

Palestinian Collaboration with the British: The Peace Bands and the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–9

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Abstract

This article examines an aspect of British counter-insurgency in Palestine in the 1930s during the Arab revolt there against British colonial rule and Jewish settlement: the pro-British, anti-rebel Palestinian militia ‘peace bands’, associated with the Palestinian Nashashibi family and raised with British and Jewish military and financial assistance, and with support from the British Consul in Damascus, Gilbert MacKereth. Using Hebrew, Arabic and untapped local British regimental sources, it details how the British helped to raise the peace bands and the bands’ subsequent activities in the field; it assesses the impact of the bands on the course of the Arab revolt; and it sets out the views of the British Army towards those willing to work with them. In doing this, it extends the recent thesis of Hillel Cohen on Palestinian collaboration with Zionists to include the British and it augments the useful but dated work of Yehoshua Porath and Yuval Arnon-Ohanna on the subject. Such a study is significant for our understanding of British methods of imperial pacification, especially the British Army’s manipulation during colonial unrest of ‘turned’ insurgents as a ‘loyalist’ force against rebels, an early form of ‘pseudo’ warfare. The collaboration by Palestinians resonates with broader histories of imperial and neo-imperial rule, it extends military histories on colonial pacification methods, and it provides rich, new texture on why colonial subjects resisted and collaborated with the emergency state, using the Palestinians as a case study.

Keywords

Collaboration, Fakhri ‘Abd el-Hadi, Husaynis, Nashashibis, peace gangs, Yatta

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In April 1936, the Palestinians revolted against Jewish settlement and British colonial rule in Mandate Palestine. A tough British counter-insurgency campaign crushed the revolt by 1939, one involving heavy troop deployments, legal sanctions, official and unofficial violence, torture, collective punishment, mass detention and diplomacy.¹ The British Army and the colonial government also supported local Jewish and Palestinian collaborators to divide and defeat the rebels. Palestinian collaboration is the subject of this article. It centred on the pro-Government Palestinian Nashashibi family and irregular, militia-style ‘peace bands’ (or, more pejoratively, ‘gangs’), *fasa’il al-salam* in Arabic. The Jews in Palestine also aided the peace bands – the subject of recent work by Hillel Cohen – as did the British Consul in Damascus, Lieutenant-Colonel Gilbert MacKereth.² British support for the peace bands peaked in December 1938 when they supported a Nashashibi-sponsored public meeting at the village of Yatta near Hebron, a gathering attended by the senior British commander in Palestine, General Richard O’Connor, and by leaders of the Nashashibi family.

This study is a military history of how the British used collaboration as a weapon to ensure imperial control, with Palestine as a case study, and one supported by a deep reading of local British Army regimental archives alongside Hebrew- and Arabic-language material, the latter limited in number, the former useful as the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) had an effective intelligence network.³ It shows how the British raised the peace bands, it details the bands’ subsequent activities in the field, it assesses the impact of the bands on the course of the Arab revolt, and it sets out the views of the British Army towards those willing to work with the colonial power, all of which resonate with wider imperial histories on resistance and collaboration in the contemporary period.⁴ Embedded in the discussion on the British and the peace bands is another argument

1 See M. Hughes, ‘The Banality of Brutality: British Armed Forces and the Repression of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–39’, *English Historical Review*, 124, 507 (April 2009), 313–54; M. Hughes, ‘A History of Violence: The Shooting of British Assistant Superintendent Alan Sigrist, 12 June 1936’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45, 4 (2010), 725–43; J. Norris, ‘Repression and Rebellion: Britain’s Response to the Arab Revolt in Palestine of 1936–39’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36, 1 (March 2008), 25–45.

2 H. Cohen, *Tzva ha-Tzolim* [An Army of Shadows] (Jerusalem 2004), translated into English as Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917–1948* (Berkeley, CA 2008).

3 E. Dekel, *Shai: The Exploits of Hagana Intelligence* (New York, NY 1959), *passim*; A. Lefen, *Ha’Sha’i: Shorasheha Shel Kehilat ha’Modi’in ha’Israelit* [The Roots of the Israeli Intelligence Community] (Tel Aviv 1997), 42–3. Readers will allow some imprecision in the use of ‘Yishuv’, ‘Zionists’ and ‘Jews’ in this article, all of which will refer to the Jewish community in Palestine before 1948; in some contexts, the use of ‘Jews/Jewish’ suits the language employed at the time and is unavoidable if imprecise.

4 Such as, D. Anderson and D. Branch, *Empire Loyalists: Histories of Rebellion and Collaboration* (forthcoming); D. Killingray and D. Omissi (eds), *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers, c. 1700–1964* (Manchester 1994); A.E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891–1929* (London 1979); A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, ‘Resistance and Collaboration in Southern and Central Africa, 1850–1920’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 10, 1 (1977), 31–62; and R. Waller, ‘The Maasai and the British 1895–1905: The Origins of an Alliance’, *Journal of African History*, 17, 4 (1976), 529–53.

on the colonial subject: that the British pacification campaign against the rebels encouraged Palestinians to internalize the colonial project and collaborate with the government, and that endemic brigandage alongside the need to survive the hard times of military operations encouraged Palestinian collaboration with the British. This is not an essay in Palestinian political consciousness but the issues raised inform and are informed by wider debates on Palestinian politics in this period, told most recently by Weldon Matthews, Jacob Norris and Shira Robertson. It tests colonial and Zionist readings⁵ of the Palestinians that emphasize the pre-modern, venal, clan-like qualities of the Palestinians and their notable leaders, divided by *fassad*⁶ vendettas, 'inherently bloodthirsty and fanatical', and easily split by their modern, politically informed and cohesive enemies.⁷ This article does not debunk the idea that Palestinians collaborated with colonial and post-colonial powers – indeed, it shows that many did precisely this – but through a detailed empirical study it contextualizes how colonial powers supported collaboration and why some colonial subjects chose to work with the colonial authorities.

The peace bands relied on forms of collaboration and transformation by colonial subjects and in Palestine in the 1930s the Nashashibi family, in charge of the 'Defence' party (*al-Mua'rada*, 'the Opposition'), helped establish the bands, working with the British and the Jews against rivals, notably the Husayni family. The Husayni-controlled *Majlis* ('council') in charge of the 'Arab' party opposed the Nashashibis, *Majlis* referring to the Supreme Muslim Council chaired by the Husayni family's Hajj Amin al-Husayni, appointed by the British (and usually known) as the 'Mufti', the chief Muslim cleric in Jerusalem. Hajj Amin was the leader and figurehead for the Arab revolt and he left Palestine for Lebanon in 1937, pursued by British forces, after which he left for Iraq, Iran, Nazi Germany, France, Egypt and back to Lebanon where he died in 1974. Fakhri Nashashibi with his uncle and head of the family, Ragheb Nashashibi, led the collaboration during the revolt, for which Husayni-backed gunmen assassinated Fakhri Nashashibi in Iraq in 1941. Palestinian urban elites across the board during the Mandate period

5 E. Danin, *Te'udot u-Dmuyot me-Ginzey ha-Knuftiyot ha-Arviyot, 1936-39* [Documents and Portraits from the Arab Gangs Archives in the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-39] [1944] (Jerusalem 1981); Y. Arnon-Ohanna, *Falahim ba-Mered ha-Aravi be-eretz Israel, 1936-39* [Falahin during the Arab Revolt in the Land of Israel] (Tel Aviv 1978); Y. Arnon-Ohanna, 'The Bands in the Palestinian Arab Revolt, 1936-39: Structure and Organization', *Asian and African Studies*, 15, 2 (1981), 229-47; Y. Arnon-Ohanna, *Herev mi-Bayit: ha-Ma'avak ha-Pnimi ba-tnu'a ha-le'umit ha-falastinit, 1929-39* [The Internal Struggle within the Palestinian Movement, 1929-39] (Tel Aviv 1989); Y. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement: from Riots to Rebellion. Volume Two, 1929-39* (London 1977).

6 A blood feud or a long-running quarrel, usually between two rival clans – rather like 'vendetta' in English, although for this there is another word in colloquial Arabic, *gom*, which means literally 'revenge'.

7 W.C. Matthews, *Confronting an Empire, Constructing a Nation: Arab Nationalists and Popular Politics in Mandate Palestine* (London 2006); S. Robertson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State* (Stanford, CA 2013); J. Norris, *Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905-1948* (Oxford 2013). See also S. Seikaly, 'Meatless Days: Consumption and Capitalism in Wartime Palestine, 1939-1948', doctoral thesis, New York University (2007). Quotation from T. Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis, MN 1995), 152-4.

worked closely with the British to maintain professional, government appointments and the patronage that came from holding high office, proof that the British coerced Palestinians into such relationships and that Palestinian elites also willingly seized the lucrative opportunity to work with the colonial authorities.⁸

Reading the Palestinians in political and personal terms rather than (or as well as) a people shaped by warring clans is a useful coda, and is worth bearing in mind in the military analysis that follows, not least as family ties are the usual explanation given by the British as to why people fought for or against the peace units. Family allegiances are a partial way of understanding the Palestinians during the Arab revolt.⁹ While individuals belonging to the Husayni and Nashashibi families led the two blocs, the vast majority of the members of each side did not belong to either family. Nor were there obvious blood relationships between the members of either party or group. There were members of each group in all major cities and towns, with the *Majlisiyyun/Majlisi* ('people of the council') more influential in the countryside because of Hajj Amin's charisma and the control that he and his supporters had of the *awqaf* (the 'endowments' for mosques, schools etc.), and not because of any Husayni blood lineage. Hajj Amin's deputy was Muhammed 'Izzat Darwazah who was neither a Husayni nor a Jerusalemite, nor even a member of the Arab party, but came from Nablus and was a leader and founder of the non-family based *Istiqlal* ('Independence') party, pro-*Mua'rada* (or at least not a *Majlisi*), and a staunch and vocal opponent of family-based politics. Other Palestinian families and local leaders in small villages could adhere to one of these two blocs, a split that was compounded by regional, religious, clan and class differences, between town and country, settled and nomadic, all of which shifted with time and generational change. In the first phase of the revolt from April to October 1936, collective solidarity masked the differences between the two blocs, but by 1938 there were intra-communal outrages as gunmen from the two sides fought each other. The British-sponsored peace bands opposed the violent anti-government direction of the Arab revolt led by Hajj Amin and they were active in the second phase of the Arab revolt after September 1937, especially in late 1938 and 1939.

Certainly, family and clan allegiances among the Palestinians underpinned the peace bands and shaped the form and place of the units but these ran parallel to personal, venal, temporary, honour-bound, grassroots and utilitarian reasons for collaboration. For instance, the simple need to survive the harsh years of a British counter-insurgency campaign forced many to collaborate in some fashion – an example of what political scientists would call rational choice theory. Meanwhile, for the British, the peace bands were an early form of 'pseudo warfare',

8 For discussion of this see I. Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939–1948* (Albany, NY 1991); R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York, NY 1997); and J.S. Migdal (ed.), *Palestinian Society and Politics* (Princeton, NJ 1980).

9 See Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, 233ff and P. Mattar, *Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York, NY 1988), 65ff.

the British Army's manipulation during colonial unrest of 'turned' insurgents as a 'loyalist' force against rebels, mimicking, confusing and doubling the enemy. Pseudo forces were irregular, copying or being like the insurgents in some way, usually strange and temporary, often merging with straightforward collaboration, and invariably amorphous – 'pseudo gangsters' and 'contras' as critics have put it – gathering intelligence and sowing discord within rebel ranks by pretending to be guerrillas or being indistinguishable from them.¹⁰ It is to the rise and fall of the peace bands that this article now turns.

The British Consul in Damascus, Lieutenant-Colonel Gilbert MacKereth, was the first on the British side to try to turn rebel Arab fighters from Palestine who had sought sanctuary in French-controlled Syria during the Arab revolt. (MacKereth's fight against the Arab revolt straddled ministries, the Foreign Office running the Damascus Consulate, while the Colonial Office administered the British Mandate in Palestine.) MacKereth's independent, 'forceful style' called for 'direct action', as the Colonial Office noted, and he forged British strategy.¹¹ MacKereth did not establish the peace bands but his actions throw light on their short history as he encouraged the dispatch of a senior 'turned' rebel – Fakhri 'Abd al-Hadi – into Palestine to command one of the main peace bands. British consular staff in Syria had been gathering intelligence on Arab rebels in Palestine for some time; the next step was to promote 'collaborators' as a *démarche* to undermine the revolt in Palestine.¹² MacKereth was effective in his work against the revolt, so much that by October 1937, Arab fighters in the rebel Black Hand Gang threatened to attack the Damascus Consulate and kill MacKereth; by November 1937, MacKereth had asked London for a bulletproof waistcoat.¹³ The threat to MacKereth from the Black Hand Gang was striking and read, in part, as follows:

Understand that we are a secret society that has sworn an oath that you and every Englishman in this city are liable to be slain should our Grand Mufti the Shaikh Amin al Hussein be even slightly injured. . . This is, however, not enough. As soon as you receive this message ask to have two policemen to watch over you, for we are not afraid of the police or of the soldiers or of any force whatever. We are 'believers' who fear no one no matter how great he may be. We fear only Allah.¹⁴

10 C. Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London 2005), 67; Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 86.

11 J.S. Bennett, Handwritten Minute, 28 February 1938, CO733/368/4, 4, The National Archives, London [TNA].

12 'Abd al-Hadi was murdered in 1943 at his son's wedding in 'Arraba, whether because of a family dispute or because of his collaboration with the enemy is not clear. See Danin, *Te'udot u-Dmuyot me-Ginzey*, 24.

13 Minute by G.W. Rendel, 12 November 1937, in M. Fry and I. Rabinovich (eds), *Despatches from Damascus: Gilbert MacKereth and British Policy in the Levant, 1933–39* (Tel Aviv 1985), 178.

14 K. Saudeh 'Black hand tinged with Blood' to MacKereth [October 1937], in Fry and Rabinovich (eds), *Despatches from Damascus*, 175–6.

Who was behind this message is unclear as the Black Hand Gang was synonymous with the 'Qassamites', whose leader, Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, had been shot dead by the Palestine police in 1935.

British Palestine police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) officers, seconded from Jerusalem and co-opted on to the Consulate staff, worked alongside MacKereth, what MacKereth called 'extra-consular cooperation'.¹⁵ (There was no Special Branch in Mandate Palestine, the usual place for colonial political-intelligence operations, so the Jerusalem-based CID covered political intelligence.¹⁶) The British police chief adviser in Palestine, Sir Charles Tegart, and an assistant, Sir David Petrie, had had two days of talks, 11–12 January 1938, with MacKereth, at which point Tegart promised more money for MacKereth's intelligence-gathering operation in Syria.¹⁷ Through the late 1930s, the Palestine government paid a 'monthly subvention' to MacKereth for his work.¹⁸ MacKereth had autonomy in his dealings, the Foreign Office writing to him in 1939: 'we have, as you know, always felt uneasy about your special work on behalf of the Palestine Government'.¹⁹ As with the Arabs that he tried to recruit for his 'contra' force, MacKereth was himself something of a 'double', working for different ministries, and for his own agenda, it seems.

In his war with the rebels, MacKereth worked with the Druze of Syria and Palestine who were angry at rebel attacks on Druze villages in Galilee.²⁰ MacKereth also fixed on the Palestinian rebel, 'Abd al-Hadi, who had fought in Palestine in 1936 against the British but was now living in exile in Syria and was short of funds. 'Abd al-Hadi, as a Jewish intelligence report noted:

roamed the Damascus streets, penniless and bitter. The British consul then in Damascus knew a thing or two about oriental customs, got friendly with him and came to understandings. Later Fakhri came to Palestine in 1938 and started acting against the official line of Arab conduct and revived – together with the late Fakhri Nashashibi – the Opposition 'peace gangs'.²¹

This quotation comes from a mass of material, much of it in Arabic, stored in the papers of British officer Orde Wingate, a passionate supporter of the Jews and

15 G. MacKereth to H. MacMichael (Palestine), 5 September 1939, FO371/23251, TNA.

16 For the role of CID, see C. Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War and the Twilight of Empire* (London 2013), *passim* and (forthcoming) E. Haroui, *Palestine Investigated: The Story of the CID of the Palestine Police Force, 1920–48* (London 2014) (Hebrew, 2011).

17 M. Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorders after 1914* (Berkeley, CA 2008), 255; MacKereth to Eden, 21 January 1938, in J. Priestland (ed.), *Records of Jerusalem, 1917–71: Volume 3*, (Oxford 2002), 738.

18 Minute dated 2 November 1939 on G. MacKereth to C. W. Baxter (FO), 3 October 1939, FO371/23251, TNA.

19 L. Baggallay to G. MacKereth, 30 November 1939, FO371/23251, TNA.

20 Mackereth (Damascus) to Jerusalem (repeated to FO), 15 December 1938, FO371/21869, 105, TNA.

21 Appendix, Notes on Captured Arab Documents [by Jews and written after 1941], Wingate Papers, M2313, 112–13, British Library, London [BL].

someone who headed up the British-led but Jewish-manned military unit called the Special Night Squads that operated in 1938 in Galilee. It proves that Jewish and British officers exchanged intelligence material, certainly with Wingate who was a committed Zionist and someone who had a 'secure intelligence network through the Jewish Agency'.²² MacKereth also made use of Jewish intelligence to guide policy, as he told superiors in the Colonial Office.²³

MacKereth encouraged relations between 'Abd al-Hadi and the Nashashibi family; the Nashashibis already had good military and intelligence connections with the Jews, as Cohen proves.²⁴ In March 1938, Fakhri Nashashibi had met 'Abd al-Hadi in Beirut at the St George Hotel. This was an open secret at the time, Palestinians knowing of Fakhri Nashashibi's work in setting up the peace bands in Lebanon and his attempts to establish an alternative leadership in Beirut to counter the Mufti.²⁵ The proto-Jewish intelligence service, what would become the Shai in 1940 – the forerunner of Israeli military intelligence and Shin Bet – was keen to deepen the rift between the insurgents and 'Abd al-Hadi and, at the beginning of April 1938, Jewish agents, including the intelligence officer Reuven Zaslany (later Shiloah), travelled to Syria. Zaslany worked with two colleagues, Eliyahu (Elias) Sasson and Eliyahu Epstein (later Eilat), both of whom were members of the Jewish Agency's Arab Bureau. Sasson was a *Mizrachi* ('oriental') Jew, born and raised in Damascus; Zaslany was born in Ottoman Jerusalem to Russian immigrant parents – both had an intimate understanding of colloquial Arabic and local culture, a distinct advantage in any negotiations. Excepting their religion, men like Sasson were Arabs, referring to themselves at times as 'Arab Jews', Sasson even taking part in the Arab national movement in Syria after the Great War before he emigrated to Palestine. Sasson went to Syria with Zaslany and the latter strengthened the tripartite British-Jewish-Nashashibi anti-Husayni coalition. MacKereth thought that the British authorities in Palestine were too hesitant and he asked Zaslany and Sasson to maintain direct contact with him to exchange information on Arab leaders.²⁶ British-Jewish collaboration in Palestine in this period was strong, especially with the Army and this included collaborating to promote the peace bands, a subject beyond the remit of this article but told in part elsewhere.²⁷

22 R. King-Clark to Trevor Royle, 22 February 1993, MR4/17/307/1/4, Tameside Local Studies and Archive Centre, Ashton under Lyne.

23 MacKereth to Secretary of State for Colonies, 12 May 1938, FO371/21877, 8, TNA.

24 Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, 95ff.

25 M. 'Izzat Darwazah, *Mudhakkarat Muhammad 'Izzat Darwazah* [Memoirs of Muhammed 'Izzat Darwazah] (Beirut 1993), 179.

26 H. Eshed, *Reuven Shiloah: The Man Behind the Mossad* (London 1997), 32; Y. Gelber, 'Reuven Shiloah's Contribution to the Development of Israeli Intelligence' and E. Haroui, 'Reuven Zaslany (Shiloah) and the Covert Cooperation with British Intelligence during the Second World War', in H. Carmel (ed.), *Intelligence for Peace: The Role of Intelligence in Times of Peace*, (London 1999), 16–48.

27 Y. Gelber, *Sorshey ha-Havatzelet: ha-Modi'in ba-Yishuv, 1918–1947* [Growing a Budding Fleur-de-Lis: The Intelligence Forces of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine, 1918–47] (Tel Aviv 1992), 149–64; Lefen, *Ha'Shai*, 45–51. See also the memoir of the British intelligence officer: Lt-Col A.C. Simonds, *Pieces of War*, 08/46/1, 42, 55, Imperial War Museum Documents, London and S. Wagner, 'British Intelligence and Policy in the Palestine Mandate, 1919–39', doctoral thesis, University of Oxford (2014).

MacKereth provided 'Abd al-Hadi with monthly payments, he raised funds to facilitate the rebel leader's return to Palestine to organize peace bands, and he offered 'Abd al-Hadi an amnesty if he would switch sides to the Nashashibi-backed Opposition movement.²⁸ The approach worked and on 21 September 1938 British-sponsored Druze mercenaries escorted 'Abd al-Hadi back to Palestine.²⁹ Thereafter, Britain subsidized 'Abd al-Hadi and paid each man in his peace band £P6 per month, as opposed to the insurgents' usual pay of 30 shillings to £P4, some of which came from levies and extortion of Palestinian villages.³⁰ The willingness to pay a good wage shows how seriously the British authorities took the peace bands. By comparison, a British Palestine police constable earned around £P15 per month, so £P6 for an Arab fighter was a good salary, especially considering the typical differences in wages between colonial masters and subjects. (£P1 equalled £1 Sterling at this time.)

In late September 1938, 'Abd al-Hadi settled with official approval in his home village of 'Arraba, near Jenin, the base of his pro-Nashashibi family from where he revived *fassad*-based feuds and defended his village, helped by British Service personnel. 'Abd al-Hadi was ideally located in the centre of rebel resistance, what was known to British soldiers as the 'triangle of terror' with apexes at Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarm. When he arrived at 'Arraba, 'Abd al-Hadi had some 30 followers (it is not apparent where these men came from), a British intelligence report commenting that, 'it is as yet too early to forecast the probable reactions to Fakhri Abdul Hadi's arrival but it is certain that his intrusion into the recognised 'ring' of the three main [insurgent] gang leaders – Abdul Rahim al Haj ['Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad], Aref Abdul Razik [Arif Abd al-Raziq], Yousef Abu Dorrah [Yusif Abu Dura] – will cause further inter gang troubles between them'.³¹ Robert Newton, Assistant District Commissioner, met secretly with 'Abd el-Hadi in December 1938 'to take stock of him'.³² Newton told 'Abd al-Hadi that the government would 'overlook his sins of the past' and hinted at 'limited funds' for his operations.³³ 'Abd al-Hadi got on well with the British, visiting the police mess in Jenin for Wild West-style 'pistol drawing' competitions with British officers, where he was not only 'quick on the draw' but he had a 'look' in his eye that he was actually going to shoot, remembered one British officer present, who also signed for 'Abd al-Hadi's official gun permit.³⁴

28 Eshed, *Reuven Shiloah*, 32.

29 Porath, *Palestinian Arab National Movement*, ii, 253; Intelligence Report (in Hebrew), 29 September 1938, 8/General/2, p. 102, Haganah Archive, Tel Aviv [HA]; Danin, *Te'udot u-Dmuyot me-Ginzey*, 24 (note 56).

30 Arnon-Ohanna, *Falahim ba-Mered*, 157–60; 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment, Battalion Intelligence Summary No. 19, Ramallah, 22 February 1939, The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire Museum, York [RYM].

31 Summary of Intelligence, Palestine and Transjordan, Wing-Commander Ritchie, 7 October 1938, CO732/81/9, TNA.

32 Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, 150; S25/22793, 39, Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem [CZA].

33 Subject: Fakhri Abdul Hadi, from Robert Newton, Assistant District Commissioner, Jenin, 17 December 1938, S25/22793-39/43, CZA.

34 Interview, author with Edward Horne, Barton-on-Sea, 26 February 2013.

British soldiers avoided searching peace band-associated villages, a significant concession, as Army searches could be immensely destructive of villagers' property. The labelling and use of peace bands from certain villages gelled with the well-established British military counter-rebel policy of triaging rural Palestine into 'good', 'moderate' and 'bad' villages, soldiers carrying out 'punitive' or 'ordinary' village searches depending on the type of village, and supporting 'loyal minorities' such as the Druze and 'friendly' Muslim communities, including paying and arming the Druze who in turn supplied intelligence to and worked with British–Jewish units.³⁵ The British mediated 'Arabness' not just by notions of 'good' and 'bad' but also by ethnicity and religion, and acted accordingly, seeing the Druze, for instance, as 'friendly', a 'much cleaner and better looking race' and 'descendants from the English and French crusaders'.³⁶ Soldiers made similar comments about Christian Arabs, noting that they had little trouble from the Palestinians around the predominantly Christian town of Nazareth.³⁷ Colonial typologies of good and bad meant the difference between survival and destruction for a village, with 'drastic action' reserved for the 'bad' ones.³⁸ Kufeir and Sir were 'pro-government' Irshid (Irsheid in British records) family villages, noted the war diary for The Border Regiment, the authorities sparing such villages the excesses of fining, detention, seizure, destruction, corvée and curfew that were the lot of bad villages.³⁹ When rebels attacked Druze in the mixed village of Shefar-A'm who would not join the revolt, the British retaliated by destroying Muslim houses in the village, deepening rifts between Druze and Muslims, ones that have endured to this day.⁴⁰ The British also armed friendly villages and encouraged informers, helped by the Jews who had an effective network of Arab spies. In March 1939, one villager from Ar Rumana (in written form, al-Rumana) that was 'mostly pro-government' came in to see the commander of The Border Regiment regarding the Army's 'supply of

35 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment, Battalion Intelligence Summary No. 2, Ramallah, 26 October 1938, RYM; 8th Division Operation Instruction No. 10 by Maj-Gen B. L. Montgomery, 21 January 1939, Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment, QRWS/3/6/7, Surrey History Centre [SHC]; Lecture No. 2: Operational Cordon: Check and Search Village, n.d., Diary of Events, 1939, Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment, QRWS/3/8/8, SHC; Letter, Lt H. J. Darlington to Wife, 6 October 1938, KO 1333/01, King's Own Royal Regiment Museum, Lancaster [KORRM]; Druze Activities file in S25/22793, CZA; Testimony of Tuvia Omani, 18 February 1971, 95.23, HA.

36 Z. Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906–48* (Berkeley, CA 1996), 251; K. Firro, *A History of the Druzes* (Leiden 1992), 337, 340–1; Swedenborg, *Memories of Revolt*, 91–2; S. Fathi el-Nimri, 'The Arab Revolt in Palestine: A Study Based on Oral Sources' doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, (1990), 184–6. For quotation, Letter, Burr to Parents, 24 February 1938, Burr papers, 88/8/1, Imperial War Museum Documents, London [IWMD]. See also Lt-Col G. A. Shepperd, 4597, 47, Imperial War Museum Sound Archive [IWMSA] and Sir Gawain Bell, 10256, IWMSA.

37 See, for instance, Maj-Gen A. J. H. Dove, 4463, 30, IWMSA.

38 Recommendation of Sir Charles Tegart, 'Village Registers for Bad Villages', accompanying Letter, Chief Secretary to District Commissioners, 28 January 1938, S25/22762, CZA.

39 Regimental War Diary, 1st Battalion, The Border Regiment, 21 January and 1 February 1939, The Border and King's Own Royal Border Regiment Museum, Carlisle [BRM].

40 M. Al-Haj, *Social Change and Family Process: Arab Communities in Shefar-A'm* (Boulder, CO and London 1987), 55–6; Swedenborg, *Memories of Revolt*, 90ff.

arms and assistance for village against gangs'.⁴¹ Soldiers went on operations 'with the cooperation of the friendly Arabs' from one village as late as September 1939.⁴² There were other tangible results. Peace bands helped British track down and kill the rebel 'Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad [Abdul Rahim al Haj above] in March 1939.⁴³

The Army's pacification campaign after October 1938 when the Munich crisis had passed swamped Palestine with troops and it targeted the civilians on whom the rebels depended for support, fining them, taking livestock and menfolk, and destroying houses, in the process reducing parts of rural Palestine to abject poverty. Some Palestinians voted with their feet and left their villages, as in the village of Tira (presumably colloquially/literary Taybe/Tayyiba, the transliteration from Arabic to Hebrew to English is not clear) where peasants responded to an official fine of £P2,000 by picking up what they could carry and leaving.⁴⁴ Collaboration by some villagers was an instinctive reaction to the social dislocation wrought by Britain's tough, brutal military counter-insurgency campaign as much as it was a conscious effort to join a 'peace band'. Alongside military operations, collaboration tore the fabric of Palestinian society, pitting neighbours against one another, transforming established order into an official anarchy in which the fellahin were to choose the oppression of the colonial state over the disorder of rebellion. It worked, gradually bringing villagers to the government side. In the zone of operations for The West Yorkshire Regiment around Ramallah, a deputation of twelve *mukhtars* (village headmen) stated that they were 'tired of the rebels and their deprivations [sic] in their villages and only wished for peace. They stated that their men had been taken away by the rebels and the Army and that they were urgently required in the villages for ploughing and olive picking in the next ten days'.⁴⁵ Forced to choose between the revolt and starvation, villagers gave the Army information, colonial authorities seeing this as tacit allegiance to British rule, which it was not. Rebel attacks helped the Army's pacification campaign. Thus, the town of Ramallah had refused to pay the rebels a subsidy and when rebels then fired on the local Army base, the inhabitants of the town 'supplied the names of all those who have fired on the billet', noted a battalion intelligence summary.⁴⁶ By January 1939, pressure on rural areas was such that village headmen appealed to local Army commanders for assistance in capturing rebel gang leaders who were raiding villages for money, one even suggesting that the British

41 Regimental War Diary, 1st Battalion, The Border Regiment, 2 March 1939, BRM.

42 *Green Tiger: The Records of the Leicestershire Regiment* 20/4 (November 1939): 122, in Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland [ROLLR].

43 Arnon-Ohanna, *Falahim ba-Mered*, 157–60.

44 B. Abu Gharbiyah, *Fi Khidamm al-nidal al-'arabi al-filastini: mudhakkarat al-munadil Bahjat Abu Gharbiyah* [In the Midst of the Struggle for the Arab Palestinian Cause: The Memoirs of Freedom-Fighter Bahjat Abu Gharbiyah] (Beirut 1993), 60–1; *Haaretz* [The Land] (Evening Issue) (22 December 1937).

45 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment, Battalion Intelligence Summary No. 7, Ramallah, 1 December 1938, RYM.

46 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment, Battalion Intelligence Summary No. 8, Ramallah, 8 December 1938, RYM.

hide soldiers in secret pseudo 'Q' forces in his house to facilitate the capture of a rebel leader.⁴⁷

Cooperation or collaboration by Palestinians – after all, the Arabic verb for collaborate, *ta'awana*, also means cooperate – prompted the Army to do more. The West Yorkshire Regiment called in to its Orderly Room village headmen who failed to inform on rebel activities – such as those of Jifna and Bir Zayt – where they were 'solemnly warned' against 'the repetition of such an omission', after which headmen 'made amends by hastening to RAMALLAH to inform the Assistant District Commissioner that MOHAMMED OMAR NUBANI dropped into supper the previous evening, 26th December, with some sixteen followers'.⁴⁸ Army intelligence improved after the autumn of 1938, with information coming in directly from Arab sources. In January 1939, the *mukhtar* of Kafr Malik gave intelligence to the Army and reported to the Assistant District Commissioner that a rebel 'gang' had spent the night in his village; the headmen of Burham and Kobar were also forthcoming on rebel movements.⁴⁹ 'There is some improvement in the production of information, and certain mukhtars are sending in regular and reliable, if unfortunately rather historical, supplies', noted the battalion intelligence officer for The West Yorkshire Regiment, also in January 1939.⁵⁰ At the same time, Nashashibi fighters hunted down rebels.

A very severe blow was suffered by the Rebels when ABDUL FATTAH was murdered in a cave between MAZRA'A ASH SHARQIYA and KH ABU FALAH [presumably al-Mazra'a al-Sharqiyya and Khirbat Abu Falah] last Sunday morning by one of NASHASHIBI'S followers

noted one Army unit war diary.⁵¹ Hunger and stress rather than an ideological commitment to the Government or the Nashashibis prompted a flow of information from Palestinians, as the Army knew: 'The amount of war weariness throughout the country is considerable, and the whole population realizes that the longer hostilities continue, the more they stand to lose. This fact is brought out by the increasingly large numbers of people who are ready to give information'.⁵² Nor could rebels always hide among villagers to escape the Army, villagers turning in to

47 Chaplin, *The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment*, 105.

48 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment, Battalion Intelligence Summary No. 11, Ramallah, 29 December 1938, RYM.

49 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment, Battalion Intelligence Summary Nos 12, 14, Ramallah, 5 and 20 January 1939, RYM.

50 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment, Battalion Intelligence Summary No. 13, Ramallah, 12 January 1939, RYM.

51 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment, Battalion Intelligence Summary No. 16, Ramallah, 2 February 1939, RYM.

52 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment, Battalion Intelligence Summary No. 17, Ramallah, 9 February 1939, RYM.

the Army rebel fighters who took refuge in one village after attempting to hide their weapons down a well.⁵³

Fakhri Nashashibi mobilized peace bands in the south of Palestine and his political network supported 'Abd al-Hadi, operating in the north of the country. Members of local families took sides, Jenin families supportive of the Nashashibis such as the Irsheid family joining 'Abd al-Hadi as he fought rebels in the Jenin and then Nablus-Tulkarm areas, as did the Nimer family of Nablus. The 'Amr family of Hebron – also traditionally pro-Nashashibi – joined the movement in the south, as did other smaller pro-Nashashibi families. The Army modified operations to give peace bands the freedom to operate without any military interference and it allowed friendly villages to keep weapons, strictly against the law at the time. Fakhri Nashashibi requested rifles from the authorities and then distributed these weapons to his men fighting rebel bands in the field, seven members of one peace band killed by rebels on 18 December 1938 had government issued weapons.⁵⁴ The Army coordinated this in the field, the battalion commander of The Border Regiment arranging an 'interview' with 'Abd al-Hadi's emissary in December 1938 to discuss the newly formed peace bands that were now 'opposed to all the other anti-Government gang leaders'.⁵⁵ Not just battalion but also brigade commanders were involved directly in the running of the peace bands, the commander of 14th Brigade travelling to Jenin 'to talk re the FAKHRI ABDUL HADI family' in January 1939.⁵⁶ The British unit war diaries reveal the extent of the collusion between the Army and 'Abd al-Hadi's peace units, in cooperation with colonial officials who worked with the Army to, for instance, transport members of the Irsheid family to Jerusalem and who interviewed 'Abd al-Hadi in 'Arraba under Army protection.⁵⁷ RAF Special Service Officers (SSOs) responsible for political matters at this time intervened in these meetings, including a Flight-Lieutenant Lash who liaised with the Irsheid family and who escorted Farid Irsheid to 'Arraba village.⁵⁸

The Army, effectively in charge in Palestine from late 1938, managed the peace bands in coordination with SSOs, District Commissioners and Assistant District Commissioners, the civil authorities troubled by the Army's activities in encouraging the lawlessness of the peace bands, not least as the civil colonial officials had to govern the country after the soldiers had left. The Army's actions opened up a Pandora's Box, leading by May-June 1939 to military-backed attempts to calm warring villages with 'reconciliation meetings' alongside getting villagers to sign

53 Letter from Abdel Halim Julani, Abdel Kader Hussein and Ahmed Jaber, 19 December 1938 quoted in Police CID, Jerusalem, Intelligence Report 68/38, 21 December 1938, S25/22732, CZA.

54 Police CID, Intelligence Summary No 92/38, 31 December 1938, 3, S25/22732, CZA.

55 Regimental War Diary, 1st Battalion, The Border Regiment, 9 December 1938, BRM.

56 Regimental War Diary, 1st Battalion, The Border Regiment, 27 January 1939, BRM.

57 Regimental War Diary, 1st Battalion, The Border Regiment, 16 December 1938, BRM.

58 Regimental War Diary, 1st Battalion, The Border Regiment, 17 December 1938, BRM. The *Air Force List* details a Flying Officer N. O. Lash in November 1938, in Middle East command (presumably Norman Lash who went on to command in Jordan's Arab Legion).

pieces of paper condemning terrorism.⁵⁹ The uneasy tension between law and official disorder was apparent to soldiers in a platoon codenamed 'Fardet' based in the village of Umm al-Faraj ('Faraj detachment' – hence 'Fardet'), just north of Acre:

Here under the auspices of the battalion lived a friendly gang of ex-rebels, led by a roguish character named Sheikh Rabah. The gang, no other term fitted them, were now in government pay as informers and allowed to carry arms for self-protection. Naturally, the authorities were very much against the formation of this party, as inevitably they took the opportunity on occasion to enforce cash levies on unfriendly villages and even to pay off old scores. They did however produce 'red hot' information on which roving platoon FARDET could act. This alone outweighed their disadvantages.⁶⁰

The authorities paid and gave Arabs in Acre weapons and the collaborators started searching houses and handing over suspects to the British.⁶¹ Peace band actions 'purged' Haifa of terrorists, according to a captured Arab report.⁶² The Palestine police joined the Army in supporting the peace bands. The police in Jenin, quick to see a split in the Arab ranks, dispatched a platoon of The Border Regiment to 'Arraba, 'Abd al-Hadi's village, to support him: 'So successful were they, that it was decided that a full company of the regiment would be posted to the village'.⁶³ The wife of a minor gang leader had given useful information on a rebel leader and took refuge in an Army camp, after which the Army transported her to sanctuary in 'Arraba village with 'Abd al-Hadi. As a police sergeant concluded, 'Otherwise she would probably get her throat cut'.⁶⁴ Sometimes the peace bands deployed alongside British troops, the former indistinguishable from Nashashibi fighters. Hilda Wilson, a British schoolteacher in the largely Christian village of Bir Zayt in 1938, recorded in her diary how British soldiers used Nashashibi informers from the village of Abu Ghosh to help identify villagers suspected of being rebels – the Jews had good relations with Abu Ghosh, a village that would survive the war of 1948 – the Army hiding the informers in the backs of trucks, a familiar tactic from later British counter-insurgency campaigns and used by the Israelis in Lebanon after 1982.⁶⁵ The forces of the state were now neither soldiers nor

59 Arab Reaction to the White Paper, 19 May 1939, signed by A.H.K. [in Hebrew], A.H.K. to Moshe Sharett, 28 June 1939, reporting on a meeting between the High Commissioner and Chief Secretary and Fakhri and Ragheb Nashashibi [in Hebrew], S25/7644, CZA.

60 Typed up Official MS, Leicestershire Regiment, 2nd Battalion, Palestine, 1939–40, 1, 22D63/10/1-3, ROLLR.

61 Y. Slutsky and B.-Z. Dinur (eds), *Sefer Toldot ha'Haganah* [Book of the History of the Haganah] vol. 3, part 1, *Me'ma'avak le'Milhama* [From Struggle to War] (Tel Aviv 1972), 16.

62 Appendix, Notes on Captured Arab Documents [by Jews and written after 1941], Wingate Papers, M2313, 113, BL.

63 'Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense', *Palestine Police Old Comrades' Association Newsletter* 100 (September 1975), 46.

64 Ibid.

65 School Year Diary, Spring Term 1939, Wilson Papers, GB165-0302, 36, Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford [MEC]; personal information from Nir Arielli, 5 June 2013.

mock rebels but were hooded, hidden and invisible. Wilson went on to record in her diary how British troops fought alongside peace units, such as when a Nashashibi band had attacked the village of Abu Shnedim (presumably Abu Shkheidim). 'British soldiers had been with them', she wrote.⁶⁶ The system of hidden informers – widely used by troops – provoked the settling of feuds, 'working off some old score', as the British recognized, but as the aim of the counter-insurgency was to force Palestinians to choose official authority, social dislocation suited the British, or at least the Army, keen to pacify Palestine before redeploying for the coming war in Europe.⁶⁷

The peace bands were flexible and rapid, using the tactics of the rebels, fighting violence with violence in a way that government forces could not easily or visibly do, with 'Abd al-Hadi nicknamed 'the butcher' because of his toughness.⁶⁸ The impact of the peace was felt back in Damascus with the rebel high command and on 5 December 1938 a British military report concluded that negotiations were now taking place

between Rebel Headquarters in Damascus and Palestine with a view to making peace with Fakhri Abdul Hadi or on the other hand crushing him altogether. . . Fakhri has under his command a permanent force of 60 men and that for the past week he has been a thorn in the side of the Rebel Forces . . . in the meantime they will do all in their power to crush him.⁶⁹

The peace units irked the insurgents – or the 'professional rebels' as the British put it – with one European captive of theirs observing how the rebel gang leader spat on the ground every time anyone mentioned the Nashashibis.⁷⁰ The rebel high command in Damascus sent two assassins to kill Fakhri Nashashibi, noted a British CID intelligence report in December 1938.⁷¹ Meanwhile, 'Abd al-Hadi played both sides – 'ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds', as one British police officer put it – and, fighting in undeveloped rural areas with parochial loyalties and traditions of brigandage, he used the Arab rebellion for his own ends.⁷² As he fought the rebels and enjoyed British support, his family was negotiating with the insurgent high command in Damascus for him to re-join the rebel side, if it paid him £P12,000 and made him a senior rebel leader.⁷³ 'Abd al-Hadi made the most of his special protected status, raiding neighbouring villages, whipping villagers to extort names of rebels and stealing cattle, the violence escalating to

66 School Year Diary, Summer Term 1939, Wilson Papers, GB165-0302, 73, MEC.

67 Memoir (typed in 1985) entitled 'Palestine 1938' by Captain P.H. Graves-Morris, Worcestershire Regiment Museum Trust.

68 Arnon-Ohanna, *Falahim ba-Mered*, 147–52.

69 British Report, Armed Gangs 60/38, 5 December 1938, S25/22732, CZA

70 H. MacMichael (High Commissioner) to Malcolm MacDonald Secretary of State for Colonies, 16 January 1939, S25/22761, CZA.

71 Police CID, Jerusalem, Intelligence Summary 92/38, 31 December 1938, 3, S/25/22732, CZA.

72 Interview, author with Edward Horne, Barton-on-Sea, 21 April 2013.

73 British Report, Armed Gangs 61/38, 6 December 1938, S25/22732, CZA.

such a level that in March 1939 the Army curtailed 'Abd al-Hadi by imposing a curfew on 'Arraba.⁷⁴ The assessment from Jewish files was that 'Abd al-Hadi formed peace bands to make money and because the rebel command in Damascus had cut his subsidy.⁷⁵ Ted Horne, a policeman who knew 'Abd al-Hadi personally, noted later how 'Fakhri was negotiating with the British authorities to swap sides and leave his Arab contemporaries to stew in their own juice, while in exchange for money he would be the mantle of "truthful Informer and friend of King George".⁷⁶ For the British, not just 'Abd al-Hadi but also the urban, urbane Nashashibis, sought personal gain. Edward Keith-Roach, a District Commissioner, remarked to Major-General Richard O'Connor, the commander in Jerusalem, that, in 'the 18 years I have known Fakhri [Nashashibi] he personally is only after the main chance, and the main chance, as far as he is concerned, is "Fakhri".⁷⁷ Talking about the Arabs in the Ramallah area, The West Yorkshire Regiment intelligence summary summed up local opinion as follows: 'That FAKRI NAHISHIBI [sic] is out for his own ends, and for no other reason, is universally agreed'.⁷⁸ The assessment was even harsher elsewhere:

The Hebronites do not take the Nashashibi supporters in their area too seriously. They claim that the latter and their satellites thrive on material benefit and pecuniary emolument as well as food etc. and that they are venal minions who will present no problem in the proper time and at the right moment they shall be eliminated without difficulty.⁷⁹

The peace bands were an official opportunity for brigandage, seized on by elements within the Nashashibi family and by 'Abd al-Hadi to make money, settle old scores and play out long-standing feuds, 'an ideal opportunity for the waging of private or semi-public feuds, and the opportunity has not been allowed to slip. Murder, abduction, robbery, attack and counter-attack have been the order of the day'.⁸⁰ Palestinians could no longer distinguish between government, rebel and bandit forces; pseudo war and the peace bands had destroyed all identifying markers. Indeed, did the British now know who was a rebel and who was a friend?

74 Regimental War Diary, 1st Battalion, The Border Regiment, 18 March 1939, BRM; Danin, *Tsiyoni be-Kol Tnay*, 140.

75 Danin, *Te'udot u-Dmuyot me-Ginzey*, 24, n. 56.

76 'The Royal Bee Lady', *Palestine Police Old Comrades' Association Newsletter*, 124 (September 1981), 52.

77 Keith Roach to O'Connor, 25 January 1939, O'Connor Papers, 3/4/10, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, London [LHCMA].

78 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment, Battalion Intelligence Summary No. 9, Ramallah, 15 December 1938, RYM.

79 Jewish Report, Hebron 29 February 1939, 140, S25/22269, CZA.

80 Memorandum on Hebron Sub-District, by Assistant District Commissioner Stewart, 25 January 1939, O'Connor Papers, 3/4/10-11, LHCMA.

The British Army was complicit in subversive action, issuing travel passes and driving the Nashashibis in military vehicles when on operations:

Only yesterday... a piece of paper was shown to me by one of these men bearing on one side (in English) the name of Fakhri Nashashibi and on the paper the name of a British officer. These men appear to imagine (wrongly of course) that if they whisper 'Fakhri' to a British official they will be granted a dispensation from all restrictions (e.g. travel permits) which apply to others.⁸¹

There are other, cryptic, comments from soldiers about their work with the Nashashibis, 'all roads lead to the Nashashibi Bridge', proving how engagement with the peace bands was significant enough to find its way into in-house regimental journals.⁸²

Spurred on by support from the British and the Jews, in October 1938, Fakhri Nashashibi published a letter to the High Commissioner in which he asked for 'reasonable moderation' and attacked the Mufti, accusing him of 'terrorism' and 'diverting' the 'noble ends' of the Arab revolt for 'his own selfish ends'.⁸³ Local rebels replied by issuing communiqués calling Fakhri Nashashibi a 'microbe' for his actions in approaching the British, threatening him with murder: 'it is the duty of every rebel to try and bring about his death'.⁸⁴ Rebels also passed a death sentence on 'Abd al-Hadi'.⁸⁵ The Mufti's gunmen attempted to assassinate a member of the Nashashibi clan; five other Nashashibis were killed shortly thereafter.⁸⁶ The Nashashibis then published a more provocative letter, after which they sent a deputation to O'Connor, the military second-in-command in Palestine, to thank him for the actions of the British Army, after which the British sponsored the most visible expression of the peace bands: a large public meeting at the village of Yatta on 18 December 1938, attended by some 3000 Palestinians and by O'Connor.⁸⁷ (Photographs of the Yatta meeting show O'Connor addressing the crowd from the back of an Army vehicle, the Union Jack flying behind him, Fakhri Nashashibi standing to one side wearing a Western-style suit and a *tarbush*, such dress being common attire for Palestinian urbanites at the time.⁸⁸)

The British and Nashashibis (badly) stage-managed the Yatta event, Palestinians seeing it as a contrived, official attempt to bribe them into changing sides. Peasants were encouraged to attend with promises of loans, seeds and animals, and given

81 Memorandum on Hebron Sub-District, by Assistant District Commissioner Stewart, 25 January 1939, O'Connor Papers, 3/4/10-11, LHCMA.

82 *FIRM: Worcestershire Regiment Journal*, 11, 2 (July 1939), 226

83 Quoted in 'Arab Leader and Former Mufti', *Yorkshire Post* (24 October 1938).

84 Mansour, HQ Arab Army in the South 28th Ramadan 1357 quoted in *FIRM: Worcestershire Regiment Journal*, 10, 4 (January 1939), 560.

85 Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, 133.

86 J.B. Schechtman, *The Mufti and the Fuehrer: The Rise and Fall of Haj Amin el-Husseini* (New York, NY 1965), 62-3.

87 *Ibid.*; Intelligence Summary, Palestine and Transjordan, by Wing Commander Ritchie, 2 December 1938, CO732/81/10, TNA.

88 Photographic Collection, Truman Institute Library, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

transport to get there. They went in good faith only to encounter Fakhri Nashashibi arriving with armoured cars, British troops and a prepared speech. No one present would read the speech, until the authorities intimidated Khalil esh Sharif into reading it, introduced as an influential sheikh but a 'simple farmer' according to the British; other village elders at Yatta claimed they had been tricked into attending the meeting and proclaimed their allegiance to Hajj Amin.⁸⁹ Children in Jerusalem later stoned Khalil esh Sharif as punishment for what he did.⁹⁰ The audience could not understand the classical Arabic in which he gave the speech and peasants went back to their villages wondering why they had attended.⁹¹ For Keith-Roach, present at Yatta, it was 'well organised as a show', with Fakhri Nashashibi 'much in evidence', as he told O'Connor afterwards.⁹² Significantly, while awaiting O'Connor's arrival, Keith-Roach heard Fakhri Nashashibi,

giving asides to the people behind him and heard him say 'Clap'; as you were coming nearer he said 'Not sufficient – clap louder', and as you came nearer 'go on – more – more'. The letter that was read out, of course, was entirely incomprehensible to the majority of people there, and I noticed it did not appear to receive very warm support from those who were doubtless hearing it for the first time. When we walked round the crowds I did not notice any very warm welcoming smiles. Later in the day when I got back to Jerusalem an Englishman who was there told me had overheard one of the men say to Fakhri – 'What about our money?'⁹³

O'Connor gave the Yatta audience a brisk address, reminding them of the need to obey the law, ironic considering British military policy at the time that effectively made lawlessness the law.⁹⁴ A British doctor working in Hebron noted O'Connor's 'short soldierly speech' and the 'overpowering smell of fish that must surely have pervaded the whole gathering... The visitors went home, the villagers dispersed, with or without their tongues in their cheeks'.⁹⁵ That Palestinians were weary of the disorder of the revolt was obvious: 'The safest thing to say is that it [the Yatta meeting] shewed [sic] that a section of the Arabs, long tired of the disorders, now feels sufficiently exasperated to voice an audible protest', noted the British Palestine High Commissioner.⁹⁶ The Yatta meeting provoked more violence: bombs and shootings directed at the Nashashibi family; guards in the Acre detention camp separated Nashashibi family members from other inmates for the former's protection.⁹⁷

89 CID Intelligence Summary 92/38, Jerusalem, 31 December 1938, 4–6. S25/22732, CZA.

90 Ibid.

91 Information re Mohd. Sherif and the Yatta Meeting, From Mohd. Abu Sharar, son-in-law of Mohd. Sherif and Mustapha Issa Unis Dudein of Dura, from Mr Stewart (to Charles), 25 January 1939, dated 26 January 1939, O'Connor Papers, 3/4/10, LHCMA.

92 Keith Roach to O'Connor, 25 January 1939, O'Connor Papers, 3/4/10, LHCMA.

93 Ibid.

94 John Baynes, *The Forgotten Victor: General Sir Richard O'Connor* (London 1989), 58.

95 Diary, 18 December 1938, Foster Papers, GB165-0110, 101–2, MEC.

96 MacMichael (HC, Palestine) to MacDonald (Secretary of State for Colonies), 16 January 1939, Security Matters 1938–39, S25/22761, CZA.

97 Letter, Burr to Parents, n.d. [December 1938–January 1939], 88/8/1, Burr Papers, IWMD.

The Army was ambivalent about events such as Yatta, one officer's marginalia on an intelligence report on Yatta recording simply: 'We know about this. It signifies little'.⁹⁸ Similarly, with the police, a CID report of 21 December 1938 concluded: 'It is, of course, accepted in Arab circles that Government is responsible for all the activities of Fakhri Nashashibi and that this demonstration was fostered by the British'.⁹⁹ On the other hand, the intelligence summary of The West Yorkshire Regiment following the Yatta meeting was encouraging, noting that

There are a large number of Arabs in Palestine who secretly do not approve of the policy of terrorism at present existing and therefore are in opposition to HAJ AMIN. If FAKHRI NASHASHIBI can avoid being 'bumped off' in the next week or two, he will probably collect quite a large following and will constitute a definite menace to the absolute power hitherto enjoyed by the Mufti.¹⁰⁰

The Army took note of the Yatta meeting in other ways. The Worcestershire Regiment – which had provided the guard of honour for the 'Loyal Address' at Yatta – behaved differently on operations afterwards: 'we went out every day, visiting some villages in our area. The type of visit has now changed; instead of going and searching them for arms we now went on back-slapping expeditions – telling them how good their village was and they would tell us how they like the troops, and so it would go on until we left them'.¹⁰¹ Fakhri Nashashibi tried to hold other meetings like the Yatta one, in Jaffa, Gaza, Nablus and Huleh, but he cancelled them after the Yatta meeting proved a failure, promoting little except more violence between the Nashashibis and Husaynis.¹⁰²

The Army supported the peace bands – as has been shown – but it was conservative as an institution and tied to conventional ways of war and manuals on such things, and it never fully believed in the irregular-style peace bands or fully supported them. It was equally suspicious of the Jewish collaborators in Wingate's Special Night Squads and forced their closure and Wingate's departure from Palestine in 1938. The supreme military commander in Palestine in early 1939, General Sir Robert Haining, expressed this ambivalence within the military high command, pointing to the value of the Yatta meeting and the peace bands but, like many officers, he was suspicious of irregular warfare and he was sure – as were most British soldiers and administrators – that the Husayni faction was much stronger than the Nashashibis'. Irregular loyalist forces such as the peace bands pulled Haining in two directions, the authorities arming Palestinians just as British soldiers were working vigorously to disarm Palestinians, instituting draconian

98 Summary of Intelligence, Palestine and Transjordan, Wing-Commander Ritchie, 30 December 1938, CO732/81/10, TNA.

99 CID Intelligence Summary 90/38, Jerusalem, 21 December 1938, S25/22732, CZA.

100 2nd Battalion The West Yorkshire Regiment, Battalion Intelligence Summary No. 5, Ramallah, 17 November 1938, RYM.

101 *FIRM: Worcestershire Regiment Journal*, 11, 1 (April 1939), 55.

102 Palestine Police CID, Intelligence Summary 92/38, 31 December 1938, 4, S25/22732, CZA.

Emergency regulations in which the ownership of even a single bullet was a capital offence. The Army, police and colonial administration behaved differently towards the peace bands, some support coming at a grassroots level from Army officers at the same time as the Chief Secretary to the High Commissioner was telling the police and the District Commissioners that they should not issue arms and ammunition to anti-rebel Palestinians, even for personal protection.¹⁰³ Haining raised a series of questions in a report on the peace bands that was sent to the War Office. Was 'Abd al-Hadi to be given official permission to carry arms? What guarantees did the British have that arms, licensed or otherwise, would only be used against the Mufti's men? How far could 'Abd al-Hadi be trusted? Haining proceeded to answer his own questions, giving an insight into the British military mind at the highest level:

The attitude I took was that, while we could use these people as agents for information, any kind of official approval and collaboration was unthinkable. I was fully justified in this later as it was not long before ABDUL HADI was found to be reverting to his old habits and playing for both sides. The same situation occurred later in one or two other villages, and the individuals concerned mostly tended to be useful for a short time and then to lose their enthusiasm and pro-Government feelings.¹⁰⁴

Despite these reservations, the British carried on with support for peace units into and beyond 1939, when the revolt had ended, there being local military interest in pursuing such things. In June 1939, the British appointed five Army officers based in Acre to establish peace bands, although at that stage they were not yet giving out weapons.¹⁰⁵ In the same month, envoys from the Nashashibi party visited Tiberias and its hinterland to try to convince 'moderate' Arabs and to get into open action against the terrorists. They failed, as the Jewish intelligence chief in northern Palestine noted.¹⁰⁶ Such activities carried on into the 1940s, often wrapped up in disputes over Arab land sales to Jews, those who sold land throwing in their lot with the government. (Members of the Husayni family also sold land to Jews, an open secret in the family.¹⁰⁷)

Did the peace bands 'substantially' contribute to the destruction of rebel power in Palestine the 1930s, as Porath claims?¹⁰⁸ The collaborators of the peace bands

103 W.D. Battershill, Chief Secretary on behalf of the High Commissioner to District Commissioners and IG Police, 29 December 1938, S25/22761, 4, CZA.

104 GOC Palestine (Haining) to War Office, Despatch on the Operations carried out by the British Forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, 1 November 1938–31 March 1939, 24 April 1939, Evetts Papers, File 1, LHCMA; see also O'Connor Papers, 3/4/53, LHCMA.

105 To Zaslani from 'M' in Haifa, 5 June 1939, Files of Shiloah Zaslani, S25/22424, CZA.

106 Letter, Feitelson (Tiberias, Intelligence Chief in North of Palestine) to Zaslani, 1 June 1939, S25/22424, 7, CZA.

107 I. Pappé, *The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian Dynasty: The Husaynis, 1700–1948* (London 2010), 258; Palestine Police Force, Report from Tiberias Police on Nazareth District, c.1940, Nazareth Town, 17/4212/8, Israel State Archive, Jerusalem.

108 Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, 256.

never won the war for the British but they helped the authorities by exacerbating pre-existing disputes and banditry in rural Palestine, so dividing Britain's enemies, encouraging collaboration, acting as a force multiplier of sorts and spreading confusion and distrust among Palestinians. The replication, shape shifting, invisibility and disguise of the peace bands are part of the wider story of colonial repression, accommodation and resistance that extended of the end-of-empire 'small wars' after 1945. The peace bands and their ilk are early examples of 'black ops', comparable to the psychological element of the French Army's *guerre révolutionnaire* of the 1950s and to British operations in Malaya, Kenya and Northern Ireland where aboriginal tribes in Malaya, turned rebels, and in Kenya 'blackened-up' white troops and loyalist Kikuyu Home Guard gathered intelligence and fought rebels.¹⁰⁹ (Indeed, the peace bands are similar in form and function to the Kikuyu Home Guard in Kenya.) Rhodesia, in its fight against black insurgents, established a discrete pseudo military unit in 1973, the Selous Scouts, a mixed force with white and black soldiers in which the former absurdly blackened their faces, hence the unit's employment of pro-Government black Rhodesian soldiers alongside 'turned' black guerrillas.¹¹⁰ Such forms of hybrid warfare reversed inwards the kinetic energy of the enemy, as when the Nashashibis and Palestinians from the village of Abu Ghosh produced leaflets purporting to come from the rebels but which subtly undermined the insurgents' cause.¹¹¹ The peace bands complemented well-established British punitive pacification tactics that pivoted on punishing the villagers on whom rebels relied for support, putting them on notice, confusing them, making them choose sides, and drawing them away from the rebellion. This had an impact and by October 1938 the rebels were fining villages that cooperated with the peace bands: 'We have warned the villages not to cooperate with the traitors and we shall impose a heavy fine on them'.¹¹² Elsewhere, there was a two-hour battle where rebels killed 20 'traitors'.¹¹³ Villagers had to choose between the rebels and the soldiers, and in the face of starvation and Army targeting of 'bad' villages, some chose the side of the government, as would happen in Malaya and Kenya in the 1950s.

109 F. Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs* (London 1960), 78, 84, 150–1 and H. Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-insurgency in Kenya* (Cambridge 2012), 152–8. See also, G. Hughes and C. Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate: Historical Precedents and Implications for Contemporary Counter-insurgency and Counter-terrorism', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 20, 1 (2009), 1–35. General Sir Frank Kitson helped establish pseudo units in Kenya in the 1950s and denied to this author any knowledge then of what had gone before in Palestine in the 1930s: Letter, General Sir Frank Kitson to author, 26 July 2013.

110 J. Pittaway, *Selous Scouts, Rhodesia: The Men Speak* (Avondale 2013), *passim*.

111 CID Police Intelligence Summary, 89, 38, 17 December 1938, S25/22732-94, CZA; MacMichael (HC, Palestine) to MacDonald (Secretary of State for Colonies), 16 January 1939, Security Matters 1938–39, S25/22761, CZA.

112 A. el Rahim el Haj Mahmud, Office of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine, Mountains, to Abdallah el Beiruti, 19 October 1938, Wingate Papers, M2313, 43, BL.

113 A. el Rahim Haj Mahmud, Arab Rebellion Office in Palestine, to Abu Abdallah, n.d., Wingate Papers, M2313, 52, BL.

There are different ways of reading Palestinian collaboration with the British. A sympathetic reading is that while the British found Arab collaborators after 1936, the British found collaborators among most colonial subjects and insurgent groups, even within the tight-knit ‘modern’ Republican community in Northern Ireland during the Troubles there, collusion that allegedly extended to Sinn Fein’s leader, Martin McGuinness.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the Palestinians faced overwhelming odds after 1936 when confronted by the formidable British–Jewish military front arrayed against them, despite which most Palestinians supported Hajj Amin and denounced the Nashashibis as traitors, and not until late 1938, well into the counter-insurgency after Britain had deployed the full strength of its armed forces, did Palestinians help the British in any numbers. Palestinian unity was such that the Yishuv’s intelligence arm was never able to infiltrate the core of the rebellion.¹¹⁵ Most Palestinians looked for ways of survival, what has been aptly termed *attentisme* in the context of occupied France in the 1940s where people survived violence and hunger by adopting a passive acceptance of the changing social and political order.¹¹⁶ At times, Palestinians publicly supported both sides to survive, depending on which way the wind was blowing, while still being strongly opposed in private to the Mandate and Jewish settlement and supportive of Hajj Amin, one record from Yishuv files neatly summing up this personal ambivalence:

We are it is true a law abiding [Palestinian] village because we are made that way and because we wish to keep on good terms with government. We think on the whole that the activities of the [rebel] gangs a mistake and we strongly object to the trouble their presence inevitably leads to. But if anyone has been telling you that either I or anybody else do not sympathise with the gangs, they are lying. We consider that the gangs represent a good cause and that it is Government’s policy that is the root of all the trouble in the country.¹¹⁷

Palestinians at the Yatta meeting expressed similar sentiments, coerced villagers pitching up for the event, passively listening to the speeches, and then returning home unconvinced. Villagers saw the immediate problem in non-political terms, asking the authorities to leave them alone to deal with the chronic stress of rebel banditry and military counter-measures, the peace bands developing initially from local, independent forces raised to protect villages from ‘brothers of Jihad terrorists’.¹¹⁸

114 D. Murray, *Bloody Sunday: Truths, Lies and the Saville Inquiry* (London 2012), 195.

115 Y. Slutsky (ed.), *Sefer Toldot ha'Haganah [Book of the History of the Haganah]* vol. 2, part 2, *Me'Haganah le'ma'avak [From Defence to Struggle]* (Tel Aviv 1963), 991.

116 See C. Lloyd, *Collaboration and Resistance in Occupied France: Representing Treason and Sacrifice* (Houndmills 2001), viii–ix

117 Note, typed, n.d., Security Matters, 1938–39, S25/22762, CZA.

118 Appendix, Notes on Captured Arab Documents [by Jews and written after 1941], Wingate Papers, M2313, 114, BL.

Village headmen were in ‘despair’, ‘terrorized’ by bandits, menfolk of villages forced to sleep in the hills, leaving the women in charge:

We are strangled in want and despair. Until when will our country go on being terrorised by these bandits! And who are these bandits! – hired men – the lowest of the low... Anyone who is suspected of being for the Government or who is for partition is sure to be slaughtered... O blessed were the days before the riots. We worked and lived. Our wives and children ate bread. We had what we wanted... May God punish those children of the Devil who have thrown us into want and despair.¹¹⁹

At a meeting at the village of ‘Imwas with British officers, Nimer Abu Rosh (presumably Nimr Abu Ghosh) advised the Army on means to get rid of the rebel ‘gangs’, adding how he:

... demanded from the Military to leave them to protect themselves as the military is unable to render them the necessary assistance... it is better to be captured by the military than the gangs. Therefore, he asks the Military not to make any operations in the villages belonging to the Abu Rosh’s family, but to let them act on their own.¹²⁰

Palestinian collaboration was less active and ideological – a clique surrounding the Nashashibi family – than it was reactive, personal and practical – the men of the peace bands and the peasants at the sharp end of the revolt facing rebel demands and British military pacification designed to make villagers more fearful of soldiers than rebels. Military pressure combined with offers of money and preference to sway some Palestinians, as did slighted honour. Thus, the Jews had an informer in the rebel ranks, ‘Rashid’, who worked for them passing on intelligence to the Jews who then sent it to the British, and he did so because his comrades had impugned his honour, while another did the same for money.¹²¹ The Jews paid one Arab prison guard known as ‘Abu Shilling’ two shillings a day (£P3 per month) to pass on prison lists to their intelligence service, noting that ‘he did not look upon himself as an informer or a traitor, but merely as a man doing a paid job’.¹²² Another collaborator remarked that he would stop informing once he had paid off his debts.¹²³ Such things carried on after the Arab revolt and for similar reasons, as is illustrated in the recent Israeli film *Bethlehem* in which a Palestinian boy collaborates with Israeli internal security forces under duress (but also for personal gain such as new jeans), before murdering his Israeli ‘handler’ with whom he had struck up a friendship. The Yishuv’s assessment in the 1930s was that financial

119 Undated note [by Jews], S25/4960-184, CZA.

120 The Meeting of the Military Officers with Nimer Abu Rosh in Imwas, 29 [or 20] January 1939, 1, S25/22269, CZA.

121 Dekel, *Shai*, 197–8.

122 Dekel, *Shai*, 207.

123 Dekel, *Shai*, 223.

reward was secondary to infighting within the Palestinian community for explaining collaboration.¹²⁴

The men of the peace bands and their peripatetic followers establish themselves as rebels and collaborators who would switch sides as suited them, violent, pragmatic, politically disengaged men living beyond the law. They were ‘bandits’, mercenaries with distinct customs and codes of honour, fighting primarily for pride and personal gain.¹²⁵ The peace units (and many rebels, as well) lacked the political engagement of ‘partisans’, being instead ‘pirates’ focused on private robbery and profit, to use the language of Carl Schmitt.¹²⁶ There was no Palestinian Mao Zedong able to transform peasants into a mobilized, conscious political force of guerrillas; instead, there was a divisive ‘Arab civil war’, part of which was a reactionary social movement, captured rebels telling the British how they hated urbane town-dwelling Palestinians.¹²⁷ ‘They controlled us for a hundred years, we will control them for one year’, remarked one rebel, adding how urban folk should also stop using Jewish-supplied electricity.¹²⁸ Wearing the modern *fez* headdress was another prohibition, as was not wearing the veil, listening to the radio, wearing make-up and going to the cinema: ‘rise to the level of your sisters who carry jars of water on their heads’, exhorted one rebel leaflet.¹²⁹ ‘Abd al-Hadi had ‘no interest’ in politics and ‘no sense of loyalty’ to the government and collaborated for personal reasons.¹³⁰ When talking to a British colonial official in December 1938, he espoused the nationalist cause, dismissed with complete ‘indifference’ a British offer of money, and made it clear that he was fighting for ‘wounded pride’, concluding how:

he has his pride and his duty towards his own country, Jenin, and his people, who have been murdered and robbed by rebels. He must revenge himself on these rebels. He must kill them. He reiterated this desire to kill several times and emphasized it by laying hands on his revolver and dagger. For these reasons he was helping the Government.¹³¹

As the British saw it, collaboration was a means for Palestinians to pursue family vendettas but with tacit official approval, something that the British and Jews readily exploited.¹³²

124 Slutsky, *Sefer Toldot ha'Haganah*, vol. 2, part 2, 990–1.

125 Discussed in the classic text by E. Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London 1969) without reference to Palestine, but his description of ‘social banditry’ (22–3) is apt.

126 C. Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan* (New York, NY 2007), 14–15.

127 J.P. Jankowski, ‘The Palestinian Arab Revolt of 1936–39’, *Muslim World*, 63, 3 (1973), 226.

128 Arnon-Ohanna, *Herev mi-Bayit*, 284.

129 Arnon-Ohanna, *Falahim ba-Mered*, 45.

130 Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, 150.

131 Subject: Fakhri Abdul Hadi, from Robert Newton, Assistant District Commissioner, Jenin, 17 December 1938, S25/22793-39/43, CZA.

132 W.D. Battershill, Chief Secretary on behalf of the High Commissioner to District Commissioners and IG Police, 29 December 1938, S25/22761, 3, CZA

Feuds and personal vendettas – the pre-modern, clan-like qualities of the Palestinians and their notable leaders – are an alternate reason as to why Palestinians cooperated with the authorities. In this critical reading of the Palestinians, erstwhile rebels and notable families instinctively preferred the temporary advantages of (often temporary) collaboration to pursue personal agendas, they were unable to subsume their differences in the face of a common enemy, and they naively thought that they could simultaneously collaborate and resist. ‘I fear our cause will fail, because everyone is acting independently. I fear our work has changed into an instrument for private interests, and the quarrels are a sure sign of this’, noted rebel commanders.¹³³ The Arab revolt of the 1930s faced a well-disciplined, strong colonial power supported by Jewish settlers that was able to divide and defeat a politically inchoate enemy whose notions – some of them, anyway – of collaboration dangerously and ambiguously encompassed personal gain with a belief in the Palestinian national cause. While the Palestinians were not remarkable among colonial subject peoples in their mixed, ad hoc reaction to colonial repression, successful colonial rebellions such as the politically mobilized, insular Jewish one against the British after 1945 did not fragment under military pacification campaigns, notwithstanding the relatively softer measures taken by the British against largely ‘white’ Jewish rebels in the 1940s. The social and political fabric of colonial rebellions as well as the power of the counter-insurgency determined success or failure – what today’s neo-imperial powers call ‘human terrain’ and something that is reflected in the US military’s recent turn to anthropology and ‘cultural counter-revolution’ to fight insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹³⁴ Palestinian collaboration in the 1930s was too partial to damn the Arab revolt but it reflected a lack of united political action – the iron discipline that is essential for successful insurgencies – that was more damning for the insurgents when fighting the finely tuned British military machine. Similarly, after the end of the Mandate and the formation of Israel in 1948, the new Jewish state looked for and found local Palestinian collaborators as the Yishuv and the British had done before, for similar reasons to those outlined here and with similarly baleful effects for the Palestinian national cause.¹³⁵

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133 Council of High Command of Rebellion Army in Palestine, Abd el Rahim el Haj Mahmad to Abu Khaled, 23 August 1938, Wingate papers, 37, BL.

134 *British Army Field Manual, Volume 1 Part 10, Countering Insurgency (AFM 1-10)* (October 2009), 3–5; Frank Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars: British Failure in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New Haven, CT and London 2011), 194–6.

135 Hillel Cohen examines post-1948 collaboration in his more recent book entitled *Good Arabs: The Israeli Security Agencies and the Israeli Arabs, 1948–67* (Berkeley, CA 2010).

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