

The document reproduced below is Safwat's fourth report to the Arab League's Palestine Committee, formed shortly after the partition resolution to take overall charge of affairs relating to Palestine. The Palestine Committee comprised representatives of the League member states, mainly at the level of prime minister or foreign minister, and was chaired by Jamil Mardam Bey, prime minister and later defense minister of Syria. Throughout the report, distinction is made between "volunteers," meaning men recruited by the Military Committee and formed into ALA units, and "guerrillas," meaning members of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni's Jihad Muqaddas. The report was submitted on 23 March 1948 but not considered by the Arab League Council until 10 April. By that time, the Haganah's Plan Dalet had already been launched. The report was translated by Jenab Tutunji and Walid Khalidi.

[Stationery letterhead: General Command of the Palestine Forces]

To: His Excellency, Chairman of the Palestine Committee¹

From: The General Command

Date: 23 March 1948

This report is to complete previous reports and verbal explanations presented to the Political Committee of the Arab League during the meetings ending 15 January 1947 and 2 February 1948.

I. Armed Forces

A. Jewish Forces

We have received no information to contradict our previous information that Jewish forces in Palestine number no less than 50,000 fighters, which is the combined strength of the Haganah, Stern, and Irgun. Half these forces were fully armed, equipped, and combat ready several months ago, while the other half was then in the process of being armed and equipped and was to be ready to join its units shortly. By now it is probable that this second half has completed its preparations, and we can safely assume that the entire force is now ready to take part in battle whenever the time comes.

It should be noted that the Haganah forces include the Palmach armored formation, estimated to have 5,000–6,000 combatants. This is a highly trained mobile formation which the Jews themselves consider an elite commando force.

The latest information indicates that in the last few days—i.e., after the recent fighting began—the Jews have organized local forces from among the colonists. Called "Local Defense Forces," these have been distributed among the colonies to

See page for members v. fighters.

Some of these figures were based on Jewish propaganda meant to deter the Arab militants.

1. Syrian prime minister Jamil Mardam Bey.

defend them against Arab attacks. Such forces are estimated to be about 20,000-strong, almost a third being young women.

B. Our Forces

Our forces currently consist of the following:

1. Regular units (or, more accurately, semiregular units) consisting of volunteers from various Arab countries who have completed their training at the Qatana camp.²

2. Regular (or semiregular) units or contingents consisting of volunteers from specific areas, such as the Druze and Circassians, most of whom had previously served in regular armies.

3. Armed groups of Palestinian guerrillas [*mujahidin*] enlisted on a full-time basis and receiving regular pay.

The total of the units and contingents mentioned in paragraphs 1 and 2 above is about 5,200. Of these, some 4,000 have already entered Palestine, including contingents from Jabal Druze. Contingents from Majdal Shams al-Din³ are about to



ALA troops stationed in central Palestine, March 1948. (*Before Their Diaspora*, Institute for Palestine Studies)

enter Palestine. The remaining units are still undergoing training and are in the process of formation. The plan is to form a reserve force out of these remaining units and to deploy them in the area of Tubas village in central Palestine.⁴

2. The Military Committee's training camp near Damascus.

3. A Druze village in Syria.

4. Tubas village is about 20 kilometers northeast of Nablus.

The total number of Palestinian guerrillas registered up to now is about 2,500. This raises the total of our combat forces to no more than 7,700 fighters, though we intend to increase the number of registered Palestinian guerrillas to 5,000–6,000 if the requisite arms and equipment become available.

It is clear from the above figures that there is no comparison between our forces and the Jewish forces, and that the difference between them is vast.

II. Weapons

A. Light Arms

The Jews possess great quantities of light weapons such as rifles and machine guns as well as inexhaustible supplies of ammunition. All these are of good modern make, either British or American.

Our side possesses only a few thousand rifles of various makes—French, British, Canadian, German, and Austro-Hungarian. Most are antiquated and unfit for modern warfare. For some weapons, such as the Canadian and Austro-Hungarian rifles, no ammunition at all is available. Our machine guns, few in number, are not much better than our rifles in terms of compatibility and age and are totally unsuited to the requirements of modern military organization. As for ammunition, our supply is extremely limited whereas the battles and constant skirmishes require unlimited quantities. If we do not receive adequate stores of ammunition very soon, there is no doubt that the catastrophe of the total expenditure of our present supply will soon be upon us, rendering our rifles no better than walking sticks.

B. Mortars

The Jews have large quantities of mortars and are using them in almost every battle, especially against our garrisons in Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem, and elsewhere.

We have only a very small number of mortars, no more than fourteen, which we took from the Syrian army and gave to some units. But the town garrisons do not possess a single mortar, although they are in dire need of such artillery to enable them to withstand the Jewish attacks that are intensifying by the day.

C. Light Field Artillery

We do not know how many field guns the Jews have. It is not far-fetched to assume that they have sufficient quantities but have not yet used them, as so far there has been no great need for them and in order not to draw in British forces.

As for our forces, we possess eight old cannons of various makes with limited ammunition. These are quite inadequate and lacking in ancillary equipment and have been assigned to the Northern Command.⁵ At present, we are unable to use them for fear of British intervention.

5. The Military Committee divided Palestine into three zones. The Northern Front, under Adib Shishakli (later to become president of Syria) comprised the Galilee. The Central Front, under the Lebanese officer Fawzi Qawukji, included the rest of the country except the Negev (the Southern Front), theoretically under the Egyptians, and the Jerusalem area, which was under 'Abd al-Qadir Husayni's command.

D. Armored Cars and Tanks

The Jews have a large number—in the hundreds—of armored cars, some of British manufacture and others made in Palestine. They are using armored cars intensively in almost every battle, in patrols, in protective convoys and communications. They also have a not insignificant number of light tanks, mostly made in Palestine (tractors converted into tanks). They have made only light use of them so far, but our guerrillas saw them in action when the Jews attacked Faluja and destroyed a number of buildings.⁶ The latest reports indicate that the Jews have 150 armored cars and 100 tanks in Tel Aviv alone.

A response, not
offensive attack

As for us, we have neither armored cars nor tanks and not a single antitank or antiarmor weapon.

The ready availability of such weapons to the Jews and their total unavailability to our side have begun seriously to affect the activities of the volunteers and the guerrillas. This lack has particularly affected the morale of the civilians in our cities and villages, such that we are being deluged by appeals for help from everywhere.

E. Aircraft

That the Jews have aircraft has been established beyond a doubt. We do not know their precise number or their makes: What we do know is that they purchased twenty-one aircraft from the British army,⁷ and it is not far-fetched to believe that they have others as well. Up until a short time ago, they were using these planes for communications and reconnaissance. Recently, however, they have fitted the planes with machine guns and are using them to attack the guerrillas from the air. Still, their use in combat remains very limited at present, a fact that we attribute to Jewish fear of British intervention.

III. Capabilities and Morale

A. Jewish Forces

We have not yet been able to assess the Jewish forces' level of training and fighting capability, as our forces have not yet engaged them in wide-scale battle. However, it is clear beyond a doubt that several thousand fighters among the Jewish forces have served in European armies and the U.S. armed forces. Moreover, several years ago, the Jews began giving intensive military training to their young men. It would thus be foolhardy to underestimate their training and capabilities. Furthermore, they have demonstrated an excellent capability in demolition, which requires precision and technical expertise.

Concerning Jewish morale, events indicate so far that it is not high and that Arab morale is better in terms of courage and valor (except for a few Jewish ter-

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6. On 14 March 1948, Haganah armored cars attacked Faluja, a village in southern Palestine some 40 kilometers northeast of Gaza, killing thirty-seven villagers and demolishing a number of buildings, including the municipal building and post office.

7. These light Auster planes were purchased in early January 1948.

Falujah was a response to Arab attacks and a siege on nearby Jews. On loc.gov, search for "Falujah" in the Washington Evening Star newspaper of March 15, 1948.

rorists whose convictions make them impervious to the fear of death in the pursuit of their objectives).⁸

B. Our Forces

The level of training among the volunteer units is less than middling, and their fighting capabilities are low due to the dearth of officers: some units and subunits are commanded either by retired officers or youths or noncommissioned officers. Furthermore, military discipline is very weak, as can be expected among units composed of volunteers who do not feel bound by rules and regulations and who are not subject to the punishment that would be normal in regular armies.

As to the guerrillas, whether full-time salaried fighters or those participating on an occasional basis out of a sense of patriotic duty or under the force of necessity or circumstance,⁹ they have no military capability.

Nonetheless, morale in both the volunteer units and the guerrilla groups can be said to be good, seeing as the Arabs still tend to look down upon and depreciate the Jews. The Arab sense of patriotism also makes them courageous in battle. Otherwise they would not have been able to hold out against the deadly weapons of the Jews.

IV. Military Plants, Workshops, and Maintenance Facilities

The Jews have many factories of various sorts where they manufacture armored cars, light tanks, small arms ammunition, mortars, and spare parts for all their weapons. They also have numerous fully equipped maintenance facilities for their vehicles and weapons, which are run by engineers, technicians, and skilled workers.

Our side has nothing of the sort, not even a single small repair shop. At the moment, we are using repair shops belonging to the Syrian army to make necessary repairs, but this entails considerable difficulties, especially in terms of transporting weapons and vehicles back and forth from Palestine to Damascus. This involves loss of time and delay of operations.

V. Transport

There is no comparison between the numerous means of transport available to the Jews and our own meager and weak capabilities in this domain.

VI. Reserves and Reinforcements

A. If the Jews declare a general mobilization of all males and females between the ages of eighteen and fifty-five, they can mobilize a large reserve force in Palestine, especially in view of the fact that most Jewish immigrants are able-bodied young men, the proportion of children or old people among them being

8. Before the launching of Plan Dalet in early April 1948, fighting had gone relatively well for the Palestinian guerrillas, who appeared to have the upper hand on the interurban roads and in the countryside.

9. Palestinian townsmen and villagers often joined the fighting near their homes on an improvised and voluntary basis, returning home after each engagement.

8. Elsewhere he tries to argue that Plan D was about conquest and here the truth slips out that it was a necessary, wartime response.

small.¹⁰ Considerable reinforcements are available to the Jews from overseas, particularly from Cyprus¹¹ and the Black Sea Coast¹² and various countries of Europe and the Americas, where tens of thousands of would-be immigrants are waiting impatiently for the day to immigrate and are totally prepared to do so at the first opportunity.

The Jews can also bring large quantities of arms and equipment including heavy arms, aircraft, and tanks into Palestine within a very short period if the embargo is lifted. If they are free to import what they need, they can do so with the help of the influence of world Jewry and the vast sums of money at their disposal. Even at present, despite the arms embargo and all the restrictions and obstacles in their path, they are able to use their wide influence and their excellent capabilities to continue to smuggle arms and equipment into Palestine. The shipments that were discovered and confiscated in America, France, and Iran are only the tip of the iceberg.¹³

B. Considering the difficulties we experienced in enlisting a few hundred Palestinian volunteers, and given that a not insignificant number of those receiving training ran off to join on their own the forces that were entering Palestine,¹⁴ and given that others rebelled before completing their training and returned to where they had come from, it is clear that we have no hope of recruiting large numbers of Palestinian volunteers even though the Arabs in Palestine far outnumber the Jews.

As for the Palestinian guerrillas who have enlisted on the basis of regular pay and certain conditions,¹⁵ they are more numerous and it is easier to recruit them, but they are of limited usefulness within a narrow sphere. And even these guerrillas do not number more than a few thousand, if one sticks to facts rather than fanciful exaggerations.

As for the volunteers from the various Arab countries, it is possible to recruit, though with some difficulty, a few thousand more on condition that we obtain the necessary arms and means to train and equip them. It should be borne in mind,

10. Haganah had organized the movement of illegal immigrants since the mid-1930s. As of the partition plan, its criteria for their selection, as spelled out in the official *History of the Haganah*, was that they be "young and ready upon disembarkation at Tel Aviv to join immediately the combat units of Haganah" [*Toldot HaHitmadvut* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Publishing, 1983), p. 1463].

11. It was to camps in Cyprus that the British navy transferred the illegal Jewish immigrants taken off the vessels they intercepted en route to Palestine. At the end of 1947, some 35,000–40,000 were interned there.

12. On New Year's Day, 1948, 15,000 illegal Jewish immigrants from Romania were brought to Farmagusta on board the *Pan York* and the *Pan Crescent*. These two ships, intercepted by the British, had sailed from the Bulgarian port of Balçik on the Black Sea. Safwat probably had this case in mind.

13. For the American shipment, Safwat is probably referring to the discovery on 3 January 1948 of 65,000 pounds of TNT destined for Haganah being loaded aboard a Palestinian-bound freighter at a Jersey City pier.

14. Many Palestinian volunteers, not wanting to wait for orders, left the training camp early to join ALA forces sent into Palestine.

15. Principally, that they serve in their own regions of Palestine.

"if"

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however, that the volunteers and guerrillas need a large number of officers to lead them. So far, we have not been able to obtain more than a very small number of officers, mostly from the Syrian army.

So much for personnel.

With regard to arms and equipment, the situation is far worse, and there is even more cause to expect failure and disappointment. The Arab countries have so far not delivered what they promised in terms of arms and equipment, even though the quantities set were for emergency aid only, not as arms sufficient for sustaining long-term combat.¹⁶

Concerning arms purchases from overseas, we have not received a single delivery as yet, and, considering the numerous obstacles in the way, we have no idea how successful our contacts have been and when any deliveries can be expected. In this connection, we must stress what we said before, that the quantity of ammunition available to us is about to run out given the daily consumption in the constant battles. Unless we take the necessary measures immediately, the inevitable result will be catastrophe.

VII. The Situation of the Jewish Colonies

It has become clear that all Jewish colonies, large and small, are well fortified. They are surrounded by barbed wire and strong emplacements. Many of them have bunkers for mortars and machine guns and are strongly defended. Events have shown that it is impossible to overcome and occupy the colonies with light arms. Furthermore, the proximity of these colonies to one another, the communication links between them, and the possibility of their rescue with armored cars and Jewish lorried forces make it impossible to isolate and besiege them individually. Finally, British army units tend to intervene quickly whenever the situation of any particular colony becomes critical.

They aimed to harm Jewish residential areas.

VIII. The Situation of Our Garrisons

We have established static garrisons in the cities where the danger is greatest. However, these garrisons are conspicuously weak everywhere, particularly since, possessing only antiquated rifles and hand grenades and a few machine guns each, they come under attack from Jewish armored cars, mortars, and machine guns. I am dubious about their capacity to hold out against attack from the Jewish forces, which are superior both in equipment and in numbers, were it not for the British units that intervene whenever battles intensify and fighting reaches a certain level.

IX. The Internal Situation in Palestine

A. As we made clear in our memorandum 7/S of 11 March 1948 addressed to your Excellency, there are armed forces and groups in various parts of Palestine that have no contact with the General Command. The commanders leading these

16. Quotas set by the Military Committee for rifles, for example, were 2,000 each for Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, and 1,000 each for Transjordan and Lebanon. By 8 February 1948, neither Saudi Arabia nor Transjordan had delivered a single rifle, Egypt had delivered 300, Iraq 1,260, and Lebanon 550. Only Syria had fulfilled its full quota of 2,000.

groups have not communicated with headquarters and do not recognize it, claiming to have been appointed by a certain party and insisting that they take orders only from that party.¹⁷ These groups are using force to compel people to recognize them and to obey their orders and wishes.

This situation has led to a rise in factionalism and local alliances among Palestinians and has pitted them against one another. The latest reports indicate that some Palestinians are arming not to fight the Jews but to prevail over their Arab opponents or to defend themselves against those Arabs they consider their enemies—and this at a time when there is the most pressing need for unity and for the closing of ranks. *

We have exerted every possible effort and shown all forbearance and tolerance in trying to end this painful situation, but all our efforts have been futile. Thus the situation is worsening and becoming more alarming each day, and its continuation will surely lead to the gravest consequences and the worst possible outcome.

B. Differences among Palestinians and the increasing factionalism among them have facilitated the spread on a wide scale of certain rumors that are not compatible with the interests of Palestine. It cannot be excluded that these rumors may lead to the actual intervention of certain parties,¹⁸ which will pose dangers to the General Command and create problems from which only the enemy will benefit.

Note: We hope that the agreement recently reached [with Hajj Amin] that all guerrilla forces be placed under the General Command will, if carried out in good faith, address these potential dangers and lead to unity and solidarity.

X. Comparative Summary

It is clear from the above comparison that the Jews at present enjoy significant superiority over us in terms of manpower and arms. This being the case, the following question comes to mind: Why have not the Jews embarked on wide-scale operations and struck as hard as they could at the Arabs, considering that they have the forces necessary to do so?

I believe the answer can be summarized as follows:

1. Despite the fact that skirmishes and battles have begun, the Jews at this stage are still trying to contain the fighting to as narrow a sphere as possible in the hope that partition will be implemented and a Jewish government formed; they hope that if the fighting remains limited, the Arabs will acquiesce in the fait accompli. This can be seen from the fact that the Jews have not so far attacked Arab villages unless the inhabitants of those villages attacked them or provoked them first.¹⁹ *

2. Their fear of the intervention of British forces prevents them from using large forces or heavy arms on a wide scale.

3. The Jews expect that—following the end of the Mandate, of course—the Arab countries will mobilize large forces to wage major battles and significant op-

17. Hajj Amin al-Husayni.

18. Safwat was most probably referring to King Abdallah of Transjordan, whose relations with Hajj Amin were exceedingly strained.

19. This is inaccurate, as is clear in Safwat's own report (section II.D above).

**It is accurate (and from Khalidi's perspective, merely one exception).
See note at bottom of p. 4 (66).**

erations. They therefore consider it to be in their interest to save the strength of their basic forces for the anticipated battles.

In addition to the above considerations, the position of the Jews has not become critical yet, and their military position does not require resort to significant force.²⁰

This is the situation at present. Nor is there anything to indicate that our side will have superiority in the days and months ahead unless the regular armies of the Arab states intervene with the full force of their armaments and equipment. The last five months have amply demonstrated that if we continue to operate on the current scale, we will remain weak and allow the Jews to retain their vast superiority. This becomes very clear if we consider what the Jews are receiving and can expect to receive from overseas in terms of unlimited reinforcements and aid, as we pointed out in an earlier report and in Section VI above. At the same time, the current situation seems to indicate that the Arab states will continue to limit their support and assistance to the level they have provided to date, which is insignificant in view of the severity of our situation and the reality that faces us.

XI. The Current Military Situation

It is our duty not to be complacent or rely on what is being reported in the Arab press, which amounts to charlatanism and wildly exaggerated claims. Despite the fact that the Jews have only used a small part of their forces, the operational initiative lies with them in most parts of Palestine. Our relatively stronger garrisons in Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Haifa are strictly on the defensive, and I doubt their ability to hold out against the Haganah, which is being held back only by fears of British intervention. As for the other smaller garrisons, they can be easily overrun if attacked by large Jewish forces. This weakness of our garrisons is not due only to the small number of fighters defending them, but also to the inadequacy of the weapons—a few old rifles of various makes and a very small number of machine guns—and the shortage of ammunition.

As for our forces deployed in various other regions, they do not have sufficient strength either in numbers or in weaponry to be able to undertake any serious action on a large scale, and they have restricted their activities so far to surrounding and harassing some of the colonies.

Although deployed, it is doubtful that these forces will be able to undertake any serious or significant actions as long as they are so short on arms and officers.

XII. Conclusion

A. Our forces in Palestine—whether trained volunteers or armed Palestinian guerrillas—cannot achieve a decisive military victory. All they can do is prolong the fighting for a certain period in accordance with the reinforcements they receive and the arms available to them.

20. Safwat could not foresee that the Jewish forces would go on the all-out offensive before the end of the Mandate, as they did within less than two weeks of this report, when Plan Dalet went into operation on 5–6 April 1948.

See bottom of p. 5 (67), and see site page for more evidence that Plan D was a necessary, wartime response to the Jews being on the verge of losing to Arab aggression.

B. Preventing the formation of a Jewish government and compelling the Jews to submit to Arab demands requires a force at least equivalent to their own. And that is impossible, given the level at which we are operating.

C. We are still of the opinion, which we expressed previously, that if we wish to achieve a decisive military victory, the regular armies of the Arab states must intervene in the fighting with the full force of their armaments and equipment.

D. The regular Arab armies have many logistical deficiencies. Unless these shortcomings are promptly addressed and mobilization takes place forthwith, they will not be ready to act when the Mandate expires, and we will lose the race against time, as we have lost it in the past.

[signed]

Ismail Safwat

Major General

Commander in Chief of the Palestine Forces

G.O.C. (general officer commanding), Military Committee