Jewish–Transjordanian Relations 1921–1948

Yoav Gelber

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1997 by
FRANK CASS & CO. LTD.

This edition published 2013 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Gelber, Yoav
Jewish–Transjordanian relations, 1921–48
1. Zionism 2. Jews – Politics and government 3. Israel – Foreign relations – Jordan 4. Jordan – Foreign relations – Israel
I. Title
327.5'694'05695

ISBN 0-7146-4675-X (cloth)
ISBN 0-7146-4206-1 (paper)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gelber, Yoav.
Jewish–Transjordanian relations, 1921–48 / Yo'av Gelber.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.
ISBN 0-7146-4675-X (cloth). — ISBN 0-7146-4206-1 (pbk.)
1. Jewish–Arab relations,—1917–1949. 2. Transjordan—Politics and government. 3. Palestine—Politics and government,—1917–1948.
I. Title.
DS119.7.G389 1996
956.94'04—dc20 96-27429
CIP

Typeset by Vitaset, Paddock Wood, Kent

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Acknowledgements

This book was written during the Gulf War as occupational therapy for a paratroop officer who, after fighting in four wars, had to spend the fifth one frustrated in a sealed room at home with his family. The patience, consideration and encouragement of my wife, Ruthi, and my children were a most essential prerequisite for the accomplishment of this undertaking under the unusual circumstances.

I am also indebted to my three colleagues at the University of Haifa who helped me to complete the task when the war was over and university life resumed. Dr Judith Baumel reviewed the manuscript to correct linguistic and stylistic errors; Dr Yosef Nevo read the manuscript and enlightened me with several useful comments and Dr Ilan Pappé did the same and also helped me with the English–Arabic transliteration. Finally, I would like to thank the team of Frank Cass & Co. Ltd for their efficient co-operation and their endeavours in producing this book.

In the long span between writing and publication, highly significant developments have taken place in Jewish–Jordanian relations which could hardly be predicted when the book was written. May the deeper perspective provided by historical study fortify the peace, so long hoped for but only recently achieved.

Yoav Gelber

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Abbreviations

AHC	Arab Higher Committee
AIR	Air Ministry
ALA	Arab Liberation Army
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
APC	Anglo-Palestine Corporation
BGA	Ben-Gurion's Archives
BMEO	British Middle East Office
CAB	Cabinet Papers
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CIGS	Chief of Imperial General Staff
Cmd	Command Paper
CO	Colonial Office
CZA	Central Zionist Archives
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence
DMO	Director of Military Operations
DNB	Deutsche Nachrichten Büro (German Press Agency)
DSO	Defense Security Office
FO	Foreign Office
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
HA	Haganah Archives
HMG	His Majesty's Government

IDFA	Israel Defense Force Archives
ISA	Israel State Archives
IZL	Irgun Zevai Leumi (National Military Organization)
JA	Jewish Agency
JIA	Jabotinsky Institute Archives
JNF	Jewish National Fund
JTA	Jewish Telegraphic Agency
MEIC	Middle East Intelligence Centre
MELF	Middle East Land Forces
MI	Military Intelligence
MP	Member of Parliament
PEC	Palestine Electricity Company
PKP	Palästinesch Kommunistische Partei
PLDC	Palestine Land Development Company
PRO	Public Record Office
RAF	Royal Air Force
SIME	Security Intelligence Middle East
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SSO	Special Service Office
TFF	Transjordan Frontier Force
UNO	United Nations Organization
UNSCOP	United Nations Special Committee on Palestine
WA	Weizmann Archives
WO	War Office

Introduction

During the first half of the twentieth century the fates of one country, two states and three peoples were determined by the parallelogram of four powers – the British, the Jews, the Hashemites and the Palestinian Arabs. The peculiar relationship between the Jewish National Home and the Hashemite dynasty in Transjordan has already attracted ample scholarly interest. It has fascinated historians of the Middle East and has been the subject of several books. Several key figures involved in this link, such as Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Elias Sasson and Ezra Danin on the Jewish side, King Abdullah on the Hashemite side, Hajj Amin al-Husayni on the Palestinian side and Sir Alec Kirkbride and General Glubb on the British side, have published their memoirs or been subjects for biographical research.

None the less, the picture that memory and research have so far sketched is still far from perfect. Its inadequacies derive mainly from an incomplete and casual examination of the Jewish sources, which are no less important than British records. Moreover, most narratives have focused on the Jewish Agency's agreement with Abdullah in the summer of 1946 and its outcomes. As we intend to show in this analysis, that *entente* was the culmination of a process, not its starting point. The connection was much older, and had developed steadily ever since Amir Abdullah appeared on the Palestine scene in 1921.

The Jewish National Home has never acquired legitimacy in the eyes of the Arabs despite its indefatigable endeavours to achieve it. The indigenous populations in Palestine and in the adjacent countries have treated it as a foreign entity. They identified Zionism with mere colonialism, backed by British and later American imperialism. Zionist efforts to obtain Arab recognition through diplomatic formulations, practical cooperation and plain bribery have all failed. Attempts to accomplish a political acknowledgement in return for surrendering much-desired goals also came to naught until 1977.

Most Zionist leaders despaired of Arab acquiescence in the Zionist enterprise, to say nothing of recognition, in their own time. They relied on Jewish independent military might and on international backing against

Arab opposition in Palestine and the adjacent countries. Accordingly, Zionist politics concentrated on mobilizing support in Europe and America. Regional diplomacy has always been of secondary significance, although it has never ceased.

Futile attempts to arrive at an understanding with the Palestinian Arabs characterized Zionist policy during the Mandate's early years. The brutal Arab outburst in August 1929 shocked the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in Palestine) and the Zionist Movement. Initially, the riots and massacres intensified Zionist efforts to confront the 'Arab Question'. Yet after a few more abortive attempts to discuss with Palestinian leaders a compromise acceptable to both sides, the Jewish Agency lost any hope of reconciliation. Since the mid-1930s the Zionist movement tried to bypass Palestinian resistance to the National Home by establishing direct contacts with the neighbouring Arab countries. These ventures, which climaxed during the Palestinian revolt in 1936–39, proved futile because of the growing support for the Palestinian cause in the Arab countries. The Arab states' open advocacy of the May 1939 White Paper terminated this phase in Zionist regional diplomacy.

Simultaneously, the Jewish Agency made preliminary overtures towards minority groups in the area, such as the Druz in Syria and the Maronites in Lebanon. These bonds tightened as relations with the Muslim majority in the Arab countries deteriorated during the revolt's final stages. For many years the Jewish Agency's 'Arabists' toyed with the idea of creating a minorities' bloc to balance Islamic predominance in the Middle East. This, however, proved similarly disappointing. These ethnic groups were too weak and internally divided to form a substantial counterweight to the Muslim Arabs.

Between the end of the Second World War and the United Nations resolution on Palestine in November 1947, Zionist diplomacy aimed at accomplishing a compromise based on partition. This solution, however, required a partner. Initially, the main target was Egypt, which was supposed to have induced the Palestinians to comply. But the Egyptians were too absorbed in their own problems to be the champions of reconciliation and to enforce it upon the Palestinians. At the same time, the Jewish Agency made fresh overtures towards Transjordan, which ultimately led to an unwritten pact.

This understanding was not incidental. Abdullah had long been the only exception in the region from the general hostility towards the Jewish National Home. The essential question is: why? The simple answer is that Abdullah needed the Jews no less than they needed him.

Curiously enough, Transjordan and Abdullah also had problems

with acceptance by (or defiance from) their neighbours. Historically, Transjordan has never been an entity – political, national, cultural, administrative or even geographical. Its sparsely populated areas could have been a segment of either Syria or Palestine. The vast desert to the east and southeast was a no-man's-land and could have belonged to Iraq or Arabia as well. The Amirate's creation in 1921–22 did not stop the adjacent countries' claims for parts or the whole of its territory. Its independent economic existence was doubtful and so, therefore, was its very survival.

Personally, Abdullah belonged to one of the most honoured and honourable families in the Muslim world. There was no question of his legitimacy in this respect. However, the circumstances that surrounded his rise to power in Transjordan and the Amirate's very creation implied non-fulfilment of the Arab Revolt's vision of a great Arab kingdom. Moreover, they symbolized Arab nationalism's failure in its first major confrontation with the West. Abdullah had imagined himself to be the Arab champion looming up from the desert to liberate Damascus and restore Arab glory. Instead, he became a puppet ruler by British grace in a remote artificial principality. Thus, Transjordan's very existence was a constant reminder of Arab undoing in the wake of the First World War, in much the same way as the Jewish National Home in Palestine.

Abdullah was a stranger in his own new country. His subjects were a conglomerate of Muslims, Christians, bedouins who had migrated to those areas since the mid-eighteenth century and mostly persisted with their nomadic way of life, a few indigenous fellahin and immigrants from western Palestine, Syria, the Caucasus and north Africa. The Amir was affiliated to the bedouins, but not to the other groups. His Hijazi and Syrian entourage competed with the local notables and Palestinian immigrants for official posts and other state benefits, thus adding to the social instability. Many of them had dreamed of greater bounty in Damascus, and their dissatisfaction was a permanent source of unrest.

Abdullah himself never concealed his dissatisfaction with Transjordan. Being practical, in 1921 he accepted the British offer to create and administer the Amirate, realizing that there was nothing better for him at the moment. He always regarded this solution only as palliative and incessantly strove to expand his dominion. The Hashemites' expulsion from Hijaz in 1926 by their traditional enemies, the Wahabis, temporarily diverted Abdullah's efforts from Syria and Palestine back to his home country. However, when he realized his inability to oust

Ibn Saud from Mecca he gave it up and turned again westward and northward.

The Amir's continual intriguing to advance his personal ambitions involved him in conflict with almost every Arab country. While he represented the old order of the Ottoman era by his descent, and the unpopular post-World-War arrangements by his office, new forces were arising all around him. None of his aspirations was accepted as legitimate and each provoked fresh adversaries. In addition to the old dynastic feud between the Hashemites and the Wahabis, he also competed with his brother, King Faysal of Iraq, and his descendants for supremacy within the family. Personally, Abdullah had a good case since he was the elder, but Iraq was the stronger state and would not admit Transjordan's superiority. Egypt, which emerged from the Second World War as the spearhead of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism, regarded Abdullah as a mere tool of the British. The Egyptians hardly tolerated Transjordan's existence, let alone its aggrandizement.

Although Abdullah had partisans in Palestine and Syria, most Palestinians and Syrians repudiated him as a possible sovereign. As the indigenous national movements in both countries matured, advocacy of Abdullah's candidacy for the Syrian throne decreased and his prospects of gaining substantial local backing further diminished.

Too weak himself, and lacking any Arab sanction, Abdullah had to rely on outside sponsorship for the attainment of his far-reaching goals. The British, whom he loyally served for 30 years, would have been the natural choice. However, with their vast experience of ruling foreign domains they were too shrewd to back his adventures. While the British installed him in Transjordan and strengthened his rule in that country, they correctly estimated his capabilities and had no intention of stretching him beyond his limits. Furthermore, support for Abdullah's excessive aspirations would have complicated Britain's complex relations with the French in Syria. Later it might have hampered Britain's status in the eyes of the other Arab countries, needlessly adding to their difficulties in the Middle East.

This basic approach exhausted itself, in view of Palestinian intransigence and impotence, towards the end of the Palestine Mandate. By February 1948, with no feasible alternative, the British government hesitantly endorsed the take-over of Arab Palestine by Abdullah.

The Jews thus remained Abdullah's principal hope as far as his ambitions in Palestine and in Syria were concerned. Zionist interest in Syria's fate was only secondary, but Transjordan was long considered to be the Zionist enterprise's natural hinterland. An understanding

with its ruler was an essential precondition for overcoming British reservations about Jewish expansion across the river. It was similarly vital for defending Jewish settlements along the River Jordan's valley and inside Palestine from bedouin assaults. In the early 1930s, mutual economic interests created the basis for *rapprochement*, which thereafter developed into a political alliance. Abdullah gradually emerged, in view of Palestine's non-conciliatory attitude, as the National Home's preferred neighbour and, subsequently, the favourite partner for partition.

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1 Early Zionist interest in Transjordan

'We shall not build the bridge across the River Jordan with soldiers – we shall make our way by Jewish labour, with the plough and not with the sword.'

Transjordan's exclusion from the Jewish National Home was the first major reversal to Zionist policy after several prominent achievements including the Balfour Declaration, the San Remo decision on granting the Palestine Mandate to Britain, and its ratification by the League of Nations. Yet the British view of Transjordan as different from Palestine began a few years earlier, soon after the Egyptian Expeditionary Force under General Allenby had occupied southern Palestine.

The concept of separation, based on the lack of a Jewish presence across the river, was gradually accepted. In the summer of 1918, before the offensive in northern Palestine and Syria, William Ormsby-Gore, the British liaison officer attached to the Zionist Commission in Palestine, made certain recommendations in respect of Palestine's borders. One of his suggestions was to restrict the National Home's boundary in Transjordan so that it should include the River Jordan's valley and possibly the western slopes of the Gilad mountains, but leave the high plateau further to the east under Arab dominion.[1]

Ormsby-Gore's counsel did not necessarily reflect a common or agreed British position. There were British officers and officials in London and in Egypt who regarded Transjordan as a part of a future Arab kingdom.[2] By contrast, Balfour interpreted the geographical meaning of the Jewish National Home as embracing the Jordan's sources and the Litany in the north, and the territory east of the Jordan up to the Hijaz railway.[3]

The question of borders did not disturb the first negotiations between Zionist and Arab national leaders. Sharif Faysal and the Zionist leader Haim Weizmann met in 'Aqaba in June 1918 and again in Paris early in 1919. They arrived at an understanding that seemed to reconcile both movements' aspirations. This accord depended on the fulfilment of Arab national claims by the Peace Conference and also

on the Palestinian Arabs' compliance. It soon became clear, however, that none of these conditions would be met. The Weizmann–Faysal agreement therefore lost its political meaning and remained a document of propaganda value only.

How did the Zionist Organization become absorbed in Transjordan's affairs? Since its arrival in the country in April 1918, the Zionist Commission (the body that directed Jewish affairs in Palestine) displayed interest in Transjordan. Its immediate motivation was colonization. The Commission promptly initiated various surveys in search of available lands for the would-be immigrants. The vast areas of Transjordan and the Negev had a special attraction owing to their sparse population. As early as the autumn of 1918, the Commission received a preliminary review of settlement possibilities in Transjordan. Its author was the engineer Baruch Basin of Jaffa, who put forward several arguments in favour of Jewish mass settlement across the river Jordan. Basin pointed to the ample fertile lands, the communications infrastructure and the good climate. A major point of contention, however, was the distribution of tracts among a few landowners who could easily be persuaded to dispose of their useless property.

Basin referred to his own observations and to previous explorations, such as the Zionist leader Arthur Ruppin's *Syrien als Wirtschaftsgebiet* (Berlin 1917). He described the fundamental geological, topographic and climatic features and their impact on the fertility of the land. He identified more than 5,000,000 dunams (5,000 square kilometers) of arable land. According to his calculations, these could sustain more than 14,000 farmers' families. Additional investments around the Dead Sea might multiply this number by three. In any case, the agricultural settlers would provide a decent livelihood for thousands of labourers and merchants.[4]

During 1919, the Zionist delegation to the Peace Conference struggled for Transjordan's inclusion in the National Home. Simultaneously, several Zionist economists and agronomists recommended embarking on large colonization projects in this region. Their reasoning was based mainly on practical and historical considerations. Political and security considerations were to emerge only in a later period.[5]

What were the practical prospects of settling in Transjordan? The Zionist Commission took the first steps to investigate the possibilities of substantial land purchases. The Circassian community had been prominent in Transjordan during the Ottoman period but, after the Turks' retreat, 40 of its members were massacred by Arabs. In the summer of 1919 the Commission learned of a desire among the Circassians for

repatriation. Jewish travellers and Arab land-dealers raised the prospect of buying the Circassians' lands.[6] Weizmann, the Commission's Chairman, dispatched an official, Moshe Shertok (Sharett), to examine the offer on the spot.

Weizmann did not mention the matter to his colleagues, preferring to ascertain the British reaction beforehand.[7] He did, however, refer to the Circassian villages in the Zionist Organization's memorandum to the Peace Conference. The Circassians, however, ultimately decided to stay in Transjordan and the idea of acquiring their unmovable property was discarded.[8]

The prospects of future large-scale colonization in Transjordan added to the Zionist Commission's curiosity about the country's inhabitants and their disposition. Jewish agents and Arab informers supplied the Commission with regular accounts of the relations between the different bedouin tribes. The reports described the local population's attitude towards Sharif Faysal's Arab government in Damascus, the British and the French. In this way the Commission became aware of the attempts made by the Arab nationalist societies west of the river to stir up the bedouins against the Jews.

The intelligence reports portrayed a chaotic picture. General Money, the British Commanding Officer, was also concerned about the situation in Transjordan and its possible repercussions in Palestine. There was still no British military or administrative legation across the river, except for a political officer who sent alarming communications and warned of an ostensible invasion.[9] Now and then rumours spread that Shariffian troops stationed in Transjordan were preparing to attack Palestine.[10]

What was Faysal's actual power in Transjordan? The Damascus government's jurisdiction in this area was negligible, despite the nationalists' enthusiasm and the sheikhs' solemn proclamations of their loyalty to the Sharif. Petty disputes and common banditry were rampant. The local chiefs traditionally resisted any central authority, quarrelled with each other, and occasionally encountered the Shariffian troops.[11] Politically, Transjordan was no-man's-land where the British, the French, Faysal's emissaries, Palestinian nationalists and even Turks were all active in mobilizing local sheikhs to their respective sides. Summing up the situation, Levy-Izhak Schneurson, in charge of the Zionist intelligence bureau, wrote:

> This is the situation in Transjordan. A golden period arrived for the greedy and warlike sheikhs of the bedouins of Trans-Jordania. Hundreds of hands

> full of gold and promises are stretched out to them begging for their sympathy. The sheikhs accept all the offers. They get the money from France, from the Damascus government and even from the Turks. Some of them have a fixed salary from all the three as well. They on their part are ready to serve, are ready to fight and invade wherever there is a good booty in view.[12]

Faysal endeavoured to strengthen his grip on Transjordan's dignitaries by compulsion as well as intrigue and temptation. He paid certain chieftains monthly sums to secure their allegiance and, simultaneously, played them against each other. Early in 1920 the first signs of a rift between the government in Damascus and the sheikhs were visible. The principal reason was apparently that Faysal provoked the bedouins by attempting to introduce conscription.[13] Ultimately, the Sharif had to compromise and replaced conscription with a voluntary system resembling a militia. None the less, his authority in Transjordan remained precarious. Inter-tribal feuds were common and several local chiefs usurped the government's functions, paying little or no attention to its directives.[14]

The anarchy in Transjordan had consequences in Palestine. Although no general invasion took place, public security deteriorated in the summer of 1919. Bedouin raiding parties crossed the River Jordan and pillaged Jewish colonies in the interior of the country. The violence was still deemed to be more criminal than racial, but it became ever more difficult to discern between these motives.[15]

The Zionist Commission was conversant with the situation across the river through its own channels. Members of the clandestine *Hashomer* (The Guard) group followed the tracks of raiders who had attacked Jewish settlements to Transjordan. The Commission's spies travelled as far as Kerak in the south and discovered the dispositions and equipment of the Shariffian army. They also described the tribal feuds and the sheikhs' stiffening opposition to Faysal's authority.[16] The agents communicated with several chieftains and their appraisal of the bedouins' attitude towards the Jews was highly optimistic:

> All the Amirs and the bedouins unanimously agree that Jewish immigration is essential for the development of Transjordan. They want to insist on it. They will not extend help to the agitators in Palestine, and if there will be any attacks [on Jewish settlements] they will only be for the sake of booty.[17]

The Commission's intelligence bureau ascribed the continuing turmoil to French intrigue, aimed at arousing anti-British and anti-

Jewish feelings among the bedouins.[18] But the actual source of trouble was Damascus, not Beirut. In March 1920 large crowds of bedouins gathered in northern Transjordan. A Shariffian delegation arrived in Jerusalem to warn General Boles, the military governor, of an impending invasion. They said that these parties were but a fraction of the millions who would rally to fight for their country.[19] The insinuation was clear enough. The British reinforced the garrison along the River Jordan and secured control of its fords. Although the bedouins remained passive during the riots in Jerusalem early in April 1920, they encountered British detachments in the Jordan Valley later in that month.[20] These border skirmishes appeared to be linked with the disturbances inside the country and the British suspected that they were manipulated from Damascus. To force Faysal to stop the agitation they withheld his subsidy.[21]

None the less, unrest in Transjordan persisted. Palestinian activists in Damascus distributed leaflets in the bedouins' encampments, telling them of the San Remo resolution. The summons called on the tribes to stop their feuds and prepare for a major assault on Palestine: 'We must make Palestine either a free [Arab] Government or a cemetery for all Jews'.[22] Palestinian extremists in Jerusalem and in Gaza negotiated a pact with sheikhs in Transjordan and the Negev according to which:

> All the bedouins will be prepared to revolt against the British government. Many mounted bedouins will be ready when the revolution will break out in Palestine. The leaders of the movement in Jerusalem will inform them about the revolution a few days in advance.

The informer divulged the story to Sir Ronald Storrs, Jerusalem's governor. He added that all this had been done with the Damascus government's connivance.[23] The Palestinians assured the bedouins that the garrison was tiny and promised them arms and money.[24] The British Military Administration treated these rumours seriously. The continuous skirmishing along the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea shores appeared to corroborate them. Late in June 1920, Boles still feared a major bedouin invasion in protest against the expected arrival of Sir Herbert Samuel, the first High Commissioner.[25]

The Zionist Commission conveyed information to the authorities about an Arab conspiracy to assassinate Samuel. This plot allegedly should have coincided with imminent mob riots in the cities and a bedouin invasion. Rumours spread in Jerusalem that the bedouins had already assembled south of the Dead Sea and were preparing to storm

the city via the Judea Desert, Hebron and Bethlehem. The police arrested several accomplices and obstructed the collusion.[26] Soon after his arrival, however, Samuel invited several sheikhs and easily placated them, to the sorrow of the Arab extremists.[27] The latter continued for several weeks to speculate about bedouins who were allegedly massing across the river and preparing to liberate Palestine, but these stories lost their credibility.[28] Following Faysal's expulsion from Damascus the bedouins' energies were diverted towards Syria and the French.

What did the Zionists do to face the bedouin menace? During all these turbulent months the Zionist Commission took independent steps to offset the threat. When Weizmann visited Palestine in March and April 1920, he ordered Schneurson to contact the important sheikhs. Schneurson's agents persuaded (in other words, bribed) ten chieftains, including Mithqal Pasha and Ruffifan Pasha al-Majali, to meet Weizmann in Jericho and to sign a pact with him. Several reports portrayed the two pashas as Faysal's fiercest opponents in Transjordan, and both were to play a significant role in the negotiations with the Jews during the 1930s. The conference should have taken place on 6 April 1920, but the riots in Jerusalem prevented Weizmann from attending. The disappointed sheikhs went back to their encampments after Schneurson's agents had generously compensated them for their wasted time and other expenses.[29]

The Commission's agents persisted in their efforts to win the bedouins' friendship, despite the frustration of the cancelled meeting at Jericho. Sheikhs such as Amir Bashir al-Hasan, chief of the Gazawia, invited Jewish middlemen to their camps, seeking financial and political assistance in restoring their relations with the authorities.[30] In mid-July 1920, Joseph Davidesku, the most audacious among the Commission's spies, set out on a three-week tour across the river disguised as a bedouin. He reconnoitered the Ajlun and Irbid districts to study the background of recent bedouin raids on Jewish settlements, Christian villages, and military outposts in lower Galilee and the Jordan valley.

Meanwhile the French army drove Faysal out of Damascus. The Arab government disintegrated and the Sharif's entourage dispersed. His last-moment appeals for help to the bedouins of Transjordan proved futile. Volunteers from Palestine were stopped on the border at Dir'aa and returned.[31] Upon his reappearance in Palestine Davidesku announced that, following the collapse of Faysal's regime, the bedouins were looking forward to the institution of a British administration. They believed that the Jews would follow suit, and Davidesku proposed to exploit the situation and communicate with the important sheikhs.

He recommended several local dignitaries who could serve as intermediaries and help in the purchase of lands.[32]

Following Davidesku's account, David Eder, the Zionist Commission's Deputy Chairman, notified Weizmann that, since Faysal's fall, the sheikhs of Transjordan had asked the British to undertake the region's administration. Samuel suggested the extension of the Palestine government's authority to Transjordan. Eder wrongly reported that the army commanders backed the High Commissioner's proposal and were quite ready to take possession. In fact, on the contrary, General Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, regarded the matter as an additional military liability which he was unwilling to undertake. The differences between the War Office and the Foreign Office delayed British action. Eder urged Weizmann to press for a quick Cabinet decision on a positive response to the bedouins, before the vacuum was filled by the French.[33] According to the Zionist Commission's intelligence reports, Faysal himself suggested to the sheikhs that they hand over their lands to the British to forestall their seizure by the French.[34]

Any British decision in respect of Transjordan was bound to have a significant impact upon the determination of Palestine's eastern border. Eder felt that the vacuum also presented an opportunity for the Zionist Commission. He discussed the new situation with local officials, among whom were the former political officers in Transjordan, and in the wake of these consultations wrote to Weizmann:

> I do think that with the entirely new position caused by the French dominance in Syria, there would not be the risk of the rebuff that we once anticipated on if we asked for the extended frontier line [the desert line].

At the beginning of August 1920 Eder met with the exiled Faysal in Haifa. The Sharif asked the Zionists to mobilize Jewish influence in the world for his sake. Eder reproached him for not abiding by his previous commitments and for losing control of his extreme anti-Zionist followers. Eder, a psychiatrist by profession, summed up his impression of the deposed king:

> I doubt, after studying Faysal in my interview, whether he is strong enough to rule an Arab people. He has plenty of intelligence but I should judge is not a born leader, he sees too many sides of the question.[35]

A few days later Samuel met with Transjordan's notables at Es-Salt

and promised to establish an area of Arab self-government east of the river.

How did the French occupation of Syria influence developments in Transjordan? Faysal's fall resulted in Transjordan's detachment from Syria leaving a vacuum in the absence of any authority. During the summer of 1920, the Palestine government established local administrations, directed by British officers, in the district towns of Irbid, Ajlun, Es-Salt, Amman and Kerak. These councils were ineffective; they disputed incessantly with each other and quietly disappeared when Amir Abdullah established himself in Amman.[36]

Abdullah, Faysal's elder brother, appeared at Ma'an, on the Hijaz-Transjordan border, in November 1920. His coming further complicated the situation. Ostensibly, he was on his way to conquer Damascus. Realizing the practical difficulties, however, he was ready to content himself, at least temporarily, with ruling Transjordan for the British. He stayed in Ma'an, preaching moderation to the local notables and awaiting a British gesture. Abdullah's emergence caused the Palestine administration some concern. Samuel advocated establishing direct British control over Transjordan as an essential prerequisite for the Mandate's peaceful progress. He therefore impressed upon London the need to expel Abdullah from Transjordan. The Foreign Office had different ideas. It considered the Amir's installation in Transjordan a possible solution for the complex situation in the entire region.[37]

In March 1921 the Cairo conference broached, among other things, the conflicting views regarding Abdullah. The advocates of Transjordan's separation from Palestine, headed by Lawrence of Arabia, and Samuel who favoured its inclusion, debated this point before the new Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill. Following the conference, Churchill summoned the Amir to Jerusalem and the two met several times. Abdullah attempted to bargain for a better offer than Transjordan, but ultimately undertook to administer the territory for six months on behalf of the Palestine administration.[38]

Although the arrangement devised in Cairo and Jerusalem temporarily satisfied Abdullah, it could hardly content his entourage of Syrian nationalists whose goal was Damascus, not Amman. They naturally grasped his accord with the British as a betrayal of the Arab national cause. The Amir's pledge to relinquish his ambitions in Syria notwithstanding, his followers continued to plot against the French. They organized an abortive attempt on the life of the High Commissioner, General Gouraud. Abdullah's speculation to placate them with

offices and honours in his new administration aroused the indigenous sheikhs, who condemned his preference for the 'Syrians'. Continuing complaints about Abdullah's ineffectiveness induced the Palestine administration to tighten its supervision of his government, particularly in financial matters.[39]

What was the impact of Abdullah's arrival on Zionist policy? The Amir's installment in Amman soon raised issues such as the Zionist Commission's relationship with him and possible support of his ambitions to rule over Syria. In March 1921, the Zionist Commission again dispatched Davidesku to Transjordan, the Hauran and the Beisan valley to observe the inhabitants' reaction to Abdullah's appearance in Amman. The agent reported that the Amir endeavoured to placate the population: '[Abdullah] asked them to make no move against the Zionists and said: the Englishmen are our allies, and the Jews are their friends and under their protection'. But, the report continued, 'All Transjordan is almost unanimously in favor of Sharif Abdullah. However, they all think that the aforementioned Sharif should have no relations whatsoever with the Jews'.[40]

The British, too, were aware of this mood. By that time, Balfour's idea of the National Home's eastern boundary was completely erased. Despite the extension of British authority to Transjordan, the Jews did not follow. In the summer of 1921, the area was included within the Mandate but excluded from the National Home, the Zionist Organization being unable to resist this move.[41]

Abdullah's ambition to rule Damascus was still his prime motive. In the summer of 1921 he modified his strategy. So far he had succeeded in alienating both his Syrian and bedouin followers in return for limited British support that did not take his long-term aspirations into account. He realized the need of establishing bonds with other powers who might help him to achieve his original goal. He was prepared to dismiss most of his Syrian advisers and officials to win French goodwill, so essential for his installment in Damascus. He tried to approach the French, both through the British and independently, but his efforts bore no fruit. The French were adamant and refused to change their basic anti-Shariffian attitude.[42]

Since his arrival in Amman, Abdullah sought to muster the Palestinians for the conquest of Damascus. He sent emissaries to collect contributions and to enlist volunteers into his army.[43] The results, however, were disappointing. The Palestinians were preoccupied with their confrontation both with imperialism and Zionism, and had already begun to detach themselves from the Shariffian cause.

Moreover, in view of Faysal's dealings with Weizmann they were quite reasonably suspicious of the Hashemites.

Like his younger brother, Abdullah also overestimated the Jews' political influence and financial power. In the autumn of 1921 he forwarded a message to Eder asking if the Zionists would be willing to exercise their standing with the British government for his sake. He also wished them to arouse world public opinion in favour of his ambitions. For his part, the Amir assured Eder that he was well disposed to the Zionist enterprise. Moreover, once secure in Damascus, he would wholeheartedly help the Palestine government and the Jewish National Home.

Eder appreciated Abdullah 'as a much stronger man than Faysal, a man who knows his own mind and would not be led away by every suggestion or any extremist.' The Amir's overture, however, seemed to Eder to be 'fantastic' and he wrote to Weizmann: 'I can hardly believe that the French would place him in Damascus, but as we know, stranger things than this have happened.' Eder refrained from committing himself to Abdullah, financially or otherwise, although he promised to consider sending a delegation to Amman for further discussions.

Abdullah's approach to the Zionist Commission was also inspired by financial calculations. The Amir received a monthly allowance of £3,500 from his father, Sharif Husayn of Mecca. The money reached Amman through the Jerusalem branch of the APC (Anglo-Palestine Corporation) Bank (the official repository of the Zionist movement). Now Abdullah asked Eder to influence the APC to pay him £7,000 ahead of his father's future allotments. Eder explained to the Amir's envoy that 'the bank could not do so without definite guarantees', and asked the Zionist Executive in London for instructions.[44]

Before replying to Eder's queries, Weizmann consulted with Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, the former political officer in the military administration of Palestine and an ardent 'Gentile Zionist'.[45] Before any payment, Weizmann stipulated that the Amir should prove his sincerity by inducing the Arabs to tolerate the Zionist enterprise. In view of his previous experience with Faysal, Weizmann considered a Zionist commitment to back the Amir's ambitions as premature. He seemed hardly convinced that Zionist interests required Abdullah's domination in Damascus.[46]

What were the consequences of these preliminary overtures? Abdullah's signature on the Hijaz Treaty of 8 December 1921 amounted to recognition of British policy in Palestine, including the Jewish National Home. It paved the way for his permanent installation in

Amman by the British and for the final separation of Transjordan from the National Home.[47]

Nevertheless, neither his legitimacy as the new Amirate's sovereign nor his further ambition to rule Palestine and Syria were recognized by his fellow Arabs. Most of them, even within his own country, regarded him as a British puppet. Being totally dependent upon the British, politically and financially, he had to seek other alignments for the accomplishment of his long-term goal.

During his visit to London in the summer of 1922 Abdullah had several talks with Weizmann. The President of the Zionist Organization was seeking official recognition of the Jewish National Home by an Arab potentate to bypass Palestinian-Arab opposition. According to Weizmann, Abdullah was prepared to recognize the Mandate and the National Home policy, and to allow Jewish settlements in Transjordan. In exchange he expected the Jews to support his aspirations for the Amirate of united Palestine.

Rumours of the discussions in London leaked out and provoked bitter internal criticism on both sides. The Palestinians suspected Abdullah's motives, fearing that he might betray them to accomplish his personal ambitions. Abdullah's expansionism alarmed the *Yishuv*'s leaders, who generally repudiated Weizmann's secret diplomacy. During his visit to Palestine in 1923 they succeeded in persuading him that the Amir carried little weight and any deal with him was worthless.[48] Weizmann also encountered the indifference of most British officials, except the Resident in Amman, St John Philby. His impressions during that visit brought the negotiations to an inconclusive end.[49]

Apparently there was no immediate follow-up to these early negotiations. None the less, they had established a link between the Zionists and Abdullah that developed moderately during the 1920s. At the same time, the Zionist Executive endeavoured to cultivate relations with other personalities in Transjordan. Haim Kalwarisky, the Zionist official in charge of Arab affairs, encouraged the creation of National Muslim Associations to balance the anti-Jewish Muslim–Christian Societies that had emerged all over Palestine. He used direct bribes and other forms of persuasion, and in 1921 expanded the network to Transjordan.[50]

The Zionist Executive hoped that Churchill's White Paper had not finished Jewish prospects in Transjordan. Abdullah similarly strove to annex western Palestine to his domain. Both parties had a common interest in the reunification of the country, though for different reasons. Ironically enough, from this starting point of a common interest in

preserving Palestine united, they ultimately agreed to divide it between themselves.

The tension that had characterized Jewish–Arab relations in Palestine since 1918 diminished with the crystallization of the mandatory system in 1922. A quick Arab–Jewish understanding did not seem as urgent as before. All parties were exhausted by the intensive events in the preceding years and were busy consolidating their internal positions. No major political moves took place until the decade's end. Zionist treatment of the 'Arab problem' aimed mainly at achieving practical co-operation with local Palestinian notables in various social and economic fields.[51]

None the less, the Zionist leaders did not totally abandon their bonds with Abdullah or their interest in Transjordan. Colonel Kisch, a former British officer and head of the Jewish Agency's political office in Jerusalem, occasionally visited the Amir or met with him during Abdullah's excursions to Jerusalem. In 1924 Kisch was received in Amman by the Amir's father, King Husayn of Hijaz.[52] These formal and ceremonial contacts did not lead to any visible consequences, but their very existence was significant for the future.

In April 1926, Weizmann and Kisch paid a visit to Abdullah. The Amir announced that he would not be an obstacle to Jewish economic penetration into Transjordan. The eager Zionist leader returned to Tel-Aviv and declared publicly: 'The Arab rulers expect us to start working there.'[53] Despite expected British opposition, Weizmann did not lose hope for expanding the area of Jewish colonization across the river. He counted on the goodwill and common interest of the Transjordan government, and on his return to London he assured his colleagues: 'in three or four years' time we could work in Transjordan.' He repeated this appreciation in several letters to his colleagues.[54]

The agitation in Syria for a union with Transjordan under a common throne, be it Hashemite or Saudi, worried the Jewish Agency. After the suppression of the Druz revolt in 1925/6, Syrian informers told Kisch about the various pretenders to the crown. He relayed the information to the Zionist Executive in London. To counterbalance the turbulence in Syria, Kisch suggested urging the British government to tighten the ties between both banks and let the Jews settle across the river.[55]

Non-political connections with Transjordan persisted throughout the 1920s. A possible way to evade British restrictions seemed to be the purchase of lands by American Jews and their eventual cultivation by Palestinian Jewish settlers.[56]

The Jewish Agency collected basic information on the economic, agricultural and climatic conditions east of the river and studied the potential of settling in this region.[57] From time to time the Jewish National Fund (JNF) discussed the acquisition of lands in Transjordan and dispatched missions to survey potential offers. Veterans of Hashomer travelled on horseback to reconnoitre the *terra incognita* of southern Transjordan. Owing to British objections and the empty Zionist treasury, all these preliminary efforts were futile.[58]

Another way to enter Transjordan was through Jewish labour and commerce. As early as 1922 Arab businessmen made proposals to Jewish individuals and companies regarding partnerships in the establishment of various projects in Amman and elsewhere in Transjordan.[59] Jewish entrepreneurs obtained tenders for public works and employed Jewish labourers in the construction of army barracks and government buildings. Organized groups of pioneers looked for work across the river in times of depression, and a few were employed in repairing the damage caused by an earthquake in 1927.[60]

Even Jewish communists went to Transjordan, to disseminate their word among the bedouins. Some ideologists, such as the PKP (Palästinesch Kommunistische Partei) leader Wolf Averbuch ('Daniel abu Ziam') mistakenly regarded the bedouin tribe as an ideal model of communist society, having internal equality and sharing of capital. They imagined the clans' encampments to be a practical laboratory exemplifying their abstract social theories.[61]

The Jewish Agency thought mainly of capitalist penetration through the state's concessions of the electricity plant in Naharayim and the potash factory on the Dead Sea shore. Although the government granted the franchises to private entrepreneurs, Pinhas Rutenberg and Moshe Novomeysky, the Zionist Organization backed both of them.[62]

In 1926, another gate to Transjordan seemed to open when a few Jews enlisted in the newly established Transjordan Frontier Force (TFF). But Weizmann emphatically preferred peaceful means and expounded the slogan that would characterize Zionist policy towards Transjordan in the next decade:

> We see in Transjordan the eastern part of Eretz Israel. However, we shall not build the bridge across the river Jordan with soldiers – we shall make our way by Jewish labour, with the plough and not with the sword.[63]

Four months later, in a conversation with a private Jewish individual, Abdullah voiced his desire for cooperation in the same spirit:

The division between Palestine and Transjordan is artificial and wasteful ... You must make an alliance with us ... We are poor and you are rich. Please come to Transjordan. I guarantee your safety. Together we will work for the benefit of the country.[64]

NOTES

1. Ormsby-Gore's report on the situation in Palestine, August 1918, PRO, FO 406/40.
2. I. Gil-Har, 'The Separation of the Eastern Bank of the Jordan from Palestine' (Hebrew), *Cathedra*, 12 (1979), pp. 47–69; op. cit. 'A New Viewpoint on the issue of Transjordan's Separation from Palestine' (Hebrew), *Yahadut Zmanenu*, 1 (1984), pp. 163–70.
3. Balfour to Lloyd-George, 26 June 1919, PRO, FO 371/4181, and Balfour's memorandum on Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia, 11 August 1919, PRO, FO 371/4183.
4. Basin's review of Transjordan's colonization potentialities, 20 December 1918, Central Zionist Archives (hereafter: CZA), S 25/3490. For earlier attempts at Jewish settlement in Transjordan cf. Z. Ilan, *Attempts at Jewish Settlement in Transjordan, 1871–1947* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem 1984), pp. 17–51, 157–79 and 324–57.
5. Ilan, op. cit., pp. 358–61.
6. Unsigned report on a trip to Amman, summer 1919, *Haganah* Archives (hereafter: HA), Golomb's files, no. 44; entries in Joseph Nachmani's diary, 24 November to 1 December 1919, HA, Nachmani's files, no. 2. Nachmani, a veteran of Hashomer, served then in the Tiberias Jewish police force and later became the representative of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) in Galilee.
7. Weizmann to Meinertzhagen, 10 November 1919, in J. Reinharz (ed.), *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann, Series A: Letters*, IX (New Brunswick NJ, Transaction Books: 1977), pp. 253–4.
8. A.H. Cohen's summary of the situation in Transjordan, 26 November 1936, CZA, S 25/3490.
9. Money to Clayton, 31 May 1919, PRO, FO 371/4181.
10. Schneurson's report to the Zionist Commission, 25 June 1919, CZA, Z 4/14437, and his review of the Arab National Movement, 19 March 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 1.
11. Reports on the situation in Transjordan, 5 and 9 December 1919, CZA, Z 4/3886/II, and Schneurson's report on the situation in Transjordan, 26 January 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 15.
12. A summary of the situation in Transjordan, 9 March 1920, CZA, Z 4/3886/II.
13. Reports on the situation in Transjordan, 26 January 1920, CZA, L 4/747, and 2 February 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 11.
14. Report no. 32 from Transjordan, 28 June 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 13.
15. See, for example, a report about a bedouin raid on Petah Tiqva, 19 July 1919, CZA, L 4/764.
16. Current reports on the situation in Transjordan from January to May 1920 are kept in HA, Schneurson's files, nos. 11 and 15. The anarchy in Transjordan was corroborated in General Headquarters, Cairo (hereafter GHQ) telegram to the War Office, 19 June 1920, PRO, FO 371/5120.
17. A report from Transjordan, 2 April 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 15.
18. A review of the French propaganda in Palestine and Transjordan, 18 February 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 13, and a review of the situation in Transjordan, 9 March 1920, CZA, Z 4/3886/II.
19. Schneurson's report from Jerusalem, 19 March 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 12.

20. GHQ to the War Office, 23–24 April 1920, PRO, FO 371/5118.
21. GHQ to the War Office, 27–28 April 1920, ibid.
22. Report no. 30 from Damascus and Transjordan, 3 June 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 11.
23. Report no. J.M.89 from Jerusalem, 16 June 1920, CZA, L 4/739.
24. Report no. 31 from Transjordan, 20 June 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 15.
25. General Boles to GHQ, 24 June 1920, PRO, FO 371/5120, and GHQ to the War Office, 27 June 1920, ibid.
26. Reports no. 108–110 from Jerusalem, 4–6 July 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 12.
27. Reports no. 111–115 from Jerusalem, 7–10 July 1920, ibid.
28. Reports nos. 118–120, July 13–15 1920, ibid.
29. Schneurson's memorandum to Eder, 6 May 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 1, and Eder to Weizmann, 17 May 1920, CZA, Z 4/16033.
30. Davidesku's report on his mission to Transjordan, 3 June 1920, CZA, L 4/747. On the outcome of this errand see GHQ to the War Office, 16 June 1920, PRO, FO 371/5120.
31. Letters from Abd al-Qadir al-Musrer (s.b. Al-Muzaphar) to Aatawi Pasha and to Mithqal Pasha, 25 July 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 11, and Report no. JM 130 from Jerusalem, 27 July 1920, CZA, L 4/739.
32. Schneurson's report to Eder on Davidesku's tour, 7 August 1920, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 9.
33. Eder to Weizmann, 9 August 1920, CZA, L 3/289.
34. A report from Jerusalem, 11 August 1920, CZA, L 4/739.
35. Eder to Weizmann, 9 August 1920, CZA, L 3/289.
36. W. Kazziha, 'The Political Evolution of Transjordan', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15 (1979), pp. 239–40. For a somewhat ironic description of such a council's functioning cf. A. Kirkbride, *A Crackle of Thorns* (London, J. Murray: 1956), pp. 18–28.
37. For a thorough analysis of British policy in Transjordan in the interim period cf. A. Kleiman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921* (Baltimore: 1970), pp. 205–8.
38. Kazziha, op. cit., pp. 241–6, and Kleiman, op. cit., pp. 209–11.
39. Kleiman, op. cit., pp. 212–26, and Gil-Har, op. cit., pp. 174–5.
40. Davidesku's report on the situation in Transjordan, March 1921, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 6.
41. Weizmann's reply to his critics at the XII Zionist Congress in Carlsbad, 5 September 1921, in B. Litvinoff (ed.), *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, series B, Papers, II (New Brunswick NJ, Transaction Books: 1983), p. 329. Cf. also Gil-Har, op. cit., pp. 171–3.
42. Kazziha, op. cit., pp. 249–50; Gil-Har, op. cit., pp. 173–4.
43. An unsigned report on the activities of the Amir's emissaries in Jaffa, early October 1921, HA, Schneurson's files, no. 6.
44. Eder to Weizmann, 30 October 1921, Weizmann Archives.
45. The Zionist Organization to Meinertzhagen, 11 November 1921, PRO, CO 733/16.
46. Stein (the Zionist Executive's Secretary) to Eder, 2 December 1921, CZA, S 25/6310.
47. Kazziha, op. cit., pp. 250–3.
48. Weizmann's confidential report to the Colonial Office on his visit to Palestine, 15 February 1923, in Litvinoff, op. cit. p. 370.
49. N. Caplan, *Futile Diplomacy*, I, Early Arab–Zionist Negotiation Attempts, 1913–1931 (London, Cass: 1983), pp. 52–4.
50. List of the heads of the Muslim Associations in Palestine, 22 December 1921, CZA, S 25/6310. Cf. also Caplan, N. 'Arab–Jewish Negotiations in Palestine after the First World War' (Hebrew), *Hamizrah Ha'Hadash (The New Orient)*, 27 (1978), pp. 19–20.
51. A report on the activities of the National Council's secretariat for Arab affairs in the year 1922/23, CZA, S 25/4384.
52. F.H. Kisch, *Palestine Diary* (London, Gollancz: 1938), pp. 96–107.

53. Ilan, op. cit., p. 366.
54. Weizmann's report to the Zionist Executive, 4 May 1926, in Litvinoff, op. cit., p. 475. Cf. also Ilan, op. cit., pp. 366–7.
55. Kisch to the Zionist Executive, 24 July 1928, CZA, S 25/10001.
56. Tisch to Ruppin, 17 May 1922, CZA, A 15/39.
57. A review of agriculture in Transjordan in 1928, CZA, S 25/10001.
58. M. Yigael, *On the Saddle* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: 1956), pp. 119–24, and Ilan, op. cit., p. 365.
59. Tisch to Ruppin, 17 May 1922, CZA, A 15/39.
60. Ilan, op. cit., pp. 368–9.
61. Saunders's (Acting Commandant of Palestine Police) memorandum to the Chief Secretary, 2 August 1929, PRO, FO 816/103. On Averbuch cf. N. List, 'And the Commintern Was Right ... : Doctrines', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 46 (Spring 1988), pp. 38–40.
62. M. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1987), pp. 104–5. For a detailed account of the Dead Sea concession cf. M. Novomeysky, Given to Salt, (London, Parrish: 1958). Cf. also E. Shealtiel, *Pinhas Rutenberg* (Hebrew) (Am Oved, Tel Aviv: 1990), for the history of the Naharayim plant.
63. Weizmann's speech at a public rally in Tel Aviv, 22 April 1926, in Litvinoff, op. cit., p. 471.
64. Quoted in A. Cohen, *Israel and the Arab World* (New York, Funk & Wagnalls: 1970), p. 28. This statement was made to Dr Saul Mizan on 18 August 1926.

2 The turning point of the 1929 disturbances

'This country has great potential, but presently lacks energy, capital and professional knowledge.'

The disturbances that broke out in Palestine in August 1929 opened a new phase in the Arab–Jewish conflict in Palestine. They also had an immediate impact on the relationship between the Jewish National Home and Transjordan.

By the beginning of September the authorities had restored order and suppressed the riots. The tense atmosphere, however, continued for several months. From time to time rumours spread that Arab extremists were conspiring to resume the disorders, and the rumours occasionally mentioned the participation of raiding parties from Transjordan.

Concurrently with the turmoil in Palestine, the mob in Amman attempted to hunt down the few local Jewish residents. Palestinian immigrants disseminated horror tales about Jewish atrocities in the holy places in Jerusalem and incited the bedouins to save the mosques. The Transjordan Legislative Council dispatched two delegates to report on the situation in the Holy City. Through Abdullah's intervention the police arrested them when they arrived. Their angry tribes threatened to invade Palestine and take revenge. After two stormy days, a military demonstration at the bedouins' encampments and the release of the emissaries pacified the situation.

During this tense period the Supreme Muslim Council, led by the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, endeavoured to rally the bedouins of Transjordan around the Palestinian cause. The telephone in the Council's office was tapped by the newly established Jewish intelligence service. The listeners could hear, among other things, that the Mufti had dispatched envoys to instigate a bedouin assault on Jerusalem.[1] These calls provoked intrigues among Transjordan's chieftains and controversies between sheikhs who were ready to join the Palestinians and others who remained aloof. The disputes reflected traditional tribal feuds and competition between rival notables more