

## Britain's Pacification of Palestine

In this complete military history of Britain's pacification of the Arab revolt in Palestine, Matthew Hughes shows how the British Army was so devastatingly effective against colonial rebellion. The Army had a long tradition of pacification to draw upon to support operations, underpinned by the creation of an emergency colonial state in Palestine. After conquering Palestine in 1917, the British established a civil Government that ruled by proclamation and, without any local legislature, the colonial authorities codified in law norms of collective punishment that the Army used in 1936. The Army used 'lawfare,' emergency legislation enabled by the colonial state, to grind out the rebellion. Soldiers with support from the RAF launched kinetic operations to search and destroy rebel bands, alongside which the villagers on whom the rebels depended were subjected to curfews, fines, detention, punitive searches, demolitions, and reprisals. Rebels were disorganised and unable to withstand the power of such pacification measures.

MATTHEW HUGHES is Chair in Military History at Brunel University.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-10320-7 — Britain's Pacification of Palestine  
Matthew Hughes  
Frontmatter  
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*Cambridge Military Histories*

Edited by

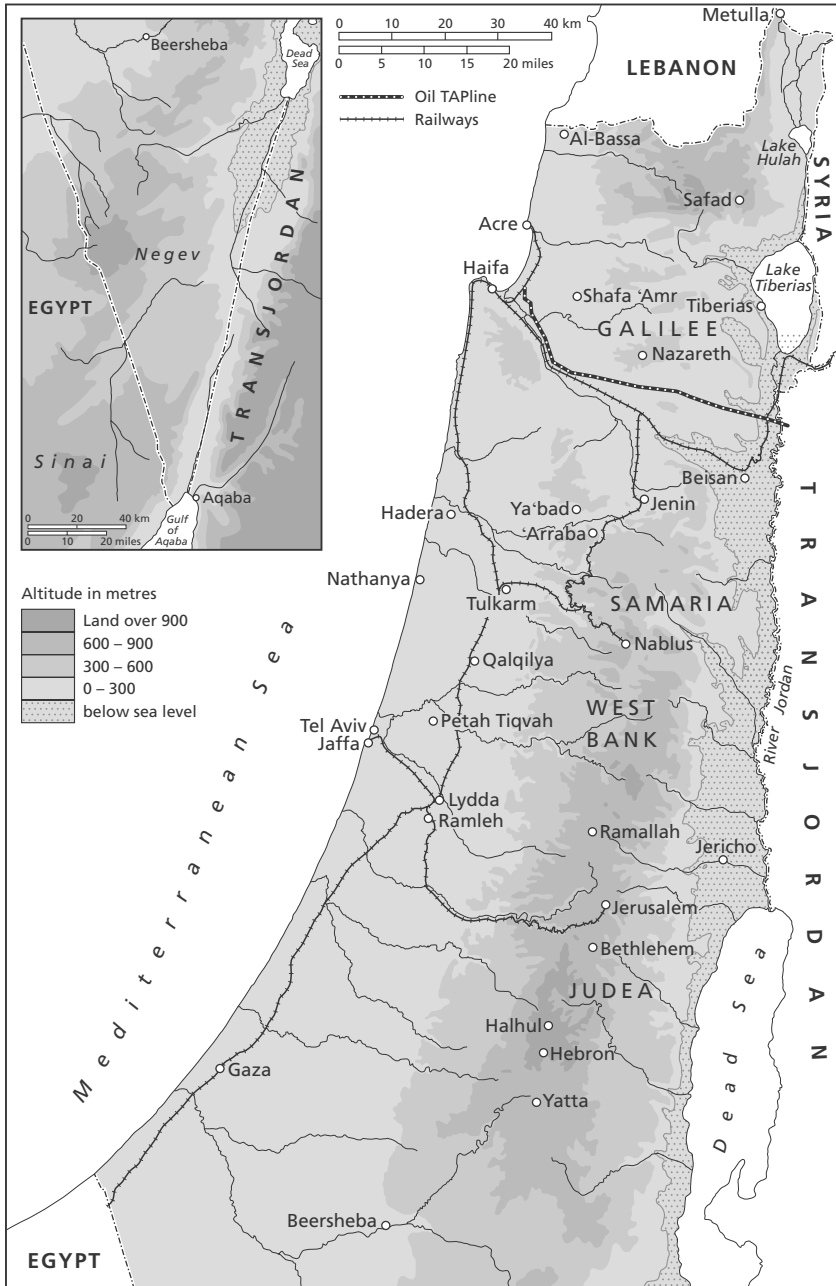
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Map of Palestine, 1937

# Britain's Pacification of Palestine

*The British Army, the Colonial State,  
and the Arab Revolt, 1936–1939*

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Matthew Hughes

*Brunel University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Matthew Hughes  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107103207](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107103207)

DOI: 10.1017/9781316216026

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First published 2019

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd. Padstow Cornwall

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Hughes, Matthew.

Title: Britain's pacification of Palestine : the British Army, the colonial state, and the Arab revolt, 1936–1939 / Matthew Hughes.

Description: Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2019. |

Series: Cambridge military histories

Identifiers: LCCN 2018039214 | ISBN 9781107103207 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781107501492 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Palestine—History—1917–1948. |

Counterinsurgency—Palestine—History—20th century. |

Mandates—Palestine—History—20th century. | Palestine—Politics and

government—1917–1948. | Great Britain—Foreign relations—Palestine. |

Palestine—Foreign relations—Great Britain. |

Imperialism—History—20th century. |

BISAC: HISTORY / Military / General.

Classification: LCC DS126.H82 2019 | DDC 956.94/04—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018039214>

ISBN 978-1-107-10320-7 Hardback

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For KH

The irregular report of the firing squad would be heard, sometime followed by a single finishing shot; a little bluish cloud of smoke would float up above the green bushes, and the Army of Pacification would move on over the savannahs, through the forests, crossing rivers, invading rural pueblos, devastating the haciendas of the horrid aristocrats, occupying the inland towns in the fulfilment of its patriotic mission, and leaving behind a united land wherein the evil taint of Federalism could no longer be detected in the smoke of burning houses and the smell of spilt blood.

Joseph Conrad, *Nostramo: A Tale of the Seaboard* (1904), p. 114

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## Acknowledgements

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The author completed much of the research for this book during his tenure of the Major-General Matthew C. Horner Distinguished Chair in Military Theory held at the United States Marine Corps University, Quantico, Virginia, funded by the Marine Corps University Foundation through the gift of Mr and Mrs Thomas A. Saunders, and supported by the Gray Research Center at the Marine Corps University. The author thanks the Saunders family, and General Thomas V. Draude, Colonel John Hales, and Dr Jerre Wilson at the Marine Corps Foundation and University. The author owes debts of gratitude to the following individuals for their advice and support: Dr Amal al-Abduljaffar, Dr Nir Arielli, Shlomi Chetrit, Professor W. G. Clarence-Smith, Professor David French, Mohamed Gaballa, the late Bahjat Abu Gharbiyya (and his son, Sami), Joshua Goodman, Dr Bruce Gudmundsson, Dr Eldad Harouvi, Edward Horne, Sabri Jiryis, General Sir Frank Kitson, Dr John Knight, Professor Mark Neocleous, Professor Laila Parsons, Daniel Perry, Najat al-Rahy, Professor Matthew Seligmann, Professor Yigal Sheffy, Dr Wayne Sullivan, Debbie Usher, Dr Steven Wagner, and Dr Daniel Whittingham. The author gives special regard to Dr Itamar Radaï for his advice on the text and for the transliteration of Arabic and Hebrew. Dr Simon Innes-Robbins read and commented on the manuscript. The following individuals kindly gave access to privately held papers: Christobel Ames-Lewis and Philip Keith-Roach (civil administrator Edward Keith-Roach), the late Prunella Briance (police officer John Briance), Owen Humphrys (Field Marshal Lord Wavell), and John Robertson (police officer Raymond Cafferata). Rachel Lev gave exceptional access to the American Colony Hotel archive in Jerusalem. Illustrations from the American Colony Hotel Archive used herein are from the 'Arab Revolt in Palestine Photograph Albums 1936–39' and the 'Scrapbook of Articles about the American Colony, Palestine, People and Events and Loose Enclosures, 1938–39' and credit is due photographers Eric G. Matson and John D. Whiting. Dr Dov Gavish gave freely the

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RAF aerial photographs of the British Army's destruction of old Jaffa reproduced here. Michael Watson at Cambridge University Press and the three anonymous referees supported the production of this book. The author acknowledges the many British regimental museums and local archives that hosted him on research trips, sent research material, and replied to later queries. The British Academy, Brunel University, and the Marine Corps University Foundation funded research in Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the USA, and in UK regimental archives. The author reproduces material from the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives with permission of its trustees. He claims any inaccuracies.

Matthew Hughes  
*Quantico, Virginia*  
*Islington, London*

## Abbreviations and Glossary

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A/	Acting
ACHA	American Colony Hotel Archive, Jerusalem
ACM	Air Chief Marshal
ADC	Assistant District Commissioner or aide-de-camp
<i>‘Agal</i>	See <i>Iqal</i>
AHC	Arab Higher Committee formed 25 April 1936, properly Supreme Arab Committee, <i>al-Lajnah al-‘Arabiyyah al-‘Ulya</i>
AL-KR	Papers of Edward Keith-Roach in possession of Christobel Ames-Lewis and Philip Keith-Roach
AOC	Air Officer Commanding, supreme British RAF military commander in Palestine
Arab Party	Palestine Arab Party, synonymous in British files with the <i>Majlis</i> (the Council, see below) but the party was not identical to the <i>Majlis</i> . The Husaynis controlled both the party and the <i>Majlis</i>
Askari	Black African soldier or police officer, from <i>‘Askari</i> , the Arabic for soldier
ASP	Assistant Superintendent Police
Auxiliaries	Para-military unit of former British military officers deployed during the Irish War of Independence (1919–21)
<i>Awqaf</i>	See <i>waqf</i>
<i>Bayan</i>	Statement/declaration/report or a communiqué issued by rebel forces in this book but can refer to a Government or any other statement, plural <i>byanat</i>
Bde	Brigade of around 3,500 men, usually comprising three to four battalions

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BIO	Brigade or Battalion Intelligence Officer
BL	British Library, London
Black and Tans	Temporary constables (often former British soldiers) attached to the Royal Irish Constabulary as a special reserve force during the Irish War of Independence (1919–21), many of whom then went to Palestine to fill the police force ranks there
BLARS	Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service, Bedford
Bn	Army battalion of around 800 soldiers comprising three (sometimes four) rifle companies plus support and HQ companies
BP	Papers of John Briance (formerly) in possession of Prunella Briance
Brig	Brigadier
BRM	Border and King's Own Royal Border Regiment Museum, Carlisle
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff (the head of the British Army before 1964)
CO	Colonial Office/Commanding Officer
COIN	Counter-insurgency
Col	Colonel or an Army column, the latter a unit somewhere between a platoon and a company
Council, The	See <i>Majlis</i>
Coy	Army company of around 150 soldiers, usually of three platoons plus a company headquarters
CP	Papers of Raymond Cafferata in possession of John Robertson, now stored in the Middle East Centre, Oxford
Cpl	Corporal
CUP	Cambridge University Press
CWGC	Commonwealth War Graves Commission
CZA	Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem
DC	District Commissioner
Defence Party	Nashashibi-controlled National Defence Party linked to the <i>al-Mua'rada</i> Opposition (see below)
DIG	Deputy Inspector General (Palestine Police)
DIS	Daily Intelligence Summary

DMO	Director of Military Operations
DSO	Defence Security Officer (of SIME) or Distinguished Service Order
DSP	District Superintendent Police
Effendi	Ottoman courtesy title used by the British to describe local Arab notables and merchants of high social standing or education, and used by Arabs to address middle- and upper-class gentlemen
EOKA	Cypriot insurgent organisation Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters)
ERMC	Essex Regiment Museum Chelmsford
ESRO	East Sussex Record Office, Brighton
ETA	Basque insurgent organisation Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Country and Freedom)
<i>Etsel</i>	From <i>Irgun Zvai Leumi</i> (National Military Organisation), revisionist Jewish military and political group, sometimes abbreviated to <i>Etsel</i>
<i>Fasa'il</i>	Palestinian rebel bands, platoons or units (literally 'groups' or 'sections,' sometimes 'factions') singular <i>fasil</i> whose numbers varied but could comprise up to 200 fighters
<i>Fasa'il al-salam</i>	Peace bands, referring in this book to anti-rebel Government- and Nashashibi-backed armed bands
<i>Fasad</i>	A blood feud or a long-running quarrel, literally 'corruption,' usually between two or more rival clans, akin to a 'vendetta' in English
<i>Faz'a</i>	Call for help in war, reinforcements or (colloquially) people called for help in a quarrel
Fellahin/fallahin	Arab rural peasants, singular fella/fallah
Fez	See <i>tarbush</i>
Field officer	Military officer of major, lieutenant-colonel or colonel rank
<i>Fitna</i>	Arabic for a clash or problem between two individuals or groups (plural <i>fitan</i> ), or a trial, in classical Arabic from the <i>Quran</i> 'sedition,' traditionally between Sunnis and Shias but could encompass sectarian clashes between Muslims and Christians or a succession crisis in Islam, and in this book denotes clan-based

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	Palestinian (usually Husayni–Nashashibi) family clashes; attractive people can cause <i>fitna</i> with their beauty
FM	Field Marshal
FO	Foreign Office
FOSH	Jewish military field companies
<i>Ghaffir</i>	A village or settlement guard
GHQ	British military General Headquarters based in Jerusalem
GOC	General Officer Commanding, supreme British Army military commander in Palestine
HA	Haganah Archive, Tel Aviv
Haganah	Jewish defence force (literally ‘The Defence’)
<i>Hamula</i>	Arab/Palestinian patrilineal clan or extended family, plural <i>hama’il</i> ( <i>hamulot</i> in Hebrew)
<i>al-Haram al-Sharif</i>	The Muslim ‘noble sanctuary’ (or Dome of the Rock/Temple Mount) in Jerusalem’s old city
<i>Hashomer</i>	Used to describe a Jewish guard, derived from the name of a Jewish paramilitary organisation of the late Ottoman period (literally ‘the watchman’)
<i>Hatta</i>	See <i>Kufyya</i> , a colloquial word for traditional Palestinian headdress, plural <i>hattat</i> or <i>hattat</i>
<i>Histadrut</i>	Jewish Labour Federation founded in 1920, <i>Ha-Histadrut</i> in Hebrew (The Histadrut) to acknowledge its importance
HLC	Haifa Labour Council
HMA	Haifa Municipal Archive
HMSO	His/Her Majesty’s Stationery Office
IED	Improvised Explosive Device (i.e., a roadside mine)
IG	Inspector-General (Palestine Police)
Inf	Infantry
IOR	India Office Records, African and Asian Library, British Library
IPC	Iraq Petroleum Company
IPS	Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut and Washington, DC
<i>Iqal</i>	The cord around traditional Palestinian peasant headdress
IRA	Irish Republican Army
ISA	Israel State Archive, Jerusalem



' <i>Isabat</i>	Singular ' <i>isaba</i> , bands or gangs in Arabic, see Oozlebarts
<i>Istiqlal</i>	Palestinian 'Independence' Party formed in 1932
IWMD	Imperial War Museum, London, Department of Documents
IWMFA	Imperial War Museum, London, Film Archive
IWMSA	Imperial War Museum, London, Sound Archive
J&EM	Jerusalem and the East Mission of the Christian Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem, papers held at the Middle East Centre, St Antony's Oxford
Jihad	'Struggle' or 'striving' in Arabic but in a religious context a 'holy war,' properly <i>al-fihad al-Muqaddas</i> meaning a Muslim holy (or sacred) war
JMA	Jerusalem Municipal Archive
JRL	John Rylands Library, Manchester
KCB	Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath
Kibbutz (im)	Jewish settlement(s), those living there being kibbutzniks
KMM	The Keep Military Museum, Dorchester, Dorset
KORRM	King's Own Royal Regiment Museum, Lancaster
KOSB	King's Own Scottish Borderers
KRI	King's Royal Irish
<i>Kufiyya</i>	Traditional Palestinian peasant turban-style headdress (plural <i>kufiyyat</i> ), also worn by some <i>Mizrahi</i> Jews. Yasir Arafat adopted the black and white chequered <i>kufiyya</i> as a Palestinian national symbol in the 1960s
L/Cpl	Lance Corporal
LAL	Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln
Lewis gun	British portable machine gun weighing 28 pounds, widely used in Palestine by the Army and police; soldiers in Palestine also used the newer Bren gun
LHCMA	Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London
Lira	Can refer to the Ottoman pound currency in use in Palestine to 1917 or the Egyptian pound in use in Palestine from 1917 to 1927, and used in the 1930s in Hebrew-language files to refer to the Palestine pound

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LP	Palestine pound, from <i>libra pondo</i> , Latin for a pound by weight
Lt	Lieutenant
Maj	Major
<i>Majlis</i>	<i>al-Majlis al-Islami al-A'la</i> (the Supreme Muslim Council or properly the Islamic Supreme Council) or 'Council' and controlled by the Husaynis who were also in charge of the Palestine Arab Party, with <i>majlisiyyun/majlisi</i> being 'people of the council.' The British used 'Majlis' synonymously with the Palestine Arab Party and the Husayni family
MC	Military Cross
MEC	Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford
MI5	British domestic security intelligence agency responsible for security in British colonies such as Mandate Palestine
MI6	See SIS
Mils	Palestine coinage, 1,000 to the Palestine Pound
<i>Mista'arvim</i>	Hebrew slang of the Arabic <i>Musta'aribun</i> (literally 'Arabised'), usually applied to Jews who masqueraded as Arabs for intelligence or sabotage purposes
<i>Mizrahi</i>	Eastern (Oriental) or 'Arab' Jew, plural <i>mizrahim</i>
<i>al-Mua'rada</i>	The Opposition (Nashashibi controlled) in charge of the National Defence Party, although the two were distinct. The British used Opposition and Defence Party synonymously to denote Nashashibi-led opposition to the revolt and the Husaynis
Mufti	In this book the chief Muslim cleric in Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni. More generally, an Islamic jurist scholar and in the Ottoman era each city had its own Mufti, answerable to Istanbul; since the British conquest of Palestine the Mufti of Jerusalem became the 'Grand Mufti of Palestine,' the chief Muslim cleric in the country. Also slang for a British (uniformed) Serviceman in civilian clothes

Mujahideen	Muslims engaged in jihad, used in the 1930s to describe the Arab fighters of the struggle (or holy war) in Palestine, singular mujahid
<i>Mukhtar</i>	Headman/mayor/leader of a village or urban quarter (literally 'chosen one'), larger conurbations having more than one, plural properly <i>makhatir</i> not <i>mukhtars</i> , and used also by the British to denote the secretary of a Jewish kibbutz or head of a Jewish village or township. In Jewish settlements the <i>mukhtar</i> was sometimes not in overall control but was an Arabic speaker in charge of liaison with and collecting intelligence on Palestinian neighbours
NAM	National Army Museum, London
NARA II	US National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland
National Defence Party	Or Defence Party, Nashashibi-controlled political party, see <i>al-Mua'rada</i>
NCO	Non-commissioned officer (a sergeant or a corporal)
<i>Noter</i>	Jewish watchman or guard, plural <i>notrim</i> , sometimes used to describe a Jewish supernumerary police officer
OBE	Officer of the Order of the British Empire
OC	Officer-in-Charge/Commanding
Oozlebarts	Military slang for rebels from Arabic plural for gangs 'ursabat' wrote former British policeman, Ted Horne, so probably from the Arabic word for insurgents or guerrillas 'isabat, singular 'isaba, meaning gangs or bands, with men on operations talking of 'oozlebarting' or 'oozling' <sup>1</sup>
Opposition, The	See <i>al-Mua'rada</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
Palestine Arab Party	See Arab Party and <i>Majlis</i>
Palestine pound	See currency details in Appendix F
Passia	Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs
PCP	Palestine Communist Party

<sup>1</sup> Edward Horne, *A Job Well Done (Being a History of the Palestine Police Force, 1920–1948)* (Tiptree: Anchor Press, 1982), p. 228.

xxii Abbreviations and Glossary

Piastre	Egyptian currency in use in Palestine, 1917–27, of 100 piastres to the Egyptian pound
Platoon	Military unit of around forty men commanded by an officer, usually three platoons to a company
PLL	Palestine Labour League formed in 1932 as the Arab branch of <i>Histadrut</i> . In Hebrew <i>Brit Po'alei Eretz Yisrael</i> (League of Workers of the Land of Israel), in Arabic <i>Ittihad 'Ummal Filastin</i> (Union of the Workers of Palestine)
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
POH	Papers of Lord Wavell in joint custody of Owen Humphrys
Pte/Pvt	Private
QLRM	Queen's Lancashire Regiment Museum, Fulwood Barracks, Preston (now the Lancashire Infantry Museum)
QRWS	Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment
RAFM	RAF Museum Hendon
ROLLR	Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, Leicester
RTR	Royal Tank Regiment
RUR	Royal Ulster Rifles, regimental archive at Waring Street, Belfast
RYM	The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire Museum, York
Sangar	A temporary military position usually made from raised stonework (also spelt sanger)
Sarafand	Or Surafend or Sarafend, large British military base on Palestine's coastal plain three miles from Ramleh, now an Israeli military base
Section	A military unit of around eight men (in the US a squad) commanded by a corporal, usually three (sometimes four) sections to a platoon
<i>Shai</i>	<i>Sherut Yedi'ot</i> (Information Service), Jewish intelligence and counter-intelligence branch of Haganah founded 1940, superseded in 1948 by new Israeli intelligence services but authors and Haganah archival material mark material from before 1940 as <i>Shai</i>
SHC	Surrey History Centre, Woking

SIME	British Security Intelligence Middle East (formed after 1937) under which served Defence Security Officers, part of the international arm of MI5 with a DSO in Palestine <sup>2</sup>
SIS	British Secret Intelligence Service (or MI6) agency for espionage abroad outside the British Empire
<i>Slick/slik</i>	A hidden weapons cache in a Jewish settlement, with <i>slickerit</i> being a female hiding weapons under her clothes
SNSs	Special Night Squads (led by British officer Orde Wingate)
SSO	RAF political-intelligence Special Service Officer
SUNY	State University New York
Suq/Souk	Market place or bazaar
Sûreté	Detective (CID) branch of the (Syrian and Lebanese) police
TAMA	Tel Aviv Municipal Archive
TAP(line)	The 585-mile-long pipeline from Iraq's Kirkuk oilfields across Transjordan and then Galilee to the Haifa refinery in Palestine (with a spur to Tripoli in French-run Lebanon) with pumping stations along the route marked H1 to H5; not to be confused with the Trans-Arabian pipeline built in the 1940s from Saudi Arabia to Sidon in Lebanon
<i>Tarbush</i>	Headdress (properly a head covering) synonymous with what is known in the West as a fez, invariably in red
TJFF	Transjordan Frontier Force
TLSAC	Tameside Local Studies and Archive Centre, Ashton-under-Lyne
TNA	The UK National Archives, Kew, London
Tommy gun	US-made Thompson sub-machine gun but generically also used as a term for any sub-machine gun
Troopers	Signals codeword for the War Office, London

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 138 dates this to 1937–38 while Eldad Harouvi to 1939 in his *Palestine Investigated: The Story of the CID of the Palestine Police Force, 1920–48* (Sussex: Academic Press, 2016), p. 251.

xxiv Abbreviations and Glossary

UP	University Press
<i>Waqf</i>	Muslim religious endowment, plural <i>awqaf</i>
WL	Weston Library, Oxford
WO	War Office
<i>Yishuv</i>	The Jewish community in Palestine (literally 'settlement'), with 'New' <i>Yishuv</i> often used to describe the modern Zionist society in the country that participated in the new Hebrew-speaking culture

## Nomenclature

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Ranks and titles for people discussed in this book are usually as they were at the time, excepting in the bibliography where they are typically those at the end of individuals' careers. The text refers to soldiers when referring to British armed forces, mindful that the RAF ran Palestine up to September 1936 and was heavily involved in intelligence work throughout the revolt; similarly, it uses at times Army and security forces interchangeably, when the latter encompassed the RAF, civil officials, the police, intelligence personnel (some from MI5, MI6 or CID), and Jewish and Palestinian supernumerary auxiliary units. Army regiments and battalions are synonymous in the text as a regiment in Palestine was a battalion of infantry as no regiment ever simultaneously deployed more than one of its battalions to the place. Regiments usually had two battalions, with one garrisoned at home and one serving abroad, so 1st Royal Ulster Rifles (or 1 RUR) in the text refers to the 1st Battalion of that regiment. Towns have more than 5,000 inhabitants, villages fewer than 5,000 people, with Jewish villages usually described as settlements, kibbutzim or colonies. Druze is both singular and plural, similarly Bedouin. The text omits diacritical marks when transliterating Arabic excepting the *ayn* (‘) and the *hamza* (’). The use of square or round brackets after proper nouns for spelling or location is the author's sense of the correct form; the text includes the original spelling. The book uses Arabic and Hebrew rather than Anglicised forms for plural nouns, so *kufiyyat* not *kufiyyas*, *bayanat* not *bayans*, kibbutzim as plural for kibbutz, excepting some commonly occurring words such as *mukhtars* as the plural for *mukhtar* (the plural is properly *makhatar*) where the contemporary files make the sibilant plural. It uses Bayt (‘house’) (literary Arabic) and Beit (colloquial) for village names interchangeably. *Mizrahi* is both singular and plural (plural properly *Mizrahim*). The text renders ‘Abdallah as the ruler of Transjordan to Abdullah. The author has differentiated between Palestinians (and, say, Syrians or Jordanians) and Arabs more generally where proper (or possible) in discussing rebel operations. The British

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usually spoke of fighting Arabs during the revolt and not Palestinians, partly because insurgent forces included men from places such as Syria. The book describes the Jewish community in Palestine, the *Yishuv*, as Jews and Jewish or, at times, settlers, as was the case at the time – Jews in the 1930s wrote in Hebrew of the Land of Israel – avoiding the label Zionists, except in the context of Zionism as a political movement. Not all Jews in Palestine were political Zionists, as was the case with some religious Jews and *Mizrahi* (and Sephardic) Oriental ‘Arab’ Jews who had been living for many years in the country. Identities shifted as violence increased and people took sides. Palestinians at the time of the 1929 riots spoke of new ‘Zionist Jews’ in the country, ‘the new breed of Jew in the land,’ in contrast to the older Jewish communities who were not recent arrivals from Europe.<sup>1</sup> The *Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* has guided word style.

<sup>1</sup> Hillel Cohen, *Year Zero of the Arab–Israeli Conflict 1929* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2015), pp. 107, 158.