



SOLDIERING FOR ARAB NATIONALISM: FAWZI AL-QAWUQJI IN PALESTINE

LAILA PARSONS

Fawzi al-Qawuqji was a soldier and Arab nationalist who fought European colonialism all over the Middle East between World War I and 1948. He served as an officer in the 4th Brigade of the Ottoman Army, fighting the British advance north through Palestine; led the al-Hama sector of the Syrian Revolt against the French in 1925-1927; was one of the rebel leaders in the Arab revolt against the British in Palestine in 1936; participated in the Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani coup against the British-controlled government in Iraq in 1941; and served as field commander of the Arab Liberation Army in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. This essay, part of a larger study of Qawuqji's life and career, is based on his published memoirs as well as his private papers, stored in boxes at the back of a closet in the Beirut apartment where he lived after his retirement until his death in 1976.

IN 2000, TOM SEGEV'S *One Palestine Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* came out in English translation.¹ Pastiche-like, it jumps from event to event and from person to person (both elite and ordinary), transporting the reader into the lives and worldviews of various individual representatives of the types of people who lived in Mandate Palestine: British army officers, Jewish bureaucrats, Arab intellectuals, and so on. It differs from many of the books about the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict that have come out in English in the last twenty years because it does not ask the "whodunnit" questions (Whose side was King Abdallah of Jordan on? Was there an Israeli policy to expel the Palestinians in 1948? Were the British pro-Jewish or pro-Arab?) that generally produce historical narratives that serve the immediate political needs of the ongoing conflict. Instead, Segev's book tries to show us a contingent world

LAILA PARSONS, associate professor of history and Islamic studies at McGill University, is author of *The Druze between Palestine and Israel, 1947-1949* (Macmillan, 2000). She is currently working on *The Making of Fawzi al-Qawuqji: An Arab Nationalist Soldier and His World*. As part of that project, she has been awarded a Canadian SSHRC grant to catalogue the Qawukji papers in her possession so that they can be archived and made available to scholars. This will be done in cooperation with Ossama el-Kaoukji. Without the support of Ossama and his daughter, Dwan el-Kaoukji, this project would not be possible. The author also wishes to thank May Farhat, Stephanie Thomas, and Nadine and Ula Hatab for all their help in Beirut; Noel Abdulahad for his help in translating some of the more difficult handwritten documents; and the anonymous *JPS* reviewers for their comments.

peopled by complex characters who act as individuals and not as examples of “Jews” or “Arabs” or “Brits.” But the book does not live up to its subtitle: *Jews and Arabs* under the British Mandate. Apart from the famous Palestinian diarist and educator Khalil Sakakini, and Musa ‘Alami, a student of Sakakini’s and later a prominent Palestinian nationalist activist, Arabs are not present: where are the middle-ranking bureaucrats, the shopkeepers, and the soldiers who fought in the Arab Revolt? When I looked carefully at the letters, diaries, official memos, and memoirs that Segev had used as his sources, I realized that less than 5 percent were in Arabic, and even those were from Hebrew translations.

Certainly, there are practical reasons for this imbalance. Many of the unpublished letters and memoirs written in Arabic are still privately held and consequently less accessible than their English or Hebrew equivalents, which can be found in the dozens of British and Israeli archives open to scholars. In addition, many of those who work on the history of this period and who write in English (or Hebrew) do not read Arabic. This means that scholars are relying on the colonial archive or on colonial memoirs (in this case Israeli and British) for their historical narratives. This has obvious problems, including the importation (often inadvertent) of the colonizer’s categories into the history of the colonized. And even where scholars are mainly engaged in a critique of the colonial project, they are often (somewhat solipsistically) circling around agendas originally set by the colonial state. Thus Segev’s book is a kind of microcosm of this larger problem. The handful of Arab voices he includes are muffled by the white noise of a narrative driven by colonial sources. The writing of history replicates the patterns of power that produced the sources in the first place, as many subalternist scholars have explained in their examination of the role of the colonial archive in the writing of the Indian past. Historians still interested in narrative history know all too well that the sources produce the history: there is no preexisting historical story out there just waiting to be backed up by sources.²

One way to lower the volume of the white noise emanating from the colonial archive is to focus on the Arabic sources. What would the story of the British Mandate in Palestine look like if it were narrated almost entirely from Arabic sources, with one or two British or Israeli sources thrown in for a little extra spice? For one thing, it would look like some of the dozens of secondary sources on the period already available in Arabic but grossly underutilized by historians writing in English.³ But it might also offer up a past inhabited by individual Arabs, complex individuals whose actions are rooted in their own specific contexts, rather than being explicable by whether or not they belong to one category or another (secularist or Islamist, pro- or anti-Abdallah, traitor or patriot, Sunni or Shi’i, Druze or Christian, and so on). Making an effort to find and use Arabic sources does not solve the problem: there is no assumption here that Arabic sources are pure, untainted by colonialism and modernity. Still, *something* is gained by making Arabic sources the foundation of a modern historical story, even if it is nothing more than a shift to a different room in the house and a different view through the doorway.

Little has been written on Fawzi al-Qawuqji in any language, though he appears in passing in works on the history of Arab nationalism. In the scholarship on 1948, there are several minor whodunit-type debates circling around him and his motivations: Did he collude with the Israelis in 1948? Was he working for or against King Abdallah? Was he working for or against the Syrians? These are all questions about Qawuqji's complicity, not his complexity. These are the kinds of questions that have dominated the political history of the Arab-Israeli conflict for many years. In my previous work on Druze-Jewish relations during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, I struggled with several such questions. Partly as a result of my growing sense of dissatisfaction with my earlier work, and particularly with the fact that I relied almost entirely on Israeli archival sources to tell a Druze-Arab story, I am now interested more in examining the role that the Arab-Israeli conflict played in Qawuqji's life and worldview than in examining the role Qawuqji played in the dramatic events of that conflict.⁴

What follows is a fragment of the story of an Arab nationalist soldier whose career intersected at various points with the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this fragment, he is the protagonist, and his archive and memoirs are treated as authoritative, setting the agenda for his story: a simple thing, but surprisingly rare. The fact that I have allowed his archive and memoirs to drive the narrative means that I have often consciously accepted at face value Qawuqji's construction of the past. I am aware that other sources will contradict his story. The choice to accept his version is a function not of naïveté but rather of a desire to experiment with a different way of laying down a *base* narrative.⁵

BOXES IN A CLOSET

On 9–10 February 1998, the Lebanese daily *al-Hayat* ran a two-part feature article on Fawzi al-Qawuqji. Written by the Lebanese journalist John Daya, the articles were occasioned by the release of British government documents under the fifty-year declassification rules; fifty years rather than thirty, because—as Daya points out—the material was considered particularly sensitive. The documents refer to the events surrounding Qawuqji's return in March 1947 to his home town of Tripoli, Lebanon, following his escape from Russian-occupied Germany to Paris. After recovering in Paris for several weeks, Qawuqji flew via Cairo to Beirut, arriving in Tripoli on 5 March to a hero's welcome. Daya's article focuses on two aspects of this return: the unexpected diversion of Qawuqji's plane to Lod airport in Mandate Palestine; and the fact that the hero's welcome quickly turned into a gun battle between supporters of Tripoli's leading families, the Muqaddams and Karamis. Hence the titles of the two *al-Hayat* articles: "Why Didn't the Mandate Government Capture Him at Lod Airport?" and "Tripoli Receives Its Returning Son in a Family Bloodbath."

Daya begins the articles with a personal note, taking us back to the 1973 war when, as a young journalist looking for a subject for a feature story relevant to the war, he decided to interview Qawuqji to get his impressions of the fighting

and his advice for the Syrian and Egyptian armies. This was during the first few days of the war, when an Arab victory seemed possible. Based on stereotypes of the older generation of retired army officers then living in Beirut, Daya expects to find an aging military adventurer living grandly with servants and a young wife. Instead, he finds Qawuqji in a modest two-bedroom apartment in a middle-class neighborhood of Beirut and still married to the German woman he had met in 1942 while hospitalized in Berlin. Daya and Qawuqji chat for a while about the war, but Qawuqji is not inclined to reminisce and has only one thing to say: if Egypt and Syria keep up the attack week after week, they have a chance of winning, because Israel cannot survive a prolonged Arab offensive. But if they accept a temporary cease-fire, the balance will tip in favor of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Daya writes his article, and a few days later—lo and behold—the Egyptians halt their offensive, and the war takes a definitive turn in Israel's favor, exactly as Qawuqji had predicted.⁶

After introducing us to Qawuqji through this encounter, Daya changes the setting, taking us from the small apartment in West Beirut to Kew Gardens in London, home to ornate Victorian greenhouses and the British Public Records Office. From the documents housed there, he tells the story of Qawuqji's journey from Paris to Tripoli in 1947. I will come back to this story, but for now I want to remain in Qawuqji's apartment with the hundreds of documents kept in boxes at the back of a bedroom closet. I spent part of the summer of 2003 in that bedroom, going through these documents with the help of Qawuqji's son Ossama. The papers, with dates ranging from the 1920s to the 1960s, were in no particular order—a jumble of personal letters, official reports, newspaper clippings, and photographs: the things that Qawuqji felt it was important to keep.⁷ Personal letters from statesmen such as Riyadh al-Sulh and Shukri al-Quwwatli were mixed in with children's letters and drawings. Next door, in the larger bedroom, Qawuqji's widow Lisolette, then in her nineties, spent the hot summer days resting.

I would like to stay with these boxes and begin with cease-fires, a topic that weighed heavily on Qawuqji's mind, as Daya had discovered in his brief meeting with the old soldier.

CEASE-FIRES

On 7 May 1948, Ismail Safwat, head of the Damascus-based Arab League Military Committee that oversaw the ALA (*jaysb al-inqadh al-'Arabi*), issued an order to Fadil Abdallah, the officer commanding the ALA forces in the Jerusalem area. Safwat ordered the Jerusalem garrison to adhere to the Arab League secretary-general's decision to accept a temporary cease-fire to begin the next day, Saturday, at 12:00 noon. The order was issued eight days before the British were to withdraw from Palestine, an event that marked the beginning of the interstate war between the newly declared state of Israel and its Arab neighbors. Safwat's order, which followed the fall to the Jewish forces of the Palestinian towns of Tiberias, Safad, and Haifa, came in the midst of a battle

between the Haganah and combined ALA and Palestinian volunteer forces for control of the roads to Jerusalem. Qawuqji heard about the order when it was passed on to him by Fadil Abdallah.

When Safwat's order arrived, Qawuqji had been struggling for several weeks to get supplies and salaries for the troops under his command, particularly for the ALA's Circassian Company, close to mutiny after several months without pay. Qawuqji had heard rumors of cease-fire negotiations in Jerusalem between the Haganah, the British, and the Arab League, and on 6 May had sent a telegram to his fellow ALA commander in Jerusalem asking that no decision on a cease-fire be made without consulting him. Thus, when he received Safwat's telegram the very next day, he was furious:

I was astonished by this behavior and thought that this decision regarding the cease-fire could only serve to provide an opportunity to allow convoys of food and ammunition to reach the Jews of Jerusalem in order to relieve the acute food and water shortage there, and to prepare for the major assault that they were planning.⁸

In fact, the cease-fire was never implemented, not because of Qawuqji's objections but because the negotiations themselves broke down at the last moment. Nonetheless, Qawuqji's reaction to the mere possibility already points to his obsession with the role that cease-fires played in the military defeats suffered by Arab armies.

Almost exactly a month later, on 8 June 1948, Qawuqji was briefly on leave in Beirut, where he met with Lebanese prime minister Riyadh al-Sulh and Arab League secretary-general 'Azzam Pasha. The British, the Americans, and the UN were putting pressure on the Arab League to get the Arab state armies to accept a cease-fire. Everyone in Beirut was talking about it. At their meeting, 'Azzam Pasha asked Qawuqji what he thought about the impending truce. Qawuqji was unequivocal in his response:

An armistice is usually made after the defeat of the enemy who then asks for it. Nothing of this kind has happened. We are not defeated or crushed, nor are the Jewish Forces, yet our position is comparatively better than theirs. . . . It will just give them an opportunity to increase their armaments and strengthen their fortifications and reorganize their fronts.

Three days later, on 11 June, the so-called "First Truce" went into effect. It lasted exactly a month and was followed by the "Ten Days War" during which the Haganah's successor, the IDF, captured the Palestinian towns of Lydda, Ramle, and Nazareth, in addition to dozens of smaller towns and villages in Palestine, including eventually Sejera (eastern Galilee), the site of fierce fighting between Qawuqji's ALA and the Jewish forces.⁹

By the end of October 1948, during the final throes of the war, Qawuqji was fed up with truces and with complying with UN resolutions. Facing an overwhelming Israeli victory and aware of the impending IDF assaults on the last pockets of territory the ALA still held in the Galilee, Qawuqji was accused by the Jewish side of breaking the October cease-fire being monitored by UN cease-fire observers. On 28 October, he sent a long telegram to the Syrian and Lebanese defense ministers concerning the issue. At the time he wrote this telegram, he was fighting in the Galilee only with the few remaining ALA troops who had not gone home in the face of the Arab armies' defeat and some local villagers who by now had understood that if they left their homes for the refugee camps springing up across the borders in Syria and Lebanon, as many had between March and July, they might never come back. The terse telegraphic language of Qawuqji's dispatch (so different from his more self-reflective accounts written later in his memoirs) resonates with his frustration at having to continue operating within the framework of rules of war imposed by purportedly disinterested outside observers:

The claims of the Jewish Forces that the Arab Liberation Army has broken the cease-fire are a lie. It is their intention, through this claim of our breaching it, to cover up the fact that they have themselves breached it. I made clear to Colonel Lorth, the head of the cease-fire observers committee in the Tiberias region, that we do not trust their promises just as we do not think that the committee has any real control over them. The Jewish Forces are not complying and are lying by claiming that we are not complying.¹⁰

Qawuqji's bitter experience with cease-fires in 1948 goes some way to explaining his insistent tone twenty-five years later to John Daya, on that day in the middle of the 1973 war in his apartment in Beirut.

SOLDIERS AND POLITICIANS

Part II of Daya's article recounts Qawuqji's return to Tripoli in 1947 via Paris after six years of exile in Germany. According to Daya, Qawuqji gave several press conferences while in Paris, but the first interview he gave was to *al-Hayat*, which published it on the front page. Responding to a question about his future plans, Qawuqji had replied:

It is extremely difficult for me to answer your question, but perhaps you will find the answer in my past. I have been a military man since my childhood and I don't understand anything about politics, and I don't want to understand anything about it. And those periods of my life that for one reason or another have been empty of soldiering have been the most

dull. I have dedicated myself to the struggle to free the Arab lands from the yoke of foreigners, so I am a hostage to Arab events and interests. When the struggle calls me to whichever area I am needed, I am ready to answer that call.¹¹

Eleven years earlier, in 1936, Qawuqji had led a group of some 200 volunteers to Palestine to join the popular revolt against the British that had just broken out. In addition to wanting to fight the British, the men, mainly Syrians and Iraqis, were motivated by a personal commitment to Qawuqji and the goals of Arab nationalism as well as by the usual reasons that lead men to fight: money, glory, excitement, or just something to do. Arriving in Palestine in August, they fought until the imposition of a temporary truce in October, when they were forced to withdraw to Transjordan via the West Bank village of Tubas. In Palestinian popular memory, Qawuqji and his men are known especially for uniting disparate rebel units in the Nablus-Tulkarm-Jenin area.¹² Qawuqji would later call these fighters an “army” (*jaysb*), but he clearly saw them as different from the other armies he had fought with in Palestine: the 4th Brigade of the Ottoman army, in which, as a young officer, he fought the British advance on Damascus in the Autumn of 1917; and the ALA he commanded in 1948, which, though a volunteer force, was configured along the lines of a state army.

Despite his self-portrayal as a soldier detached from the world of politics, Qawuqji frequently worked with politicians—Riyadh al-Sulh, Shukri al-Quwwatli, Jamil Mardam, Nabih al-‘Azmah, ‘Adil al-‘Azmah, and ‘Azzam Pasha. These names and many others repeatedly appear in Qawuqji’s self-narrative. But it is absolutely clear that Qawuqji viewed his own role as having been played outside the political structures of the nascent Arab states. What emerges from his papers and memoirs is his love of the spirit of soldiering and his sense of himself as a man of action rather than of words, as an Arab nationalist soldier-at-large.

Qawuqji’s soldiering was always set against the backdrop of politics, and it is in his contrasting accounts of 1948 and 1936 that the role of politics is most apparent. In both cases he was fighting against colonial control of Palestine. In 1948, however, he is—by his own account—weighed down by the politics surrounding the formation of the ALA, as well as by the ALA’s very structure, modeled as it was on a modern state army. For Qawuqji, the 1936 revolt was a soldiers’ war, while 1948 was a politicians’ war. But there is something else at play, too. In his eyes, 1936 was a “pure” Arab insurrection against colonial power, fought in the spirit of Arab nationalism qua anticolonialism, whereas 1948, with the ALA battalions and companies and, most importantly, its remote headquarters staffed by politicians, was spoiled by a half-baked modernity that collapsed, deflating the fighting spirit of the men in the field.¹³

In Qawuqji’s eyes, the 1936 revolt was a “pure” Arab insurrection against colonial power, whereas 1948 was spoiled by a half-baked modernity that collapsed, deflating the fighting spirit of the men in the field.

Even the materiality of the documents in his boxes reflects this difference. Most of the 1936 documents (as well as those for the similarly anti-colonial 1925 insurrection in Syria) are handwritten letters between the fraternity of men active in the revolt. Some were even written on “secret” paper where the writing would appear only when dipped in water. These letters are full of allusions and code names and pledges of allegiance and hand-drawn maps of plans of attack. The 1948 documents in the boxes are far more numerous—thirty times more numerous, in fact. These are mainly typed and consist of hundreds of official reports on the mobilization of the various companies, battles fought against the Jewish forces, and so on. Most are addressed to a central command far from the battlefield, which only occasionally seems to direct the action or respond to requests for reinforcements and supplies.

Qawuqji evokes the contrast between 1936 and 1948 in his description of his arrival in Palestine in March 1948. He first arrives in Tubas, the same village that he left thirteen years before. Reaching the village, perched on the eastern edge of the hills of the West Bank, had involved journeying from southern Syria to northern Jordan, crossing the Jordan River at the Allenby Bridge into the desert of the Jordan valley, and finally climbing to the village. It rained heavily that day, and most of the cars and lorries carrying supplies had broken down or got stuck in the mud. For Qawuqji, this was an omen of what was to come. As he wrote in his memoirs:

We arrived in Tubas on the 6th of March 1948. This village was the last I left in 1936 when the revolt came to an end. Being there brought back memories of heroism and honor, memories of the brave deeds of the group who had come from various Arab countries, and who had opened up an opportunity before the Arabs, had the leaders only known how to make use of it to solve the Palestine Problem once and for all thirteen years before, and then there would have been no need for us to come back to Palestine to fight. Rain fell heavily and incessantly on Tubas. Owing to the ignorance of the drivers the cars of our convoy lay scattered on the Jericho-Tubas road, either because of problems with the engines or because they were stuck in the mud. Other cars shared the same fate on the Amman-Dar'a road. This problem with vehicles and the problem of supply hindered our operations until the end of the campaign.¹⁴

In his account of 1948, Qawuqji travels to and fro between the soldier's space (fighting and anxiety about supplies) and the politician's space (summits and meetings in Damascus and Beirut). He paints a picture of these two spheres operating independently of one another. Perhaps more importantly, he always portrays himself as a stranger amongst the politicians, shocked at their disconnectedness from the reality of the fighting. Whenever he meets with them

(and “them” is usually Syrian prime minister Jamil Mardam, Syrian president Shukri al-Quwwatli, Riyadh al-Sulh, ‘Azzam Pasha, and Taha al-Hashimi—this last a general, but deeply involved in politics), he is pleading with them to respond positively to the requests for supplies that he has been sending from the field.

In September 1948 the ALA held some of the high ground that rises above the Huleh plain northeast of Safad. This included the town of Marus, just seven kilometers northeast of Safad, which was being held by the ALA’s Alawite Battalion under the command of Ghassan Jadid. With the Haganah attacking the Marus area to dislodge ALA forces from their commanding position, Qawuqji was receiving telegrams daily from Jadid asking for reinforcements and ammunition. Syrian forces were meanwhile holding Mishmar Ha-Yarden, four kilometers to the East, so Qawuqji asked Husni Za’im, the commander of the Syrian army, for help. Za’im persuaded Qawuqji to go with him to Damascus so together they could make their case. During their 13 September meeting at the presidential palace with Quwwatli, Jamil Mardam, and Riyadh al-Sulh, Qawuqji asked for mortar bombs and guns for Marus’s defense. According to Qawuqji, Quwwatli turned to him and said, “Why do you provoke the Jews? Don’t you see that they have us by the neck? You had better withdraw from Marus.” Qawuqji left the meeting filled with anxiety:

These words were a severe blow to me. I never expected anything like this. What disturbed me more now was not the question of ammunition but the mentality, this strange and surprising mentality in the heads of “the heads.”¹⁵

Overthrown six months later by Za’im, Quwwatli became president again in 1955. And it was during this second presidency that Qawuqji, then retired in Beirut, wrote to Quwwatli asking for financial help. He was subsisting at the time on a tiny pension from the Saudi government for his services training the Saudi army in the late 1920s, as well as on his small salary as a military consultant to the Lebanese army. On 30 September 1957, he wrote to Quwwatli as follows:

I have already complained to you about this matter and I have made clear that my children can only expect a terrible future in light of the pathetic pension that I receive, an amount that wouldn’t even be enough for a floor-sweeper in your palace. And this after the long battle that I fought against the colonialist in every Arab land and after the fact that I have filled the pages of history.¹⁶

Like so many of Qawuqji’s dispatches from the field during the 1948 war, the letter apparently went unanswered. Written nine years after the meeting in Quwwatli’s palace, it seems particularly poignant because it smacks of a final

request for support and recognition from soldier to politician. Indeed, such requests continued even after Qawuqji's death in 1975. On 12 August 2003, *al-Sharq* newspaper ran a long article entitled "Fawzi al-Qawuqji, Warrior against British and French Colonialism: His Daughter Appeals to the Emir of Kuwait to Rescue Her from Destitution."¹⁷ The article recounts Qawuqji's life as an Arab nationalist soldier as told by his daughter, Haifa al-Qawuqji, then in her eighties. She tells of his time fighting the British in the battle for Nabi Samwil just north of Jerusalem in 1917, his struggle against the French in Syria in 1925–1927, his role in the Palestine revolt in 1936, his role in the pro-Axis coup in Iraq in 1941, his command of the ALA in 1948, and finally his withdrawal from public life. It is on the basis of Qawuqji's participation in the fight against colonialism that his daughter makes her public appeal to the emir.

Qawuqji's numerous requests from the field for supplies, his letter to Quwwatli in 1957, and the appeal—also to a political leader—from his daughter Haifa almost fifty years later produce a narrative of desperate appeals from the fighters to the politicians, one which Qawuqji himself presented as being the root of the failure of Arab nationalism to achieve its goals in 1948. Thus understood, the silence of the politicians in the face of appeals for action by men such as Qawuqji, whose legitimacy as nationalists derived from their function as "men of action," cemented Qawuqji's division of men into soldiers and politicians.

THE MUFTI

Of all the fronts against colonialism on which Qawuqji fought, Palestine was the most poignant. And whenever he encountered Palestine, he encountered the Mufti—Haj Amin al-Husayni—the de facto leader of the Palestinians. His problems with the Mufti were multilayered, both personal and political. In time, Qawuqji came to see him as symbolizing all that was wrong with politics.

Faced with a folder stuffed with documentary fragments of his encounters with the Mufti, it is difficult to decide where to begin. The best place, perhaps, is with an event that seems to lie at the center of the concentric circles of their relationship: Berlin 1942, when the Mufti's office there sent the German Foreign Ministry a document denouncing Qawuqji as a British spy. I will come back to this document, but first I should say something about the immediate context that produced it.

Qawuqji's German period (1941–1947) is the subject of considerable polemic, which I am not interested in engaging with here. This was the only significant time in his life up to that point when he was neither fighting in nor training an army, and he thought of these years as his most intense encounter with what he termed "politics." The most detailed secondary source on Qawuqji—a 1995 article by Gerhard Höpp—not surprisingly focuses on this period.¹⁸ Although the account relies mainly on the German archives (a limitation Höpp himself acknowledges), it offers an intricate history of the

relations between Qawuqji and the other Berlin-based Arab soldiers and politicians who had hoped that an Axis victory would bring about Arab independence from French and British colonial rule, and who spent the war years negotiating with the German and Italian foreign ministries. By far the most prominent members of this group¹⁹ were the Mufti and Rashid ‘Ali al-Kaylani, the former prime minister of Iraq who led a coup against the pro-British government in 1941, and who had been forced to flee with his associates—including the Mufti—when the British regained the upper hand. The two men, allies in Iraq during the period leading up to the coup, became bitter rivals for influence with the German foreign ministry during their exile.

Given the dearth of Arabic material concerning the war years in Berlin (Qawuqji’s own papers are silent on the subject, and the memoirs devote only a few pages to it), the German officials who wrote the reports on which Höpp bases his account inevitably become the main source for the Mufti’s British spy accusations against Qawuqji. Höpp locates the denunciation in the context of Qawuqji’s support for Kaylani’s maneuvering with the German authorities.

It is not clear from Höpp’s account whether he had seen the actual text of the denunciation or merely German memos *about* it—his passing mention of the event and the fact that he gives as reference a file in the German Foreign Ministry archives would seem to suggest the latter. In any case, the denunciation is a 22-page document entitled “The Life of the Hero Fawzi al-Qawuqji Issued by the Office of the Mufti in Berlin.”²⁰ Written by Badri Qadah, at the time commander of the engineering corps of the Iraqi army and an acquaintance of Qawuqji’s, it offers “evidence” in support of the spy charge such as Qawuqji’s association with I. P. Domviles, head of the Royal Air Force intelligence service in Baghdad; the fact that Qawuqji had meetings in the house of Emile Kourmi, “a well-known British spy”; and the fact that Qawuqji had enough money to purchase land in Baghdad. Supplementing such “evidence” is Qadah’s assessment that the etymology of Qawuqji’s name (Turkish) and fair complexion revealed that he was not a “real” Arab.

Supplementing other “evidence” that Qawuqji was a British spy was the assessment that the etymology of his name (Turkish) and fair complexion revealed that he was not a “real” Arab.

Höpp is dismissive of the allegations, noting that scholars “have emphasized that such accusations [from the Mufti] formed part of the ‘standard repertoire’ with which the Mufti fought and silenced his opponents.”²¹ Certainly there is no evidence supporting the claim in any of the hundreds of original sources I have read.²² In any case I am not really interested in getting to the bottom of this whodunnit question. What is more interesting is to determine the way that such an accusation reverberated in his self-narrative. So when he told the *al-Hayat* journalist in Paris in 1947 that he had been a military man all his life and did not want to understand anything about politics, Qawuqji probably had in mind his experience in Berlin.

In Qawuqji's boxes there are three sheets of paper in Qawuqji's own hand stapled together. There is no date and the title is simply "The Mufti."

He never fought on the battlefield of any country. He lays claim to leadership whenever he feels that his life is threatened, then he steals the money and retreats in defeat. He is an ignorant man. He is not a graduate of either a religious school or a secular one. He claims absolute knowledge and authority. He restricts all work in all fields to his person only and he exerts every effort to destroy any name that starts to shine amongst the Arabs. He is a conceited man. He believes that each individual must be at his disposal and if it happens that he disagrees with him, he accuses him of betrayal. His motto is either you agree with me or you will play the role of hypocrite and traitor. He is a devious man. Whenever he hears that an influential name has surfaced, he is gripped by a fit of rage and desperation so he gives his orders to annihilate him or assassinate him.²³

The 1942 report issued by the Mufti's office in Berlin, and Qawuqji's words above, probably written many years later, sit like bookends, with a piece of the story of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war in between. We know that the relationship between the Mufti and Qawuqji goes back to 1936 (and even before, to a meeting between them in 1934) and that it goes forward again to 1941 when they were both in Baghdad at the time of the Rashid 'Ali coup. Still, it is the 1942 denunciation in Berlin that seems to lie on the other side of 1948 like an explanation.

On 9 May 1948, five days before the start of the interstate war, the Syrian foreign minister Muhsin al-Barazi wrote to Qawuqji on behalf of President Quwwatli. Barazi's letter, which appears to be part of a Syrian government effort to reconcile the Mufti and Qawuqji, included a letter sent by the Mufti to Qawuqji through Quwwatli attesting to his willingness to cooperate with Qawuqji. Quwwatli is clearly signaling via the Barazi letter that he is satisfied by the genuineness of the Mufti's gesture and that Qawuqji should be as well:

His Excellency the President perused the letter sent to you by his eminence the Mufti, Amin al-Husayni, and was pleased with its truthfulness and with the fact that it shows cooperation and collaboration, something that we badly need in these critical times.²⁴

Publicly, or at least to the Syrians, Qawuqji went along with the Mufti's letter, though privately he believed that an old dog cannot learn new tricks, or rather, that "Halima returns to her old habits." Here are the comments he later

scribbled on the letter:

All the accusations that the Mufti disavowed in the newspapers and then declared again, that I am a spy (English or French) and that I am conniving with the Jews, were futile and did not benefit him, nor the revolt that he set up against us, nor the corruption of some of our troops to the point of desertion. . . . After all this and all his failures, he could find no better behavior to show except his approaching me through Shukri al-Quwwatli, and to write a letter, the whole of which is praising me and complimenting my nationalism. So I welcomed his repentance but yet Halima returns to her old habits.²⁵

Barazi thus negotiated a quasi-truce between the Mufti and Qawuqji in May 1948. The Mufti's letter, also in Qawuqji's boxes, does indeed praise him and compliments him on his nationalism and commitment to the struggle against colonialism. Again, Qawuqji's thoughts are later jotted onto the letter:

His Eminence accuses me of spying on behalf of the English and the French, and in collusion with the Jews. Then he comes to me in this letter saying all this stuff about what I have accomplished by way of great deeds and struggle and defense of the land and that my name will be mentioned with appreciation, blah, blah, blah. . . where is the truth in all of this? Is it in the spying or in the great national deeds? He is not truthful. There is hypocrisy in his letter.²⁶

This, then, is a fragment of the story of Qawuqji and the Mufti.²⁷ But before leaving Qawuqji with his thoughts on his own archive in Beirut, I want to come back to Kew Gardens and a different archive—the British Public Records Office that John Daya turned to for his article on Qawuqji. In June 1941, just after the Iraqi nationalist revolt against British control and about a year before the Mufti denounced him as a British spy, Qawuqji—who was soon to be airlifted to Germany because of severe injuries—was still operating with 100–200 men in the area of the first pumping station of the Haditha–Haifa oil pipeline after it leaves the Euphrates. The British had largely suppressed the nationalist revolt and reinstated a pro-British government, and they were concerned about Qawuqji's attempts to sabotage the pipeline. A telegram, now housed in Kew Gardens, sent to the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in London from a British official at the SOE in Jerusalem describes Qawuqji as follows:

The Fawzi referred to above is a well-known scallywag leader of considerable cunning. He cannot escape into French territory because the French are very desirous of hanging him. It is therefore likely that he will soon be caught in a trap just north

of the Pipe Line. Force headquarters have requested that D. P. X. be held in readiness to assist in operations should definite action be taken to liquidate Fawzi's party.²⁸

"A well-known scallywag leader of considerable cunning": This is the view of Qawuqji from Kew Gardens. No literary analysis is required to convey the remoteness of this official's gaze. The view is very different from Qawuqji's apartment, with the boxes in the closet, during his conversation with Daya in 1973 in the midst of one of the many wars whose seeds were planted during Britain's moment in the Middle East in the first half of the twentieth century. From Beirut, Qawuqji is an old soldier, still loyal to the goals of Arab nationalism, and bitter about what politicians could do.

NOTES

1. Tom Segev, *One Palestine Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000).

2. Although Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous article on the Rani of Simur focuses on how the Rani gets "caught in the cracks between the production of the archives and [my italics] indigenous patriarchy," it does a wonderful job of conveying the remoteness of colonial discourse from the object of knowledge; see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Simur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (1985), pp. 247-72. For a more recent synopsis of the scholarship on the colonial archive, see Tony Ballantyne, "Archive, Discipline, State: Power and Knowledge in South Asian Historiography," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 3, no. 1 (June 2001), pp. 87-105.

3. Among the excellent recent histories in English of the Mandate period in the Middle East that show an understanding of the importance of Arabic sources are Joseph Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); May Seikaly, *Haifa: Transformation of an Arab Society,*

1918-1939 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002); Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); and Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

4. The following are examples of empirical studies of Arab nationalism during the Mandate period that mention Qawuqji as an actor in either or both the Syrian revolt of 1925-1927 and the Palestine revolt of 1936: Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Yehoshua Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement: From Riots to Rebellion, 1929-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1977); and Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*. For a work that casts Qawuqji as working for King Abdallah's interests in 1948, see Haim Levenburg, *The Military Preparations of the Arab Community in Palestine, 1945-1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1993). For works that cast him as working for Syria's interests in 1948, see Michael Doran, *Pan-Arabism before Nasser* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Joshua Landis, "Syria in the Palestine War," in Avi Shlaim and Eugene Rogan, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 178-205. For a political history of the way in which Qawuqji's appointment as Field Commander of the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) related to the

rivalry between Syria and Jordan, see Walid Khalidi, "The Arab Perspective," in Wm. Roger Louis and Robert W. Stookey, eds., *The End of the Palestine Mandate* (London: I. B. Taurus, 1986), pp. 104–37. For Israeli documents that purport to indicate that Qawuqji was colluding with the Jewish forces, see Avi Shlaim, "Israel and the Arab Coalition in 1948," in Shlaim and Rogan, eds., *The War for Palestine*, pp. 79–103.

5. I discuss how this narrative is informed by postcolonial and narrative theory in the introduction to my forthcoming book on Qawuqji.

6. *Al-Hayat* 12762, 10 February 1998. For an interesting article on the role of the Qawuqji visit in precipitating the Muqaddam-Karami clashes in Tripoli, see Oren Barak, "Intra-communal and Inter-communal Dimensions of Conflict and Peace in Lebanon," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 4 (Nov. 2002), pp. 619–44; for an account of Qawuqji's return to Paris from Germany, see Fawzi al-Qawuqji's memoirs, *Filastin fi mudbakkirat Fawzi al-Qawuqji, 1936–1948* [Palestine in the Memoirs of Fawzi al-Qawuqji, 1936–1948], ed. Khayriyya Qasimiyya (Beirut: Dar al-Quds, 1975), pp. 112–17.

7. All of the papers cited in this article are copies made from the collection of papers kept in boxes in Qawuqji's closet. Some of these documents were used for *Filastin fi mudbakkirat*. Some of Qawuqji's papers are also available at the Institute of Palestine Studies in Beirut and can be seen with permission.

8. The 7 May 1948 telegram from Safwat to the commander of the Jerusalem Garrison is in Qawuqji's private papers (hereafter QPP). For Qawuqji's thoughts on this period, see *Filastin fi mudbakkirat*, pp. 184–85. The Safwat telegram is also cited here, as is his own 6 May telegram.

9. One of the many secondary sources concerned with the events surrounding the imposition of the first truce is Hasan al-Badri, *al-Harb fi 'ard al-salam: al-jawla al-'Arabiyya al-Isra'iliyya, 1947–1949* [War in the Land of Peace: The Arab-Israeli Round, 1947–1949] (Cairo: n.p., 1976), p. 231. Badri cites an interview given by David Ben-Gurion to the newspaper *Palestine* on 27 December 1948. There, Ben-Gurion claims that the first truce "allowed Israel the opportunity to increase

the number of volunteers [to the IDF] and arms and supplies and re-organization of the army." See also 'Arif al-'Arif, *al-Nakba* (Sidon: al-Maktaba al-'asriyya, 1956), pp. 536–595. For Qawuqji on the truce, see *Filastin fi mudbakkirat*, pp. 209–11, at p. 210.

10. QPP. Benny Morris has an account of the supposed ALA violation of the cease-fire in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited, 1947–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 473. This account is based on Ben-Gurion's diaries published by the Israeli Ministry of Defense in 1982.

11. Cited in *al-Hayat* 12762, 10 February 1998.

12. For more on the way that Qawuqji's role in the revolt survives in popular memory, see Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), pp. 82–83.

13. For more on the structure of the ALA and its limitations as a modern functioning army, see Hani al-Hindi's excellent short book, *Jaysb al-inqadb* [The Liberation Army] (Beirut: Shams al-muthallath, 1996), pp. 25–78. Hindi bases much of his account on interviews with and memoirs by people who served as officers in the ALA. See also Avraham Sela, "Tzava hahatzala ba Galil ba milhemet 1948" [The Liberation Army in the Galilee in the war of 1948], in Alon Kadish, ed., *Milbemet Ha'atzmaut* [The War of Independence] (Tel Aviv: Misrad Habetahon, 2004), pp. 206–267.

14. *Filastin fi mudbakkirat*, p. 156.

15. *Filastin fi mudbakkirat*, pp. 250–51.

16. QPP. Qawuqji's son Ossama told me that as far as he knew, the letter was never answered.

17. *Al-Sbarq*, 12 August 2003. My thanks to May Farhat for clipping this article for me.

18. Gerhard Höpp, "Ruhmloses Zwischenspiel: Fawzi al-Qawuqji in Deutschland, 1941–1947," in Peter Heine, ed., *Al-Rafidayn: Jabrbuch zu Geschichte und Kultur des modernen Iraq* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 1995), pp. 19–46. Many thanks to Richard Wittman for translating this article for me.

19. Lesser known figures of the circle included Munir al-Rayyis, 'Umar al-Safi,

Hamid al-Safi, Baha al-Din al-Tabba'a, 'Abd al-Karim al-Siba'i, 'Ali al-Safi, 'Abd al-Hamid al-Hilali, and Farajallah Wirdi.

20. "Tarjamat hayat al-batal Fawzi al-Qawuqji sadira 'an maktab al-mufti al-akbar bi Berlin" (n.p., n.d.). Oren Barak's article also mentions the text of denunciation (Barak, "Intra-communal and Inter-communal Dimensions," p. 641, fn. 41). Many thanks to Oren Barak for telling me that it is available at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

21. Höpp, "Ruhmloses Zwischenspiel," p. 34.

22. Höpp has done the best work on the Mufti and Qawuqji in Berlin. Philip Matar's biography of the Mufti does not mention Qawuqji; *The Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Zvi El-Peleg does not mention the Berlin incident, although he does refer to the animosity between the two men in passing in *The Grand Mufti: Hajj Amin al-Hussaini* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), pp. 86, 96. Ma'rif al-Dawaylbi, who was a Syrian educator and a member of the National Bloc, also condemns Qawuqji as having been a British spy in his memoirs recently serialized by *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (25–28 May 2005). Dawaylbi seems there to stick closely to the Mufti's narrative on Qawuqji. My thanks to Adel Allouche for alerting me to these memoirs.

23. QPP. His son Ossama told me that Qawuqji often scribbled his thoughts down during the empty years of his retirement.

24. QPP, Letter from Barazi to Qawuqji, dated 9 May 1948. See also *Filastin fi mudbakkirat*, pp. 186–87.

25. QPP, Letter from Husayni to Qawuqji, 1948 (exact date unclear).

26. QPP, Letter from Husayni to Qawuqji, 1948 (exact date unclear).

27. For further information on their relationship, see Taha al-Hashimi, *Mudbakkirat Taha al-Hashimi*,

1942–1955 [The Memoirs of Taha al-Hashimi, 1942–1955] (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1978), pp. 158–78; 'Arif, *al-Nakba*, p. 41; Hindi, *Jaysb al-inqadh*, pp. 10–11, 29–30; Khalidi, "The Arab Perspective"; and Bayan Nuwayhid al-Hut, *al-Qiyadat wa al-mu'assasat al-siyasiyya fi Filastin, 1917–1948* [Political Leadership and Institutions in Palestine, 1917–1948] (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 1981), pp. 614–15. In his memoirs, the Mufti mentions Qawuqji only in passing (although the tone is disparaging). Haj Amin al-Husayni, *Mudbakkirat al-Hajj Mubammad Amin al-Husayni* [The Memoirs of Hajj Muhammad Amin al-Husayni], ed. 'Abd al-Karim al-'Umar (Damascus: al-Ahali, 1999), pp. 391, 491, 501. In addition, some of the "new historians" have treated the relationship between the Mufti and Qawuqji, particularly as part of discussions about Qawuqji's alleged meetings with the Israelis in 1948. See Avi Shlaim, "Israel and the Arab Coalition in 1948," in Shlaim and Rogan, eds., *The War for Palestine*, pp. 85–86. Many of the telegrams that were sent between the different battalions of the ALA offer instances where Qawuqji instructed his battalion commanders to keep away from the meddling of the Mufti's people. My thanks to Walid Khalidi for making this collection of telegrams available to me. There are also reports in QPP written by Safwat about the Mufti's interventions into the ALA. It is not the purpose of this article to be comprehensive on this question but rather to offer up a slice of Qawuqji's life as an example of his bitter encounter with politicians; I am currently working on an article that explores more fully the story of the Mufti and Qawuqji in the war.

28. From the papers of the SOE, Public Record Office HS3/154. Telegram sent to S.O.2 with copies to London and Cairo, from Jerusalem, 14 June 1941.