

How Britain Runs Palestine

Four million pounds was the bill to the British taxpayer in 1921-22 for running Palestine under a military administration, the head of which was a general officer. Its principal officials were all military men, we learn from a special correspondent of the London Times, who has lately returned from Palestine, and military forces controlled public security and the frontier. But to-day this expense account has been reduced to £624,000, and Palestine is administered by a civilian High Commissioner with a purely civilian staff, while its frontiers and internal security are assured by British forces. This informant goes on to say:

"The only military forces now in the country are a cavalry regiment, the Ninth Lancers, at Surafend, and a squadron of the Royal Air Force (with an armored-car company) at Ramleh and Amman, in the Transjordan. The Middle East Vote of £624,000 is, in fact, made up of the cost of the air squadron, £40,000 toward the and £200,000 for the cost of British

maintenance of the cavalry regiment, gendarmes, which forms an integral part of the civil forces of the country. The Cabinet will be called upon to take a decision on the question of these Imperial commitments as soon as it has been able to receive and study the report of its two members, who recently visited Palestine. It may, therefore, be opportune if a brief survey be given of the system at present followed in Palestine in the matter of public security and the control of the frontiers.

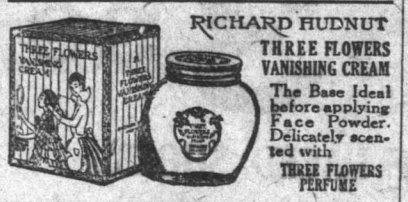
"The civil forces employed in the country number 2,000 officers and men—viz., 1,000 police (including the C. I. D.), 450 native gendarmes, and 550 British gendarmes.

"The police, mainly foot, with a small mounted section, is locally recruited, only the senior officers being British. The native gendarmes, which is mounted under British officers, consists of one-third Arab (Moslem and Christian), one-third Jew, and one-third foreign element, mostly Circassian—a mixture which was much condemned at the outset, as not conducive to harmony or efficiency, but which, according to its officers, has worked out extremely well.

The British gendarmes is on foot, with a small mounted section and motor transport, and consists of British ex-soldiers under British officers, all with war service."

The police do normal police duty in the towns and districts, we are told, while the Jewish suburb of Jaffa, Tel Aviv, has its own municipal force, consisting of Jews. The national gendarmes patrols the land frontiers and fulfils police duties in the areas adjoining. But it is pointed out that the British gendarmes is a militarily trained force acting as a mobile reserve and backing for the other forces, in addition to which it is used for special duty, where only British can be usefully employed, and for general patrol work throughout the country from Dan to Beersheba. We read then:

"As regards the military forces, the R. A. F. squadron is stationed here



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mainly because of the necessity of controlling the Imperial airway to the Middle East, which passes through Ramleh and Amman. The cavalry regiment is part of the general scheme for maintaining a British garrison at strategic points on the line of Imperial communications, as, for example, in Egypt.

"The question of retrenchment in these Imperial commitments is of moment to Palestine, for, while it is intimately concerned in the £200,000 provided for the British gendarmes, it also had a close interest in the fate of the R. A. F. estimates, since the armored cars provided thereunder—the cost is estimated at £90,000—are, in view of the peculiar conditions reigning in the country, a valuable support, particularly in matters of defense.

"Palestine is, it is true, a relatively small country; its area is approximately 10,000 square miles. But it presents features that complicate the problem of public security. Its population comprises 600,000 Moslems, 86,000 Christians, belonging to no fewer than a score of more or less conflicting rites, 108,000 Jews, and about 10,000 miscellaneous sects. The atmosphere of religious fervor produced by the existence of the sacred places and the ceremonies and festivals periodically held in and around them exercises an exciting influence on these constitutionally antagonistic communities, and gives to the daily situation a potentiality of explosiveness that exists in no other land. Then there are topographical difficulties to be contended against. The Holy City itself with its narrow, tortuous streets and its rabbit-warren-like houses surrounding and leading to the various shrines and points of religious interest, is a never-ending source of serious preoccupation to those responsible for the maintenance of peace and order; while the scattered nature of the inhabited centers and settlements and the formation of the country itself complicate the task of supervision and control. Finally, it has an abnormal length of land frontier—some 280 miles—bordering for the most part on regions inhabited by nomad tribes and exposed to the constant danger of raids."

It is interesting to note, says this Times correspondent, that the city of Cairo requires a police force more than double the total civil forces employed in Palestine. Yet the population of Cairo is only 12 per cent. greater than that of Palestine and is nowhere like the same exciting influences. To this police force of Cairo, we are told, is added a body of 1,400 public ghaibis (native policemen), and behind them all is the moral influence of the British garrison of some 4,000 men. This writer then remarks:

"In the circumstances the Middle East Vote, covering purely local requirements, assumes the character of an amazingly cheap insurance premium, considering the risks it covers and the heavy expenditure in the matter of garrison and reinforcements it obviates."

"If the present satisfactory condition of things, in so far as concerns the maintenance of public order, is to continue, no very radical change in the system at present followed should, or can, be made. That some British support for the native civil forces is imperative all authorities agree. However efficient these forces may be they require to have at their back the moral of a non-native element."

"Purely military units are not of the same value in this respect as a white element forming an integral part of the civil forces. The former can only be called upon in a crisis, when the situation has for all practical purposes got beyond the control of the ordinary civil force, whereas a militarily trained British element in that force has the advantage of being able to come into action as a normal feature of the public security organization while there is still a possibility of circumscribing or even preventing the threatened trouble. In other words, the presence of a British civil element acts as a salutary deterrent, and it is no secret that during the critical period of the Balfour tour, although the police and native gendarmes very satisfactorily afforded the necessary protection and maintained public order, the key to the situation was furnished by the white element, in this case the British gendarmes."

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