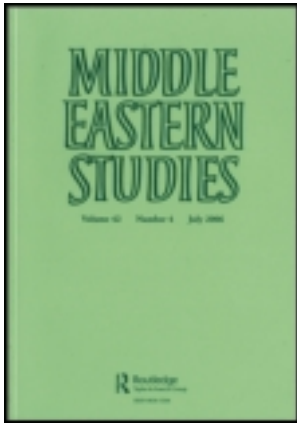


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# The Arab States and the 1948 War in Palestine: The Socio-Political Struggles, the Compelling Nationalist Discourse and the Regional Context of Involvement

MICHAEL EPPEL

On 29 November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly decided to accept the proposal of the partition of Palestine between the Jews and the Palestinian Arabs and to establish two separate states within an economic union. The resolution signalled the beginning of a violent struggle between local and irregular Palestinian Arab forces, reinforced by the 'Army of Salvation' (*jaysh al-inqadh*), a contingent composed of volunteers from various Arab states organized under the auspices of the Arab League, and the forces of the Jewish settlement in Palestine. The Arab states vehemently rejected the UN partition decision and unequivocally and verbally declared their commitment to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. The invasion by the Arab states was justified by their principled objection to the partition of Palestine and the founding of a Jewish state in Palestine. The military intervention by the Arab states opened the second stage of the war in Palestine. On 15 May 1948, the day after the establishment of the State of Israel, the new state was invaded by the regular armies of five Arab states: Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

However, the moves leading to the military involvement of the Arab states in the Palestine war deserve an additional comprehensive examination in the wider context of the socio-economic conditions that prevailed in the Arab states after the Second World War and the conditions in the inter-Arab arena.<sup>1</sup> Most of them dealt with the issue of Zionist–Jordanian–British relations, and with the question of whether there was collusion, agreement or conspiracy between the Zionists and the Jewish *Yishuv* (settlement) and King Abdallah of Transjordan, with a view to dividing up Palestine and avoiding the establishment of a Palestinian state, or whether all that existed between them was some sort of non-obligatory, vague understanding or simply a convergence of interests. They also focused on the debate concerning the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem.

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of the socio-political conditions that prevailed in the Arab states after the Second World War and the conditions in the inter-Arab arena.

The purpose of this article is to examine the domestic socio-political struggles, the compelling nationalist discourse in the Arab states, mainly in Egypt and Iraq, and the interaction of that discourse with the regional inter-Arab relations that led the Arab states to war against Israel in May 1948.

During the Second World War, the national status and prestige of the central politicians in Iraq, Syria and Egypt were undermined. Politicians from the mainstream of the ruling conservative elite in Iraq who had built their prestige and legitimization through nationalist anti-British positions and slogans chose to cooperate with Britain during the war in face of the pro-German anti-British Rashid Ali movement in Iraq in 1941. After the defeat of the Rashid Ali movement and the Iraqi army officers, the British returned the elite politicians and the Regent, Abdul-Ilah, who had remained loyal to Britain, to power in Baghdad. Their return to power with British assistance severely damaged their nationalist image and their prestige.<sup>2</sup> Nuri al-Said and other mainstream politicians, whose political status and legitimacy were founded on their nationalist image and positions, were now viewed by the *effendiyya* as a corrupt bunch of pro-British lackeys. Although Rashid Ali was a member of the conservative ruling elite, and the nationalist officers under al-Sabbagh were also related to that elite, after 1941 they were regarded by the nationalist mainstream of *effendiyya* as national heroes and the 'Rashid Ali movement' (*Harakat Rashid 'Ali*) entered the nationalist discourse as the popular nationalist uprising suppressed by British colonialism supported by the local collaborators, the ruling elite and the Hashimites.

In Egypt the main nationalist force, the *Wafd* party, whose socially conservative leadership held the banner of the anti-British nationalist struggle from the inception of the party in 1919, in 1942 was compelled into cooperation with Britain. On 4 February 1942, fearing pro-German tendencies, the British forced King Farouk to appoint Mustafa al-Nahas, a leader of the *Wafd* party, as prime minister. Notwithstanding their status as the main nationalist force and Britain's principal opponents in Egypt, the British believed that al-Nahas and the heads of the *Wafd* were committed to the values of liberalism and anti-Fascism and to the parliamentary legislative system, and understood that the fate of the entire elite and the regime in Egypt now depended upon Britain. The blow to the prestige of the *Wafd* helped to undermine the faith of *effendiyya*, the modernized, educated or half educated urban middle class, in the entire political establishment, and increased political unrest. King Farouk, who had been forced to give in to the British demands, was now perceived as weak and spineless.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of the Second World War, the ruling political elites and the rich upper classes in Egypt, Iraq and Syria faced an economic crisis and severe social unrest, which threatened the stability of their regimes and their interest in preserving the socio-political status quo. Their conservative worldview made it difficult to provide a response to the economic, political and ideological distress of the expanding *effendiyya*, and of the large strata of peasants and urban poor. Poverty, illiteracy,

unemployment, the rising cost of living, the unavailability of basic food items to the poor, and the difficult living conditions that plagued the majority of the population required a series of wide-ranging changes: agrarian reform, accelerated modernization and industrialization. All these were possible only in context of far-reaching political and social reforms. Such reforms demanded change of the socio-political status quo and constituted a threat to the interests of the upper social class and the ruling elites based on them.

Throughout the war years, the economies of both Egypt and Iraq considerably expanded. The presence of hundreds of thousands of British troops and the inability to bring in supplies from Great Britain created large numbers of jobs in the army camps and in various industrial sectors that manufactured supplies for the army. At the same time, food consumption by these vast forces created shortages of many commodities and led to a rise in the cost of living, and especially in the prices of basic foodstuffs. This gave rise to the outbreak of local riots among the poor of Cairo and other cities during the war years.

Between 1939 and 1946, the cost of living in Egypt increased by 196 per cent, while salaries rose on average only by 113 per cent.<sup>4</sup> Between 1945 and 1948, though prices stabilized, unemployment increased against the background of the economic slowdown.<sup>5</sup> (This was a recurring trend: as early as the 1920s and 1930s, although Egypt's population increased by 25 per cent, the consumption of grain, meat, coffee and textiles actually fell.) In Syria as well, the cost of living increased by 390 per cent during the Second World War.<sup>6</sup>

In Iraq, the cost of living rose by 495 per cent between 1939 and 1945.<sup>7</sup> Prices of basic foodstuffs increased even more, by 525 per cent. The cost of living continued to rise until 1948, reaching a level of 573 per cent, and food prices increased by 705 per cent.<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding the increased salaries of the civil servants (government employment at the time represented the largest single source of income for members of the *effendiyya*), by 140 per cent to 359 per cent as a function of grade between 1939 and 1948, the actual value of salaries was significantly eroded.

In 1944, Britain began to reduce the size of its military forces in the Middle East. This reduction led to the dismissal of hundreds of thousands of workers who had been directly employed by the British army, or who had worked in small and medium-sized plants that had been set up or expanded to meet British needs in Egypt, Iraq and Palestine. In 1943, the British directly employed 263,000 Egyptian workers.<sup>9</sup> In addition, there was a large number, which cannot be readily estimated with any degree of accuracy, of workers in factories and workshops. By 1946, as a result of the reduction of the British forces, between 200,000 and 250,000 Egyptian workers had lost their jobs.<sup>10</sup> The dismissals primarily affected workers from the poorer classes, many of whom had recently migrated from the villages, but also merchants, craftsmen and clerks who had been employed by, or had produced goods on behalf of, the British forces. In Iraq, the number of persons employed by the British army fell from 70,000 in 1943 to 30,000 in 1946. Between 1945 and 1948, the number of industrial workers declined by an additional 45,000.<sup>11</sup>

Social changes accelerated but there was no change in the basic structure of the economy, agriculture or land ownership. The political elites, representing the conservative interests of the higher stratum of landowners, prevented the advancement of land reforms and did not succeed in accelerating industrialization. In Iraq, 1 per cent of the landowners owned more than 55 per cent of cultivated land. By contrast, 73 per cent of the *fellahin* owned less than 6 per cent of the land, and some were landless.<sup>12</sup>

In Egypt, the great majority of the rural population lived in shocking poverty. Approximately 1.5 million *fellahin* were landless and about 72 per cent of landowners held less than one *fedan* each and lived below the poverty line. In contrast, some 2,100 landowners, representing approximately 0.1 per cent of the landowning population, held areas of more than 200 *fedan* each, and 188 of them owned more than 1,000 *fedan* each.<sup>13</sup> Most of these big landowners lived in the cities, where they constituted the backbone of the regime and a part of the ruling class. True, there was a thin layer of wealthy commercial and industrial bourgeoisie in Egypt; many of them, however, came from large landowning families and were connected to the conservative interests of the landowners.

The feelings of frustration and ferment among the poorer classes and the *effendiyya* were intensified by the widening economic gap between them and the upper class consisting of the ruling elites: senior bureaucrats and politicians (some of them had come from higher echelons of *effendiyya* who had climbed up the bureaucratic ladder), large landowners, rich merchants and a few factory owners. The latter enjoyed prosperity during the Second World War and accumulated considerable assets, only a small part of which was utilized as capital and invested in industrialization and development. Most of the money went to the purchase of real estate and the support of an extravagant and wasteful lifestyle.

After the end of the Second World War, strikes and labour disputes in both Egypt and Iraq increased considerably. The troubled labour relations stemmed from the deterioration of the standard of living, as well as from the increased activity of Communist activists and young activists from the legal parties (the *Wafd* in Egypt and the National Democratic Party and *al-Istiqlal* in Iraq), who were more radical than their party leaders. The number of strikes in large workplaces, such as the port of Basra in Iraq and the facilities of the IPC (Iraqi Petroleum Company), increased after 1945.<sup>14</sup> Some of the strikes developed into violent riots. During a strike by IPC workers in Kirkuk in June 1946, the police opened fire on strikers and ten people were killed.<sup>15</sup>

The social force that played a central role in political unrest in Egypt, Iraq and Syria consisted of educated young people, the *effendiyya*, and particularly students at universities, colleges and high schools. This segment, which continued to grow and expand with every graduating class, was characterized by political awareness and a readiness to take up political struggles, especially under the banner of nationalism. The population of Iraq in 1948 included more than 28,000 students in high schools and colleges, more than 60 per cent of whom were in Baghdad.<sup>16</sup> Egypt, at the same time, had 19,000 students in institutions of higher education, the great majority of whom were in Cairo and Alexandria (Egypt's second secular university was established in 1942). The number of high school students in Egypt reached 75,000 in 1945.<sup>17</sup>

This large number of students in Cairo, Baghdad and Damascus led to the continued expansion of a modern, Western-educated middle class, whose members suffered from identity crises, conflicting values and frustration due to un-realized expectations. All three states faced increasing difficulty in finding suitable employment for their graduates within the framework of the bureaucratic system and the civil service. The number of clerks and teachers in Iraq increased from 10,000 in 1930 to 18,000 in 1948; the number of policemen rose from 7,000 to 25,000 during the same years. This growth in the number of civil servants imposed a heavy burden on the government budget.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, as a result of the poverty that affected the majority of the rural population and the urban lower classes, very few of them required the services of members of the modern professions: doctors, lawyers, engineers and so forth. This reality constituted an additional obstacle to the creation of jobs for members of the *effendiyya* who had acquired higher education.

Population growth and urbanization were creating demographic pressures in the large cities. Worsening economic distress and widening socioeconomic gaps provided fertile ground for ferment and unrest among the urban poor. Subject to the influence of Communist activists, some younger members of the *effendiyya* had developed some social sensitivity but they did not develop class-consciousness. However the intensity of the frustrations brought on by modernization, confusion over identity, and enmity toward Britain and France led to the dominance of the nationalist component in the ideological trends and discourse.

Channelling the unrest of the *effendiyya* in nationalist directions was a useful tool of the socially conservative politicians who were worried by the leftist orientation of social change, which constituted an explicit threat to the socio-political status quo, as well as to the status of the politicians and the ruling elites. The Palestine question as the symbolic nationalist issue was the channel into which the elite politicians could direct the increasing unrest.

Following the Second World War, Egypt's national demands on Britain were the focus of public awareness and of political struggles. Egypt demanded the withdrawal of British military forces from Egypt, the evacuation of the Suez Canal area and its return to Egyptian control, unification of the Sudan with Egypt, and abrogation of the British–Egyptian treaty of 1936, which had left Britain with powers that restricted Egypt's independence. The combination of opposition to British dominance and exacerbation of economic distress and unemployment among the poor, as well as the frustration of the job-seeking *effendis*, led to an increase in both political and social unrest. While the nationalist struggle against Britain and the demands regarding Sudan and the Suez Canal had been the most important points on the political agenda in the area since the 1930s, now, on the level of domestic politics, the Palestine question became interwoven into that agenda. The involvement of Egypt in the process of establishing the Arab League and the increasing trend toward Arab identity within Egypt gave rise to the increased influence of the Palestine question on Egyptian politics, as an expression of anti-British militant nationalism and of Arab-Egyptian national identity among the younger members of the *effendiyya*.

Throughout the 1930s and the 1940s, the *Wafd*, the main nationalist force, was embroiled in a growing conflict between the conservative social attitudes of its leading politicians, and the increasing socioeconomic needs and distress of the

middle and poorer classes, whose solution necessitated fundamental change and radical reform.<sup>19</sup>

The ideological orientation of the *Wafd* was basically nationalist, secular, liberal and Egyptian territorialist. However, from the late 1930s and in light of the reinforcement of the pan-Arab trends in the ideological climate and nationalist discourse, the *Wafd* increased its preoccupation with relations with the Arab world. Following his return to power in 1942, *Wafd* leader Mustafa al-Nahas attempted to improve his nationalist image and reclaim his own status and that of his party by calling for regional activity in the inter-Arab arena, with a view to giving Egypt the role of the leading Arab state.

The *Wafd* was challenged on the one hand by the leftist inclinations among the young *effendiyya* and on the other by the Islamist ‘Muslim Brethren’ movement (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*). This movement, under the leadership of Hasan al-Banna, was characterized by radical Islamist ideology that flourished among the urban poor during the early 1930s, and had occasionally received assistance from the Palace, which sought to support a force that could compete with the *Wafd*. Initially, it was a social and ideological movement. However, in the climate of political radicalization of the mid-1930s, the Muslim Brethren became a political force.<sup>20</sup> The activity of the Muslim Brethren between 1936 and 1939 was influential in the dissemination of awareness of, and identification with, the Palestinian Arabs among the public and in the political arena.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the Palestine question was an important lever in the transformation of the Brethren into a political force.

Toward the end of the Second World War, when the struggle against the British was renewed, the *Wafd* was at an extremely low ebb. Its image and the nationalist legitimization of its leadership had suffered severe damage, and its rivals – the Muslim Brethren, Young Egypt (*Misr al-Fatat*), a right-wing group with fascist inclinations, and two parties that had split from the *Wafd* – enjoyed increasing success. In this state of affairs, the Old Guard of its leadership adopted a populist slogans and positions in order to preserve the party’s status in the streets and especially among the students and younger members of the *effendiyya* and the discontented working class. During and after the war, a leftist wing, the *Wafd* Pioneer (*al-Tali’a al-Wafdiyya*), developed among the young activists of the *Wafd*. Its members were influenced by Communist activists and adopted radical positions, which embarrassed the leaders of the *Wafd*, but were nonetheless useful in helping that party preserve its influence among the students and younger members of the middle class.

In October 1944, as part of his strategy, King Farouk dismissed the Wafdist Prime Minister Mustafa al-Nahas. The governments from then until 1947 were formed by the bitter rivals of *Wafd*.

In 1945, the *Wafd* took an initiative that prompted the government and the Palace to place the matter of the withdrawal of British forces and the future of Sudan on the public agenda. In a letter to the British ambassador, written in June 1945, *Wafd* leader Mustafa al-Nahas presented the Egyptian demands: complete evacuation of the British forces from Egypt and unification of the Nile Valley – that is, in practical terms, Egyptian control of Sudan.<sup>22</sup> This move was intended to restore the *Wafd* to its position of national leadership and to rehabilitate its status among the *effendiyya*.

In an attempt to stop the pressure exerted by the *Wafd*, Al-Nuqrashi turned to cooperation with the Muslim Brethren. This required the adoption of a strong

nationalist position with regard to Britain and the Palestine question. On 2 November 1945, the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, the Muslim Brethren and the young members of the *Wafd* organized a mass demonstration accompanied by a general strike. Prominent among the speakers at the demonstration was the leader of the Muslim Brethren, Hasan al-Banna. In order not to lose control of the situation, al-Nuqrashi came out with a forceful statement emphasizing the government's commitment to the Arab struggle for Palestine. While the leadership of the *Wafd* continued its attacks on the government regarding Egyptian–British relations, the government began to use the Palestine question to enlist the support of the public in general and in particular of the young people, the nationalists and the increasingly militant Muslim Brethren. Starting at the beginning of the 1945–46 academic year, the students' anti-British demonstrations and riots increasingly assumed the nature of a threat to the government and the ruling elite. As a result of a new wave of riots which broke out in February 1946, and against the background of a split in his government, al-Nuqrashi was forced to resign.<sup>23</sup>

King Farouk assigned the formation of a new government to Ismail Sidqi, both because of his image as a 'strong man' capable of coping with the political, economic and social crisis and in order to prevent the *Wafd* from forming the government. In Egyptian public opinion, Sidqi was perceived as having authoritarian and anti-democratic tendencies; he had been responsible for suspending the constitution and parliamentary life during his previous term in office as prime minister in 1930. Along with these tendencies, however, Sidqi, who was connected with Egyptian industrialists, aimed to achieve accelerated development, industrialization and modernization in Egypt. He considered increased regional cooperation in economic matters an important Egyptian interest. Within this framework, he sought to bring about a solution to the Palestine problem, and thus to enable economic cooperation between Jewish settlement in Palestine (and the future Jewish state) and Egypt and the other states in the region, while maintaining cooperation with Britain. Throughout 1946, Sidqi's government had to deal with demonstrations, some of which were organized by *Wafd* activists to undermine the government and prevent any agreement with Britain without the involvement of the *Wafd*.<sup>24</sup>

Sidqi sought to reach an agreement for the evacuation of the British forces from Egypt, even at the price of concessions concerning Egyptian control of Sudan. In this way, he hoped to stabilize the political situation by defusing the nationalist and Islamic forces, which had placed the struggle against the British at the centre of the political arena. An agreement for British evacuation was intended to help rehabilitate the status of the regime and the elite and to help ensure assistance for the development and industrialization of Egypt.

In November 1946, Sidqi and British Foreign Minister Bevin agreed on the draft of the new treaty, in which Britain promised to withdraw its forces from most of Egypt's territory. However, the question of control of the Suez Canal and the future of Sudan remained unresolved. The issue of 'unity of the Nile Valley' – that is, the future of Sudan – became a symbolic, emotionally charged issue for the politically aware segments of the Egyptian public. The *Wafd* and the Muslim Brethren stirred up a wave of demonstrations and riots, which led to the fall of Sidqi's government in December 1946.<sup>25</sup> The *Wafd* and the Muslim Brethren exploited Britain's unwillingness to meet the Egyptian demands in order to torpedo the treaty by exerting

pressure on public opinion. The *Wafd* leadership was sucked in by the nationalist trends among the students and the young party activists, who were organized in the 'Executive Committee of Labourers and Students' – an entity under the influence of the *Wafd* Pioneer. The young radical members of the *Wafd* cooperated with both the Communists and the Muslim Brethren – the latter within the framework of an organization known as the 'National Front of Nile Valley Students'. The populism of the *Wafd* leadership reflected the profound internal contradictions that beset the politicians and the old guard of the elite, which could not provide a response to the distress of the *effendiyya* and the poorer classes, but nonetheless needed their support.

The activity of the *Wafd* Pioneer, Young Egypt and the Muslim Brethren among the students and in the streets placed extreme pressure on the governments, which were incapable of any achievements, either on the economic level or in the negotiations with Britain. Fahmi al-Nuqrashi's second government, established in February 1947 following the rejection of the draft treaty with Britain and Ismail Sidqi's resignation, was subject to heavy nationalist pressure on the domestic front and reached an impasse in its relations with Britain on the international level. The impasse brought matters between the two states to an all-time low. In July 1947, Egypt brought the dispute with Britain before the United Nations, hoping in that way to obtain broad international support.

The *Wafd's* position regarding the Palestine question was influenced by the need to preserve its nationalist image as well as by practical considerations of the political struggle against the Palace, the Muslim Brethren and the British. While, for the Muslim Brethren the struggle in Palestine represented a vital front in the Islamic struggle against British imperialism, heresy in general and Zionism in particular.<sup>26</sup>

In view of the competition with the Muslim Brethren, Young Egypt for influence among high school and university students, the *Wafd* could not permit itself to lag behind on such a stirring nationalist theme. Its radical activists became involved in activities related to the Palestine question and impelled the leadership of the party to adopt a uniform line on that issue. This competition between the two major opposition forces increased the influence of the Palestine question on domestic politics and made it much harder for the government and the politicians to maintain moderate positions.

The veteran politicians – prime ministers Sidqi and al-Nuqrashi (both rivals of the *Wafd*), the *Wafd* leaders who sought to enlist public support through populist means and the heads of the parties that seceded from the *Wafd* – all became embroiled in the vicious cycle of fomenting unrest among the students and the working class. The *Wafd* leaders, attempting to appear as the central national force, were dragged into outbreaks of violence. Forced to adopt a uniform stance and keep pace with nationalist slogans, they were unable to maintain any kind of pragmatic policy. Politicians from the conservative elite, incapable of bringing about reform or coping with socioeconomic problems, sought to find a way out of the entanglement with Britain; they manoeuvred around the radical forces in an attempt to exploit the unrest in the streets and channel it in directions convenient for them. In so doing, however, they became virtual prisoners of those forces, fanning flames that they found harder and harder to control.

The politicians from the ruling elite in Iraq who had built their prestige and mobilized the support of the nationalist public opinion, mainly the *effendiyya*, by demonstrating their nationalism became discredited and lost their status as the result of their return to power in 1941 with the help of Britain after the defeat of the pro-German Rashid Ali movement that was perceived as popular and genuinely nationalist. Among the *effendiyya*, the prevailing opinion was that the state was controlled by a bunch of corrupt reactionary politicians who were loyal to Britain and feared to give up the economic and political advantages enjoyed by the elite and the ruling class.<sup>27</sup> The shortage of jobs for secondary school graduates, the slim chances for personal advancement and the economic difficulties provided fertile soil for reinforcement of the nationalist, pan-Arab and anti-British trends and the strengthening of leftist tendencies of the young *effendiyya*.<sup>28</sup>

The political unrest among the *effendiyya* in the large cities and the strengthening of the nationalist and leftist forces made the Regent and the elite politicians more dependent on the support of the conservative tribal landowners, who objected to agrarian and political reforms. The alliance between the ruling elite – most of which was urban Sunni Arab (although its members owned extensive areas of land outside the cities) – and the major tribal landowners, both Shiites and Sunnis, strengthened after the suppression of the Rashid Ali revolt in 1941, which had been supported by army officers and the *effendiyya*.<sup>29</sup>

The exacerbated social and political tension in Iraq had an economic and ideological background. Iraq's economic situation did not improve after the Second World War. Between 1946 and 1948, Iraq was beset by an economic crisis, which reached its peak in the autumn and winter of 1947–48.<sup>30</sup>

In the nationalist ideological climate that prevailed in Iraq, even those politicians who preferred to focus on promoting the solution of domestic problems, and whose basic orientation was Iraqi-territorialist rather than pan-Arab, chose to show their nationalism through extreme statements and activity on behalf of the Palestine question. The importance and the binding nature of the Palestine question motivated even those whose opinions of Zionism were usually moderate, such as Kamil al-Chaderji, to show nationalist resolve with regard to the Palestine question, in order to preserve their credibility in the eyes of the *effendiyya*.<sup>31</sup>

In 1937, while serving as minister of economics in the Hikmat Sulayman government, al-Chaderji had held talks with Zionist emissaries, in which he had expressed a sympathetic attitude to the Zionist endeavour and a desire to learn from it and to achieve reciprocal cooperation. Now, however, against the background of the social and political ferment within Iraq, and considering the weight of the Palestine question in the nationalist political climate, his National Democratic Party sought to keep pace with the pan-Arab nationalist *al-Istiqlal* and the militant statements by government spokespersons, and increased its activity with regard to the Palestine question. Political activists and party heads lent their efforts to a series of activities, demonstrations, meetings and appeals on behalf of Palestine.<sup>32</sup> Party members in cooperation with Communist activists, some of them Jews, founded the Anti-Zionist League, whose role was to combat Zionism.

The tensions concerning central issues of the Arab arena: the question of Syria, the impasse in relations between Egypt and Britain, and the Palestine question, escalated in the course of 1947. Starting at the beginning of that year, tension focused on Syria

increased as a result of Abdallah's intensive activity directed at bringing Syria under Transjordanian rule. The alliances between Transjordan and Turkey (January 1947) and between Transjordan and Iraq (April 1947) were viewed by the Syrians as tightening the ring which was intended to subjugate Syria to Hashimite rule under Abdallah. In January 1947, tension between Transjordan and Syria increased as a result of efforts by the Damascus government to impose Syrian sovereignty on Jabal Druz (Druze Mountain) in southern Syria and thereby to undermine the status of the al-Atrash clan, which was considered Abdallah's ally. In March, the Transjordanian consulate in Damascus was closed by the Syrian authorities, after thousands of flyers calling for the unification of Syria and Transjordan under the Hashimite Crown were found in the building. As a result, the Transjordanian consul was expelled from Syria. In May, Transjordan published the 'White Paper of Transjordan' (*al-Kitab al-Abyad al-Urduni*), which contained the historical justification for Abdallah's rule over United Syria.<sup>33</sup>

In the summer, Abdallah increased his pressure on Syria, following the disappointment he experienced when most of the candidates who were considered his supporters failed to obtain seats in the elections to the Syrian parliament. After representatives of the al-Atrash clan in the Jabal Druz area, who enjoyed a close relationship with Abdallah, won a number of seats in the parliament, Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatli cancelled the elections in the mountain district. In response, and in order to exert pressure on al-Quwatli, the Druze tribesmen disconnected the telephone lines and blocked the roads leading from Damascus to the mountain. The heads of the al-Atrash clan appealed to Abdallah and Britain, proposing the annexation of Jabal Druz to Transjordan.<sup>34</sup> In August, Abdallah wrote to the Syrian leaders, asking them to meet with him concerning the proposed unification, and appealed to the citizens of Syria over the heads of their state, calling for unification with Transjordan.<sup>35</sup> In view of the pressure from Abdallah and the fear that Hashimite Iraq and Transjordan would cooperate with Britain against him, President al-Quwatli sent a secret message to Saudi Arabian King Ibn Saud with a proposal for Syrian-Saudi cooperation against Abdallah. Parallel to the increasing friction in the relations between the Hashimite states and Syria and Saudi Arabia, tension rose in the relations between Egypt and Britain.

Following the failure of the London Conference on Palestine, which was convened by the British and continued at intervals throughout the autumn and winter of 1946-47, British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin, on 18 February, announced Britain's decision to bring the Palestinian question before the United Nations for decision. At a meeting of the Arab League Counsel on 23 March 1947, differences of opinion were revealed. Iraq expressed its objections to the settlement of the Palestine question by the UN, claiming that the Zionist influences in the United States and the weight of the US in the UN were likely to give rise to a situation where the results of the deliberations would favour the Jews. At the same meeting, the prime minister of Transjordan announced that his country reserved the right to act as it saw fit in order to preserve the Arab nature of Palestine.<sup>36</sup>

On 31 August 1947, UNSCOP (the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine) published a report that included a recommendation for the partition of Palestine into two states: one Jewish and one Arab (while retaining the economic unity of Palestine). Immediately after the publication of the report, Iraq's prime

minister, Salih Jabr, launched an initiative for an urgent meeting of the prime ministers of the Arab states in order to discuss the Palestine question. By raising that initiative, Jabr sought to emphasize Iraq's status as the leading Arab state. At the same time, by placing the Palestine question on the agenda of the Arab world, he sought to put a stop to the crisis, which Iraq found embarrassing, that Abdallah had precipitated concerning Syria. Jabr's activism and militancy also stemmed from domestic Iraqi considerations. By means of intensive activity and a show of militancy on the Palestine question, he was attempting to build himself a pan-Arab nationalist image and to create conditions that would enable him to sign the new treaty with Britain.

In the summer of 1947, Salih Jabr, the first Shiite prime minister in Iraq, encountered a series of tensions and pressures, both in the inter-Arab arena and within Iraq. In the inter-Arab arena, the tension created by King Abdallah, Iraq's Hashimite ally in matters concerning Syria, embarrassed Iraq and adversely affected its status. In the domestic arena, he was unceasingly harried by other elite politicians, because of both his reformist tendencies and his close relationship with Nuri al-Sa'id. Although he belonged to the ruling elite he was opposed by many as Shiite. On the economic level, Iraq's constantly exacerbating economic crisis and acute shortage of food required the economic assistance of Britain.<sup>37</sup>

From the beginning of his term in office, in April 1947, Jabr sought to reach an agreement concerning a new treaty with Britain, under which Iraq would receive military and economic assistance, which was vital to the reinforcement of its regional and inter-Arab status and would relieve its domestic economic distress. Jabr hoped that, by signing a new treaty which would ensure economic and military aid while reducing the British presence in Iraq, he would gain status and prestige as the senior Iraqi politician in the eyes of both Iraqi nationalists and the British. The crisis and the impasse in Egyptian-British relations were viewed by Jabr as an opportunity to formulate a new treaty with Britain. However, in view of the anti-British nationalist sentiments in Iraq, an agreement concerning a new treaty that would not answer all of the Iraqi nationalist demands was a difficult and sensitive matter.

Notwithstanding his indifferent, instrumentalist attitude toward the Palestine question, he chose, in the autumn of 1947, to exhibit an extremist attitude as a means of concealing his intention of signing a new treaty with Britain. Thus, the dynamics of the Iraqi political arena and the status of the elite politicians, in view of the socio-political unrest of the middle class, constituted the background for the increasing force of the Palestine question as a domestic political issue.

The UNSCOP Report and the increasing tension concerning the Palestine question gave Jabr a chance to prove his national leadership on a sensitive issue fraught with pan-Arab nationalist symbolism. At the conference of heads of Arab states, held on 16 September 1947 in Sofar, Lebanon, on Jabr's initiative, Iraq expressed extreme positions with regard to the Palestine question and demanded the activation of the secret resolutions that had been adopted at the Bludan Conference in June 1946, calling for preparation for military intervention in Palestine. Jabr was aware that his proposal would be rejected by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, so that Iraq would not have to bear the consequences of activating the Bludan resolutions concerning petroleum, which would have dealt a serious blow to Iraq's relations with

Britain. This was the stand taken by Iraq at all of the inter-Arab conferences in the autumn of 1947 – in Sofar on 16–19 September, in Aley on 7 October, and in Cairo in December. At each of these conferences, Iraq adopted extreme, militant positions and demanded the launching of military preparations.

A no less militant position, though based on other motives, was taken by Syria. In fact, immediately after the Aley Conference, Syria dramatically concentrated 2,000 troops on the Golan Heights. In actual fact, President al-Quwatli and the heads of the regime sought to avoid invading Palestine with regular military forces. The Syrian army was extremely weak and not capable of summoning up more than 4,000–4,500 troops. However, in contrast to the Iraqi extremism, which was intended to give it the leading role in the Palestine question and to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state headed by the Hashimites' enemy, al-Haj Amin al-Husayni, Syria sought to view the Arab League as the entity in charge of assisting the Palestinian Arabs and preventing an invasion by regular armies. Accordingly, Syria was a fervent supporter of the establishment of the 'Army of Salvation' (*jaysh al-inkadh*) and the activation of volunteers and regular forces under the supervision of the Arab League. Iraq and Transjordan took pains to ensure that the commander of the 'Army of Salvation' would be Fawzi al-Qawuqji, who was acceptable to Abdallah, and that the supervisor of the force on behalf of the Arab League would be Taha al-Hashimi, a former Iraqi prime minister and chief of staff. As far as Syria was concerned, the establishment and activation of the 'Army of Salvation' would be the ideal way to prevent an invasion by regular armed forces and a Hashimite takeover of parts of Palestine, as a preamble to taking over Syria.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast to the extreme militant positions exhibited by Iraq and Syria, Egypt took a more moderate line, seeking to prevent the exacerbation of the Palestine conflict and its exploitation by the Hashimites. Abdallah's takeover of the Arab portions of Palestine would be counter to Egyptian interests.

Egypt had got itself into a difficult situation. On one hand, it sought to preserve its leading position in the Arab League and the Arab world, which was vital, from its point of view, in light of its debate with Britain. On the other hand, it wished to avoid any exacerbation of the tension surrounding the Palestine question. This tension served its Hashimite adversaries, who sought to undermine Egypt's position and to reinforce their own status as leaders in the central Arab struggle.

In the autumn of 1947, tension increased in the political arena in Egypt, and the Muslim Brethren and young members of the *Wafd* and its left wing redoubled their efforts on the Palestine question. Egyptian Prime Minister al-Nuqrashi sought to reinforce his own position by verbally emphasizing his militant stance on the Palestine question. Placing the Palestine question on the public agenda was also intended to make it difficult for the *Wafd* to raise the questions of Egyptian–British relations and the treaty between Egypt and Britain. The government supported the opening of recruiting offices by the Muslim Brethren for the establishment of the Liberation Battalion, which was planned to go into action in Palestine. In the autumn of 1947, al-Nuqrashi could allow himself to take this stand, because he believed the possibility that war in Palestine would require the involvement of the Egyptian Army to be unreasonable. Nonetheless, in the inter-Arab arena, the government of Egypt, together with that of Saudi Arabia, continued to pursue a moderate line, which sought to prevent war in Palestine and to leave the matter to

political handling of the Arab League. At the meeting of the Political Committee of the League in Aley, in October 1947, al-Nuqrashi expressed his opposition to the invasion of Palestine by regular forces, noting that Egypt would not participate in the war in Palestine as long as its struggle against Britain was still going on.<sup>39</sup> At the next meeting of the Committee in Cairo, in December 1947, Egypt supported the Palestinians and objected to the Hashimite positions, which aimed to ensure Abdallah's takeover of parts of Palestine and to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.<sup>40</sup>

Notwithstanding the similarity between the extreme positions adopted by Iraq and Syria, there was a common interest shared by Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia in blocking the Hashimites and frustrating Abdallah's plan to take over parts of Palestine through an understanding with the Jews.

On 29 November 1947, the UN General Assembly passed the partition resolution that divided Palestine into a Jewish and a Palestinian Arab state. All the Arab countries rejected the idea of partition and publicly, formally and unequivocally ruled out the establishment of a Jewish state. The definitive public position, which ruled out the partition of Palestine and saw partition as opposed to basic Arab interests and to Palestinian Arab interests in particular, gave rise to the impression of a monolithic stance adopted by the entire Arab world against partition. Scrupulous examination of the positions on the decision-making level, however, reveals a much more complex picture, fraught with contradictions.

Notwithstanding their official positions opposing the partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state, it was not partition per se that worried Abdallah and many of the Syrian, Egyptian and Iraqi politicians, but rather the future of the Arab portion of Palestine. This was the point at which the contrast and contradictions between Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia, on one hand, and the Hashimite states and their rulers, on the other, were expressed. All of the players, however, faced domestic social and political unrest and feared the consequences of the establishment of a Jewish state for their internal political arenas and their own nationalist image and status.

In fact, a significant number of Arab politicians spoke out as becoming resigned to the partition of Palestine and were even, under certain conditions, resigned to the establishment of a Jewish state. Some went so far as to express a positive view of the advantages that could be achieved by their own countries, through cooperation with a Jewish state in Palestine. Eliyahu Sassoon, a member of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, believed that, among the leaders and politicians of the Arab states, there were many who were prepared to consider the partition plan, and that the definitive rejection of the plan stemmed from a dispute with regard to the future of the Arab portion of Palestine.<sup>41</sup>

The two Arab rivals whose mutually exclusive interests would not be harmed, and could be served, by the partition of Palestine were Transjordan and Egypt. It was not the partition of Palestine that ran counter to the interests of the rulers of Transjordan and Egypt, but rather the fate of the Arab portion. The conflict between Abdallah and Egypt focused on the question of whether an independent Palestinian state would be established, in line with Egyptian interests, or whether Transjordan

would annex those parts of Palestine that were designated to become an Arab state. Egypt's main concern was the possibility that Transjordan would annex part of Palestine and, with the cooperation of the Jewish state and the British, would come to dominate Syria.

As early as 1944, Abdallah had raised the possibility of partitioning Palestine, so that the Arab portion would be annexed to Transjordan under his rule, and the other part would house a Jewish state which, at a later stage, would join a federation consisting of Transjordan, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. This position, in various versions, constituted a basis for proposals raised by Abdallah and his representatives in talks with Zionists in 1945, during the summer and autumn of 1946 and throughout 1947–48.<sup>42</sup> Basically, Abdallah preferred that all of Palestine be united with Transjordan under his rule; however, from pragmatic realistic considerations, he was ready to consent to partition, provided that the Arab portion be annexed to Transjordan. He believed that in such a case, the Jewish state would extend over only a small part of the territory, and the majority of Palestine would be under his rule.<sup>43</sup> In talks which took place in August 1946 between Eliyahu Sassoon and King Abdallah, an understanding was reached to the effect that the solution of partition and annexation of the Arab portion to Transjordan would serve the interests of both parties. The understanding, however, remained unwritten in consideration of the political obstacles, and primarily of the binding weight of the collective Arab position, which ruled out any solution involving partition. As long as the polarization of the inter-Arab arena persisted and all the Arab states and their rulers were committed to their objection to the partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state, even if only within a small portion of Palestine, Abdallah could not allow himself to publicly support any agreement with the Zionists.

Egypt was the dominant force in the Arab League, which adopted resolutions utterly ruling out the partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state. Nonetheless, many of its central politicians did not object to the partition of Palestine, or even to a Jewish state, provided that Abdallah and the Hashimites would not take over the Arab portion and that relations between Egypt and the Arab world would not be broken off. Among these politicians were prime ministers Ismail Sidqi and Fahmi al-Nuqrashi, Arab League secretary Abd al-Rahman Azzam, and Muhammad Husayn Heikal, president of the Senate.<sup>44</sup> Thus, for example, at a meeting with Eliyahu Sassoon in August 1946, Sidqi said, 'There is no point in discussing a Jewish state in all of Palestine; but there is definitely a point in discussing partition, a national state, a federal state'. In the course of that visit to Egypt, Sassoon also met with Abd al-Rahman Azzam, secretary of the Arab League, who told him, in a definitive manner, that the only solution to the question of Palestine involved partition, but clarified that he himself could not initiate such a proposal, although he would support it if it were to be brought before the Arab League by another Arab state. Azzam may have been waiting for a British initiative, which would be accompanied by British support of Arab demands for the independence of Libya and the North African states.

Azzam's rigorous opposition to partition resulted from his viewpoint as secretary of the Arab League. As such, he sought to secure a unified Arab position and to refrain from undermining the balance of forces in the Arab world, which would

undoubtedly have been the case if Abdallah were to take over the Arab portion of Palestine and a Jewish state were to be established in the other part. His loyalty to the Egyptian interest in preventing a Hashimite takeover of part of Palestine and his position as secretary of the League exerted a synergistic effect, thereby increasing his opposition to partition even further. Accordingly, Azzam attempted to prevent an all-out war and an invasion by regular armed forces, which, in practical terms, would have meant a takeover of the Arab portion of Palestine by Transjordan under Abdallah. In his attempt to avoid war, Azzam even tried to persuade the British ambassador in Cairo to have the British postpone their departure from Palestine.<sup>45</sup>

The leaders of the *Wafd* had opposed the partition of Palestine since the late 1930s.<sup>46</sup> This position by the *Wafd* leaders was a direct result of the strengthening of the Arab–Egyptian and pan-Arab orientation in Egyptian public opinion and in the *Wafd* itself. It also resulted from fear that, if partition were to be adopted, the Arab portion would be taken over by Abdallah. The strengthening of the Hashimites and the establishment of a large Arab state under their rule, east of the Sinai Peninsula, would be against the Egyptian interest of constituting the strongest force in the area. Moreover, the Egyptians also feared the possibility that Britain would take action to transfer the Sinai Peninsula to the Hashimite state, thus harming Egypt's position even further. In such a case, the Suez Canal would be transformed from an internal Egyptian waterway to an international waterway, thus weakening Egypt's position in its dispute with Britain over control of the Canal.

Syria, a weak state under pressure by Abdallah, adopted extreme positions, ruled out any possibility of compromise with the Zionists and objected to the partition of Palestine, whose implementation might have furthered a Hashimite takeover of Syria. The annexation of the Arab portion of Palestine by Abdallah was viewed by the Syrians as the first step in a series of moves coordinated with the Zionists and Britain, which was intended to establish Abdallah as the ruler of Damascus. The Syrian politicians, acting within an extremely complex political system, were also forced to show nationalist intransigence in order to preserve their own status. Following the UN resolution on partition, demonstrations broke out in Damascus that were exploited and fostered by radical political forces: the Muslim Brethren, the *al-Ba'th* Party, and even the government.<sup>47</sup> The leader of the Muslim Brethren in Syria called for the immediate initiation of recruitment of volunteers to fight in Palestine and the cancellation of all of the rights and franchises of the Western partners in the Arab states.<sup>48</sup> In actual fact, central Syrian politicians such as the nationalist leader from Aleppo, Sa'dallah al-Jabiri (d. 1946), President al-Quwatli, and even Prime Minister Jamil Mardam, considered the partition of Palestine as a possible and even reasonable solution. (As early as 1939, Jamil Mardam, one of the heads of the Nationalist Bloc and prime minister of Syria in 1947–48, stated in the course of a conversation with Eliyahu Sassoon that he did not consider the partition of Palestine as damaging to the Palestinians or to the Arab states.)<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, the need to show a nationalist position on the domestic front, combined with their fear of Abdallah and the Hashimites, led them to express definitive objections to partition.<sup>50</sup>

Iraq, the proponent of the most extreme position on the Palestine question, definitively opposed partition. Its leaders feared the establishment of a Palestinian state led by the Mufti, al-Haj Amin al-Husayni, which would rely on Egypt, and the

establishment of a Jewish state as part of an agreement between Abdallah and the Zionists, which would give rise to a wave of anti-Hashimite nationalism, thereby endangering the stability and the regime of Iraq.<sup>51</sup>

In February and March 1948, Nuri al-Said and Fadil al-Jamali, the proponents of pan-Arabism, who expressed extreme nationalist positions with regard to the Palestine question, tentatively explored the possibility of negotiations between King Farouk, King Abdallah and Syrian President al-Quwatli. Their intention was to reach a consensus on the Palestine question, whereby Egypt would recognize the annexation of the Arab portion of Palestine to Transjordan by Abdallah, and would reassure the Syrians that this move on Abdallah's part was not a prelude to taking over their country.<sup>52</sup> In actual practice, they were willing to accept the partition of Palestine according to an agreement between Abdallah and the Zionists, provided that Syria was left open for Iraqi activity.

Under the conditions which prevailed in the internal political arenas, the Palestine question was a means of showing nationalist intransigence and attacking any rival who dared to take a flexible position and thereby to deviate from the hard line against partition. The weakness of the politicians when faced with inflamed crowds in the streets, which reflected the weakness of the elites when faced with the nationalist *effendiyya* and the rivalry among the Arab states, forced the politicians to adopt positions that utterly ruled out partition. It forced them to comply with the extreme positions of the inter-Arab arena, which utterly rejected any solution involving the partition of Palestine and opposed any compromise or negotiation with the Zionists as a dogmatic principle.

During the winter of 1948, tensions in Iraq and Egypt reached unprecedented heights. Waves of political violence, riots, strikes and demonstrations rocked the regimes in Cairo and Baghdad and threatened to undermine the status of the ruling political elites and the higher socioeconomic strata. The socio-political unrest and the rise of tension in inter-Arab relations were central factors in the conditions under which Arab decision-makers operated in the months that preceded the invasion of Palestine by regular Arab armies in May 1948.

From mid-January 1948, Iraq had been caught up in disorder and confusion, and the regime and the ruling elites were forced to cope with a wave of violence and ferment that threatened their very existence. Jabr's rivals in the ruling elite resented him as both a Shiite and a protégé of Nuri al-Said, and the opposition parties – both those active within the framework of the regime, the National Democratic Party and *al-Istiqlal*, and the illegal Communist organizations – sought to exploit the situation in order to topple the government.

Jabr's efforts, starting in the autumn of 1947, to nurture the Palestine question as a smokescreen to distract the public, enabling him to sign a treaty with Britain, failed. His declared militant positions on the Palestine question only increased attention and unrest in the streets of Baghdad and amplified anti-British sentiments. On 6 January, Jabr travelled to Britain at the head of an official delegation to negotiate a new treaty between the two states. He hoped that Iraq would be the first Arab state to sign a treaty with Britain, which would remove some of the restrictions on Iraq's independence and satisfy the nationalists, but primarily obtain British military and

economic aid for his country. Economic assistance from Britain was essential to help Iraq cope with the economic crisis and accelerate modernization and economic development. The hoped-for military assistance was intended to reinforce the Iraqi army and to transform Iraq into the Western powers' most important ally among the Arab states. Attaining senior status for Iraq was intended to ensure the assistance of both Britain and the United States and priority over Egypt as the leading Arab state. On 15 January, the Iraqi delegation and British representatives signed in Portsmouth a draft treaty, through which Britain eliminated some of the restrictions on Iraq's independence, while retaining its military status and control of the bases in Iraq. In addition, Iraq was promised military and economic assistance.

On 16 January, with the news that a draft treaty had been signed the day before, the local clashes between striking college students and the police in Baghdad transformed into a violent outbreak of wide-ranging anti-British demonstrations given the name of *al-wathba*. Students in Iraqi colleges and secondary schools were now joined by masses of the urban poor, who suffered from profound economic distress. In the course of the attempts to suppress the riots and prevent any further demonstrations, the police fired into the crowd, killing and wounding many students. The streets and the bridge over the Tigris River, leading to the Palace, became the setting for dramatic bloody events. Upon Salih Jabr's return to Baghdad on 26 January, the riots intensified and the police lost control of the streets in the capital.<sup>53</sup>

The outbreak of riots was assisted by the activity of activists from *al-Istiqlal* and the National Democratic Party (both legal) and the Communists (illegal). Nonetheless, the scope, severity and duration of the riots were the direct result of the economic distress, often amounting to famine, among the poor, as well as of the nationalist atmosphere and unrest that had been mounting among the *effendiyya* since the autumn of 1947.

In the course of that year, food shortages in Iraq had become extremely severe. Following a period of drought and a plague of locusts, the wheat harvest had been reduced from 370,000 tons in 1946 to 235,000 tons in 1947.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the government continued to export barley and wheat because of its dependence on the big tribal landowners and the urban elite, who continually sought to obtain foreign currency. Famine set in among parts of the Iraqi population.<sup>55</sup> In 1947, the last of the British forces stationed in Iraq during the Second World War left the country, thus reducing Iraq's income even further. Economic distress moved the members of the poorer strata to join the demonstrations in Baghdad.

In the Palace and among the elite, which was shaken by the severity of the events, widespread panic arose. It was justly feared that a revolution could undermine the socio-political status quo, put an end to the regime and bring down the status of the ruling elite. Prominent central politicians identified with the regime and known to be pro-British, such as Nuri al-Said, fled Baghdad. The Regent, in an attempt to pour oil on troubled waters, announced the rejection of the draft treaty on 21 January, after consultation with a group of frightened politicians. Salih Jabr was dismissed. The tension in Baghdad, however, continued. Demonstrations and riots recurred from time to time in February, March and April, and the tension within the city persisted.

The Regent feared for his political status, and even for his life. He also feared that Nuri al-Sa'id, with British assistance, was plotting to overthrow him and replace him

with another member of the Hashimite family who could ensure stability.<sup>56</sup> Nuri, in fact, had proposed to the British that the Regent should be dismissed and exiled to Europe, and that Emir Zayd, then Iraqi ambassador to Britain, should be appointed in his place. (Emir Zayd was the brother of King Faysal (Iraq, 1921–33), King Abdallah (Transjordan, 1921–51), and King Ali (Hejaz, 1925–26).

After dismissing Jabr, the Regent appointed Muhammad Sadr as prime minister. Sadr, a veteran conservative Shiite politician, was favoured by some Shiites as a religious Shiite and a conservative, and by nationalists in Baghdad because of his role in the anti-British revolt of 1920. Sadr was now faced with the urgent tasks of calming the people and restoring order in daily life, overcoming the growing food shortages and rescuing Iraq's relations with Britain from the crisis caused by the frustration of the new treaty. The government had become embroiled in a monetary crisis and was having difficulty paying the wages of its civil servants and clerks.<sup>57</sup> This, in turn, exacerbated the unrest and ferment among the *effendiyya*. The severe shortage of food forced Sadr to ask Britain for urgent supplies.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, in order to counter the pressure to provide assistance to the Palestinian Arabs, Sadr announced the opening of recruiting offices for volunteers who were willing to go to Palestine. The activity by the political parties and preparation for the elections that were to take place in June increased the unrest and tension, which were exacerbated even further by the continuing economic crisis, food shortages and unemployment. The news from Palestine added to the unrest and exacerbated the anti-British and anti-Hashimite sentiments in the streets.<sup>59</sup> The Palestine question became an integral part of the ferment and the demonstrations featured the slogan 'Bread and Palestine'.<sup>60</sup>

In 1947, political and social unrest and tension in Egypt increased. There were frequent demonstrations, strikes and clashes between the police and striking workers, students and supporters of the Muslim Brethren. Due to the fear of riots and violence by students at the beginning of the 1947 academic year, the government surrounded the University campus in Cairo with police cordons.<sup>61</sup> In 1947, 137 strikes in large workplaces were officially declared.<sup>62</sup> Relations between the *Wafd* and the Muslim Brethren deteriorated, and both forces increased their competition for influence on the streets and among the *effendiyya*.<sup>63</sup> In preparation for the UN General Assembly session discussing Egypt's demands of Britain, a huge wave of demonstrations, organized by the Muslim Brethren and the *Wafd*, broke out in August.<sup>64</sup> The disappointment with the UN impasse and the failure to enlist the support of the organization increased frustration and anti-British feelings in Egypt and embarrassed the government even further. Against this background, interest in the UN deliberations on the Palestine question increased, and Palestine was envisioned as an additional front in the anti-British and anti-imperialist struggle.

The leader of the Muslim Brethren, Hasan al-Banna, sent a letter to the participants of the Arab League Conference in Aley in October, with a proposal to recruit 10,000 Egyptian volunteers from among the Muslim Brethren, who would fight the Jews and assist the Palestinian Arabs.<sup>65</sup> (Al-Banna also called for the dispatch of regular Arab armed forces, in contrast to Egypt's official approach).<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, the Brethren began to recruit volunteers for a *jihad* (holy war) in Palestine. In the winter of 1948, the members of Young Egypt added their efforts to the recruiting of volunteers.

Following the United Nations resolution in favour of partition, a chain of demonstrations began, which reached its peak in a vast demonstration in Cairo, with 100,000 participants.<sup>67</sup> The demonstration was organized primarily by activists of the Muslim Brethren and *Misr al-Fatat* acting within the framework of various front organizations, such as the 'Committee for Unity of the Nile Valley'. The effort to recruit volunteers for a holy war in Palestine were now joined by Salih Harb, leader of an Islamic organization, *Al-Shuban al-Muslimun*, and other personages, including the Arab League secretary, Abd al-Rahman Azzam. The intensive activity on the part of the Muslim Brethren left the *Wafd* in a delicate position. Its leadership preferred to focus the struggle on the attempt to topple the government and on bilateral Egyptian-British topics, primarily demands for immediate British withdrawal and for Egyptian control of Sudan. However, the success of the Muslim Brethren in their activity on the Palestine question put pressure on the *Wafd* to issue more forceful statements on this matter.<sup>68</sup> In March, the *Wafd* increased its activity aimed at overthrowing the government and encouraged students and young people on the streets to pay more and more attention to the Palestine question. The political tension and the atmosphere of violence were reinforced by assassinations and attempts on the lives of politicians and government officials, starting with the murder of Prime Minister Ahmad Mahir in January 1945 and continuing into 1947 and 1948. In April 1948, an attempt was made on the life of *Wafd* leader Mustafa al-Nahas, apparently by activists of the Muslim Brethren.

The pressure on the al-Nuqrashi government increased. The government, for its part, was incapable of extricating Egypt from either of two impasses: that of the domestic arena and that of Egypt's relations with Britain. In January 1948, Hasan al-Banna demanded that King Farouk dismiss the government.

Political friction also increased as a result of the new wave of labour disputes and strikes, which disrupted day-to-day life in Egypt during the winter and spring of 1948 and brought the country to the brink of anarchy.<sup>69</sup> In January and February, strikes broke out among Cairo's water and fuel workers. The strike by workers in the industrial centres of Mahalla al-Kubra and Kafr al-Dawar was renewed in February and continued into April. On 1 April, riots broke out at Alexandria University (which had opened in 1946), leading to the closure of the university. On 5 April, a violent strike broke out among male nurses and service workers in Cairo's hospitals.<sup>70</sup> In the same month, public transportation drivers in Cairo announced their intention of striking.

On 18 March, a labour dispute involving policemen flared into a general strike by the police. On 4 April, police at the strike headquarters in Alexandria barricaded themselves inside the Officers' Club and demanded the dismissal of the minister of the interior, wage rises and improved social benefits.<sup>71</sup> In view of the anarchy that prevailed in Alexandria, the government called in the army to suppress the police, but the army also reacted with visible discontent.<sup>72</sup> In March and April, Egypt was beset by a growing feeling of total collapse of public order, utter confusion and loss of control by the government.

King Farouk's status and image continued to deteriorate.<sup>73</sup> Various circles in Egypt began to cast doubt on the very existence of the monarchy. Exchanges of accusations between the Palace and Mustafa al-Nahas concerning an event which had taken place in 1942 – when the British forced Farouk to dismiss Prime Minister

Ali Mahir, who was suspected of being pro-German, and to appoint al-Nahas in his stead – added to the erosion of King Farouk's position.<sup>74</sup>

Against the background of his weakened status, King Farouk again increased his involvement in the Palestine question, as had occurred in the late 1930s, when he had needed to reinforce his position and his ties with the Muslim Brethren.<sup>75</sup> Following the dismissal of al-Nahas in October 1944, the king began to take independent initiatives in the inter-Arab arena, sometimes without coordinating them with the government or even over its head. The initiative to meet with Ibn Saud in the winter of 1945 was against the advice of Prime Minister Ahmad Mahir. Farouk's initiative to convene the kings and presidents of the Arab states in Inshas at the end of May 1946 was not coordinated with his government.<sup>76</sup> The same applied to the granting of political asylum to the Mufti of Jerusalem, al-Haj Amin al-Husayni, in 1945. The tension with regard to the Palestine question and its transfer to the United Nations for deliberation in March 1947 were exploited by Farouk, who needed involvement in regional Islamic and pan-Arab matters in order to acquire the status of a regional leader and to reinforce his rule on the home front. Starting in February 1948, Farouk's statements on the Palestine question became more extreme. When speaking with Western diplomats, he argued that because a world war between the West and the USSR was unavoidable, the West should make efforts to gain the friendship of the Arabs.<sup>77</sup>

In March and April 1948, the streets of Cairo, Alexandria, Baghdad and Damascus were filled with a sense of impending violence. The militant nationalist atmosphere prevailed in the streets, among the *effendiyya* and in the press, pushing for war.

The mounting tide of news from Palestine was played up by the Egyptian and Iraqi press and helped to intensify the nationalist unrest. The arrival of the first wave of refugees, mainly from the Palestinian urban middle class, in Cairo, Beirut and Damascus added to the nationalist tension in the streets and to the sense of emergency.<sup>78</sup> News of the slaughter at Dir Yassin and the fall of the cities of Haifa, Safed and Tiberias to the Jews in April gave rise to ferment and identification with the Palestinian Arabs in the streets, especially among the frustrated *effendis*. The growing centrality of the Palestinians and the hostility in the nationalist discourse made it dangerous for the politicians not to demonstrate their conformity with the militant attitudes toward the Palestinian issue.

In Damascus, the nationalist atmosphere intensified in the spring of 1948 and was exploited by opposition forces against the government. Al-Quwatli's fears and those of his government with regard to King Abdallah and Iraq were now supplemented by domestic pressure on the part of nationalist members of parliament, or those who sought to bolster their own status through manifestations of militant nationalism, along with the demonstrations in the streets, organized by opposition forces, calling for regular military intervention in Palestine.<sup>79</sup>

In contrast to the ambience in the streets and in the media, many of the central politicians in Egypt, Iraq and Syria sought to avoid military involvement by regular forces in Palestine. Iraqi nationalist politician Fadil al-Jamali, who had taken extreme positions on the Palestine question, emphatically expressed his reservations to the British at the possibility of military intervention and war in Palestine, but noted that, in view of the nationalist atmosphere prevailing in the streets, it was

difficult to express a moderate attitude.<sup>80</sup> Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatli and Minister of Defence Ahmad Sharabati expressed their fears of Iraqi pressure toward intervention by regular military forces in Palestine, and their concern that Iraq really intended to realize its plans for Hashimite dominance of the Fertile Crescent and to find an excuse for entering Syria.<sup>81</sup> Egyptian Prime Minister Fahmi al-Nuqrashi and most of his ministers wished to prevent the involvement of Arab armies in Palestine.<sup>82</sup> Military commanders, well aware of the weakness of their armies, also feared war.<sup>83</sup> The recommendations of the chiefs of staff of the Arab armies, who gathered in Amman on 30 April, stated that to prepare a force capable of conquering Palestine, significant resources and a long period of time were needed. In their estimation, this force would have to amount to five divisions and six squadrons of aircraft. It would take years to put together such an order of battle. The implication of this demand by the chiefs of staff was the postponement or avoidance of the invasion of Palestine by regular armies.

While the internal unrest and tension continued in Egypt and Iraq, international activity with regard to the Palestine question accelerated, and the struggle between Jews and Palestinian Arabs in Palestine became more severe. On 10 April, the Council of the Arab League met in Cairo. In the course of the meeting, the Transjordanian representative announced that the Legion would enter Palestine as soon as the Mandate ended and Britain pulled out. Following this announcement, King Farouk declared: 'If Arab armies enter Palestine in order to rescue that country, His Majesty would like to clarify that such a measure must be considered as a temporary solution, devoid of any intent to conquer or divide Palestine. Following the liberation of Palestine, it should be transferred to its people, which will elect a government as it sees fit.'<sup>84</sup> However, most of the political system and the army officers in Egypt still believed that there would be no war by regular forces.

Abdallah had made up his mind to take over that portion of Palestine which was intended for a Palestinian state, and to prevent the establishment of that state. As he saw it, control of Palestine, or at least of the Arab portion of it, would provide him with the legitimate historic right to realize his ambitions to control Syria. In any event, the establishment of a Palestinian state under the leadership of the Mufti was perceived by Abdallah as a threat. The Transjordanian representative to the Arab League also announced, at the meeting of the League Council in April 1947, that his country reserved the right to act as it saw fit in order 'to preserve the Arab nature of Palestine'. Abdallah preferred to reach an arrangement on the Palestine question by way of an understanding and an agreement with the Zionist Movement and the Jews. This was the course he had followed since he was first recognized by the British as the Emir of Transjordan in 1920.

Under the conditions prevailing in the inter-Arab arena and the domestic political conditions within the Arab states between 1945 and 1948, Abdallah could not take open action in accordance with this trend without being accused of treason. In view of the military and moral collapse of the Palestinian Arabs, Abdallah began to receive desperate appeals for help from various Palestinian entities. Preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state, which was liable to be headed by his enemy the

Mufti, by taking over the Arab portion of Palestine after having reached an understanding with the Jews, might have led to his isolation throughout the Arab world and perhaps even to an attempt to topple his regime. The transformation of the Palestine question into an emotionally charged ideological topic throughout the Arab world, and the creation of conditions requiring that all Arab states and their rulers express public condemnation of the partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state, made it difficult for Abdallah to realize his intention. His difficulties were obvious, even in his relations with his own aides and functionaries within his kingdom. Although he was a ruler whose powers, in practice, were not limited by any democratic or parliamentary institutions, Abdallah was forced to take into account his own officials' positions concerning the impact of the events in Palestine on certain sectors of Transjordan's population.

In the autumn and winter of 1947–48, Abdallah came under extreme pressure. The establishment of an independent Palestinian state in part of Palestine conflicted with the existential interests of Transjordan and the Hashimite dynasty. Abdallah feared that, were the Arab Legion to enter Palestine as the result of an open understanding with the Jews, Ibn Saud might take over Aqaba, Transjordan's only outlet to the sea, and the Maan area of southern Transjordan. His fears were not unjustified. Back in August 1947, as a result of Abdallah's increasing pressure on Syria, President al-Quwatli had sent his advisor (who was later to become foreign minister), Husni al-Barazi, to the court of Ibn Saud with a proposal for Syrian–Saudi cooperation against Abdallah. Al-Quwatli asked that, in the event of a Transjordanian threat against Syria, Saudi Arabia would mass troops on its border with Transjordan and lay claim to Aqaba and the Maan area. At the same time, Ibn Saud's emissaries would start up tribal revolts in southern Transjordan against the Hashimite regime. This proposal amounted to a Syrian–Saudi threat against Abdallah, whereby his country would be divided, with the northern part annexed to Syria and the southern part to Saudi Arabia.<sup>85</sup> Although there is no evidence of any explicit or secret Syrian–Saudi agreement, the threat against Transjordan existed.

Indeed, Ibn Saud's suspicions were also justified: Abdallah continued to maintain the return of Hashimite control of the Hejaz as one of his objectives, in addition to his ambition to rule Syria.<sup>86</sup> In February 1948, Ibn Saud warned the British that Abdallah was planning to take over parts of Palestine. He argued that, in order for the Saudi Arabian army to be able to operate in Palestine, it would first have to deploy along its borders – that is, in southern Transjordan.<sup>87</sup>

Against the background of his fear of Ibn Saud, Abdallah proposed that the Iraqi Regent, Abd al-Ilah, concentrate the Iraqi army in southern Iraq, in the Basra area. This proposal was intended to threaten the petroleum-rich al-Ahsa area of Saudi Arabia, to distract Ibn Saud and to pin down Saudi forces, thus preventing any threat against Transjordan.<sup>88</sup> Abdallah's fear of Ibn Saud also explained Transjordan's objection to the Saudi proposal to allow Saudi forces to pass through Transjordan on their way to Palestine. According to a pro-Saudi source, Abdallah even threatened that the concentration of Saudi troops on the Transjordanian border would be considered an act of war against him.<sup>89</sup>

The Iraqi Regent, Abd al-Ilah, had generally displayed little interest in the Palestine question. However, now, in light of his weak domestic position, he began a campaign intended to lead to military intervention in Palestine.

Accompanied by the prime minister of Lebanon, Riyadh al-Sulh, and officers of the Iraqi army, he arrived in Amman on 24 April and met with King Abdallah concerning the entry of Arab armies into Palestine. The Regent made it clear to 'Abdallah that there was no escaping military conflict. Both of the Hashimite states and their rulers admittedly had a common interest in preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state headed by the Mufti. However, unlike Abdallah, who sought to achieve this goal while preventing war, Abd al-Ilah viewed the prevention of war as a threat to his own status and that of the Hashimites, and pressed for armed intervention by regular forces, in which Iraq and its leadership would show their nationalist position.

From Amman, Abdul-Ilah continued to Cairo, where he met with King Farouk twice, on 25 and 26 April. It was apparently at these meetings that an agreement was reached on the entry of regular Arab armies into Palestine, immediately following the British withdrawal.<sup>90</sup> Farouk insisted that this move would only take place after the British had pulled out; nonetheless, his attitude constituted a change in Egypt's basic position, which, until then, had been one of emphatic objection to the entry of regular armed forces into Palestine. Following the conversation with the Regent on 25 April, King Farouk ordered the minister of defence to prepare the Egyptian army for immediate war.<sup>91</sup> This decision was opposed by Prime Minister al-Nuqrashi and the Egyptian army commanders, who knew very well that the Egyptian army was not prepared for war.

Like the Regent, King Farouk was in need of rehabilitation from his weakened status and impaired prestige during the winter and spring of 1948. In view of the nationalist atmosphere in the streets and the fear that, once a Jewish state had been established, the unrest and ferment would turn into an outburst of nationalist violence which would undermine or perhaps even topple their regimes, Farouk and Abdul-Ilah sought to take advantage of the nationalist trend and to portray themselves as nationalist leaders.

The government of Egypt still did not commit itself to war in Palestine, even after the meetings between the heads of the royal houses. The prime minister objected to an invasion of Palestine until 11 May, claiming that the introduction of Egyptian military forces into the Sinai Peninsula and from there into Palestine was a dangerous move, in view of the presence of the British army along the Suez Canal – that is, at Egypt's back. Despite his attempts to preserve Egypt's leading position in the Arab League and the Arab world, Al-Nuqrashi tried to avoid being dragged into war, which he believed would run counter to Egypt's interests and would give his rival, King Abdallah, the opportunity to take over part of Palestine. Nonetheless, the Egyptian prime minister, in view of the atmosphere prevailing in his country, was not prepared to object to King Farouk's circumvention of his government and parliament, and, through Defence Minister Muhammad Haydar, ordered the Egyptian army to enter Palestine. This move was illegal, as Egyptian law required the approval of parliament and a resolution by the government. Nonetheless, any objection to the King's decision might have brought about a government/constitutional crisis, could have exacerbated the instability already prevailing in Egypt, and, from the politicians' point of view, would have necessitated taking an

unpopular stand, which could have been exploited by their rivals to weaken and embarrass them. In view of the militant attitude in the Egyptian streets and the conditions prevailing in the inter-Arab arena, the prime minister chose to ignore the irregularities and to go along with the king's actions.<sup>92</sup> This choice was also made by the remaining ministers and members of parliament, who, in view of the prevailing conditions, chose to support the military move. On 11 May, the Egyptian Senate met at the initiative of former Prime Minister Ismail Sidqi, who sought to prevent his country from becoming embroiled in war. Sidqi presented the prime minister with a list of 14 questions concerning the possibility of invasion of Palestine by the Egyptian army. Sidqi called for avoiding war and emphasized that Egypt was not facing a possible Jewish invasion and must therefore prevent war in Palestine. In his answers, al-Nuqrashi adopted a militant attitude, but stated that the decision concerning the invasion was not yet final and that he did not rule out the possibility of a three-month truce. Al-Nuqrashi was pressured by the hard-line position adopted by the secretary of the *Wafd*, Muhammad Saraj al-Din, who demanded intervention by the Egyptian army in order to prevent partition and to hand over a unified Arab Palestine to its residents.<sup>93</sup> Only Sidqi had the courage to publicly oppose the entry of Egyptian forces into war in Palestine, and even voted against the invasion in Parliament.

In Egypt, Iraq and Syria, the politicians and the ruling elites, whose status had become weakened by the new social forces, were embroiled in a conflict with no way out. These politicians, when they faced the nationalist *effendiyya* and the streets under its influence, had built up their status as the chief proponents of nationalist struggle. Because a solution to the increasing distresses of the *effendiyya* and the poor called for profound changes in the socioeconomic structure and the political system, the politicians directed the socio-political unrest into Arab-Egyptian nationalism and pan-Arab nationalism in Iraq and Syria. When the developments in Palestine reached the stage at which decision was inevitable, the politicians, caught in the web of their own nationalist statements and positions, were unable to withstand the pressure of the streets and the hard line adopted by the heads of the royal houses.

While he was still in Cairo, Abdul-Ilah ordered the Iraqi army to transfer all of its forces to Transjordan, to move toward the border with Palestine and to prepare to invade immediately upon the conclusion of the British Mandate. From Cairo, Abdul-Ilah returned to Transjordan, where he met Abdallah again on 29 April for additional talks. In the course of these trips by Abdul-Ilah and his meetings with King Farouk and King Abdallah, the final decision was made by the rulers of the Arab states to go to war in Palestine.

On 30 April, the Political Committee of the Arab League met and resolved that the Arab states should prepare their armies for invasion of Palestine upon the expiry of the British Mandate on 15 May. The committee yielded to pressure from Abdallah and appointed him as commander in chief of the Arab forces. At the same time, however, the committee did not rule out the possibility of avoiding war, should the initiative for truce in Palestine prevail. Nonetheless, King Farouq, the Regent Abdul-Ilah and King Abdallah had already made a decision in favour of invasion. It was Abdallah who informed Abd al-Rahman Azzam, secretary of the Arab League, that Farouq had issued an order to the Egyptian army to invade Palestine.<sup>94</sup>

At a subsequent meeting of the Political Committee of the Arab League that took place on 12 May, notwithstanding the insistent militant position of all of its members, a proposal to agree to a truce and a ceasefire in Palestine was raised, and gained considerable support. Furthermore, the recommendations made by the chiefs of staff of the Arab armies, by raising requirements with regard to the extent of forces needed for the conquest of Palestine, actually – since the order of battle required was not available – amounted to a recommendation to refrain from regular armed conflict. Nonetheless, both the foreign ministers and the military echelons had to proceed with care, in view of the ‘war fever’ which prevailed in the streets and in the press. Each foreign minister had to take into account his personal status vis-à-vis that of his domestic rivals, who could exploit the willingness to avoid war as a political weapon against him. The attempt by the foreign ministers was blocked by Abdallah, who now believed that there was no choice but that of military invasion, and that such an invasion would even serve his ends. Abdallah was now bound by the understanding and coordination which had been achieved by the Iraqi Regent with King Farouk of Egypt, Syrian Prime Minister Jamil Mardam and Lebanese Prime Minister Riyad al-Sulh.

Abdallah expressed himself to this effect in his conversations with Golda Meir, at a meeting on the night of 10–11 May, stating that he was no longer alone, but one of seven. Because his proposal that the Jews agree to accept him as king of all Palestine had been rejected out of hand, Abdallah now believed that the only way remaining, under the conditions which prevailed, for him to take over the Arab portion of Palestine and prevent the establishment of the Palestinian state, was by war. He was aware that he no longer had a chance to gain all of Palestine. On the other hand, this was a historic opportunity to attain his more restricted objective: annexation of the Arab portion of Palestine, while resigning himself to the fact of partition. However, under the circumstances and in light of the ambience prevailing throughout the Arab world, an open agreement with the Jews would have been extremely risky for him, especially as there was no official agreement. The entry of the Arab Legion into Palestine, under the banner of defence of the Palestinian Arabs, and within the framework of a war campaign coordinated with the other Arab states, was intended to give Abdallah the legitimacy to take over the Arab portion of Palestine and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state headed by the Mufti. The results of the war in sensitive areas would be determined, to a large extent, by military developments on the ground, because Abdallah could not afford to have the commanders and soldiers of the Arab Legion find out that, in actual fact, he had agreed to the partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state, leaving the Arab portion of Palestine under his own control and refraining from establishing a Palestinian state.

The prime ministers, foreign ministers and senior military commanders of Egypt, Iraq and Syria did not want war in Palestine, and nor did King Abdallah or King Ibn Saud. Nevertheless, in view of the atmosphere throughout the Arab world and under the conditions of the inter-Arab arena, the moves made by King Farouk and the Regent, Abdul-Ilah, tipped the balance in favour of war. Thus, in view of the domestic pressures and risks involved, war by regular military forces became a way out, even for those who had not wanted it and feared its consequences.

In the historical perspective of social and political processes, the invasion of Palestine by Arab armies in May 1948 took place against a background of domestic socio-political struggles, contradictions surrounding the ruling conservative elites and struggles between Arab states and dynasties. The final decisions regarding the Palestine question approached under a cloud of increasing socio-political tension in the Arab states. The ferment and anger of the *effendiyya* was directed to violent nationalism, and the weakness of the political elites and the ruling classes transformed the decision-makers into captives of the dominant social and political discourse, captives of their own slogans and their own militant nationalist positions on the Palestine question.

The Palestine problem, as an ideologically charged pan-Arab nationalist symbol, and the emotional solidarity with the Palestinian Arabs, played a role in the domestic political arenas as a rallying call to the frustrated middle class and the *effendiyya* in general by the conservative elite politicians. However, the leading politicians of the Arab states were not motivated by ideological solidarity with the Palestinians. It was the clash between contradicting state interests, and the socio-political tensions that endangered the stability of the regimes and the ruling conservative elites, which pushed the Arab states to invade Palestine in 1948. It was not Islamic *Jihadi* motives that pushed the Arab states into the war in Palestine but the domestic socio-political conditions and inter-Arab relations expressed by the Arab nationalist/pan-Arabist discourse. The Muslim Brothers used *jihadi* Islamic slogans, and their conduct was in the context of Islamic discourse that had an impact at the popular level. However, it was secondary to Arab nationalist motives and the discourse of the *effendiyya* and the politicians from the ruling socio-political elite. The main motivation of the *effendiyya*, the most active factor in the streets, stemmed from the Arab nationalist discourse and from the economic distress.

The invasion of Palestine by Arab armies marked the intersection of the two lines of conflict. One was the conflict between the Arab states and dynasties: the Hashemite dynasty of Iraq and Transjordan against the royal houses of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The other was the socio-political conflict, in which the ruling conservative elites opposed the deep socio-economic and political reforms needed by the modern social strata, the *effendiyya*. The economic frustrations and identity crisis led the young *effendiyya* onto the path of militant nationalism, of which Palestinian nationalism was one of the most powerful symbols. From the standpoint of the nationalist *effendiyya*, the struggle in Palestine constituted the concrete expression of Arab nationalism and the anti-colonial struggle. The profound crises experienced by Egypt and Iraq after the Second World War brought the tensions and contradictions which had accumulated and intensified in their societies and political systems to a point of no return.

Egypt entered the war in Palestine at a time when Egypt's own national interests were centred on the unity of the Nile Valley, control of the Suez Canal and the expulsion of the British from Egypt. It was the combination of the interest in preserving Egypt's central role in the Arab League and the 1947–48 transformation of the Palestine question into a nationalist issue considered symbolic by the *effendiyya*, against the background of the weakness of the regime and the ruling elite, which led Egypt to military intervention.

On the interstate level Iraq was the main leading force that pushed for military intervention of Arab states in Palestine. Iraq's entry into the war was a direct result of a policy that positioned it at the head of the Arab struggle in the Palestine question. The political and social tension and the contradictions in which the regime and the ruling elite had become entangled – which reached a peak in the winter of 1947–48 – promoted the active role adopted by Iraq in creating the extremist dynamics which gave rise to the inevitable invasion of Palestine in May 1948.

The prime factor which led King Abdallah of Transjordan to war in Palestine was his inability to obtain the legitimization of the Arab world for any separate agreement which he might have reached with the Jews – that is, to achieve Arab recognition of his right to control the Arab portion of Palestine. Abdallah saw no alternative but to take over whatever lands he could by means of limited war against Israel within the framework of an all-out Arab invasion of Palestine. In waging such a war, Abdallah sought to take over the Arab portion of Palestine and to reinforce his own position towards a future Hashemite takeover of Syria.

The pattern of the conflict, which became dominant in the relations between Jews and Palestinian Arabs, and in the relations between the nationalist movements, developed into a regional conflict and served as a catalyst for the development of the pan-Arab trend in the nationalist movements of the Arab states. Under the socio-political conditions and in the ideological climate that prevailed in the Arab states, the Palestine conflict became a domestic issue that fulfilled different functions for different social and political forces. In this way, the positions which rejected Zionism and any possibility of negotiating with the Zionists were transformed into a binding ideology.

The Arab–Israeli conflict brought the conflicts and contradictions between the Arab states, within Arab societies, and in the internal politics of each Arab state to a dramatic climax. The consequences of the 1948 war accelerated the weakening and collapse of the regimes, the ruling elites and the conservative social classes. The failure of the Arab states and their ruling elites to cope with the Zionist movement and Israel hastened their decline and fall in the 1950s, brought down by military coups and nationalist radical forces based on the new middle class.

## Notes

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5. Ibid.
6. *Cost of Living Index, 1944, Middle East Economic and Statistic Bulletin*, No.9 (issued by the Economic Advisory Bureau on Behalf of the Minister of State Resident in the Middle East Supply Centre, Cairo, 1944), PRO/FO/921/235/79.
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11. Beinin and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, p.261.
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13. Note by Financial Counsellor, Cairo, 22 May 1946, PRO/FO/141/1136.
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59. Mack (Baghdad) to FO, No.455, 27 April 1948, PRO/FO/371/68448/E/5362; Mack (Baghdad) to FO, No.457, 28 April 1948, PRO/FO/371/68448/E/5362.
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62. Translation and Summary of Report by the Ministry of Social Affairs on its Work During the First Ten Years of its Existence, PRO/FO/371/80580; also cited in Beinlin and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, p.274.
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78. Campbell (Cairo), No.39, 8 March 1948, PRO/FO/371/69190.
79. Memminger (United States Consul in Syria) to Secretary of State, 'Demonstrators in Syria demand Syrian Army intervention in government', 27 April 1948, A393, NA/890D/00/4-2748.
80. On the state of public opinion in Egypt: M. Riyad, *Mudhakkirat Mahmud Riyad*, Vol.2 (Cairo: Dar-al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi, 1986), p.12; al-Nur, *Dawr al-qasr*, p.312. See also the Weekly Political Summary of the British Embassy in Egypt, Jan. 1948, PRO/FO/371/69190; Pappe, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, pp.104–5.
81. Al-Hashimi Memminger (Damascus) to Department of State, 22 Oct. 1947, NA/890D/00/16-224/A393.
82. On al-Nuqrashi's objection to the involvement of the Egyptian Army in Palestine, while Egypt was still involved in a crisis with Britain, see Ravesdale (Cairo), PRO/FO/141/1246/1.
83. Al-Hashimi, pp.219–20; S.S. al-Jaburi, *Mihnat Filastin* (Beirut, 1970), pp.131–2.
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88. Kirkbride to FO, No.204, 5 April 1948, PRO/FO/371/68448/E/4324; Al-Hashimi, p.156; Eppel, *Palestine*, p.186.
89. K. al-Din al-Zirkali, *Shabh al-jazira fi 'ahd al-malik 'Abd al-'Aziz*, Vol.3 (Beirut, ?), p.1289.
90. Al-Jaburi, *Mihnat Filastin*, p.129; Kirkbride (Amman) to Bevin, 29 April 1948, PRO/FO/816/118.

91. al-Nur, *Dawr al-qasr*, p.312; Al-Hashimi, pp.216, 317–18; Riyad, *Mudhakkirat Mahmud Riyad*, p.13; Heykal, Vol.II, p.331; Tuck to Secretary of State, *FRUS 1948*, 26 April 1948, p.862.
92. Heykal, p.280.
93. ‘Al-Jalsa al-Siriya li-majlis shuyuh al ma’kud 11 Mayu “an masalat Filastin”’ [The Secret Session of the Senate on Palestine, 11 May 1948], *al-Tali’a* (Cairo), 3 March 1975, pp.135–45.
94. Azzam twice repeated this version of events to Dan Kurzman, according to an interview with Kurzman appearing in: Nimrod, *The Alternative of Peace and the Way of War*, p.194.