Playing with Dynamite: U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Palestine, 1945-1948

Jared Paul Rivard
University of New Hampshire, Durham

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Abstract
This thesis seeks to explain the motivations for United States Government actions regarding Palestine from 1945 to 1948. The conclusion, based upon accumulated primary research and secondary sources, is that the United States government involved itself in Palestinian conflict for humanitarian reasons and was then unable to extract itself from the conflict due to Cold War considerations. The United States did not seek a solution to the Arab-Zionist quandary itself, which would have involved directly confronting the competing nationalist goals of the two groups. Instead, Washington’s earliest actions focused on relocating Jewish victims of the Holocaust to Palestine, and formed its later policies around Cold War concerns. Research for this thesis was drawn primarily from documents found in volumes of the Foreign Relations of the United States. Other primary sources include the NSA archives, the London Times, and documents in The Israel-Arab Reader, edited by Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin. Secondary books and articles are also employed to strengthen arguments, add perspective, and provide necessary information.

Keywords
Cold War, Mandate, Palestine, Truman, U.N., Zionism, Middle Eastern history, American history, History

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Playing with Dynamite:
U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Palestine, 1945-1948

By

Jared Rivard
BA History, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2009

THESIS

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Kurk Dorsey, Professor of History
J. William Harris, Professor of History
Jason Sokol, Associate Professor of History

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Original approval signatures are on file with the University of New Hampshire Graduate School.
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This thesis seeks to explain the motivations for United States Government actions regarding Palestine from 1945 to 1948. The conclusion, based upon accumulated primary research and secondary sources, is that the United States government involved itself Palestinian conflict for humanitarian reasons and was then unable to extract itself from the conflict due to Cold War considerations. The United States did not seek a solution to the Arab-Zionist quandary itself, which would have involved directly confronting the competing nationalist goals of the two groups. Instead, Washington’s earliest actions focused on relocating Jewish victims of the Holocaust to Palestine, and formed its later policies around Cold War concerns. Research for this thesis was drawn primarily from documents found in volumes of the Foreign Relations of the United States. Other primary sources include the NSA archives, the London Times, and documents in The Israel-Arab Reader, edited by Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin. Secondary books and articles are also employed to strengthen arguments, add perspective, and provide necessary information.
Introduction

The Powder Keg in the Middle East

A Crisis of Lasting Importance

A historical inquiry often starts with the question of a subject’s relevance to the present. What drew me to the subject of the Palestinian crisis in the late 1940s was that its current significance needed little justification in my eyes. In fact, that crisis never truly ended, but simply continues to evolve in response to shifting historical forces. Just recently, on December 23, 2016, the United Nations passed a resolution prohibiting the Israeli government from permitting Jewish settlement in the West Bank territory occupied by the Jewish state since 1967.\(^1\) While the Israeli government protested the decision, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution on January 5, 2017, condemning it. In doing so, it declared its opposition to any resolution it deemed “one sided” or “anti-Israel.”\(^2\) Congress’s response to the U.N. resolution was also significant, as it signaled opposition to former President Barack Obama’s recent decision not to veto U.N. Resolution 2334, opposing Jewish expansion into predominantly Palestinian territory in the West Bank.\(^3\)

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While the recent uptick in media coverage spawned by these events gives the impression that it represents some unprecedented crisis, or a departure from the past, its driving characteristic is consistent with the very beginnings of the Arab-Jewish confrontation in Palestine. The fact of the matter is that Jewish settlement into predominantly Arab territory was the core issue of the Arab-Jewish controversy from the beginning. It leads to the very heart of the crisis. The Zionists in Israel believe both in the necessity of a distinctly Jewish State as the solution to nearly two millennia of persecution and that they have a unique historical claim to Palestine. They are resolute in both their convictions and their dedication to realizing their goals. Conversely, Arabs see land claimed by Israel, and Palestine in general, as territory belonging to a distinct Arab nation. They deny the Zionists’ professed right to Palestine and see Israel as an incursion on their land. Their own convictions are firm, and thus Zionist determination for statehood and expansion continues to clash with widespread Arab refusal to recognize even Israel’s right to exist.

The United Nations frequently revisits familiar impasses without progress. Israel and the Arab States have fought a series of wars and added to the bad blood, while peace talks fail to bring improvements. Israel, Palestine, and the Arab-Jewish conflict continue as an ever-present conundrum, one that fosters new problems while the oldest and most basic ones have yet to be answered. It is very much a living problem, which, due to the impasse between Jews and Arabs, lacks a clear answer.

Domestic American opinion itself is divided and includes staunch supporters of Israel, along with those who advocate for the Palestinian cause. But the black-and-white dialogue that sometimes accompanied those positions is surprising. For lack of a greater understanding, I found the Israeli-Arab controversy murky and complicated, but also exceedingly important. It is
sometimes said that Israel is at the heart of unrest in the Middle East. For that reason, I was motivated to delve deeper into the foggy details and untangle the knot that was the Israeli-Arab crisis.

What I found was that the crisis was not only shaped by the refusal of two zealous antagonists to compromise, but that it was also a part of multiple larger historical themes that converged within the claustrophobic borders of Palestine. This was especially true for the United States. The bitter struggle between two ethnic groups vying for political control over a slice of land roughly the size of New Hampshire impacted oil interests, Cold War strategy, American sympathy for the victims of the Holocaust, and the relocation of the stateless victims of the Holocaust.

**Historiography**

A breadth of recent scholarship discusses the significance of these. There is often a degree of common ground among historians. They often cite the same sources, especially newspapers and official documents. Authors generally agree that oil interests, Cold War national security, and sympathy toward Zionism were primary motivations for U.S. action in the Middle East. Their disagreements are in the details. John Donovan’s *U.S. & Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1945-56*, written in 1972, argues that U.S. policy in the Middle East was driven by Truman’s containment policy. More recently, Peter Hahn’s *Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1945-1961*, agrees that U.S. foreign policy in Palestine was guided by Cold War ideology. Unlike Donovan’s work, however, he also states that Washington’s fear of Soviet incursion was based on paranoia rather than concrete facts. Books
such as John Lewis Gaddis’s *We Now Know*, reinforces the idea that U.S. actions to prevent Soviet incursion were based on a mistaken fear of aggressive Soviet efforts to expand their sphere of influence. Works such as Irene Gendzier’s *Dying to Forget: Oil, Power, Palestine and the Foundations of U.S. Policy in the Middle East* and Said Aburish’s *A Brutal Friendship: The West and the Arab Elite*, paint a far less forgiving picture of U.S. intentions, as both describe a United States whose moves are primarily motivated by economic gain and global supremacy at the expense of others. Gendzier’s book is notable, in that, in addition to using familiar sources such as official U.S. documents found in the *Foreign Relations* volumes, she draws extensively from documents from oil lobbyist Max Ball and the Division of Oil and Gas, which dramatically influenced her conclusions.4

While these authors access different sources and present valuable perspectives, their conclusions do not conform entirely to those drawn by my own research. This is especially true concerning the nature of oil interests in the Middle East. While officials often expressed concern over losing vital oil resources in the Middle East due to trouble in Palestine, this was often expressed in regard to its crucial role in European reconstruction, which was meant to stabilize and strengthen Western Europe’s resistance to Communist influence. Since European reconstruction partly hinged upon ready access to oil, control over Middle Eastern petroleum was a vital strategic resource with importance above and beyond mere economic gain. Without Middle Eastern oil’s significance in foreign policy, it would be difficult to imagine the State

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Department’s fierce defense of private oil stakes. Daniel Yergin’s *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* adeptly highlights the foreign policy significance of oil. His account demonstrates how Secretary of State George C. Marshall and the State Department viewed access to Middle Eastern oil as vital to European reconstruction after World War II. His compelling argument proves that efforts to defend oil concessions in the Middle East were not about economic supremacy, but a crucial element in political strategy.⁵

The backbone of my thesis is based on evidence from the *Foreign Relations of the United States*, which is vital to understanding of the U.S. role in Palestine. I also utilize The *London Times* to detail specific events, and the Israeli-Arab Reader provided valuable documents including Theodore Herzl’s *The Jewish State*, The British “Peel (Royal) Commission Report of 1937”, and Britain’s “White Paper of 1939”, issued on the eve of World War II. I also employ secondary sources from the above listed authors.⁶

**Central Arguments**

The clash between the Zionists and the Arabs in Palestine was as close to inevitable as History allows. The establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine was the central tenet of the Zionist movement since 1897. Theodore Herzl spearheaded the movement in the 19th century. He argued that the persecuted and rejected Jewish people of the world required their own homeland. Zionists identified Palestine as the ideal location for a Jewish nation, as it was the historical land

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of Judea, their ancient homeland. The gradual immigration of Jews into Palestine, however, both applied pressure to an already strained economic system and threatened to compromise the cultural integrity of Palestine as Arabs saw it. The rise of Arab nationalism from the 19th century, while varying significantly throughout the region, helped forge a solidarity between Arabs in Palestine and the greater Arab World that had not existed before. It brought outside Arabs into the conflict on the side of Palestinian Arabs and identified Palestine as an indispensable part of the Arab homeland.

British attempts to find common ground between these opposing elements succeeded only in proving that such grounds did not exist. Rather, British involvement in Palestine fueled tensions between the opposing factions while garnering the animosity of both. Nazi activity during World War II radicalized Zionists and Arabs alike. The Holocaust was a manifestation of a worst-nightmare scenario which steeled Zionist resolve and confirmed for them the necessity of a separate Jewish homeland. Likewise, Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda in the Middle East, and Nazi endorsement of the fanatical Mufti of Jerusalem as a leading spokesman, radicalized Arab Anti-Zionist sympathies. By the end of World War II, tensions were already at a near fever-pitch.

Under President Franklin Roosevelt, the United States engaged the precarious situation in the Middle East with little appreciation for the seriousness of matters in Palestine, making contradictory promises to the Arabs and Jews reminiscent of those made by Britain. The Roosevelt Administration itself was split in its views. The White House staff was populated with pro-Zionists, especially David Niles and Clark Clifford, who consistently lobbied in Zionism’s interest. These elements came into contention with the State Department, and, to a lesser degree, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, whose lack of empathy for the Zionist cause, and concern for healthy
U.S.-Arab relations and the geopolitical advantages that came with them, pushed them to oppose Zionism’s bold agenda.

Harry S. Truman inherited the conundrum when he came into the presidency at FDR’s death. His own policy in Palestine was largely motivated by humanitarian concerns and domestic pressure from Congress. Truman did not fully appreciate the mechanics of the Arab-Jewish conflict. This accounted for the pro-Zionist nature of Truman’s early foreign policy in the region. The subsequent failure of U.S. and later the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry led the United Kingdom to submit the problem to the United Nations.

There, the matter was exposed to the developing rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The emerging geopolitical concerns of the Cold War took precedence, eclipsing prior humanitarian concerns but still subject to pressure from pro-Zionist sympathizers in both Congress and Washington. The State Department feared that support for partition and Jewish statehood would irrevocably damage U.S. economic and geopolitical interests in the region and undermine European reconstruction essential to global security. However, encouragement from White House staff, notably Clark Clifford, successfully countered the State Department, arguing that the Middle East’s dependence on U.S. investments and support protected U.S. interests in the region. This position led Truman to support the Partition of Palestine, with the creation of a Jewish state, and ultimately to decide to immediately recognize Israel.

The thesis is primarily a political history. Specifically, the goal of this thesis is to help understand what drives governments to act the way they do, and how other historical forces interact from their standpoint. While this thesis seeks to identify the driving forces behind United States foreign policy in Palestine in the post-war period, it also seeks to promote a greater
understanding of the motives behind United States policy, to illuminate a shadowy aspect of history, and to ultimately construct a greater and more balanced perspective. By viewing the matter in this light, the conflict in Palestine goes far from its isolated borders and emerges as crucial factor in post-war reorganization.
Chapter 1

The Roots of U.S. Involvement in Palestine

Introduction

Shortly after noon on July 22, 1946, a milk lorry drove up to the basement entryway of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. Out of the truck emerged a group of armed Jews dressed as Arabs. Drawing their weapons, they held up the door guard and made entry into the hotel through the kitchen. From there, they located the room directly under the office of the Palestine Government Secretariat, the administrative headquarters of the British Mandatory government. There, they began unloading what appeared to be milk urns. Shortly after, British officers witnessed five intruders fleeing the hotel. At 12:37, a massive explosion ripped through the hotel, leveling an entire corner of the building and killing 92 Britons, Arabs and Jews.1

The vicious act of terrorism came at the hand of an extremist organization, the Irgun Sva’i Leumi (National Military Organization), a radical wing of Zionists that sought Jewish statehood in Palestine at any cost. While severe in their methods, they merely represented the most extreme manifestation of the Zionist agenda, a Jewish nationalist program that ultimately sought to create a Jewish state in Palestine.2 This fundamentally uncompromising movement came at odds with Arab nationalists, the struggling Palestinian people, and the ambitions of Arab statesmen, who would use means ranging from protests and public demonstrations to revolt, murder and threats of war on a regional scale to halt Zionist advancement.

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2 Ibid.
The British Empire, which controlled Palestine from 1918-1948, was largely responsible for the level of violence that evolved in Palestine. During World War I, British officials simultaneously promised the Jews a “national homeland” in Palestine and vowed to give the Arab Sharif of Mecca dominion over large swaths of the Arab world, which ostensibly included Palestine. Double-crossing both, the British and French governments partitioned the Arab remnants of the Ottoman Empire amongst themselves. The consequences of these actions nurtured animosity between Zionists and Arabs, along with mutual hatred for the British, who attempted to govern Palestine as an imperial mandate until 1948. The ensuing Zionist-Arab conflict made Palestine the center of turmoil that threatened the stability of the entire Middle East.

By the 1940s, U.S. oil firms already possessed valuable stakes in the Middle East, namely in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The U.S. military maintained military bases in Saudi Arabia as well. The United States hoped to further develop good relations with the Arab States, even before the rise of U.S.-Soviet tensions produced a rivalry between the two powers.

The United States was initially drawn into the Palestinian conflict by the events of the Holocaust. Nazi Germany’s attempted extermination of the Jews in Europe evoked unprecedented sympathy for the persecuted Jews and support for Zionism in the United States. President Franklin Roosevelt’s ambiguous policy in the region reflect the conflict between Middle Eastern stability and successfully relocating Jewish Holocaust victims. This influenced President Harry S. Truman’s later policies in attempting to reconcile these differences by appealing to British and Arab governments of the humanitarian cause for Jewish immigration into Palestine. In doing so, he underestimated the nationalistic antagonism between Zionists and Arabs and fueled the conflict as he drew the United States farther into it.
The Origins of Zionism and Arab Nationalism

The origins of the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine had its origins in the nineteenth century at two focal points, Austria and the Ottoman Empire. These two states were the respective birthplaces of Zionism and Arab nationalism. While both concepts were generally influenced by Western ideas of nationalism, they were first and foremost ideological answers to existing problems. Both nationalist movements were grounded upon an awareness of a distinct national identity. They both perceived their current political dispositions as incompatible with their national integrity. This new consciousness led to ambitions for statehood. But while their interests were similar enough, their respective histories, along with geographical fixations, put them at odds with each other.

The origins of Zionism trace back to mid-nineteenth century Austria. Throughout its first years, it gained momentum due to growing anti-Semitism in Europe and the rise of a transnational Jewish identity. Jewish intellectual pillars such as Theodor Herzl gave the new ideology its basis and identified Zionism’s primary objective. In his book, *The Jewish State*, Herzl argued that true Jewish assimilation in current societies was impossible, and that the Jewish people needed to establish their own state. While he believed that Gentiles were unsympathetic to their plight (and probably unlikely to be Zionists themselves in its truest sense), he also believed that nations “scourged by antisemitism” would be “keenly interested” in assisting Zionists with their goals as a way to completely rid themselves of Jews. Popular

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Zionist sentiment centered on the return of the Jews to the ancient homeland of Palestine.\textsuperscript{5} Immigration to Palestine flowed steadily in the following years, and by 1920, the Jewish population there numbered 66,000 people, making up 10 percent of the total population, and showing no signs of stopping.\textsuperscript{6}

Zionists resolved to establish a Jewish Homeland in Palestine in 1897. Early Zionist writings also formulated tactics and strategies. Herzl himself noted the necessity of endorsement by a powerful nation, as he believed that for the Jews to establish a homeland anywhere, they would require the backing of a dominant nation. Otherwise, he asserted, they would be persecuted and driven out, as Jews had been since the Diaspora.\textsuperscript{7} Thus, the plan to establish a Jewish State in Palestine was a long-standing goal in the Zionist agenda.

Arab nationalism, like Zionism, owes its existence to a combination of western influence and domestic troubles. Unlike Zionism, though, its origins are more obscure. Peter Hahn ascribes its earliest manifestations to the end of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century in Egypt, while most other scholars, such as Benny Morris and Rashid Khalidi, place it closer to the middle of the nineteenth century. Scholars generally concur, however, that Western nationalism influenced the development of a distinct Arab consciousness.\textsuperscript{8} The main reason for the subsequent growth of Arab nationalism was the threat to Arab identity and culture caused by encroachments by the British (in the case of Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Iraq) and Ottoman “Turkification” policies designed to impose


6 Hahn, \textit{Caught in the Middle East}, 14.


Turkish supremacy over other ethnicities within the Ottoman Empire. During the late 19th century, the Ottoman Empire attempted to modernize itself by centralizing its historically regional power centers. Before then, other ethnic groups within the Empire, such as Armenians and Arabs, exercised a fair degree of autonomy within the imperial system. Local notable families held a considerable degree of power and enjoyed elite status in their respective districts. Turkish consolidation, under Sultan Abdulhamid II, placed this system in jeopardy. The Sultan, inspired by the recent unification of Germany as an example, hoped to restructure his empire as a centralized polity under the dominance of the Turks. He instituted new education policies and made Turkish the official language. History programs were reformed to exalt Turkish history while downplaying that of others. Centralization policies also affected the power of provincial notables, who saw the growing centralization of government as a threat to their status.9

These politics gave rise to an Arab nationalist movement with intellectual centers in Damascus and Beirut. Nationalist efforts sparked a new awareness of Pan-Arab identity. The new nationalists aimed to modernize Arab societies and break free of foreign and Ottoman rule through Islamic reform, territorial patriotism, and Pan-Arab identification.10 Although the movement itself was relatively subdued, Ottoman attempts at repression, especially those after the Young Turk takeover of the government in 1908, sparked greater resistance and steeled Arab nationalists’ resolve.11


10 Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 12.

**World War I and the Beginning of the British Mandate in Palestine**

In 1914, war erupted in Europe. The Ottoman Empire sided with the Central Powers in 1915. Shortly after entering the war, the Young Turk government launched a new campaign of repression against dissenters, doubling down on arrests and public executions of suspected dissidents.\(^\text{12}\) In an empire that had recently decided to demote its non-Turkish majority to second-class citizens, dissidents were not hard to come by.

Thus, when the British approached Hussein Ibn Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, offering him dominion over huge swaths of land in the Asiatic Arab world in return for revolt, he was happy to comply.\(^\text{13}\) However, their chosen man of the hour was no progressive activist. Hussein was an influential Hashemite chief in the Hejaz, today known as Saudi Arabia. Like most of the notable elites in the Arab regions of the empire, he was dissatisfied with the Ottoman Empire. Likewise, he was no “Arab Nationalist” in the sense that he yearned for an independent Arab nation free of foreign intrusion. Hussein’s interests were that of a member of the elite; he saw Turkification, modernization, and centralization efforts by the Empire as a threat to his local power base. In recent years, the Ottoman government had begun working on a railroad system that could finally connect the relatively isolated cities of Mecca and Medina to the rest of the Islamic world. For the Hashemite, this was no sign of progress. He regularly contended with rival factions in the Hejaz, most notably the House of Saud, but this was a greater threat, because where the railroads went, Turkish power followed. Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt,


The Sharif’s own claim to power was thus predicated upon his Hashemite name, which denoted him as a descendent of Mohammad. His domination of the Holy City added to his influence, but outside of that, his grasp was tenuous. At the time, the Hejaz was a poor backwater quarter of the Ottoman Empire, lacking wealth and held together by bonds of allegiance.
promised that, “… Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits set by the Sharif of Mecca.”\textsuperscript{14} In 1916, the Arabs, led by the Hashemite family (the descendants of the prophet Mohammed) took up arms alongside British troops to expel the Turks from Arab lands. How helpful the Arabs actually were is still up for debate, but regardless, by 1917, Anglo-Arab forces captured Jerusalem, Damascus and Beirut. The road to Arab independence (under Hashemite rule) seemed clear.\textsuperscript{15}

But it wasn’t. By 1916, the British and the French were already drafting plans to carve up the Middle East between themselves. In the Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916, the French claimed Syria and Lebanon, while the British assumed control over Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine.\textsuperscript{16} The Balfour Declaration of 1917 further undermined Arab control of the Middle East because it sanctioned the establishment of a “Jewish National Home” in the territory which was then Palestine. The Declaration specifically stated that such a “home” should not and would not trespass against the Arab population, but exactly how anyone expected that to happen was left unsaid.\textsuperscript{17}

Both the Balfour Declaration and the Sykes-Picot Treaty remained a secret until copies fell into the hands of the Soviet Bolsheviks in 1921, who then published them. This double-cross did not sit well with the Sharif of Mecca, and he sharply protested the Anglo-French partition of the Near East, along with the Balfour Declaration. This objection prompted the British to


\textsuperscript{15} Hahn, \textit{Caught in the Middle East}, 6.


\textsuperscript{17} Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, \textit{The Israel-Arab Reader}, British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour, “The Balfour Declaration (November 2, 1917)”, found in Laqueur, 16.
withdraw support from the Hashemite in favor of his persistent rivals, the Saudis (while the Saudis were more tolerant of Zionism, British favor offered them an irresistible opportunity to seize control of the Hejaz). Before long, Sharif Hussein was out of power, and the British found their new allies in the Arabian Peninsula. This falling out with Hussein did not burn bridges with the entire Hashemite family, though. Hussein’s son Abdullah was made the first king of Transjordan, and his other son, Faisal, the recently-dethroned king of Syria, became the King of Iraq.

Palestine’s situation was unique. The British had created a rift within the territory by promoting Jewish immigration into Palestine. Although Britain’s true reasons for controlling the area rested upon geopolitical grounds, its official reason as justified in the mandate awarded to Britain in 1922 by the League of Nations, stated that it took on the responsibility of seeing the Balfour Declaration through with due consideration to the native Arab people. It did not take long for trouble to arise. Jewish purchases of Palestinian land left many Arab farmers homeless. Since most Jewish buyers would not purchase land populated by Arab tenants, Palestinian landowners would often evict them before selling the land, displacing poor Arab farmers. Continued immigration into Palestine promised further tension. The British government initially tried to settle this problem in the most obvious way when it barred Jews (and other foreigners) from buying land from Palestinian Arabs. However, purchases continued via loopholes.

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19 Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 13.
While the British government took a hard line with land purchases, it did make an honest effort to improve Palestine’s representative capacity and improve its infrastructure. Various High Commissioners attempted to beautify Jerusalem, reform healthcare and education, and overhaul the legal codes, with mixed success.\textsuperscript{22} The British also established representative bodies for both the Jews and Arabs. The British established the Jewish Agency as a representative body for the Zionists, as specified in the Mandate.\textsuperscript{23} Palestinian representation was differently structured. Rather than giving the Arabs a similar representative body, the British took an established religious post, The Mufti of Jerusalem, to preside over the Muslim Supreme Council (comprised exclusively by elite Palestinians, later called the Arab Higher Committee), which would represent all Arabs in Palestine.\textsuperscript{24} The post was an attractive one to the elites in Palestine, as the rival Nashashibi and Husseini families competed for the title that would be determined in upcoming elections. Suffrage was limited to the Ulemas, the Muslim elite. In addition, the winner was decided among the three leading contenders by the British High Commissioner. Excluding suffrage to the Palestinian elite, and, leaving the final decision to the High Commissioner, contrasted with the Jewish Agency’s more democratic voting structure, and reflected Britain’s belief that most of the Arab population required more time to become capable of self-government. Such a process favored the elites, who dominated Arab society and barred the vast majority of Arabs from the political process. High Commissioner Herbert Samuel, a fervent Zionist, chose Amin Al-Husseini to the post as the representative of the Arabs.\textsuperscript{25} This was a shrewd move for the High Commissioner. Al-Husseini had the reputation of an Arab

\textsuperscript{22} Shepherd, \textit{Ploughing Sand}, 18.
\textsuperscript{23} Shepherd, \textit{Ploughing Sand}, 40.
\textsuperscript{24} Shepherd, \textit{Ploughing Sand}, 40, Aburish, \textit{A Brutal Friendship}, 151.
\textsuperscript{25} Aburish, \textit{A Brutal Friendship}, 148-165.
nationalist whose prison sentence for his participation in anti-British riots in 1920 had been
commuted by Samuel. His brush with the law could have been seen as a disqualifier, but, as in
the case of King Faisal of Iraq, British officials had learned to trust the loyalty of their Arab
reclamation projects. Such repute also promised popular support from the Palestinian people.\(^{26}\)
However, by this point, Amin Al-Husseini, like much of the Palestinian elites, was more
concerned with consolidating power and out-competing rival families such as the Nashashibis
than with advocating for the interests of the *Fellaheen*, the Arab common man. He was happy to
collaborate with British authorities, and used Jews as scapegoats to win public Arab support and
shift anger away from his colonial benefactors. For a great while, the obsequious and self-
interested Husseini proved to be an easily manageable figurehead for the British Mandate.\(^{27}\)

Al-Husseini’s motivations were typical for aspirants to the post. For a Palestinian notable,
the post represented a means of increased influence among his peers, for two reasons. First, it
identified Al-Husseini as the voice of the Palestinian people and the representative of their
interests. Largely thanks to his image as a man of the people, the new Mufti enjoyed the
widespread support of the common Arab Palestinian people

Second, it afforded Al-Husseini unparalleled access to the mandatory government in
Palestine. This meant that the Mufti could collaborate with the British Mandate to cement his
own hegemony, while still enjoying the widespread support of the Arab people. And this dual
strategy characterized Al-Husseini’s early leadership as the Mufti of Jerusalem. When strikes
and rebellions broke out against the Mandate as in 1921, 1929, and 1933, he would try to pacify

\(^{26}\) Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 61.

the masses to protect the British government, which in turn protected the Mufti’s authority. Al-Husseini demonstrated a strong will to maintain his monopoly on local power by turning down later suggestions by the British to establish an elected legislative assembly for the Arabs. Such an assembly would no doubt limit the Mufti’s powerbase, and he wanted nothing to do with it.

**The Arab Revolt of 1936**

Despite efforts by the British government to improve conditions within the Mandate and diffuse civil unrest, tensions came to a head in 1936. Increasing numbers of immigrants from Eastern Europe exacerbated an already difficult situation. According to Peter Hahn, immigration led to a massive increase in the Jewish population, growing from 10 percent of the total Palestinian population in 1920 to 31 percent by 1936. Immigration restrictions passed by the Mandate were remarkably ineffective, as deportation was expensive, and thousands of Jews routinely slipped through the porous borders, found employment, and inconspicuously blended into the social fabric of the territory with little trouble. The standing British Mandate over the territory added to frustrations of the Arabs, believing that they lacked control over their homeland. Thus, imperial subjugation and growing animosity between Arabs and Jewish settlers generated the rise of Palestinian-Arab nationalism and the resulting hostility. This type of nationalism diverged from earlier forms of Arab nationalist movements in that it focused chiefly

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29 Ibid.
30 Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 14.
on Arab social and political inequity (partly caused by the Mufti’s obstruction of Arab elective assemblies to maintain a monopoly over local power) and Zionist encroachment.\textsuperscript{32}

Palestinian Arabs, believing that such a demographic shift endangered their own interests, launched a massive labor strike in 1936, accompanied by rioting and attacks against Jews and British officials. The revolt was not triggered by any sudden events. Rather, it was the result of Palestinian frustrations with the longstanding problems of Jewish immigration, Jewish land purchases, and lack of Arab political autonomy.\textsuperscript{33} The British military and Jewish settlers answered with counterattacks. At this point, the Mufti felt compelled to realign himself with the Arabs against the British Mandate and Jewish incursion. He hoped to overcome the declining faith of the Arab people, and more importantly, the eroding support of the Arab elites, due to years of snubbing their chances for a share in power. The switch worked wonders. Tapping the frustrated populism of the Arab people, Al-Husseini, the wealthy Palestinian elitist, became the champion of the new Arab resistance against the British Mandate.\textsuperscript{34}

The Arab Revolt of 1936 was by far the most overt manifestation of the Jewish-Arab conflict in British Palestine to that point. Between 1936 and 1939, it plunged the entire Mandate into chaos to the point that the British government temporarily lost control of huge swaths of the territory by 1938.\textsuperscript{35} It was also a time of general intensification of violence and hostility. Jewish settlers started to economically isolate Palestinians by deliberately refusing employment opportunities in the Jewish-dominated industrial sector, while Palestinians threatened to issue

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{32} Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe, 24; For notables’ efforts in containing Arab Nationalism in Palestine, see \textit{The Origins of Arab Nationalism}, Mohammad Muslih, 171-175.
\bibitem{33} Shepherd, \textit{Ploughing Sand}, 186
\bibitem{34} Aburish, \textit{A Brutal Friendship}, 148-165.
\bibitem{35} Shepherd, \textit{Ploughing Sand}, 179.
\end{thebibliography}
fatwas on any individual selling land to Jewish buyers.\textsuperscript{36} The Arab Revolt was also the beginning of widespread terrorism in Palestine. As early as July 1, 1936, reports emerged that \textit{Fedayeen} (Arab guerrillas) were extorting neutral villages to sustain bands of Arab rebels.\textsuperscript{37} Arab militants seized dominance over outlying Jewish settlements and imposed discriminatory sales taxes, practiced extortion, and utilized blackmail to control the Jewish population in these areas.\textsuperscript{38} They sabotaged oil pipelines and conducted outright attacks upon Jewish, Christian, and British targets by means including ambushes, armed assaults and bombings.\textsuperscript{39} Escalating Arab violence eventually convinced the Mandatory government to eject Al-Husseini from power 1937, and he fled in exile to Beirut.\textsuperscript{40}

Hardline Jewish factions responded in kind. Jewish reprisals against both British and Arab authorities ensued, and it soon became apparent that the acts were coordinated by organized terrorist groups. Reports of the first, Irgun Sva’i Leumi (National Military Organization), headed by Menachem Begin, emerged in 1939 when \textit{The (London) Times} reported that

\begin{quote}
British authorities have been convinced that the Jewish terrorists who were responsible for the bomb outrages at Haifa and Jaffa last year were planning a more serious and general campaign. There can no longer be any doubt that their clandestine organization is now in command of a force known as the Irgun Tzai Le-Umi (National Military Organization).
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{36} Milton-Edwards, Hinchcliffe, 25. \\
\textsuperscript{37} “Terrorism in Palestine; Forced Levies by Arab Bands”, \textit{The Times}, July 1, 1936, accessed \textit{December 15, 2016}. \\
\textsuperscript{38} “More Palestine; Five Jews Killed”, \textit{The Times}, March 15, 1937, accessed \textit{December 15, 2016}. \\
\textsuperscript{39} “Terrorism in Palestine; Police Ambushed, Two Constables Killed, Jerusalem Under Curfew; Agitators in Custody, Train Raiders Killed, Police Fight the Ambushers, A Record of Troubles”, \textit{The Times}, October 16, 1937, accessed \textit{December 15, 2016}. \\
\textsuperscript{40} Hahn, \textit{Caught in the Middle East}, 13. \\
\textsuperscript{41} “Terrorism in Palestine; Secret Broadcasting Station; A Death Sentence; A Jewish Conquest”, \textit{The Times}, June 22, 1939, accessed \textit{December 15, 2016}. \\
\end{flushright}
The extremism was evidence of a radical shift in Zionist thought. This violent new faction of Zionists was shaped by victimization in Palestine and escalating persecution in Europe. These new terrorist groups operated outside legitimate authorities and demanded the immediate establishment of a Jewish state encompassing all of Palestine. Unlike moderate Zionists, the Irgun was willing to attack British targets to force the Mandate out of Palestine, which they viewed as an obstruction to Jewish Statehood. Due to their actions, the more moderate Zionists in the Jewish Agency found much greater difficulty lobbying for support from a progressively hostile British population. Furthermore, the rise of Zionist extremism reinforced bolder appeals for a Jewish state. While the moderate Labour Party under David Ben-Gurion attempted to rally the Jewish cause along moderate lines (which promoted cooperation with the British government and denounced terrorism), it could not entirely extinguish radical elements within its ranks. The prevalence of radical Zionism was becoming more apparent by this time. For example, posters hung in Tel Aviv denouncing terrorism were torn down, and slogans such as “With blood and fire Judea will rise” and “Death to Traitors” were painted on the walls.42

The Arab Revolt brought about a new level of violence in Palestine. Political anxieties and socio-economic pressures gave way to outright violence and subversion. Jews and Arabs alike engaged in heinous acts of terror to achieve their goals. The two groups were at each other’s throats, and the British were caught in the middle, incurring the wrath of both sides.

The British started considering the Partition of Palestine as a viable solution to the chaos. The Peel (Royal) Commission of 1937, an attempt by British officials to assess dysfunctions in

Palestine and develop a solution, conveyed the logic of separate Palestinian states by articulating the incompatibility of the two groups based on conflicting nationalist aspirations. It stated that

There is no common ground between them [Jews and Arabs]. The Arab community is predominantly Asiatic in character, the Jewish community predominantly European. They differ in religion and language. Their cultural and social life, their ways of thought and conduct, are as incompatible as their national aspirations. These last are the greatest bar to peace. Arabs and Jews might possibly learn to live and work together in Palestine if they were to make a genuine effort to reconcile and combine their national ideals and so build up in time a joint or dual nationality. But this they cannot do. The War and its sequel have inspired all Arabs with the hope of reviving in a free and united Arab world the traditions of the Arab golden age. The Jews similarly are inspired by their historic past. They mean to show what the Jewish nation can achieve when restored to the land of its birth. National assimilation between Jews and Arabs is thus ruled out.  

The British acknowledged that Arabs and Zionists were fundamentally incompatible. The Commission ultimately intended to resolve the Arab-Jewish conflict by separating them. The resolution was met with mixed reactions. Zionists celebrated the idea as a means to realize statehood, but it was rejected by Arab leadership. Britain discarded the policy itself in November 1938, citing the impracticality of “the political, administrative, and financial difficulties” regarding partition. Instead, Britain encouraged peace talks between the two sides, and suggested bringing in neighboring Arab states and Zionist organizations outside Palestine to participate in negotiations. All of these talks, of course, would exclude Arabs “responsible for the campaign of assassination and violence,” alluding to Mufti Al-Husseini and his followers. (Radical Zionist elements such as the Irgun and Stern Gang were not mentioned, as their

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44 Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 35.
45 Ed. Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, The Israel-Arab Reader, 43.
46 Ed. Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, “The Israel-Arab Reader, 43.
existence was not detected until June 1939.) This measure also failed to reduce hostilities, and as a second great war loomed in Europe, Britain became increasingly resolute in bringing an end to the violence.

The White Paper of 1939 and Turning Points During World War II

By the middle of 1939, Britain’s focus shifted toward an impending conflict with Germany. In an effort to halt civil unrest, Britain’s position evolved into one more favorable to the Arabs. In 1939, Britain, under Neville Chamberlain, issued a White Paper. This document placated the Arabs by placing a limit upon Jewish immigration until 1944, at which time immigration would be permanently terminated. It also prohibited Jews from purchasing land outside of established Jewish settlements, and promised Arab Palestinian statehood within ten years.47 The Jews condemned the decree, calling it “a breach of faith and a surrender to Arab terrorism.”48 However, the need to combat the Nazis took priority over continued fighting with Great Britain, and so large-scale violence in Palestine subsided until 1943, when Palestine was secure from Axis threat.49

While the White Paper of 1939 marked the end of the Arab Revolt, the measure was only a temporary patch. Though its terms served to moderate Arab anger, internal quarreling within the Arab Palestinian factions was just as responsible for the collapse of the Arab campaign.50 Conversely, Zionists staunchly opposed the resolution and circumvented immigration limitations

47 Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 14.
49 Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 14.
as much as possible during the wartime period, and a growing militant attitude fostered stalwart resistance to British arbitration.

Although the years between Hitler’s invasion of Poland and German surrender marked an apparently pacific time in Palestine, underneath the supposed tranquility radical fervor spread among both the Zionists and the Arabs. Hitler’s Final Solution program against the Jews was the Zionists’ “worst nightmare.” Paling in comparison to mere persecution, it marked the world’s Jews for extermination. Years of fleeing from Nazis, desperate attempts to escape to safe havens, and suffering masses incarcerated in concentration and death camps created an unprecedented sense of urgency to resettle hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from Europe.51

World War II also bolstered the ranks of trained Jewish military veterans. During World War II, a part of the Jewish resolution was to set aside their differences with Britain to join in the fight against the Nazis. This approach, of course, meant that a strong percentage of Palestine’s Jews received both military training and combat experience. Such experience gave them a decisive edge over their Arab rivals, who unlike them, lacked both training and experience in conventional war. Therefore, World War II afforded the Zionists both added pressure to settle Palestine and enough military strength to feel confident enough to assert themselves.52 Thus, growing awareness of the extermination of the Jews in Europe further steeled Zionist resolve and cultivated global sympathy for Jewish immigrants to Palestine, further complicating British policy. Badly weakened by the war, the British were absolutely incapable of shouldering the


52 Shepherd, Ploughing Sand, 18; Founding of the Hagenah in 1921, 185; British training of the Hagenah during World War II, Shepherd, 215-223.
herculean task of enforcing the White Paper, setting the stage for further conflict as the Axis threat dissipated.\textsuperscript{53}

The events of the Holocaust also had a momentous impact upon global sympathy for the Jews, and by extension, the Zionist cause. This was particularly significant in the United States. Before World War II, there was not a great deal of American sympathy for the Jews in Europe. Ironically, there was even a noticeable upsurge of anti-Semitism in the days immediately preceding U.S. entry into World War II.\textsuperscript{54} Anti-Semitic movements were strongest among Catholics, who traditionally blamed the Jews for killing Christ, and the America First Movement, an isolationist conservative movement headed by Charles Lindbergh.\textsuperscript{55} Most members of the State and War Department were members of the pre-1933 world, which placed isolationist sentiments over defending human rights overseas.\textsuperscript{56} The State Department publicized numerous reports of Jewish persecution and extermination. However, the public wrote them off as gross exaggerations or even outright lies reminiscent of the outrageous propaganda programs of World War I.\textsuperscript{57} It was not until the near end of the war, when the camps themselves were discovered, crowded with tortured and emaciated bodies, that American sympathy turned toward the plight of the Jewish people. And it came with fervor.\textsuperscript{58} The upwelling of sympathy led to unprecedented support for Zionism, as both the Democratic and Republican parties attempted to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} Shepherd, \textit{Ploughing Sand}, 107-111.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Robert A. Abzug, \textit{America Views the Holocaust, 1933-1945: A Brief Documentary History}, Bedford/ St. Martin’s, Boston, New York, 1999, 55.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Charles Lindbergh and America First Party, Abzug, \textit{America Views the Holocaust, 1933-1945}, 99-108; Catholics and anti-Semitism, Hahn, \textit{Caught in the Middle East}, 40; Father Laughlin, Abzug, \textit{America Views the Holocaust, 1933-1945}, 77-85.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Abzug, \textit{America Views the Holocaust, 1933-1945}, 16.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Hahn, \textit{Caught in the Middle East}, 28, 50.
\end{itemize}
eclipse the other in their support for Zionism.\textsuperscript{59} The media itself reflected full-fledged backing for the Zionist cause, juxtaposed against an overall lack of interest in Arab circumstances.\textsuperscript{60}

Nazi propaganda in the Middle East also bore a polarizing effect, but the message targeted toward Arabs was staunchly anti-Semitic, contributing to the radicalization of not only Palestinians, but the entire Arab world, turning the Arab-Zionist conflict into a regional crisis. During World War II, the Nazis undertook an aggressive propaganda campaign against the Jews in the Muslim world, morphing an already clear distaste for Jews into an urgent call to action. Their chief spokesperson was none other than Amin Al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{61} Through his voice, the Nazis spread the word that the Jews were not only seeking to take control of Palestine itself, but that such gains were only part of a larger and bolder strategy to ultimately take control of the entire Arab world.\textsuperscript{62} While such claims were unfounded, the message found ready ears among a people already hateful toward both the Jews and the British.\textsuperscript{63} By the time U.S. diplomats began discussing post-war relations in Europe, fears of a Jewish conspiracy to conquer the Arab world had pervaded Arab opinion.

By 1945, the British had decided Palestine was an “economic and political liability.”\textsuperscript{64} It was becoming clear at this point that the war-weary empire could not resolve the problem that it

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 48.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Jeffrey Herf, Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World, 8, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2009.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Herf, Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World, 13.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Herf, Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World, 168.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Milton-Edwards, Hinchcliffe, Conflicts in the Middle East since 1945, Routledge, London and New York, 2001 25.
\end{itemize}
While World War II still raged in Europe, violence resumed in the shape of a renewed Jewish terrorist insurgency. Irgun, and its offshoot, the Stern Gang, attacked British targets throughout the Near East. Zionist extremists assassinated Lord Moyne, the British Minister-Resident in Cairo and a close friend of Winston Churchill, in 1944.\footnote{Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 15.}

Arab nationalists in surrounding states were also taking new steps to resolve the conflict to their ends. In March, 1945, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Transjordan and Iraq founded the Arab League. It was a direct manifestation of Arab nationalism in the Middle East, and it demonstrated Pan-Arab sentiment in maintaining the integrity of Arab lands in the face of Jewish incursion. Along with laying out provisions for political and economic cooperation between the states, its founding pact contained articles specifically related to the Arab cause in Palestine, against Zionism. It echoed the drive for Arabs to maintain their territorial integrity and proposed an “Arab National Fund to safeguard the lands of the Arabs of Palestine.”\footnote{Yale Law School, The Avalon Project, “The Alexandria Protocol; October 7, 1944.”, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/alex.asp, accessed August 1, 2016.} The League demanded that Britain honor its promise in the White Paper of 1939 and that all Jewish immigration to Palestine cease. Further, it asserted that Palestine be established as an Arab nation and threatened reprisals against agents working toward the establishment of a Jewish state.\footnote{FRUS, The Chargé in Egypt (Lyon) to the Secretary of State, November 11, 1945.} At this point, the larger scope of Arab nationalism began to play a greater part in the Palestinian question and transformed it into a regional problem. As stated by Somerville Pinkney Tuck, the U.S. Minister to Egypt, “The nationalistic trend … unquestionably influenced Egypt’s attitude and policy in so far as the League of Arab States is concerned, which, as an organization, derives
its cohesive force from a common attitude among all Arab States towards Jewish immigration into Palestine." \(^{69}\)

**U.S. Entry into the Middle East**

While Britain was struggling to maintain its tenuous grasp in Palestine and the Middle East, the United States was increasing its own involvement in the region. In the wake of World War I, the Americans joined the French, Russians and British in large-scale oil speculation in the region. \(^{70}\) While earlier treaties such as the Red Line Agreement of 1928 gave the U.S. its initial foothold in the Iraq, it was their fortunate endeavors in Saudi Arabia that opened the door for large-scale oil imports for the Middle East. \(^{71}\)

The Red Line Agreement was a product of collaborative efforts of British and French oil companies and U.S. efforts to gain a foothold in the oil fields of the Middle East. European capital found its way into Arab territory at the turn of the century, when British Royal Dutch/Shell, the German Deutsche Bank, and the Turkish National Bank (which was, in fact, owned by the British) formed the Turkish Petroleum Company to acquire and develop oil production within the boundaries of the former Ottoman Empire. During World War I, the Allies expropriated Deutsche Bank’s share in TPC and handed it over to France after the war. The San Remo Agreement of 1920, best understood as a post-war economic partition of the Arab oil industry, excluded American companies, much to the ire of both U.S. capitalists and the Department of State. While U.S. companies expressed concern that foreign companies would

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\(^{69}\) FRUS, *Memorandum by the Minister of Egypt (Tuck) Currently in the United States, the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson)*, October 26, 1945.

\(^{70}\) Aburish, *A Brutal Friendship*, 76.

\(^{71}\) Aburish, *A Brutal Friendship*, 75.
exclude them from the lucrative oil resources in the Middle East and flood the market with cheap Arabian oil, the State Department objected to the agreement, as it discriminated against American companies. The U.S. government retaliated by passing the Mineral Leasing Act in February 1920, prohibiting oil drilling on any public land by any company whose government discriminated against U.S. businesses. In order to avoid increased economic tensions, the TPC caved in and reorganized to include U.S. companies, including Standard Oil of New York and Standard Oil of New Jersey, who eventually bought out the rest of the U.S. companies in the TPC in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{72}

The Red Line Agreement of 1928 was signed by the members of the TPC (renamed the Iraqi Petroleum Company in 1929), following the discovery of substantial oil reserves in Mosul and Baghdad, Iraq. The agreement was grounded upon cooperation for the development of oil fields within the old borders of the Ottoman Empire. The pact was bound by an agreement to share profits equally among its members and a “self-denying” clause, which forbid any partner from independent ventures within the prescribed borders. Expecting the pact to minimize competition and ensure price stability, the Red Line Agreement was signed to ensure lasting peace and prosperity for the oil tycoons in the TPC.\textsuperscript{73}

While the Red Line Agreement gave U.S. companies a foothold in Iraq, Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) struck oil in Bahrain after securing drilling rights in 1933. The discovery motivated the impoverished King Saud to sell oil concessions to SOCAL for a meager $250,000.


Only three years later, SOCAL struck oil in 1936, transforming Saudi Arabia into a lucrative capital asset. SOCAL expanded its operations and invited Texaco to join them, forming the Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO).74

ARAMCO’s success in striking oil in Saudi Arabia irreversibly changed King Saud’s position in world affairs. In what was formerly an impoverished backwater region of the old Ottoman Empire, Saudi Arabia earned both an economic windfall and the support of the United States. The State Department, along with the rest of the U.S. government, was especially interested in advancing U.S. economic power, and ARAMCO’s promising stake in Saudi Arabia led to significant financial support for the desert nation, creating a relationship of perceived mutual dependency.75

U.S. government funding to Saudi Arabia followed to support private capital, ossifying the amiable U.S.-Saudi relationship by the eve of World War II. Luck and U.S. capital afforded the King a lavish lifestyle, and like many of the other Sheiks and elites in the Middle East, he generally spent his dividends on personal expenses rather than public infrastructure. Such men amassed massive personal fortunes while investing very little in the countries they presumed to rule.76 This comfortable lifestyle, however, was entirely contingent upon continued investments and support from the United States. So while the United States benefited from Arab oil concessions in the Middle East, Arab governments, especially Saudi Arabia’s, became entirely dependent upon continued business with the United States.

74 Ibid.
76 Aburish, A Brutal Friendship, 77-78.
**Roosevelt’s Ambivalent Policy in the Middle East**

The earliest formal diplomatic meetings in the Middle East by the United States were conducted by President Roosevelt in 1945, shortly after the Yalta Conference. The purpose of the meetings was to establish formal relationships with the new countries of the Middle East and promote stability in the region. Such rendezvous were friendly and productive. The Arab leaders of the region uniformly expressed not only optimism at the promise of favorable foreign relations with the United States, but also a heartfelt belief that the United States was a nation apart from the imperialists that sought to control them. In 1945, Arab leaders believed that the United States stood for the principles of self-determination and the consent of the governed that President Wilson had laid down at the end of the first World War, and that the United States was ready to defend those principles. So, when King Saud asked FDR about the current trouble in Palestine, he believed the president when he said that “he would do nothing to assist the Jews against the Arabs and would make no move hostile to the Arab people.” This, of course, was an excellent diplomatic answer; King Saud had already stated that he would fight to the death against the “Zionist threat”, even that he would be willing to die on the battlefield himself. In all talks with Arab leadership, Roosevelt stated that he supported the “open door” policy, rapid advancement of Middle Eastern countries, alignment with Western democracies rather than Eastern totalitarian states, and free trade with these countries.77

FDR’s meetings with Arab leaders helped to produce amicable relationships in the region, and his stated advocacy for the Arab cause was pronounced and convincing. At this time,

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77 FRUS, *Conversations between President Roosevelt and King Farouk of Egypt, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, and King Abdul Aziz al-Saud of Saudi Arabia, at Great Bitter Lake, Egypt, on February 13–14, 1945.* FDR’s quote regarding the Jews in Palestine was recorded in a Memorandum of a conversation between King Saud and FDR dated February 14, 1945, Doc. 2.
the U.S. government believed that the nations of the Middle East were about to enter “a new renaissance”. But concerns over Palestine cast a shadow over these bright prospects. King Saud’s declaration did not go unnoticed by the State Department. The Acting Secretary of State wrote to Roosevelt in January that “Zionist activities in this country will remain the gravest threat to friendly relations between the United States and the countries of the Near East until a solution to the problem is reached.” Secretary of State James Stettinius concluded that the Arab states would never accept a Jewish state in their midst.  

State Department officials identified what they believed to be the central deficiencies that led to the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine up to that point. In a memorandum dated January, 30, 1945, U.S. officials placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the British, asserting (accurately) that the contradictory commitments made to Jews and Arabs generated hostilities. Furthermore, the acting Secretary of State, Joseph C. Grew, explained why Jewish immigration was so troublesome. He pointed to the economic stress that it put on Palestine, arguing that it put added pressure on an already strained agricultural economy and led to increased food shortages. Furthermore, the State Department anticipated a difficult industrial realignment in Palestine due to returning demobilized soldiers and other wartime workers. Due to such concerns, it opposed any increase in land purchases by Jews or large scale immigration into Palestine.  

FDR had begun formulating a concise foreign policy with the Arab countries, but his public statements with the president of the World Jewish Congress, Rabbi Wise, on March 17, 1945 in support of unlimited Jewish immigration and colonization of Palestine raised concerns

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78 FRUS, Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, January 12, 1945, Doc. 659. 
79 FRUS, Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, January 30, 1945, Doc. 667.
among Arabs and tempered their faith in the new global titan. These statements were completely against the recommendations of the State Department and his own promise to King Saud and illustrated a fundamental split between the White House and the State Department regarding Palestine. White House staffers such as Clark Clifford and David Niles advocated for pro-Zionist action (in accordance with public opinion following the discovery of the Holocaust), while State Department officials and the Office of Near Eastern Affairs consistently prioritized geopolitical concerns.

FDR’s statement, unsurprisingly, triggered outrage in the Middle East. King Saud argued that supporting the Zionist cause would discredit him as a leader and make him a traitor to the Muslim faith. The Regent of Iraq condemned these statements: “The Arabs believe at present that the Jews want to have Palestine only as a means for their future domination of the whole Arab world economically as well as politically. Their future aim is no less than the colonization of all adjacent Arab countries. The Arabs naturally are opposed to such designs.” Riots in Syria over the statements demonstrated similar disapproval.

Considering this obvious divergence in perspectives, the State Department suggested a trusteeship for Palestine as the most viable solution to the growing problem. FDR’s own position on an ultimate resolution is unclear. Nevertheless, he took measures to delay the problem for the time being. On March 24, 1945, Roosevelt attempted to allay the fears of Arab statesmen by restating his assurances from 1943 and 1944 that the United States would not make any policy in the Middle East without consulting both the Arabs and the Jews.

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80 FRUS, The Chargé in Iraq (Moreland) to the Secretary of State, March 18, 1945, Doc. 674.
81 FRUS, The Minister in Iraq (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, March 10, 1945, Doc. 673.
82 FRUS, The Acting Secretary of State to the Chargé in Iraq (Moreland), March 24, 1945, Doc. 679.
Regardless of such efforts, there were signs that Roosevelt’s vacillating policy was encouraging further instability in the Middle East. The State Department was growing critical of “Zionist elements” in the White House, and some U.S. officials concluded that “the recurring indications of support of Zionist aspirations in certain influential American Government quarters are affecting most gravely our standing in the entire area.” When Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, the situation in Palestine, along with that of the whole Arab Middle East, was still unresolved.

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83 FRUS, Memorandum by the Deputy Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Alling) to the Assistant Secretary of State (Dunn) April 6, 1945, Doc. 682.
Chapter 2

President Truman’s Early Policy on Palestine

**Introduction**

In 1961, Henry Kissinger, then a junior professor at Harvard University, met former president Harry S. Truman at the Truman Library while on business in Kansas City, Missouri. While touring the library with the former commander-in-chief, the two men reached a replica of the oval office as it was when Truman was in office. There, knowing that Kissinger was acting as a part-time consultant for the Kennedy Administration, Truman asked him what he had learned during his tenure there. Kissinger replied that he believed that the “bureaucracy appeared…. to function as a fourth branch of government, severely constricting the president’s freedom of action.” Dismissing what he thought to be an unamusing and unhelpful “professor talk,” Truman replied that, “If the president knows what he wants, no bureaucrat can stop him. A president has to know when to stop taking advice.”

President Truman’s statement to Kissinger resonates with his early action toward Palestine. As the war in Europe ended, the plight of hundreds of thousands of Jewish victims of the Holocaust became one of his primary concerns. Largely disregarding State Department fears, Truman took a stand to relocate 100,000 displaced Jews from squalid displaced persons camps in Europe to Palestine. While this could be interpreted as simply a capitulation to White House Staff demands or domestic political pressure, there is enough evidence to support the claim that Truman himself felt enough sympathy for the suffering Jews in Europe to brush aside

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advice from his advisors to pursue the course of action that he believed was right.\textsuperscript{2} Truman’s hand was not forced by public opinion. Rather, his own sympathy for the Jews matched that of Congress and the public. His foreign policy was also highly Eurocentric in 1945, accounting for his relative disinterest in the complexities of Middle Eastern circumstances. According to John Lewis Gaddis’s \textit{We Now Know}, President Truman’s early post-war focus was centered upon Western European reconstruction, often to the point that he was blindsided by adverse events in other regions, such as the Communist takeover in China in 1949.\textsuperscript{3} The foreign policy aspects of the crisis in Palestine suffered similar neglect until it drifted into the realm of European security.

FDR’s passing in the closing months of the war placed Harry S. Truman at the helm of the United States. Becoming the new commander-in-chief at this precarious moment meant that he had a great deal of catching up to do in regards to foreign policy, and that included U.S. policy in the Middle East. One of Truman’s tasks with concern to the Middle East was to assure the Arabs that the United States would not revert to isolationism in the wake of the war, as it had at the end of the First World War. For Truman, the Middle East did not resonate at the beginning of his presidency. The dearth of official U.S. government documentation regarding the Middle East at this time speaks to his relative lack of concern for the region at this time. He did, however, make certain promises to the Arab heads of state at the behest of the State Department. The faith that the Arabs placed on Woodrow Wilson’s bold declarations of freedom and self-determination had been dashed when the U.S. receded back across the Atlantic while Britain and


France seized control of the region. The new President assured Arab sovereigns that the U.S. planned to remain active in the world theater. He expressed his belief that the Middle East was bound for rapid advancement, and pledged solidarity against any attempts by foreign powers to impose “special positions” within their borders.

More overtly suspicious of the USSR than FDR, Truman also promoted Arab alignment with the West against totalitarian autocracy (a clear reference to the USSR), and promised educational visits to the region. It is worth noting, however, that U.S. perceptions of the Soviet Union were still ambiguous. Relations between the USSR and U.S. had not yet soured, and while Truman erred on the side of caution by encouraging Arab states to align themselves with the U.S., he also expressed hope that the two superpowers would be able to cooperate in the interests of world peace. Therefore, U.S. efforts to align the Arab world with the U.S. pre-dated the dominance of Cold War fears. At the time, building relations with the Arab world was primarily an exercise in extending influence and building friendly relations overseas.

Americans hoped to see the Arab states “come into their own,” as expressed by George Wadsworth, the U.S. Ambassador to Syria. In a letter to Truman, he wrote,

we believe the countries of the Arab world, especially if taken as a whole, well warrant a more important place in our positive postwar foreign-policy thinking than is normally given to them as a simple counterpoise to Zionist ambitions or because they lie at the strategic center of the British Empire or of the great world air routes of the future, or because they happen to contain the two cradles of civilization and the greatest known undeveloped oil reserves of the world…. All these we feel are important, but to us [George Wadsworth, Minister to Egypt Somerville Pinkney Tuck, the Minister of Saudi Arabia, William Eddy, and the


5 FRUS, The Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to Brigadier General H.H. Vaughan, Military aide to President Truman, November 10, 1945, Doc. 7.
Consul General at Jerusalem, Lowell C. Pinkerton] it seems vital to recognize that the whole Arab world is in ferment, that its peoples are on the threshold of a new renaissance, that each one of them wants forth-rightly to run its own show, as the countries of the Western Hemisphere run theirs, without imperialistic interference, be it British or French, in their internal affairs.\(^6\)

An active foreign policy in the region was therefore essential. Furthermore, Arabs were amicable and willing to work with the United States toward common goals and looked forward to developing friendly relations with the West.

**The Jewish Refugee Crisis in Europe**

The main obstacle to those goals was the Zionist problem. When Truman assumed office as the President, Secretary of State Stettinius was quick to warn him of the persistent “Zionist influence” within the White House. He also emphasized that while Roosevelt was sympathetic to Zionism, he had also assured the Arab states that he would not enforce any policy prior to consulting them. Alignment with the Zionists at this stage would almost certainly lead to violence.\(^7\)

Regardless, by this time, domestic politics was already turning heavily toward support for the Jews in Palestine. For the many European Jews during World War II, the Third Reich had taken everything. Six million European Jews had been slaughtered by the Nazis, and many of those that survived no longer had a home to return to. By 1945, an estimated one hundred thousand Jewish Displaced Persons were confined to detention camps awaiting relocation. Conditions were dire, and there was constant pressure to relocate the inhabitants. The question

\(^6\) FRUS, *Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State*, November 13, 1945, Doc. 8.

\(^7\) FRUS, *The Secretary of State to President Truman*, April 18, 1945; *Memorandum by the Deputy Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Alling) to the assistant Secretary of State (Dunn)*, April 6, 1945, Doc. 682.
was where to go. For many Jews, the only answer was a true homeland. For that, they looked East, toward Palestine.  

The tragedy of the Holocaust and the enduring plight of the Jews in detention camps across Europe motivated U.S. politicians, Republican and Democratic alike, to throw their support behind the Zionists, promising that it would be an important issue in the elections in 1946 and 1948. Truman’s own sympathies for the victims of the Holocaust were genuine and unremitting, as he often beseeched Arab heads of state to consider Jewish immigration to Palestine on humanitarian grounds. By this time, the refugee situation in Europe was deteriorating, with several thousand Jewish refugees entering Switzerland and requesting transportation to Palestine. While Switzerland had opened its border to refugees, the Swiss government wanted them to leave as soon as possible. By this time, Switzerland was groaning under the weight of 18,000 refugees.

The Growing Militancy of Zionism

Pressures created by the Holocaust were amplified by new developments on the ground in Palestine. A conversation between Nahum Goldmann (a representative of the World Jewish Congress) and Gordon Merriam, Loy Henderson and Evan Wilson of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs on June 20, raised concerns over growing hostility in the Zionist camp. Goldmann stated that, until now, moderate Zionists had restrained Jewish extremists by

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convincing them that cooperation with British authorities during the war would lead to statehood, and that the coming dissolution of the Mandate would likely result in violence. Loy Henderson, the director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs expressed a growing fear that wavering Anglo-American policy was “driving Jewish youth into the arms of Moscow.”

It was true that, by this time, Zionists in Palestine were growing more assertive. In a June 27 meeting with the Office of Near Eastern Affairs, David Ben-Gurion, flanked by Eliezer Kaplan and Nahum Goldmann of the Jewish Agency, stated that Jews had a right to “set their house in order.” This, according to Ben-Gurion, meant abolishing the “preposterous” British Mandate. Going against Pan-Arab sentiment, he argued further that the outside Arab powers had no business in the affairs of the people of Palestine, although they would be unable to rally enough support to assert themselves in any case.

This conversation proved to be a turning point in U.S. relations in Palestine. Ben-Gurion made several landmark statements in this meeting. First, he condemned outside interference in Jewish affairs. Second, he explicitly renounced the British Mandate, and third, he discredited the claim of solidarity between Palestinian Arabs and the rest of the Arab world. He claimed that the Jews in Palestine had thus far been patient with the British government and hoped that their cooperation with them would be rewarded with statehood. The fact that the reward had not yet arrived led Jews to accuse moderate Zionists of following a policy of “appeasement” with the British government. As a result, Zionists in Palestine were turning to extremism. This statement

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10 FRUS, Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Evan M. Wilson of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, June 20, 1945; FRUS, Memorandum by the Director of Near Eastern and African Affairs, June 22, 1945, Doc 694.
11 FRUS, Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Evan M. Wilson of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, June 27, 1945, Doc. 695.
12 Ibid.
proved to be a forecast of things to come. By July 5, the new Secretary of State, James Byrnes, wrote to the Consul General at Jerusalem, Lowell C. Pinkerton, that his department was receiving reports of an impending Jewish uprising in Palestine.\(^{13}\)

By July 24, the volatility in Palestine was becoming overwhelming. Threats of violence by Zionist extremists grew in the face of possible anti-Zionist legislation from Britain, and the mutual radicalization and hostility between Arab and Jewish camps was making compromise more implausible. Yet the growing urgency of the Jewish refugee crisis in Europe compounded the urgency to generate a solution. Rapidly deteriorating conditions in detention camps pressured Britain to increase immigration quotas into Palestine despite the current economic concerns and Jewish insurgency in the area.\(^{14}\)

In the face of this crisis, Truman’s own position hardened. He began to see the question of Palestine in direct relation to the Jewish refugee crisis. For him, Palestine was not the problem, but the solution. Instead of the question, it was the answer. His efforts regarding Palestine were henceforth driven by a genuine concern for the thousands of displaced Jews in Europe. This drove him to pressure the British government to permit displaced Jewish refugees to resettle in Palestine. According to a memorandum to the General Consul to Jerusalem, Secretary of State Byrnes stated that the President endorsed collaboration with U.K. Prime Minister Attlee and the British government to pursue the possibility of permitting as many Jews as possible into Palestine as a solution to the refugee crisis in Europe.\(^{15}\)

\(^{13}\) FRUS, Secretary of State to the Consul General at Jerusalem (Pinkerton), July 5, 1945, Doc. 696.

\(^{14}\) FRUS, Memorandum by President Truman to the British Prime Minister (Churchill), July 24, 1945, Doc. 698.

\(^{15}\) FRUS, The Secretary of State to the Consul General at Jerusalem (Pinkerton), August 18, 1945, Doc. 075; David McCullough; *Truman*, 595, Simon and Schuster, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore, 1992.
Objections to Truman’s Policy

This standpoint placed President Truman in contention with not only the State Department, but also the rest of the Arab world. The State Department, seeking to change the President’s thinking, acted upon reports from diplomats in Arab states, warning that the Arab people and governments were overtly hostile to Truman’s statements. The chairman of the Arab League, Jamal Hussein, called Truman’s endorsement for increased Jewish immigration into Palestine an offense to Arab and human rights. Concerns that Zionists were gaining influence in the White House were growing in Arab circles, further jeopardizing U.S. standing in the Middle East.\(^\text{16}\)

The growing fear of violence in Palestine was further complicated by an aversion to using force to enforce policy in Palestine. Allied governments were eager to demobilize at the end of the war, and State Department officials did not want to delay such a process. Accordingly, the State Department and White House alike were unwilling to seriously consider deploying U.S. troops to enforce policy in Palestine against the will of “40 million Arabs.”\(^\text{17}\) Thus, any suggested solution to the Palestinian problem had to preclude the use of military force.

Furthermore, the State Department and the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs expressed a growing concern that the Soviet Union was gaining traction in the region, and that its interests in the region were growing rapidly. The State Department stated that the Soviet Union was slowly drifting toward a pro-Arab, anti-Zionist stance, and, although it officially remained

\(^{16}\) FRUS, *The Chargé in Iraq (Moose) to the Secretary of State*, August 20, 1945, August 22, 1945, Doc. 707; *The Chargé in Syria (Porter) to the Secretary of State*, August 22, 1945, Doc. 709; *The Consul General at Jerusalem (Pinkerton) to the Secretary of State*, August 27, 1945.

\(^{17}\) FRUS, *The Secretary of State to the Consul General at Jerusalem (Pinkerton)*, August 18, 1945, Doc. 706.
silent on the issue, the Soviet government was spreading propaganda linking the United States as inextricably in collusion with the Zionists.\textsuperscript{18}

On August 24, 1945, Loy Henderson, the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, sent a memorandum laying out a rather bleak set of possibilities for future U.S. policy in Palestine. He laid out four options, acknowledging that all would have some negative consequences. The first was the recognition of a Jewish commonwealth, which would scuttle all positive relations with the Arabs states. Such an endorsement would undoubtedly endanger the U.S. influence and oil concessions. The second option, support for an Arab state, would likely lead to the persecution of the Jewish minority by the Arabs. The U.S. government would be seen as abandoning the Jews in dire straits. The third option, partition under trusteeship as suggested by the Peel Commission, was deemed unachievable by the Royal Commission of 1938 and likewise considered untenable by the U.S. The fourth option, a general trusteeship agreement, was seen as the least of all evils.\textsuperscript{19} Henderson stated that while such an agreement would anger extremist elements on both sides, it would be enough to satisfy moderates. He suggested the matter be taken to the United Nations Security Council.\textsuperscript{20}

Likewise, Merriam and the State Department were highly critical of renewed immigration of Jews into Palestine. While stating that the British renewal of immigration into Palestine was likely, such a plan came with difficulties. First, it was estimated that a half-million to a million Jews would ultimately seek asylum in Palestine. Palestine was currently economically incapable

\textsuperscript{18} FRUS, The Secretary of State to the Consul General at Jerusalem (Pinkerton), August 18, 1945, Doc.706 ; The Chargé in Iraq, (Moose) to the Secretary of State, August 22, 1945, Doc. 707.

\textsuperscript{19} FRUS, Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, August 24, 1945, Doc. 711.
of supporting such a population, and the expected post-war economic fluctuations would further exacerbate economic pressures. Additionally, such immigration would almost definitely lead to Arab resistance by means of force. As a result, security requirements for enforcing such a policy were daunting. (A later memorandum by the War Department stated that it would require 400,000 troops to enforce an immigration increase in Palestine.) These circumstances made supporting such a policy of mass immigration completely undesirable. However, in the likelihood that Britain would go ahead with such a policy, it was suggested that due consideration would be given to the economic capacity of Palestine, and that justification for such action would be taken on purely humanitarian grounds. And, finally, Britain would be required to assume responsibility for enacting such a policy.21

The President Moves Forward

Such were the concerns of the State Department. They were not, however, in line with Truman’s thinking. In a memorandum to Prime Minister Attlee, Truman suggested that 100,000 Jewish displaced persons be permitted to enter Palestine as soon as possible, stating that those victims had a right to find a true home: “No claim is more meritorious than that of the groups who for so many years have known persecution and enslavement.”22

If the State Department’s fears were accurate, Truman’s encouragement might have led Britain’s government to condone the resumption of immigration. But the Prime Minister was critical of such actions, because as of September, 15, 1945, stating that such a policy would bear

21 FRUS, anticipated use of force to enforce immigration, Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson), August 21, 1945, Doc. 708; Memorandum by President Truman to British Prime Minister (Churchill), July 24, 1945, Doc. 698.

22 FRUS, President Truman to the British Prime Minister (Attlee), August 31, 1945, Doc. 715.
negative consequences in the Middle East. Unlike Truman, Attlee agreed with the U.S. State Department on the implications of increased immigration: “The position in the Middle East is already one of great danger and difficulty and I fear that this action, had it been taken, would have precipitated a grave crisis which would indeed be a lamentable start to the work of reconstruction to which we are now devoting ourselves.”

While no action was taken, Truman’s proposal was leaked via Reuters news agency, sparking widespread outrage in the Middle East. The State Department was bombarded by protests from the Arab countries, some of whom expected as many as a million Jews to enter Palestine. Such beliefs rekindled Arab fears that Jewish conquest of Palestine was merely an opening phase of the ultimate Zionist aspirations. The Iraqi government was blunt:

It has been proved to the Arabs beyond all doubt, that the Zionists intend to invade other Arab countries after they have overrun Palestine. We therefore regard the Palestine question as a matter of life and death. Zionism is an aggressive movement directed at the heart of the Arab nation and any support which may be given to it will create in Arab circles thoughts and impressions which would not be desirable by the American Government.

These reactions demonstrated that the Arab Middle East perceived Zionism as a ruthless campaign of conquest. Iraqi newspapers had written that “America must choose” between honesty and hypocrisy and that “Americans must decide whether they wish to sacrifice Arab friendship and their economic interests in Near East in a bloody war to uphold unjust Zionism.” Such perceptions were ostensibly shared by Arab heads of state such as King Saud, who now

23 FRUS, The British Prime Minister (Attlee) to President Truman, September 14, 1945, Doc. 716.

24 FRUS, Memorandum by the Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs (Merriam) to the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson), September 26, 1945, Doc. 724.

25 FRUS, The Chargé in Iraq (Moreland) to the Secretary of State, September 28, 1945, Doc. 726.

26 FRUS, The Chargé in Iraq (Moreland) to the Secretary of State, September 28, 1945, Doc. 726; The Chargé in Syria (Porter) to the Secretary of State, September 28, 1945, Doc. 726.
threatened to publish a letter from FDR pledging that the U.S. would not make Palestine an issue.²⁷ Henderson wrote to Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson expressing concern that the U.S. was quickly losing Arab support in the Middle East and that recent events were undermining all the work that the U.S. had done thus far in the region.²⁸

Truman’s statements proved to be what thrust the United States headlong into the fray. The chaos that he created necessitated damage control. Henderson was quick to reaffirm to diplomats from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt that the U.S. would not enact policy without prior consultation with the Arabs. Truman replied to King Saud’s threats, stating that he would follow in line with FDR’s statement concerning Palestine.²⁹ Yet the Arabs states’ overall tone changed very little. The Syrian government responded that while the Arabs shared sympathy with the persecuted Jews in Europe, they rejected the notion that political Zionism was a humanitarian movement. They asserted, rather, that its true nature was that of a people attempting to build a state by driving another peaceful people from their homeland. They expressed solidarity with Palestinian Arabs, and called the conflict a “matter of life and death.” The statement not only echoed the fears expressed earlier by the Saudis and Iraqis that Zionists sought ultimately to conquer the entire Arab world, but also demonstrated that Pan-Arab nationalist sentiments had become a driving force in the Palestinian conflict.³⁰

²⁷ FRUS, Amir Abdullah to President Truman, September 29, 1945, Doc. 729.
²⁸ FRUS, The Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Acting Secretary of State (Acheson), October 1, 1945, Doc. 730.
²⁹ FRUS, Assurances given to ministers recorded in Memorandum of Conversation by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, October 3, 1945, Doc. 736; The King of Saudi Arabia (Abdul Aziz ibn Saud) to President Truman, October 2, 1945, Doc. 734.
³⁰ FRUS, The Syrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs to the American Legation in Syria, October 9, 1945; The Chargé to Saudi Arabia (Sands) to the Secretary of State, October 16, 1945, 748.
At the same time, in the fall of 1945, the Jewish Agency, the Zionist representative assembly in Palestine, turned its attention to the United States as a major player. Chaim Weizmann, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, sent a letter to the Secretary of State laying out the demands of the Jewish Agency. He stated they wanted the White Paper of 1939 rescinded. In addition, they sought the repeal of restrictions on land acquisition by the Jewish people along with the admission to Palestine of all Jews in need of a home, starting with the 100,000 Jews still in displaced persons camps in Europe. Finally, the Jewish Agency wanted to claim Palestine for the Jews and wanted national recognition for such action. This last requirement was the central tenet of Zionism (It is unclear how receptive the Jewish Agency was toward partition at this point). Correspondence sent by the U.S. Consul at Jerusalem described similar demands while adding that illegal immigration by Jews was becoming a prominent issue in Palestine.

**The Establishment of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry**

It was Ernest Bevin, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who first suggested a solution He stated that, due to the growing trouble in Palestine and the extreme hardships faced by displaced Jews in Palestine, “His Majesty’s Government suggest that a joint Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry should, as a matter of urgency, be set up at once…” The joint inquiry would observe the political and socioeconomic situation in Palestine in relation to immigration, seek an objective assessment of Jewish victims of Fascist and Nazi persecution and options for relocation on a global scale, consult Arabs and Jews on the problems within Palestine.

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31 FRUS, *The President of the Jewish Agency (Weizmann) the Secretary of State*, October 3, 1945, Doc. 737.

32 FRUS, *The Chargé in Saudi Arabia (Sands) to the Secretary of State*, October 16, 1945, Doc. 748.
and grounds for productive talks for a permanent solution, and make any other recommendations that might address various problems not perceived thus far.\textsuperscript{33}

The chaos did not pause for the committee to form. Jewish radicals launched attacks and spread propaganda in opposition to the White Paper and demanded the immediate creation of a Jewish state.\textsuperscript{34} In correspondence sent October 29 and November 1, 1945, Hooper reported Hagenah (a Jewish paramilitary organization) activities and the Jewish Agency’s “temporary blindness” to their operations. In a clearly pre-meditated large-scale operation, unknown (but believed to be Hagenah) forces made coordinated attacks, bombing the Haifa refinery, holding up trains, and mining the railroad tracks.\textsuperscript{35} And while the Jewish Agency claimed that they were making efforts to halt terrorism in the country, they nevertheless maintained support for illegal Jewish immigration and justified Hagenah activities.\textsuperscript{36} The British government thus condemned the Jewish Agency as a party guilty of inciting violence, which henceforth could no longer be trusted.\textsuperscript{37} Additionally, Arabs protested in Cairo, during an Arab League meeting in November, against the Balfour Declaration. The demonstration developed into a riot and local shops were looted indiscriminately.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{33} FRUS, Memorandum of Conversation between the Secretary of State and the British Ambassador (Halifax), October 22, 1945, Doc. 753.

\textsuperscript{34} “Jewish Terrorism in Palestine; Policemen Murdered”, The Times February 7, 1944, accessed December 15, 2016.

\textsuperscript{35} FRUS, The Consul at Jerusalem (Hooper) to the Secretary of State, October 29, 1945, November 1, 1945, Doc. 777.

\textsuperscript{36} FRUS, Mr. Alexander C. Kirk Political Advisor to the Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean Theatre, to the Secretary of State, November 2; Consul at Jerusalem (Hooper) to the Secretary of State, November 2, 1945, Doc. 779.

\textsuperscript{37} FRUS, British Embassy to the State Department, November 6, 1945, Doc. 784.

\textsuperscript{38} Mr. Alexander C. Kirk, Advisor to the Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theater, to the Secretary of State, November 2, 1945; The Chargé in Egypt (Lyon) to the Secretary of State, November 3, 1945, Doc. 779.
The charter of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry was announced in a statement dated December 10, 1945. Its final form retained its dual investigative task with regards to the Jewish displaced persons crisis in Europe and the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine. Its selection of committee members was based on impartiality and functioned with a rotating committee. The AACOI would conduct an investigation of Displaced Persons Camps in Europe, followed by an assessment of conditions in Palestine. The anticipated recommendations were meant to be as fair and balanced as possible with regard to Arabs and Jews alike.\textsuperscript{39} Yet while the Anglo-American Committee was meant to be impartial, a certain degree of bias was built into its charter. President Truman agreed to accept U.S. participation in Bevin’s proposal, on the condition that the Committee would consider Jewish immigration into Palestine as a viable option. This move linked the Jewish crisis in Europe to Zionism in Palestine. While this did not seem to allay Zionist criticism of the charter, it no doubt gave them a considerable advantage in its potential outcome.\textsuperscript{40}

While Bevin likely considered this a blow to his goal of maintaining limits on Jewish immigration to Palestine, he felt that U.S. participation in talks over Palestine was vital. First, involving the Americans in negotiations would strengthen the Anglo-American security agreement. Second, Bevin hoped to draw the United States closer into the conflict, thereby assisting Great Britain in shouldering responsibility for it. This conclusion leads to some suspicion over Bevin’s motivations in drawing the U.S. into the Palestinian conflict. It is possible that Bevin manipulated Truman’s interests in increasing Jewish immigration into Palestine in

\textsuperscript{39} FRUS, Secretary of State to the British Ambassador (Halifax), December 10, 1945, Doc. 820.

order to pull the U.S. unwittingly into the center of a political quagmire, at which point Britain could withdraw, leaving the United States to struggle in its place.\textsuperscript{41}

At the turn of the year, Bevin issued a statement that the governments would seek non-partisan membership in the committee to provide an objective analysis, but that did not allay anger in the region. Tel Aviv erupted in violence. Moshe Shertok declared that the majority of the Jewish Agency opposed the mere establishment of the committee.\textsuperscript{42} On the Arab side of the fence, King Farouk concluded that the “very real admiration and respect which all Arabs held for America is evaporating rapidly and may soon disappear altogether along with our many mutual interests and cooperation.”\textsuperscript{43} The Iraqi government similarly stated that it, “opposes further Jewish immigration into Palestine (2) opposes formation of Joint Anglo-American Investigation Committee (3) opposes formation in Palestine of Jewish state no matter how small and (4) suggests that if position of European Jew is so difficult they be taken into U.S. or some part of British Empire.”\textsuperscript{44} Thus Jews and Arabs alike condemned the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry before it was even developed. And while the Arab League attempted to market itself as some sort of voice of reason, it was resolute in resisting Zionist expansion regardless of the Committee’s recommendations.\textsuperscript{45} The demands of both the Zionists and Arabs were so entrenched at this point that it appeared nearly impossible to find common. Nevertheless, Anglo-

\textsuperscript{41} Hahn, \textit{Caught in the Middle East}, 34.


\textsuperscript{43} FRUS, \textit{The Chargé in Egypt (Lyon) to the Secretary of State}, November 19, 1945, Doc. 803.

\textsuperscript{44} FRUS, \textit{The Chargé in Iraq (Moose) to the Secretary of State}, November 27, 1945, Doc. 812.

\textsuperscript{45} FRUS, \textit{The Chargé of Egypt (Lyon) to the Secretary of State}, November, 27, 1945, Doc. 813.
American officials, undeterred by Arab and Zionist prejudices, went forward with the investigation.

There was plenty of doubt over the “impartiality” of such a committee, but skepticism gave way to outright fear when the U.S. Congress passed a resolution promising to support the continued immigration of Jews up to Palestine’s maximum capacity and the further realization of the Jewish National home. The Senate’s attempt to disambiguate their claims by reiterating that the U.S. sought a Palestine where all its citizens would enjoy equal rights fell on deaf ears. Arab hate mail flowed into the State Department, decrying the Senate’s resolution. While Syria condemned the resolution, the Iraqi government declared that “Iraqi officials now consider United States as irrevocably in Zionist camp” and questioned how constructive the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry could possibly be in light of such a clearly pro-Zionist declaration. King Saud, in line with his diplomatic use of the benefit of the doubt, professed his disappointment in the Senate’s resolution and that he was convinced that U.S. Senators had been manipulated by Zionist propaganda. The British seemed to aggravate the matter further by provisionally resuming immigration into Palestine at the rate of 1,500 per month pending the Committee’s recommendations. As these new developments were taking shape, Arab states stood their ground, asserting that Zionism was no answer to the Jewish problem and demanding the establishment of an Arab Palestinian state.

46 FRUS, Memorandum Prepared in the State Department, December 17, 1945.
47 FRUS, The Chargé in Syria (Porter) to the Secretary of State, December 21, 1945, Doc. 825; The Chargé in Iraq to the Secretary of State, December 21, 1945, Doc. 826, December 28, 1945, Doc. 827; The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, December 31, 1945, Doc. 829.
48 Foreign Relations of the United States 1946 (hereafter called FRUS), The Near East and Africa, Vol. VII, Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Truman, April 19, 1946, Doc. 449.
The Findings of the AACOI

The findings of the committee were announced on April 25, 1946. They stated that while many Jews intended to remain in Europe, 100,000 permits should be provided for nonrepatriable victims of the Holocaust with permission to enter Palestine as far as its economic capacities allowed. This recommendation was tempered by the committee’s rejection of any Jewish “right” to Palestine. It also renounced the violence in Palestine, and it demanded that the two sides abandon their respective nationalist paradigms. Furthermore, it recommended the abolition of restrictions on land sales on the grounds that they were racially discriminatory. Finally, it stated that the Mandate should focus its energies on dealing with income inequality between Jews and Arabs and work to reform education. The recommendations of the report reflected an attempt to placate both sides of the conflict, conceding some things to the Zionists, such as Truman’s proposal to allow 100,000 displaced Jews into Palestine, and others, such as the above mentioned limitations on Zionist expansion, to the Arabs. Its recommendations were roundly rejected by Arabs and Jews alike, (which suggested that it might have been very reasonable). While Arabs condemned the AACOI recommendation that 100,000 permits be issued to displaced Jews for entry into Palestine, the Jewish Agency was “bitterly opposed” to its denial of basic Zionist political aims (achieving statehood).49

At any rate, the recommendations were completely unproductive. Arab foreign ministers expressed their familiar discontent in Washington. The Arab Higher Committee, a Palestinian representative body consisting of squabbling local elites,50 not only rejected the

49 FRUS, The Consul General at Jerusalem to the Secretary of State, May 2, 1946, Doc. 454.
recommendations of the report, but now asserted that outside powers had no right in their affairs and that Jews and Arabs should be left to settle the matter themselves. King Saud repeated his claim that the Zionists were scheming to conquer the entire Arab world, and merely planned to use Palestine as a stepping stone. He pointed to the aggressiveness of the Hagenah, Irgun, and Stern gang, along with the Zionists’ disregard for law and policy, to demonstrate that the Jews would go to any lengths to achieve this goal.\(^{51}\)

Yet the protests fell on deaf ears. And while Jewish terror in Palestine caused Attlee to reconsider allowing immigration to resume in Palestine, Truman pushed back, insisting upon the humanitarian urgency of continued immigration. Attlee was acutely aware of the repercussions of resuming immigration, but on June 26, he buckled under pressure, from both Truman and the Jewish insurgency, and ordered the issue of 100,000 new permits to Jewish displaced persons headed for Palestine. Truman took the lead in deflecting the anticipated backlash, writing to King Saud, imploring him to understand the humanitarian cause for permitting immigration.\(^{52}\) But resuming immigration at the behest of the American President would likely do more than anger the Arabs. Capitulating to American pressure on the matter also meant permitting potential Jewish terrorists into Palestine.

Indeed, it appeared that the British government was starting to crack under the pressure of the insurgency. Extremists and moderates in the Zionist camp were continuing to push for Jewish statehood, and the British counterinsurgency operations were only feeding into Jewish animosity. British authorities attempted to clamp down on this new wave of extremist violence, stepping up military action and even employing 13,000 troops in a city-wide pursuit of Zionist

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\(^{52}\) *FRUS, Press Release Issued by the White House*, July 2, 1946, Doc. 500.
terrorists in Tel Aviv, with no success in moderating the violence.\textsuperscript{53} From May 1945-May 1946, British troops suffered a total of 555 casualties from extremist attacks conducted by Irgun and the Stern Gang, killing 184.\textsuperscript{54}

Continued violence and condemnation of the proposed Trusteeship recommended by the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry left delegates to reconsider an option not recommended since the Peel Commission and shelved since 1938: partition. On July 19, the British ambassador to the U.S. stated that “Our thinking is now along the lines of provincial autonomy under which plan Palestine would be divided into two partially self-governing Arab and Jewish provinces with an overall Central Government. Jerusalem and the Negev (the desert in Southern Palestine) would remain under the direct jurisdiction of the mandatory.” In light of the complications that Britain was dealing with at the time in the Middle East and the Empire as a whole, their government no longer had any desire to maintain a trusteeship.\textsuperscript{55}

The Irgun added to that pressure. On July 22, 1946, Jewish terrorists disguised as Arabs bombed the King David Hotel, a makeshift headquarters for British military officials. And although the U.S. government thought that this event would provoke British hostility toward Zionist aims, it had the opposite effect. The British government was pushing harder than ever for a partition plan. They were still unwilling to capitulate to the demands of the radical Irgun, who desired all of Palestine. Such a settlement would no doubt satisfy almost all Jews in Palestine, but would also place excessive risk on Anglo-Arab relations. However, the possibility of swiftly closing a deal acceptable to the more moderate members of the Jewish Labour Party currently in

\textsuperscript{53} “Tel Aviv Combed for Terrorists”: 13,000 Troops in Search”, \textit{The Times}, July 31, 1946, accessed \texttt{December 15, 2016}.

\textsuperscript{54} Hahn, \textit{Caught in the Middle East}, 25.

\textsuperscript{55} FRUS, \textit{Ambassador to the United Kingdom (Harriman) to the Secretary of State}, July 19, 1946, Doc. 506.
control of the Jewish Agency could potentially relieve Britain of its Palestinian conundrum. And the British offer was a generous one. Their proposed plans even afforded the Jews almost the entire citrus industry and nearly all the coastline, along with Haifa port. It appeared that that the British resolve had collapsed under the weight of American political pressure and the Jewish insurgency.

The Morrison-Grady Plan

Regardless of recent events, however, on July 24, 1946, Henry F. Grady, U.S. ambassador to the U.K., and British Cabinet minister Herbert Morrison submitted to the Department of State what became known as the Morrison-Grady Plan. It recommended a trusteeship system divided into a Jewish and an Arab province, each with substantial autonomy, with additional provinces in Jerusalem and the Negev, which would remain under direct British control. This trusteeship would be united under a central representative government that would eventually gain complete autonomy within five years depending on performance. Immigration and land laws would be handled by provincial governments. The Morrison-Grady Plan also afforded for improved programs in education, healthcare, and infrastructure with a heavy emphasis on improving Arab conditions. The plan also proposed that significant numbers of Jewish displaced persons be permitted in countries other than Palestine, the United States taking 50,000 itself.

56 FRUS, The Consul at Jerusalem (Hooper) to the Secretary of State, July 22, 1946, Doc. 508; The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the United Kingdom, July 23, 1946, Doc. 512.

57 FRUS, The Ambassador in the United Kingdom to the Secretary of State, July 24, 1946, Doc. 513.
It appeared to be a good plan. President Truman drafted a proposal in line with the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry and submitted it to Congress on July 29, 1946, hoping that it would pass for the sake of the displaced Jews in Europe. But his proposals were rejected by Congress, which cited both extended domestic quotas for immigration set by the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 and financial obligations in the proposal as unacceptable conditions.\(^{58}\) Congress’s rejection of the Morrison-Grady Plan recommendations sheds light on its priorities. As mentioned before, both Republican and Democratic Congressmen vowed to support the suffering Jews in Europe. However, so did Truman, who had made clear his unwavering commitment to the displaced Jews of Europe public on multiple occasions. Congress’s rejection of the proposal demonstrated that, however important it may have been to help the suffering Jews in Europe, it was far more important for these politicians to stonewall a political opponent so that he looked like a failure. So, as much as the members of Congress were eager to talk about helping persecuted Jews, they were unwilling to put those words into action when partisan politics were involved. Rather than assisting Truman’s policy, Congress obstructed it.

Likewise, American Jewry denounced the plan because it was too moderate. Truman wrote to Attlee, “The opposition in this country to the [Morrison-Grady] plan has become so intense that it is now clear it would be impossible to rally in favor of it sufficient public opinion enable this Gov’t to give it effective support.”\(^{59}\) Yet he reiterated his resolve to aid the Jewish refugees stating, “In view of the critical situation in Palestine and of the desperate plight of homeless Jews in Europe I believe the search for a solution to this difficult problem should


\(^{59}\) FRUS, *The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the United Kingdom, August 12, 1946, Doc. 527.*
This position jeopardized Truman’s hopes for delivering the victims of the Holocaust to Palestine, as Prime Minister Attlee stated that he was not sure that Britain could shoulder that responsibility without moral and financial support from the United States.  

Even before the plan failed in Congress, leaks of the proposals spurred both Arab and Jewish groups into action. The Jewish Agency condemned the plan as “too moderate” and demanded immediate partition and the end of the Mandate within three years. In addition, they wanted full resumption of Jewish immigration starting with the submission of 100,000 permits to Palestine. Arabs, by contrast rejected any form of partition and expressed resentment for any support of such action by the United States.

**Negotiations**

Subsequent talks with Arab and Jewish circles in the London Conference were practically over before they began. While the U.S. and Britain expressed optimism that moderate members from both sides of the conflict were willing to talk, negotiations quickly deteriorated. To start, the Arab and Jewish delegations would not meet with each other directly, which caused Anglo-American diplomats to meet with the two groups separately. The Jewish Agency refused to meet in London unless the discussion centered around partition rather than the Morrison-Grady Plan. Conversely, Arab delegates viewed rejection of the Morrison-Grady program as a sign of capitulation to Zionist sympathies, and while they presented suggestions for modifications, they

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60 Ibid.
61 *FRUS, The British Prime Minister (Attlee) to President Truman*, August 9, 1946, Doc. 525.
62 *FRUS, The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Harriman)*, August 12, 1946, Doc. 527.
63 *FRUS, The Chargé in Egypt (Patterson) to the Secretary of State*, August 15, 1946, Doc. 530.
would not concede any grounds permitting the advancement of Zionist aims. Arab contributions were absolutely counterproductive, and amounted to what Peter Hahn called “obstructionism.”  

The hopelessness of the situation was becoming increasingly apparent to British officials.  

In the United States, the Morrison-Grady Plan could not gain traction because it allowed provincial autonomy and was an open-ended solution permitting either a bi-national state or full partition. It was rejected by members of both political parties and even Truman could not give it his support, stating that a solution that afforded for a Jewish state would gain more domestic support. Truman himself again stressed the urgency of relocating the displaced Jews to Palestine, at this point seeking any expedient solution that could achieve this end. Truman was so compelled to defend this position that, despite Prime Minister Attlee’s requests, he made a statement supporting Partition on October 4, 1946, most likely due to pressures from upcoming congressional elections.  

Due to the impasse, talks over the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry recommendations were suspended until December 16. The coming winter and the knowledge that the Jewish refugee crisis in Europe would not be solved by then profoundly influenced Truman’s thinking. He spent the coming months attempting in vain to convince Britain, as well as King Saud, of the urgency of his cause. While Attlee found it regrettable that Truman would take such a stalwart public position without acquainting himself with the true complexity of the

64 Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 35.
65 Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 36.
66 FRUS, President Truman to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (Attlee), October 3, 1946, Doc. 548; See also Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 35.
67 FRUS, The British Prime Minister (Attlee) to President Truman, October 4, 1946, Doc. 551.
matter, Saud restated his disappointment and his convictions that the Zionists were aggressors in Palestine with designs to ultimately conquer the entire Arab world.⁶⁸

By the end of 1946, talks with the Jewish Agency had broken down. The Agency unified under the demand for partition. By January 1947, hard line Zionists under Rabbi Silver ousted the more moderate Rabbi Wise and Chaim Weizmann, signaling a radical shift in Zionist demands, which now extended, in their most extreme forms, to include demands for territory to include the whole of Palestine along with Transjordan.⁶⁹ Arabs stuck to their guns, accusing Zionists of ambitious designs of conquest over the Arab world, maintaining adamant opposition to the establishment of a Jewish State, and stating that many of the “pitiful remnants” of Jews that Truman advocated for were, in fact, “bad people”.⁷⁰

Talks resumed January 28, 1947. Upon opening, the United States officially endorsed partition, or a possible compromise between that and the Morrison-Grady Plan. Arabs rejected both partition and the Morrison-Grady Plan, demanding a complete cessation of Jewish expansion, and asserted that the Jewish refugee crisis in Europe was a global problem and that the Arabs should not be forced to shoulder such a burden themselves. In the Zionist camp, nothing short of partition was acceptable. In fact, the Jewish Agency under Rabbi Silver stated that it would not even consider talks unless partition was the central subject. At this point, the British government was prepared to consider either partition or a unitary or bi-national state as

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⁶⁸ FRUS, President Truman to the British Prime Minister (Attlee), October 10, 1946, Doc. 553; President Truman to the King of Saudi Arabia, October 25, 1946, Doc. 557; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, September 5, 1946, Doc. 540.

⁶⁹ FRUS, The Consul General at Basil (Sholes) to the Secretary of State, December 30, 1946, Doc. 570.

⁷⁰ FRUS, Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State, December 13, 1946, Doc. 566.
proposed in the Morrison-Grady plan, with Bevin preferring the latter. But they were even more willing to turn the whole problem over to the United Nations.\textsuperscript{71}

Everyone knew the score, but no one was willing to negotiate. It appeared that the adjournment period had caused perspectives to ossify further, leaving no room for negotiation. The Arabs would never give in to partition, but the Jews would settle for nothing less. Neither Jews nor Arabs accepted the Morrison-Grady Plan. The exhausted British were desperate for a settlement but flabbergasted by the U.S.’s fixation on Palestine as a solution to the Jewish Displaced Persons problem. Talks went nowhere. The atmosphere darkened as Arabs and Jews alike lost hope that a peaceful solution was within reach.\textsuperscript{72} Arabs and Jews alike were suspicious that the British were favoring the other side.

Matters got worse as time went on. By February, Zionist demands had increased to unlimited immigration into not just proposed Jewish sections of Palestine, but its entirety. The Jewish Agency was reluctant to actually draft an official plan for partition. However, after pointing out expected frontiers on a British map in a meeting with an Anglo-American delegation, U.S. delegates were convinced that “even if both sides should accept partition in principle there exists no hope of reaching agreement re[garding] frontiers.”\textsuperscript{73} The Jewish Agency’s plan proposed that Jews would be given the vast majority of the coastline, arable land and industry in Palestine, while Arabs were to be sequestered to the barren hills in the East.


\textsuperscript{72} FRUS, The Chargé in the United Kingdom (Gallman) to the Secretary of State January 31, 1947, Doc. 718; Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 36.

\textsuperscript{73} FRUS The Chargé in the United Kingdom (Gallman) to the Secretary of State, February 13, 1947, Doc. 734.
Jamal Husseini of the Arab League stated that Arabs could not restrain themselves much longer.\textsuperscript{74}

\textbf{Britain Refers Palestine to the U.N.}

On February 21, the British government declared that talks had failed and that they would refer the problem to the United Nations. The British laid partial blame on “U.S. meddling.”\textsuperscript{75} In a statement to the House of Commons, Bevin stated on February 25 that Britain’s efforts to perform its duties as a mandatory power, along with its attempts to aid Jewish refugees seeking asylum in Palestine, had been hindered by U.S. agitation. He highlighted President Truman’s public endorsement of sending 100,000 refugees into Palestine as especially counterproductive. The fact that Bevin was chiefly responsible for bringing the United States into the crux of the matter in the first place did not seem to matter in the eyes of Parliament. The House of Commons responded to his statement with resounding applause.\textsuperscript{76} The White House issued a statement denying the British charge that “America’s interest in Palestine and the settlement of Jews there is motivated by partisan and local politics” and reassured its humanitarian motives, but it was unable to refute London’s charges with concrete evidence.\textsuperscript{77}

Such accusations and replies did little except to spread blame or alleviate responsibilities. Regardless of such feelings, the two countries conceded that the problem should be forwarded to the newly established United Nations. The United Nations had no intentions to lead any such

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} FRUS, \textit{Secretary of State to the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs}, February 21, 1947, Doc. 741.
\textsuperscript{76} FRUS, \textit{Memorandum by Dr. William McWilliams of the Executive Secretariat to the Secretary of State}, February 25, 1947, Doc. 743.
\textsuperscript{77} FRUS, \textit{Statement issued by the White House}, February 26, 1947, Doc. 744.
solution at this point, and offered only to contribute historical facts on the issue of Palestine in the matter. However, the United States was also reluctant to take a leadership role in the upcoming deliberations and hoped that a solution for Palestine could be fashioned from a consensus of several smaller nations.

While the U.S. and Britain hoped to use global consensus to force a resolution in Palestine, submitting the case to the United Nations also exposed it to Cold War pressures. While concerns about Soviet subversion in Palestine had been secondary before 1945, much had changed since the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences. Communist action in Poland, Greece, Turkey, and Czechoslovakia, along with George Kennan’s bleak assessment of Soviet aims in his Long Telegram, dashed any hopes that the Soviet and American governments would be able to cooperate in matters of maintaining world peace. The Truman Doctrine, issued on March 12, 1947, publicly solidified the U.S. commitment to halt Communist encroachment and ushered in the U.S. policy of containment. As the two nations accepted their newfound rivalry, the world became a chess board, upon which every square mattered. And, in the eyes of the United States, any actions taken by the Soviet Union regarding Palestine were meant to extend the Soviet sphere of influence into the Middle East. Thus, when Palestine became the business of the United Nations, humanitarian motives, public pressure, and oil stakes became secondary. Such things now only mattered as they related to the struggle of capitalist democracy against Communist autocracy. The Cold War now took the lead.

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78 FRUS, The British Embassy to the Department of State, March 18, 1947, Doc. 750.
79 FRUS, Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Truman, undated. April 17, 1947, Doc. 757.
Chapter 3

The U.N. Enters the Fray

Introduction

Referring the Palestinian question to the United Nations in 1946 directly exposed it to Soviet influence. By this time, the Cold War was beginning to take shape. Western Europe was still reeling from the devastation of World War II, and the economic crises that followed left it weakened in the face of possible Soviet advancement. Truman and other U.S. officials fretted that the Soviet Union would take the opportunity to undermine stability in the Middle East. Losing the Middle East to the Soviets abruptly eclipsed President Truman’s concerns for Jewish refugees and drove U.S. policy until Israeli Independence.

Reports began to flow in from U.S. diplomats in the Soviet Union, advising the U.S. government of the likely strategy of the Soviets. They concluded that the Soviet Union had thus far been watching and waiting, but it was moving toward an anti-Zionist policy, condemning any formation of a Jewish state as a tool of the West, and was further planning to argue that the Arab-Jewish divide was drummed up by British imperialists.1 The Soviet Ambassador Andrei Gromyko’s opening statements at the U.N., however, surprised them. He declared that,

An equitable solution can be reached only if sufficient consideration is given to the legitimate interests of both these peoples. All this leads the Soviet delegation to the conclusion that the legitimate interests of both the Jewish and Arab populations of Palestine can be duly safeguarded only through the establishment of an independent, dual, democratic, homogeneous Arab-Jewish State.

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Such a position, he added, could only be reversed to support partition if such a state was found to be impossible. Gromyko’s apparent opposition to partition, however, was tempered with statements of resounding optimism that gave even the U.S. delegate confidence that the U.N. could solve the Palestine problem once and for all. Gromyko’s speech was well structured, as it emitted glowing optimism while maintaining a healthy distance from any sort of commitments. This approach allowed the Soviet Union to present itself as an advocate for peace while waiting for a chance to gain leverage.

Despite Gromyko’s uplifting rhetoric, the State Department stayed frosty. Dean Rusk, the Director of the Office of Special Political Affairs, accurately assessed the Soviet Union’s conduct as a ploy to buy time to develop a cohesive strategy without burning bridges in the meantime. He believed that the Soviets were “‘playing both ends against the middle’ in such a way as to gain credit both with the Jews and with the Arabs.” He believed that the Soviet endorsement of full discussion was meant to legitimize itself in the eyes of the United Nations, and that endorsing Great Power participation in the upcoming committee was meant to give the Soviet Union a decisive hand in the outcome of the resolution. Furthermore, while the Soviets were reserving their suspected pro-Arab position for a better time, their criticism of the Mandate and advocacy for its immediate termination was meant to win the support of both Jews and Arabs. Rusk was convinced that Soviet political maneuvering, coupled with Britain’s withdrawal from the center of the matter, left the Soviet Union with excellent tactical standing.

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4 FRUS, *Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Special Political Affairs, (Rusk), to the Undersecretary of State (Acheson)*, May 27, 1947, Doc. 768.
The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP)

Before the United Nations could deliberate on Palestine, it had to establish a committee. Due to concerns that countries such as the United States and the Soviet Union might have too much of a stake in the crisis (and due to U.S. suspicions that the Soviet Union would use its influence to steer the committee in line with its own interests), delegates from the Big 5 were not considered for membership. The same went for Arab nations, due to their obvious partiality.

Hoping to structure an objective investigation, the General Assembly concluded that the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) would be manned by Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay, India, Iran and Yugoslavia. Although none of these countries were directly invested in the Palestinian conflict, the selection was as impartial as intended. Being a Muslim majority country, Iran tended toward pro-Arab sympathies. The delegate for India, Sir ‘Abdur Rahman, himself a Muslim, harbored a clear dislike for Zionists. The Latin American countries of Guatemala, Uruguay and Peru were well within the U.S. sphere of influence. Canada was a U.S. ally, and the Netherlands was situated in the American sphere of influence in Europe. Sweden alone was truly neutral.

Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were both behind the Iron Curtain. Despite attempts to imbue UNSCOP with an objective character, the possibility for political influence was very real from both sides. Peter Hahn noted not only the biased political leanings of the UNSCOP committee, but also their lack of cohesive knowledge of the Middle East and their overall lack of qualifications for the job. Hahn quotes Ralph Bunche of UNSCOP’s secretariat, who stated that
the UNSCOP committee was “just about the worst group I have ever had to work with. If they do a good job, it will be a real miracle.”

But while the United States feared Soviet subversion in the Palestinian matter, Arabs and Jews seemed more keen than ever to win the United States over to their side. During the spring of 1947, the Arab League had issued a statement that the members of the Arab League had pledged themselves to the independence and defense of Palestine, and criticized lackluster British attempts at curbing illegal immigration. Yet, while such a statement was rife with familiar criticisms, it notably omitted criticism of U.S. policy from its final draft. Similarly, the Jewish Agency continued to make appeals to the United States. In a memorandum dated May 28, the Jewish Agency expressed its hope for continued U.S. support, emphasizing that such advocacy was a crucial counterbalance to the apparently pro-Arab leaning of the Soviet Union. They condemned the violence of both Jewish terrorists and British retaliation, and gave urgency to the matter of increased Jewish immigration by attesting that detention camps in Europe were swiftly deteriorating.

Given the pressures exerted by both the Arab and Jewish communities, along with Soviet unpredictability, the United States government resolved to keep its positions to itself, whatever they happened to be at that point. After UNSCOP left for Palestine, Secretary of State George C. Marshall made it clear in a memorandum to staff to stay quiet on the matter, and that current U.S. policy was to conform to the will of the United Nations. The rationale was to allow the

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6 FRUS, Ambassador of Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, March 26, 1947, Doc. 752.

7 FRUS, Memorandum by the Jewish Agency for Palestine, May 28, 1947, Doc. 769.
UNSCOP a chance to conduct its investigation impartially without influence from the United States government.\(^8\)

UNSCOP’s investigation, lasting from June 16 to July 21 was tumultuous and eventful. Shortly after landing, the UNSCOP chairman was slammed by journalists clamoring to know UNSCOP’s position on the Arab Higher Committee’s accusation that it was biased, along with the decision to boycott the UNSCOP proceedings, to which the diplomat replied, “It would be easier and more correct, if they were right, to come and give their opinions.” The boycott was not the only way that the Arab Higher Committee registered its discontent. That very day, the AHC called a general strike of Arab workers, which included all Arab-controlled commerce and transportation. Such actions swiftly made a poor impression upon the UNSCOP committee, to the point where the Yugoslavian delegate even proposed to censure the Arab Higher committee for its attitude (although the proposal was defeated 9-1, along with Guatemala’s abstention). While rejecting a censure, the UNSCOP opted to make a radio statement, directed toward Arabs, denouncing the AHC’s antagonistic and counterproductive manner. If it was the AHC’s intentions to alienate itself, its actions, in the first twenty-four hours was as resounding success.\(^9\)

Later that week, UNSCOP interviewed Moshe Shertok of the Jewish Agency, whose demeanor and “agility” in response to the Committee members’ questions bore stark contrast to the AHC’s rash actions. Shertok opened the meeting with an hour and a quarter where he presented an overview of Palestine (In a public televised setting at the YMCA in Tel Aviv, the delegates grilled Moshe Shertok in a series of questions. The Indian delegate was particularly critical and interrogated Shertok intensely in regard to land sales and immigration. Shertok

\(^8\) FRUS, *The Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic and Consular Offices*, June 13, 1947, Doc. 775.

\(^9\) FRUS, *The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State*, June 23, 1947, Doc. 778.
argued that land restrictions were racially discriminatory, and pointed out that the British Mandate contained a specific clause permitting Jews to settle the land. In response to the Indian’s question asking if Shertok would like to see all the immigration laws in the world disappear, he replied that such a question was completely irrelevant. When the Iranian delegate politely asked if Shertok felt that, “in view of the examples of Arab-Jewish cooperation cited by M. Shertok” that was not a good indication that both peoples might collaborate, “if, as and when a Palestinian state were created”. Mr. Shertok explained to the Iranian that the Jews felt they would be left in the lurch if subjected to an Arab majority with hostile leaders.”

Shertok’s successful defense of the Jewish position was tempered by the recent capture of five Irgun terrorists accused of attempting to blow up a citrus house in Haifa. The men faced death sentences from the British government, and, according to pleas by the Jewish Agency, such actions could lead to increased Zionist hostility against the Mandate. UNSCOP found itself in the middle of the crisis, and in an attempt to allay “unfavorable repercussions,” UNSCOP drafted a resolution to the Secretary General at the United Nations to apply pressure to halt the executions of the captured terrorists.

The Secretary General swiftly rebuked UNSCOP for its apparent meddling in the situation. And while the AHC remained bitterly distant, Arab newspapers sulked over the matter, considering UNSCOP’s attempts to halt the execution of the captive Irgun terrorists as a sign that the Committee was firmly on the side of the Zionists. By contrast, Jewish populations in Tel

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
Aviv and the Yishuvs in Negev greeted UNSCOP with applause, singing, and blessings. Such positive receptions were in stark juxtaposition to the angry and sullen demeanor of the Arabs.\textsuperscript{12}

Later weeks exposed the more hostile elements of the Zionist camp. In place of Shertok’s cool and collected presence, the UNSCOP questioned David Ben-Gurion, a representative of the Jewish Agency’s more aggressive edge. Ben-Gurion boldly argued that Palestine was not a part of the British Empire, and, supported by J.A. treasurer Mr. Bernstein, accused the British government of irreversibly damaging Arab-Jewish relations.

. . . . The Palestine administration, barely tolerating Jewish development—instead of assisting it—seemed chiefly concerned with what was explained as the protection of the Arab population from the dangers threatening them from Jewish colonization. The Arab population nevertheless derived immense advantages, but what Arab goodwill towards the Jews could have been obtained as a result of economic benefits was largely lost because those benefits were represented as the gift of a ‘protecting’ Administration which, by the very attitude of the protector, denounced Jewish colonization as harmful and dangerous to the Arabs.\textsuperscript{13}

Ben-Gurion’s asserted that a Jewish population would surely be oppressed by an Arab state, although an Arab minority would not receive similar treatment in a reversed scenario. Finally, he justified the formation of a Jewish state on the grounds that Arabs had already established a homeland 125 times the size of Palestine, and that it was only fair that the Jews could have a small nation of their own.

Subsequent talks with Ben-Gurion were intense, and at times testy. Ben-Gurion often clashed with the Indian delegate (who was jeered by the Jewish audience), while continuing to argue for a Jewish State. He denied the Arab claim to Palestine grounded in 1,000 years of settlement while upholding the Jewish 3,500-year claim supported by the British government,

\textsuperscript{12} FRUS, \textit{The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State}, June 30, 1947, Doc. 780.

\textsuperscript{13} FRUS, \textit{The Consul General (Macatee) to the Secretary of State}, July 7, 1947, Doc. 781.
whose policies he frequently condemned. He denied any Jewish quarrel with the Arabs, yet asserted that force would be necessary to uphold a Jewish state. When Chaim Weizmann later spoke fondly of the British government (given his productive history working with British officials), Ben-Gurion pointed out that “Weizmann spoke only for himself,” and that his views were a departure from Zionist consensus. Indeed, Weizmann’s statements were becoming outdated. The Zionist movement had grown stronger, more militant, and more independent. Meanwhile Arab opposition grew more bitter. Through imposing land restrictions and immigration limitations, the Mandate had become an impediment to Jewish expansion. So, while the Mandate was at first essential to Jewish settlement in Palestine, the Zionist movement had outgrown it and was now attempting to take matters into its own hands.14

After several weeks, UNSCOP concluded its investigation and prepared to depart the Mandate amid growing tension. At this time, the executions of the five Irgun terrorists were confirmed. This spurred the kidnapping of two Jewish British. As tensions escalated, the British army combed the area, threatening martial law if the two sergeants were not found. To compound issues, a large passenger ship from Philadelphia, renamed the Exodus and carrying 4,500 illegal Jewish immigrants had been intercepted by the Royal Navy in Palestine. As the UNSCOP members were departing, the British were busy deporting the immigrants. One U.S. diplomat reported that

As UNSCOP prepared to leave, the British were transshipping the illegals. Terrorist elements were also getting into action, and the toll for Friday, July 18, was two dead and eighteen injured—all British military. The sirens were sounding with monotonous regularity in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Palestine, and prospects for the near future were somewhat grimmer than usual.15

14 Ibid.
15 FRUS, The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State, July 21, 1947, Doc. 784.
Perhaps such chaos was a fitting end for the investigation in Palestine, as it demonstrated both the uncompromising resolve of the Zionists, along with the ever-present specter of terror and savage brutality, undermining even the most rational and collected discussions.

UNSCOP approved an invitation by the Arab States to meet in Beirut, Lebanon to discuss the Arab position in lieu of the Arab Higher Committee (AHC). They were further pleased when they were informed that UNSCOP submitting evidence presented by them in their report. Yet, despite the AHC’s repeated refusal to participate in the UNSCOP investigation, Arab leaders were quick to criticize both the proceedings and perceived U.S. policy shortly after UNSCOP’s departure. Saudi Arabia condemned UNSCOP for conducting its investigation without consulting the AHC, and, although the Saudi king maintained his polite diplomatic character, he blamed the severity of Zionist aggression in Palestine on the U.S. government’s pressure against British countermeasures, although his discontent was tempered by UNSCOP’s acceptance of evidence submitted by representatives of surrounding Arab states during their brief stay in Beirut July 22. And although the United States resolved to remain silent until UNSCOP had presented its report to the U.N., in order to avoid influencing the committee, the Iraqi government demanded that the United States withdraw its support for renewed immigration into Palestine and endorse the establishment of an independent Arab state in Palestine. Thus, even though the U.S. and Britain had technically referred the Palestine question to the U.N., Arab states still held the two powers fully responsible for its outcome.

16 FRUS, Secretary of State to the Legation in Saudi Arabia, August 22, 1947, Doc. 790.

17 FRUS, The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Childs) to the Secretary of State, July 23, 1947; Secretary of State to the Legation in Saudi Arabia, August 12, 1947, Doc. 790.

18 FRUS, The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Iraq, July 24, 1947, Doc. 786.
The Majority Plan for Partition

With such matters coloring UNSCOP’s investigation, the committee submitted its draft on August 31. Delegates from Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, and Uruguay advocated for the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. The other three delegates fell closer in line with the Morrison-Grady Plan, with Iran, India and Yugoslavia advocating for a unitary federal state. Support for the respective plans signifies a clear divide along religious lines, as Iran, India and Yugoslavia all contained sizeable Muslim populations. Accordingly, reactions to the plan were also divided. The British, remembering the Royal Commission’s rejection of the Peel Commission’s proposal for partition in 1937, regarded UNSCOP’s conclusions as unworkable. The Jews, by contrast, were elated. Partition allowed for a Jewish state, making Zionism’s goal nearly tangible. And while Arab reactions were initially silent, Iraqi minister Jamali spoke for many when he called the plan “ridiculous” and asserted that if the U.N. were to vote in favor of the majority plan, the Arab states would renounce the U.N. altogether and take up arms against the Jews. Common ground had not been achieved. Yet the buck stopped at the United Nations, and UNSCOP’s investigation would undoubtedly go to a vote.

The months preceding the U.N. vote turned into a fierce competition of parties. The J.A. wasted little time in courting U.S. support for the majority plan. While the U.S. continued to avoid explicitly stating its position, the members of the J.A. gauged U.S. sentiment as heavily inclined toward the Zionist cause. Emanuel Neumann, Nahum Goldman, and David Horowitz of

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20 FRUS, *The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State*, September 2, 1947, Doc. 797.
21 FRUS, *The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State*, September 3, 1947, Doc. 798.
the J.A. met with the Hawkins, the U.S. chargé in the United Kingdom, pressing for United States support for the majority plan, expressing the belief that the U.N. vote rested heavily upon U.S. endorsement. Their confidence in the United States as their champion contrasted with their disdain for Britain. Such feelings had long-since crystallized in the minds of both radical and mainstream elements in the Zionist movement. Zionists also understood that neither the United States nor Britain were willing to implement such a plan by force. Therefore, Jewish Agency delegates requested access to weapons and munitions to defend themselves.22

Such pressure from the J.A., along with repeated Arab commitments to halt the creation of a Jewish state at all costs, left the United States in a precarious diplomatic position. Marshall was especially sensitive to Arab anger toward the U.S. He believed that such animosity would have repercussions beyond the certainty of open conflict in the Middle East. He believed that U.S. endorsement of the majority plan would draw the Arabs closer to aligning with the USSR. Eleanor Roosevelt (now a representative for the U.S. at the U.N.) added that, while the Arabs were unlikely to become permanent allies of the Soviet Union, and while they were apparently more intimidated by Moscow than Washington, they would be willing to ally themselves with the communists for the purpose of defeating a common enemy, i.e. the United States. Loy Henderson, the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, added that the UNSCOP plans were predicated upon expediency rather than principle, and seemed to agree with the British on the fact that the plan was unworkable. To him, the members of UNSCOP were not concerned with constructing an implementable plan, since their respective countries would not be expected to implement the plan, no matter what it was. Such a task would be left to the Great Powers, namely France, Great Britain, or the Soviet Union, none of which would be willing to do

22 FRUS, The Chargé in the United Kingdom (Hawkins) to the Secretary of State, September 11, 1947, Doc. 799. 74
so. The members all agreed that a Jewish state in the heart of a hostile Arab world would exist in perpetual jeopardy. Marshall conceded that the reluctance of other nations to contribute military force in Palestine could possibly lead to considerable unwanted military obligations on the part of the U.S.\textsuperscript{23} Accordingly, the United States State Department concluded that, despite the wishes of the White House, any decision made by the U.S. regarding Palestine would necessitate military involvement, bringing the United States deeper into the vortex than ever.

A later memorandum by Henderson on September 22 added that explicit U.S. support for the partition plan would shatter Middle Eastern perceptions of the justness of the United States and enhance the radicalization of Arab resistance. This would, in turn, jeopardize oil concessions held from “oiler” Muslims, which above all, he argued, were crucial to the post-war reconstruction of Europe. In addition, the United States and Britain could lose vital air bases currently held in the region. The loss of strategic bases would weaken the West’s military check against Soviet aggression, and the loss of oil reserves could potentially cause an energy shortage in western Europe, promote destabilization in the region and render it vulnerable to Communist overthrow. A staunch critic of the majority plan, Henderson repeatedly condemned its character, which he argued was based upon expediency rather than the principles of the UN charter. Contemptuous of UNSCOP’s submission of a plan that would doubtlessly demand implementation by force that no country on the committee would likely be expected to provide, he argued that combatting Arab and Jewish extremists would overwhelm budgets of the enforcing nations, with no perceivable end in hostilities. He argued that partition, as a concept, was fundamentally antithetical to the spirit of the U.N. because creating separate Arab and

\textsuperscript{23} FRUS, \textit{Excerpts from the Minutes of the Sixth Meeting of the United States Delegation to the Second Session of the General Assembly}, New York, September 15, 1947, Doc. 801.
Jewish states recognized theoretical racial alignments. Finally, the very idea of a partitioned state bound in economic union was only viable if the two nations were not hostile toward each other. These factors meant that the majority report would inevitably fail and the problem of Palestine would end up back on the doorstep of the U.N. within a few years. Considering geopolitical, economic and practical factors, Loy Henderson concluded that the U.S. should remain discrete until prudent to take more direct action. “It is realized that the tactics outlined above are not likely to appeal to those of us who prefer to approach all problems with energy and decisiveness. There are times, however, when energy and decisiveness are not appropriate.”

Henderson’s concerns were logical, in that open U.S. support for partition would most certainly anger Arabs. His argument that partition was unworkable was also sound. However, the actual loss of Middle Eastern oil and military bases overlooked key factors concerning nearby Arab states, which made such drastic measures unlikely. By this point, Britain was in the process of winning back Arab support and consolidating its own sphere of influence in Iraq. Transjordan was reliant upon Britain for monetary and material support for its government and military. Likewise, the chance that the United States would lose its advantages in Saudi Arabia was quite low. King Saud was dependent on U.S. oil production in his country. For all his saber-rattling, King Saud played an active role in suppressing anti-U.S. sentiment in his country by shutting down protests and even requiring blessing to the United States in Mosques.

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The Perilous Disposition of the Arab States

Despite United States fears that the Arab States would gravitate toward the Soviet Union, the Arab States were very much aware of their own precarious position. For them, partition of Palestine was unacceptable. In fact, the Arab governments couldn’t support a Jewish state of any kind. Arab public outrage was at an all-time high, and civil unrest was starting to breed formidable challenges to existing governments. Arab public pressure demanded a hardline posture. Thus far, Arab governments had complied with public demands. But while Arab states were not above threatening U.S. delegates with blackmail by threatening to side with the Soviet Union in the U.N. vote, in truth, they were fearful of burning bridges between themselves and the United States. Furthermore, they were reluctant to gravitate too close to the Soviet sphere of influence. So, they changed their tone, and presented a solution that they at least found reasonable. Drawing heavily from the minority plan, the Arabs proposed a unitary democratic state in Palestine with specific safeguards for freedom of worship. They included practical steps including declarations of independence, the election of legislative assemblies, and a timeline for terminating the Mandate. They understood that negotiating with the Zionists was impossible, but recommended presenting their proposals to Zionists anyway. The Arabs understood that the Jewish position was fixed; their only hope was to persuade the United States to change its position.27

The Advent of War in Palestine

27 FRUS, The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, October 7, 1947, Doc. 815.
Reports of Syrian military movements along the Palestinian border added tangible reality to the gravity of the matter. U.S. officials worried that such movements were made to support the rumored chance that the Mufti of Jerusalem would declare an Arab Palestine before a mutually agreed upon date. The Arabs themselves were confident in their abilities to drive out the Zionists, believing that the United States simply underestimated them, they cited the Arab Revolt of 1936 to show that, regardless of U.S. perceptions, Arab strength and zeal were forces to be reckoned with. Arab confidence in force, coupled with Jewish assertions that they could defend a Jewish State, provided they were supplied with sufficient arms, meant that the two sides were sure that, if push came to shove, they would be triumphant. This confidence in turn meant that the efforts to lobby support for their causes were purely to gain international approval. In even the worst case scenario the Arabs believed, they would surely be able to rely on Soviet support in the U.N. to scuttle partition.

**The Soviet Union Makes its Move**

That changed on October 13, when the USSR ended its silence, and, against prior signals, openly endorsed partition in the United Nations, thereby shocking the United States, flabbergasting Great Britain, and leaving the Arabs bereft of potential allies. The death of the potential Arab-Soviet alliance meant that the Arabs would be forced cast their votes without the hope of valued Soviet support. The United States, conversely, began considering an American-Soviet arrangement. Soviet support thrust the United States into open support for the majority

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28 FRUS, *Chargé in Syria (Memminger) to the Secretary of State*, October 11, 1947, Doc. 818.


plan. Remaining silent gave Moscow the opportunity to declare itself the Jewish state’s protector, upstaging Washington in front of the UN and threatening to oust it from Palestine.

The United States delegation resolved to publicly back the majority plan, while simultaneously reiterating that the U.S. was ultimately prepared to fall in line with any plan that the United Nations called for. On October 18, the U.S. delegation at the United Nations publicly endorsed the majority plan in the General Assembly. The U.S. delegation suggested Arab-friendly modifications to the border arrangements for the proposed partition plan to deflect the assured Arab outrage. But they didn’t want the final draft to be deemed “The American Plan”; the U.S. delegation was still committed to its statement that the U.S. was deferring to the will of the UN. They didn’t want to take full responsibility for a conundrum jointly shared by the members of the United Nations. It was an exercise in finesse, meant to guide the majority plan safely through the General Assembly vote, while applying enough damage control to minimize collateral damage.

The attempt failed on all fronts. While the British reiterated their commitment to staying out of the United Nations resolution as much as possible, U.S. officials bristled at frequent referrals of the modified majority report as the “American Plan.” Arabs angrily declared that they held the United States directly responsible for the consequences of the United Nations vote. Forsaking efforts to placate the Arabs, the combination of Jewish pressure and the chance for a Soviet endorsement for partition meant that a push for anything but the majority plan would be impossible. However, Robert McClintock of the U.S. delegation to the U.N. also believed that, if the majority plan failed to win the necessary two-thirds vote, the U.S. would be involved “in a most unpleasant mess.” This meant that there was no choice but to take a more active role in
promoting partition. Despite U.S. efforts to avoid ultimate responsibility, the rest of the world was ready to pin the consequences of UN decisions on Washington.\(^{31}\)

The Jewish position was a grateful one. In a meeting between representatives of the J.A. and the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, Shertok expressed the Agency’s gratitude for the U.S.’s support for partition. He also appreciated the American suggestion that a token constabulary force be stationed in Palestine in the early stages of partition, but he believed that this was unnecessary. Instead, he stated that the Jews were willing and able to defend themselves against aggression, provided that they had access to weapons and ammunition. The J.A.’s confidence in their position was evident at this point when Loy Henderson brought up a matter regarding would-be Jewish immigrants from Rumania and other Soviet-dominated countries. While Henderson pointed out that such an influx from Eastern Europe could exacerbate existing tensions over Jewish immigration to Palestine and hinder efforts to alleviate the displaced persons situation in Western Europe, Shertok simply replied, “that the Jews from the Black Sea area were also displaced persons fleeing from hunger, other hardships and from Soviet domination.”\(^{32}\)

The final days of October meant that the vote was closing in. The United States continued to deflect attacks hurled by Arab diplomats and asserted that the final vote would ultimately reflect world opinion. They also struggled with Great Britain, which the U.S. was at present attempting to secure permission from the U.N. to quit the Mandate early. Washington attempted to convince London to hold it at least until July 1948 to allow time for a U.N. resolution to gain

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) FRUS, Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson), October 22, 1947, Doc. 828.
traction. Indeed, there was plenty of anxiety over the chance that Britain would “scuttle and run” from the Mandate, leaving the ensuing mess in the hands of the General Assembly while washing itself of all responsibility.\textsuperscript{33}

King Saud, taking the lead for the Arabs, pressed the United States to reconsider its position. His tone was befitting special relationship with the United States, because while he declared familiar pledges of doom against the Zionist incursion, his tone was primarily that of one beseeching a close ally. He stated that,

At this critical moment, during which relations between the United States and the Arabs are clouded with doubt and suspicion, it is my duty as a close friend whose country is united to the people of the United States by several strong mutual political and economic ties to implore you before this last opportunity is missed to revise as quickly as is possible this dangerous situation which has resulted from the support your Government has lent to Zionism against the interests of the Arab peoples which may lead to the partition of Palestine into two states.\textsuperscript{34}

He argued that the United States’ support of the Zionists was in stark contrast to what the U.S. stood for, proven by every other action it had taken thus far.

Such a policy of the United States is in disagreement with its long-held reputation as a defender of friendly nations against fearfulness and aggression. This former policy of honor was seen in the support given Syria and Lebanon by the United States in expelling the tyrannous French; this same policy was followed in supporting Turkey and Greece against the aggression of their neighbors to the north.\textsuperscript{35}

The inevitability of a vote and the possibility of the Jewish State also forced the disputes among different factions of the Zionist movement to come to a head. The Irgun accused the “left-

\textsuperscript{33} FRUS, The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Iraq, October 22, 1947, Doc. 831; The Secretary of State to the Acting Secretary of State, October 23, 1947, Doc. 832; The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, October 25, 1947, Doc. 835; Memorandum Prepared in the United States Mission at the United Nations, October, 26, 1947, Doc. 1947, Doc. 836.

\textsuperscript{34} FRUS, King Azziz Abdul Ibn Saud to President Truman, October 26, 1947, Doc. 837.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
wing” elements of the Zionists of using manipulative tactics to control the Jewish Agency. A recent meeting between Jewish Agency representatives and Irgun supporters in Tel Aviv turned violent, with men brandishing cudgels while raising accusations against each other. Outside the assemblies, reports had come in that the Hagenah and the Irgun had begun to fight one another, engaging in small skirmishes that made observers believe they were witnessing the beginning of a “small civil war” between Zionist factions.\(^{36}\) Such violence only contributed to Britain’s adamancy to terminate the Mandate as soon as possible. Descent into chaos in Palestine was no longer a mere prediction. It was a reality unfolding in plain sight.

And it was a quagmire that no country wanted anything to do with. As Britain sought a chance to leave Palestine as soon as possible, there was the particular matter of who would volunteer to enforce partition in Palestine. By this point, it was clear that the majority plan would not be realized without the backing of force of arms. But the plan as drafted by UNSCOP apparently overlooked the fact that someone was actually going to have to stay in Palestine and make sure matters went according to plan. It was a massive undertaking, and no one wanted to pick up the tab. Britain’s resolute refusal to aid in the implementation of a U.N. resolution was joined by in its reluctance by just about every other nation in the General Assembly. The trouble for the United States, in this matter, was that it was understood that someone would eventually have to commit, and as both a chief proponent of partition and one of the two leading powers in the world, any solution would likely involve the use of United States forces.\(^{37}\)

\(^{36}\) FRUS, Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State, October 29, 1947, Doc. 841.

\(^{37}\) FRUS, Mr. Fraser Wilkins to the Chief of the Division of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Merriam), October 31, 1947, Doc. 845.
This problem dovetailed with the growing fear that the Soviet Union promoted partition, while planning to sabotage it and later capitalize on the ensuing chaos. The USSR fervently supported early British withdrawal from the Mandate, even as early as December 31, 1947. In contrast to American proposals arguing for a swift declaration of Independence by both states to retain British support in the uncertain opening days of the two states, the Soviets denounced the proposal on the grounds that, since the British had already failed as a mandatory authority in Palestine, giving them charge of any further tasks was unwarranted. According to the Soviet Representative, Britain should not be permitted to oversee implementation of partition even if it were to offer. The Soviets were also opponents of any sort of longstanding trusteeship. The idea that Britain would withdraw without first creating sound institutions seemed like a recipe for disaster that Moscow could possibly work to its advantage.

The United States was hostage to the Palestinian crisis. It was irrevocably committed to the majority plan at this point, and, although the U.S. attempted to make several concessions to “appease” the Arabs, such as handing over Western Galilee and the Negev, Arab fury was unquenchable. Even worse, the irreconcilable differences between the Arabs and the Jews, along with the willingness on both sides to use violence to achieve their aims, meant that any plan adopted by the U.N. would require the use of force, and more likely than not, military and financial commitments by the United States. The trouble was compounded by pressure from both Congress and the public against any policy other than endorsing the Zionists, and by Soviet intent and abilities to exploit the situation to further its own interests. Finally, Britain’s post-war

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38 FRUS, Memorandum by Mr. Gordon Knox to the United States Deputy Representative at the United Nations (Johnson), November 4, 1947, Doc. 852; The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, November 4, 1947, Doc. 853.

39 Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 40.
contraction of power and influence as a result of its weakened state demanded that it withdraw
from the troublesome Mandate as soon as possible, placing a timeline on a highly unstable matter
that shortened like a fuse to a bomb. Palestine had become the powder keg of the Middle East,
and at that moment, the United States had unwittingly taken hold of it without anyone to pass it
off to.
Chapter 4

Sacrificing a Lasting Peace to Stop the Soviets

Introduction

The development of the Cold War reshaped U.S. maneuvers at the United Nations. The growing significance of Middle Eastern oil in European reconstruction pressured the State Department to sway the White House from backing pro-Zionist policies. However, the USSR’s expressed support for partition motivated the United States to openly support Zionist goals for fear of sacrificing influence in Jewish Palestine to the Soviets. As the United States weighed the cost of sacrificing Arab relations against permitting a Soviet foothold in Palestine, it became more willing to accept a degree of hostility in Palestine.

On November 5, the U.S. pledge to respect the positions of foreign nations and conform to the will of the U.N. fell into question with the first reports of American lobbying for the majority plan. While the U.S. State Department, White House and U.N. delegation remained true to their word not to lobby, reports nevertheless reached the ears of Arab countries that they had. Edmund Dorsz, the Chargé in Iraq, relayed Azzam Pasha’s complaint that El Salvador, Chile and “a third South American government” had capitulated to U.S. pressure and threw in their support for partition. Commenting to one U.S. official, he said: “Arabs can appreciate internal political considerations which determine U.S. pro-Zionist policy, but can’t they at least leave the small states alone to form their own opinions?”¹ Pasha sullenly stated that such U.S. pressure was

destined to force Arab states into a war that they were keen to avoid. Evidence of U.S. lobbying, along with Arab awareness of Washington’s strong global influence, resigned them to the inevitability of bloodshed in Palestine. Secretary of State Marshall attempted to allay Arab perceptions by restating U.S. commitment to respecting the choices of other nations, and deflected blame by pointing out that the Jewish Agency was highly motivated to influence other countries. Any aggressive lobbying, he replied, was likely to come from them, not the U.S.

Despite Marshall’s claims, however, there is evidence that the U.S. did, in fact, press other countries to back their proposals. King Faisal of Iraq alleged that “Salvador, Chile and a third South American state had deserted Arabs under U.S. pressure.” Elizalde, the Ambassador to the Philippines, reported to the State Department that, “a ‘United States representative’ had intimated that failure to support the United States position on the Palestine question might have an adverse effect upon Philippine-American relations. [The Pilipino] President Roxas had also received a ‘high-pressure telegram’ signed by some ten United States Senators.” This evidence shows that while the State Department itself may not have engaged in lobbying, they could not stop others in Washington from pressuring smaller states into backing the majority plan.

The U.S. government became the reluctant champion of the majority report. To avoid Arab animosity, Washington avoided taking a strong position at the U.N. The U.S. quietly supported partition, but stressed its deference to the will of the United Nations. However, the Soviet Union’s endorsement of the partition plan led to concerns that Moscow sought to use the Jewish State in Palestine as a foothold in the Middle East. Such fears compelled the United

2 Ibid.
3 FRUS, Secretary of State to the Legation in Syria, November 10, 1947, Doc. 860.
4 FRUS, Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to President Truman, December 10, 1947, Doc 910; The Chargé in Iraq (Dorsz) to the Secretary of State, November 5, 1947, Doc. 855.
States to adopt a bolder posture. The question of force and implementation was still in the air. Along with most of the rest of the world, the United States was busy demilitarizing in the wake of the Second World War, and after a conflict of that magnitude, there was virtually no support for a new military venture overseas. But even partial military assistance from the British was completely out of the question. Likewise, any foreign troops stationed in Palestine would be regarded, at least by the Arabs, as hostile.\(^5\) The only other option was to send arms and ammunition into the Middle East to provide for mutual defense. The Jewish Agency had already made repeated appeals to the United States for material assistance to defend a Jewish State from likely aggression following its establishment. Such material aid could be justified as a way to ensure the safety of a Jewish state against its Arab neighbors, who were already receiving arms from Britain through established trade agreements. But there was trouble with this matter as well. If the United States started supplying arms to factions in the Middle East, it would have to give equal access to both sides to avoid accusations that it was supplying the Zionists to fight the Arabs. Such a move would undoubtedly undermine the U.S. assertion that it stood by partition because it was a U.N. sponsored resolution in the best interests of both Arabs and Jews. Therefore, supplying arms to the Zionists would reinforce the Arabs’ belief that the United States was taking sides in a racially and culturally based dispute. Furthermore, material aid was very much unsuited for the Palestinian question, due to internal frictions between Jewish factions in Palestine, along with a suspicion that extreme elements of the Zionist movement might take control and use those weapons in aggressive operations to expand Israel’s borders beyond the provisions of established partition boundaries, or even worse, use them against the British.

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U.S. could bring arms into Palestine, but it had little control over who would ultimately get their hands on them, and even less over how those weapons would be ultimately used. Given the various dangers of sending weapons into Palestine, not only did the United States not acquiesce to Jewish requests for arms and munitions, but also placed an arms embargo on all parties in Palestine.  

The Inexorable Soviet Specter

The lack of viable solutions to the enforcement problem of partition theoretically played into the hands of the Soviets. On November 14, Walter Bedell Smith, the Ambassador to the Soviet Union, relayed his suspicions of Soviet subversion in Palestine. According to Smith, the Soviet strategy in the United Nations was ultimately to “soften up” the Middle East for communist penetration. He pointed out that devastation in much of Europe and Asia, along with the continued fighting in China, left the two regions vulnerable to communist influence. The Middle East represented its last “hard” target, bolstered by U.S. support for Greece, Turkey and Iran. The crisis in Palestine served to circumvent these protected borders. By promoting a plan that would allow Britain to terminate the Mandate and withdraw without providing for a provisional force to replace it, the USSR could potentially destabilize the region, while injecting Communist agents from Eastern Europe posing as Jewish immigrants. The Soviet switch to support partition was also explained, arguing that the U.S. decision to support partition made it safe for the Soviets to endorse partition, since they assessed that they could salvage Arab support

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6 FRUS, Memorandum by the Director of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, November 10, 1947, Doc. 861; For reference to British arms deals with Middle Eastern countries, see FRUS, Ambassador to the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, December 17, 1947, Doc. 918.
by switching their position again, thereby leaving the United States to soak up the responsibility.\(^7\)

While Smith’s theory on Soviet penetration lacked concrete evidence, the possibility of Soviet subversion could not be overlooked. The post-war years witnessed the extension of Soviet expansion of its sphere of influence into Eastern Europe, most notably in Poland, East Germany, Greece and Czechoslovakia. In the east, the Soviets were believed to be actively promoting communist elements in Korea. Therefore, the idea of Soviet manipulation with regard to Palestine, while lacking concrete evidence, was creditable enough at the time to influence U.S. decisions in the closing days before the vote.\(^8\)

The Soviet threat also manifested itself beyond subversion. Washington understood that the United Nations considered the U.S. and the USSR as the two champions of partition, which meant that if force were recommended by the U.N. for enforcing partition, these two countries would be expected to provide troops. This meant that, if the U.N. decided at any point that troops were needed in Palestine, the USSR would have the opportunity to send troops there. This would prove “disastrous” for the United States for a few reasons. First, if the Soviet Union took the opportunity to send troops into Palestine, it could gain both a military and political foothold in the Middle East. Furthermore, the USSR could cast itself as the “champions of the U.N. and defenders of world peace.”\(^9\) U.S. officials knew that they could not match Soviet intervention with its own troops, due to a combination of domestic opposition to further military operations and a fear of causing “irreparable damage to the relations of the U.S. and the Arab countries.”\(^10\)

\(^7\) FRUS, *The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Smith) to the Secretary of State*, November 14, 1947, Doc. 871.

\(^8\) Ibid.


Their only remaining viable option was to oppose a plan of intervention altogether. National security matters and the policy of containment dictated the United States’ decision to block military intervention despite the apparent need for a provisional security force. By this time, the United States Government was willing to tolerate hostilities between the Jews and Arabs so long as it did not lead to Soviet infiltration. But it was crucial that Arab relations remained secure for the sake of European reconstruction, and that communist expansion was contained.

The British Ultimatum

The certainty of chaos and bloodshed rose as Britain, noting the deadlock between the U.S. and the USSR, announced, without giving a specific date, that it reserved the right to quit the Mandate as soon as it became apparent that a mutually acceptable decision could not be reached. This came even though U.S. pressure to obligate Britain to maintain the Mandate until such a solution could be drafted. It was very clear by this point that the British were intent upon leaving as soon as they could.

And neither London nor the British public seemed to care much at all. They were beleaguered by years of violence and unrest in Palestine, and frustrated by stifling U.S. pressure which they believed stemmed from Zionist influence. The Jewish violence in Palestine had snuffed out any reasonable sympathy that the British public could harbor toward the Jews, even after the Holocaust. In fact, anti-Semitic attitudes were so prevalent that Bevin stated that “anti-

11 Ibid.
13 FRUS, The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, November 19, 1947, Doc. 875.
Jewish feeling in England now was greater than it had been in a hundred years.” On November 28, 1947, Bevin handed Marshall British plans for evacuation from Palestine. The date for administrative withdrawal was set for May 15, 1948. Military extraction was to be complete no later than August 1, the same year.

**The UN Votes for Partition**

At 6:10pm, November 29, 1947, the vote was in. The General Assembly, by a vote of 33-13, endorsed partition as the United Nations’ recommended plan. The vote closely followed political affiliations. Those opposing were overwhelming Muslim-majority countries, including Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey and Yemen. Cuba, India and Greece also voted against the plan. As promised, the United Kingdom abstained. Most other abstaining nations fell within the U.S. sphere of influence, namely Argentina, Chile, China, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras and Mexico. Yugoslavia was an exceptional case, since it was not exclusively influenced by either the U.S. or the USSR. Such a vote demonstrated that despite committees, debates and investigations, General Assembly members voted chiefly along religious and political lines. It also demonstrated that United States influence was instrumental in making partition a reality.

Arab reactions were swift and violent. Riots erupted in Syria, attacking the United States embassy while the Syrian military stood by. Rioters tore down the flag at the French embassy as

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14 FRUS, *Secretary of State to the Acting Secretary of State*, November 25, 1947, Doc. 891.
15 FRUS, *The Secretary of State to the Acting Secretary of State*, November 28, 1947, Doc. 891.
16 FRUS, *The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State*, November 29, 1947, Doc. 896.
17 FRUS, *The United States Representative at the United Nations(Austin) to the Secretary of State*, November 29, 1947, Doc. 896.
well, reminding observers of simmering animosity toward their old colonial overlords. The British embassy, notably, was untouched. In Palestine the American Consulate was bombed. While Undersecretary of State Robert Lovett berated the Syrian Government for its idleness in the face of the hostility, he similarly warned Arab delegates against acts of popular violence against Jews in Iraq. In a thinly veiled threat, he stated, it “would be extremely unfortunate from the point of view of security of the Middle East, of the interests of the U.S., and of Iraq itself if the Iraqi government should fail to grant full protection to local Jewish communities in the case of outbursts of violence against them.”

By December, Arab anti-American violence grew so severe that U.S. nationals in the Middle East were ensconced in British facilities. But trouble with Arab riots was eclipsed by signs of mounting preparations for large-scale war in Palestine. On December 3, King Farouk of Egypt privately informed Ambassador Tuck that he had deployed two Egyptian units to the border to resist partition by force, also mentioning that King Saud had pledged to back them up. King Abdullah also declared that he had sent troops to strategic positions on the Palestinian border. Interestingly, he declared that he “regards himself entirely alone in efforts maintain peace in the Near East with British withdrawing,” demonstrating early rifts in Arab cooperation in preparation for invasion.

Jews renewed attempts to persuade the U.S. to lift the arms embargo, going so far as to suggest that, if persistently rebuffed by the United States, they would begin looking “elsewhere,”

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18 FRUS, The Chargé in Syria (Memminger) to the Secretary of State, November 30, 1947, Doc. 897.
19 FRUS, The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State, December 31, 1947, Doc. 927.
20 FRUS, The Acting Secretary of State to the Legation in Syria, November 30, 1947; The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Iraq, December 2, 1947, Doc. 900.
21 FRUS, The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State, December 10, 1947, Doc. 911.
22 FRUS, The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, December 3, 1947, Doc. 901.
23 FRUS, The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State, December 23, 1947, Doc. 922.
an apparent allusion to the Soviet Union. Shertok also applied pressure to the United States to convince Britain to open the port at Haifa and allow unfettered immigration into Palestine. The renewed pressures were not without warrant. Within Palestine, Arab violence against Jews was escalating, and, according to Macatee’s report to Marshall on December 31, “The signs of serious preparation on the part of the Arabs for resistance are many.” Current Arab hostility was sporadic and disorganized, but there were signs of growing hostility. An average of fifteen Arabs deserted the Palestinian Arab police force per day. Others began putting up blockades in the streets holding up even the police and military. Passing Jews were handled roughly, and “if Arabs lay a hand on a Jew, he is lucky to leave with his life.” While Arabs were lining up troops along the border, the Zionists in Palestine were stockpiling for men and munitions to prepare for the impending onslaught.

**Keeping the Conflict Local, For Now**

The one thing holding the Arab armies back was the continued presence of the British Mandate. While internal fighting between the Arabs and Jews erupted within Palestine as soon as the majority plan was affirmed, the surrounding Arab states abstained from the fighting for fear of confronting the British Mandatory Army. And while the Arabs had made it clear by this point that they would not back down from fighting U.S. troops (although this is also doubtful) they had a great deal to lose by engaging British forces. Iraq and Britain were still connected through strong economic ties, and Transjordan was so far within Britain’s sphere of influence that its own

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25 FRUS, *The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State*, December 31, 1947, Doc, 925.

26 FRUS, *Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State*, December 3, 1947, Doc. 901.
Arab Legion was staffed with British officers. And while King Saud owed his affluence to the United States, Britain made King Saud’s rise to power possible.\textsuperscript{27} The very fact that Britain remained neutral while it seemed that the United States and the Soviet Union had both abandoned the Arabs in favor of the Zionists had a noticeably positive effect on British standing in comparison to its peers, although Bevin later admitted that its neutral character had somewhat damaged its standing among Arabs in the region.\textsuperscript{28} King Farouk of Egypt had pledged that he would not invade Palestine while the British still occupied it, with King Saud giving his word that Saudi Arabia would back him up.\textsuperscript{29}

And continuance of the British Mandate seemed to be something that only the United States wanted. While the Arab states were lining up their troops along the Palestinian border waiting for the day the British pulled out, the Jews were practically willing to help them pack their bags themselves. The Jewish Agency continued to register complaints over British policing, stating that continued police presence constituted a second enemy in addition to the Arabs. They argued that although they could handle the Arabs themselves, they could not deal with the British and Arabs together. Recent demands illustrated the growing anti-British mindset of the Zionists in Palestine; “This frame of mind is typical of J.A. these days as their many difficulties increase. Having at first welcomed British handing over Tel Aviv area to Jewish police, now sees sinister design here also, commenting since British and Arabs remaining in Jaffa Jews will be compelled

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States 1947}, The Near East and Africa, Volume V, \textit{Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State}, December 3, 1947, Doc. 901.
to fight them both.”\textsuperscript{30} And while British and Soviet intentions were clear and unremitting, U.S. hopes that the U.K. would remain committed to the Mandate until a solution was found were swiftly dimming.

\textbf{The Implausibility of Partition}

The abysmal Arab reaction to Resolution 181 further damaged the State Department’s dwindling confidence in the peaceful implementation of partition. The American and British governments spoke grimly about the matter, citing the severity of the Arab outbursts against the partition plan, and they shared suspicions of Soviet designs to use the partition plan to undermine the stability of the region.

The Secretary of State explained that Arab reactions had been even worse than we had expected. We were getting in reports from all over the Middle East, which were disturbing …. The situation might blow up throughout the Middle East with serious reactions on the Americans as well as ourselves. He was himself convinced that the Soviet Union had supported partition in order to cause a general mix up, from which they would profit when the Jews and Arabs began to fight.\textsuperscript{31}

The United States had to consider the likely possibility that the majority plan would fail, and began drafting possible options for such an event, ranging from recommencing Anglo-American negotiations with Jews and Arabs, centering around trusteeship, to doing absolutely nothing and maintaining the arms embargo. The latter would abandon the Palestinian Zionists in the face of an almost certain Arab invasion. This last option, therefore, implies that the U.S. considered quietly abandoning the Jews, at least as one of several options. Although such an idea lacked


clear backing in government circles, its inclusion suggests that the U.S. was willing to consider any option that could potentially lead to an expedient solution to their problem.\textsuperscript{32}

The violence in Palestine was escalating to include larger scale attacks by Arab Palestinians. Arabs began attacking Jewish settlements “for demonstration, training and probing purposes;” U.S. diplomats reported: “Arms arriving increasing rate and young Arabs undergoing rigid training.” Meanwhile, Palestinian Arab leaders in Cairo started the groundwork for a unified Palestinian state.\textsuperscript{33} Arab nations, by contrast, were deploying their troops to the border of Palestine partly out of necessity. While most Arab governments, especially Transjordan, feared that supporting the U.S. and partition would lead to an overthrow of their governments by extremists, more stable heads of state, most notably King Saud, was keen on shoring up his authority in the Middle East while simultaneously maintaining his crucial relations with the United States, despite noted disapproval from some of his cabinets members.\textsuperscript{34}

The Jewish Palestinians themselves were growing more restive and less satisfied with even the established plans for partition, as right-wing extremist groups continued to expand their support base and threaten the more moderate Jewish Agency’s claim to power.\textsuperscript{35} And while the Jewish Agency continued requesting weapons and munitions from the United States, evidence began surfacing that Jewish factions had nevertheless been acquiring weapons. The Soviet Union was implicated as the supplier.\textsuperscript{36}


\textsuperscript{33} \textit{FRUS}, \textit{The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State}, January 16, 1948, Doc. 8.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{FRUS}, \textit{Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Kennan) to the Secretary of State}, January 20, 1948, Doc. 10.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
Both American and British diplomats agreed that the Soviet specter never loomed far from the embattled region, with the USSR strategically manipulating tenuous circumstances to destabilize it. The Soviet Union was already applying political pressure to the “Northern Tier” of the Middle East; Turkey, Greece and Iran. The latter was a direct move against British oil interests. Accordingly, Soviet incursion into the Middle East posed a direct threat to post-war reconstruction to Europe. World War II had brought the European economy to a virtual standstill. German industry was hardly running at all, and the severe winter of 1946-1947 exacerbated Europe’s coal shortage into an outright energy crisis. Economic instability left Western Europe vulnerable to Soviet infiltration. As a countermeasure, Secretary George C. Marshall engineered the European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan, to provide Europe with the resources necessary to stabilize the region economically. It proved to be a central tenet of containment, and it relied heavily upon Middle Eastern oil.

Largely due to the lack of adequate coal supplies, Marshall assessed that Western Europe needed ready access to substantial oil supplies. In addition to fueling Europe’s vehicles, oil could replace coal as a fuel source for its factories. Arab sources were essential; Far Eastern oil and sources from Venezuela were too far away to be expedient. The Director of the Policy Planning Staff, George Kennan, warned about

A serious threat to the success of the Marshall Plan. The present oil production of the Middle East fields is approximately 800,000 barrels a day. To meet Marshall Plan requirements, production must be raised to about 2,000,000 barrels a day, since no oil for Europe for this purpose could be provided from the U.S., from

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Venezuela, or from the Far East. Before the current disturbances, U.S. oil companies had made plans for the required development in the Middle East, with which it will be impossible to proceed if the present situation continues.\footnote{FRUS, \textit{Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Kennan) to the Secretary of State}, January 20, 1948, Doc. 10.}

Thus, European fuel needs, and therefore the tempo of European reconstruction, were at least partially dependent upon Middle Eastern oil. Interfering in the region could simultaneously weaken the Western bulwark in the Middle East and scuttle attempts to rebuild Western Europe, leaving it vulnerable to Soviet influence.\footnote{Ibid.} In accordance with the global policy of containment, Marshall saw successful reconstruction of Europe as crucial. Its dependence on Middle Eastern oil shaped Marshall’s pro-Arab position on Palestine and bolstered the State Department’s objection to the Zionist-friendly policies of the White House.

There was a clear realization that dividing Palestine into Jewish and Arab states just was not going to happen peacefully. The United States, while still committed to keeping troops off the ground in the Middle East, briefly considered supplying arms to guerrillas in the region to steer the conflict in the most favorable direction, until the idea was swatted down as antithetical to the principles of the U.N. charter.\footnote{FRUS, \textit{Memorandum by Mr. Dean Rusk to the Undersecretary of State (Lovett)}, January 26, 1948, Doc. 13.} And while there were vague allusions that the U.N. would “use its authority” to defuse a regional war, there was no clear idea of how that would be done. Besides, when ideas for U.N. peacekeeping forces were seriously considered, they almost invariably involved both U.S. and Soviet participation, neither of which the United States wanted.\footnote{\textit{Foreign Relations of the United States 1947, The Near East and Africa}, Volume V, \textit{Memorandum Prepared for the Secretary of State}, November 18, 1947, Doc. 872.} And while the Arab States, the Arab League, and the AHC (who apparently came around to negotiating with the United States, likely due to Saudi pressure) all pressed for their
ideas for a “federal state” in Palestine, this was unrealistic. The Jews in Palestine demonstrated their distaste for such a plan when they rejected the Morrison-Grady program back in 1946. Since then, the Zionist factions had radicalized to such a point that it was ludicrous to believe that they would willingly accept such a plan. A trusteeship plan could only be implemented if the Zionists to beaten into submission or driven out completely.

The British seemed unlikely to curb a large-scale slaughter of Palestinian Jews. The U.K. had managed to salvage its standing the Middle East and secured its influence and economic investments in Iraq and Transjordan, with no intention of surrendering it. Likewise, repeated U.S. appeals to end the British arms trade with Arab states were roundly rejected. Avoiding the entirely possible defeat of the Zionists meant that they would need to lift the embargo on arms sales, primarily to supply the Hagenah, despite British complaints that those same weapons would likely be used against them.

The Twilight of British Palestine

The hope for a solution faded further when the British announced that they would abandon the Mandate completely by May 15, 1948. This new development, along with Britain’s explicit intention to keep the date fixed, meant that provisional plans for a U.N. trusteeship were out of the question. Despite pleas from the United States to extend the Mandate,

45 Ibid.
46 FRUS, Memorandum of Conversation, by the Deputy Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Satterthwaite), January 29, 1948, Doc. 19.
47 FRUS, Memorandum by the Director of the Office of United Nations Affairs (Rusk) to the Undersecretary of State, February 3, 1948, Doc. 22.
Creech Jones, the British Undersecretary of State and part of the U.K. delegation at the U.N. General Assembly, stated that “…the United Kingdom cannot enter into any new or extended commitment in regard to Palestine. Our contribution has already been made over the years and the date of termination of our responsibility is irrevocably fixed.” 48 The beleaguered British government had resolved to terminate the Mandate, regardless of the situation on the ground at that time. Henderson called the partition plan “manifestly unworkable.” 49 Dean Rusk was sure that the plan would inevitably lead to Soviet penetration and loss of oil concessions. 50 The Joint Chiefs of Staff swatted down suggestions that the use of force was necessary to secure Palestine, arguing that such action would require an entire restructuring of military strategy in the Middle East. 51 Furthermore, the Arab States cast doubt on the United Nations’ ability to authorize force as a means to impose its resolutions, citing earlier crises in Korea and Greece, where the United Nations had rejected the use of force. While the crisis in Palestine was a separate situation, these previous matters set a precedent in the young United Nations that was still groping to assess its capabilities and limitations. In this respect, the U.N.’s pacific handling of crises in Greece, Turkey and Korea weakened its justification for forceful intervention. 52 This was beneficial to the United States, not only due to its disinclination to commit troops to Palestine, but also

48 FRUS, The Secretary of State to the United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin), March 5, 1948, Doc. 74.
49 FRUS, Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Director of the Office of United Nations Affairs (Rusk), February 6, 1948, Doc. 26.
50 FRUS, Draft Memorandum by the Director of the Office of United Nations Affairs (Rusk) to the Undersecretary of State, February 11, 1948, Doc. 36.
51 FRUS, Report by the Policy Planning Staff, February 24, 1948, Doc. 59.
because of the likely Soviet rejection of any plan for use of force that did not also include the use of Soviet troops.\footnote{FRUS, \textit{Report by the Central Intelligence Agency}, February 28, 1948, Doc. 69.}

The British did what they could to mitigate the violence and control movement across the border while they remained in charge, but they knew that they were only delaying the inevitable until their responsibilities were fulfilled. While both the Arabs and the Zionists were convinced that the British were supporting their enemies, third-party observers noted that the mandatory government acted impartially and prevented casualties on both sides. But although the British officially maintained a neutral posture, their sympathies, if any, were with the Arabs. After years of terrorism and murder by Jewish extremists, this was understandable. With respect to the Arab resistance and the impending onslaught, the general British belief was that “they asked for it.”\footnote{FRUS, \textit{The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State}, February 9, 1948, Doc. 31; Further reports of Arab movement over borders along with Arab regulars deployed along Palestinian border, see \textit{Secretary of State to the Legation in Syria}, February 10, 1948, Doc. 35.}

Stopping foreign Arab aggression into Palestine became a top priority, as officials discussed the conditions under which an Arab invasion of Palestine would constitute an act of aggression, which would necessitate U.N. action under article 106 of the charter. However, if the Arab states crossed into Palestine after May 15 after being invited by the Arab Higher Committee, or a similar locally recognized governing body, and remained within Arab Palestinian borders, the U.N. would have no justification to charge them with aggression.\footnote{FRUS, \textit{Memorandum of Conversation by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson)}, May 2, 1948, Doc. 204.} However, none of these talks generated a policy for definitive measures to prevent full-scale war in Palestine. Talks ignored the reluctance of U.N. members to provide military support. Likewise, the procedures for initiating the use of force were unclear.
While the United Nations debated the scope of its responsibilities, Arab and Jewish factions were preparing for a regional war. An influx of Arab irregulars was crossing into Palestine (especially from Syria and Iraq) and raids against Jewish settlements were commonplace. The Mufti remained the undisputed leader of their cause. Jews, for their part, were busy armoring buses and trucks, organizing convoys, and putting up defenses along Jewish settlements in towns. Such efforts reflected their edge in formal military training, which was further demonstrated by their sterling defense of settlements targeted by Arab fighters. Several settlements had been assaulted, yet by this point none had been overrun. The largest scale attack had been systematically crushed by Hagenah fighters using sound military tactics. A U.S. diplomat in Jerusalem summed it up:

The Arabs have launched attacks on several of these, that on the Kfar Etzion group near Hebron reportedly involving two to three thousand men. Yet none of the settlement defenses have been pierced. It should be said in this connection that only once have the Arabs apparently attempted to storm a kibbutz, which was in the Kfar Etzion affray. The report on that action indicates that the Jews allowed the Arabs to press the attack and then drove them into minefields with automatic fire, causing them heavy losses.\(^{56}\)

In fact, Jewish fighters were conducting their own defense so well that the Jewish Agency, as of course the Irgun, opposed any sort of U.N. peace-keeping forces in Palestine, and, seeing the British military as a hindrance in the first place, looked forward to the termination of the Mandate, so that they could continue their strategy of “aggressive defense” unimpeded by mandatory authorities.\(^{57}\)

\(^{56}\) FRUS, *The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State*, February 9, 1948, Doc. 31.

\(^{57}\) Ibid.
The Battle for Palestine in Washington

The changing circumstance on the ground pitted the White House staff and the State Department against each other in a new political bout. As the Mandate in Palestine drew closer to termination, the State Department drew up plans to reconsider the solution for Palestine. Convinced that the partition plan would most certainly fail, they drew up plans for a U.N. trusteeship in Palestine. The State Department’s support for trusteeship was primarily meant to salvage United States relations with the Arab states. They were concerned that since the Arabs already blamed the success of the partition proposal on the United States, any and all trouble following it would likewise be pinned on the United States. The potential loss of oil concessions and military bases drove State Department officials to draft the plan and pitch the idea to the president. Although Arab support for the plan was uncertain, State Department officials hoped that it would be more favorable to them than partition.

While the State Department was making a case for a change in U.S. policy, Clark Clifford, a leading White House staff member in support of the partition plan and the Zionist cause, argued for continued U.S. advocacy for the Jewish state. He reminded the president that support for recognition of a Jewish state was consistent with U.S. policy in Palestine since 1944, stating that, “In 1944 both the Democratic and the Republican National Conventions adopted resolutions favoring the establishment in Palestine of ‘a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth.’” He also cautioned against retreating from such a policy, saying that such a move would be detrimental to U.S. interests in several ways. He downplayed the need for strong alliances in the Middle East, favoring a focus on developing ties with Western Europe and the

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58 FRUS, The Department of State to President Truman, February 23, 1948, Doc. 49.
Americas, believing that a retreat from those efforts would undermine the confidence those governments had in the U.S.

Furthermore, he (quite accurately as it turned out) assured the president that State Department fears of a loss of military bases and oil concessions were unrealistic, due to the fact that those governments receiving royalties for concessions benefited more from it than U.S. companies did. 59

There are those who say that such a course of action will not get us oil, that the Arabs will not sell us oil if we back up the United Nations partition plan. The fact of the matter is that the Arab states must have oil royalties or go broke. For example, 90% of Saudi Arabia’s revenues come from American oil royalties. The Arab states have no customer for their oil other than the United States. 60

He specifically noted King ibn Saud’s repeated statements that he would not rescind oil concessions. Regardless of U.S. support for the General Assembly Resolution, Middle Eastern oil resources were safe. 61

Last, Clifford refuted the State Department’s claim that U.S. support for the Jewish State encouraged Arab states to forsake the West in favor of a Soviet alliance. Clifford believed this to be nonsense, stating that, as much as the Arab people were anti-Zionist, they were also very much Anti-Communist. The legitimacy of Arab rulers was already tenuous. Clark stated that, “it would be suicide for their ruling classes to come within the Soviet sphere of influence…”

According to Clifford, the U.S. could not back away from partition at this point. He pointed out the need for the United States to remain firm, despite criticism from Britain and the State Department. He left no stone unturned when refuting the concerns of his critics, calling them

59 FRUS, Memorandum of the President’s Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman, March 8, 1948, Doc. 79.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
mere phobias. The pro-Zionist White House Counselor had made a convincing argument, to say the least.  

It is likely the State Department anticipated Clifford’s appeal. Marshall sent his trusteeship draft to Truman, who replied that he agreed with it “in principle”. Taking that as a sort of green light, the State Department sent the information to Austin to make a public announcement to the U.N. in support of the new plan before the White House could stop it. The subsequent announcement infuriated the president, who clarified his position, which was that trusteeship was to act as a provisional solution until partition became a viable solution.  

Thus, the fight between the State Department and the White House produced a sort of synthesis. The United States would not back down from its support of partition. However, considering Britain’s imminent retreat from its recalcitrant Mandate, the U.S. would superficially back a draft for provisional U.N. trusteeship. While moderate Arab elements saw this decision as a ray of hope, calling it a sign that “the U.S. is returning to its principles”, it was roundly rejected by Zionist spheres. Weizmann wrote an emotional appeal to Truman regarding the change, writing that “The choice for our people, Mr. President, is between Statehood and extermination. History and providence have placed this issue in your hands, and I am confident that you will yet decide it in the spirit of the moral law.” In addition, he wrote “virtual Partition is now crystallizing in Palestine. Jews and Arabs are both mature for independence and are already obedient in a large degree to their own institutions, while the central British Administration is in virtual collapse.”  

62 Ibid.  
63 FRUS, Memorandum of Telephone Conversation by Mr. Robert M. McClintock, March 17, 1948, Doc. 97.  
64 FRUS, Dr. Chaim Weizmann to President Truman, April 9, 1948, Doc. 139.
He registered his disapproval of U.N. Trusteeship on compelling grounds. He stated that

It is the logic of partition and of the present situation in Palestine which compelled me to go on record against the idea of trusteeship. One fails to see how any of the admitted difficulties of Partition are avoided by Trusteeship. The problem of enforcement becomes even more acute, as neither the Arabs nor the Jews of Palestine have accepted Trusteeship which appears likely to deprive each of them of Statehood. It is proposed to institute a Trusteeship in a country threatened by foreign Arab aggression, torn by internal warfare, and already moving inexorably towards Partition under a valid international resolution. The proposal is made without any assurance that a trustee is available, that Arabs or Jews will cooperate, that the General Assembly will approve an agreement or that any effective measures can be improvised by May 15th.65

In his eyes, Palestine had already reached the point of no return and United States’ devotion to see partition through was crucial to the Jewish people.66 Like most of his Zionist colleagues, he was confident that the Jews could successfully defend themselves in a partition scenario. But they needed the blessing of the United States. To Jews in Palestine, a U.S. retreat from Resolution 181 was a matter of life-and-death.

In Palestine, conflict had reached the point of no return, as Stern Gang militants entered the Palestinian village of Deir Yasin, killing over one hundred villagers, half of them women and children.67 This atrocity, in conjunction with the Irgun’s aggressive operations in Jaffa, began to shed light on the shifting objectives of Jewish militias. The Zionists in Palestine were no doubt confident in their ability to defend themselves against Arab aggression, but the sheer momentum of the Hagenah, matched with the ruthless advancement of radical militias, increased Jewish awareness of their true military potential.

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 FRUS, “Editorial Note,” April 1, 1948, Doc. 132.
Attempts at Brokering a Truce in Palestine

The reality of violence on the ground ruled out any real hope of the State Department’s Trusteeship Plan. But suggesting it maneuvered the U.S. closer to a neutral position, which gave them an advantage in brokering a truce in Palestine before it turned into a regional conflict. The Jewish Agency responded positively to the possibility of a cease-fire, although they insisted that the Arab Higher Committee would also have to agree. The J.A. added that they themselves had made repeated efforts to reach a similar agreement with them to no avail, and had since then ceased further efforts. Even contacting the A.H.C. was difficult at this point, as most of its members had fled the country or gone underground.  

Likewise, the willingness of Arab governments to avert warfare rested on some sort of concessions by Arab Palestinian representatives. Any attempt to shrink from combat at this point would undermine the fledgling consensus many of these governments held within their own boundaries. In a meeting between the U.S. State Department and the U.K. Foreign Office, Bevin stated that “He and his colleagues think that an agreed truce by the Arabs and the Jews is most unlikely and that ‘in the absence of agreement between the parties, the proposal for trusteeship will require the use of substantial force.’”

Some Arab governments were interested in truce as well, but only to stall partition. On April 22, Prince Faisal, the U.N. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia spoke with Austin. He said that, while apprehensive over trusteeship, his government was open to endorsing a truce in Palestine

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68 FRUS, The Consul of Jerusalem (Wasson) to the Secretary of State, May 11, 1948, Doc. 244.
69 FRUS, The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, April 28, 1948, Doc. 193.
70 FRUS, Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, April 22, 1948, Doc. 173.
so long as the Zionists ceased their political ambitions.\textsuperscript{71} This, of course, was a non-starter, especially in light of the galvanized Jewish military following their operational progress in Palestine. Rather, the noticeable change in tone reflects a loss of confidence in the ability of Arab governments to impose its will upon the Zionists in Palestine.

Nevertheless, Arab governments had to ready themselves for May 15. Correspondence from Cairo drifted into the State Department reporting wartime planning in Cairo among the Arab States. However, efforts to draw plans for a coordinated invasion of Palestine met with increasing difficulty, as some Arab governments retracted their hawkish convictions in favor of more sheepish postures. The Egyptian government had concluded that it would not be able to provide military aid in the fight against the Jews due to the growing Wadfist threat at home. However, this argument seems dubious, as domestic turmoil was a product of public frustration over King Farouk’s moderate measures for Palestine up until this point. His following reason appears more creditable, as he argued that failure to defeat the Zionists in Palestine would demonstrate that Egypt was incapable of asserting itself without foreign assistance. Thus, Egypt decided not to invade Palestine alongside its confederates, opting instead to merely to supply funds to the war effort.\textsuperscript{72}

The very thing that King Farouk used to justify his absence in the fight was conversely forcing the hands of Hashemite Kings of Iraq and Transjordan to intervene. The two governments were both badgered by an angry populace demanding decisive action against the Zionists in Palestine. Despite British pressures to discourage invasion, both countries were not

\textsuperscript{71} FRUS, \textit{The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State}, April 22, 1948, Doc. 174.

\textsuperscript{72} FRUS, \textit{Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State}, April 28, 1948, Doc. 194.
only committed to the fight, but also expected to provide the bulk of Arab forces, alongside Syrian and Lebanese contingents.\(^{73}\)

In the scramble to salvage the deteriorating situation in Palestine, the question of recognition of the new states came into play. As the possibility of either truce or trusteeship faded with each passing day, it became apparent that the United States would need to make a decision. As Austin stated to Marshall on May 4,

> In anticipation of the situation which would be created as of May 15 if no temporary solution is agreed upon by the GA before that date, and if a Jewish and a Palestinian state are then proclaimed, we believe we must be prepared to take a position. The anticipated danger is that the Jewish and Palestinian states might be recognized by various governments.\(^{74}\)

It was rather clear who his reference to “various governments” was alluding to. Austin feared that the declaration of a Jewish State on the 15, followed by an Arab invasion of that State’s boundaries, would give the Soviet Union the justification it needed to forcibly insert itself into the Near East. “… Soviet recognition of a Jewish state may be contemplated. Such recognition might afford the Russians a basis for invoking article 51 of the charter and providing assistance to the Jewish state to fend off “aggression”.\(^{75}\)

### Recognizing Israel

On the eve of British withdrawal from Palestine, the United States was considering if or when it should recognize the Jewish state after its declaration. White House staffer Clark

\(^{73}\) FRUS, *Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State*, April 28, 1948, Doc. 194; Emir Farouk’s statement, *Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State*, April 26, 1948, Doc. 186.

\(^{74}\) FRUS, *The United States Representative to the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State*, May 4, 1948, Doc. 212.

\(^{75}\) Ibid.
Clifford argued that that the U.S. should be ready to recognize the Jewish State as soon as possible, that the establishment of the Jewish state was just days away, and that other states would begin to recognize it. Since it would only be a matter of time before the United States itself would be obligated to recognize it, there was little reason for delay. Of course, the looming possibility of swift Soviet recognition and involvement fostered a sense of urgency, where recognition of the Jewish state by the Soviets, in the absence of similar action by the United States, would potentially help cement Soviet standing as the Jewish State’s foremost champion. Last, Clifford argued that recognition was the path consistent with past policy in Palestine.

Marshall’s disapproval of Clifford’s case was palpable. At this point, he was still convinced that even the implementation of partition could potentially spell the end of Saudi-U.S. relations and provoke the animosity of the entire Middle East at the expense of global U.S. containment strategy. Prior efforts to halt the majority plan, including his attempts to call a special session at the U.N. to revisit partition, along with his trusteeship proposal had succeeded only in angering the president. He was, however, still convinced that continued backing for the Jews in Palestine threatened global security. Marshall continued to fight for a truce rather than immediate recognition. Marshall was so upset that Truman had even consulted the advisors, telling Truman that if he decided to recognize the Jewish state, he would vote against him in the 1948 election.


78 FRUS, Secretary of State to the United States Representative to the United Nations, May 12, 1948, Doc. 255.

79 Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 50.
The day before recognition, the situation on the ground seemed to point toward partition. With the exception of Irgun in Jaffa and the gratuitous violence displayed by the Stern Gang, the Jewish militias generally stayed within their prescribed borders. The Palestinian Arab position, however, seemed more tenuous than ever and regional discrepancies continued to undermine Arab unity in the last hours before the planned invasion. Saudi Arabia and Egypt were no longer competent allies in the fight. Interstate rivalries added to the troubles. As war loomed closer, the Arab states needed to decide who would rule the Arab-Palestinian state. Syria dreamed of a “Greater Syria”, Transjordan coveted Palestine, the Saudis wanted Transjordan. Lebanon was in perpetual fear of Syria, and the Hashemites and Saudis hated each other. Two blocs were already forming, one comprising of Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, and the other, the Hashemite kingdoms of Jordan and Iraq. Therefore, the ambitions of rival Arab states contributed to the growing dissonance of the Arab invasion force and undermined their solidarity.\textsuperscript{80} Pan-Arab nationalism galvanized the Arabs to arms against the Jewish State, but it could not preserve Arab unity against divisive national aspirations.

Clifford had made a last-minute case to Truman, securing a promise from the president that he would recognize the state as soon as it was established. Clifford then reported back to Eliahu Epstein of the Jewish Agency to encourage the Zionists to declare their state and immediately request recognition.\textsuperscript{81} On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion declared the State of Israel. Epstein sent a letter to the White House, stating “I have the honor to notify you that the state of Israel has been proclaimed as an independent republic within frontiers approved by the

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\textsuperscript{81} Hahn, \textit{Caught in the Middle East}, 50.
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General Assembly of the United Nations in its Resolution of November 29, 1947” and requesting recognition.82 Ironically, George C. Marshall received the honor of informing the heads of the new state that “The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de facto authority of the new State of Israel.”83

And while White House advisors considered Truman’s refusal to give de jure recognition as reasonable on the grounds that their borders were still in flux and vulnerable to communist infiltration, the decision nevertheless caused an uproar at the U.N.84 Dean Rusk described the scene at the United Nations upon hearing the news as “pandemonium” and stated that, for some, disillusionment was so intense that “one of our U.S. Mission staff men literally sat on the lap of the Cuban Delegate to keep him from going to the podium to withdraw Cuba from the United Nations.”85 Marshall even called Rusk informing him to keep the U.S. delegation from resigning en masse.86 Britain’s Earnest Bevin expressed his ostensible disappointment on behalf of the whole British government, stating that recognition of Israel “left us bewildered and frustrated.”87 Arab reactions were predictably negative, as the Arab armies invaded Palestine and the United States braced for a full-scale breakdown in Arab-American relations.88 The consequences of Truman’s fateful decisions had started to arrive. Domestic support for his upcoming election campaign, his policy of communist containment, and the U.S. relations with the Arab world and

82 FRUS, The Agent of the Provisional Government of Israel (Epstein) to President Truman, May 14, 1948, Doc. 266.
83 FRUS, Secretary of State to Eliahu Epstein, at Washington, May 14, 1948, Doc. 271.
84 Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 50.
86 Ibid.
87 Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 51.
88 FRUS, The Minister in Saudi Arabia to the Secretary of State, May 15, 1948, Doc. 276.
the economic and military advantages that came with it, were all at stake as the Arab and Israeli clashed over domination of Palestine.
Conclusion

Playing with Dynamite

Epilogue

The events of May 15, 1948 signaled the beginning of large-scale war between the new state of Israel and its Arab neighbors: Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Despite repeated Arab boasts of military superiority and the inevitability of Zionist defeat at the hands of a pan-Arab onslaught, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) successfully expelled native Arab Palestinians from the proposed territories of the Jewish state, secured Israeli borders, and repelled the advancing Arab armies. In addition to achieving these objectives, Israel seized additional territory that Resolution 181 allotted to the Arabs in retaliation for Arab aggression.¹

While Israel’s resounding success in the First Arab-Israeli war was based partly on the military strength of the IDF, political rivalries between Arab governments and the restiveness of Arab nationalists also played a deciding role in the war’s outcome. The breakdown of the Arab campaign in the 1948 war with Israel was characterized by a failure of Arab states to effectively engage the IDF in a coordinated manner. Tensions between states were caused by either domestic unrest or territorial ambitions.² For instance, Transjordan’s campaign did not focus on destroying Israel. Instead, it seized the West Bank, a territory that was already ascribed to the

Arabs under Resolution 181. The Arab Legion’s reluctance to engage Israeli forces or to cross into Jewish-allotted territory shows that Transjordan’s government pursued territorial ambitions over nationalist demands to destroy Israel. Its subsequent annexation of the West Bank into Transjordan (by then called Jordan) in 1950 exposed King Abdullah’s true intent, leading to his assassination at the hands of an Arab Palestinian in 1951, scuttling any chance for peace between Israel and Jordan.³

Egypt’s lackluster performance was a result of internal strife. By 1948, King Farouk was facing mounting criticism by an impatient public demanding the destruction of the Zionists in Palestine. King Farouk believed that he needed his military at home to resist public unrest. However, he knew that failure to assist in the campaign against the Jewish state would only galvanize his opponents. Therefore, he sent a contingent to seize the Gaza Strip, another territory allotted to Arab Palestine. However, the IDF soundly defeated further advances by the Egyptian army.⁴ The Egyptian people viewed their army’s campaign as a failure, and in 1952, King Farouk was overthrown by a military coup, which briefly held power until Colonel Gamal Nasser took power in a second military overthrow. His own stance as a stalwart Arab Nationalist signaled an anti-colonial nationalistic shift in the Egyptian government. While Nasser was not initially antagonistic toward the U.S., his neutralist stance diverged from King Farouk’s more cooperative nature, frustrating U.S. diplomats.⁵


⁵ Hahn, Caught in the Middle, East, 92, 141, 151.
In Northern Palestine, the advancing Syrian forces were staved off by the IDF. Despite attempts to barter a favorable peace with Israel, Syria begrudgingly accepted an armistice with Israel on July 20, 1949. Following the agreement, Syria experienced a succession of military coups. All Syrian governments demanded immediate repatriation of Palestinian refugees into Israel. The United States declined selling arms to Syria after learning that Syria planned to use them against Israel instead of the Soviets. In 1950, U.S. officials reported, “a considerable growth in anti-American sentiment.” Between the years of 1949 and 1952, U.S.-Syrian relations suffered considerably due to U.S. support for Israel.

Despite anti-American political unrest in Transjordan, Egypt and Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia remained relatively amicable toward the west. The Saudis were displeased by U.S. recognition of Israel, but relations quickly rebounded. King Ibn Saud stated that, “There was too great a community of interest between the United States and Saudi Arabia…” for sustained animosity between the two nations. In fact, King Saud permitted the expansion of oil production in his country by the end of 1949.

While Iraq was bitter over Israel after its defeat in the 1948 war, they were able to retaliate economically against Israel by closing the IPC pipeline that brought Iraqi oil to the Haifa refinery to the Western Mediterranean coast in Israel. Sustained opposition toward Israel in the wake of military defeat likely helped the Iraqi government retain its legitimacy in the eyes

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6 Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 62.
7 Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 141.
8 Ibid.
9 Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 142.
10 Hahn *Caught in the Middle East*, 138-142.
11 Hahn *Caught in the Middle East*, 138-142.
of the public. Lebanon’s hatred of Syria surpassed its anti-Americanism. Lebanon was also fearful of Syria’s predatory designs for a “Greater Syria.” The Lebanese needed U.S. protection, and were thus likely disinclined to take a definitive stand against the United States’ ally.\footnote{Benny Morris, \textit{1948}, 387, 380.}

\textbf{The High Cost of Victory}

Although U.S. actions in Palestine damaged its standing among Arabs in the Middle East, the repercussions feared by the State Department did not come to pass. The State Department’s anxiety over the loss of oil concessions in the Middle East proved to be mistaken. Despite anger over U.S. support of Israel, Saudi Arabia remained amiable toward the U.S. In fact, U.S. relations were most resilient in areas holding economic interests with U.S. firms. The State Department was correct to expect Arab backlash, but White House staffer Clark Clifford accurately predicted the loyalty of oil-exporting Arab nations.

Concerns over Soviet penetration in the Middle East were equally mistaken. Despite the State Department’s overriding fear of aggressive Soviet designs in the Middle East, there is currently no definitive proof that the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin sought to impose itself in the Middle East through Palestine. Communist parties in the Middle East remained weak, and Arab governments remained hostile toward them, regardless of their relations with the U.S. at any given time.\footnote{Hahn, \textit{Caught in the Middle East}, 51, 141, 255.} It is true that Arab governments occasionally struck deals with the Soviet Union. The Egyptian-Soviet arms deal of 1955 is one example. However, arrangements such as
these were made purely out of political expediency. They did not preclude an alliance between Arabs and the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{14}

The true cost of U.S. intervention on behalf of the Jews in Palestine was the irreparable damage it did to the U.S. image in the Arab world. Arab nationalists were already frustrated with their governments’ sheepish policies toward the Zionists in Palestine since 1945, especially after the United States entered the conflict on the side of the Jews. From 1945-1948, the Arab population became increasingly restive and pressure increased on their governments to take decisive action. The Arab coalition’s subsequent failure to crush Israel in 1948 bolstered challenges against existing Arab governments. From 1949 to 1953, the Arab world experienced a chain reaction of coup d’états and assassinations. Governments that replaced those overthrown espoused nationalist platforms that were typically more hostile toward both the United States and Israel than its predecessors. The posture of these governments reflects the increasingly anti-American mindset of the Arab people by 1953. The Arabs believed that the United States abandoned its principles and betrayed them by forming an alliance with the Zionist invaders. U.S. intervention in Palestine on behalf of the Jews did not sacrifice oil concessions or strategic advantages. Nor did it render the Middle East more vulnerable to Soviet influence. The U.S.-led reconstruction of Europe continued uninhibited by troubles in the Middle East, and the Arab world never became a Cold War battleground. Instead, Washington’s support for the Zionists and its role in the creation of Israel tarnished U.S.-Arab relations and destabilized the Middle East. Although some Arab leaders maintained hopeful for improving relations with the U.S., U.S.-Arab ties would never return to their rosy pre-1945 conditions.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Hahn, \textit{Caught in the Middle East}, 151.
\textsuperscript{15} Hahn, \textit{Caught in the Middle East}, 137, 143.
Assessing Truman’s Action: The Enduring Crisis

One could argue that Truman’s policy in Palestine from 1945-1948 was successful. After all, he successfully aided the Zionists in establishing a Jewish homeland. Stateless Jews in Europe now had a place to relocate. In addition, while his actions angered the Arabs and caused significant turmoil in the Middle East, U.S. oil concessions and strategic bases were preserved. He avoided military intervention in Palestine, saving the U.S. from a costly campaign in the Middle East that would surely have had devastating effects on U.S. ties in the region. This allowed the United States to provided much-needed oil to Europe to aid in post-war reconstruction, thwarting potential Soviet attempts to exploit weaknesses created by economic instability.

Yet the folly in Truman’s actions are found in their unintended consequences. It is true that no one in the Federal government from 1945-1948 expressed serious anxiety over enduring Arab animosity outside of Cold War concerns. Nor did U.S. officials express concern that Israel would expand its borders past those established in 1948. However, this is precisely what happened. Israel’s attack on Egypt in 1956 during the Suez Canal Crisis, its seizure of Arab land in the 1967 Six-day War, and its present settlement of the West Bank against the will of the Arabs demonstrates that the Arab-Israeli crisis is alive today.16 Repeated attempts by the U.S. and U.N. to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian crisis through negotiation have met with repeated failure. By 1970, Arab Palestinians had rejected the Mufti of Jerusalem and reorganized under the Palestinian Liberation Organization under Yasser Arafat, who in 1974 railed against not only

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the Zionists in Palestine but also American imperialism. Meanwhile, animosity on behalf of Palestine has radiated outside Arab borders, as governments such as Iran devote itself to Israel’s destruction. Truman’s efforts to solve the Jewish Refugee Crisis in Europe has ironically contributed to an Arab Palestinian refugee crisis in the Middle East. In the end, President Truman accomplished his intended objectives, but unintentionally laid the foundation for enduring political instability in the Middle East.

The United States entered the Palestinian crisis in 1945 for humanitarian reasons. By 1947, Washington felt compelled to remain engaged in the crisis for Cold War concerns, even after all attempts to garner a peaceful resolution between the Zionists and the Arabs had failed. Washington’s pro-Zionist policy in the Middle East was vital to the realization of the Jewish State of Israel. His policy did not sacrifice the Middle East to the Soviets or jeopardize oil stakes or military bases in the region. But it contributed to widespread instability in the Middle East, the vitriol of Arabs against the U.S., and the continued hostility between Israel and its neighbors in the Middle East. Today, the Middle East is a powder keg, and Israel is the spark that threatens to ignite it. As in 1945, diplomacy in the Middle East is “playing with dynamite.”


19 Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 147.

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