War Again
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Arabs Fight Israel

The U. S. S. Marquette steamed slowly out of Haifa harbor last Thursday night. She was evacuating United Nations truce observers from Palestine.

Shortly after dawn on Friday Egyptian planes bombed Tel Aviv, capital of the State of Israel.

The war in the Holy Land—after an uneasy four-week truce—was on again.

That war had started on May 15—the day the British relinquished their League of Nations Mandate over Palestine, the day the Jews proclaimed their State of Israel. It had begun when armies of the Arab League attacked in Palestine. Then, on June 9, the United Nations got the Arabs and Israel to issue a cease-fire order. During the weeks of the truce, U. N. representatives tried to work out a permanent solution for the Holy Land. They failed—as those before them had failed for thirty years.

Up to last night no major military offensives had yet been reported. There was speculation that big powers might be putting pressure on both sides for a settlement.

In the Palestine fighting so far neither side has gained a decisive victory. These are the opposing forces and the positions they hold:

Arabs: Altogether there are 33,000 to 35,000 Arab troops in Palestine. The crack striking force is King Abdullah's Trans-Jordan Legion. It has 8,000 to 10,000 well-disciplined, well-equipped troops. Second in efficiency are the 2,000 or so Iraqi troops; third are the 8,000 Egyptian forces. The Syrian and Lebanese forces and the Arab irregulars are reported to be of "indifferent quality."

The Trans-Jordan Legion has occupied the territory in and around Jerusalem. Its apparent aim is to blockade the Jewish road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and cut off the 103,000 Jews in the Holy City. Iraqi troops north of Jerusalem in the vicinity of Jenin and Tulkarm are aiming at the coast—to force a wedge between Israel's two ports, Tel Aviv and Haifa. Egyptian forces at the southern end of the coastal plain have a double goal: to drive north to Tel Aviv and to isolate the Jewish settlements in the southern Negeb.

Israel: The State of Israel has more than 40,000 seasoned first-line fighters, plus about 50,000 "second-line, static defense" troops. They are believed to be well supplied with small arms, machine guns and light mortars, may also have a handful of fighter aircraft and one or two B-17's.

Israeli Positions

The bulk of the Israeli forces are stationed inside the new state. Apparently the army's immediate goals are to keep the Jerusalem road open, to turn back the Egyptians in the south, and to strengthen its hold over Western Galilee in the north.

The war between these forces is being fought over one fundamental issue—the State of Israel. The Arabs insist they will never make peace as long as Israel exists. They demand further that no more Jewish immigrants be admitted to Palestine. Israel insists it will never make peace unless its sovereignty is maintained intact.

It is this issue, more than any other, that is behind the U. N.'s failure to achieve a settlement in the Holy Land. The U. N. Mediator for Palestine, Count Folke Bernadotte, had tried hard during the four-weeks truce. Operating out of his headquarters on the Island of Rhodes in the Dodecanese, Count Bernadotte flew some 14,000 miles through the Middle East to confer with Israeli and Arab officials. He made numerous visits to Cairo in Egypt, to Tel Aviv and Haifa in Israel, to Amman in Trans-Jordan and to Beirut in Lebanon. He held meetings with Arab and Jewish "technicians" in Rhodes.

Two weeks ago the Count submitted a plan to Arab and Israeli authorities. It would have created a federal Palestine composed of semi-autonomous Arab and Jewish "members." Under it a joint Arab-Jewish Council would have exercised some control on immigration into the Jewish area. Eight days ago both Arabs and Israel rejected it. The Arabs objected primarily to an implied recognition of Jewish autonomy. Israel objected primarily to the limitations upon its sovereignty.

Truce Extension Urged

It was then too late to draft another plan before the truce expired. The only hope was to persuade both sides to extend the truce.

Last week the hope collapsed.

On Monday from Rhodes Count Bernadotte sent an urgent appeal to Arabs and to Israel for truce extension. In Cairo the military committee of the Arab League said no.

On Tuesday Bernadotte cabled the U. N. Security Council to try to get both sides to extend the truce.

On Wednesday the Security Council met at Lake Success. After an all-day discussion it sent its own appeal to the Arab League and to Israel.

On Thursday Israel said yes. The Israeli Government cabled the U. N. that it would "accept prolongation of the truce for thirty days." The Arab League said no. The Security Council met in emergency session. The American and Soviet delegates warned they would urge the Council to take strong measures. American delegate Dr. Philip C. Jessup said the Arabs were provoking a situation—"the gravity of which cannot be overemphasized." Soviet delegate Andrei A. Gromyko said the Arab purpose was "to wreck the decisions of the United Nations." The Syrian delegate, Faris el Khouri, replied "The Arabs are ready to be killed by your atom bombs."

On Friday, from Rhodes, Count Bernadotte made another appeal to both sides. He asked the Arab countries and Israel to accept a ten-day cease-fire and announced that he would fly to Lake Success to discuss his peace efforts with the Security Council tomorrow. There were some indications that Trans-Jordan favored accepting the cease-fire.

Yesterday Israel said she would agree to the ten-day truce. Arab sources said the Arabs would keep fighting.

Thus, at the week's end, the Palestine problem was back where it was when the truce began. The U. N.—and the great powers—again are faced with critical decisions.

Inside the U. N. most of those in favor of strong U. N. action base their argument on Chapter VII of the U. N. Charter. That chapter gives the Council power to call on U. N. members to invoke economic sanctions and—if sanctions don't work—to use military force to stop an aggressor. Last May 29 the Council said it would consider action under Chapter VII if either the Arabs or Israel ignored its cease-fire order. Whether the Council will now invoke sanctions is still highly uncertain. Any formal proposals to do so seem certain to start a great debate.

Big Power Positions

Outside the U. N. the positions taken by two great powers—the United States and Britain—can have a fundamental effect on Palestine's future.

The United States was the first country to recognize Israel. In Washington one school of thought holds that the Administration should now help Israel out by lifting the seven-months-old embargo on shipment of arms to the Middle East.

Another school, however, cautions the Administration against making moves that would antagonize the Arab world—and perhaps lead the Arabs to cancel oil concessions.

Great Britain has close ties with the Arab Governments—and the question is how she will use her influence in the Middle East. Last week there were signs that the British may have reached important decisions. For example, one London source said that the British were almost sure to recognize Israel—eventually at least. There were reports that the British were putting pressure on the Arabs to call off the fighting.

At any rate it seemed clear last week that—unless the U. N. or the big powers acted—the decision on Palestine would come on the battlefields.

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