FIGHTING IN PALESTINE IS THUS FAR INDECISIVE
By HANSON W. BALDWINSpecial to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
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First Three Weeks of Conflict Show Military Limitations on Both Sides

By HANSON W. BALDWIN
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WASHINGTON, June 5—After three weeks of fighting since the British vacated their mandate, Arab and Israeli forces still appear to be jockeying for position. Raids by land and air, desultory shelling and sporadic fighting extend from the Negeb area to Galilee, but neither side has won decisive victories and a full trial of strength has not occurred.

The past three weeks of fighting have, however, revealed strengths and weaknesses on both sides. The Arabs have demonstrated, as expected, an initial advantage in artillery, light armor and in aircraft and they have shown aptitude in severing or harassing Israeli communication lines—particularly the isolated tracks to the Jewish agricultural settlements in the Negeb Desert area in the south—and the vulnerable Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road.

Arab Legion's Strength

The Trans-Jordan Arab Legion has proved to be, as was forecast, both spearhead and backbone of the Arab forces, and it has shown capacity for sustained offensive operations—even for street fighting, a form of warfare to which Arab talents are not well suited.

The Trans-Jordan forces, organized in one motorized infantry division, two independent infantry brigades, two armored car squadrons, one artillery regiment and one company each of engineer, signal and service troops, number, however, only about 8,000 regulars, and probably no more than 5,000 or 6,000 of these are in Palestine.

The Iraqi forces, second in efficiency to the Trans-Jordan Arabs—but well below the Legion's standards of efficiency—add only 2,000 men to the Arab strength in Palestine.

Egypt, with two brigades of about 8,000 men, and an original total, three weeks ago, of some 150 planes of miscellaneous types, is about third in efficiency of the Arab armies.

Syria and Lebanon, with 4,000 or 5,000 men and thirty-two pieces of artillery between them, have shown limited efficiency and none too much stomach for fighting. All these forces are reinforced by about 13,000 Arab irregulars.

The Arab weaknesses in the first weeks of fighting, therefore, are rather clear. The Trans-Jordan Legion is an efficient fighting force, fairly comparable to the Haganah's best, but it is far too small to conquer the new state of Israel alone.

The shifts of the Legion from one important strategic point to another in the first weeks of fighting showed clearly it was bearing the brunt of the fighting, and only where the Legion was engaged could the Arabs chalk up fairly important successes.

Advantage Compensated

Moreover, the initial Arab advantage in artillery, planes and light armor was gradually being compensated. The five states of the Arab League that participated in the thrusts into Palestine could muster between them three weeks ago a grand total of only 160 planes, forty-nine light tanks, 250 armored cars and 140 pieces of artillery ranging in size from 75 mm. to 105 mm. Some of these have been destroyed or captured in the fighting, and the Arabs have virtually no reserves either of equipment or ammunition.

The Israeli forces, on the contrary, have fairly sizable ammunition reserves and are rather well supplied with small arms, machine guns and light mortars. Moreover, the Israeli forces probably are commencing to receive equipment from outside the country; in fact some limited supplies of munitions, it is believed, already have been shipped from Czechoslovakia to both sides.

The Israeli forces unquestionably have superior discipline, combat experience—and except for the Trans-Jordan Legion, officered in part by Britons—superior leadership. They were initially weak in planes, but the Israeli air force—composed largely of trainers modified for bomb-carrying, and some old fighters—has been increasingly active. Both sides may suffer shortages of gasoline and petroleum products, and Israel—because of the Arab evacuation of coastal cities—faces a definite labor shortage and the problems that large population migrations bring. The Israelis have one other major weakness: they are largely settled in urban communities that depend in part upon the Palestinian countryside, vulnerable to Arab raids, for water and for some food.

Israeli Forces Larger

Nevertheless, as the first three weeks of war ended, the Israeli fighting forces—some 42,000 strong in full-time, trained personnel, bolstered by about 50,000 part-time militia—were still superior in numbers to the 33,000 to 43,000 Arab regulars and irregulars in Palestine. The Haganah, too, had by no means committed all its reserves. For that matter, neither had the Arabs, but the three weeks' fighting indicated that the main strength of the best of the Arab forces—the Trans-Jordan legion—probably was almost fully engaged in Palestine.

The most dramatic and conspicuous Arab success has been the capture—after a protracted struggle—of the Old City of Jerusalem, coupled with the continued blockade of the entire city. The Arabs have been strong enough to maintain an intermittent but generally effective series of road blocks along the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road from Latrun to Bab el Wad.

The Arabs appear also to have made at least one raid into the Israeli coastal strip near the town of Natanya.

No serious attempt—except for the Egyptian approach in the south, which seems more of a gesture than a threat—has been made by the Arabs, however, to penetrate the Israeli coastal citadel, which extends from Isdud to Acre. The ports of Tel Aviv, Jaffa and Haifa are still functioning, despite attempted "blockades."

The Israeli forces, on their part, have not only made good their defense of coastal Israel. Even the isolated settlements in the Negeb, far to the south and almost hopelessly cut off from succor by Arab guerrillas, apparently are still holding out.

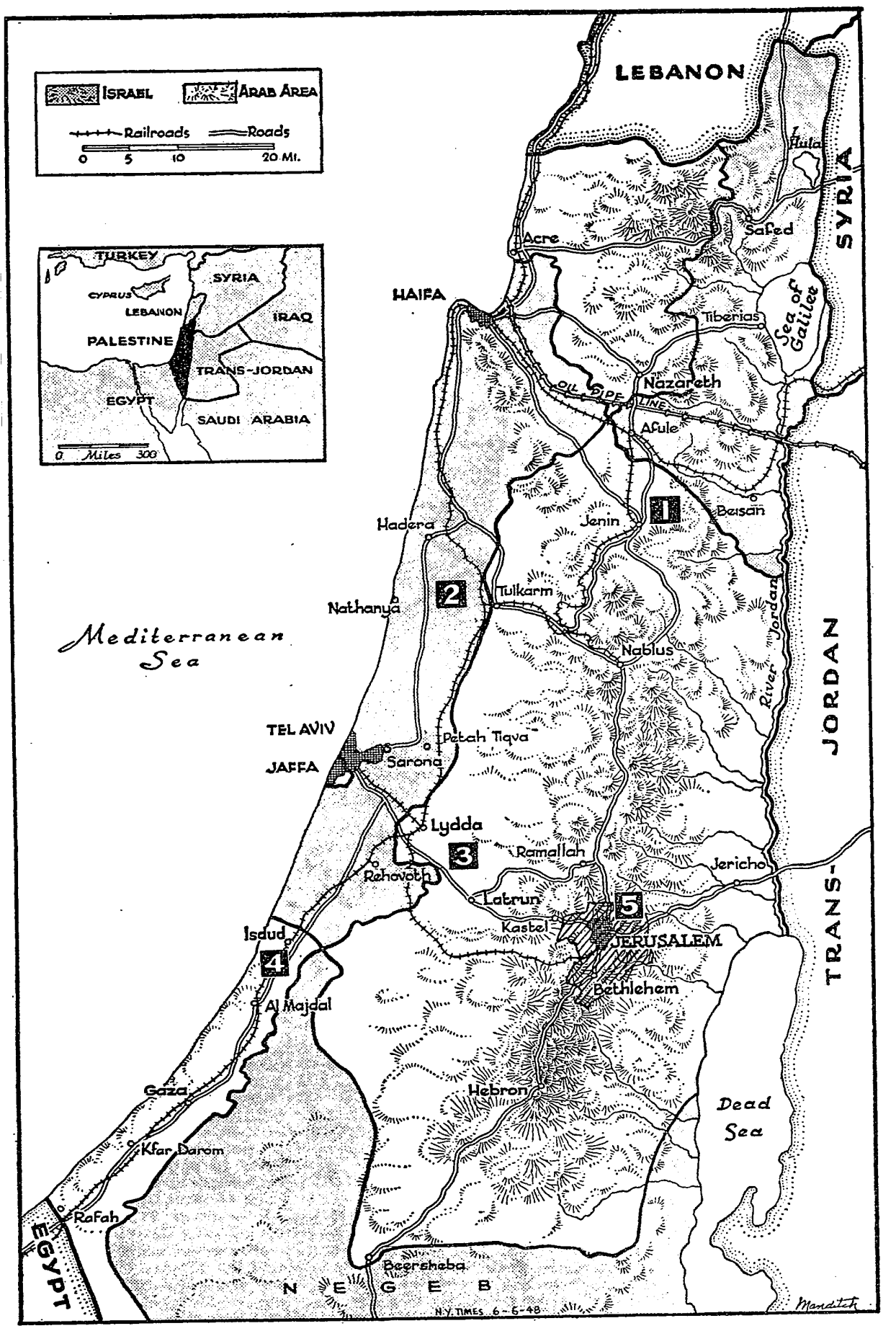
In the north, Israeli troops have thrust out into the so-called Arab triangle and have repulsed Syrian and Lebanese attempts to conquer Galilee.

Except for Jerusalem — where sizable Israeli forces still retain control of major portions of the new city—there have been, therefore, no major successes by either side. The Arabs have taken over chiefly areas that Israel made no serious attempt to defend—mostly in Arab Palestine. The new state of Israel has been blooded, but except for the Negeb and Jerusalem its boundaries are largely intact.

As yet the strategic goals of the two sides—except for control of Jerusalem—are not fully apparent; and, indeed, strategy may change if fighting goes on.

The great question posed at the present time is, therefore, the question of whether or not the blood-letting of the past three weeks has been enough to convince each side of the futility of further fighting. A test of strength has been made; blood has flowed, but there has been no knock-down, much less a knockout. If each side is satisfied that ultimate stalemates, despite initial victories, will be the final result, fighting may cease; otherwise more blood-letting is likely.

MAJOR BATTLE AREAS IN THE PALESTINE WAR



Fighting has been mainly in areas indicated by numbers on map. Israeli troops have struck hard at northern apex (1) of Arab concentrations in the Jenin-Tulkarm-Nablus region, while Arabs have tried to penetrate to coast from Tulkarm (2). Most important battle has been in Latrun-Lydda sector (3) for control of Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road. Egyptians are engaged in Isdud region (4). Israel still holds most of Jerusalem (5) though Old City and much of proposed international area (shaded) are in Arab hands.

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