

# MEMOIRS, 1948

## PART II

FAUZI AL-QAWUQJI

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Fauzi al-Qawuqji was the commander of the Arab Liberation Army which entered Palestine in the first months of 1948 following the UN resolution of November 1947 to partition Palestine. The *Journal of Palestine Studies* has been able to obtain his papers and diary on the period and, in view of their historical interest, is publishing extracts from them in two parts, the second of which appears below.

Towards the end of the period described in the earlier part of the memoirs, which concluded with a description of the Arab defeat in Jaffa, Qawuqji received orders from his Damascus headquarters to go to the aid of the Arabs of Jerusalem. The second part of his memoirs describes the events in which he participated in May 1948.]

While Arab resistance was gradually being wiped out in Jaffa, the enemy started a series of violent attacks on all fronts. The main object of these attacks was, in the long run, to reach Jerusalem and rescue the 100,000 Jews there who were suffering from hunger, and then to occupy the whole city so that it might be their future capital, in spite of the international status granted it under the Partition resolution adopted with a two thirds majority by the United Nations at Lake Success on November 29, 1947.

The occupation of Jerusalem, in addition to its moral and religious value, was also of considerable military importance. After occupying it the enemy would have been able without much difficulty to go down the main road that leads to Jericho and reach the Allenby Bridge, which would have been a great disaster for all the Arab forces in Central Palestine. Another object of these attacks was to gain control of the road and to occupy as many sensitive positions as possible before the Arab regular armies came in.

In this fighting the enemy used the pick of his regular forces, which at that time consisted of six Haganah brigades and one Palmach<sup>1</sup> brigade — in

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<sup>1</sup> A special strike force later joined to the Haganah.

all more than 20,000 trained troops, most of whom had taken part in the Anglo-French campaign against Syria and Lebanon in the summer of 1941, and in the battles of the Second World War, as members of the Jewish Brigade attached to the British command or as members of the armies of the other allies. The Jewish brigades were experienced in both night and day fighting. They were equipped with light and heavy machine guns, tanks, armoured cars and armoured freight trucks; a special feature of their equipment was mortar guns of various sizes. These field units were supported by other trained troops, totalling more than 40,000, not to mention the national guards stationed in the settlements. The enemy's regular forces were rapidly expanded, to reach a total of seven Haganah brigades, three Palmach brigades, one armoured brigade and some naval and air formations.

As the fighting grew more intense, among the problems that faced us were the flood of refugees from the towns of the Triangle,<sup>2</sup> the dwindling of our stocks of ammunition and the delay in paying our men, most of whose families had no other means of support. There follow a number of cables which illustrate the critical situation we were in.<sup>3</sup>

46S 28/4 [1948]

To High Command

Our petrol has run out so that it is extremely difficult to provide transport for our units. Supply us with petrol as soon as possible.

FAUZI

51S 30/4

To High Command

The number of refugees from the important villages is now very large. The Palestinian towns in our area have barely sufficient food supplies for themselves, so that they cannot supply the refugees. I therefore request you take urgent measures to help them by ensuring them supplies of food.

FAUZI

67S 4/5

To High Command

The following received from Adib: Large Jewish concentration in Ja'una Camp. Continuous engagements day and night in Safad. Absolutely no ammunition in our stores.

FAUZI

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<sup>2</sup> Formed by Tulkarm, Nablus and Jenin.

<sup>3</sup> Copies of the cables are kept in the archives of the Institute for Palestine Studies.

63S 8/5

To High Command

Many men handing in their rifles and asking to be discharged because their pay is several months in arrears.

FAUZI

65S 8/5

To High Command

Qadisiya Battalion deliberately disbanded. Jordanian Company in Yarmuk. Other remnants have joined Lebanese Battalion and others other units. Your stopping pay has greatly inconvenienced us. Men grumbling more than ever today and who knows when they will be paid.

FAUZI

70S 8/5

To High Command

Today 62 men came to hand in their arms and ask for discharge because their pay has not arrived and because their uniforms are so shabby and worn out that they cannot appear in them in public. Kindly deal with our requests and suggestions.

FAUZI

72S 9/5

To High Command

Pay delayed and this delay has caused us to lose control of the troops. Half the Circassian detachment have abandoned their arms and the force will dissolve unless you save the situation by sending pay in two days at the most. We have kept the accountant Jarida here.

FAUZI

88S 10/5

To High Command

After reconnaissance yesterday the Jews launched a heavy attack on Tira and Qalqiliya this afternoon. Heavy fighting still continuing. The Jews are assembling in Kefar Yona settlement. Our ammunition insufficient. We cabled for pay yesterday and the day before yesterday, but you have not replied. How do you expect a man to fight bravely without ammunition and without pay and with a terribly shabby uniform?

FAUZI

Such was the crippling situation in which I had to face repeated enemy attacks on all fronts with the remnants of a force exhausted by fighting, and

with insufficient ammunition and inadequate rations, not to mention their shaken morale as a result of the bad treatment they had received at the hands of those who were in control of things in Damascus.

Before proceeding to discuss the battle of Jerusalem, I want to reproduce from the official records, which are available at the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut, the texts of a number of cables. These cables, with their dates, are in themselves sufficient to give a true picture of what the situation was in the stage that preceded the entry of the Arab regular armies, and the proclamation of the State of Israel on May 15, 1948.

72S 5/5

To High Command

In Adib's area the Jews have occupied all the hills around Harawi. The Jews are trying to encircle Safad. The Jews have attacked and occupied the villages of Kudairiya and Zanghariya. The Jews launched a general attack on Safad at 2100 with the intention of occupying it and the village of Dahiriya. The attack has been repelled and we shall provide you with details.

FAUZI

74S 6/5

To High Command

The following from Adib: The majority of the inhabitants have left their villages. Their morale has collapsed completely. Jewish concentration constantly increasing. No ammunition. The majority of our men are deserting because the Palestinian irregulars have fled. The Jews are trying all the time to encircle Safad. They have launched a violent attack on all our positions. Fighting still continuing.

FAUZI

75S 6/5

To High Command

The following from Adib: Incessant intense enemy attack on Safad. The garrison cannot hold out after 1600. We have no ammunition or reserve force to reinforce it. Advise.

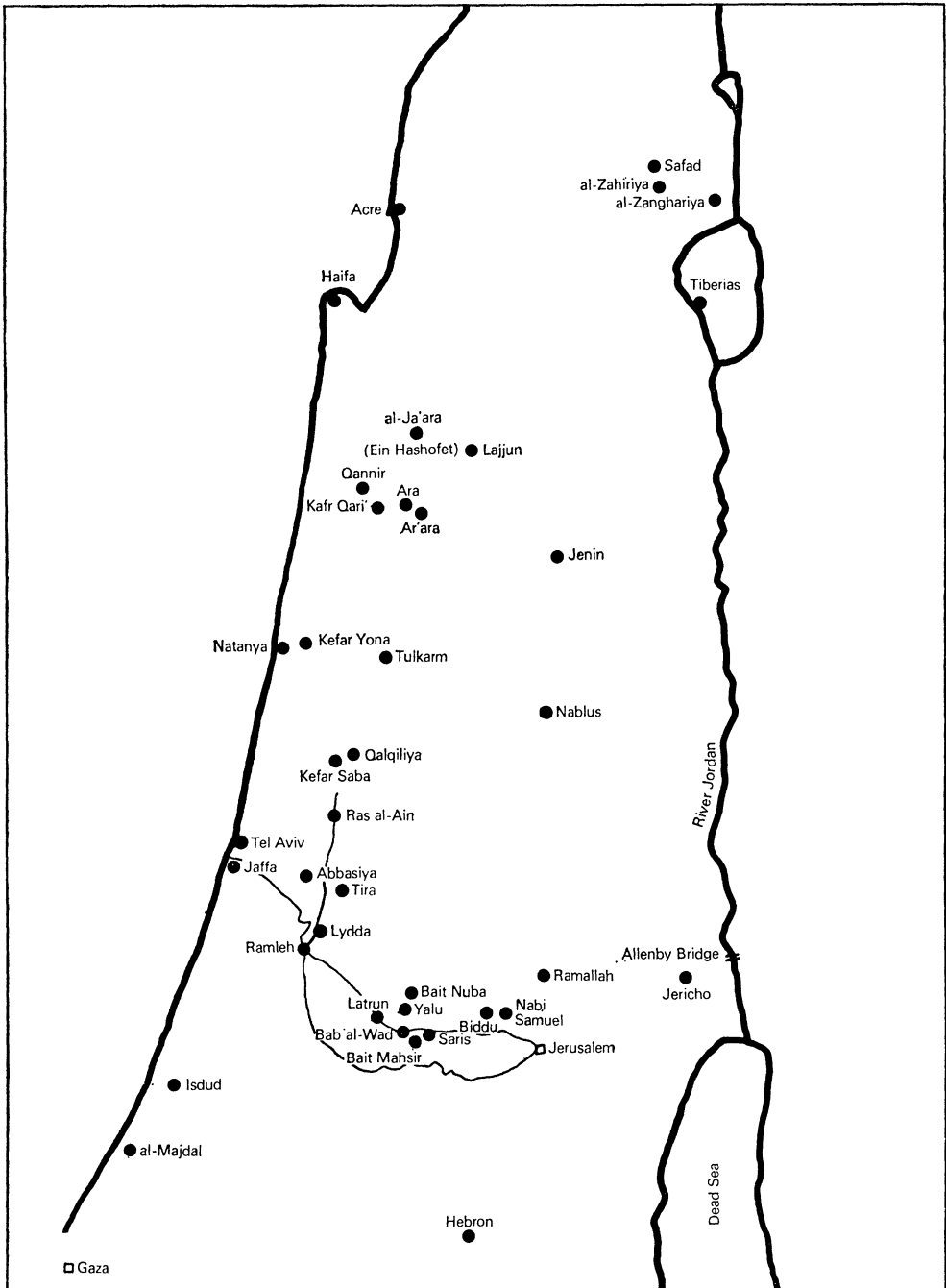
FAUZI

59W 7/5

To Fauzi

The Jews attacked the Yarmuk and Lebanese Battalions' positions in the Lajjun area at 0400 yesterday. Our forces lured them on until they were close to the positions and then drove them back, turning the attack into

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a defeat, pursuing them until contact was lost, and they escaped leaving behind a number of mortar shells and hand grenades. The Jews withdrew their killed and wounded. Our losses one killed and two wounded.

“Safa”

66S

8/5

To High Command

Since 0430 today our forces have been engaging enemy forces in the Ara area. Fighting continues with increasing intensity. The enemy constantly receiving reinforcements. The enemy trying to cut off the Lajjun area from Tulkarm in preparation for seizing Lajjun and Jenin and cutting off Tulkarm from Nablus. Powerful attack expected from Affula to Lajjun. I have informed you that I have no reserves. These moves are in preparation for a major attack anticipated after May 10. If you want to maintain the important positions in our area and to save our honour send what forces you have immediately. We have spared what men we could from our positions to strengthen the city and area of Jerusalem in accordance with your recommendations.

FAUZI

73S

9/5

To High Command

Yesterday repelled a violent Jewish attack on Bait Mahsir aimed at opening the Jerusalem road. The attack failed at the village of Saris on the Bab al-Wad - Jerusalem road. The Jews were driven back to their bases.

FAUZI

74S

9/5

To High Command

Fighting in progress around the village of Tira near Tulkarm. Will inform.

FAUZI

76S

To High Command

At 0400 on Saturday the enemy attacked from al-Ja‘arah (Ein Hashofeit) and a group of settlements south of it towards Qannir and Kafr Qari‘ supported by a number of armoured cars, and succeeded in penetrating as far as Ara. Our detachments resisted and repelled this attack and forced the enemy to retreat and pursued him to the bases he had come from, and recovered the villages of Kafr Qari‘ and Qannir. The fighting ended at 1730. Our losses one killed and four wounded. Have not yet ascertained losses of the enemy who as usual dragged away dead and wounded with special ropes attached to them, but blood stains suggest heavy losses.

FAUZI

81S

10/5

## To High Command

The Jews made a surprise attack on Kefar Saba extending as far as the neighbourhood of Tira. Our forces repelled the attack from the start. Our casualties nil. I think the object of the attack was to reconnoitre and discover the siting of our positions and forces, and that the target was Qalqiliya. This unimportant attack caused a panic among the people of Kefar Saba, all of whom fled, spreading consternation as they went until our forces forced them to return to their village.

FAUZI

The Jerusalem area, which had not originally been under my command, had been attached to it on April 26 when Colonel Mahmoud al-Hindi declined to accept responsibility for the area. But the High Command had not supplied me with a single new man or a single additional rifle.

The Inspector-General, Lieutenant-General Taha al-Hashimi, who had personal links with the two battalions allotted to this area — the Ajnadin Battalion and the Third Yarmuk Battalion — had given orders for the first of these to be sent to Jaffa, and for the second to enter the Holy City. The result was that the Ajnadin Battalion broke up and melted away in Jaffa, and such anarchy and defeatism spread in the ranks of the Third Yarmuk Battalion that the commander of the Jerusalem garrison was obliged to ask that it should be disbanded and discharged.

Meanwhile the city's garrison was still directly attached to Damascus. Realizing the extreme importance of the Jerusalem area both to us and to the enemy, I withdrew certain units from the Lajjun and Tulkarm areas and deployed them in strategic positions in the Jerusalem area, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh, although this weakened both my main force and my reserve force.

I believed that the fate of the Holy City would be decided outside it, and that the key to the whole situation lay in the Latrun - Bab al-Wad hills. All the same I was disturbed by what was going on inside the city, to judge by reports I received of Jewish pressure on the Arabs, especially in Qatamon.<sup>4</sup>

On April 30 I received the following signal by dispatch rider:

30/4

2340

Brother Fauzi Bey

It is clear from telephone conversations with Jerusalem between the garrison commander and Riad Bey al-Sulh<sup>5</sup> and Jamil Mardam Bey,<sup>6</sup> that the

<sup>4</sup> A modern residential quarter in New Jerusalem which was wholly Arab-owned.

<sup>5</sup> Riad al-Sulh: Prime Minister of Lebanon, 1943-1951.

<sup>6</sup> Jamil Mardam Bey: Prime Minister of Syria, 1946-1948.





weakened the position in Jerusalem. I have spared all the troops I can and concentrated some of them in Abbasia and the rest in Nabi Samuel. At 1700 we shall start a double operation from inside and outside against Jewish localities in Jerusalem. Will advise.

FAUZI

The attack began at exactly 1700 with a concentrated bombardment by 75mm and 105mm artillery, the object being to weaken the enemy's morale and relieve the pressure on the garrison. While the bombardment was in progress, two companies of infantry advanced from Nabi Samuel and engaged the Jewish forces stationed in the five settlements. Fires were spreading rapidly, the sky was thick with black smoke and all was chaos and confusion in the Jewish area. I sent the following cable to the garrison of the city.

1S

2/5

To Hilmi Pasha, To 'Abd al-Hamid al-Rawi

Inform me of the moral and material effects of the bombardments. You will receive the necessary ammunition. Our arrangements as regards Jerusalem remain unchanged. If you can and have the time will you come to meet us. Advise.

FAUZI

Wishing to support the Jerusalem garrison, I sent it a company of Jordanian volunteers with fifty Palestinian irregulars. I received the following cable referring to the results of the attack, and the support force arrived without losses.

6W

3/5

To Commander of Forces, Northern and Central Areas

Reliable reports from all fronts. The Jews have sustained five hundred casualties from the bombardment. Haganah positions and stores shelled. The Jordanian company and the fifty Palestinians have reached Jerusalem safely.

FADEL

The quarrel between Lieutenant-Colonel 'Abd al-Hamid al-Rawi, the commander of the Third Yarmuk Battalion and the commander of the garrison, Captain Fadel Rashid, both of them Iraqis, was growing more acute and threatening to have disastrous consequences. In a previous cable I had informed High Command in Damascus of it and explained how it was weakening the position in the city, and the High Command decided to settle the argument by withdrawing al-Rawi and giving Captain Fadel full responsibility.

In the meantime units of the Jordanian Arab Legion were withdrawing from all their positions in Palestine over the Allenby Bridge, leaving their

positions completely unguarded. The following is the text of my cable on this subject.

70S

4/5

To High Command

al-Rawi and his assistant have arrived from Jerusalem and Fadel has taken over. I am afraid of the effect on his Battalion of al-Rawi's withdrawal. The Arab Legion garrison guarding Allenby Camp has received orders to return to Amman tomorrow. Many positions will be in danger and impossible to hold. Send us all available forces as soon as possible to strengthen the position. Fadel says he has no ammunition, and is asking for help of all kinds. We have no reserves of ammunition.

FAUZI

Reports reaching me from the intelligence branch on May 5 showed that Jews in Jerusalem were in desperate straits because of the continued interruption of contact between them and Tel Aviv and other settlements, and that their rations were barely enough to keep body and soul together. The price of meat in the black market was £ P 2.5 per kilo; eggs were from 20 to 25 piastres apiece, while rice, milk, vegetables and other items were quite unobtainable. Bread was distributed against ration cards, each person receiving not more than 200 grammes per day.

These reports also indicated that the fires caused by our bombardment of Jewish installations had burnt down many of their provision stores, that the Jews were in utter despair, and that the idea of surrendering and making peace was widespread among them.

When I had checked the accuracy of this information, I decided to take a new step which would lead to their inevitable destruction. I sent the following cable to Hilmi Pasha, that indomitable fighter, whose advanced years did not prevent him from staying in Jerusalem, which he never left for a moment, despite the imminent danger.

2S

6/5

To Hilmi Pasha

Would the cutting off of Jerusalem water supplies affect the Arabs; if so to what extent, or would it only affect the Jews?

FAUZI

Hilmi Pasha replied at once that the cutting off of the water supply would hurt the Jews more than the Arabs, because the Jewish areas depended entirely on water from the Ras al-Ain position, while the Arabs could use the wells in the old city. I therefore cabled to Captain Madlul Abbas, the

Commander of the Hattin Battalion, telling him without delay to cut off the water at the springs, which were in his area.

This was the decisive blow which brought things to a head among the Jewish population of Jerusalem and led to the overwhelming majority of them openly demanding surrender.

The first cable from Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh indicated a Jewish move towards Jerusalem. The following is the text of the cable:

19W

6/5

To Fauzi

The Jews are trying to get a convoy through to reinforce the Jews in Jerusalem. We have taken measures in Ramallah and Nabi Samuel. We fear the convoy may go by the Bab al-Wad road, so we need well organized forces to station in Latrun Camp and other necessary localities. From a reliable British source.

MAHDI SALEH, Lieutenant-Colonel

In the morning of May 6 an amazing report, put out by the Arab News Agency, the little sister of the British agency Reuters, was brought to me by one of my aides, specialized in information affairs. The report was as follows:

“Yesterday evening, May 5, the head of the Red Cross mission in Palestine, accompanied by a group of members of the Arab Medical Association in Jerusalem, arrived in Amman. There were talks in which Azzam Pasha, Fauzi al-Mulqi, the Jordanian Foreign Minister, and the Syrian and Egyptian consuls in Jerusalem took part. The Arab News Agency has learned that the object of the talks is to obtain the approval in principle of the Arab League for Jerusalem to be made a headquarters of the International Red Cross; if it is obtained, the truce now being discussed under the supervision of the tripartite international truce committee will come into effect automatically. The Agency understands that the major obstacle that the negotiations have so far encountered is the difference between the two conflicting parties on procedure for communications between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. It is reported from Jerusalem that negotiations for a truce for the city of Jerusalem will be resumed in Jericho this afternoon, between representatives of the Arab countries and the tripartite international truce committee. The Arab delegation will be headed by Azzam Pasha. The Jews have demanded that Arab volunteer and armed forces be withdrawn from the whole of Palestine, while the Arabs insist on one point only — that if Jewish convoys are to use the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road to transport food supplies, they must be subject to Arab inspection, and that the Arabs should search them for arms. The Arabs always exercise this right, as regards the passage of convoys. Ends.”

I re-read the report several times, almost bursting with rage. It was a Jewish procedure which I had known them to employ before. When they are weak and in danger they ask for a truce on any terms, and then repudiate it, after turning it to their own advantage, as soon as they feel strong enough.

What infuriated me more than anything else was that, in spite of their tribulations in Jerusalem, they should talk at the negotiations as if they were the victors, refuse all conditions and demand my withdrawal from the whole of Palestine, while the Arab negotiators talked as if they were helpless.

The strange thing was that one week after the signing of the Jerusalem truce, King Abdullah, in his capacity as Supreme Commander of the Arab regular armies, gave orders that the Liberation Army should be dissolved and withdrawn from Palestine.

Only such a truce could have saved the Jews in Jerusalem from their ordeal of hunger, thirst and destruction. But the big surprise came when, the following day, I received from the commander of the Jerusalem garrison a copy of the following cable:

To Fadel

The Secretary-General of the Arab League has agreed with the competent authorities in Jerusalem on a cease-fire by both sides in the city of Jerusalem as from 1200 on Saturday, May 8. You must implement this and inform the commander of the Northern Front.

AL-HASHIMI

My opposition to any truce was well known to the senior officials in Damascus. Only recently I had refused a similar truce which the British authorities and the United Nations envoy had tried to impose during the battle of Mishmar Ha'emek. I had bitter and uneffaceable memories of the ill-fated truce to which the Arab leaders had agreed during the 1936 Palestinian revolt, when the British Army had been unable to harm me or defeat me, so that all its plans had been frustrated, despite its most strenuous efforts. Faced with my violent opposition to a truce at that time, the British asked certain leaders of Arab countries to intervene and put pressure on me to make me agree to withdraw from Palestine; some of those who intervened were actually Palestinian leaders. This fact, fully documented, will be recorded in my memoirs. The consequence of this truce had been the laying of the foundations for the construction of the Zionist entity in the Holy Land.

And now history was repeating itself twelve years later, with the Arab leaders accepting another truce in the city of Jerusalem. The senior officials on the Military Committee in Damascus preferred not to inform me of it directly, but through the commander of the Jerusalem garrison. I promised

myself to resist the implementation of this truce with all my strength, because I believed that it was not favourable to the Arabs. And subsequent events proved that I was right. The Jews exploited it in the most unscrupulous manner, just as they later exploited the truce of June 11, 1948 and that of July 19, 1948, to strike at the Arab regular armies, and pick them off one by one.

I decided to cable the Commander-in-Chief, Major-General Ismail Safwat, telling him that it was essential that he should come to Amman or Jericho as soon as possible for talks, as in view of the situation of the fighting fronts it was impossible for me to go to Damascus. I also informed him that the Jordanian army units were withdrawing from Palestine to their barracks in Transjordan. There follows the text of the cable I sent him.

68S

8/5

To High Command

We have seen secret cable No. 59 dated May 3 to Brigade-Commander Sidqi al-Jundi, which outlines the plan for the withdrawal of all Jordanian units between May 14 and 16, when the last Jordanian soldier will have left Palestinian territory over the Allenby Bridge to barracks in Transjordan. The withdrawal of the Northern Brigade from Haifa has been completed. The withdrawal of the Arab Legion from Palestine will cause panic and a general exodus eastward, as its presence and the hope that other armies would come in has been the population's only source of reassurance.

We are at present faced with great activity, including fully equipped and armed concentrations north of Jenin, we are engaged in heavy fighting in the Ara district, and there are concentrations west of Tulkarm in Qalqiliya, the Lydda and Ramleh area and the settlements in the western outskirts of Jerusalem. Request you to come without fail to Amman or Jericho tomorrow for consultation. Expecting your reply tonight.

FAUZI

Damascus remained silent and no reply came that night. Next morning I sent a second cable, the text of which follows:

77S

9/5

To High Command

I still insist that a meeting is essential.

FAUZI

In view of my insistence, the Inspector-General, Lieutenant-General Taha al-Hashimi, informed me that the Commander-in-Chief had resigned five days earlier.

84W

10/5

To Commander, Northern and Central Front

In reply to your cable 77 Safwat Pasha resigned five days ago. Decision on appointment of his successor will be taken at a meeting today.

AL-HASHIMI

The plans prepared by the Jewish leaders for each of their objectives were ready in advance. Among these major plans was the so-called "Plan Dalet," drawn up by Yigal Allon, the commander of the Palmach forces, six months before. Its aim was the occupation of Jerusalem either through Latrun-Bab al-Wad, or Ramleh, or both. In every detail it was expressly drafted for the confrontation of the Arab regular armies which were expected to enter Palestine, and was based on the assumption that war would break out in Palestine when the British left and the State of Israel was born. It was then anticipated that there would be a short spell of total vacuum during which every Jewish unit would have to fend for itself as best it could.

The plan took into account the fact that there would be a violent battle for Jerusalem if the United Nations insisted on the city having international status, and that if the partition proposal was adopted, it would be the Arabs who started the fighting, while if the voting went against partition at the United Nations it would be the Jews who made war on the Arabs. In either case fighting was inevitable. With this in mind the Jews continued their energetic and exhaustive preparations to ensure the successful implementation of the plan.

The enemy's High Command was obliged to bring forward the implementation of the plan for the following reasons:

1. The desperate situation of the Jews in Jerusalem, who were on the point of surrendering, and pressure from Jewish public opinion on the High Command to rescue them.

2. The success achieved by the Jews in imposing a truce in Jaffa and a second truce in Jerusalem. This meant that they could move freely from both directions.

3. The hope of confronting the United Nations with a *fait accompli* by occupying Jerusalem before a firm decision was taken as regarded its future.

4. The withdrawal of the Arab Legion from Palestine to Jordan and its evacuation of important strategic positions; gradual withdrawal had begun at the beginning of the month.

5. The desire to smash the Liberation Army and the Palestinian irregular units before May 15.

6. The Haganah High Command's determination to obtain control of the roads, to which it gave first priority, and its belief that the war would be lost or won on the roads of Palestine, in Ben Gurion's phrase.

The Latrun - Bab al-Wad area is of great strategic importance; throughout history these hills have been the scene of the battles that have decided the fate of the Holy City. There are two important roads from Latrun; the first, a main road, leads to Jerusalem; the second, a secondary road, leads to Ramallah, and then on to Jerusalem. If the enemy succeeded in occupying and controlling either of these roads he would be able to attain his objective by getting through to the city.

Taking advantage of the calm prevailing in Jaffa and Jerusalem because of the truces, the enemy's plan was that a large convoy should set out from Tel Aviv for Jerusalem, after which another light motorized convoy would break off from it and proceed towards South Tira, then on to Ramallah and Jerusalem, in the rear of our forces on the Latrun - Bab al-Wad front, thereby either cutting them off or forcing them to withdraw. At the same time a powerful convoy was to advance from the five settlements west of Jerusalem, equipped with huge tractors to open the blocked road in the pass, or else to meet the convoy from Tel Aviv, when the two together would advance on Jerusalem to occupy it and settle things there once and for all.

The advance was preceded, and sometimes accompanied, by attacks in Safad and Eastern Galilee, and in the Lajjun area, and by other attacks from the coastal plain on our positions in Ara, Ar'ara, Tulkarm and Qalqiliya. Before the real object of these attacks was disclosed, I was afraid, as they were so far from the Latrun - Bab al-Wad battlefield, that their object was to isolate the Lajjun area from Tulkarm, in preparation for the occupation of Lajjun and Jenin, and to isolate Tulkarm from Nablus. However, I was absolutely certain that a major attack would be launched against a specific major target within the next few days. Information which had started arriving at headquarters confirmed the truth of Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh's cable No. 19 of May 6, which is reproduced above, and disclosed that the enemy's real object behind all this activity was to reach Jerusalem. I was therefore extremely impatient to receive a reply to my cable to High Command [May 8] in which I asked for all available forces to be sent immediately, as my reserves were exhausted.

The reply came in the following cable:

72W

9/5

To Commander, Northern and Central Front

Sections of the Jordanian Army now stationed in Jordan and expected to withdraw in order to leave British command and be attached to Jordanian command so that they may advance into Palestine again as part of the Arab armies. What small reserves we had have been sent to Adib because of the grave situation in Safad.

*IPS - 2*

We have no forces to send you at present. We appreciate the gravity of your situation and the confidence of all in your powers of command makes us sure that you will maintain the present situation for a few more days until the Arab armies start to advance even if this means evacuating some positions of secondary importance. What do you think of withdrawing the Jerusalem garrison and attaching it to you if a truce is finally decided on?

for Commander-in-Chief  
 MAHMOUD AL-HINDI, Colonel

I had been expecting just such a negative reply. Before it arrived I had therefore proceeded with all possible speed to withdraw all the units I could from positions of secondary importance in the various areas, and collected all the ammunition I could lay hands on — even stripping the guard company of their arms and ammunition. I also stripped all those who had returned from Jaffa of their arms and ammunition, and enlisted such of them as were fit to fight. Among those enlisted were 300 Yemeni soldiers who had succeeded in reaching our lines from Jaffa in the last stages of mental and physical exhaustion. But in spite of that their enthusiasm to go on fighting was amazing, when I told them in a few brief words of the great danger that threatened the city of Jerusalem, and they later fought magnificently.

I disposed two groups of our forces in defensive positions in Bait Mahsir, Latrun, Yalu and Bait Nuba; a third I equipped as an offensive unit under the command of Second-Lieutenant Ghassan Jadid. I gave the command of the front to Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh, with his headquarters in Latrun; he had the artillery.

As we have seen, the enemy had prepared for his major attack on Latrun-Bab al-Wad with attacks on the Ara and Ar'ara positions and also on the Tulkarm and Qalqiliya front where he later concentrated his attack on the positions of the First Yarmuk Battalion and the Lebanese Battalion in the Latrun area. At the same time the enemy was exerting great pressure on the positions of the Second Yarmuk Battalion at Safad. It was clear to me that the enemy wanted me to withdraw part of the forces stationed in the Latrun-Bab al-Wad field, to reinforce our outlying positions which were in danger. So I cabled to these positions to tell them to hold out and continue the defence to the last gasp without expecting any reinforcements from me.

In the night of May 9 the enemy started to advance from the settlements west of Jerusalem, before the arrival of the convoy from Tel Aviv, launching a violent attack on Bait Mahsir to test our lines; however, the attack was checked before the village of Saris, the enemy sustaining heavy loss of life. After this we sent out a reconnaissance force consisting of four armoured cars, which was followed by a fifth.



It was not long before the vanguard of the convoy coming from Tel Aviv and the vanguard of the convoy proceeding towards South Tira engaged our advance guard posts and our patrols.

My plan for the first day, May 9, was to do no more than lay ambushes and engage the enemy by means of small detachments scattered on the hills, under the trees and at the tops of the valleys along a broad front, in order to discover how large an enemy force was advancing, how it was armed and organized and in which direction it was advancing. These detachments therefore had orders to abstain from long engagements and to withdraw as they fought.

In this way the enemy's forces were forced to spread out on a very broad front without getting to know which positions we had decided to hold out and fight in. On the first day the enemy command thought that we were avoiding battle because of our weakness and the immense size of the advancing force. By adopting this flexible method we succeeded in exhausting and misleading the enemy, in addition to discovering which way he was advancing and the details of his numbers and arms. It was in the light of this information that we made our arrangements for our real attack on the following day.

In the evening a number of foreign war correspondents arrived at my command headquarters to ask me about the situation. The faces of some of them betrayed their satisfaction at the progress made by the Jews in the first stages of the fighting. I said to them:

"I have nothing important to report. If you come back tomorrow at the same time you will get what you want."

On the second day, May 10, our counter-attack began, and the enemy's forces were cut in two, more than a thousand Jewish troops were surrounded, and the operation of finishing them off as a military force began. That day saw the end of the Jewish advance. On the third day we resumed the counter-attack, and from the first moments we realized that the enemy's morale was undermined and that his infantry was retreating in great confusion, in spite of the protection provided him by armoured vehicles and artillery.

Finally there was complete collapse; it was a complete rout — they left behind them on the field hundreds of dead, in addition to guns, mortar guns, armoured cars, ammunition, rations and blankets.

The foreign correspondents did not bother to come back to my command headquarters, because the answer they were so anxious to hear from me had been provided by the utter defeat of the enemy. There follow the texts of a number of official cables which give a picture of the fighting and its results.

32W

10/5

The situation in Bait Mahsir critical. The Jews are determined to

open the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road. We need a force to station at the road junction.

MAHDI SALEH, Lieutenant-Colonel

I sent him one of the two battalions I had put on reserve, and the situation was saved by its timely arrival.

87S 10/5

To High Command

A Jewish convoy of four thousand men from Jerusalem has tried to open the Jerusalem-Jaffa road with the object of joining up with another convoy coming from the West.

The engagement began at 0400, the fighting continued, repeated reinforcements were sent and the fighting grew fiercer. Our forces succeeded in cutting off about one thousand Jews and completely encircling them in the Bait Mahsir-Khirbat Harsis area. Artillery and armoured cars were sent to end the fighting quickly and prevent reinforcements arriving. Fighting still continues. Will advise.

FAUZI

90S 10/5

To High Command

Fierce fighting continues on both fronts. We have captured some arms and other items. We are in control of the situation. Losses on both sides. Will advise.

FAUZI

[No Number] 11/5 [Dispatched by telephone at 1240]

To Fauzi

Our forces have captured all the woods. Innumerable Jewish dead. We have captured thirty-five rifles. The Jews are withdrawing with our forces in pursuit.

MAHDI SALEH, Lieutenant-Colonel

92S 10/5 (0915)

To High Command

Qalqiliya front fighting ended with complete success at about midnight. All Jewish forces repelled with heavy losses. The Jews left fifteen dead on the field, the remaining dead and wounded being withdrawn as usual. We have captured seven rifles, two Stens, one pair of binoculars and some ammunition and hand grenades. Our losses four killed.

Bait Mahsir front — the fighting is still turning to our advantage every moment. We have repelled attacks by reinforcements intended to rescue the encircled Jews. Our artillery is intervening with success. Will advise.

FAUZI

While the violent fighting continued, I received the following cable from the intelligence branch:

40W 11/5 (1820)  
To Commander, Northern and Central Front

From a British source. Demonstrations in Tel Aviv because of the closing of the Jerusalem road. The Jews threatening the [Jewish] Agency if the road is not opened.

SALIM AL-ASIL, Captain

94S 11/5  
To High Command

Numerous Jewish reinforcements for Bab al-Wad area arriving from East and West. We are still in control. Serious demonstrations in Tel Aviv against the Jewish Agency demanding that the road to Jerusalem be opened. Send ammunition of all kinds.

FAUZI

95S 12/5  
To High Command

The Bab al-Wad road is still closed to the Jews. Jewish forces coming from the West have been repelled. Jewish forces coming from Jerusalem and outskirts succeeded in entering Bait Mahsir thanks to the large reinforcements with all kinds of equipment which arrived constantly. We have recovered Bait Mahsir through artillery bombardment but large forces are still concealed in the woods near the village. The large Palestinian forces are withdrawing to their villages without resistance. Our artillery successfully shelled the Yazbud and Ghabim settlements inflicting heavy losses.

The road is under crossfire from our artillery positions in Biddu and others in Yalu. No reserves left on either front. French ammunition exhausted and if fighting continues till morning all ammunition the troops have left will be exhausted. Fighting may break out in Qalqiliya, Tira and Tulkarm tonight or tomorrow.

FAUZI

97S 12/5  
To High Command

After heavy artillery shelling of the positions and woods in which the Jewish

force is entrenched in the Bait Mahsir area our forces launched an attack on these positions and drove out the enemy, who was forced to withdraw. The withdrawal soon turned into a rout, the enemy leaving many dead and large quantities of arms. The pursuit is continuing. We have not yet listed the dead and the booty. Will advise.

FAUZI

The Lajjun front was the only one I could rely on in an extremity if, in this critical situation, I withdrew some of the forces stationed on it to reinforce the positions against which I expected a concentrated enemy attack to be launched.

I therefore cabled to Lieutenant-Colonel Mohammed Safa, the Commander of the First Yarmuk Battalion, to prepare to reinforce the Tulkarm area in case there should be a concentrated attack on it.

[No Number] 11/5  
To Safa

Alert two companies to reinforce Tulkarm if necessary, to move only on orders from me.

FAUZI

98S 12/5  
To High Command

All attempts by the Jews from the east and the west to open the Bab al-Wad road having failed and we having completed our arrangements last night, this morning launched an attack along the Bait Mahsir line occupied by the enemy as far as Zabbud under the protection of heavy artillery shelling which forced the Jews to evacuate their positions and withdraw. Our vigorous pursuit turned the withdrawal into a defeat. Our forces recovered Bait Mahsir, their forces having so far left behind two hundred Jewish bodies, seventy rifles and other arms and ammunition. The pursuit continues and the ammunition stores near Zabbud are burning following direct hits. I shall withdraw forces necessary to strengthen the Tulkarm front.

FAUZI

Communiqué issued by the Command of the Liberation Army Forces on the Northern and Central Front on the battle of Bab al-Wad:

12/5 2320

This evening witnessed the end of the battle that began in the morning of 10/5 with a double attack launched by the Jews from both the east and the the west with the object of opening the Bab al-Wad road. We have evicted the Jews from all positions they occupied on May 10 and 11 and they have

been pursued as far as the gates of the five settlements. During the pursuit our forces passed more than three hundred dead and we have captured three hundred rifles, six armoured cars with their radio equipment, and two other infantry radio apparatus, and the binoculars and revolver of the Haganah commander, along with his identity tag and documents are in our hands. We have collected the documents of all the dead. The booty includes such equipment as blankets, etc., and all kinds of ammunition. Special vehicles equipped with machinery to open the road and ammunition stores were set on fire by artillery shelling and burnt at the Zabbud settlement. The enemy left on the battlefield a number of Jewish armoured cars which have been destroyed. Our forces are now stationed in positions allotted to them as the furthest limit of their advance. Our losses three dead and nine wounded.

FAUZI

Annex to the above communiqué:

13/5

Engagements between armoured cars: In the course of the battle of Bab al-Wad there were engagements between our armoured cars and those of the enemy near Bab al-Wad, the five settlements and the Kefar Yona settlement, between five of our armoured cars and thirty enemy armoured cars accompanied by twenty-five troop carriers. Our armoured cars succeeded in destroying eleven enemy cars and capturing three, a pick-up and a number of Jewish freight trucks accompanying them.

The total now in our hands is nine armoured cars, sixteen troop carriers, four hundred and fifty dead left behind by the Jews with their rifles and large quantities of ammunition and explosives. All our armoured cars returned to their positions. Our losses two wounded only, one with slight wounds.

FAUZI

One of the main reasons for our small loss of life in this major battle was the impregnability of the positions we were holding, and the fact that we commanded the points towards which the enemy was advancing.

100S

13/5

To High Command

During the Bab al-Wad fighting our artillery expended 1,100 75 mm shells so that we have only a few left. I have already informed you that our 105 shells are exhausted. Request you send 2000 rounds 75 mm and 500 rounds 40 mm for armoured cars, and French ammunition.

FAUZI

I did not ask for 105 shells because Command had informed me in an earlier cable that there were none left in the Damascus stores, and the Inspector-General, Lieutenant-General Taha al-Hashimi had referred me to King Abdullah, suggesting that I ask him personally to provide me with ammunition of this calibre, in view of the fact that he was with the Arab Legion.

56W 6/5

To Commander, Northern and Central Front

Personally ask King Abdullah for 105 ammunition. This more likely to be successful.

AL-HASHIMI

This major engagement having resulted in the total defeat of the enemy on the Latrun-Bab al-Wad battlefield on May 12, on May 13 with the object of enabling the scattered forces to retreat and relieving the pressure on the encircled survivors, Jewish forces launched a wide-scale attack in a distant field, an attack which I had anticipated in my cable to Lieutenant-Colonel Mohammed Safa on May 11.

101S 13/5

To High Command

The Jews have attacked on the Tulkarm-Tira-Kefar Saba-Qalqiliya front. We have repelled the attack at Tira inflicting on the enemy losses of life and arms. Our losses nil. Fighting still continuing. Will advise.

FAUZI

Thus the Jewish "Plan Dalet" ended in defeat, or rather in disaster, with the smashing of the largest force assembled by the enemy, taking advantage of the truce, to break the blockade of Jerusalem and then occupy the city. If any of the Arab regular armies had then reinforced us, even with only a single armoured brigade, we should have been able to hunt down the scattered units of the enemy and exploit to the full the victory we had won. This might well have resulted in a radical change in the whole military situation, which would have been followed by a change in the political situation.

But unfortunately there was no co-ordination between the Arab military commands and the will to fight of most of them was non-existent, not to mention inadequate preparation, indecision and improvisation. And, in fact for the most part, the 1948 fighting was directed by senior Arab politicians from behind their office desks, and in accordance with their own personal interests, ambitions and whims.

This is what Ben-Gurion has to say about the battle of Latrun-Bab al-Wad:

"Half the Jewish units stationed on all the fronts in Palestine took part

in this historic battle, in addition to one thousand five hundred rifles collected with the greatest difficulty. You know what the result was.”<sup>9</sup>

After the withdrawal from Palestine of the Liberation Army, the Latrun-Bab al-Wad battlefield was to be the scene of a series of engagements between the Israeli and Jordanian armies, in which the enemy was never victorious in spite of sustaining terribly heavy losses.

But during the cessation of hostilities during the first total truce of June 11, 1948 and the second total truce of July 19, 1948, the Jews managed to get sufficient rations and provisions into Jerusalem, in full view of the United Nations observers, to last the Jewish population for a whole year, and also to ensure them of an adequate water supply.

The Jewish forces inside the city were also supplied, by various means, with all the men, arms and ammunition they needed.

In this way the Latrun battlefield lost much of its value, and the Arabs lost one of their principal incentives to keep control of the surrounding hills.

Similarly the efforts and sacrifices we had made during the fighting proved to have been in vain.

The truce of May 8 allowed the Jews in Jerusalem to rest and prepare themselves for a few days, during which the battle of Latrun-Bab al-Wad was being fought — which battle they hoped was going to save them. When the battle ended by no means in accordance with their wishes, they drew up a new plan in an attempt to occupy the Arab parts of the city; the attack was to begin early in the morning of May 15, 1948, in spite of the fact that this constituted a violation of the local truce.

The reports in our intelligence branch’s cable of May 11, which is reproduced above, indicated that the situation in the Arab part of Jerusalem was still unsatisfactory because of the chaos that reigned in the ranks of the Third Yarmuk Brigade, which was attached to the command of the Inspector-General, Lieutenant-General Taha al-Hashimi; and also in the Jerusalem garrison and the Palestinian combatant units. This cable also indicated that morale had collapsed, that important defensive positions had been evacuated and that the illegal sale of arms had become widespread.

There were only a few days left before the regular armies were to come in, and, according to the plan of the Arab High Command, Jerusalem and the Jerusalem area came within the field of operations of the Jordanian army. The obstacle that could impede the advance of the Jordanian Army, which was to come from Ramallah to Jerusalem, was the fortified settlement of Nabi Ya‘qub, only three miles from the city. This settlement was surrounded with reinforced concrete towers and strong barricades which made it an impregnable

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted by the Beirut daily *al-Hayat*, December 14, 1950.

fortress only a few metres away from the road. Throughout the previous few months it had been responsible for the death of dozens of innocent Arabs, as they passed along the main road, either in cars or on foot.

I decided at all costs to attack this settlement and put it out of action before the date appointed for the advance of the Jordanian army and the withdrawal of the forces attached to me in Palestine on May 15. In this I had two objectives.

1. The morale of the Arab defenders of Jerusalem would be raised when they heard of the destruction of this settlement which had such a formidable reputation.

2. To make it possible for the Jordanian Army units to reach Jerusalem quickly and gain control of it before the weakness of the Arabs there enabled the Jews to do so.

The enemy command expected that the Nabi Ya'qub settlement would be attacked by the Jordanian Army, not my forces. It also expected that there would be fierce fighting around it. Therefore, in co-operation with, and under the protection of British forces supported by tanks, women, children and furniture were evacuated from both Nabi Ya'qub and from Atrut, the other settlement near it, at 9.30 a.m. on May 10. This was while we were still fighting the battle of Latrun - Bab al-Wad.

On May 15, I was in Ramallah and our troops started attacking the settlement at 1700 that evening. Violent fighting continued until morning, when our forces succeeded in entering and occupying the settlement. There follows the text of the relevant cable:

102S

15/5

To High Command

Our forces supported by artillery attacked the settlement of Nabi Ya'qub at 1700 yesterday evening. Violent fighting. Strong resistance. The settlement fell into our hands this morning. Our losses two killed and two wounded. We have not yet counted enemy losses and prisoners. Will advise.

FAUZI

On May 15 the units of the Jordanian Army coming from Jordan crossed the Allenby Bridge and started to take up positions in the Nablus area and in Ramallah, while two infantry companies advanced along the Jericho-Jerusalem road. These units were estimated at 4,500 men.

The radio broadcast, and the press published, an order issued by King Abdullah in his capacity as the Supreme Commander of the Arab regular armies, to the effect that the task of the Liberation Army was completed and that it was to disband itself and withdraw. This was the view of the Arab



League Military Committee, and, consequently, the view of our High Command in Damascus.

Our forces began to withdraw gradually and to assemble east of Nablus, in preparation for crossing the River Jordan towards Deraa.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem early that morning a Jewish attack by three battalions had begun with the object of liquidating the Arab quarters adjacent to the Jewish positions, occupying the railway station, the German colony, the Allenby Barracks and the Shaikh Jarrah quarter, and contacting the Jewish garrisons in the Hadassah Hospital and Hebrew University on Mount Scopus. The attack was accompanied by an information campaign in which loud-speakers were used to urge the Arabs to surrender and save themselves, their women and children from certain death.

Having failed in its efforts to secure a prolongation of the truce as from that evening, the Truce Committee issued another order for a cessation of hostilities as from the morning of the following day. However, no one obeyed its orders, and, indeed, the fighting became even more violent, the enemy using large numbers of mortar guns; he was determined to occupy all quarters of the city whatever the cost and sacrifice involved.

In the face of increasing pressure the Arab forces fell back behind the walls of the city, followed by a hail of mortar shells, some of which fell inside the Haram al-Sharif and on the walls of a number of churches and mosques.

I decided to go to Amman as quickly as possible to discuss the following points with the High Command of the Jordanian Army:

1. The general situation in the city of Jerusalem.
2. Arrangements for handing over the positions under my command, and the way these arrangements were to be carried out.

I met Major-General 'Abd al-Qader al-Jundi, the Deputy Commander-in-Chief, and explained to him why I had come. He replied that he could express no opinion, as it was a question for General Glubb Pasha to decide. We went together to the Commander-in-Chief's office, which was in the next room, and I started the discussion by giving an appraisal of the critical situation in Jerusalem and emphasizing the necessity for the Jordanian units to enter it as soon as possible. I told the Commander-in-Chief that the first force of the Liberation Army would cross the Allenby Bridge that day, May 17, and that the whole withdrawal would be completed within three days. I added that the Jerusalem, Latrun, Lydda, Ramleh and Arab Triangle areas were now entrusted to the Jordanian Army, and briefly outlined to him the withdrawal plan. General Glubb admitted the gravity and difficulty of the situation in Jerusalem, and spoke of the heavy responsibility that confronted the Jordanian Army for covering the areas that had been transferred to it, in view of their great extent. He also tried to persuade me to postpone the withdrawal and

make other plans, saying that, if I agreed in principle, he was ready to suggest to His Majesty the King that he should cancel the previous order.

I did not agree, however, on the ground that I must obey the orders of my High Command in Damascus, which had decided on the withdrawal that was now already being carried out.

I then left the meeting to return to my headquarters in Jaba'.

What I did not disclose to the Jordanian Commander-in-Chief was that the senior officials in Damascus, from Shukri al-Quwatli to the Prime Minister, and even the officers of the High Command, had insisted on the necessity for rapid withdrawal.

I later discovered that the reason for their insistence was the Syrian President's fear that King Abdullah might take over the Liberation Army and employ it in accordance with his own wishes which, so al-Quwatli believed, lay in one quarter only — the achievement of the Greater Syria Project.

Certainly our rapid withdrawal, based as it was on a great delusion, was a grave mistake. It was this delusion, along with the morbid and fantastic notions it gave rise to, that was responsible for the determination that the Liberation Army should remain weak, that it should be deprived of the arms and ammunition that were essential if it was to hold out against the enemy, and that I should have no say in deciding its numbers or choosing its officers and men, organizing its training and provisioning, or making decisions on any other matters essential for its efficiency.

This same great delusion was also responsible for the absolute confidence President al-Quwatli reposed in Husni al-Za'im<sup>10</sup> to whom he granted the widest powers to protect him from alleged dangers, with the result that the late President paid a high price, while the Arab nation paid, and is still paying an even higher price.

The ideal solution would have been for the Liberation Army to remain in its positions, reinforced with additional arms, ammunition and competent troops, and to co-operate with the Arab regular armies which could have benefited from its strength and drawn up their plans in the light of its information and experience.

What I found impossible to explain was why the Jordanian Army units took so long to enter Jerusalem, although they were stationed in the outskirts of the city, and although, thanks to our having eliminated the Nabi Ya'qub settlement in the night of May 15, the road to Jerusalem was open to them; and at the Amman meeting with the responsible military authorities I did not succeed in getting an unequivocal answer to this question.

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<sup>10</sup> Later the President of Syria, following his coup d'état in 1949.

What I should have liked to know was: What were the concealed motives for impeding the movement of this army which, though small, was strong and well trained? And to what extent could its British Commander-in-Chief, and the other British officers who controlled it, act in conformity with Arab interests?

While I was returning from Amman on May 17 I received the latest reports on the situation in Jerusalem. Things had deteriorated very seriously and the Jews were pressing on the old city.

I cabled to Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh to proceed at once with the 75 artillery battery to the heights commanding Jerusalem and to carry out an intense bombardment of the lines reached by the enemy attack, points of concentration and all important military installations. The bombardment lasted two hours and was completely successful.

According to General Glubb, in his book *A Soldier with the Arabs*, (p.110)<sup>11</sup> "At half past eleven in the morning I received the following signal from Amman: 'His Majesty the King orders an advance towards Jerusalem from the direction of Ramallah. He intends by this action to threaten the Jews, in order that they may accept a truce in Jerusalem.'

"Half an hour later, at noon on May 17th, a further and longer telegram arrived. It read as follows:

" 'From the Minister of Defence to Glubb Pasha. His Majesty the King is extremely anxious and indeed insists that a force from Ramallah with artillery be sent to attack the Jewish quarters of Jerusalem. The Jews are attacking the gates of the Old City in order to break into it. An attack on the Jews would ease the pressure on the Arabs and would incline the Jews to accept the truce for Jerusalem. The Belgian consul has been here and his Majesty has gathered from him that such action on our part might frighten the Jews and make them less obstinate. His Majesty is awaiting swift action. Report quickly that the operation has commenced.' "

Why then, when I met him in Amman, did General Glubb conceal from me the fact that he had received this order from the King?

I was convinced that the bombardment was only a temporary solution, and that the Jordanian army should advance on Jerusalem without delay, especially as it was officially responsible for the city.

In the morning of May 18, therefore, I cabled to High Command in Damascus asking it to request King Abdullah to give orders for the Jordanian Army to enter Jerusalem. There follows the text of my cable:

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<sup>11</sup> John B. Glubb, *A Soldier with the Arabs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957).

103S 18/5 (0800)  
 Jerusalem calling for help. Forces of the Arab Legion at the gates of Jerusalem. Cable to the King to reinforce Jerusalem before it falls.

FAUZI

But there was a surprise awaiting me a short time later. At 1040 on May 18 I received a cable from the Jordanian Brigade-Commander Sidqi al-Jundi, who was with his staff in Ramallah, asking me to resume the bombardment in order to save the situation by distracting the enemy, on the grounds that it would take some time for the Jordanian Army to take part in the fighting. There follows the text of this cable:

[No Number] 18/5 (1040)

A Jordanian Army force is now moving to reinforce Jerusalem. It will be some time before this force can play an effective part in the fighting although every minute the Jews are achieving greater success against the Arabs. To save the situation and distract the enemy only for a few hours I request that the artillery undertakes an operation like yesterday's.

Five minutes later the reply reached Brigade-Commander Sidqi al-Jundi. The text was as follows:

[No number] 18/5 (1045)

When the artillery had completed the bombardment yesterday I withdrew it to the assembly positions east of Nablus. It is difficult for the artillery to take part in the fighting. Forces are being gradually withdrawn on His Majesty's orders.

FAUZI

At 2.15 p.m. I received the following cable from the deputy commander of the Jordanian Army, 'Abd al-Qader Pasha al-Jundi.

[No Number] 18/5 (0315)

Extremely urgent From 'Abd al-Qader Pasha to Qahtan  
 Situation in Jerusalem extremely critical and on point of collapsing. Can you reinforce them as soon as possible and by the shortest route.

Naturally I was both perplexed and anxious. Practically all our units had left the area, our place there having been taken by the Jordanian Army, which was much stronger than us. Why then did it not reinforce Jerusalem in its critical situation?

Before I replied to this cable, two more cables arrived from the commander of the Jerusalem garrison, Captain Fadel Rashid, at 3.55 and 5.20 a.m.

respectively, explaining to me how grave was the situation and giving a picture of the real state of affairs in the city.

[No Number] 18/5 (0355)

Most urgent from Fadel to Qahtan

Situation grave. The enemy is launching a general attack in all sectors of the city. Intense artillery bombardment from all sides. We must have reinforcements or be wiped out. Wiped out. I repeat wiped out and the city will fall. Shells falling inside the Haram.

[No Number] 18/5 (0520)

Most urgent from Fadel to Qahtan

Situation getting worse. Artillery shelling the Haram. Alas for the Holy City. Advance to save the situation. Our lives depend on your rapid reinforcement.

Although these three cables followed each other so rapidly that they arrived almost at the same time, and all to the same effect, I decided that it was best to pretend to apologize to the Deputy Chief-of-Staff of the Jordanian Army for my inability to accede to his request, although in fact I was determined to intervene as soon as possible and send the reinforcements he had asked for. I therefore sent him the following cable at 5.15 a.m.:

[No Number] 18/5 (0515)

To 'Abd al-Qader Pasha

In reply to your cable we bombarded for two hours yesterday. We have withdrawn our forces at His Majesty the King's orders. You are at the gates; it is easier and quicker for you to reinforce the city. Do not let it be lost.

FAUZI

At the same time I sent off two cables, one to Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh telling him to bring the artillery into the fighting and to collect as many Palestinian and Jordanian volunteers as possible to enter the Shaikh Jarrah quarter in Jerusalem. The second cable was to the commander of the Jerusalem garrison, Captain Fadel Rashid, telling him that I was responding to his call for reinforcements and that I was on my way to him.

There follows the text of these two cables:

[No Number] 18/5 (0530)

To Mahdi

Jews shelling the Haram. Fadel repeating his call for reinforcements. If our artillery is still there shell Jerusalem. Make a show of force with as many

Palestinian and Jordanian Arab volunteers as you can gather and try to enter Shaikh Jarrah.

FAUZI

[No Number] 18/5 (0535)

Fadel. Hold on. Syria and Jordan have read your cables. I myself will do all I can to reinforce you. I am on my way to you. To your aid, Haram of God!

FAUZI

While fighting was in progress between the enemy and Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh's force which I had strengthened with a company from the Alawite Battalion, in addition to the Palestinian and Jordanian volunteers, the Jordanian Army units stood idly by all through May 18.

The Jews had occupied the Shaikh Jarrah quarter and attacked the Mount of Olives with the object of cutting off the Old City from the east, thereby encircling it on all sides, so as to force it to surrender.

At dawn on May 19 we launched a violent attack in which, in addition to our forces, units of the Jordanian Army, totalling some 300 men, took part for the first time.

We started the attack by shelling the enemy positions near the walls of the Old City after which the shelling was concentrated on the Shaikh Jarrah quarter on which the advancing enemy formations had started to fall back.

While our attacking forces were approaching the Shaikh Jarrah quarter, forcing the enemy to withdraw from it, I was standing at the artillery observation post, watching the progress of the battle through my binoculars, and beside me were Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh, Prince Nawwaf, the son of King Abdullah, and Brigade-Commander Sidqi al-Jundi.

As the fighting started gradually to abate, to end at noon with the saving of Jerusalem from what had seemed its inevitable fall, Prince Nawwaf turned to Brigade-Commander Sidqi and said:

"The Liberation Army has saved it once again, and saved our honour. Why don't you do the same?"

In a troubled voice the Brigade-Commander replied:

"Orders, Sir, orders."

Prince Nawwaf said:

"Poor fellow: I wonder what will happen to you when they have withdrawn...?"

Whereupon I turned to the Brigade-Commander and said to him: "From now on you are responsible for the city. I shall not come back again." I then ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh to keep our forces in their

positions until the evening and withdraw them at night, when the total withdrawal would be resumed according to plan.

For the Arab millions there will be many surprises in the events and incidents I have described. Many of the details of the disaster of 1948 have been practically unknown to a large section of the Arab public, and especially to the young people who are now at the helm of the struggle.

I was in retirement when the painful story of the 1967 setback was unrolled. And now, as reports confirm, we are on the threshold of a stage fraught with possibilities of war.

I can only hope that what I have written will teach senior officials in the Arab capitals, both civilian and military, the lesson that they must enter on the war that is imposed on us united in will, united in ranks, and only when the fullest preparations have been made.

Our struggle against the enemy has many aspects, and it is our duty to ensure that our whole life, down to the smallest detail, is geared to it, for only when every individual among us is fully equal to the hard struggle shall we be able to achieve final victory.