of the State of Israel in Palestine, and was not far from being part of their aspirations in Iraq. This was confirmed by statements of the first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, immediately after the State of Israel was declared in Palestine that "the Jewish people will return to the land of parents and grandparents stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates." Also, Moshe Dayan, one of the Israeli warlords, after the occupation of Jerusalem on June 6, 1967, said: "We have seized Jerusalem and we are on our way to Yathrib (Madinah) and Babylon. Undoubtedly, this Zionist dream annoys Iraqis²⁸.

Second: the existence of secret Jewish organizations in Iraq: In the summer of 1934, some hidden Zionist organizations were uncovered in Iraq, including an association called "Ahi'ever" founded by a teacher who had come from Palestine. Among the association's clandestine activities was facilitating the immigration of Iraqi Jews to Palestine; teaching Iraqi Jews Hebrew; and holding meetings, lecturing and fundraising for the Jewish National Fund. Most of the members of the association were young students who were attending Jewish schools in Baghdad, such as Shamash School owned by Rachel Shimon. Some members of the Ahi'ever association planned a Zionist march through the streets of Baghdad, however other members voted overwhelmingly against this proposal, which led to divisions within the association. A new association called the Shemesh Association was accordingly established, which was more active than the original association, but less cautious. In the end, the Iraqi authorities uncovered the two associations which were dismantled by the Iraqi security services. Among the other Zionist organizations established by some Iraqi Jews during this period was the Hebrew Youth Association and the Association for Distribution of Products of the Land of "Israel", the Hebrew Books Distributors Association, the Maccabees Sports Organization, and others. This covert Zionist activity and the prohibited communist activity in Iraq were monitored by successive Iraqi governments. In Sep-

²⁵ Akram, Zeaiter, "The Palestinian National Movement", I 2, left publications, 1988, p. 352.

²⁶ Mohamed Dakhel Karim al-Saadi, Shatha Faisal al-Obeidi, Israeli attitudes towards Iraq 1958-2007, p. 1.

²⁷ Ahmad, Sousa, Ahmad, "Features of the Ancient History of Iraqi Jews," (Baghdad: Center for Palestinian Studies, University of Baghdad, 1978), p. 50.

tember 1934, Arshad al-Omari, the Minister of Economy and Communications appointed by Ali Judeh al-Ayoubi, decided to terminate services of a number of senior officials in his ministry, mostly Jews among other non-Muslims and some Muslims. After protests by notables of the Jewish community in Baghdad, Al-Omari re-employed a number of those Jewish employees whose services had been terminated²⁹.

First Topic: Official Iraqi Position on the Jewish influence in Palestine

1- The Iraqi King:

Because of the Zionist ambitions in Iraq and because of their penetration in Palestine; and because of the religious significance of Palestine, the Jewish conflict in Palestine has always been present in the mind of the official bodies in Iraq. The people of Iraq and their monarchy under King Ghazi expressed their sympathy for the Palestinian people. In 1936, the best Iraqi youth joined Arab volunteers, led by the national hero Fawzi al-Qawuqji, an Iraqi army officer who resigned for the purpose of volunteering and leading Arab fighters in Palestine”, where he reached together with the volunteers that accompanied him the village of Bal'a in Tulkarm.³⁰

2- Nouri al-Said:

Nouri al-Said, an Iraqi politician during the British mandate in Iraq and the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq, presented himself as lenient and understanding of the wishes of the Jews in Palestine. On October 20, 1948, Nouri al-Said informed the head of the Middle East Economic Studies mission, Jordan Clab that the Iraqi government was willing to cooperate with the mission in the exchange of Iraqi Jews wishing to immigrate to Israel with a similar number of Palestinian refugees who wish to settle in Iraq, provided that the property of the Iraqi Jews be handed over to the Iraqi government. After the mission transmitted al-Said's offer to the Israeli authorities, they welcomed the offer, but stipulated that all Arab Jews should be allowed to immigrate to Israel, and that its borders should be adjusted to accommodate this additional number of Jews in Palestine, but Nouri al-Said refused. On February 18, 1949, the International Conciliation Commission arrived in Baghdad to discuss the question of Palestine. The US representative in this committee tried to persuade al-Said to agree that Iraq would enter into direct negotiations with Israel, but Nouri al-Said refused. The British government then commissioned its ambassador in Baghdad to try to convince al-Said again. The British ambassador to Iraq then warned al-Said that if he refused the offer, the Jewish forces in Palestine would attack the Iraqi army there. But Nouri al-Said reiterated his refusal to negotiate with the Jews³¹. Nouri al-Said's position on Palestine and his involvement in this strong way, which escalated differences between al-Said and the British Foreign Office, was due to Nouri al-Said's adherence to the Fertile Crescent project in the first place, where Palestine was a cornerstone³².

²⁸ Mahmoud, Khattab, "Israel's Expansionist Goals in the Arab Countries," 3rd edition (Cairo: Dar al-Eitissam, 1970), p. 31.

²⁹ Ahmad Burhan Bash A'ayan, Iraqi Jews before the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1921 .. Pages on their conditions and activity, Al-Mada website for media, culture and arts, Date of publishing, 14-8-2016, accessed date 22-9-2019.

³⁰ Akram, Zeiter, op. cit., P. 608.

³¹ Ahmad Burhan Bash A'ayan, op. cit.

³² Telephone interview with the historian Saleh al-Naami, on 1-11-2018.

3- Rashid Ali al-Gaylani and Fadhel al-Jamali:

Hajj Amin al-Husseini, Mufti of Palestine, and Rashid Ali al-Gaylani established the “Arab Secret Committee” with the participation of Younis al-Sabaawi and Naji Shawkat. The Mufti was the only representative for Arabs from all communities in Iraq in organizing this committee³³ which was meant to protect Palestine. In addition, there was convergence of position on Britain and the Zionists between the Palestinian leadership and Rashid al-Gaylani and his men. Representative of Iraq, Dr. Fadhel al-Jamali suggested that Arab states should treat Jews living in Arab countries as Israel would treat Arabs in Palestine. However, a number of Arab delegations, led by the head of the Egyptian delegation, Ali Maher Pasha, rejected this proposal, being contrary to the principles of Islamic human rights, and making Arabs decline to the level of “Israel” in violating the rights of Arabs in occupied Palestine. Al-Jamali expressed his appreciation of the magnanimity and nobility of these delegations, but he explained to them that the political circumstances oblige Arabs, as an attacked and oppressed nation, to address the enemy in the language which it understands, especially since Arabs spared no effort in consuming all other means³⁴.

Second Topic: The Popular Position (Political Parties)

It is undeniable that there is a kind of interaction between the Palestinian and Iraqi intellectuals, which witnessed a remarkable development after Iraq had gained independence. However, the Iraqi parties had a clear position on what was going on in Palestine, most prominently:³⁵

1- Al-Muthanna Club:

The Iraqi Al-Muthanna Club Party, named after Al-Muthanna ibn Haritha, an Iraqi Muslim Arab general who defeated the Persian Sassanids at the Battle of al-Qadisiyyah, was founded in April 1935, including some nationalist figures such as Mohamed Mahdi Kubba, Abdul Majid Al-Qassab, Noman Ani and others³⁶. The party established the Committee for the Defense of Palestine which raised funds for Palestinian Mujahideen, and formed the “Association for the Defense of Palestine” in October 1937. The association succeeded in providing services to the Palestinian cause through seminars, fundraising and issuing fatwas urging jihad, giving and donating for Palestine³⁷.

2- The Iraqi National Party:

The Iraqi National Party, headed by Jaafar Abu Altmen, was founded in 1922. It supported the Palestinian cause, especially during the events of 1929, explaining that what was happening at the time was caused by the Balfour Declaration. The party declared support for the Arabs of Palestine in their struggle against the British Mandate and the Zionist attacks on the Holy Places, and sought to establish a committee to address the incidents in Palestine. The party leadership also sent a letter of protest to the parliamentary committee sent by Britain to investigate the events of Palestine in 1929, asking the committee to work to remove grievances and respond to the wishes of the indigenous Arab people to prevent recurrence of such grievances³⁸.

³³ Ibrahim, Ahmed, Ibrahim, Hamidi, Jaafar, "History of Contemporary Iraq", Mosul: Dar al-Kutub, 1989, p. 122.

³⁴ Ahmad Burhan Bash A'ayan, op. cit.

³⁵ Akram, Zeiter, op. cit.

³⁶ Ibrahim, Ahmed, Ibrahim, Hamidi, Jaafar, op. cit. p. 95

³⁷ Ibid. p. 96

³⁸ Ibrahim, Ahmed, Ibrahim, Hamidi, Jaafar, op. cit. p. 52

3- The Independence Party:

The Independence Party is an Arab nationalist party founded in 1941, by Faiq al-Samarrai. It gave the Palestinian cause special attention and considered fighting Zionism and resisting the establishment of a Zionist entity in Palestine or part of it one of its top priorities³⁹. The party called for Arab popular resistance and providing support to Arabs in Palestine, suggesting organization of a comprehensive movement to save the land of Palestine, suggesting that Arab governments and the Arab people should cooperate to achieve this end, the former by allocating sufficient funds from their budgets and the latter by providing donations. The party was instrumental during the 1948 war in Palestine through rallying the masses to pressure the government for effectively contributing to save Palestine, and sending the Iraqi army to defend the Arab country.⁴⁰ The Iraqi position rejecting the Jewish expansion in Palestine explains the existence of units of the Iraqi army there before the 1948 war, fighting heroic battles in defense of a Palestinian area called the “Tireh Triangle”, instructing Palestinian fighters to attack the settlement of Ramat Hakovish, where some of the destroyed tanks are still present at the gates of the Israeli colony. Some Israeli writers described that period as “difficult days”. The Iraqi army also hosted dozens of Palestinian leaders, revolutionaries, intellectuals and poets in Iraq, most notably the revolutionary leader Aref Abdul Raziq and the revolutionary Abdul Fattah Al Mazraawi.⁴¹

The position of the Iraqi army was not the only Iraqi position against the Jewish expansion in Palestine. There were almost daily Iraqi popular demonstrations in support of Palestine against the Jews even those living in Iraq. On 27 September 1937, which marked the Jewish annual Yom Kippur, a grenade was reportedly thrown at a synagogue for the Jews, which was packed with worshipers, in Baghdad, but the bomb did not explode. As Iraqis continued to target Jews in Baghdad, Baghdad Rabbi, Sasson Khadouri, and a number of Iraqi Jewish intellectuals issued a statement repudiating the “Zionist plan” in Palestine. This statement was followed by two articles written by a Baghdad Jew named Ezra Haddad, a school principal, in the Iraqi Al Akhbar and Al Belad daily newspapers, saying that when the Jews of Iraq express their position on the Zionist movement, they “do it at will”; and that when they talk about the Arab world, they “talk about countries that was long ago their motherland that embraced them with complete generosity and lavished upon them with all its goodness. Haddad added that the Jews always considered the Arab world, and still consider it, as oases in the deserts of oppression and suppression, which afflicted the Jews in many world countries that boast of civilization and culture. Haddad also said that the Jews of Iraq “are Arabs before being Jews”.⁴²

Chapter III

Iraq's Contributions to Arab-Israeli Wars in Palestine

Introduction

Wars constitute only what has been termed the systematic “major armed conflicts”, between parties to the conflict. The reality is that the use of armed force, with its various elements, has not ceased throughout all periods of conflict, and within this framework, complex patterns of

³⁹ Ibid. p. 141

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 142

⁴¹ Abdul Aziz Amin Arar, “The battles of the Iraqi army in the 1948 war, the site of the Basra network, a visit on 11-11-2018,

⁴² Ahmad Burhan Bash A'ayan, op. cit.

armed conflict emerged. According to one of the well-known databases of international conflicts, within the Arab-Israeli conflict (during the period from 1945 to 2000), there were about 17 cases of violent conflicts between Israel and the five Arab parties adjacent to it (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinians) such as the war of attrition on the Egyptian front (1969-1970), the first Palestinian intifada in 1987, an armed crisis that the database considered non-violent, namely, Israel's entry into southern Lebanon in 1978, a latent conflict related to the Jordan River problem that caused strong tension in the region for years, in addition to dozens of specific military operations that had a strategic effect such as Israel bombardment of the Osirak reactor in 1981, Iraq's missile strike on Israel in 1991, and the hundreds of operations carried out by Palestinian guerrillas and Palestinian and Lebanese resistance organizations against Israel. Although many of those armed interactions constituted almost "small wars", the most famous historical wars between the Arabs and Israel are three wars, namely, the Nakba in 1948, the setback in 1967, and the October 1973 war. This chapter will address the wars of 1948 and 1967:

First Topic: The Iraqi role during the Arab-Israeli war in 1948

When the Arab League established the Arab Salvation Army before entering the war of 1948, three Iraqi regiments participated in this army in addition to three senior officers of the rank of Maj. General (Taha al-Hashemi, Ismail Safwat, and Nur al-Din Mahmoud) who were members of the Military Committee of the Arab League, which oversaw the recruitment of the Salvation Army personnel, its armament and ammunition supplies⁴³.

The Iraqi army was deployed in the area from Jenin in the north to Majdal in the south; while the Jordanian army was stationed in the area from Ramallah to Hebron, the Syrian army in Tiberias and the Nazareth region, the Lebanese army on its border, and the Egyptian army in the Beersheba, Negev and Gaza areas; and some Saudi and Sudanese battalions participated through the Egyptian army. The number of Iraqi army personnel involved in the 1948 war was initially estimated at 3,000 soldiers and then rose to 19,000 soldiers. Egypt participated with 10,000 troops, Jordan 4,500 and Syria 3,000. As for Lebanon, it participated with only 1,000 soldiers. Meanwhile, the Zionist army reached 120,000 soldiers and officers.⁴⁴

The most important battles of the Iraqi army included:

1) The Battle of Jenin (June 1948):

The Battle of Jenin (in June 1948) was led by Lt. Colonel Omar Ali, who was reportedly acting without orders from his senior command. The battle left nearly 350 Jews killed and 1,000 injured, and the Iraqi army seized about 350 weapons and large quantities of equipment and mines. On the Arab side, twenty army soldiers were killed, 20 Palestinian fighters and 46 civilians were killed.⁴⁵ Soon, Israeli forces moved to retaliate against Iraqi groups, inflicting them heavy casualties. The Israeli forces moved a military column armed with various weapons. Only a month after the first battle, the city of Jenin witnessed fierce clashes, specifically in the village of Mazar, in the Jenin district after movement of about two thousand Palestinian and Iraqi fighters, who were able to prevent the Jewish forces from advancing towards the city. Although the

⁴³ Abdul Aziz Amin Arar, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Bahjat, Abu Gharbiyeh, "In the Midst of the Arab-Palestinian Struggle: The Memoirs of the Militant Bahjat Abu Gharbiyeh, 1916-1949," 1st edition, (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993), p. 310.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 310

death toll among Arab reached 750, 123 of whom were Palestinian guerrillas, 57 from the Iraqi army, and the rest from Palestinian civilians⁴⁶.

2) The battles of Tulkarm:

Tulkarm is known to be one of the areas that were under the control of the Iraqi army. Tulkarm witnessed many battles between the Iraqi army and the Israeli army, leaving many Iraqi army personnel dead⁴⁷. At the end of that era, we can say that the Iraqi army has persevered in defending Palestine. The Zionists could not control an inch that was under the control of the Iraqi army. However, the Zionists took control of these areas after the Arab leadership asked the Iraqi army to hand over the areas under its control to the Jordanian army. Thus, these areas fell after only three days, raising many questions on the role of Arab leaders in the 1948 war.⁴⁸

Second Topic: the Iraqi role in the Arab-Israeli wars in 1967

After the end of the Arab-Israeli war in 1948, there were many results, most notably placing the West Bank and the city of Jerusalem under the Jordanian control, the Gaza Strip under direct Egyptian rule, and prompting other Arab armies, including the Iraqi army, to withdraw to their countries. However, it was apparent that there were signs of an imminent new war, as a result of the escalating crisis and high political and military tension between the Israeli enemy on the one hand and both Syria and Egypt on the other. The military build-up peaked between parties referred to, especially after the withdrawal of international emergency forces from Gaza and Sinai and Egypt's closure of the Tiran Straits in the face of Israeli navigation in addition to the issue of the Jordan River Diversion Plan, adopted by the Arab League to divert two of the three sources of the Jordan River.⁴⁹

However, Iraq could not leave Egypt and Baathist Syria without support; therefore, there were some senior Iraqi officers and specialists in the fields of military engineering in the Egyptian and Jordanian camps.⁵⁰ Also, before the start of the war, the 1st battalion of an Iraqi infantry brigade, led by Lt. Colonel Tareq Mahmoud Jalal, was transferred from Iraq to Egypt by 5 Ilyushin transport planes. On June 5, 1967, the 8th Iraqi mechanized brigade of the 12th. Iraqi armored brigade moved from its permanent headquarters in Ramadi to Jordan under the command of staff Brigadier General Staff Hassan Mustafa Al-Naqib. Then, command of the Iraqi brigade was transferred to Lt. General staff Abdel Moneim Riyadh, commander of the Eastern Front in Jordan. The Iraqi fighter planes also launched air strikes from al-Waleed airbase (on the Iraqi-Jordanian-Syrian border), and Iraqi fighter jets bombed Tel Aviv, Netanya and Kafr Sarkin⁵¹.

⁴⁶ Ahmad, Rahal, "Palestine Between the Truth of the Jews and the Lie of the Talmud," i, 1 (Amman: Dar al-Bidaa, 2008), p. 111.

⁴⁷ Nayef Abboush, the martyrs of the Iraqi army in the 1948 Palestine war, the site of Dar al Mosul, the date of publishing, 3-11-2013, accessed 12-11-2018

⁴⁸ Mohamed Ali, Abu Mousa, The Kurdish Role in the Middle East, an unpublished Master Thesis, (Gaza: Al-Azhar, 2011), p 76.

⁴⁹ Mohsen, Saleh, "The Palestinian Cause: Its Historical Backgrounds and Contemporary Developments," (Beirut: Zaytouna Center, 2011), p. 155.

⁵⁰ Younis Khaled, "Suspensions about the Kurds and the Islamic Solution", i 1, (Stockholm: Without a Publishing House, 1994), p. 35.

⁵¹ Qahtan Al-Samarrai, Group 73 historians, "The Role of the Iraqi Army in the Six-Day War of 5-10 June 1967", accessed 1-10-2019.

Conclusion

The political and military institutions of the Iraqi State had a supportive stance alongside the rights of the Palestinian people. However, the role of the military institution was clearer and much more supportive for the Palestinian issue than the position of Iraqi governments. Apart from the official position of the Iraqi State, there was a clear popular Iraqi position in support of the Palestinian rights against the Zionist project in Palestine. Thus, we can say that the Iraqi army adopted a firm position against the Israeli forces in the 1948 war. However, the decisions of Arab leaders in general and those of Iraqi politicians in particular weakened the resolve of the Iraqi army during the wars in Palestine. In the 1967 war, the position of the Iraqi army was supportive for the Egyptian and Jordanian army without direct participation in the war.

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