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TRANSJORDAN AND THE WAR *

Notes on an informal talk given by Brigadier J. B. Glubb, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., on October 9, 1944, General Sir John Shea, G.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O., in the Chair.

In opening his lecture, Brigadier Glubb said: Please note that any views which I express are my own, and that His Majesty's Government undertakes no responsibility for my fancies.

BEFORE starting to talk about what Transjordan has done in this war, I should like in a very few minutes to remind you of the origin of Transjordan. You have all probably listened to various speeches and counter-speeches made during the last war, the gist of which was that the Mediterranean would be a first-class mandate, whereas what is now Syria and Transjordan would be second-class mandates, where there would be Arab States in which we would give any necessary assistance. For a short time Syria and Transjordan formed one country under the government of the Emir Feisal in Damascus, but before very long a clash took place, with the result that the French invaded Syria and Syria became directly administered by the French.

This left Transjordan an odd piece, with nobody in particular to look after it, and it so remained for the best part of a year. It was not until 1920 that the Emir Abdullah, the son of King Hussein, arrived from the Hedjaz, and then an agreement was reached, by which he took over the sovereignty of this piece of country. When he did so he proceeded to form an army and a police force. The army was called the Arab Legion, or in Arabic the Arab army, in order to commemorate the army of Feisal which had fought in the Great War.

It was not until 1926 that the position of Transjordan *vis-à-vis* His Majesty's Government was regularized, but when an agreement was drawn up it was laid down that the British Government undertook responsibility for the external defence of Transjordan and that His Highness need not maintain any military forces. As a result of that agreement the Arab Legion became the police and gendarmerie of Transjordan only.

The years from 1926 to 1930 passed quietly. In 1930 Transjordan, in common with a number of Arab Governments, decided to take over control of its desert, which was a policy which had never been carried out by the Turks. The Turks made no attempt to govern anything except the settled areas, and the desert was left to look after itself. As a result, in 1930 a new branch of the Arab Legion was formed, enlisted from desert troops, with the object of administering that desert and ensuring security there.

The last disturbance in Transjordan took place in 1932, after which we again had four more or less quiet years, until in 1936 the disturbances took place in Palestine. Although the inhabitants

As Brigadier Glubb had left the country before it was understood that he is not responsible for any mistakes.



deeply moved by the Arab-Jewish hostility, no disturbances of any kind took place inside Transjordan itself. Towards the end of the disturbances, the rebels in Palestine attempted to create trouble across the Jordan in the hope that British troops would have to be sent over to restore order. In actual practice the Arab Legion itself coped with all such attempts. No British soldier entered Transjordan during the period of the disturbances from 1936 to 1939.

Just before the outbreak of war a modification to the Transjordan-British agreement was made, by which His Highness was once more authorized to maintain purely military forces. When the war began, the Emir Abdullah immediately informed H.M. Government that he was prepared to offer every assistance that he could, and this his forces would be at the disposal of the British Government for hostilities. When in the early stages of the war His Highness made this offer, H.M. Government replied that the war would be fought out in Europe and that the Middle East would not be involved. It was not until the fall of France in the beginning of 1940 that Transjordan was suddenly faced with the position of having an enemy on her frontiers. As a result, during the summer of 1940, His Highness's original offer of armed assistance was accepted and an agreement was made with the British Army to raise one regiment, which was to be completely mechanized.

It was not until April, 1941, that we actually reached the bottom of the trough. In that month you will remember Rommel was carrying out his first offensive against Egypt. Greece had gone. Crete was about to go. At this critical moment a pro-German faction appeared in Iraq and declared war on the British Government. Our first regiment was at that time not completely equipped. Although it was almost entirely enlisted it was only very partially trained.

In addition to that, there can be no doubt that at that time almost every Arab, and I should think a large part of the world, was quite convinced that the British were finished and that it was only a question of days before the Germans arrived and occupied the greater part of the Arab countries.

Furthermore, during the first days of the Baghdad *coup d'état* we were in an exceedingly weak position because we had no broadcasting station on which the Arabs relied and which could speak in Arabic, with the exception of Jerusalem (which they suspected was not purely Arab) and the London B.B.C. But the B.B.C. was not near enough to get across quick and immediate rejoinders to the exceedingly exciting and passionate propaganda which was put out by the Baghdad radio for the first few days.

Almost every Arab, as I have said, if not every Arab, was convinced that these were just the last stages before the British collapse; a fact which makes it all the more remarkable that His Highness took this opportunity to renew his offer of assistance, and that, whereas almost every other force which we had enlisted in Arabia was either trembling or applying in large numbers to resign, the Arab Legion was one of the first which made a voluntary offer to accompany any British force which took part in the operations. (Applause.)

When our cantonment at Habanniya on the Euphrates was besieged, a small column of British troops left Palestine in order to drive across the

desert to relieve it. The first regiment of the Arab Legion accompanied that column. It is interesting to think that as far as we know in history the desert had only once before been crossed by an army—namely, by one of the first Moslem armies, I suppose about A.D. 630. In those days the Moslems from the Hedjaz had an army in Syria and an army in Iraq.

The Arab Legion proved itself quite useful in the course of the desert crossing; for instance, in finding ways by which the column could enter Habanniya and in guiding and reconnaissance duties.

Having relieved Habanniya, it was decided that the column should go forward and take a chance of attacking Baghdad at once, but an inevitable delay took place owing to the fact that the enemy had broken the banks of the Euphrates and had flooded all the country along the road to Baghdad. The Arab Legion, however, occupied the days of waiting by crossing the Euphrates and moving on to the Tigris, and on several occasions they cut the road and railway between Mosul and Baghdad. At that time the Germans in Syria were attempting to send trainloads of munitions via Mosul to Baghdad to assist the enemy there, so that the cutting of that railway was a useful little job.

After Baghdad fell we discovered that this particular excursion had been very much more valuable than we knew. When the final advance on Baghdad took place the Arab Legion led a column across so as to attack Baghdad from the north at the same time as the main column was attacking it from the west. It was merely meant as a small diversion, but it transpired afterwards that Rashid Ali and his assistants had worked out that if the place got too hot for them they would retire to Mosul and so to Turkey. The information (which was sent) that our forces were arriving on their road made them nervous about their get-away. So much so that after the first cutting of the railway the Governor of Baghdad himself was sent up to inquire, because the Iraq Government refused to believe that the British had succeeded in crossing the Euphrates and in driving across the desert to the Tigris. While the Governor was carrying out his inquiry our column came across. It was driving down this road towards Baghdad when the Governor arrived in his car, plus his notes, and ran into the back of the column. We took him prisoner and unfortunately he was wounded, but the next day we wrapped him up and put him on a boat and let him float down to the city of Baghdad, like Moses in the bulrushes, but without his notes.

As soon as the appearance of the column was confirmed, Rashid Ali and his party got very nervous, because a British army had already landed at Basra. Our arrival was accompanied by rumours that we had crossed the Tigris. It was not so, but it made them nervous that their last get-away route would shortly be cut also. It appeared likely that that was one of the principal reasons which persuaded them to throw their hand in, although they still had eight or ten men to our one advancing on Baghdad.

As soon as this operation was over the British army decided to occupy Syria, and our first Transjordanian regiment once more accompanied a British column which cut across the desert into Palmyra, thereby turning the left flank of the army which was facing the British. On this occasion the Arab Legion had a nice little battle of its own, because it ran into a

Vichy-French column which arrived from Dair az-Zor to reinforce Palmyra, and as a result eighty prisoners were taken, with five armoured cars and twelve trucks; twelve of the enemy were killed and only one member of the Arab Legion.

One result of these operations was rather unfortunate, because it was decided to expand the Arab Legion very considerably. This, of course, put them back for a year or more to allow for training and equipment, with the result that at the time of Alamein they were still not ready. Actually a small advance party was sent to Egypt, which had an officer killed; but the battle of Alamein then followed, and before anything more could be done the enemy had unfortunately retired to Tunis.

Although the Arab Legion has not been in action since those days in 1941, it has very greatly increased since then, and is to-day holding large numbers of garrisons and doing guard duties in various parts of the Middle East.

So much for the military action of Transjordan. From the economic point of view no friction has ever occurred, and under the controlling organization of the Middle East Supply Centre all the grain surplus of Transjordan is handed over to the British authorities for the use of other countries in the Middle East, for whom shipping would otherwise be required. In addition to their military and agricultural efforts, many thousands of labourers have been provided, especially in the years 1940-41 and the first part of 1942, for the construction of defences and roads.

In order to give you some idea of the military effort of Transjordan I would like to rough out some very elastic figures. If we calculate the British population of the British Empire to be 70,000,000 and the armed forces to be, say, 6,000,000 or 7,000,000, we get 1 person in 10 as being in the Services. If we say that the United States population is 120,000,000—I have no idea what their Forces are, but I suppose they are 8,000,000 or 9,000,000, which means again something like 1 in 14. If, on the other hand, we go to India, we are told in the Press that a population of 340,000,000 has produced 2,000,000, which would be 1 in 170. Transjordan, of course, has not got conscription, but to the best of my calculations it seems that by a voluntary system she has enlisted about 1 person in 35, which is slightly less than half as good as the United States, which has done it by conscription, but on the other hand is four or five times as much as India, which also has a voluntary system.

Not only that, but the Arab Legion has in this process turned away many thousands of recruits owing to difficulties in equipment and the varying demands of the British Army. So that I have very little doubt that, if we had been pressed, we could have enlisted, say, 1 in 2 in the armed forces as against what appears to be about 1 in 10 or 1 in 14 in Great Britain or the United States; this being done, of course, by voluntary enlistment and not by conscription.

Transjordan has one or two claims to distinction, of which the first and perhaps the most distinctive of all in Arabia is that for the last twenty years there has not been a rebellion. No other Arab country can make this claim. One must not think that Arabs only rebel against the British, for the worst Arab rebellion in those twenty years was against Ibn Saud.

Transjordan is also the only country which is not directly British administered the troops of which have actually fought for the United Nations, the only country in the Middle East from Libya to the Indian borders. She is also, as far as I can make out, the only country whose troops are serving at this moment outside their native country. At this moment when I am speaking, every single military unit raised by Transjordan is serving outside Transjordan.

That is a very brief account of what Transjordan has done in the last five years. But the interesting part, and the one from which we may perhaps benefit, is to try to think out what are the reasons why Transjordan may claim to have been a success.

Personally, I am inclined to put as the first reason the fact that she has a Constitution which is more suitable to her population than that of any other country in that part of the world. Somebody said to me the other day that the British have created men in their own image, and I think there is something to be said for that when you consider that wherever we have gone in the East we always tend to produce an imitation Westminster Constitution. The British Constitution to-day is entirely founded on elections. Without going into this question too deeply, it is enough to say that where the great majority of the people cannot read or write an effective election is quite impossible.

The Constitution of Transjordan includes a legislative assembly, which is elected; but this assembly has no right to initiate measures, nor can it by passing a vote of no confidence cause the Cabinet to resign. The Cabinet is appointed solely by His Highness, who orders somebody to take office or orders him to leave it, and whether or not the legislative assembly approves is not very relevant. The Government is pledged to submit all legislation to a vote in the assembly, and if the assembly rejects it the measure has to be amended. But the legislative assembly cannot initiate. This limited amount of control is not without value. There is no doubt that there is a big difference between the Government being able to issue orders in council of its own and its having to submit all its measures to public debate. The fact, however, that office does not depend on a man being a popular demagogue but on appointment by the Emir does keep the system on lines which appear to be more suitable to the present development of the population.

I never understand myself why, when we think that the Arabs should have representative government, we do not start on the lower level of municipalities or rural councils instead of putting on the roof before we have laid the foundations. Actually it is curious to note that during these last years municipal elections or the appointment of mayors, which used to be the result of election, have in many cases now become a matter of Government appointment.

The second thing which I think has been of great assistance to Transjordan is that population is almost entirely rural, and there is, or was, no such thing as either class distinctions or big differences in wealth, such as you find in Egypt.

It is one of the ironies of our presence in these countries that at a time when class distinctions are meeting the bitterest criticism in England and

are rapidly being eliminated, they are just beginning to appear in the various countries where we have exercised influence in the Middle East. There is no doubt, as a result of the difference in education between a small number of persons who have received a semi-European education and the bulk of the ordinary people, and also to some extent of the increases of wealth which have taken place since the beginning of the war, that class distinctions are now beginning to appear; but in Transjordan at least they have not yet reached a limit which would cause ill-feeling between different branches of the population. Incidentally, where class distinctions are acute in the Middle East, the only influence which seems possible to moderate their bitterness is either that of a ruling house or of British or other European officials. I think both His Highness and the British officials in Transjordan are fully aware of this danger and are doing all they can to prevent a schism between various classes of the people.

One of the biggest assets that Transjordan enjoys is undoubtedly the privilege of the Emir himself. We always imagine that an autocracy is a place where everybody is oppressed, whereas a democracy is a place where everybody gets a fair deal. As a matter of fact that does not go without saying at all, and the ancient Arab tradition is that of a single Governor, who in former days always sat in a public place for a certain period every day and was accessible to every single person amongst his subjects. Although this complete accessibility to everybody is a little difficult when the Government works in a more machine-like manner, yet there is no doubt that the very great accessibility of His Highness provides one of the best safety valves against any discontent in the country.

Nearly two hundred years ago a British official in India said that government in the East is less a matter of framing Constitutions than of establishing personal contacts, and it is rather sad to think that two hundred years later we are still framing Constitutions, whereas the great way to control these people is always through personal relations.

Some years ago, before I took command of the Arab Legion, when I was in charge only of the desert, I had the very good idea; I would, I thought, introduce a little democracy. So we collected the Sheikhs of all the tribes and I made a little speech, in which I said I had no desire to continue issuing orders to everybody, and I suggested that the Sheikhs should get together and have a meeting now and again and themselves introduce all the reforms they thought necessary. But at the end of my speech one of them said: "But will you still draw your salary if we have to do all the work?" I think that we are perhaps a little patronizing when we think we are going to introduce freedom to the Arabs.

I am sorry that all my authorities seem to be so old, but in the introduction to one of the chapters of the *Decline and Fall* Gibbon summed up the Arabs in his day. Amongst other things, he said, "The citizens of European nations may exult in their national independence, but the Arab is personally free," and there is certainly a very great deal to be said for that. So much depends on the spirit with which any Constitution is carried out. If you take our famous British Constitution—when applied in France the result is very different from what it is when applied in England; when applied in Germany, Greece, the United States, wherever it is, in each

country the answer comes out quite different from the original at Westminster. I think the same applies equally to the rule of Arab princes, and it would be a great error to think that the rule of one man necessarily means the loss of the independence of the individual subject.

In trying to work out the reasons for Transjordan's success I do not want to omit the British, and I should attribute the British influence in Transjordan to two things. First of all, to the fact that there is absolute equality throughout the Transjordan Government between the British and the Arab officials. We have been fortunate perhaps in avoiding the system known as dyarchy, by which every executive official is double-banked by a fellow whose only job is to tell him when he has done it wrong. All the British in Transjordan are themselves executives and fit in at different levels of the administration. They are by no means always at the top. In the Arab Legion, British and Arab officers are intermingled, by no means in succession of rank. If a commander happens to be British, the next three senior after him may all be Arabs, and after that there comes one British, and so on.

Another very important point is that Transjordan is such a forgotten place that any British officer who gets there never gets out of it. We become patriarchs. It is one of the most remarkable changes, I think, that in recent years of British administration in most places the "patriarch" no longer exists. We have made all our services very regular and officials do about three years at one place and then pass on to a different type of job, so that it is difficult in most countries for any British officer to take local roots. But in Transjordan it is different. The fact that Sir Henry Cox, or Colonel Peake, or Mr. Kirkbride, the British Resident, have served for many years in the country means that they themselves have become, I might say, Transjordanized to such a degree that they possess far more influence and are in a position to put the Transjordan case far better than if they had only three years there and then served in some part of the Empire.

In saying what Transjordan's rôle is to be in the post-war world, I hope you do not expect me to expound what will be the future political settlement of the Middle East. All I can say is that I believe that Transjordan is now in a strong position to exercise a stabilizing influence, whatever may be our future in the way of disturbances or rebellions. But what is a little distressing is the fact that Transjordan, which, as I have told you, was born out of due time and did not really come to fruition until 1926, has always been, we feel, a Cinderella who was introduced to do the tidying-up when her bigger sisters, like Egypt, Iraq and Saudi-Arabia, were going to the parties and enjoying the publicity. The fact that Transjordan has been a success does not seem to have led us in any way to analyse whether there is anything that we can learn from her and apply in other countries.

Twenty years ago the great cry was independence and self-determination. But surely in the twenty-five years that have elapsed we had the opportunity to try this out, and now we should be in a position to make any necessary adjustments. The result which has followed from this infatuation for independence is what I think I might call fragmentation—*i.e.*, a tendency to get down to smaller and smaller units. Not only was

the whole of Arabia part of the Turkish Empire before the war, but Syria, Transjordan, Palestine and the Lebanon were one bloc. Not only have these now been broken up, but we have even heard cries of independence for the Druses or the Alawis or any other small body you like.

I cannot help feeling that this continued fragmentation is in exact opposition to what should be the result of modern methods of communications. When I went to Iraq in 1920, it took me a month to get to Jerusalem when I wanted to pay a visit there. It took me five weeks to get from England to Basra. Nowadays it takes about twelve hours from Jerusalem to Baghdad, as against nearly a month the first time I went over.

When I was in Iraq in 1924 I took an Iraqi with me to Jerusalem. He looked upon the place as if he had been in China and said he wanted to go home, as he could not understand what they were all saying. But anybody who has been to the Middle East lately will know that every step, every incident of the political situation in Palestine is followed in Baghdad and in Damascus. So we have these two conflicting movements at the same time: this excessive devotion to independence, without any limit, which has been leading in one direction to smaller and smaller units, and on the other hand there is the progress in communications which must inevitably tend to lead to larger and larger units.

Another thing which must lead to larger units, I presume, is the needs of defence. In Turkish times the troops that were stationed in Northern Arabia marched on their flat feet or rode on mules. In 1914-18 there was a British army in Palestine and one in Iraq, but they had no means of getting together. Nowadays not only vehicles but whole formations cross the desert in a few hours. With the progress of technical advance in war, particularly airborne armies, these microscopic little parcels become more and more impossible if you are going to interpret complete independence literally.

We hear a certain amount about Arab unity, which I am sure is a step in the right direction; but even Arab unity does not either provide a bloc which is strong enough to defend itself or offer commercial reasons to start itself without being tied in to an even bigger bloc.

It seems to me that the only way out of this *impasse* is to realize that our mistake is in treating sovereignty as one thing. On the one hand there is no doubt that the great success of Transjordan has been largely due to its smallness, with the result that every subject of Transjordan has access to His Highness and can make himself known. But on the other hand it has enormous disadvantages. It is surrounded with customs barriers. No Transjordanian can get out without a passport and a visa, and its future is altogether too small for the many educated and enterprising young men who are now growing up in Transjordan and feel that there is no field for them to find a career. So that I cannot help feeling that one of the first lessons we get from Transjordan for the future is that of a country which runs its own internal affairs entirely, but which has the benefit of, or has taken advantage of its membership of, a larger bloc. I would very much prefer seeing more careers for Arabs opened under British auspices in other parts of the world to seeing all these young men shut up in these tiny countries.

We must, however, remember that, while co-operation with the British Empire offers the Arabs such enormous advantages, the Arabs are not prepared to form part of an empire in which they will occupy a subservient position. They look upon themselves as the heirs of a race which in its day controlled an empire as big as our own, and we have to face the fact that we must deal with them on terms of personal equality. I must stress the term *personal* equality, for it is obvious that a country like Transjordan cannot aspire to deal with the British Empire on terms of actual equality. Perhaps a simile will explain what I mean. If you take, for example, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man—I understand that they make their own taxes and have a considerable amount of independence as far as the administration is concerned, but I assume that they will hardly ask for an equal voice in the Government in Westminster. But on the other hand, when we meet a man from the Channel Islands we do not treat him with any less respect because he belongs to an island which is smaller than Great Britain itself.

The Arabs themselves are realists, and they realize that their numbers are such that, of course, they cannot hope to exercise a controlling voice in the policy of the British Government, but they do insist and always will insist as individuals on being treated on exactly equal terms with any British subject.

At the same time, I think there is one point which we should always remember, and that is that the Arabs, while often individually exceedingly brilliant—a fact which is proved when they mingle with other races—on the whole are lacking in civic spirit inside their own country. They are too great and too strong individualists, and it seems to me that the best way in which we can assist to change this failing in a race which is itself so proud, and has itself such a long history, is by exercising the greatest care in the selection of the British officials who go to serve in Arab countries. The gratuitous offer of advice is not a way to make yourself always popular, and the easiest and most effective manner of encouraging public spirit is by making perfectly certain that every British officer who serves in the Middle East will set a personal example of public spirit about which there can be no doubt.

I am afraid I am already exceeding my time, so I will try to summarize the one or two points which I have made up till now.

I think the success of Transjordan may first of all be attributed to its suitable Constitution, which allows a certain scope for public debate but has not gone so far as to be a copy of the Constitution of Great Britain.

The next point to observe is, I think, what I have called divided sovereignty—i.e., the enormous advantage there is in small countries administering themselves, where every man can feel that he exercises influence and has an outlet for his complaints. Especially is this the case in the Eastern countries, which are more used to government by individuals than by elected bodies.

But this small union is unpractical from the point of view of either defence, commerce, passports or even careers for the intelligent and educated young men who are now rising. So you have to divide your sovereignty and have small units for your internal administration with some

tie-up to a very much larger bloc. In other words, as I have said, not fragmentation but coagulation.

But we must always remember that the Arabs look upon themselves as the heirs of an empire as great as our own, and it is quite impossible to treat them as subordinates, nor will they ever consent to be in a subservient position.

Their principal shortcoming in public affairs is too great an individualism, too great a devotion to personal freedom, and I think the best way to overcome that, if we really wish them well, is not by continually offering advice but by making sure that we always set them the very highest example through our own representatives.

This question of our own relations with the various races in the Middle East, and in India, is perhaps after this war the most important with which we shall be faced. Transjordan is a microscopic country with a very small population and an even smaller revenue; but I think perhaps that if we can study the reasons why Transjordan has been a success she may have justified her existence, however small she may be, if we can deduce from her any lessons which we can apply with benefit in a larger sphere.

