



A Chronicle of a Defeat Foretold: The Battle for Jerusalem in the Memoirs of Anwar Nusseibeh

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Personal memoirs, as a general rule, record personal accomplishments and successes. In the public field, they stake a claim to the author's share in national triumphs and glories. On both counts, Anwar Nusseibeh's memoirs are strikingly different. They could not be otherwise. Written in the immediate aftermath of Arab defeat in 1948, while the author was recuperating from a wound sustained during the fighting around

* I would like to thank Sari Nusseibeh for allowing me to quote from the manuscript of his late father's memoirs. Numbers in the text are page references to the edited version of the manuscript, which will be published in the near future. The manuscript was written in English in 1949.

Jerusalem on the eve of the termination of the Mandate, they are more a commentary on the political events surrounding the Palestinian debacle. His memoirs highlight the major role played by the Palestinian leadership, and the Arab states in general, in bringing about the catastrophe that befell the Palestinians in 1948. Yet he also records the selfless efforts of countless individuals who shouldered the burden of defending their homeland. At the same time, Nusseibeh is mindful of the greater forces at play, and here Britain earns well-deserved condemnation for its role in the dismemberment of Palestine and the dispossession of its Arab inhabitants.

While pointing out the failures and shortcomings of the established Palestinian leadership, its internal rivalries, and its unpreparedness for the task at hand, Nusseibeh records the grassroots activities of ordinary Palestinians in their efforts to defend their city despite the lack of resources and the absence of political leadership; he presents us with a "history from below." This type of account is unfailingly absent from the official histories of battles and campaigns, which typically record the activities of "the high and mighty." The heroes of his memoirs are unknown characters, both Jerusalemites and volunteers from neighboring villages, who themselves assumed the task of defending Jerusalem's Arab quarters. They succeeded in preventing the Jewish take-over of the whole city in the crucial period from December 1947 to May 1948. During this time, when the battle for Jerusalem was being waged, the British were still in control. The latter preferred to sit on the sidelines and observe the unfolding events under the pretext that they were disinterested onlookers, powerless to fulfil the duties incumbent upon

them as the legal authority in the country. This too applies to the neighboring Arab states, who, full of bellicose declarations, were woefully ignorant of the real state of affairs in Palestine and much too pre-occupied with their own internal rivalries and with their hostility towards the Mufti.

Through the Office Window: In the Beginning There Was Chaos

A few days after the United Nations General Assembly voted in favor of the Partition Plan for Palestine on November 29, 1947, Anwar Nusseibeh was sitting at home when his younger brother informed him that a demonstration was underway. The older Nusseibeh rushed to the site of the demonstration (9). A few days earlier when news of the United Nations decision reached Palestine, the Jews spent the whole day in jubilation, while the Higher Arab Executive ordered a countrywide three-day protest strike in response. Once he arrived at the scene of the demonstration, he quickly felt disappointed. The group of protesters was composed of "fifty odd urchins" and nobody seemed to know why or how the process started or where it would end. The Higher Arab Executive itself refused to accept any responsibility and as Nusseibeh saw it, "no other organisation was either interested or even capable of producing so uninspiring a protest as this." After assailing a Jewish journalist, the only Jew who happened to be on the scene, the demonstrators proceeded to attack and sack the commercial center of the city. As he records, they "indiscriminately looted Arab and Jewish premises alike" while British policemen looked on without intervening. The looting, he tells us,

continued for weeks. Watching from his office window in Mamilla Street, overlooking the center, he notes that "nothing was spared." Doors, windows and eventually even sanitary installations were removed, and in time, dynamite was used to pry open unwieldy locks, until the center was transformed into "dust, noise and chaos" (10).

The Home Front: A People Divided

The main body of Arab leaders remained outside the country. This had been the case since 1937 and remained so until the very end of the Mandate. In Jerusalem itself there were only two members of the Higher Arab Executive, Dr. Hussein Fakhri al-Khalidi and the elderly Hilmi Pasha Abdul Baqi. Some time later Sheikh Hassan Abu al-Sauod was dispatched, and Emil al-Ghouri, member of the Executive and a very close associate of the Mufti, would also make occasional appearances. This is not to say that the Mufti did not have his own men on the ground. However, his absence meant that he was removed from the actual theater of events, and this was to have an effect on his political decisions and his ability to conduct the day-to-day aspects of the struggle.¹

In an attempt to explain the absence of plans and resources to mount a credible defense of

Jerusalem, Nusseibeh journeys back to the years of the 1936 rebellion and the resulting social and political chasms within Palestinian society. Notwithstanding the fact that nearly ten years had passed since the end of the Revolt, Palestinian society remained divided (p. 29). Both the Mufti and his opponents feared a repeat performance. For its part, the members of the opposition were afraid that the Mufti would resort to the same methods of violence and intimidation in order to silence them; they therefore did everything in their power to thwart him and put pressure on the Arab League to refrain from providing him with material help and support. In this endeavor, Nusseibeh comments, they were quite successful. The Mufti was afraid that if his enemies were armed they would take revenge for what happened in 1939. Additionally, he felt that the moderates had let him down in the past, and he had no guarantee that "they would not let [him] down again if he relied on them and their supporters" (37). This might have been one of the Mufti's considerations in refusing to issue arms to anyone except his loyal supporters and in only recruiting loyal supporters for the forces of al-Jihad al-Mukaddas (73). Yet it is possible to ascribe this to the Mufti's "lust for power, a lust that the years of the revolt only wetted but did not completely satiate" (73). This partially accounts for the absence of an organized Arab force in the first months of hostilities in the aftermath of the partition resolution and for the paucity of arms, which continued to plague the defenders of Jerusalem throughout the period. Commenting on this self-inflicted constraint, Nusseibeh writes that the internal divisions among Palestinians meant that "the Mufti entered the battle with one arm tied

¹ The Mufti did nevertheless personally intervene in field decisions; Nusseibeh recounts that during talks with the British to implement a cease fire in Katamon when the Arab were faced with overwhelming force and had all but lost the battle for the defence of the quarter, both Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, and Abu Dayeh, the local military commander, had to explain themselves on the phone to the Mufti in Cairo. The Mufti impressed on them the need to continue the fight (p.137). Another recorded incident occurred during the Battle of Dheishe, when the British negotiated with Dr. Hussein al-Khalidi, member of the Executive, for the safe passage of a group of Jews besieged in a convoy.

behind his back, while the opposition saw to it that his free arm wielded nothing more than a wooden sword" (p. 37).

While clearly part of the Mufti's camp, Nusseibeh evinces some sympathy for the opposition's stand, though he finds its political position untenable. Affirming that moderates were always present in Palestinian Arab politics, and adding that his own late father was one of them, he considers it possible to ascribe their moderation either to an "innate sense of defeatism or [one of] realism," depending on how the issue is viewed. Yet he believes it more likely to have sprung from "an ignorance of the nature of the Zionist menace and the implications of the British Mandate" (29). While terming themselves the "opposition," it was clear that the opposition members opposed the Mufti and his group, but not "the essential national complaint against the Mandate." The opposition did show a readiness to accept British policy proposals, such as the Peel partition proposal, the 1939 White Paper, and one calling for the establishment of a legislative council. While the opposition may have believed that supporting these proposals would somehow lead to the abolition of the Mandate, or at least the minimization of its ill effect, ultimately, the opposition was practicing "a form of self deception for which there could be no justification" (30). The national demand for the abolition of the Mandate and immediate recognition of independence "corresponded exactly with the minimum needs for the survival of the Arabs as a nation"; the longer it took to achieve this goal, the more unrealizable it became. At the same time, members of the opposition never accepted the implications of their position

(31). On the contrary, the Mufti's determination to continue the fight filled them with apprehension and resentment.

The Arab Role: Politicians at War

As the conflict in Jerusalem intensified, its inhabitants looked to the Higher Arab Executive and to the Arab League for leadership and support. However, they were not forthcoming, as neither took the lead, and both ignored the real state of affairs in Palestine. In addition, there was the behind-the-scenes conflict between the Mufti, on the one hand, and most of the other Arab leaders on the other. The disagreement was over who would be responsible for the direction of military operations in the field, thus becoming the ultimate authority in Palestine. The Mufti wanted his appointee, Abdul Qader al-Husseini, to be in charge, while the Arab League wanted Fawzi al-Kawukji, who in the end was given the command of Jaish al-Inkadh under the command of two Iraqi generals, Ismail Safwat and Taha al-Hashimi (66). The fact that these two officers never set foot in Palestine further compounded matters. Delegations from inside Palestine continuously looked for them to ask for assistance in the form of arms and ammunition, only to be rebuffed as it was the Arab League's policy not to proffer any aid to Al Jihad al-Mukaddas. Even when pleas were made for the intervention of Jaish al-Inkadh, General Safwat explained to the supplicants that this army's role was to serve as a striking force rather than a defensive force. He summarized his general strategy by informing a Palestinian delegation asking for the army's intervention: "Let Jaffa, Haifa, Acre, Safad, Jerusalem, Nazareth, fall. All

these towns are of no strategic importance and we can always take them back" (67). Nusseibeh comments that all these towns, with the exception of Jerusalem, fell while Jaish al-Inkadh watched from the peaceful hills of Nablus, and adds bitterly that General Safwat "has not been able to recover them" (67). Citing a particular instance in which he was a direct witness, he records that during the attack on al-Kastal and Deir Yassin, two platoons of Jaish al-Inkadh that were stationed in the nearby village of Ein Karem did not take part in the battle because their officers had orders to leave the area (119).

Without venturing an opinion, Nusseibeh reports on the widespread belief that the Arab rulers were "privy to the partition plan and only made a show of opposing it to justify subsequently their apparent impotence" (3). He does record, however, that Jordan's King Abdullah was "not entirely free to shape his own policy," and that the Arab Legion "is Arab in name only and is incapable of defending an Arab policy." As for Iraq, he comments that the British Embassy was reputed "to enjoy a high degree of prestige in the Regent's circle in Baghdad," and that the Iraqi rulers held "a grudge against the Mufti" because, in their view, he had been behind Rashid Ali's abortive rebellion of 1941 (68). Syria and Lebanon considered themselves "under a debt of gratitude to Great Britain" for the stand it took when they broke free from the French (3). The Arab leaders had conveyed to the Arab public the impression that they seriously intended to defend Palestine, yet no sooner did the Arab armies enter Palestine than a truce was called and "the sordid round of intrigues and shameful debacles began" (4). To the claim that the Arab rulers accepted the truce in June 1948

in response to pressure from Europe's Great Powers, Nusseibeh responds that this should have been clear to them from the outset and that "the rattling of sabres among the Arab politicians, judged in the light of their subsequent behaviour, was either stupid or downright dishonest" (4).

The British Role: Original Sin

Once the United Nations passed the partition resolution, Britain declared its intention to evacuate Palestine by May 15, 1948, and refused to involve itself in the implementation of the partition. Yet the Peel Commission had advocated this course of action openly as far back as 1937, recommending a surgical operation to divide the country into two halves. Nusseibeh has no doubts that "partition was of [Britain's] making." Although appearing to be a spectator, it was "a drama which [Britain] herself had created, produced and acted [in]" (1). Nusseibeh condemns Britain, despite its show of apparent neutrality, as the "arch intriguer in the sordid drama, the guardian who had failed in her duty towards her ward and who, in order to cover up her failure, had condemned her ward to death" (3). He records the widespread belief at the time that the Arab states were prompted to enter Palestine by the British in order to force the Jews to accept "a different form of partition," and presents as evidence the Arab states' willingness to accept the Bernadotte partition plan. This plan would give the Negev to the Arabs and the Galilee to the Jews and recommended that the Arab part of Palestine be joined to Transjordan, which at the time was under British control (4). As for King Abdullah himself, Nusseibeh, despite his own personal

inclinations, notes that the king was "not entirely free to shape his own foreign policy" (3).² He adds to his observations above that "it is a fact...that King Abdullah accepted partition in 1937 provided that the Arab part was given to him," that his chief army officer would be British, and "the Arab Legion would be subsidized by the British Treasury" (3).

On the ground, British forces did not intervene in battles between Jews and Arabs that occurred from December 1947 to mid-May 1948. Consequently, most Arab towns fell under Jewish control with British still present in the country. The British remained onlookers even when Deir Yassin was attacked. The only time they intervened was when their lines of communication were threatened by the fighting. In Jerusalem itself, which they had divided into security zones, they appeared to be in favor of the status quo with the Jewish and Arab populations remaining within their own districts. Thus, they were ready to expel Jewish forces from Sheikh Jarrah when the Jews occupied Arab homes on the "wrong side" of Nablus road (134), while at the same time attacking Arab forces that assailed a Hadassah convoy in the aftermath of the massacre at Deir Yassin

(129), and rescuing trapped Jewish combatants in the aftermath of the Battle of Dheishe (92).

Nusseibeh is firm in his condemnation of the British, ultimately holding them responsible for the massacres at Deir Yassin, Jaffa, Haifa and other Arabs towns and villages, which "were sacked and ravaged by the Jews during the British occupation" (99). In his mind, not only could they have prevented these incidents, and he is confident that the British had adequate armed forces in the country for that purpose, but more importantly, "by holding [the hand of the Jews]" they had helped create the refugee problem and consequently should be held accountable. Blame, however, should also be directed at the Arabs themselves for having been so blind to the aims and policies of the West in general and Britain in particular. The only interest the West showed towards the Arabs was "a desire to dominate and devour" (125). It was determined to help Zionism at the expense of the Arabs, while the latter were "blinded by a hint here and a word of bribes there" - causing them to betray their own self-interest. "[Arab] politicians rubbed their palms and kow-towed, [behaving like] grinning apes that give away this, make away with that, tangible concessions in return for hints and words" (25).

Formation of the Jerusalem National Committee: Organizing for Self-defense

At the local level, residents in Jerusalem took the initiative in forming a national committee in their city. The city's inhabitants had expected the Higher Arab Executive to take the initiative itself in establishing such

² In a recently published book, Bernard Wasserstein writes that the British Cabinet had decided as early September 20, 1947, that is even before the passage of the partition resolution, that they would not cooperate in any way with the partition plan and would simply withdraw from Palestine. According to the author, they wanted to avoid "incurring the odium," in the eyes of the Arabs, of helping to implement a partition. At the same time, their secret objective was precisely the opposite: to help facilitate a partition of Palestine between the Zionists and King Abdullah, thus precluding the creation of a Palestinian state headed by the Mufti. See Bernard Wasserstein, *Divided Jerusalem: The Struggle for the Holy City* (London: Profile Books, 2001), p. 138.

a committee based on the model of those set up during the years of the Revolt in 1936. When this did not happen, and when it became clear that the British police had abdicated its role in maintaining law and order, people in local neighborhoods began congregating in order to appoint night patrols to guard against Jewish armed incursions and bomb attacks (40, 143). As the conflict intensified, people considered purchasing weapons for their own self-defense, and, in the absence of any material support from the outside, they had to finance their own purchases and procure their weapons on the black market (28). A number of local committees were formed in the various Arab quarters, such as, Musrara, Wadi al-Joz, and Bab al-Zahira. Eventually, the Higher Arab Executive supplied the arms, but this was a haphazard operation both in terms of the quality of the arms supplied and in terms of their delivery. Most of the arms delivered to the Arab armory combatants in Jerusalem were second-hand weapons collected from the leftovers in Egypt's Western Desert. Consequently, most of the armory rescued from the sands was "junk" (28). Although attempts were made to repair the weapons and related materials, the little that did reach Palestine was hardly serviceable (53). This was compounded by the great variety of weapons distributed and the absence of suitable ammunition for these guns. There were English, Italian, French and Canadian varieties of weapons "and a few others whose identity was difficult to establish". These had to be shared by all of Jerusalem's neighborhoods, as there were not enough of each variety to assign to each quarter. During armed engagements, many of these weapons proved to be defective, and once the

ammunition ran out, they were rendered virtually useless.

Eventually, the cumulative pressure of ongoing events forced the hand of the Higher Arab Executive; it dispatched one of its members from Cairo, Sheikh Hassan Abu al-Sauod to establish national committees in the main Palestinian towns and cities (70). The Sheikh established committees in Jaffa and various other locations before he approached Jerusalem. He created a committee in Jerusalem last because of the special sensitivities and family rivalries in the city. A committee of twelve members was elected "representing a fair cross section of the city's inhabitants." It consisted of two lawyers, two doctors, a couple of merchants and notables, and included both lay and religious members (71). With the exception of the head of the committee, Nusseibeh himself, all the members worked on a voluntary basis. The committee carried out a multitude of functions, such as issuing identity cards, arms licenses and movement permits for the transfer of foodstuffs from one locality to another. It regulated trade and strove to eliminate profiteering. It oversaw the work of the local committees responsible for the equitable distribution of bread, kerosene and other essential commodities (77). It also sent delegations beyond Jerusalem to other towns to discuss food problems, to Cairo to arrange for financial support, and to Damascus to request arms from the Arab League's military committee; Nusseibeh comments that "this useless practice was [later] dropped" (77).

Last but not least, the committee maintained relations with Abdul Qader al-Husseini in the Jerusalem hills to coordinate the armed defense of the city (78, 89). The committee's work was increased by the daily

calls for assistance it received from the surrounding villages. The most common demand was for ammunition. Nusseibeh adds that often villages would request this type of assistance while they were "the middle of an engagement" (82). The committee survived on a day-to-day basis and spent the majority of its collected fees on defense. However, it saw its role as temporary; no plans, he records, were made beyond May 15th, when it was hoped "the Arab states would take over" (82).

A War of Defense, A War of Partition

The Battle of Jerusalem started immediately in the aftermath of the United Nations partition decision and was to continue until the entry of Abdullah's Arab Legion into Jerusalem a few days after the final British withdrawal in mid-May 1948. Arab forces in Jerusalem formed a motley crew with very little coordination amongst them. On the one hand, there were the volunteers in the various quarters who saw their main task as defending their own areas.. These were the inhabitants of Jerusalem, or what was left of them, the majority having left in successive waves after each new atrocity committed by the Jewish forces intent on widening their control over the whole city. The fighters from Jerusalem included Adel Najjar, Shurki Qutteineh, Saleh Abdu, Bahjat Abu Gharbiyeh, Haj Eid Abdeen, Hind Husseini, Sheikh Hassan Abu al-Sauod, Fouad Khalidi, Jamil Wahbe, Issa Majaj, Dr. Hanna Attalah, and Raouf Darwish.

Volunteers from the surrounding villages also came to the city's defense. They included people such as Ibrahim Abu Dayeh from the Hebron region who was instrumental in

organizing the defense of the Katamon Quarter. Other groups of volunteers included those of al-Jihad al-Mukaddas led by Abdul Qader al-Husseini and his deputy Kamel Ireikat. These two took their orders from the Mufti in Cairo and were mainly present in the hills surrounding Jerusalem; they enforced the siege on Bab al-Wad, the gateway to Jerusalem, which, until the building of the Burma road by the Hagana, prevented Jewish reinforcements, both men and supplies, from reaching the Jewish quarters of Jerusalem. Al-Husseini and Ireikat also fielded men within the confines of the Old City led by Hafez Barkat. After the fall of al-Kastel and the death of Abdul Qader al-Husseini in early April 1948, the Jihad's role became marginal. Fawzi al-Kawukji led groups from Jaish al-Inkadh that included mostly Syrian and Iraqi volunteers. A small detachment led by Fadhl al-Abdullah an Iraqi officer, was stationed in al-Rawdah School (97). Volunteers from this detachment could be found in various areas of the country; though some of its forces stayed in the vicinity of Jerusalem, they did not participate in al-Kastel's defense or intervene in the massacre that took place at Deir Yassin. Fadhl al-Abdullah followed the orders of the Damascus-based Arab Military Committee and pursued a policy of non-cooperation and rivalry with the Mufti's supporters. In addition, the Arab Legion, part of the British Army formations whose command the Legion followed, stationed troops in Jerusalem's environs. Prior to its re-entry into Palestine after the termination of the Mandate, its most prominent achievement was the defense of the Mount of Olive's Augusta Victoria complex in the face of a Jewish attack mounted from the nearby

Hadassah and Hebrew University compound.

Jerusalem was effectively partitioned into exclusively Arab or Jewish areas. During the Mandate's last months, not a single day or night passed in which Jews and Arabs did not engage in some form of military confrontation. (55). Nusseibeh records that most of the Jewish attacks served as a prelude to the blowing up of frontier houses separating Arab and Jewish quarters, whether in places like Katamon bordering Rehavia, or the Nablus road bordering Mea Sharim. The Jews waged a war of nerves, placing explosive devices in the crowded Arab shopping areas of Jerusalem. He characterizes Arab attacks as retaliatory in nature. Thus, the blowing up of Ben Yehuda Street, the Palestine Post, the Jewish Agency, and the attack on the Hadassah convoy in Sheikh Jarrah all came in response to various Jewish terrorist acts, such as the blowing up of the Samiramis Hotel in Katamon, the massacre at Deir Yassin, the death of Abdul Qader al-Husseini at al-Kastel, and the shooting of Arab civilians on Jaffa Road, the city's main shopping thoroughfare.

Al-Kastel: A Battle in Vain

Perhaps the most important battle in the Jerusalem area was that at al-Kastel, not only because the foremost Arab Palestinian military commander, Abdul Qader al-Husseini met with his death there, but also because the village possessed tremendous strategic importance, controlling the road to Jerusalem and thus preventing Jewish convoys from bringing relief to the Jewish defenders in the city. Nusseibeh was present during the battle, and he records the presence at the scene of a number of Jerusalemites

including, Adel Najjar, Hafez Barakat, Saleh Abdu, Bahjat abu Gharbiyeh, Kamel Ireikat, as well as Ibrahim Abu Dayeh and Abdul Halim al-Jaylani from Mount Hebron. Jewish forces initially occupied al-Kastel in a surprise attack, but a subsequent counter attack succeeded in driving them out. Abdul Qader had arrived in the midst of battle from Damascus after failing to secure support from the Military Committee there and was killed while leading the attack to liberate the village. In the battle's aftermath, all the neighboring villagers had returned to their homes. Nusseibeh records that it seemed impossible to convince them stay behind and defend it. All the fighters were volunteers who owned their own rifles and bought their own ammunition and thus "were amenable to neither discipline nor pressure" (118). No more than 15 men remained to guard the newly liberated village (116). The rest had either returned to their villages or were participating in Abdul Qader's funeral in Jerusalem. In the meantime, Jewish forces reoccupied the village virtually unopposed. Nusseibeh reflects that considering the price paid, the whole operation "had been in vain, absolutely, completely and wastefully in vain" (121).

The British, in preparation for their departure, had already divided Jerusalem into a number of security zones, which had the effect of facilitating the partitioning of the city. Security zone D, near Schneller Orphanage in the north-west of the city, was allowed to pass into the control of Jewish forces who immediately set up roadblocks stopping all vehicles entering the Jewish-controlled area for inspection, including British army and police vehicles. The British themselves retreated into the central security

zone where the government offices were located and that also included Lower Baqa'a, Talbiyeh, the German Colony, the railway station, the government printing press, Socony Shell, the Swedish Hospital for Lepers and the British Athletic Club. They also established another zone, which included the King David Hotel, the U.S. Consulate, the French Consulate, the Terra Sancta College, the YMCA, King George Street and the Government Press Office in David's Building. A fourth zone included the central post office, the police headquarters, a radio station, a prison, the government hospital, the municipality and all of the Russian Compound. The Arabs nominally controlled a smaller zone comprising the Greek colony and Katamon, but in effect it became a battleground as Jewish forces mounted continuous attacks in order to expel its defenders and put its inhabitants to flight. When British troops withdrew at the end of the Mandate, Jewish ones advanced and occupied these quarters as no Arab force in Jerusalem was ready and able to replace the withdrawing British troops (146). At the same time, Nusseibeh notes that those quarters, valiantly defended by their residents from the very beginning of the year, including the Old City, Bab al-Zahira, Wadi al-Joz, al-Tur, and parts of Musrara, remained with the Arabs. On the last day of the Mandate, Jewish forces launched a strong offensive, which very nearly resulted in the occupation of the whole of Jerusalem. The Arab volunteer forces in Jerusalem, joined by three hundred Arab policemen, succeeded in holding the Jewish forces at bay. Yet it was not possible to defend and hold on to Jerusalem without outside support. Abdullah's was the only available address. Repeated calls for help eventually

impelled King Abdullah to order Glub Pasha to send the Arab Legion to Jerusalem, which he did, but only after "watching the city burn for days" and after the third day after British forces had evacuated the city. Nusseibeh concludes by affirming that the whole of Jerusalem would have eventually fallen to the Jewish forces had the Arab Legion not entered the city (147).

The People and The Leader

Constantine Mavrides records in his diaries that long before May 14th, many of the city's inhabitants from the new quarters, both the Muslim and Christian ones, had gone abroad. Only "the very poor and those who had no money stayed behind."³ The city inside the walls was emptied of its inhabitants with only five to seven thousand people remaining. Nusseibeh is full of praise for the many Jerusalemites who "stoically [shared] the vigil, noise and danger of the past five months without complaint" (139); he commends the courage of the city's inhabitants whose spirit and resistance enabled the city to hold out against the attacking Jewish forces until the arrival of the Arab Legion on May 19, 1948. Notwithstanding the resistance of Jerusalem's inhabitants, he notes that the wealthier residents had already started to leave in January after the Haganah blew up the Samiramis Hotel in Katamon resulting fourteen dead. The National Committee had no authority to stop this exodus; nor would it have been in its interest to do so, for as he asserts, such a move would have implied that

³ Published in S. Tamari (ed.), *Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighbourhoods and Their Fate in the War* (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies and Badil Resource Center, 1999), Appendix I.

it was in a position "to defend the citizens, and in particular the women and children," which in fact it was not. He reflects that perhaps the only competent authority that could have effectively put a stop to their flight would have been the Higher Arab Executive. However, the Executive itself was abroad. The only members left in Palestine were Dr. Hussein al-Khalidi and Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, in addition to Emil al-Ghouri who made occasional visits; the rest, along with their families "were away from Palestine and its dangers" (140). Some like the Mufti himself and his closest associates were banned by the government from entering the country, while others were abroad because of work. But "the rationalising rich" viewed the absence of the Higher Executive members as a "justification for their own departure" from Palestine. People also secretly feared a repetition of what took place in 1938, when they were forced to make financial contributions to the national cause. As the situation deteriorated, Nusseibeh records that the less wealthy began to follow the others out of the country "and so the movement, once started, gathered momentum" (140). The massacre of Deir Yassin accelerated the process and caused many residents in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem to abandon their villages (122). In Nusseibeh's mind, those who left felt justified in leaving, "[believing] they would soon [return] in the wake of the victorious Arab armies [who would] reoccupy a country to which order had been restored" (141).

Evaluating the Mufti

Throughout the Mandate period, the Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini headed the national movement. The Higher Arab Executive,

through which he executed his policies, has been criticized from various quarters, especially because its failed policies led to the Nakba of 1948. Nusseibeh, aware of the methods employed by the Executive and of the accusations levelled against it, is not harsh in his judgment. He first turns his attention to the individuals who made up the Executive and comments that there is "an old world, musty atmosphere of secrecy and intrigue" surrounding their methods (7). This he ascribes less to the persons "steeped in the Old Ottoman tradition, as some of them are, than to the nature of the work that they had to perform and the kind of obstacles with which they had to contend." Whatever the accusations, it was never suggested that they "did not represent the hopes and aspirations of the Arabs of Palestine" (7). The Executive's shortcomings, Nusseibeh notes, include over-centralization and the Executive's absence from Palestine during the most critical period. However, he refers mainly to the Mufti who "for better or for worse dominates the scene...all the other politicians fade into insignificance against his luminous background. They appear and fade across the political horizon without leaving any great or deep impression behind them" (7). While the Mufti has been called a "gangster," there is no doubt that "his political opponents fear as well as respect him." "He has been described as clannish and highly unreliable. He is certainly ambitious and very single minded. It is quite conceivable that people who do not share with him his ideals find him a very unsafe partner. He is slow but thorough, not given to trusting people easily. Being steeped in the old Arab tradition where family ties are stronger than in the West, he naturally leaned for support on members of

his family because he could be more certain of their loyalty" (7). As for the Mufti's relations with the British, Nusseibeh proclaims that this friendship "had been precarious and unnatural...the breakaway was inevitable." Many people regarded al-Husseini as a friend, even an agent, of the British and pointed to the fact that the British had approved his appointment as Mufti. Nusseibeh affirms that he was not "anti-British," but as a "pro-Arab he has not been able to make the two loyalties work together" (8). His principles were "sound and shared by all patriotic Arabs," but he "made the mistake of believing that he could achieve more through [allying himself with] Italy and Germany; it was the British themselves who had driven him to despair." His final judgment is that although the Mufti succeeded in providing the Arabs "with a symbol of resistance, he failed them as a leader." But considering the circumstances, this failure was probably "inevitable."

Biography:

Anwar Nusseibeh (1913-1986) was born in Ottoman Jerusalem. He studied law at Cambridge University in England in the early thirties and, upon his return to Palestine, worked briefly in the legal offices of the Mandatory government. In 1948, he was elected secretary of the Jerusalem National Committee, and later, in 1949, moved to Gaza where he held the position of secretary of the All Palestine Government established by Haj Amin al Husseini. He returned to Jerusalem soon after its annexation by King Abdullah of Jordan and participated in the first elections to be held after the "unification" of the West and East Bank. He was elected deputy for

Jerusalem in April 1950. He served two further terms in the Jordanian Parliament in 1951 and in 1954. In March 1953, he was appointed to the Jordanian Senate, and soon after resigned his seat upon being elected to Parliament. Nusseibeh served a further term in the Senate in November 1963, and resigned in June 1965 after his appointment as Jordanian Ambassador to the United Kingdom. In 1963, he was appointed Governor of Jerusalem. He served three terms as a cabinet minister; first in 1952 as Minister of Defense and Reconstruction; in 1954 as Minister of Defense and Education, and then again in 1954 as Minister of Defense. In 1956, along with a number of prominent East and West Bankers, he established the Arab Constitutional Party under the leadership of Prime Minister Towfic Abu al Huda. He continued to live in Jerusalem after the Israelis occupied it in June 1967, and served in the early 1980's as Chairman of the Jerusalem Electricity Company.

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