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Impartial Allies:

American Policy in Palestine During the Truman Administration

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**Impartial Allies:
American Policy in Palestine During the Truman Administration**

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Abstract

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American policy toward Palestine during the Truman administration was influenced by a number of factors, but none carried greater weight than the unfolding cold war. Because the Middle East carried so much strategic weight, American leaders were determined to ensure that the *entire* region remained allied with the United States. As a result, the Truman administration strove to maintain good relations with both Arabs and Israelis throughout the period. American policy did not, as many allege, favor Israel, but in fact pursued the middle-of-the-road.

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INTRODUCTION¹

On the heels of the Second World War and in the opening days of the Cold War, American policy makers recognized the Middle East as a region of vital import to the United States because of its strategic location along lines of communication and oil.² The region carried such importance that American policy makers worriedly noted that its loss to the Soviets “could truly be a national catastrophe” from which there might not be any recovery.³ It would seem that with so much at stake in the Middle East, American policy makers would have enacted policies designed to strengthen America’s, and her allies’, position vis-à-vis the Arab states in the predominantly Arab Middle East.

Such was not the case. Indeed, on May 14th, 1948, at 6:11 pm the administration of Harry Truman extended *de facto* recognition to the State of Israel, scarcely eleven minutes after its declaration in Palestine, making the U.S. the first nation to recognize the legitimacy of the newly born state. Key Arab allies responded viscerally to the seemingly unqualified support America gave the Israeli state—the creation of which the Arab states had previously sworn to prevent.⁴ The decision created giant rifts between

¹ The argument presented in this thesis was first formulated and presented in my paper entitled “Allies, Peace, and Stability: America’s Pursuit of the National Interest in the Middle East, 1946-1956”. I wrote this paper for Dr. Jeremi Suri and Peter Trubowitz’ class, “Strategy and Statecraft”, in the spring of 2013.

² United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946. The Near East and Africa*, Volume VII, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946): 632, 633, Hereafter the Foreign Relations Series shall be referred to as *FRUS*; *FRUS, 1947: The Near East and Africa*, Volume V: 1154; *FRUS, 1946. The Near East and Africa*, Volume VII: 632; *FRUS, 1948, Volume V: the Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Part 2*: 546; *FRUS, 1949: The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Vol VI*: 1009; Glennon, John P, editor, *FRUS, 1952-1954. The Near and Middle East (in two parts) Volume IX, Part 1*: 222.

³ *FRUS, 1952-1954. The Near and Middle East (in two parts) Volume IX, Part 1*: 1083.

⁴ *FRUS, 1947, The Near East and Africa*, Volume V: 1212, 1213; *1948, Volume V: the Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Part 2*: 548.

the US and its key Arab allies that threatened to destroy America's standing in the Middle East.⁵ Why did the Truman administration grant this (limited) support to the new Jewish state?

In answer to this important, if controversial, question, this paper will argue that American policy during the Truman administration was driven by a profound sense of pragmatism. American policy makers sought to keep the *entire* Middle East on the western side of the cold war with the Soviet Union by maximizing the stability in the region, achieving a settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute, and by maintaining alliances with *all* of the states in the Middle East (including Israel). Thus, American policy during the Truman Administration was more of an attempt to maintain relations with both the Arabs and the Jews than a promotion of Israel.

This policy did not emerge immediately. At the beginning of the Truman administration, American officials were divided as to what policy should be followed with regard to Palestine, with most of the State, War and Navy departments advocating a policy that would have decidedly favored the Arab states. Others in the Truman administration, including Truman himself, sought to follow a more middle-of-the-road policy that gave a modicum of diplomatic and economic support to the Jews. By 1949, however, most American statesmen had come to agree with the President's policies.

Of course, many scholars argue that American policy toward Palestine was shaped primarily by domestic political concerns. According to this thesis, the power of

⁵ *FRUS, 1948, Volume V: the Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Part 2: 996, 1015, 1019, 1020, 1030, 1060, 1061, 1146, 1147, 1156, 1157, 1182, 1184, 1187.

five million American Jews, together with the enthusiastic backing of many Evangelical pro-Zionist groups, wielded the influence necessary to press the American government to wholeheartedly support the Jews in Palestine. This is a powerful argument, and it bears a great deal of weight, especially in America's relationship with the Middle East today.⁶

This fails, however, to explain American actions in Palestine during the period in question for several reasons. Notably, President Harry S. Truman emphatically denied that his decisions regarding Palestine (or the Middle East in general) were dictated by domestic political demands and pressures.⁷ Truman's top aides and advisors, among them Dean Acheson and Clark Clifford, corroborated these claims.⁸ Of course, a great deal of congressional pressure came to bear upon the President and other policy makers during this period, as the many congressional petitions attest, but congressional exuberance was generally toned down and carefully constrained. American policy makers, however, did not successfully constrain congressmen in their public statements and speeches.⁹ These statements annoyed and frustrated American diplomats— but they did not shape American foreign policy.¹⁰ Finally, as shall be demonstrated, if domestic politics had been the only concern for the Truman administration, then scholars could

⁶ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. For Mearsheimer's explanation of how the United States responds to every other case other than Israel, see John. J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (W.W. Norton & Co.: New York, 2001).

⁷ See Harry S. Truman, *Memoir*, New York: Signet Book, 1965: 158, 159, 161, 182, 184, 191.

⁸ See Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969: 169, 176; Clark Clifford and Richard Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir*, New York: Random House, 1991.

⁹ *FRUS, 1950. The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Volume V: 895; *FRUS, 1952-1954. The Near and Middle East (in two parts)*, Volume IX, Parts 1&2. John P. Glennon, ed.: 1138; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, July 6, 1950, found in *FRUS, 1950, V, 947*.

¹⁰ As will be demonstrated, the Arabs thought differently.

expect to find a greater uniformity in favoring Israel. American policy, however, did not uniformly support Israel, but instead attempted to find a delicate balance between supporting Israel (as a vital strategic ally) and maintaining good relations with Arab allies.

To prove this argument, this paper will utilize the documents from the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series printed by the Department of State. These documents give a clear picture of much of the reasoning that informed and shaped American policy in the Middle East. These documents, written by and for many of the chief creators and implementers of American foreign policy, are often surprisingly candid. Most of the documents bore the classification of “Confidential”, “Secret”, or “Top Secret” and often gave the precise reasoning behind key decisions. Thus, so far as determining the reasoning behind American foreign policy is concerned, no other collection of documents rivals those of the State Department for utility.¹¹

¹¹ I have made use of the following collections of documents from the Cambridge Archive Editions: *Palestine and Transjordan Administrative Reports: 1918-1948*, vols. 14, 15, 16, (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1995); *Political Diaries of the Arab World: Palestine & Jordan*, volumes 8, 9, 10, ed. Robert L. Jarman, (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 2001), hereafter to be referred to as *PDAW*; *The Zionist Movement and the Foundation of Israel, 1839-1972*, vols. 7-10, ed. Beitullah Destani, (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 2004) hereafter to be referred to as *ZMFI*; *Israel: Boundary Disputes With Arab Neighbours, 1946-1964*, vols. 1, 2, eds. Patricia Troy and Angela Seay, (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1995); *Records of Jerusalem: 1917-1971*, Volumes 4, 5, ed. Jane Priestland, (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 2002), hereafter to be referred to as *ROJ*. These volumes were particularly useful in getting insight into the Palestinian side of the issues at stake. Most Palestinian records were destroyed in the wars of 1948 and 1967, and those that survived were seized by the Israelis and the Jordanians and have since been kept under lock and key. As a result, historians have few sources that they can utilize to determine the Palestinian side of history. British documents are some of the few that are available that give insight into the Palestinian political situation. Some historians, most notably Rashid Khalidi, have utilized Palestinian newspapers since many of those are available in Israeli archives.

BACKGROUND

The Zionist movement enjoyed exceptional support in the US after World War Two. Some protestant groups, many of whom believed that the Bible foretold the return of the Jews to their homeland, lent their support to the Zionists.¹² Furthermore, the horrors of the Holocaust motivated many more Americans to support Zionism.¹³ These two factors combined to lend Zionism a great deal of power in American politics. As Avi Shlaim pointed out, “The moral case for a home for the Jewish people in Palestine was widely accepted from the beginning; after the Holocaust it became unassailable.”¹⁴ Zionism, then, enjoyed greater support in the United States after the Second World War than ever before.

American Zionists had sought to secure American backing for the Zionist program during the war, but they found their efforts stymied by President Franklin Roosevelt. For instance, in January 1944, the American Zionist Emergency Council succeeded in introducing a resolution to both houses of Congress that called on the British to abandon the infamous White Paper of 1939. For a time it appeared that the

¹² For some discussion on this topic, see: David A. Rausch and Carl Hermann Voss, “American Christians and Israel, 1948-1988,” *American Jewish Archives*, vol. 40, no. 1 (1988): pp. 41-81; Caitlin Carenen, “The American Christian Palestine Committee, the Holocaust, and Mainstream Protestant Zionism, 1938–1948,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Fall 2010): pp. 273-296; William L. Burton, “Protestant America and the Rebirth of Israel,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Oct., 1964): pp. 203-214; Kenneth Ray Bain, *The March to Zion: United States Policy and the Founding of Israel*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1979): 34.

¹³ Michelle Mart, “Constructing a Universal Ideal: Anti-Semitism, American Jews, and the Founding of Israel,” *Modern Judaism*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Oxford University Press: May 2000): 189; William L. Burton, “Protestant America and the Rebirth of Israel,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Oct., 1964): 203; Carenen, “The American Christian Palestine Committee,” 274, 277; Zvi Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel, 1945-1948*, (Holmes & Meier Publishers, New York: 1979): 31.

¹⁴ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, (W.W. Norton and Company: New York, 2001): 23.

resolution would pass, and several of the Arab states lodged complaints with the State Department as a result. Concerned about undermining and embarrassing America's key ally in the conflict, and worried about the effect the resolution would have on Middle Eastern allies, Roosevelt ordered General Marshall to convince Congress to drop the resolution.¹⁵ Marshall succeeded in getting the resolutions dropped by convincing Congress that the resolutions were a "security-military" threat during a time of war.¹⁶ Roosevelt also kept the Zionists satisfied by extending his own promises to support the Zionist project. For instance, in a letter to Senator Robert F. Wagner, President Roosevelt stated that he personally wanted to see the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.¹⁷

Roosevelt also made promises, however, to the Arab leaders regarding Palestine. For example, in a meeting with King Ibn Saud on board the *USS Quincy* after the Yalta Conference in February 1944, Roosevelt promised that the United States would do nothing regarding Palestine without consulting the Arabs.¹⁸ In a letter to the King sent in April 1944, Roosevelt told the King:

Your Majesty will recall that on previous occasions I communicated to you the attitude of the American Government toward Palestine and made clear our desire that no decision be taken with respect to the basic situation in that country without full consultation with both Arabs and Jews. Your Majesty will also doubtless recall that during our

¹⁵ Evan M. Wilson, *Decision on Palestine*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979): 40-42.

¹⁶ Michael J. Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 48; Evan M. Wilson, "The American Interest in the Palestine Question and the Establishment of Israel," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 401, America and the Middle East (May, 1972): pp. 64-73.

¹⁷ Wilson, *Decision on Palestine*, 45.

¹⁸ Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 16.

*recent conversation I assured you that I would take no action, in my capacity as Chief of the Executive Branch of this Government, which might prove hostile to the Arab people.*¹⁹

By giving this promise, President Roosevelt managed to keep King Ibn Saud content. Unfortunately, Roosevelt thereby committed himself and his administration to two contradictory policies regarding Palestine, since helping to establish a Jewish state would certainly “prove hostile to the Arab people” living in Palestine. Roosevelt then once again reassured the American Zionists in a meeting with Rabbi Wise, telling him that he stood by what he had stated in Senator Wagner’s letter.²⁰ Roosevelt managed the juggling act of keeping both implacable sides happy because of his unique talents and prestige. As Evan Wilson put it, “The fact is that Roosevelt, with his political acumen and his uncanny ability to maneuver, was able to follow a course of action which did not fully commit him to either side in the dispute. His immense prestige made it possible for him to maintain this position to the end.”²¹ When Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, Harry S. Truman had the misfortune of having to step into Roosevelt’s shoes to continue the juggling act.

¹⁹ FRUS, 1945, VIII, 698.

²⁰ Wilson, *Decision on Palestine*, 52.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

THE 100,000

Secretary of State Edward Stettinius warned Truman days after assuming the presidency that he would soon come under intense pressure to help the Zionists. Stettinius advised Truman to take extreme caution in how he proceeded.²² As Stettinius had predicted, public pressure on the President broke forth like a tidal wave at the end of the war. For example, President Truman received two petitions from forty-one governors and 362 congressmen on July 2, 1945 that called on the President to support the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.²³ This sort of intense pressure would dog the President for the next three years.

Truman, of course, felt a great humanitarian need to help the Jews, so Truman agreed with Congress and the Zionists to a large extent. At least he agreed that civilization owed something to the Jews and that solving the Jewish Question demanded immediate action.²⁴ In his own words, he felt “that world peace would, in the long, run, be best served by a solution that would accord justice to the needs and wants of the Jewish people who had so long been persecuted.”²⁵ With this in mind Truman, while at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, asked the British Prime Minister to rescind the White Paper and to allow Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) in Europe to immigrate to Palestine.²⁶ In his post-Potsdam press conference, however, Truman served notice that

²² President Roosevelt to the president of the Syrian Republic (Kwatly), April 12, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 704, 705.

²³ *ZMFI*, VII, 881-883.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, VII, 881; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 32.

²⁵ Truman, *Memoirs*, 161.

²⁶ Memorandum by President Truman to the British Prime Minister (Churchill), July 24, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 716.

he did not agree with the entire Zionist program of establishing a *Jewish* state in Palestine by stating that “the matter will have to be worked out diplomatically with the British and the Arabs, so that if a state can be set up they may be able to set it up on a peaceful basis. I have no desire to send 500,000 American soldiers there to make peace in Palestine.”²⁷ For Truman, the important thing was to take care of the humanitarian crisis with Jewish refugees and displaced persons in Europe, not to help establish a Jewish state in Palestine. His real goal was to preserve peace and engender stability in both Europe and the Middle East as part of his broader strategy for containing the Soviets. The State Department had strengthened Truman’s resolve by telling the President, while at Potsdam, that something needed to be done urgently lest “extreme leftist activities” succeed in utilizing the “poverty and destitution of Europe” to establish communist regimes there.²⁸ Solving the Jewish humanitarian crisis in Europe was therefore seen as an urgent strategic necessity in the unfolding Cold War.

The British, however, did not cooperate with Truman’s requests. Attlee demurred at Potsdam, saying that he did not know enough about the situation. Truman reiterated his request after the conference in a letter to Attlee.²⁹ Attlee again demurred.³⁰ In order to put greater pressure on the British and to relieve some of the mounting political

²⁷ Truman, *Memoirs*, 136; quoted in Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 32; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 51.

²⁸ FRUS, The Berlin Conference, I, 279; quoted in Bain, *The March to Zion*, 74.

²⁹ President Truman to the British Prime Minister (Attlee), August 31, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 738.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 740; Quoted in Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israeli*, 39.

pressure in the United States, Truman then publicly stated that he supported allowing 100,000 Jewish refugees to immigrate to Palestine.³¹

This public statement, more than any previous action taken by Truman in relation to Palestine, set off a storm of protest. The British were incensed by the President's action. After World War Two, the British had their biggest military force in the world outside of India in the Canal Zone in Egypt, increasing the strategic importance of this region for the British.³² Furthermore, the Egyptians were at the time trying to renegotiate their treaties with the British, putting Britain's future in Egypt into question. Should their forces be ejected from Egypt, the British hoped to be able to use Palestine instead.³³ Doing as Truman had requested, the British were convinced, would undoubtedly have lead to a second Arab revolt there, thereby threatening Britain's strategic position in the Middle East.³⁴ The British also felt certain that the Arabs outside of Palestine would respond angrily to any move to transfer Jews to Palestine.³⁵ The British felt that they could allow 1,500 Jews into Palestine per month since that was the level dictated in the White Paper, but they felt that they could do no more. Rather than shipping them to Palestine, the British thought that the best way to deal with the Jewish DPs was to reintegrate them into European and American society.³⁶

³¹ "Truman Asked to aide Jewish Immigration," *New York Times*, September 30 1945, p. 39; quoted in Radosh and Radosh, *Safe Have*, 102.

³² Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 9.

³³ Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers*, 40, 41.

³⁴ Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 389.

³⁵ The British Prime Minister (Attlee) to President Truman, September 16, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 740.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 391.

The leaders of the Arab states, as the British had feared, reacted harshly to Truman's announcement as well. The Iraqi Foreign Minister, Hamdi al Pachachi, told the State Department, "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."³⁷ King Ibn Saud complained that the United States had broken its promise, as extended by President Roosevelt, to consult the Arabs before changing policy in regards to Palestine.³⁸ Prince Faisal, one of King Ibn Saud's sons and his chief diplomat, warned 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." Official complaints were likewise lodged by Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Transjordan, echoing King Ibn Saud's disappointment at this betrayal.³⁹ The Arab states all insisted that the Palestine issue was nothing less than a "question of life and death".⁴⁰

These complaints and threats dismayed the State and War Departments since the President's actions appeared to be threatening America's key strategic interests in the

³⁷ The Charge' in Iraq (Moreland) to the Secretary of State, September 28, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 749.

³⁸ The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, September 29, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 750.

³⁹ The Charge' in Iraq (Moreland) to the Secretary of State, September 28, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 749; The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, September 29, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 750; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson), October 3, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 757.

⁴⁰ The Syrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs to the American Legation in Syria (Damascus), October 9, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 765, 766.

Middle East. One State Department official aptly described the vital importance of the Middle East to the United and her allies thus:

Should the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East fall under Soviet domination, a process of deterioration would thereby be initiated which, if not successfully resisted, would constitute a disastrous blow to the preservation of world peace under the United Nations and, as far as the United States is concerned, would result in our being forced back to the Atlantic, with consequent loss of ability effectively to bring to bear not only our political and economic strength, but also military force in the maintenance of the security of the area, and of the United States and of all states friendly disposed to us. In the specific case of the United States, this would mean a retreat to the Western Hemisphere and facing the prospect of a war of attrition which would spell the end of the American way of life.⁴¹

America's interests focused on Saudi Arabia in particular, where American companies had recently acquired huge, potentially profitable, and certainly strategic oil concessions. Furthermore, the United States was then constructing a large airbase at Dhahran in Saudi Arabia for the purpose of strengthening its lines of communication throughout the Middle East.⁴² The United States, Dean Acheson explained to the President, could not afford to lose either the oil concessions, which would be used to help

⁴¹ Memorandum by the Chief of the Division of South Asian Affairs (Hare), November 5, 1947, FRUS, 1947, V, 577. My italics.

⁴² Report by the Ad Hoc committee of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, February 19, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 852-854; The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, May 13, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 894; Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to President Truman, June 26, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 916, 917; The American Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Saudi Arabian Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs (Yassin), August 5, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 946, 948; The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Winant), November 19, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 968; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Chief of the Division of Financial Affairs (McGuire), November 30, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 973; The Acting Secretary of State to the Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy), December 13, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 976, The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, December 18, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 977; 1947, V, 209-255.

fuel the European reconstruction, or access to the bases.⁴³ The War Department related the importance of American interests in Saudi Arabia to Palestine and the refugee crisis in Europe by stating that while taking care of Jewish DPs in Europe was important, helping Britain maintain peace in Palestine was more important.⁴⁴

One State Department diplomat, Loy Henderson, felt that America's best interest in the Middle East mirrored that of Britain's. For Henderson, as well as many others in the State Department, helping Britain would help the United States, and doing anything to undermine Britain's position would only hurt American interests.⁴⁵ Though the United States had historically frowned on Britain's imperialist tendencies, Henderson believed that the British Empire was a strong stabilizing force in an unstable world, and he sought to implement policies that would serve to prop it up.⁴⁶ As Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, he was in a good position to do just that.

In light of the importance of siding with the British and placating the Arabs with regard to Palestine, the State and War Departments felt that President Truman had done a major disservice to American interests in the Middle East and the world at large by publicizing his support of sending 100,000 Jewish DPs to Palestine. Dean Acheson wrote to the President and warned him that if Truman persisted in his course, the Arab

⁴³ Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to President Truman, June 26, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 916, 917.

⁴⁴ Memorandum by the War Department to the Department of State, September 19, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 742, 743; quoted in Michael Ottolenghi, "Harry Truman's Recognition of Israel," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 47, no. 4 (Dec., 2004): 969.

⁴⁵ Michael J. Cohen, *Fighting World War Three From the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945-1954*, (Frank Cass: London, 1997):32.

⁴⁶ Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 37, 38.

States would view that as breaking a promise that had been made only earlier that year.

He summarized the views of the rest of the State department by predicting that this

would constitute the severest kind of blow to American prestige not only in the Near East but elsewhere. Much of the work done in the Near East in recent years in building up respect for, and confidence in the United States would be undone. Beyond the loss of prestige is the very serious threat to vital American interests in the area which would result from a hostile Arab world. Moreover, the smaller nations of the world, who have looked to the United States for leadership and on whose support we counted so heavily at [the founding of the United Nations in] San Francisco, would be sadly disillusioned if we violated our word in this conspicuous instance.⁴⁷

Acheson believed that Truman had committed a grave error in the opinion of the diplomats of the State Department, but not an irreparable one. As the State Department made clear, they still hoped that the President would rectify his mistake and work to strengthen America's position in the Middle East by strengthening Britain's position there. The State Department wanted to unequivocally side with the Arabs against the Zionists of Palestine, ironically, for the same reason that Truman sought to allow Jewish DPs to enter Palestine in greater numbers—in order to strengthen America's position vis-à-vis Russia. Thus, President Truman found opposition to his desire to help solve the political and humanitarian crisis in Europe from not only the British and the Arabs, but also from the State and War Departments.

Disturbed by America's break with Britain over Palestine, the British Foreign Secretary, Ernst Bevin, decided to solve the troubles with the Americans once and for all.

⁴⁷ Dean Acheson to President Truman, October 2, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 755.

Bevin determined that in order to get the Americans to let up the pressure he needed to get the US involved in helping resolve the DP problem. To that end he invited the Americans to participate in a joint committee to study the problem. By committing the Americans to help find a solution, he would not only get them to cease their criticizing, but he would also hypothetically commit them to helping bear the burden of remedying the situation.⁴⁸ Truman accepted Bevin's invitation, and the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry was created.⁴⁹

When the Committee issued its report to the two governments in April 1946, however, the British were appalled to find that the Committee Report called for, among other things, the abrogation of the White Paper, a lift on the land-sale ban, and the immediate entry of 100,000 European Jewish DPs into Palestine.⁵⁰ Rather than relieving the pressure from the United States to abrogate the White Paper, the Report actually increased it while at once alienating and angering the Arab allies who the British had for so long tried to appease. President Truman, on the other hand, was "very happy" that the report honored his request for "the immediate admission of 100,000 Jews into Palestine".⁵¹ Ignoring Bevin's pleas for extra time, Truman promptly released the Report to the public with an enthusiastic (if partial) endorsement.⁵² Truman hoped that the

⁴⁸ Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 51; Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers*, 111.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁰ The Acting Secretary of State to Certain American Diplomatic and Consular Officers, April 25, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 585.

⁵¹ The Acting Secretary of State to the Secretary of State, April 30, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 589.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 588, 589.

humanitarian crisis in Europe, with the threat to stability that it represented, was one step closer to being solved.

Once again, Truman's action angered both the British and the Arabs, causing the State Department even more worry. By this time the Cold War was well under way, with the Soviet Union already making menacing moves. For instance, though the Soviets, Britain, and the United States had all promised to withdraw from Iran after the end of the Second World War, the Soviets refused to withdraw from northern Iran until later in May, 1946, and even then only because of intense pressure from the U.S. and Great Britain.⁵³ Within another few months Stalin provoked a crisis in Turkey that nearly led to war.⁵⁴ In March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff "warned that Soviet pressure against Turkey and Iran might well ignite the spark that would start World War Three."⁵⁵

The Joint Chiefs further warned that in the event of war with the Soviet Union, which appeared ever more likely, the United States would need to rely heavily on the Arab Middle East. If the U.S. alienated the Arabs, they would undoubtedly join the Soviet camp.⁵⁶ One way that the Joint Chiefs foresaw that happening would be if the United States dispatched troops to Palestine, which appeared a likely scenario if the United States forced Britain to allow 100,000 more Jews to enter Palestine.⁵⁷ In that event, the Joint Chiefs predicted that "The USSR might replace the United States and

⁵³ Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, 50.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁷ Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, June 21, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 632.

Britain in influence and power throughout the Middle East” and that “the Middle East could well fall into anarchy and become a breeding ground for world war”.⁵⁸ It was therefore imperative that the United States not pursue any policy that would hamper Britain’s ability to maintain control of Palestine without the help of American soldiers.⁵⁹ This was all the more important since American strategy for prosecuting a war against the Soviets depended so heavily upon the British bases in Egypt and the oil of the Persian Gulf.⁶⁰ Since the British held sway, either directly or indirectly, over vast swaths of the Middle East, “Any disintegration of British power would critically weaken the United States’ global disposition.”⁶¹ From this perspective, which was a perspective shared by the State Department, the United States had no choice but to side with the Arabs and the British against the Zionists in Palestine. To do otherwise would threaten America’s strategic position at a time when another global conflict appeared only too likely.

Thus, the American government’s policy was split between the wishes of the President and the wishes of the State, War, and Navy Departments. The President sought for the abrogation of the White Paper. The Departments sought to ignore the demands of the Zionists and to support the British in working to keep the Arabs happy. For the entire administration, however, the chief concern during this time was not the goings on in Palestine, but dealing with the tremendous challenges following the Second World War and preventing the start of a third. As the United States government adapted to the

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, 33.

⁶¹ Quoted in Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, 33.

beginning of the Cold War, the policies that the U.S. government pursued in Palestine were shaped primarily by the exigencies of the Cold War.

TO PARTITION

In an effort to placate the Arabs, Attlee announced soon after the publication of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry Report that Britain would not permit the 100,000 DPs mentioned in the Report to enter Palestine until the Jewish militias in Palestine had disbanded.⁶² This quid pro quo was necessary because Britain was facing an increasingly ferocious terror campaign at the hands of Jewish terrorists in Palestine—a campaign so effective and deadly that Britain had been forced to station 100,000 soldiers there.⁶³ The British nevertheless went along with the plan, at least nominally, agreeing to begin deliberations with another joint Anglo-American committee to decide exactly how to implement the Report.

The plan that resulted from this joint planning conference became known as the Morrison-Grady plan. The plan called for splitting Palestine into four autonomous provinces, but preserving a central government that would be run by an international trusteeship. Each province would have ample power to determine their own policies, but the central government would reserve for itself the power over trade, immigration, and defense.⁶⁴ Truman received the plan enthusiastically, and confided to Ambassador Henry

⁶² Radosh and Radosh, *Safe Haven*, 149.

⁶³ Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 467. For some discussion on the Jewish terror campaign, see Haim Levenberg, *Military Preparations of the Arab Community In Palestine*, (Frank Cass: London, 1993): 72-77, 83; Motti Golani, *Palestine between Politics and Terror, 1945-1947*, (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2013); Menachem Begin, *The Revolt: The Story of the Irgun*, (Tel-Aviv: Hadar Publishing Company, 1964); David Niv, *A short history of the Irgun Zvai Leumi*, trans. D. Shefer, (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1980); J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror out of Zion : Irgun Zvai Leumi, LEHI, and the Palestine underground, 1929-1949*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977); Saul Zadka, *Blood in Zion: How the Jewish Guerrillas Drove the British Out of Palestine*, (London: Brassey's, 1995); Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics, and Terror, 1940-1949*, (London: F. Cass, 1995).

⁶⁴ The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Harriman) to the Secretary of State, July 24, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 654-668.

Grady that he thought that the plan was “the best of all solutions proposed for Palestine.”⁶⁵ He hoped they had found a solution that would allow them to solve the problem presented by the Jewish DPs by sending some of them to Palestine while also helping to maintain peace and order in the Middle East. The campaign of terror and chaos that Jewish terrorists were then waging was certainly an important part of this calculation, since the terrorist groups were fighting to drive the British out of Palestine and to secure independence for themselves. When the Zionists got wind of the proposed plan, however, they launched a determined campaign to prevent it from being implemented. Thus, Truman differed markedly from the goals and desires of the Zionists, despite allegations that he was an avid Zionist supporter.

Attacks against the Morrison-Grady plan began right away. Congressmen quickly rallied against the plan, demanding that that the Jews be given a free independent state rather than a small autonomous province.⁶⁶ Rabbi Silver called the plan the creation of nothing more than an impoverished Jewish Ghetto.⁶⁷ Former members of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry denounced the plan, branding it a betrayal of the Jews.⁶⁸ As a result it quickly became apparent that implementing the plan would face stiff opposition from the United States Congress, despite Truman’s enthusiasm for the plan.

⁶⁵ Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers*, 128.

⁶⁶ Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948*, (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 1977): 319.

⁶⁷ Radosh and Radosh, *Safe Haven*, 174.

⁶⁸ Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis*, 319.

At this juncture one of President Truman's key aides, David K. Niles, played an essential role in convincing the President to change course.⁶⁹ Niles was the son of Russian Jewish immigrants, and had been inherited by President Truman from the Roosevelt administration. Niles, as a White House aide, coordinated meetings for the President, and as such functioned as a sort of gate keeper to the President. Niles convinced Truman to meet with Nahum Goldman, one of the "moderate" Zionist leaders, who had been dispatched by the World Zionist Organization to present a counter-proposal to the Morrison-Grady plan. Goldman proposed that rather than giving autonomous provinces to the Arabs and the Jews in Palestine, the United States should support partitioning Palestine into two parts. One part of Palestine would go to the Jews, while the other part would be added to King Abdullah's Transjordan.⁷⁰ Goldman also confided that he and the other moderates such as Rabbi Stephen Wise and Chaim Weizmann, were being threatened with replacement at the World Zionist Congress. The moderate Zionists, he said, needed something more from the United States and Britain, otherwise the extremists like Rabbi Silver and David Ben-Gurion would take power and seek to gain independence for the Jews through more terror campaigns.⁷¹ Goldman's argument was so convincing that even anti-Zionist American Jews and heretofore pro-Arab State Department officials like Dean Acheson were convinced of the wisdom of

⁶⁹ Joseph A. Pika, "Interest Groups and the White House under Roosevelt and Truman," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 102, no. 4 (Winter, 1987-1988): pp. 657-659; Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 80.

⁷⁰ Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 84.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

scrapping the Morrison-Grady plan and supporting another plan based on partitioning Palestine.⁷²

Truman, however, was reluctant to surrender the Morrison-Grady plan. Truman had no interest in creating a *Jewish* state since he knew that doing so would alienate the Arabs and would likely create even more problems than it solved.⁷³ Indeed, he worried that establishing a Jewish State in Palestine “would cause a third World War.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, the President grew frustrated with the Zionists because of the constant pressure that they applied regardless of the efforts he took to relieve the plight of the Jewish DPs in Europe. As opposition to the Morrison-Grady plan grew, Truman angrily wrote, “Jesus Christ couldn’t please them when he was here on earth so how could anyone expect that I would have any luck?”⁷⁵ Nevertheless, implementing the plan appeared increasingly futile. Not only did the Jews reject the plan, but Azzam Pasha, the General Secretary of the Arab League, informed the American legation in Cairo that the Arabs would oppose the new plan “by every means possible.”⁷⁶ Therefore, on August 12, 1946, Truman sent a telegram to Prime Minister Attlee to let him know that he could not accept the Morrison-Grady plan because of its widespread opposition.⁷⁷

⁷² Ibid., 91, 92.

⁷³ Wilson, *Decision on Palestine*, 49, 50; Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948*, (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 1977): 319; Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 82.

⁷⁴ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 53.

⁷⁵ Radosh and Radosh, *Safe Haven*, 177.

⁷⁶ The Charge in Egypt (Lyon) to the Secretary of State, August 2, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, p. 676.

⁷⁷ President Truman to the Prime Minister (Attlee), August 12, 1946, FRUS, 1946, VII, 682.

Meanwhile, momentum was building in Washington for a new policy endorsing partition. Rabbi Wise reiterated Goldman's request to the President and the State Department that the government make an announcement in favor of partition in early September, hoping that if the government did so it would give the moderate leaders an edge over the "extremist" Zionist leaders.⁷⁸ The State Department, however, warned Truman not to make any public announcement in favor of partition. If he did make the announcement, the State Department warned the President in a memorandum, it would threaten vital American interests in the Middle East by angering the Arabs.⁷⁹ Prime Minister Attlee also implored Truman not to make any such announcement.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Truman, on the eve of Yom Kippur in October, 1946, gave a speech in which he not only reiterated that the British should immediately allow 100,000 Jewish DPs to enter Palestine, but also expressed his support for a plan that would include the partitioning of Palestine.⁸¹

At least one part of Goldman's argument struck home for the President. Early in his presidency, Truman had noted with concern a growing trend toward extremism and radicalism among the Zionist leadership.⁸² At that time there was a great deal of worry

⁷⁸ Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to President Truman, September 12, 1946, FRUS, 1946, VII, 693.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Top Secret telegram No. 1748 from Foreign Office to United Kingdom delegation in Paris, 4 October 1946, giving text of message and statement (temporarily postponed) which President Truman proposed giving on 4 October 1946 regarding the fate of 100,000 Jews awaiting admission to Palestine; top secret telegram No. 1749 from the Foreign Office to the United Kingdom delegation to the Peace Conference, Paris, 4 October 1946, in response to President Truman's statement [FO371/52560], found in ZMFI, IX, 43-46.

⁸¹ President Truman to the Prime Minister (Attlee), October 3, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 701.

⁸² Bain, *March to Zion*, 77.

that so “many Jews [had] become disillusioned regarding the policies of the United States and Great Britain” and such a “mood of impatience and desperation” reigned among the Jews that there seemed to be a high probability that unless more was done to help the Jews, the US and Great Britain would inadvertently drive “Jewish youth ‘into the arms of Moscow.’”⁸³ Much to Truman’s dismay, just as the report had predicted, the moderate and pro-British/pro-American leadership of Rabbi Wise, Nahum Goldman, and Chaim Weizmann were replaced by the more radical and militant leadership of Rabbi Silver and David Ben-Gurion.⁸⁴ That the radicals held sway was further evidenced by the bloody insurrection waged by the Irgun and the Stern Gang in Palestine—a revolt that had already cost the lives of hundreds.⁸⁵ In order to improve the morale of the Jews and to strengthen the hand of the moderate leadership, Truman decided to back the partition plan. Truman’s efforts to strengthen the moderates worked, at least in part. Indeed, by 1950 Goldman had ascended to the position of preeminence among American Zionists and Rabbi Silver had been reduced to a secondary role.⁸⁶ Thus Truman recognized the necessity of keeping the Jews within the American camp during a time of increasing tensions with the Soviet Union. Truman knew that in order to increase stability in

⁸³ Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson), June 22, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 713.

⁸⁴ Ibid.; Radosh and Radosh, *Safe Haven*, 201; Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 118.

⁸⁵ Levenberg, *Military Preparations*, 72.

⁸⁶ Memorandum of Conversation by The Secretary of State, March 28, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 819, 820.

Palestine a moderate leadership would need to be at the helm of the Zionist ship, and he did what he could to strengthen their hands vis-à-vis the extremist Zionist leaders.⁸⁷

Many scholars argue that President Truman made the Yom Kippur statement for purely political reasons. David Niles certainly tried hard to convince the President to make the announcement, citing a recent Gallup poll that showed Tom Dewey, a Republican, with a commanding lead in the New York gubernatorial races.⁸⁸ Ernest Bevin, who, like Attlee, was furious at Truman's announcement, certainly believed that the President changed policy for purely political reasons.⁸⁹ Many in the State Department believed that Truman made the announcement for purely political reasons too.⁹⁰ Since the political situation at the time (for the Democrats) was so dire, and because Bevin and others so vehemently claimed that the Yom Kippur statement was a purely political act, it is no wonder that most scholars accept that argument.

Truman, on the other hand, insisted that he had purely altruistic motives. In a letter to Senator Walter F. George of Georgia, Truman insisted "I am not interested in the politics of the situation, or what effect it will have on votes in the United States. I am interested in relieving a half million people of the most distressful situation that has

⁸⁷ Of course, David Ben-Gurion would remain as the preeminent power in Palestine for years to come, leading to many difficulties for the United States because of his aggressive strategies toward the Arabs. Perhaps if the United States and Great Britain had acted sooner the moderates would have been able to remain in power and the Arab-Israeli conflict would have been resolved.

⁸⁸ Pika, "Interest Groups and the White House," 658; Snetsinger, *Truman, the Jewish Vote, and Israel*, 42; Bain, *March to Zion*, 135.

⁸⁹ Memorandum by Mr. William J. McWilliams of the Executive Secretariat to the Secretary of State, February 25, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1056; Snetsinger, *Truman, the Jewish Vote, and Israel*, 47.

⁹⁰ For example, see: Memorandum by the Chief of Near Eastern Affairs (Mirriam) to the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson), December 27, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 732-734.

happened in the world since A. Hitler made his invasion of Europe”.⁹¹ As already noted, Truman was convinced that working to solve both the humanitarian crisis in Europe and the Jewish Question were vitally important objectives in order to maintain world peace and keep the Soviets at bay. Dean Acheson also insisted that the October statement had nothing to do with politics. Acheson later wrote that he was so convinced of Truman’s motives and goals that he helped Truman draft the statement.⁹² Since Acheson had previously warned Truman against taking precipitate action with regard to the Jews and Palestine, Acheson’s opinion on the October statement carries a lot of weight. In light of Truman’s ceaseless efforts to ameliorate the sufferings of the Jews, a desire to help the Jewish DPs is a convincing explanation for the President’s action.

Regardless of Truman’s motivations, the Arabs reacted angrily to the Yom Kippur statement. King Ibn Saud led the charge by sending multiple letters and telegrams to the President—even dispatching Faisal to Washington.⁹³ The King implicitly threatened to cut off his relations with the United States by pleading with President Truman to preserve the “friendship of the Arabs and the East towards the United States of America”.⁹⁴ The other Arab States likewise submitted official complaints to the State Department. The

⁹¹ Quoted in: Radosh and Radosh, *Safe Haven*, 192.

⁹² Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969): 176.

⁹³ The King of Saudi Arabia (Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud) to President Truman, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 708, 709; The King of Saudi Arabia (Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud) to President Truman, October 25, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 718, 719; Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State: Memorandum of Conversation Between the President and Amir Faisal, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, December 13, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 729, 730.

⁹⁴ The King of Saudi Arabia (Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud) to President Truman, October 10, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 709.

anger of the Arabs was also witnessed just a short time later when Arab terrorists bombed the American legation in Beirut and attempted to bomb the American University of Beirut as well.⁹⁵ Fears that the Arabs would be alienated and angered by any pro-Zionist actions, regardless of any altruistic intentions, were thus beginning to be realized.

These developments terrified the State Department. Loy Henderson warned that if they continued with the present policy,

Our cultural position, built up with painstaking effort over the past 100 years, as well as our commercial and economic interests, including oil concessions and aviation and telecommunications rights, would be seriously threatened. Already the almost childlike confidence which these people have hitherto displayed toward the United States is giving way to suspicion and dislike, a development which may lead the Arab and Moslem World to look elsewhere [to the USSR] than toward the West for support...The Arab States might well withdraw from the United Nations and sever diplomatic relations with us.⁹⁶

The exigencies of the Cold War made most State Department diplomats feel certain that the US should do more to keep the Arabs and the British happy.

To be sure, the negative reaction of both the British and the Arabs troubled Truman, and he attempted to placate them by citing once again the “tragic situation of the surviving victims of Nazi persecution”.⁹⁷ He nevertheless stood his ground with his policies, regardless of the pressure from the British, the Arabs, and the Zionists to do

⁹⁵ Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Undersecretary of State (Acheson), October 21, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 710-713; The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, December 16, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 731.

⁹⁶ Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Under Secretary of State (Acheson), October 21, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 712.

⁹⁷ President Truman to the King of Saudi Arabia (Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud), October 25, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 714.

otherwise. As ever, Truman and those who opposed his Palestine policy in the US government had the same ultimate goal of preventing the Soviets from penetrating the Middle East.

TO THE UNITED NATIONS

In February, 1947, Ernest Bevin stood before the House of Commons and declared that “We have decided that we are unable to accept the scheme put forward either by the Arabs or by the Jews, or to impose ourselves a solution of our own....The only course now open to us is to submit the problem to the judgment of the United Nations.”⁹⁸ This announcement shocked many people. General George S. Marshall, who had become the new Secretary of State at the beginning of the year, recalled that the British had “dumped in our lap another most serious problem—that it was tantamount to British abdication from the Middle East with obvious implications as to their successor”.⁹⁹ The United States government thereby came to feel an increased sense of responsibility for helping to resolve the Palestine issue, especially as the Palestine Question threatened to draw the Soviet Union into the Middle East. The Cold War influenced American policy in Palestine more than any other single factor during this period, making peace and stability in the Middle East an increasingly important strategic necessity.

The expanded role for the United States in international politics highlighted the significance of American strategic interests in the Middle East, and therefore in Palestine. With intense Soviet pressure coming to bear upon Greece and Turkey, the Middle East became all the more essential in ensuring that those key countries did not fall to

⁹⁸ Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2008): 37.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 98.

communism. Loy Henderson expressed the thinking of the American government well when he wrote:

*In the present international situation Arab hostility towards the United States and towards the Western world would be extremely harmful to our interests. Among other damaging results, a hostile attitude on the part of the Arabs would threaten from the rear the position we are desperately trying to hold in Greece, Turkey and Iran. We should therefore be extremely careful to avoid any action which might be seriously injurious to our relations with the Arab world while at the same time overlooking no opportunity for affirmative action which should strengthen those relations.*¹⁰⁰

To be sure, Palestine figured prominently in avoiding “any action” that would alienate the Arabs. As a result, both the State Department and President Truman felt continued pressure from the Arab States to disavow supporting either partition or Jewish immigration to Palestine.¹⁰¹ Truman tried to placate the Arabs by pointing out that since the Jews had suffered more than any other people during World War Two, surely they deserved more “sympathy and support” than the Arabs were willing to grant them.¹⁰² Secretary Marshall likewise appealed to the Arab sense of humanity when he told the Arab League that “It would appear to be contrary to the humanitarian instincts of all peoples” to deny the Jews the right to immigrate to Palestine.¹⁰³ The Arabs denied these

¹⁰⁰ Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), August 28, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 800.

¹⁰¹ FRUS, 1947, V, The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, January 14, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1008; President Truman to the King of Saudi Arabia (Abdul Aziz ibn Saud), January 24, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1012, 1013; The Charge in the United Kingdom (Gallman) to the Secretary of State, February 13, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1045; The Charge in the United Kingdom (Gallman) to the Secretary of State, February 14, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1046.

¹⁰² President Truman to the King of Saudi Arabia (Abdul Aziz ibn Saud), January 24, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1013.

¹⁰³ The Secretary of State (Byrnes) to the Embassy in Egypt, January 13, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1003, 1004.

humanitarian claims, however, by insisting that since they did not perpetrate the crimes against the Jews, they should not be made to make reparations by handing over their lands.¹⁰⁴ The Arabs would not willingly allow the United States to solve Europe's refugee problem by shipping the refugees to Palestine.

In early March, the UN Secretary General, Trygve Lie, called for a special session of the United Nation's General Assembly in order to deal with the new challenge that had been presented to the international body by the British. In order to grapple with the new responsibility, the General Assembly voted to create the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), charging the committee with studying the problem and proposing a solution.¹⁰⁵ Because of America's stance regarding Palestine, President Truman feared that the Soviets would take advantage of the situation by placing themselves on UNSCOP. The Soviets, it was feared, would then be able to advocate the cause of the Arabs, currying favor with the Arab States and creating a wide enough diplomatic opening to allow the Soviets to enter the Middle East.¹⁰⁶ This was all the more worrisome when, in response to the proposed creation of a special committee, the Arab League passed a resolution that "pledged themselves to defend independence Palestine" [sic] and created a committee committed to preparing the military defense of

¹⁰⁴ The Charge in the United Kingdom (Gallman) to the Secretary of State, February 13, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1045; The Charge in the United Kingdom (Gallman) to the Secretary of State, February 14, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1046.

¹⁰⁵ Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Truman, May 16, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1085, 1086.

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State (Acheson) to the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson), April 17, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1072, 1073.

Palestine.¹⁰⁷ American interests in the Middle East thereby appeared to be at risk not only from direct Soviet intervention but also from an increased threat of war in the region. The United States averted this threat in part by blocking the USSR from getting placed on the committee, but suffered diplomatically for even allowing a committee to be created with the purpose of studying the situation in Palestine.¹⁰⁸

UNSCOP began its mission in Palestine in June and submitted two reports by the end of August, 1947. The Majority Report, which eight of the eleven delegations signed, called for the partition of Palestine into three regions. One region would become an independent Jewish state, another would become an Arab state, and the third, which included Jerusalem and Bethlehem, would be governed by the UN as an international zone.¹⁰⁹ The Minority Report, on the other hand, called for a single independent federated state in Palestine.¹¹⁰ These two reports were presented before the United Nations General Assembly, starting the great United Nations debate over the future of Palestine.

The Truman administration was hopelessly divided over how to respond to the UNSCOP majority report. The Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, insisted that the United States could not support the Majority Report, noting the damage that it would do to American and British interests in the Middle East by further alienating the Arabs who

¹⁰⁷ The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, March 26, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1065.

¹⁰⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Deputy Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, March 19, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1064, 1065; Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Truman, April 17, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1071; Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Truman, May 16, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1085, 1086.

¹⁰⁹ Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939-1948*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991): 153, 154.

¹¹⁰ UNSCOP report signed Geneva August 31, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1143.

had made their animosity to any plan that included partitioning Palestine clear.¹¹¹ The Joint Chiefs agreed. In cooperation with the British Chiefs of Staff, therefore, the Joint Chiefs prepared a report that warned of a “grave danger that [supporting the UNSCOP majority report] would result in such serious disturbances throughout the Near and Middle East area as to dwarf any local Palestine disturbances resulting from the decision. As a consequence, the USSR might replace the United States and Great Britain in influence and power throughout the area....The most serious of all possible consequences, from the military point of view, is that implementation of a decision to partition Palestine would gravely prejudice access by the United States to the oil of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.”¹¹² Thus, the Department of Defense concluded that, in light of the Cold War, the United States could not afford to support the Majority Report. Doing so would undoubtedly compromise America’s vital interests in the Middle East.

Many in the State Department opposed the partition plan. None opposed the partition plan more vehemently or consistently than Loy Henderson. He insisted that the United States should oppose partition for many reasons. First and foremost, he was convinced that supporting the Majority Report would play into the hands of the Soviets. He warned that the partition plan, if passed, would “greatly influence the extent of success or of failure of some of our efforts to promote world stability and prevent further Soviet penetration into important areas free as yet from Soviet domination.”¹¹³ The

¹¹¹ Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 132.

¹¹² Quoted in Levenberg, *Military Preparations*, 122.

¹¹³ The Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, September 22, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1153.

partition plan would work to the advantage of the Soviets primarily by “undermin[ing] our relations with the Arab, and to a lesser extent with the Moslem, world”.¹¹⁴ Hurting relations with the vital Arab allies would undoubtedly put American economic programs, like the Marshall plan, at risk since those plans required active Arab cooperation.¹¹⁵ Nothing less than America’s entire global strategy was therefore at stake. Not only would the US lose vital allies, but the Soviets would be able to take advantage of the conflict that the partition plan would foment in order to expand its influence into the Middle East.

Henderson further answered those within the State Department who argued that the Arabs would never side with the godless Soviets by arguing that “just as we, during the war, lined up with the USSR although having nothing in common, so the Arabs for convenience would work with the USSR against No. 1 common enemy, [the United States]” if the Americans supported the partition plan.¹¹⁶ The United States, Henderson argued, would thereby go from a position of prestige and influence in the Middle East to being the primary enemy. He continued that even if the United States’ moderate allies in the Middle East attempted to maintain relations with the US and Britain after the United States had supported the partition plan, the position of those leaders would be critically undermined. “If we press for [the partition plan], we shall undoubtedly weaken the

¹¹⁴ The Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, September 22, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1154.

¹¹⁵ The Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, September 22, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1154.

¹¹⁶ 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, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1148.

position of the moderate Arabs who are friends of the western world and strengthen that of the fanatical extremists.” Henderson then pointed out that such a trend was already underway in Palestine, where some moderate leaders had been assassinated by “followers of the fanatical Mufti”, who was the leader of the Palestinian national movement, just the week before.¹¹⁷ The stability of the region was therefore at risk since supporting the Majority Report would, he predicted, cause the downfall of the current anti-Soviet and pro-West governments.

While some in the State Department agreed with Henderson’s views, many did not. For instance, many of the American delegates to the United Nations disagreed with Henderson. Eleanor Roosevelt insisted that the United States should support the UNSCOP Majority Report if only to increase the prestige and validity of the United Nations. She worried that rejecting the report would severely undermine the legitimacy of the United Nations in the eyes of Americans and people around the world, and therefore supporting the majority decision from UNSCOP was of vital national interest.¹¹⁸ The American Ambassador to the United Nations, Warren G. Austin, agreed that the United States should support the UNSCOP Majority Report, insisting that they should do so without amending it.¹¹⁹ As far as Henderson’s fear that the Arabs would join the Soviets if the Americans supported the partition plan went, Mrs. Roosevelt

¹¹⁷ The Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, September 22, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1154.

¹¹⁸ 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, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1149.

¹¹⁹ 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, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1150.

insisted that the Arabs would not make such a foolhardy move simply because “the Arabs were clearly more afraid of the USSR than of us.”¹²⁰ The deciding vote in the State Department came from General George S. Marshall, the Secretary of State, who decided, for the same reasons as Mrs. Roosevelt, that the United States should support the Partition Plan.¹²¹

Marshall was in favor of being cautious, however, in the face of the Soviet threat. Marshall observed that since the United States did not know exactly how the Soviet Union would vote at the UN, the US should be careful in making declarations for or against the Majority Report. If the US came out in favor of the Majority Report, as he and others in the State Department desired to do, then it would be an easy thing for the Soviets to come out against it, thereby “precipitating [the Arabs’] rapprochement with the Soviet Union”.¹²² There was little doubt in the minds of most of the American statesmen that the Soviet Union would attempt to supplant Britain and the United States in the Middle East by way of ruling in favor of the Arabs with regards to the Palestine question.

The Soviet Union, however, proceeded to confuse American leaders by coming down in favor of the Zionists. This trend began in May when the Soviet ambassador to the UN, Andrei Gromyko, announced that the Soviet Union would support a partition

¹²⁰ 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, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1148.

¹²¹ 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, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1148, 1150, 1151.

¹²² 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, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1147.

plan in Palestine.¹²³ This announcement surprised the Americans since it had long been taken as an aphorism that the Soviets considered Zionism to be little more than a “tool of West [sic], inevitably hostile to Soviet Union [sic].”¹²⁴ At the time of Gromyko’s announcement, the State Department had assumed that the Soviets were simply trying to play both ends against the middle, and attempting to curry favor with both the Arabs and the Jews. As Dean Rusk said to Dean Acheson, “The course pursued by the Soviets appears to leave the USSR in an excellent position for the future.”¹²⁵ American leaders were slow to believe that the Soviets would actually support the Jews since they had so much to gain by supporting the Arabs. General Hilldring expressed the common beliefs of American leaders in September 1947 by stating that the USSR would pose “as an advocate of Arab desires...to the very end”.¹²⁶

As time went on, however, and the Soviets continued to lend diplomatic support to the Zionists at the UN, the State Department began to suspect that the Soviets had an entirely different strategy than they had originally assumed. As the debate at the United Nations entered November, one State Department official observed to Ambassador Herschel Johnson, the Acting Ambassador at the United Nations, “examination of the Russian proposals makes one wonder whether the Russians want partition or whether it is

¹²³ Statement by the Soviet Representative at the United Nations (Gromyko), May 14, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1085.

¹²⁴ The Charge in the Soviet Union (Durbrow) to the Secretary of State, May 10, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1081.

¹²⁵ Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Special Political Affairs (Rusk) to the Under Secretary of State (Acheson), May 27, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1089.

¹²⁶ 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, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1148.

chaos they seek in Palestine.”¹²⁷ The Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Walter Beddel Smith, insisted that “...Soviet policy and tactics toward Palestine question [sic] are deliberately calculated to ensure unsettlement, rather than settlement, and to create maximum difficulties for British and American in Near East [sic].” A war in Palestine that would eject the British and sow discord would open the way for Soviet (or Soviet satellite) troops to enter Palestine, from whence they would never leave.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the Soviets could very easily capture Arab support by suddenly reversing policy and declaring their support for the Arabs, thereby undermining the American and British positions in the Middle East.¹²⁹ All in all, the American statesmen had no clue what Soviet intentions were with regard to Palestine.

Yet, as time would tell, Soviet support of the Zionists was a policy that lasted the duration of Truman’s time in office.¹³⁰ The American statesmen were correct in being

¹²⁷ Memorandum by Mr. M. Gordon Knox to the United States Deputy Representative at the United Nations (Johnson), November 4, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1234.

¹²⁸ The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Smith) to the Secretary of State, November 14, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1263.

¹²⁹ The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Smith) to the Secretary of State, November 14, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1264.

¹³⁰ For some discussion of Soviet policy in Palestine in addition to the sources I cite, see: Campbell, John C. "The Soviet Union in the Middle East." *The Middle East Journal* (1978): 1-12; McLaurin, Ronald D., and Mohammed Mughisuddin. *The Soviet Union and the Middle East*. No. AIR-32800. AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH WASHINGTON DC, 1974; Bernard Reich, "The Soviet Union and the Middle East." (1980). Howard, Harry N. "The Soviet Union and the Middle East." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 263, no. 1 (1949): 180-187; Yapp, M. E. "The soviet union and the Middle East." *Asian Affairs* 7, no. 1 (1976): 7-18; Dawisha, Adeed I., and Karen Dawisha, eds. *The Soviet Union in the Middle East: policies and perspectives*. (Holmes & Meier Pub, 1982); Freedman, Robert O. "Soviet Policy toward the Middle East." *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* (1987): 176-197; Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. (HarperCollins Publishers, 1978); Lederer, Ivo J., and Wayne S. Vucinich. *The Soviet Union and the Middle East: The Post-World War II Era*. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974); Hurewitz, Jacob Coleman, ed. *Soviet-American Rivalry in the Middle East*. Vol. 29, no. 3. Published for the Academy of Political Science, Columbia University, by Praeger, 1969; Rubinstein, Alvin

surprised at this Soviet policy change, since the Soviets had consistently supported the Arabs throughout the epoch of the British Mandate in Palestine.¹³¹ In May 1947, however, the Soviets decided that it would be better to side with the Jews in the conflict over Palestine. After the Second World War the Soviets had suffered a number of reverses in the Middle East, with the British and Americans forcing them to retreat from Iran and keeping Soviet forces out of Turkey.¹³² As the Cold War continued to progress, however, Soviet interest in the Middle East only increased.

The Soviet strategic interests in the Middle East were four fold. First, the Soviets sought warm water ports in Turkey and Iran. Soviet access to these ports would have certainly compromised Allied shipping and communication lines in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean—a truly frightening prospect for Allied military planners at a time when another world war appeared only too likely.¹³³ The Soviets also sought to take over the oil supplies of the Middle East, especially after suffering the destruction of their own oil industry at the hands of the German Wehrmacht in World War Two.¹³⁴ Third, the Soviets sought to deny the Middle East to the Allies because of its strategic importance to the allied war effort. Finally, and most importantly, the Soviets needed to control the Middle East in order to protect their vulnerable southern flank. The USSR's vital oil-

Z. *The foreign policy of the Soviet Union*. Random House (NY), 1972; Ro'i, Yaacov, ed. *The limits to power: Soviet policy in the Middle East*. Taylor & Francis, 1979.

¹³¹ Avigdor Dagan, *Moscow and Jerusalem: Twenty Years of Relations Between Israel and the Soviet Union*, (Abelard-Schuman: London, 1970): 19; Arnold Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship: Israel and the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1953*, (University of Illinois Press, Chicago: 1974): 16, 17.

¹³² Krammer, *Forgotten Friendship*, 34.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³⁴ Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, 44.

producing region, Baku, lay within easy range of British and American bombers based in the Middle East (principally, at this time, in Egypt at bases on the Suez Canal), meaning that a determined Allied air attack could bring the Soviet war machine grinding to a halt within only a few months of the beginning of a war.¹³⁵ The industrial centers in the Ukraine and the Ural mountains likewise lay within easy reach of Allied bombers coming from the Middle East.¹³⁶ The Soviets therefore sought to gain control of the Middle East in order to protect themselves from Allied attack.

Palestine, however, was not the Soviet focus in the Middle East. Iran, Turkey, and Greece held far higher importance in the eyes of the Soviets as they sought to turn these states into Soviet satellites.¹³⁷ Palestine figured only tangentially into Soviet attempts to take over those states and the rest of the Middle East. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union saw it necessary to give diplomatic support to the Jews in an effort to establish a pro-Soviet state (or even satellite) in Palestine.¹³⁸ One reason for this was that, as Hashim Behbehani pointed out, the Middle East had already been carved out into very strict areas of influence. “This division of the sphere of influence left the Soviet Union with no other choice than to find an outlet through Israel to penetrate the region, for the Soviet Union had no close relations of any sort with the Arab world, save those with Arab Communist parties, which in turn, had no meaningful political role to play in

¹³⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹³⁷ Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 9.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 40.

the Arab world.”¹³⁹ The Arabs were all quite pro-British (or at least the leaders were), leaving no room for the Soviets to extend their influence.¹⁴⁰ The Jews, on the other hand, were locked in a life-or-death struggle with the British at the end of World War Two, seeming to make them natural allies for the Soviets.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the leader of the Palestinian national movement, the Mufti, was a hated Nazi sympathizer and a reactionary member of the old monied Palestinian elite whom the Soviets were eager to see ousted from power.¹⁴² Additionally, the majority of Jewish Zionists in Palestine had come from within the confines of the Soviet (or former Russian) empire, seeming to give the Zionists a natural cultural and linguistic proclivity toward the Soviets.¹⁴³ Finally, as Behbehani further wrote, “in a practical sense there remained the fact that a [Jewish] state with all its various apparatus, essentially military, had been established, had become a reality in the midst of an ocean of backwardness and in an arena dominated by Arab entities basically divided in every aspect that the imagination can conjure up.”¹⁴⁴ All of these issues prompted the Soviets to work to secure their strategic interests in the Middle East through the backdoor of Palestine.

The Arabs did not sit idly by and allow American policy at the United Nations to take shape without vociferously opposing the UNSCOP reports (since the Arabs

¹³⁹ Hashim S.H. Behbehani, *The Soviet Union and Arab Nationalism, 1917-1966*, (KPI: London, 1986): 70.

¹⁴⁰ Dagan, *Moscow and Jerusalem*, 20.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Behbehani, *The Soviet Union and Arab Nationalism*, 59.

¹⁴³ Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 5.

¹⁴⁴ Behbehani, *The Soviet Union and Arab Nationalism*, 69, 70.

categorically rejected both the Majority and Minority reports).¹⁴⁵ After Marshall made his initial equivocating declaration of American intentions at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly in September, most Arab delegations approached the American delegation to lodge official complaints. Henderson warned that the delegates of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia all interpreted Secretary Marshall's statement "as an all-out declaration of American support of the Majority Plan in the UNSCOP report, and consider it as being a forthright commitment that the United States would make every effort and wield its influence in favor of a Zionist solution for the Palestine problem."¹⁴⁶ The Iraqi delegate in particular took the opportunity to voice his opinion that all woes in Palestine, both past and present, were due to the Zionist pressure on the American government, and the resultant American meddling in affairs that were not theirs to meddle in. The Iraqi delegate "accordingly considered the U.S. as primarily responsible for present and future developments in Palestine."¹⁴⁷ Thus, the United States came under intense pressure from the Arab states even after attempting to remain noncommittal and neutral during the beginning of the UN General Assembly meeting.

¹⁴⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Paul H. Alling, Adviser to the United States Delegation at the General Assembly, September 23, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1159; The Arab Higher Committee to the Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee), October 3, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1170; Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Samuel K.C. Cooper, October 3, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1171, 1172; Memorandum of Conversation with Dr. Charles Malike, by Ambassador Alling, October 3, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1175; Levenberg, *Military Preparations*, 116

¹⁴⁶ Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), September 18, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1152.

¹⁴⁷ Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), September 18, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1153.

FORCING THE RESOLUTION THROUGH

Throughout this period, the President's policy focused on maintaining stability and peace in the Middle East, and it was hoped that the Majority Report would accomplish just that. Strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of the United Nations was another vital part of American policy during this period, and supporting the Majority Report seemed necessary at this juncture in order to achieve that aim. In a further effort to strengthen the UN, Truman specifically instructed the American delegation to refrain from pressuring any of the other delegations to support the partition resolution as the vote approached. As Lovett reported,

...the President did not wish the United States Delegation to use threats or improper pressure of any kind on other Delegations to vote for the majority report favoring partition of Palestine. We were willing to vote for that report ourselves because it was a majority report but we were in no sense of the word to coerce other delegations to follow our lead...the presidents' orders to adhere to our commitments to the Arabs lay the general requirement that the United States was not to be an advocate and was not to use improper pressure on other Delegates.¹⁴⁸

Despite this clear testimony from Lovett, many allege that only a few days before the UN voted on the partition resolution, President Truman reversed course and ordered the American delegation to round up the votes necessary to ensure that the resolution passed. Herschel Johnson said as much when he reported that David Niles called and ordered the American delegation, in the name of the President, to round up enough votes

¹⁴⁸ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, by the Acting Secretary of State, November 24, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1284.

to get the resolution to pass.¹⁴⁹ Eddie Jacobson, a close friend of the president, also later recounted how when he and Abe Granoff went to visit with the President after the resolution had passed, Truman boasted that he had personally convinced a couple of delegations to vote in favor of the resolution.¹⁵⁰ And Truman was certainly willing to take the credit for the passage of the resolution.¹⁵¹ Thus, there is some debate regarding Truman's role in the passage of the UN resolution.

While there may indeed be some truth in these claims, Truman's stance regarding the United Nations and the importance of the Majority Report to that new institution indicates that he did not take any such role. Truman's policy throughout the period had been to support the Majority Report as part of a commitment to support the decisions of the United Nations.¹⁵² He would not have done anything that he thought would compromise the integrity of the United Nations or that would make it appear to be nothing more than a veil for legitimizing American policies. Nor would the pressure that he felt from the American Zionists have been sufficient to persuade Truman to go against his principles and undermine the legitimacy of the United Nations by forcing smaller nations to support partition. Truman, as noted above, reacted harshly to efforts to pressure him, and he often pushed back or followed a different course in order to prove (both to himself and others) that he was an independent agent.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 168.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁵¹ Radosh and Radosh, *Safe Haven*, 276.

¹⁵² Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 465.

¹⁵³ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 27.

There is little doubt, however, that Truman did order the American delegation to attempt to muster enough votes to get the resolution to pass. Yet, his orders were clearly to avoid “improper pressure” or coercion on the other delegations. The American delegation certainly could have done a great deal without crossing those lines. After all, as Zvi Ganin noted, though “The president [was] irritated and disgusted with the entire problem [he] still was genuinely concerned with the plight of the displaced persons” in Europe and worried that nothing would be done to help them if the resolution did not pass.¹⁵⁴ Truman certainly felt that he could stay within his principles of respecting the sanctity of the United Nations while also working to ensure that the humanitarian needs of the Jewish DPs in Europe were met.

When other American leaders used their power and influence to coerce other delegations at the UN to vote in favor of partition, however, Truman was furious. The Zionists may not have been able to motivate the president to do what was necessary to get the resolution to pass, but they did succeed in getting other American leaders to do it for them. There are many examples of American pressure coming to bear on smaller nations. Wealthy American businessmen, congressmen, Senators, and Supreme Court Justices all threatened and harangued the leaders of nations such as Liberia, the Philippines, France, Greece, Costa Rica, Haiti, Cuba, Ethiopia, and others in order to coerce those nations to change their votes in favor of the partition resolution.¹⁵⁵ Because of this pressure, when

¹⁵⁴ Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 130.

¹⁵⁵ For a few examples, see: Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 485; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 169; Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis*, 330; Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to President Truman, December 10, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1306; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 169; Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to President Truman, December 10, 1947, found in FRUS,

the United Nations General Assembly voted on the partition of Palestine resolution on November 29, 1947, the resolution passed with thirty-three for, thirteen against, and ten abstentions.¹⁵⁶ Thus, American congressmen, justices, and wealthy citizens exerted all of the leverage they could in order to force smaller and dependent nations (and in one case another great power) to vote in favor of partition. This was a tremendous victory for the Zionists that was a direct result of the marvelously well-coordinated and organized Jewish lobby groups in the United States.

Truman reacted angrily to this bullying by American leaders and businessmen in the forum of the United Nations. He wrote to Lovett soon after the partition vote, expressing his frustration, and worrying that if such a trend continued the United Nations would go the way the League of Nations had gone before. “It is perfectly apparent that pressure groups will succeed in putting the United Nations out of business if this sort of thing is continued and I am very anxious that it be stopped.”¹⁵⁷ Truman was willing to have the American Delegation negotiate and work with other delegations at the UN in order to garner support for the partition plan, but he was not willing to allow any sort of coercion or pressure to take place that would make smaller powers feel that they had to do the bidding of the United States at the United Nations. The pressure that was applied to the other powers went beyond anything that Truman wanted, and it actually angered

1947, V, 1307; Memorandum by President Truman to the Acting Secretary of State, December 11, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1309; Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 485; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 170.

¹⁵⁶ Evensen, “A Story of Ineptness,” 350.

¹⁵⁷ Memorandum by President Truman to the Acting Secretary of State, December 11, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1309.

him. Thus, while Truman did support partition for his own humanitarian and political reasons, he does not deserve the credit he gets for getting the partition vote passed. If he had had his way, the pressure campaign would not have taken place and it is likely that the partition resolution would not have garnered the necessary two-thirds majority it needed to pass.¹⁵⁸

To the dismay of everyone in the Truman administration, the Arabs made it abundantly clear after the passage of the resolution that they would not acquiesce without a fight. King Farouk of Egypt summoned the American Ambassador and warned him that neither he nor any other Arab leader would allow Palestine to be partitioned without a fight. He further warned the American ambassador that “instructions had gone out other [sic] Arab capitals with view of coordinating plans, both military and economic, in preparation for the conflict.”¹⁵⁹ The fury of the Arabs also broke loose upon American property and citizens as furious mobs attacked the day after the passage of the vote.¹⁶⁰ Just as the Iraqis had warned, the Arabs held the United States responsible for the passage of what was for them an evil resolution.¹⁶¹ Perhaps no more chilling a cry was heard, however, than from the United Nations General Assembly itself. As the vote concluded and the outcome became clear, Azzam Bey, an Arab delegate at the UN, stood and

¹⁵⁸ The British were convinced that the resolution would not pass up to the time of voting. The pressure campaign waged by the American congressmen, justices, and businessmen was therefore fantastically successful. Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, 152.

¹⁵⁹ The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, December 3, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1295, 1296.

¹⁶⁰ The Charge in Syrian (Memming) to the Secretary of State, November 30, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1292.

¹⁶¹ The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Iraq, October 22, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1199.

shouted for all to hear, “Any line of partition drawn in Palestine will be a line of fire and blood!”¹⁶²

¹⁶² Radosh and Radosh, *Safe Haven*, 275.

TO TRUSTEESHIP

A vicious civil war broke out the following day in Palestine. The fighting was so fierce and widespread that in only one month's time after the passage of the partition resolution, 430 were killed and over 2000 were wounded.¹⁶³ This outbreak of increased fighting worried the American government a great deal since the effort to achieve the vital goal of maintaining peace and stability seemed to have backfired. It was assumed by many within the State Department that this chaotic situation was what the Soviets had intended in helping the Partition resolution to pass.¹⁶⁴ With a civil war breaking out in Palestine, Arab vows to initiate a real war in the event that the partition resolution was implemented, and a widespread anti-American furor growing among the Arabs, the three-fold American goal of maintaining peace, stability, and a close relationship with the states of the Middle East appeared to be sinking fast.

The Cold War became all the more important to American strategists in 1948 after the Czechoslovak coup, the reinstatement of conscription in the US military, and the blockade of Berlin.¹⁶⁵ Not only did heightened tensions with the Soviets shape the way in which the American government viewed the crisis in Palestine, but all of these crises demanded far more attention than did the crisis in Palestine. Though American leaders considered Palestine, and the Middle East in general, to be an important area in the

¹⁶³ Bruce J. Evensen, "The Limits of Presidential Leadership: Truman at War with Zionists, the Press, Public Opinion and His Own State Department over Palestine," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Presidential Perception and Persuasion(Spring, 1993): 275.

¹⁶⁴ British memorandum of Conversation, December 17, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1313.

¹⁶⁵ Zvi Ganin, "The Limits of American Jewish Political Power: America's Retreat from Partition November-March 1948," *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1/2, American Bicentennial: II (Winter-Spring, 1977): 14; Cohen, *Fighting World War Three in the Middle East*, 5; Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 52.

unfolding Cold War, its importance was dwarfed in comparison to the other vital areas of interest in Europe and Asia.¹⁶⁶ This is an important point to make because many assume that the Palestine Question carried far greater weight with the Truman administration, and President Truman in particular, than it really did. Palestine and the Middle East were largely considered to be important only because of how the strategic resources and geography of the region impacted the larger conflict of the Cold War.

Nevertheless, many in the State Department were worried about the furious Arab reaction to the partition resolution, and none more so than Loy Henderson. He had warned that the United States was forfeiting its relations with key Arab allies by supporting partition, and in the few days after the passage of the resolution it seemed that his dire prediction was nearing fulfillment.¹⁶⁷ In order to save what he could of American relations with the Arabs, Henderson used a quick bureaucratic maneuver, with the permission of Under Secretary of State, Robert Lovett, to enforce an arms embargo on Palestine.¹⁶⁸ Performing this maneuver took only a week, and it surprised even President Truman, who found out about it in the papers.¹⁶⁹ Zionists and congressmen alike reacted angrily to the embargo, but President Truman had been presented with a *fait accompli* and did nothing to lift the embargo.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Memorandum by the director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), November 24, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1282.

¹⁶⁸ The Acting Secretary of State to the Secretary of State, at London, December 6, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1300; Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 142.

¹⁶⁹ Radosh and Radosh, *Safe Haven*, 278.

¹⁷⁰ Shlomo Slonim, "The 1948 American Embargo on Arms to Palestine," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 94, no. 3 (Autumn, 1979): 501.

Beyond starting the embargo, Henderson did all in his power to lead a campaign against partition in hopes of saving American interests in the Middle East by placating the Arabs. Henderson found an ally in George Kennan, head of the Policy Planning Staff.¹⁷¹ In a policy planning paper issued on January 19, 1948, Kennan reiterated the old American policy goals in Palestine when he concluded that “For these reasons, and particularly in view of the Soviet pressure against the periphery of that area, and Soviet infiltration into the area, it is important that political, economic, and social stability be maintained there.”¹⁷² Unfortunately, he warned, because of “irreconcilable differences between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, great danger exists that the area may become the source of serious unrest and instability which could be readily exploited by the USSR unless a workable solution can be developed.”¹⁷³ He then pointed out that since the partition plan needed the cooperation of both Arabs and Jews in order to work without the plan being enforced through strength of arms, the partition plan was not a workable solution.¹⁷⁴ Both Kennan and Henderson agreed that in the interests of maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East, the US should abandon partition.

The fear of the Soviets successfully breaking the Arabs away from the West also came into play. Kennan warned that the partition plan had created the ideal situation for the Soviets, and he listed three ways in which the Soviets could use the situation to their advantage. First, “the USSR stands to gain by the partition plan if it should be

¹⁷¹ Slonim, “The 1948 American Embargo on Palestine,” 503.

¹⁷² Report by the Policy Planning Staff on Position of the US With Respect to Palestine—Signed by George F. Kennan, January 19, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 547.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 547-549.

implemented by force because of the opportunity thus afforded to the Russians to assist in ‘maintaining order’ in Palestine”. This would give the Soviet Union the invaluable chance of deploying troops to the Middle East. Once Soviet troops, whether regular troops or “volunteers”, had arrived on the soil of Palestine, they would likely never leave unless forced out by American and British military intervention. “[T]he presence of Soviet forces in Palestine would constitute an outflanking of our positions in Greece, Turkey, Iran, and a potential threat to the stability of the entire Eastern Mediterranean area.”¹⁷⁵ If the Soviets did not choose to use the situation in that way, then it could be expected that the Soviets would allow the United States to bear the brunt of enforcing the plan on an unwilling population. Doing so would inevitably turn the entire Arab world against the United States, allowing the Soviet Union to swoop in and establish itself everywhere in the Middle East.¹⁷⁶ Kennan also predicted that the Soviets could also use the pretext of partition to demand the partition of other vital states like Turkey, Greece, and Iran.¹⁷⁷ Ultimately, Kennan warned that they could not foresee exactly how the USSR would use partition to its advantage. The only certain thing was that partition could only be used to the advantage of the Soviets.¹⁷⁸

One reason that partition worked to the advantage of the Soviets was that it had so successfully alienated America’s Arab allies. Though some staunch allies sought to maintain relations with the United States, such as King Ibn Saud, the American

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 551.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

government was making it very costly for them to do so by supporting the hated partition plan.¹⁷⁹ There was little doubt that if they continued supporting partition like they had, those vital ties would be cut, and the United States would lose its oil, bases, and other economic and cultural interests in the Middle East. “So numerous would be the ramifications of mounting Arab ill will, of opening the door to Soviet political or military penetration, and of generally chaotic conditions in Palestine and neighboring countries that the whole structure of peace and security in the Near East and Mediterranean would be directly or indirectly affected with results impossible to predict at this stage in detail but certainly injurious to U.S. interests.”¹⁸⁰ He thereby alluded to the previous prediction that the loss of the Middle East to the Soviets would certainly lead to the ending of the American way of life.

In sum, Kennan insisted that “We should take no further initiative in implementing or aiding partition.”¹⁸¹ This argument fit in nicely with Henderson’s, especially when he wrote in mid-December that “The United States should immediately announce that we have become convinced that the partition of Palestine is impossible of implementation and that the Palestine problem should therefore be referred back to a special session of the General Assembly”.¹⁸² As far as he was concerned, events had already proven that partition could not be implemented peacefully. In the stead of the

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 550.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 551, 552.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 553.

¹⁸² Report for the Department of State, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1314. Scholars are not certain that Henderson wrote this report, but the strong position taken, as well as the proposed solutions, indicate that Henderson was likely the author.

partition plan, Henderson put forward a plan that he had proposed months before: to create a United Nations trusteeship for Palestine.¹⁸³ This plan would allow the United States to keep the Arabs happier and would buy time for finding a solution that would satisfy both sides of the conflict.¹⁸⁴ Henderson thereby began working for a different solution to the Palestine Question.

Militarily speaking, there was no doubt that helping to enforce the partition plan was out of the question. The War Department had warned since 1945 that helping to maintain control of Palestine would require the United States to send as many as 100,000 troops—a burden that the US military could not afford in light of the growing threat of the Cold War.¹⁸⁵ The Joint Chiefs had insisted in 1946 that the United States could not be drawn into sending troops into Palestine for the same reasons that the War Department had warned against it, but also because if they did so “The USSR might replace the United States and Britain in influence and power throughout the Middle East.”¹⁸⁶ These estimations continued to hold true after the passage of the partition resolution and into 1948. Indeed, Secretary of Defense James Forrestal worried so much about the situation that he told the Senate that the American way of life hung in the balance in Palestine.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ The Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, September 22, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1158; Memorandum by the Director of the office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), October 22, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1196; Report prepared for the Department of State, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1314.

¹⁸⁴ The Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, September 22, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1158.

¹⁸⁵ Memorandum by the War Department to the Department of State, September 19, 1945, found in FRUS, 1945, VIII, 742.

¹⁸⁶ Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, June 21, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 632.

¹⁸⁷ Evensen, “The Limits of Presidential Leadership,” 275.

He worried that if the United States continued on its course, it would only succeed in igniting war in the Middle East, undermining American interests, and driving the Arabs into the arms of the Soviets.¹⁸⁸ As chaos enveloped Palestine in 1948, therefore, the partition solution continued to appear to be less and less of a viable option to many leaders in the Truman administration.

Yet some in the American government continued to insist that the best option for Palestine and for American interests in the Middle East would be to continue to support the partition plan. Partition had no more valiant a champion in the American government than Clark Clifford. Clifford was the President's special advisor, and some argue that he was his most influential.¹⁸⁹ Clifford was normally a political advisor, and he designed Truman's winning presidential campaign of 1948. Nevertheless, he frequently delved into advising the President on matters of international policy.

In a memorandum written to the President, Clifford warned that, with the British withdrawal date of May 15th rapidly approaching, war would shortly break out in Palestine.¹⁹⁰ "There is no more certain way of having Russia move into the Arabian Peninsula than for us to permit war to develop between the Jews and the Arabs—and this is as certain as the rising of tomorrow's sun, unless we move promptly to prevent it."¹⁹¹ Thus, for Clifford, vigorously supporting partition was the best chance America had of avoiding war in the Middle East and of strengthening America's stance vis-à-vis

¹⁸⁸ Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 29.

¹⁸⁹ Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 27.

¹⁹⁰ Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman, March 8, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II., 691, 692.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 694.

Russia.¹⁹² For the sake of maintaining peace and stability, the United States had no choice but to staunchly support the partition plan. He further argued that the United States needed the United Nations to remain a strong, viable organization that could help the United States to withstand Soviet pressures around the world. Going against partition would inevitably weaken the United Nations as an institution, thereby undermining America's interests.¹⁹³ Nor did the United States have anything to fear from losing its Arab allies since they abhorred the Soviets and needed the Americans far more than the Americans needed them.¹⁹⁴ He insisted, therefore, that "Vigorous American support of UN's Palestine decision is the only policy which is in American interests in the Middle East."¹⁹⁵ Some others in the State Department, such as Ambassador Warren Austin, Ralph Bunche, and (initially) Dean Rusk, agreed with Clifford's assessment of the situation.¹⁹⁶

As time progressed, however, the situation in Palestine continued to deteriorate. The British were determined to evacuate Palestine by May 15th, and as their preparations progressed their ability to maintain control diminished.¹⁹⁷ As the American consul in Jerusalem observed on February 9, 1948, "The Government of Palestine is admittedly in

¹⁹² Ibid., 691.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 693.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 695.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, February 10, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 616; Memorandum by Mr. Dean Rusk to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), January 26, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 556-558.

¹⁹⁷ The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State, December 31, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1322-1327; The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State, February 9, 1948, 606-612.

a state of disintegration.”¹⁹⁸ As a result it did not take long for Rusk to be convinced that the United States had no choice but to abandon partition and begin working toward trusteeship instead.¹⁹⁹ Thus, American officials grappled with the puzzle of how to help maintain order and alliances in the face of the widening civil war in Palestine. As Rusk’s case proves, the situation was anything but clear, and both abandoning partition and continuing to support it could easily be justified in the name of helping to restore peace and stability to the Middle East.

In the face of increasing opposition from the rest of the Truman administration, Weizmann sought to meet with Truman in an effort to strengthen his resolve. Truman assured the aged Zionist that he fully intended to continue to support partition and that he had no intentions of abandoning that policy.²⁰⁰ The pressure had been building for a while in the Truman administration to abandon partition in favor of trusteeship, however, and much of it was out of his control. A couple of weeks before Truman had met with Weizmann he had received a draft of a proposed speech to be given by Austin before the Security Council. The proposed speech would have announced American support for creating a UN trusteeship in Palestine, thereby abandoning partition. Truman had written a note to Marshall, however, clarifying his intent with the speech: “I want to make clear, however, that nothing should be presented to the Security Council that could be interpreted as a rescission on our part from the position we took in the General

¹⁹⁸ The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State, February 9, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 606.

¹⁹⁹ Draft Memorandum by the Director of the Office of the United Nations Affairs (Rusk) to the Under Secretary of State, February 10, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 617.

²⁰⁰ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 186.

Assembly.” The president then further instructed Marshall to let him see the final draft of the speech before anything was done with it.²⁰¹ Then on March 18th Truman had his fateful meeting with Weizmann in which the President promised not to change American policy in Palestine. On March 19th Ambassador Austin stood before the Security Council and announced that the United States would support a United Nations Trusteeship in Palestine, effectively withdrawing American support for the partition plan.

This move infuriated the President, who felt that he had been made a liar to Chaim Weizmann, who had only the day before been assured that no change in policy would be forthcoming. Nevertheless, after this State Department *fait accompli*, Truman felt that he had no choice but to simply clarify to the public that the plan was to have a Trusteeship only until partition could be made to work.²⁰² This was the greatest split between President Truman and his State Department. Ironically, both the President and those advisors and officials who supported him as well as the State and Defense Departments advocated different policies in order to achieve the same goals of peace and stability in the Middle East. The State Department, however, worried so constantly about losing influence among the Arabs that they failed to follow President Truman’s orders as exactly as they should have done. The President, for his part, worried about the Arabs but also took into account the needs of the Jews in Palestine and in Europe. It would take time, but eventually the preferred policies of the President and the State and Defense

²⁰¹ President Truman to the Secretary of State, February 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 645.

²⁰² Slonim, “President Truman, the State Department and the Palestine Question,” 23; *FRUS*, 1948, vol. V, p.759.

Departments would achieve far greater unity than was witnessed on Friday, March 19, 1948.

THE RECOGNITION

Despite the ire of the President, the American government moved forward with its plans to create a UN trusteeship in Palestine. By the time Ambassador Austin made his announcement at the UN that the US would support a trusteeship plan, most of the American government agreed with the fact “that GA recommendation of Nov 29 could not be implemented by peaceful means”.²⁰³ The civil war that had enveloped Palestine was growing increasingly bloody, while the Arab states were mobilizing their armies in order to invade Palestine as soon as the British Mandate came to an end on May 15.²⁰⁴ Ambassador Austin expressed the fears of the American government well when he told Secretary of Defense James Forrestal:

*If we did nothing, it was likely that the Russians could, and would take definite steps toward gaining control in Palestine through the infiltration of specially trained immigrants, or by otherwise capitalizing on the widespread, violent civil war that would be likely to break out. Moreover, the slaughter of thousands and perhaps hundreds of thousands of Jewish residents would present difficult questions for the United States. In the event of such developments, the United States might be forced to intervene, and intervention under those circumstances might require a substantially larger force than the force required simply to support a trusteeship.*²⁰⁵

²⁰³ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck), April 28, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 870.

²⁰⁴ The consul at Jerusalem (Wasson) to the Secretary of State, April 13, 1948, FRUS, 1948, V:II, 817; The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, April 20, 1948, FRUS, 1948, V:II, 837-839; The Consul at Jerusalem (Wasson) to the Secretary of State, April 22, 1948, FRUS, 1948, V:II, 842, 843; The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, April 26, 1948, FRUS, 1948, V:II, 862, 863; The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, April 28, 1948, FRUS, 1948, V:II, 871, 872; The Secretary State to the Consulate General at Jerusalem, May 1, 1948, FRUS, 1948, V:II, 882, 883; The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, May 3, 1948, FRUS, 1948, V:II, 887, 888; The consul at Jerusalem (Wasson) to the Secretary of State, May 3, 1948, FRUS, 1948, V:II, 889.

²⁰⁵ Draft Diary Entry for April 4, 1948, by the Secretary of Defense (Forrestal), April 4, 1948, FRUS, 1948, V:II, 797.

Determined to do something to prevent the Russians from entering Palestine, the United States moved forward with plans to help bear the burden of trusteeship. Despite the stern warnings of the Joint Chiefs, the State Department, with the approval of President Truman, created trusteeship proposals that called for the United States, along with Great Britain and France, to provide the troops necessary to enforce the creation of a United Nations trusteeship government for Palestine.²⁰⁶ The State Department hoped that the British would be willing to stay on for a while, since the evacuation of British troops was clearly increasing the chaos.²⁰⁷ Though the American government had consistently attempted to avoid any plans that called for the dispatch of American troops to Palestine, this course of action was considered absolutely necessary in order to prevent the Soviets from dispatching their own troops to the region.²⁰⁸ Fear of the Soviets seizing the Middle East reached a crescendo in driving American policy from March to May 1948.

The initial trusteeship proposal was soon recognized as impossible since the Soviets rejected anything that went back on partition, the British refused to remain in Palestine any longer, and the Arabs rejected anything that did not give the Palestinians full independence in all of Palestine.²⁰⁹ The Americans responded by producing a plethora of truce and

²⁰⁶ The Acting Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic and Consular Offices, April 6, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 801-803.

²⁰⁷ Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to President Truman, April 4, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 799, 800; The Acting Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic and Consular Offices, April 6, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 801-803; The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, April 26, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 865.

²⁰⁸ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, April 27, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 865; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson), May 2, 1948, 883-885; Memorandum by Mr. John. E. Horner, May 4, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 898-901.

²⁰⁹ The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, April 17, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 828; The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, April 18, 1948, found in

trusteeship resolutions in order to restore order to Palestine and to prevent a full-scale war from breaking out there.²¹⁰ After it became clear that the British would not consider remaining in Palestine any longer to help with any kind of trusteeship plan, the importance of the attempts to establish a truce between the Palestinians and the Jews took on even greater importance as the only realistic option remaining. Ever anxious to maintain the stability of the Middle East, President Truman threw his weight behind the efforts to establish a truce in Palestine, as Dean Rusk later recalled,

The President said that he would be glad to do everything possible to help out in such a situation and he wanted Secretary Marshall to know that he (the President) was ready to take whatever steps the Secretary thought would hasten the completion of a truce. The President said he wanted to give the United Nations every possible support in bringing about this truce and was prepared to go to the limit...The President said our policy will not change. We want a truce. Tell the Arabs that our policy is firm and that we are trying to head off fighting in Palestine. Remind them that we have a difficult political situation in this country. Our main purpose in this present situation is to prevent a war. He expressly stated his concern over the Russian aspect of the situation. He ended by saying "go and get a truce. There is no other

FRUS, 1948, V:II, 830, 831; Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Dean Rusk of the United States Delegation to the United Nations, April 20, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 836, 837; The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, April 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 847; The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, May 4, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 897.

²¹⁰ Memorandum of Conference on Palestine, March 24, 1948, Prepared by the President's Special Counsel (Clifford), March 24, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 755; Memorandum prepared in the Department of State, April 2, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 778-796; Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to President Truman, April 4, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 799, 800; The Secretary of State to the United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin), April 26, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 860-862; Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, April 28, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 866-868; The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, April 29, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 873; Memorandum by Mr. Charles P. Noyes to the deputy United States Representative on the Security Council (Jessup), May 5, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 911.

answer to this situation. Good luck to you and let me know if there is any way in which I can help."²¹¹

The weight of the President's influence, or even the arms embargo that the United States had imposed on the Middle East, however, had no visible impact on either the Jews or the Arabs. One reason that the Jews became uncooperative was that they did not want to give up the independence that had been promised to them in the Partition resolution.²¹² The Arabs likewise refused to accept any truce agreement that so much as implied that partition would be implemented, since, in their opinion, partition was "not a pacific solution since it can be implemented only by force. Therefore, it cannot be considered a solution."²¹³

The fear of Soviet intervention in Palestine grew as the prospects for securing a truce withered. Most were convinced that the "Russian bloc will be content to let situation [sic] drift and avoid all action by GA in the belief that resulting factual situation will be to their liking."²¹⁴ After the British left and chaos took complete control over Palestine, the Soviets, it was feared, would have nothing to stop them from either occupying Palestine itself, or allowing the chaos to spread throughout the Middle East. In a desperate attempt to avoid those terrible potentialities, the State Department continued to create new truce and trusteeship resolutions for the United Nations, none of which succeeded.

²¹¹ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of United Nations Affairs (Rusk), April 30, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 878, 879.

²¹² Memorandum by Mr. John. E. Horner, May 4, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 898.

²¹³ The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck), to the Secretary of State, April 18, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 830, 831.

²¹⁴ The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, May 9, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 953.

Interestingly, some in the State Department had already proposed that the United States recognize the Jewish State after it was announced in lieu of continuing to attempt to effect a truce or create a UN trusteeship.²¹⁵ These proponents noted that the United States was well within its legal rights to recognize the new Jewish State as a result of the UN partition resolution, the Balfour Declaration, the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine, as well as past American policies toward Palestine.²¹⁶ For all of the support that the recognition of the Jewish State received from the State Department, however, the greatest proponents of that policy were Truman's advisors: David Niles, Clark Clifford, and Max Lowenthal.²¹⁷ While the influence of these aides was great, President Truman made the decision to recognize the state of Israel for his own reasons and of his own accord. When it came down to it, Truman announced *de facto* American recognition of Israel soon after the Israeli declaration of Independence was read by David Ben-Gurion.²¹⁸

Scholars disagree as to why Truman decided to extend *de facto* recognition to the Israeli state so soon after its declaration of independence.²¹⁹ Most insist that President Truman did so in order to bolster his flagging political standing in an election year, and indeed President Truman was suffering politically in that election year. *Time* magazine had proclaimed that only "a political miracle, or extraordinary stupidity on the part of the

²¹⁵ Memorandum by Mr. John. E. Horner, May 4, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 898-901.

²¹⁶ Memorandum by the Legal Advisor (Gross) to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), May 13, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 962-964; Memorandum by the Legal Advisor (Gross) to the Under secretary of State (Lovett), found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 959.

²¹⁷ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 209.

²¹⁸ The Secretary of State to Mr. Eliahu Epstein, at Washington, May 14, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 992.

²¹⁹ For some discussion of this subject, see Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 26, 27.

Republicans can save the Democratic party, after 16 years of power, from a debacle in November.”²²⁰ The Democrats had been routed in one of their own bastions of strength, the Bronx in New York City, in a humiliating defeat for a congressional election only a short time before, adding to the worries of a coming defeat in the 1948 elections. The fact that fifty-five percent of the constituents in the Bronx were Jewish seemed to indicate that the Jewish voters were angry at Truman’s handling of the Palestine Question.²²¹ President Truman polled so remarkably badly that most considered the President a “gone goose”.²²² Furthermore, when it came down to it, many in the State Department agreed that the President recognized Israel for purely political reasons. As Robert Lovett told the President to his face, he thought that recognizing Israel “was a very transparent attempt to win the Jewish vote but, in Mr. Lovett’s opinion, it would lose more votes than it would gain.” Secretary of State George Marshall agreed.²²³ Colonel William Eddy famously reported that the President recognized Israel for the same reason, recounting that the President said, “I’m sorry gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents.”²²⁴

Many other theories have been put forward by scholars to explain Truman’s recognition of Israel beyond the simple political one. Some have argued that Truman did

²²⁰ *Time*, March 15, 1948, quoted in Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 178.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, Evensen, “A Story of Ineptness,” 358.

²²² Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 180.

²²³ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, May 12, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 975.

²²⁴ Quoted in Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers*, 51. Note that this comment does not exist in the official State Department notes for the meeting in which Truman supposedly said this.

not wish to recognize Israel but that he was convinced by his aides that he should do so.²²⁵ Some have argued that he did it for religious reasons.²²⁶ Others believe it was for humanitarian reasons.²²⁷ Fear of the Soviets recognizing Israel first is another way of explaining Truman's actions.²²⁸ Many other theories have also been put forward, but Truman had more than one reason for recognizing Israel. Indeed, it is clear that Truman recognized Israel so promptly in an effort to keep the Soviets out of the region, because of the new realities that had developed in Palestine, as well as his old humanitarian concern for the Jews.

The primary reason for Truman's decision to extend *de facto* recognition to Israel was in order to prevent the Soviets from getting an advantage over the United States by giving the Jews extra diplomatic support.²²⁹ Truman said as much in a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt soon after the fact, noting that "Since there was a vacuum in Palestine and since the Russians were anxious to be the first to do the recognizing, General Marshall, Secretary Lovett, Dr. Rusk and myself worked the matter out and decided the proper thing to do was to recognize the Jewish Government promptly."²³⁰ That Truman's primary concern was the Soviet threat is also clear from his earlier statements to other members of the State Department, such as a conversation he had with Lovett just a few weeks before. In that

²²⁵ Michael J. Cohen, "Truman and the State Department: The Palestine Trusteeship Proposal, March 1948," *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2 (Spring, 1981): 167.

²²⁶ Naomi W. Cohen, *American Jews and the Zionist Idea*, (KTAV Publishing house, 1975): 92.

²²⁷ Michelle Mart, "Constructing a Universal Ideal: Anti-Semitism, American Jews, and the Founding of Israel," *Modern Judaism*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Oxford University Press: May 2000): 194.

²²⁸ Michael Ottolenghi, "Harry Truman's Recognition of Israel," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 47, no. 4 (Dec., 2004): 983.

²²⁹ See discussion about Ambassador Austin's warnings, above.

²³⁰ Quoted in Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 188.

instance, Lovett recalled that the President “expressly stated his concern over the Russian aspect of the situation.”²³¹

There was certainly plenty of evidence to indicate that the Jews were considering joining the Soviets. The State Department had long feared that the Soviets would use Jewish immigration into Palestine in order to establish a communist state on the Mediterranean.²³² These fears had been reinforced in November, 1947, when a US intelligence report called attention to Soviet agents getting smuggled into Palestine by way of the Jewish DP camps in Europe.²³³ Then, in May, 1948, another report alleged that there was “a real danger that Communism may gain a firm hold in Israel.”²³⁴ The United States had also clearly alienated the Jews by supporting trusteeship proposals so frequently during the preceding months. As the American Consul in Jerusalem reported, many Jews were talking of seeking aid from the Soviets after the United States abandoned partition in mid-March.²³⁵

Yet, as the State Department feared, giving further support to the Jews would hopelessly alienate the Arabs and would completely destroy America’s position in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia certainly contributed to this fear in the months before the United States recognized Israel. Despite all the bluster coming from Saudi Arabia, however, Truman had good reason to doubt whether King Ibn Saud would cut relations with the

²³¹ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of United Nations Affairs (Rusk), April 30, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 879.

²³² Ganin, “The Limits of American Jewish Political Power,” 19.

²³³ Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, 102.

²³⁴ Quoted in: Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, 103.

²³⁵ The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State, March 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 753.

United States. King Ibn Saud had himself admitted that his interest lay in remaining close to the United States and keeping Aramco running. Though he had warned President Truman that supporting the Jews would deal a “death-blow to American interests”, he later effectively withdrew that threat.²³⁶ Just a few days after the passage of the partition resolution, King Ibn Saud spoke with the American ambassador in Saudi Arabia, as the ambassador himself recounted:

*His Majesty stated ‘I occupy a position of preeminence in the Arab world. In the case of Palestine I have to make common cause with other Arab states. Although the other Arab states may bring pressure to bear on me I do not anticipate that a situation will arise whereby I shall be drawn into conflict with friendly western powers over this question.’ His Majesty remarked that apart from Palestine his relations with the United States were of the closest. He considered that aside from Palestine there were no points of conflict between the two countries whose interests were complimentary to one another.*²³⁷

The King thereby assured President Truman that he would not, regardless of the President’s policies toward Palestine, break relations with the United States. As Clark Clifford argued in March 1948, “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.”²³⁸ King Ibn Saud needed the United States far more than the United States needed King Ibn Saud. The United States government could therefore pursue whatever

²³⁶ King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud to President Truman, October 26, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1212-1213.

²³⁷ The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Childs) to the Secretary of State, December 5, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1336. My italics.

²³⁸ Memorandum by the President’s Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman, March 8, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 694, 695.

policy it thought best without fear of the Saudi's cutting off base rights, communication lines, or oil.

Truman's action certainly appeared justified in light of how the Soviets worked to reap the diplomatic and political benefits of supporting the Zionists. As one State Department officer noted of the Soviet attempts to curry favor with the Jews at the UN, "the Russians in the SC would almost certainly veto any proposal which is directed against the Jews or which would prevent the Russians from having free access to the Jewish State either for men or munitions."²³⁹ After the United States beat the Soviet Union to the punch at extending recognition to Israel first, the Soviets upped the ante by being the first to extend *de jure* recognition to the Israelis.²⁴⁰ The Soviets would later further attempt to strengthen their hand vis-à-vis the Americans in Israel/Palestine by circumventing the American/British embargo of Palestine and shipping tons of vital military supplies to the young Jewish state. Viewed in this light, Truman's decision to extend *de facto* recognition to Israel was a conservative effort at preventing the Soviets from expanding their influence deep into the Middle East.

Another factor that motivated Truman to recognize Israel was the situation as it had developed up to that point in Palestine.²⁴¹ Many in the State Department readily realized that the situation on the ground in Palestine had drastically changed even since the trusteeship proposals had first been floated in mid-March. Though the State Department

²³⁹ Memorandum by Mr. Charles P. Noyes to the deputy United States Representative on the Security Council (Jessup), May 5, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 911.

²⁴⁰ The Chargé in the Soviet Union (Dubrow) to the Secretary of State, May 18, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1011; also see: Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 28.

²⁴¹ Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel*, 178.

continued to work toward trusteeship in one form or another, even Lovett, who was one of the most ardent opponents of recognizing Israel, admitted that a trusteeship “for all of Palestine would be unrealistic in the light of the present situation as it is developing.”²⁴² Dean Rusk, who also opposed recognizing Israel right away, had to admit that “something has happened in fact over there. It is not according to plan but nevertheless there is a [Jewish] community in existence over there, running its own affairs.”²⁴³ The American government just needed to “face up to the inescapable fact that a Zionist State already is in being in Palestine.”²⁴⁴ One of President Truman’s aides, Max Lowenthal, echoed these ideas in another memorandum to the President. Lowenthal went a bit beyond what the State Department officials, or the President for that matter, would agree with, but nevertheless made some truthful points when he argued:

The Jews in Palestine, by showing unexpected strength in relation to the Arabs, succeeded in achieving that objective....It is clear that partition is an accomplished fact. Everyone realizes this except the State Department....It is now only a question whether it can be reversed. To reverse the reality of partition would require military force, threats, sanctions or persuasion. None would be effective. If we could not muster military support to implement the UN resolution, or our trusteeship proposal, surely we could not muster it to dislodge the Jews from the areas assigned to them by the UN....Since we cannot, and would not want to, reverse the reality of partition, we should derive the maximum advantage for the President and for the U.S. government from the existing situation. This can best be done by an immediate

²⁴² Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, by Mr. John C. Ross, May 9, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 942.

²⁴³ Transcript of Remarks Made by Mr. Dean Rusk in conversation by Telephone with Mr. Jessup and Mr. Ross on May 11, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 967.

²⁴⁴ Memorandum by Mr. John. E. Horner, May 4, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 899.

*statement that he intends to recognize the Jewish State when it is proclaimed.*²⁴⁵

Thus, the facts on the ground were such that Truman really had no other realistic option but to recognize Israel. Refusing to recognize Israel would have accomplished nothing since the Jews had the backing of the Soviet Union and had effectively already carried out the partition of Palestine by force of arms. Furthermore, as Naomi Cohen argued, granting Israel immediate recognition promised to bring peace and stability to Palestine faster than any other plan then under consideration.²⁴⁶ Clark Clifford also made this point when he argued that “The United States and Western Europe can only get oil in Arabia if there is peace in Arabia....The only alternative is, therefore, to back up the [Partition Plan] so that there will be peace in Arabia.”²⁴⁷ A desire to restore peace and preserve stability in the Middle East thereby pushed Truman to recognize Israel.

Many in the State Department, however, vehemently opposed the President’s plan to recognize Israel, and Secretary Marshall threatened to resign over the issue.²⁴⁸ All the State Department could consider at the time was the potential loss of influence that supporting the Jews would effect in the Arab states. Both Truman and the State Department held the Cold War as the highest priority on the international arena, but the State

²⁴⁵ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 210.

²⁴⁶ Naomi W. Cohen, *American Jews and the Zionist Idea*, (KTAV Publishing house, 1975): 92.

²⁴⁷ Memorandum by the President’s Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman, May 8, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 694.

²⁴⁸ Memorandum of Conversations, by the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), May 17, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1004; Quoted in Ganin, *Truman and Israel*, 187; FRUS, 1948, V:II, 993; The United State Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, May 15, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 998; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), May 21, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1019, 1020; The British Embassy to the Department of State, May 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1035; see also: Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 529; Clifford and Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President*, 6.

Department did not grant the Jews of Palestine the same strategic consideration that they accorded the Arabs. While they did recognize that there was some danger of the Jews going over to the Soviets, they stubbornly insisted that the greater threat lay in the Arabs joining the Soviets. Truman was frequently frustrated at those “striped pants boys” in the State Department and their unwillingness to go along with his program. Truman later recounted, “I was told that to some of the career men of the State Department this announcement [recognizing Israel] came as a surprise. It should not have been if these men had faithfully supported my policy.”²⁴⁹ The State Department and the Department of Defense would both soon come around to seeing the Middle East through the same lens as President Truman following the Israeli victory in the war of 1948.

²⁴⁹ Truman, *Memoirs*, 193.

THE CONFLAGRATION

President Truman's policy of supporting Israel, as noted, was calculated to keep the Soviets from gaining access to the Mediterranean through the Jews, to help maintain peace and stability in the region, and as a humanitarian effort. Truman's policy required maintaining relationships with both the Jews and the Arabs since losing either side to the Soviets would have compromised American strategic interests in the region. It would take a couple of months, but soon after Truman extended *de facto* recognition to Israel the Departments of State and Defense came to agree with Truman's policy. This overarching policy was evident in the American government's goals of achieving a peace agreement in Palestine and enforcing a strict arms embargo on the Middle East. These goals, which as always were conditioned by the ever present Cold War, characterized American policy in Palestine through the end of the year.

The initial reaction of the State Department to the recognition of Israel was one of dismay. As Arab armies crossed the borders into Palestine on May 15th, the long-held fears of war breaking out in the Middle East followed by Soviet armed intervention seemed about to come to pass.²⁵⁰ Some in the State Department were so worried that they thought it would be best to simply evacuate American citizens from the Middle East and surrender American interests to the Soviets.²⁵¹ Arab threats to cancel oil concessions

²⁵⁰ The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, May 14, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 990; The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, May 15, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 997; The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, May 21, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1026.

²⁵¹ The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Childs) to the Secretary of State, May 15, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 996.

and air base rights fanned the already inflamed fears of the State and Defense Departments that President Truman's policy would cost America dearly.²⁵² Some leaders, including Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, angrily condemned the President's action as a foolhardy attempt to gain the Jewish vote in that year's elections at the expense of vital American strategic interests.²⁵³

As if alienating the Arabs were not enough, the State Department feared the effect that the American policy toward Palestine was having on American relations with Britain. The American Ambassador in Britain warned of a "crevasse widening between US and Britain over Palestine" that was "...already seriously jeopardizing foundation-stone of US policy in Europe—partnership with a friendly and well-disposed Britain."²⁵⁴ The fact that the British continued to arm their Transjordanian and Egyptian allies complicated matters all the more.²⁵⁵ Since the British were obligated through their treaties to provide these allies with arms and ammunition, the British refused to abide by the arms embargo that the United States had unilaterally imposed on the Middle East.²⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the domestic political pressure to abandon the embargo continued to mount against the American government.²⁵⁷ Indeed, the pressure was fast becoming so intense

²⁵² The Charge in Egypt (Patterson) to the Secretary of State, June 30, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1159.

²⁵³ Diary Entry for October 21, 1948, by the Secretary of Defense (Forrestal), found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1501.

²⁵⁴ The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, May 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1031; quoted in Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 54.

²⁵⁵ The ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, May 27, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1067.

²⁵⁶ The British Embassy to the Department of State, May 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1035.

²⁵⁷ Memorandum by the Department of State to President Truman, May 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1027, 1028.

that President Truman thought it comparable to the frenzied lobbying that took place during the campaign to get the trusteeship proposals passed at the UN.²⁵⁸ It seemed likely, therefore, that if the British did not begin to enforce the arms embargo against the Middle East then the United States would capitulate under the political pressure and begin allowing arms to flow to Israel.²⁵⁹ The American Ambassador to Britain warned that should this increasingly likely situation come to pass, the United States and Britain would end up on the opposite sides of a war “scarcely three years after May 8, 1945.”²⁶⁰ This rift, many feared, would give the Soviet Union exactly the opportunity it needed to expand its power further into Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Indeed, Kennan had warned that the Soviets would do “Everything possible...to set major Western Powers against each other” in his Long Telegram of February, 1946, and it seemed that the Soviets were succeeding in doing just that in Palestine.²⁶¹

Thus, the State Department was convinced that Truman’s support of Israel was destroying America’s Cold War policies. Kennan summarized the fears of much of the Truman administration when he wrote, “It [America’s policy in Palestine] thereby threatens not only to place in jeopardy some of our most vital national interests in the Middle East and the Mediterranean but also to disrupt the unity of the western world and to undermine our entire policy toward the Soviet Union. This is not to mention the

²⁵⁸ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, by the Acting Secretary of State, September 29, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1430.

²⁵⁹ Report by the Central Intelligence Agency, August 5, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1285.

²⁶⁰ The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, May 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1031.

²⁶¹ The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State, February 22, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 706.

possibility that it may initiate a process of disintegration in the United Nations itself.”²⁶² With these vital interests at stake, the war and chaos that had enveloped Palestine seemed made to order for the expansion of Soviet influence into the Middle East and elsewhere.²⁶³ Ambassador Austin predicted that the Soviets aimed “To create conditions likely to weaken the present regimes in the Arab countries. They no doubt foresee that either weakness in supporting the Palestine Arabs or military reverses in Palestine would bring down the governments at least of Iraq and Syria and might even create a revolutionary situation in those two countries. [sic]”²⁶⁴ This political unrest would thereby lead to a loss of many key Arab allies. As a result, it seemed clear that the “foundation of state of Israel ha[d] been ... ‘made to order as bridge head for penetration of Near East by USSR[sic]’”.²⁶⁵

Despite these fears, the Defense and State Departments began to see greater wisdom in President Truman’s preferred policies after the Soviet blockade of Berlin began on June 24, 1948.²⁶⁶ The reason for this change in opinion was the increasingly obvious efforts of the Soviets to court the Jews. The Soviets had diplomatically supported the Zionists for over two years by the time the Berlin blockade began, and this

²⁶² Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Kennan) to the Secretary of State, May 21, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1021.

²⁶³ Memorandum by Mr. M. Gordon Knox to the United States Deputy Representative at the United Nations (Johnson), November 4, 1947, found in FRUS, 1947, V, 1234; The Acting United States Representative at the United Nations (Jessup) to the Secretary of State, July 1, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1182.

²⁶⁴ The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, May 21, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1026.

²⁶⁵ The Consul at Jerusalem (Wasson) to the Secretary of State, May 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1030.

²⁶⁶ Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 52.

support had garnered a great deal of prestige among Jews around the world (at least according to the CIA).²⁶⁷ The fact that there were lots of communist and socialist Jews that were moving to Palestine was another matter of concern for the American government.²⁶⁸

Soviet military aid to Israel did more than anything else to convince the Departments of Defense and State that the USSR was attempting to enter the Middle East by way of Israel. Though the United States was enforcing an embargo on military wares and men, the Soviets had allowed the Czechoslovak government to fly armaments to Israel.²⁶⁹ This flow of arms, which included artillery, fighter planes, machine guns, rifles, and ammunition, had begun in December 1947 and picked up pace after Israel declared independence.²⁷⁰ Nor did the Czechs limit their aid to weapons. In addition to sending arms and munitions the Czechs also dispatched “mercenaries” to Israel who volunteered to help the Jews fight the Arabs and provided extensive training to Israeli airborne units and pilots.²⁷¹ The Czechoslovak arms, training, and mercenaries proved to be an essential part of the Jewish victories over the Arab armies, and there was no doubt in the minds of American leaders that this military aid had helped strengthen the ties between

²⁶⁷ Report by the Central Intelligence Agency, July 27, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1246.

²⁶⁸ The Acting United States Representative at the United Nations (Jessup) to the Secretary of State, July 1, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1182; Ibid., The vice Consul at Jerusalem (Burdett) to the Secretary of State, June 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1142; The Vice consul at Jerusalem (Burdett) to the Secretary of State, June 25, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1145; Department of State Comments on NSC 27, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1361.

²⁶⁹ Krammer, *The Forgotten friendship*, 31, 66-111; Radosh and Radosh, *Safe Haven*, 313; Larry Collins, Dominique Lapierre, *O Jerusalem*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).

²⁷⁰ Krammer, *The Forgotten friendship*, 31, 66-111.

²⁷¹ Department of State Comments on NSC 27, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1361.

Israel and the Soviet Union.²⁷² With communist arms and men flowing into Israel, it suddenly seemed that the Soviets were only one step away from securing a satellite on the Mediterranean.²⁷³ Fears that the Soviets would gain control of Israel were exacerbated in June when the Soviets volunteered to send troops to Palestine as UN truce observers.²⁷⁴ This tactic for entering Palestine, which had so long been feared and predicted, was defeated only by a determined American campaign at the UN.²⁷⁵ The USSR was making a move on Israel.

It seems that after witnessing these efforts of the Soviet Union to extend its influence into the Middle East through Israel, the departments of State and Defense changed their minds regarding the wisdom of ignoring the needs and desires of the Jews. For instance, Robert Lovett worried that if Israel were isolated and “kept with a circle of weak Arab enemies kept in a ring only by British armed assistance” then they would surely join the Soviet camp.²⁷⁶ Forrestal, who had so vehemently opposed supporting the Jews, warned of the risk of Israel falling into the hands of the Soviets.²⁷⁷ The American

²⁷² Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, November 13, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1578.

²⁷³ Memorandum by Mr. Robert M. McClintock to the Director of the Office of United Nations Affairs (Rusk), July 1, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1177; Department of State Comments on NSC 27, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1361; The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Acting Secretary of State, October 26, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1517; The Secretary of State to the Acting Secretary of State, October 27, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1521; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, November 13, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1578.

²⁷⁴ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Egypt, June 7, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1103, 1104.

²⁷⁵ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, by Mr. Robert M. McClintock, June 14, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1112-1114; The Secretary of State to the Acting United States Representative at the United Nations (Jessup), June 23, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1138, 1139.

²⁷⁶ Quoted in Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 271.

²⁷⁷ Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense (Forrestal) to the National Security Council, August 19, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1322.

delegation at the United Nations summed up the new fears of the State Department well when they warned Marshall in a telegram, “If in effect Israel is thrown into arms of Soviet Union it could become a force operating to very great disadvantage to US, UK and other western powers and to Arabs.” They then gave the good news that “Israel, if fairly treated, could become a force operating to our own advantage and to advantage of Arab countries.”²⁷⁸ Thus, the entire Truman administration came around to agreeing with the president on a policy designed to maintain close relations with both the Jews and the Arabs.

As a result of the American government’s conclusion that a working relationship had to be maintained with both the Arabs and the Jews, the arms embargo against the Middle East became all the more important. For instance, the new Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, Joseph C. Satterthwaite, warned of the effects that lifting the arms embargo against Israel would have on American interests with regard to the continuing Cold War.²⁷⁹ First he warned that arming the Jews would lead to serious military setbacks for the Arab armies, which would certainly lead to the rise of anti-American and anti-British regimes throughout the Arab world, along with an attendant increase in chaos which “would provide a breeding ground for communism”.²⁸⁰ Furthermore, the rise of these new “Governments hostile to the Western powers would

²⁷⁸ The Acting United States Representative at the United Nations (Jessup) to the Secretary of State, July 1, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1184.

²⁷⁹ Truman had blamed the trusteeship proposal debacle on Loy Henderson, and promptly had him shipped off to India as the new ambassador there in order to get him out of Washington. See FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1217, footnote one; also see: Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 225-230.

²⁸⁰ Memorandum by the Acting Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Satterthwaite) to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), July 12, 1948, 1217.

mean the loss of vital strategic facilities in the Near East coveted by the Soviet Union” and would destroy America’s position vis-à-vis Greece, Turkey, and Iran.²⁸¹ Finally, and most chillingly in light of the Berlin Airlift, lifting the embargo would bring the United States into the war on the opposite side of Great Britain, and that rift between allies would “jeopardize the entire basis of US policy in Europe.”²⁸² The Division of Near Eastern Affairs echoed Satterthwaite’s report by warning

*In the opinion of United States diplomatic and military observers in the near Eastern capitals, repeal of the United States arms embargo in favor of the Jews would be regarded throughout the Near East as a virtual American alliance with Jewish war effort and an American declaration of war against the Arab States. Such a move would immediately evoke hostile and violent mob reactions against the United States and irreparably damage America-Arab relations. It would result in the destruction of American tactical and strategic security throughout the entire Near East, and would lead ultimately to the loss of the American stake in this area.*²⁸³

The arms embargo had great significance in the American efforts to reestablish peace in the region as well. The CIA predicted that the arms embargo against the Middle East would limit the scale and intensity of the fighting, and would eventually lead to a stalemate in which both sides would sue for peace.²⁸⁴ On the other hand, allowing the embargo to break down would add fuel to the conflagration, and would lead to increased

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Memorandum Prepared in the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1060; quoted in Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 54. My italics.

²⁸⁴ Report by the Central Intelligence Agency, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1279.

chaos that would destroy both the American and British positions in the Middle East.²⁸⁵ It was hoped the arms embargo would thereby serve to help reestablish peace in the region.

Reestablishing peace in the region was vital in light of the importance of maintaining good relations with both the Arabs and the Jews. Allowing the conflict to continue unabated ran the increasing risk that one side or the other would fall into the Soviet camp. It was feared that if the war continued and the United States continued to maintain its embargo of the Middle East, the Jews would join the Soviet camp because of the continued diplomatic and military support that the USSR provided. Furthermore, as noted above, the Arab states ran a great risk of having their armies defeated if the war continued. This eventuality, the Americans and British were certain, would lead to the fall of the moderate and pro-Western regimes which would certainly be replaced by extreme pro-Soviet regimes.²⁸⁶ As a result, restoring peace in Palestine became “just as serious as Berlin” in the eyes of American policy makers.²⁸⁷

The American government had begun working to reestablish peace in Palestine as part of the multiple truce and trusteeship proposals it had presented to the United Nations in the first months of 1948. On May 14 the United Nations General Assembly had

²⁸⁵ Department of State Comments on NSC 27, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1361; The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Acting Secretary of State, October 26, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1517.

²⁸⁶ Report by the Central Intelligence Agency, August 5, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1279-1285; The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1292, 1293.

²⁸⁷ The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1292.

adopted a resolution that appointed a mediator for the conflict, and a week later the Security Council also charged France, Belgium, and the United States with the responsibility of functioning as a Truce Commission which was to assist the UN Mediator in his efforts to bring an end to the conflict.²⁸⁸ The Mediator, Counte Folk Bernadotte, immediately began his work in Palestine.

The following months were characterized by frustrated efforts at mediating between the two warring sides as Bernadotte's continued efforts repeatedly failed. The Jews and the Arabs agreed to their first ceasefire on June 11.²⁸⁹ The Jews used the ceasefire to rearm, reinforce, and reorganize their forces, rushing in arms and ammunition from Czechoslovakia so that by the time the ceasefire lapsed on July 9 the Jewish army had become a formidable fighting machine.²⁹⁰ The Arabs on the other hand spent their time squabbling amongst themselves, and provided an excuse for the Jews to continue their fight by rejecting a continuation of the ceasefire.²⁹¹ In fact, the Egyptians broke the ceasefire early by launching a preemptive attack on July 8.²⁹² In the second round of fighting the Israelis drove back the Arab armies, inflicting a humiliating defeat on their enemies.²⁹³ That round of fighting came to a halt after the Security Council passed a

²⁸⁸ Resolution 186 (S-2) Adopted by the General Assembly on May 14, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 994; Resolution 49 (1948) Adopted by the Security Council on May 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1029.

²⁸⁹ Memorandum of Telephone conversation, by Mr. Fraser Wilkins of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, June 1, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1084.

²⁹⁰ The Charge in Egypt (Patterson) to the Secretary of State, June 15, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1114; Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan*, 256; Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 52.

²⁹¹ Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan*, 257-263; Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine*, 222, 223.

²⁹² Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), July 8, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1198.

²⁹³ Palumbo, *The Palestinian Catastrophe*, 139-145; Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan*, 260-272.

resolution on July 15 that threatened sanctions if the belligerents did not accept a ceasefire.²⁹⁴

Though restoring peace to Palestine was an important goal during this period, the crisis in Berlin so absorbed the energies of the American government that only a minimal effort was put forward to help bring the conflict in Palestine to a close. Certainly the United States was quick to help pass ceasefire resolutions and to lend diplomatic support to Count Bernadotte's efforts to bring about a peace treaty, but the demands of the Cold War blunted American efforts. For instance, when Count Bernadotte asked the United Nations to supply troops to act as peacekeepers and observers and the Soviet Union stepped forward volunteering its own troops for the job, the United States launched a determined campaign to prevent the Soviets from being able to send any of their soldiers to Palestine.²⁹⁵ Though the United States did send three destroyers to Palestine to help enforce the United Nations arms embargo, the American government refused to send any soldiers to Palestine despite Count Bernadotte's repeated pleas for peacekeepers and guards, sending instead a few officers to act as "observers".²⁹⁶ The reason for the

²⁹⁴ Resolution 54 (1948) Adopted by the Security Council on July 15, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1224, 1225; The Consul General at Jerusalem (MacDonalld) to the Secretary of State, July 21, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1234.

²⁹⁵ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Egypt, June 7, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1103, 1104; memorandum of Telephone Conversation, by Mr. Robert M. McClintock, June 14, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1112-1114; The Secretary of State to the Acting United States Representative at the United Nations (Jessup), June 23, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1138, 1139.

²⁹⁶ ²⁹⁶ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Egypt, June 16, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1116; The Secretary of State to the Secretary-General of the United Nations (Lie), June 24, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1140; The Acting United States Representative at the United Nations (Jessup) to the Secretary of State, July 17, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1228; The United Nations mediator in Palestine (Bernadotte) to the Secretary of State, July 20, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1231; The Acting United States Representative at the United Nations (Jessup) to the Secretary of State, July 21, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1235; The Secretary of State to the Consulate General at Jerusalem, July 28, 1948,

American refusal to dispatch peacekeeping troops to Palestine was that the Department of Defense did not want to send any troops at a time when war with the Soviet Union appeared to be imminent.²⁹⁷ Secretary Forrestal also argued that if the United States sent troops in any large numbers then that would likely provoke the Soviet Union to also dispatch troops to the region—an eventuality that the United States could not countenance.²⁹⁸ Thus, the United States effectively blocked the efforts of Count Bernadotte to bring in peacekeepers and thereby undermined the peacemaking efforts because of the broader strategic fears of the Cold War.²⁹⁹

Count Bernadotte submitted his peace plan for Palestine to the United Nations in mid-September and then was gunned down in cold blood by Stern Gang terrorists the next day.³⁰⁰ The assassination of Count Bernadotte sparked an international fervor for his plan that, as Marshall pointed out to President Truman, created a good environment for

found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1251; The Consul General at Jerusalem (MacDonald) to the Secretary of State, July 31, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1263; The Consul General at Jerusalem (MacDonald) to the Secretary of State, August 1, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1264; The Consul General at Jerusalem (MacDonald) to the Secretary of State, August 1, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1265, 1266; The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, August 3, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1274; The Secretary of State to the Consulate General at Jerusalem, August 3, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1275, 1276; Also see: Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 53, 62; The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, August 3, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1274; The Secretary of State to the Consulate General at Jerusalem, August 3, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1275, 1276.

²⁹⁷ Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense (Forrestal) to the National Security Council, August 19, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1322.

²⁹⁸ Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense (Forrestal) to the National Security Council, August 19, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1323.

²⁹⁹ The Consul General at Jerusalem (MacDonald) to the Secretary of State, August 1, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1265, 1266.

³⁰⁰ Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator in Palestine, September 12, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1401-1406; The Consul General at Jerusalem (MacDonald) to the Secretary of State, September 17, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1412.

the acceptance of the plan.³⁰¹ The United States had worked out with Britain how to get the peace plan accepted even before Bernadotte submitted his plan to the United Nations. As per their plan, Marshall released a statement endorsing the Bernadotte plane.³⁰² Unfortunately, it soon became clear that the plan would not be acceptable to the belligerent parties. The biggest issue was that the plan called for a readjustment of the borders of Palestine by giving the Western Galilee to Israel and giving the rest of Arab Palestine (including the Negev) to Transjordan.³⁰³ Because the plan gave the Negev to the Arabs, the Jews rejected the plan.³⁰⁴ The Arab states, with the exception of Transjordan, likewise rejected the plan and refused to negotiate with the “expansionist Zionists”.³⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the State Department, with President Truman’s approval, began working toward getting the peace plan ratified by the United Nations.³⁰⁶

³⁰¹ Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 55; Shlomo Slonim, “President Truman, the State Department and the Palestine Question,” *The Weiner Library Bulletin*, vol. XXXIV, series no. 53/54 (1981) pp. 15-19; Joseph Heller, “Failure of a Mission: Bernadotte and Palestine, 1948,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Jul., 1979), pp. 515-534; Snetsinger, *Truman, the Jewish Vote, and the Creation of Israel*, 125.

³⁰² the Acting Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic and Consular Offices, September 21, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1415, 1416; quoted in part in Snetsinger, *Truman, the Jewish Vote, and the Creation of Israel*, 125; The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, September 17, 1948, 1411; Slonim, “President Truman, the State Department, and the Palestine Question,” 25.

³⁰³ Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator in Palestine, September 12, 1948, 1401-1406; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 233; Hahn, *Caught in Palestine*, 55; Epeleg, *The Grand Mufti*, 99; Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, 130; Slonim, “President Truman, the State Department, and the Palestine Question,” 25; Heller, “Failure of a Mission: Bernadotte and Palestine, 1948,” 518.

³⁰⁴ The Special Representative of the United States in Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, September 28, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1428; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, October 5, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1452; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 233, 245-248; Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 55.

³⁰⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Henry S. Villard of the Advisory Staff of the United States Delegation to the General Assembly, September 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1416; The Ambassador in Egypt (Griffis) to the Acting Secretary of State, September 25, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1422; The Ambassador in Egypt (Griffis) to the Acting Secretary of State, September 25, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1424, 1425; Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 56; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 233; Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan*, 294.

³⁰⁶ Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 57.

Ironically, as Peter Hahn points out, America's stance in agreeing to give the Negev to Transjordan prompted the Israelis to launch another attack on October 15 in an effort to take the Negev.³⁰⁷ Once the Israelis had taken the Negev, they determined that they would "not give it up...unless they [were] bodily removed from it."³⁰⁸ Other Israeli offensives similarly changed the situation on the ground before the plan could be implemented, rendering the plan obsolete before it could be ratified by the UN.³⁰⁹

Some in the American government also continued to worry that if the United States pressed Israel too hard to abandon the Negev, the "Effect of this would be to throw Israel into the Soviet camp rather than holding them in Western orbit."³¹⁰ This seemed all the more probable since the United States expected the Soviets to continue supporting the Israelis diplomatically. The State Department felt certain that the Soviets would veto any attempts that the United States made to have the Bernadotte plan ratified.³¹¹ The United States could not afford such a steep diplomatic price for supporting the Bernadotte plan, and so American resolve began to crumble. Furthermore, since the Israelis were determined not to retreat from the positions that they had taken, it also seemed that

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 56.

³⁰⁸ The President of the Provisional Government of Israel (Weizmann) to President Truman, November 5, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1549.

³⁰⁹ The Secretary of State to the Acting Secretary of State, October 25, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1518; The Acting Secretary of State to the Special Representative of the United States in Israel (McDonald), December 30, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1704; Diary Entry for December 31, 1948, by the Secretary of Defense (Forrestal), found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1705.

³¹⁰ The Secretary of State to the Acting Secretary of State, November 12, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1576.

³¹¹ Ibid., The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Smith) to the Acting Secretary of State, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1480; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, November 13, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1577, 1578; The Special Representative of the United States in Israel (McDonald) to the Acting Secretary of State, November 17, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1606, 1607.

nothing short of military intervention would make implementing the Bernadotte plan possible.³¹² Thus, the facts on the ground helped lead the United States government to change its stance toward the Bernadotte plan, which was allowed to die.

³¹² The Israeli Foreign Minister (Shertok) to the Secretary of State, at Paris, October 27, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1527; Mr. Aubry S. Eban to the Secretary of State, at Paris, November 4, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1545; The Special Representative of the United States in Israel (McDonald) to the Acting Secretary of State, November 17, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1606, 1607.

THE REFUGEES

The strategic importance of Palestine/Israel had prompted Truman and the American government to lend diplomatic support to the Zionist cause and had likewise constrained American efforts to press Israel to be more compliant in working with mediators in 1948. The strategic importance of the new Israeli state became very clear to the Truman administration in 1949. Indeed, after the successful Israeli war effort, the entire Truman administration had to admit that a new situation had developed and that the United States had to maintain relations with both the Israelis and the Arabs. The importance of keeping the Israelis happy was driven home by fears that the Soviets would soon be able to extend their reach to the Mediterranean by way of acquiring an alliance with Israel.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff acknowledged Israel's importance from a military point of view when they issued a new study in May, 1949. The Joint Chiefs were so impressed with the effectiveness of the Israeli army that they concluded that "From the viewpoint of tactical operations, Israel's territory and its indigenous military forces, which have had some battle experience, would be of importance to either the Western Democracies or the USSR in any contest for control of the Eastern Mediterranean-Middle East area."³¹³ This was in part because the Israeli army had performed so wonderfully in the 1948 war while the Arab armies, upon whom allied war plans relied so heavily, had performed poorly.³¹⁴

³¹³ Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense (Johnson) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Sowers), May 16, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1010.

³¹⁴ Report by the National Security Council on United States Policy Toward Israel and the Arab States, October 17, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1434.

They argued that, “Should Israel ally herself with the Western Democracies in the event of war with the USSR, full advantage could be taken of defensive positions in that country and of Israel’s forces for the defense of the Cairo-Suez area and for land operations to defend or to recapture the Middle East oil facilities. The cooperation of Israel would be of considerable assistance to the Western Democracies in meeting maximum Soviet capabilities in the Palestine area.”³¹⁵ They concluded that Israel was of “critical importance to the future security of the United States”.³¹⁶ Thus, the American defense establishment had come to recognize the vital importance of Israel in their grand strategies for the Middle East.

Should the Soviet Union secure Israel as an ally, however, the Anglo-American position in the Eastern Mediterranean would be compromised.³¹⁷ Even more frightening were the continued efforts of the Soviets to court the Israelis. The State Department fully expected that the Soviets would continue to grant Israel diplomatic support as they moved forward because, as the American Chargé in the USSR wrote, Israel was “‘soft’ for penetration purposes.”³¹⁸ The State Department therefore assessed the Soviet Union’s strategy regarding Israel as a plan to

Extend increasing support to Communists of Israel, encouraging and aiding them to penetrate Government, at same time infiltrating Communist agents into Eastern European emigration, which Israel

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense (Johnson) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Sowers), May 16, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1012.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ The Charge’ in the Soviet Union (Kohler) to the Secretary of State, July 1, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1194; The Ambassador in Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, June 8, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1100.

*desires and Kremlin controls. The Embassy recently learned from usually reliable sources that some half-dozen Soviet citizens have been authorized to leave the Soviet Union for Palestine; since normal emigration from USSR is forbidden, these persons could only be Soviet agents.*³¹⁹

The Joint Chiefs likewise warned of the risk of infiltration into Israel, pointing out that “there is an opportunity for Communist penetration through Jewish immigration into [Israel] from eastern Europe, the Balkans, and China. There are indications that significant numbers of immigrants who have passed through Communist indoctrination courses have already entered Israel.”³²⁰ As if Soviet diplomatic support and infiltration were not enough to frighten American policy makers, the Joint Chiefs also pointed out that Israel had thus far been worryingly neutral in its policies regarding the Cold War.³²¹ As a result, the Joint Chiefs warned that “Israel may become a danger or an asset depending upon the nature of her future relations with the Soviets and with the Western Democracies.”³²² They left no doubt that the United States should ensure that Israel did not join the Soviet camp. At least one official proposed that the United States should increase its aid to Israel in an effort to lure the Israelis to more solidly identify themselves with the United States.³²³ Truly, both the Department of Defense and the State

³¹⁹ The Charge’ in the Soviet Union (Kohler) to the Secretary of State, January 13, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 657.

³²⁰ Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense (Johnson) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Sowers), May 16, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1011.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense (Johnson) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Sowers), May 16, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1012.

³²³ Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Satterthwaite) to the Secretary of State, March 24, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 864.

Department had come a very long way in how they judged the strategic importance of the Jews in Palestine.

Of course, the vital importance of the Arab states was still recognized.³²⁴ Since the Arabs had not broken their relations with the United States, however, and had in fact sought to strengthen their ties with the United States despite their differences over Palestine, American statesmen lost much of their fear that the Arabs would desert them. Indeed, as the year progressed, the Arab states repeatedly made requests for closer ties to the United States, often including requests to make official alliances with America.³²⁵ Nevertheless, the United States government retained a healthy respect for the Arabs and sought to avoid alienating them further. Indeed, the fear that the Arabs would “feel that they [were] deserted by the West” continued to motivate the American government to do everything in its power, short of completely alienating the Israelis, to keep the Arabs on the western side of the Cold War.³²⁶

Thus, the Truman administration entered a new phase of unity in policy in 1949. The course plotted by Truman and his advisors, which was calculated, at least in part, to keep the Soviets out of the Middle East, was now followed willingly by the Departments of State and Defense. At last the entire administration agreed that keeping the Israelis on

³²⁴ Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense (Johnson) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Sowers), May 16, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1009-1012.

³²⁵ For just a couple of examples, see: Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Satterthwaite) to the Secretary of State, March 24, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 864; Memorandum by Mr. Samuel K.C. Kopper to Mr. Mark F. Ethridge, January, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 704; Report by the National Security Council on United States Policy Toward Israel and the Arab States, October 17, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1434; The Acting Secretary of State (Webb) to the Embassy in Egypt, November 14, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 225.

³²⁶ British Embassy to the Department of State, January 18, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 676.

the American side of the Cold War was as important as keeping the Arabs on their side. As a National Security Report said in that year, “It is in the national interest of the United States to have the respect and, in so far as possible, good will of *all* the peoples of the Near and Middle East, Jews and Arabs alike, and their orientation toward the West and away from the Soviet Union.”³²⁷

Keeping both sides happy demanded that peace be reestablished in Palestine. With the constant threat of war looming on the horizon, the United States needed to get the Israelis and the Arabs to make peace with one another so that the Soviets would not be able to make use of the chaos of the situation. The old worry remained that if the war continued, the moderate Arab regimes would fall and be replaced by pro-Soviet regimes. Furthermore, the war continued to alienate the United States from both Israel and the Arabs since the United States was blamed by both parties for their reverses and troubles.³²⁸ “In other words, the absence of peace play[ed] into Russia’s hands.”³²⁹ As the Joint Chiefs concluded, “The stability of the Middle East, including assurance that the peoples of this area will not turn to the USSR and against the United States, is a vital element in United States security.”³³⁰

It soon became painfully obvious, however, that Israel was actively creating barriers to peace. This put the United States in an awkward situation since it did not want

³²⁷ Report by the National Security Council on United States Policy Toward Israel and the Arab States, October 17, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1437. My Italics.

³²⁸ Mr. Mark Ethridge to the President, April 11, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 905; The Charge in Egypt (Patterson) to the Secretary of State, June 19, 1948, found in FRUS 1948, V:II, 1156, 1157.

³²⁹ Mr. Mark Ethridge to the President, April 11, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 905.

³³⁰ Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense (Johnson) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Sowers), May 16, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1012

to alienate the Israelis and thereby “throw them into the arms of Russia”, yet the continued conflict threatened to not only undermine American interests in the region but to start another world war.³³¹ The decision was made, therefore, that the United States needed to begin putting greater pressure on Israel to cooperate with the peace-making efforts of the UN and the United States. After all, as the Department of State noted in a memorandum to the President, “The strategic interests of the United States demand early termination of the present conditions of instability and mutual suspicion, which provide such a favorable atmosphere for Soviet penetration and exploitation of the Near East.”³³² Israeli belligerence, therefore, frustrated American leaders. Marshall was so angered by Israeli intransigence that he proposed that the United States withhold *de jure* recognition, withdraw American support for Israel joining the UN, and withhold loans until Israel became more compliant.³³³ Truman echoed the feelings of his entire administration when he called Israel a “troublemaker, endangering peace by flouting U.N.”³³⁴

The United States government became even more frustrated with the Israelis as a result of their refusal to allow the 700,000 Palestinian refugees that had fled their homes during the fighting in 1948 to return.³³⁵ As the Palestinian refugee crisis unfolded, the

³³¹ The Consul General at Jerusalem (Macatee) to the Secretary of State, March 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 753; The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State, February 22, 1946, found in FRUS, 1946, VII, 696-706.

³³² Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to the President, May 27, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1061.

³³³ Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Truman, August 16, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1314.

³³⁴ Quoted in: Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 60.

³³⁵ Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 100; The Minister in Lebanon (Pinkerton) to the Secretary of State, March 26, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 876-878; Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President, May 9, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 983.

Joint Chiefs of Staff warned that the United States needed to quickly solve the crisis or else American strategic interests would be at risk.³³⁶ The State Department likewise warned that American relations with the Arab states would suffer if the United States Government did not take swift action to help care for the refugees. On the other hand, if the US took good care of the refugees, many were certain that the United States would enjoy an increase in prestige among the Arabs.³³⁷ To that end the United States supported a UN resolution in November, 1948, that sought to care for the Palestinian refugees that had fled their homes during the fighting in 1948.³³⁸

Unfortunately, the Israelis continued refusing to allow the Palestinians to return. Count Bernadotte attempted to convince the Israelis to readmit the refugees, but his efforts failed.³³⁹ American officials were likewise rebuffed by the Israelis, who insisted that they could not allow any Palestinians to return because it would constitute a security risk during a time of war.³⁴⁰ This refusal on the part of the Israelis to readmit any refugees into Israel soon created even more frustration on the part of the American government when it became clear that the return of the refugees was a *sine qua non* for a

³³⁶ The Acting Secretary of State to the Secretary of State, At Paris, September 28, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1427, 1428.

³³⁷ Memorandum by the Department of State for President Truman, October 15, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1479.

³³⁸ The Acting Secretary of State to the President, January 14, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 663, 664

³³⁹ The Charge in Egypt (Patterson) to the Secretary of State, August 7, 1949, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1295, 1296; Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator in Palestine, September 12, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1401-1406.

³⁴⁰ The Special Representative of the United States in Israel (MacDonald) to President Truman, August 24, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1138; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), August 26, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1347; The Special Representative of the United State in Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, September 9, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1384, 1385.

peace agreement with the Arab states.³⁴¹ As the American Consul at Jerusalem reported, “Immediate key to peace negotiations if not peace, is refugee problem [sic].” The American consul likewise despondently warned that “new immigrants now occupying Arab property throughout Israel and homes no longer exist to which Arab refugees could return.”³⁴² The Israelis, it seemed, were making peace impossible.

Beyond the threat that continued conflict posed, the State Department soon began considering the effect that the refugees would have on the Cold War. As one State Department official warned, “Despondency, misery, lack of hope and faith, and destruction of former standards of values, make the refugees an ideal field for the growth of communism. Having lost everything, the rosy, although vacuous, pictures of a Communist society are a strong temptation.”³⁴³ The continuing state of war, together with the refugee catastrophe, were threatening to cause the entire Middle East to fall to communism. Quite literally, the American way of life, some American leaders were certain, hung in the balance in the Palestine crisis. As a CIA report noted, “We believe

³⁴¹ The Ambassador in Egypt (Griffis) to the Acting Secretary of State, September 25, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1424, 1425; Charge’ in Egypt (Patterson) to the Secretary of State, February 15, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 749; Special Representative of the United States in Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, February 22, 1948, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 763; The Consul at Jerusalem (Burdett) to the Secretary of State, February 26, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 772, 773; The Consul at Jerusalem (Burdett) to the Secretary of State, February 28, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 775; The Consul at Jerusalem (Burdett) to the Secretary of State, February 28, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 777; The Consul at Jerusalem (Burdett) to the Secretary of State, February 26, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 772, 773; The Consul at Jerusalem (Burdett) to the Secretary of State, February 28, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 775; The Consul at Jerusalem (Burdett) to the Secretary of State, February 28, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 777.

³⁴² The Consult at Jerusalem (Burdett) to the Secretary of State, January 29, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 712.

³⁴³ The Consul at Jerusalem (Burdett) to the Secretary of State, July 6, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1204.

that a satisfactory long-term solution for security in that area and the earliest resolution of this and other major differences between Israel and the neighboring Arab States will pay important dividends in terms of our national security.”³⁴⁴

Truman was unwilling to have America’s standing in the Middle East destroyed by the obduracy of the Israeli government, and he therefore authorized some strong punitive action against the Israelis. Heretofore Truman had largely supported the Israelis by moving to support them joining the United Nations, seeking to extend a large loan to the Israeli government, and extending *de jure* recognition (which he had done soon after Israel’s first elections in January).³⁴⁵ Yet in the face of Israeli intransigence, as one State Department official reported, something had to be done. “President was strongly of the opinion that the orders of the Security Council should be obeyed and that no party to the Palestine dispute should be permitted to defy the United Nations.”³⁴⁶ Truman accordingly ordered the State Department to put pressure on Israel to repatriate the Palestinian refugees.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁴ The Secretary of Defense (Johnson) to the Secretary of State, June 14, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1135.

³⁴⁵ A memorandum to Secretary Marshall, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1391; Memorandum by president Truman to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett), August 16, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:II, 1313; Memorandum by the Secretary of State (Acheson) to the President, January 27, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 702; January 31, 1949, White House extended *de jure* recognition to Israel, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 713.

³⁴⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Fraser Wilkins of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, January 3, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 599.

³⁴⁷ The Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic and Consular offices, April 29, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 959.

The American government felt an urgent need to get the Israelis to become more compliant as the PCC talks languished and threatened to fail.³⁴⁸ The State Department began putting pressure on Israel to readmit the refugees by threatening to reconsider American policy toward Israel. The State Department simply informed the Israeli embassy in Washington that “If the [Government] of Israel continues to reject the basic principles set forth by the [resolution] of the [General Assembly of the United Nations] of Dec 11, 1948 and the friendly advice offered by the US Govt for the sole purpose of facilitating a genuine peace in Palestine, the US Govt will regretfully be forced to the conclusion that a revision of its attitude toward Israel has become unavoidable [sic].”³⁴⁹ The Israelis did not respond well to this vague application of diplomatic pressure. Ben-Gurion angrily told the American Ambassador in Israel, James McDonald, that no one had come to Israel’s aid when she was fighting for survival, and in fact the United States had enforced a strict arms embargo against her! He refused to either withdraw Israeli forces to the November 29 resolution’s boundaries (as the Arab states were insisting) or to allow any refugees to return, declaring that “we do not intend to commit suicide”.³⁵⁰

As a result of the American threat to rethink policy toward Israel, the Israelis launched a political campaign in the United States in an effort to block the efforts of the Truman administration to put any real pressure on Israel.³⁵¹ This, together with Israel’s

³⁴⁸ Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to the President, May 27, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1063.

³⁴⁹ The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Israel, May 28, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1074.

³⁵⁰ The Ambassador in Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, May 29, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1074, 1075.

³⁵¹ Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 104.

refusal to accept its responsibilities with the refugees, infuriated Truman, who wrote to his friend, Mark Ethridge, “I am rather disgusted with the manner in which the Jews are approaching the refugee problem. I told the President of Israel [Chaim Weizmann] in the presence of his Ambassador just exactly what I thought about it. It may have some effect, I hope so.”³⁵² Truman authorized the suspension of the remaining \$49 million of a \$100 million loan from the Exim (Export-Import) Bank as part of the campaign to force Israel to be more compliant.³⁵³ An Israeli pressure campaign through American Zionist groups was unable to bring enough pressure to bear to get the American government to rescind its order. While Congress had repeatedly supported the Jews, when Congress began receiving hefty bills to help pay for refugee relief projects, many congressmen began to complain. After Congress received a massive bill to the tune \$120-150 million in order to pay for refugee relief in 1949, the State Department reported that at least a few Senators “repeatedly asked how we could justify action which in effect underwrote the situation brought about by the taking of houses and land away from the Arabs by the Israelis.”³⁵⁴ Truman therefore could steer his own course without tremendous political pressure coming to bear, and so he decided to apply pressure on Israel in order to help restore peace and keep the Soviets out of the Middle East. The Israelis, however,

³⁵² The President to Mr. Mark F. Ethridge, at Jerusalem, April 28, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 957.

³⁵³ Memorandum by the Department of State to the President, June 10, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1110; Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and African Affairs (McGhee) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (Thorp), August 15, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1311, 1312.

³⁵⁴ Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President, May 9, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 983; Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for congressional Relations (Gross) to the Acting Secretary of State, May 24, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1048.

stubbornly resisted and refused to do more than to accept a token number of refugees back. As a result the peace talks languished.³⁵⁵

Despite Israeli intransigence, the peace efforts made limited progress later in 1949. Israel signed armistices with Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon that year, though intermittent clashes and fighting continued across the borders for years to come.³⁵⁶ As an unsteady peace settled over the Middle East, the United States began to reconsider its arms embargo in the region, especially at the behest of their British allies who were eager to strengthen the Arab armies in light of continued Soviet aggression. This reconsideration of the embargo led to the implementation of a new policy that aimed, as ever, at keeping both the Arabs and the Israelis solidly in the Western camp.

³⁵⁵ Memorandum by The Secretary of State, August 1, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1273; The Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic and Consular Offices, August 16, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1319; The Consul at Jerusalem (Burdett) to the Secretary of State, August 16, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1319, 1320; Mr. Mark F. Ethridge to the Secretary of State, May 3, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 976; Memorandum of conversation, by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and African Affairs (Hare), August 25, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1329, 1330.

³⁵⁶ FRUS, 1949, VI, 655; The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, January 19, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 686; Statement by the President, February 22, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, 766; FRUS, 1949, VI, 888; The Secretary of State to the Legation in Syria, July 20, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1239.

THE TRIPARTITE DECLARATION

Maintaining the arms embargo against the Middle East had become a key cornerstone of the American policy of maintaining close relations with both the Arabs and the Israelis. The United States could not begin arming one ally without alarming and alienating the other, and therefore the American leaders preferred to avoid arming either so as to be able to point at their complete impartiality in regards to arms sales as evidence of their desire to maintain close relations with both.³⁵⁷ The British desire to lift the embargo complicated this situation. As Wm. Roger Louis points out, however, the United States and the British both sought to calm and reassure the Arab leaders, and providing them with more arms seemed an important aspect of achieving that goal.³⁵⁸ Furthermore, as an NSC policy paper pointed out, in light of what appeared to be the increasing likelihood of a global conflict with the Soviet Union (especially as tensions rose in Korea), “It is in the security interest of the United States that... The Near East be militarily strengthened for defense against communist aggression, and that the countries concerned obtain their arms from friendly sources.”³⁵⁹ Thus, the United States agreed to go along with the lifting of the UN arms embargo in August, 1949.³⁶⁰ Fearful that lifting the embargo would only lead to an arms race in the Middle East, further destabilizing the already unstable region, the United States agreed with Great Britain that the goal in

³⁵⁷ For an example of this, see The Secretary of State to the Legation in Saudi Arabia, January 29, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 712.

³⁵⁸ Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 586.

³⁵⁹ Draft Report by the National Security Council, March 28, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 134.

³⁶⁰ Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President, September 1, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1341, 1342.

arming the Middle Eastern States would be “For the purpose of maintaining internal law and order” and “providing for reasonable requirements of self defense.”³⁶¹ Thus, a new policy of helping to ensure the defense and stability of the Middle East by providing arms to those states replaced the embargo.

This policy came under pressure after the French began arming the Syrians without regard to limited arms sales.³⁶² The mutual fear held by both the Arabs and the Israelis that the other side was preparing to renew the conflict put additional pressure on the new arms policy. This mutual distrust weakened the already shaky peace and threatened to further destabilize the region. As a result, the United States and Great Britain determined to bring the French into an agreement to limit the arms supply in the Middle East. On May 20, 1950, these three governments issued what became known as the Tripartite Declaration. The declaration reiterated the old American and British policy of supplying sufficient arms to the Arabs and the Israelis “to maintain a certain level of armed forces for the purposes of assuring their internal security and their legitimate self-defense and to permit them to play their part in the defense of the area as a whole” so long as those governments made assurances that they did not intend to use those arms for aggressive purposes.³⁶³ The Tripartite Declaration went beyond the old Anglo-American policy when it declared that

³⁶¹ Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President, September 1, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1342.

³⁶² Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 585.

³⁶³ The Acting Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic and Consular Offices, May 20, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 167, 168.

*The three governments take this opportunity of declaring their deep interest in and their desire to promote the establishment and maintenance of peace and stability in the area and their unalterable opposition to the use of force or threat of force between any of the state in that area. The three governments, should they find that any of these states was preparing to violate frontiers or armistice lines, would, consistently with their obligations as members of the United Nations, immediately take action, both within and outside the United Nations, to prevent such violation.*³⁶⁴

The Tripartite Declaration thereby sought not only to limit arms sales to the Middle East, but to guarantee the security of the region by threatening to intervene to maintain peace. It was hoped that this security guarantee would help all of the states in the region to accept peace agreements. This new policy went far beyond anything that the United States had previously been willing to commit itself to. The declaration sought to allow both the Arabs and the Israelis to obtain the arms that they so desperately desired while also helping to settle the nerves of those, as Rober McClintock called them, “fanatical and over-wrought people”.³⁶⁵ More importantly, by providing arms the US and UK sought to tie both the Arabs and the Israelis to the West. Wm. Roger Louis astutely observed of the declaration, “The silent premise of the formula was that the Arabs and Jews would be kept on the western side of the cold war.”³⁶⁶

The Israelis, however, who were left out of the British armaments deals, were naturally worried about the increasing flow of arms to the Arabs, and they applied

³⁶⁴ The Acting Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic and Consular Offices, May 20, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 168.

³⁶⁵ Memorandum by Mr. Robert M. McClintock to the Director of the Office of United Nations Affairs (Rusk), July 1, 1948, found in FRUS, 1948, V:I, 1173.

³⁶⁶ Wm. Roger, Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 584.

pressure to the US government to get the British to stop supplying arms to the Arabs and to sell arms to Israel. Secretary of State Dean Acheson laid out American policy at the time in a letter to Congressman Jacob Javits in January 1950, pointing out that the United States and the United Kingdom were determined to only provide the arms necessary for self-defense.³⁶⁷ Acheson also made it clear that the United States sought to ensure that the Arabs remained in the Western camp by writing “It is desirable that the countries in this part of the world obtain from reliable and friendly sources such arms as they may need for their legitimate security requirements.” Acheson made it clear that the United States and Great Britain would coordinate to ensure that the amount of arms provided to the Middle Eastern states would not lead to a renewal of the conflict.³⁶⁸

Despite American assurances, the Israelis believed that the Arab states were seeking to build up their armed forces in preparation for a “second round” of battle.³⁶⁹ As a result, the Israelis continued pleading for the United States to grant them licenses to buy arms. Because of Israel’s traditional stance in the Cold War, some in the State Department were in favor of encouraging the Israelis to lean more toward the West by allowing them to buy some arms. Indeed, in May the State Department officially requested that the Department of Defense grant licenses for the Israelis to buy limited

³⁶⁷ Acheson ascended to this position in January, 1950.

³⁶⁸ The Secretary of State to Representative Jacob K. Javits, January 12, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 684, 685.

³⁶⁹ The Ambassador in Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, January 26, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 705, 706.

defensive arms.³⁷⁰ This dramatic change of policy, which stood in such stark contrast to the previous year, is in part explained by a desire to motivate Israel to align itself with the West.³⁷¹

As the Cold War progressed in 1950, however, the Israelis began to identify themselves more and more with the US without the added motivation of arms shipments.³⁷² This new Israeli policy first came to light in February, 1950, in a conversation between State Department officials and Ambassador Elath. When asked why the Israeli Defense Force could not simply buy more arms from the Czechs if they were so desperate for arms, Ambassador Elath responded that

*Israel did not wish to become too deeply entangled with the Czechs. Israel had in the past acquired arms in Czechoslovakia only as a last ditch measure in a time of desperate emergency. However, Israel knew that its future lay with the United States. It desired to pattern its army after the American army and to replace the arms acquired in Czechoslovakia by American arms. If further arms were acquired now in Czechoslovakia, it would mean continuing Israeli dependence on the Czechs for ammunition and replacements.*³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Such as a few anti-tank aircraft, half-tracks, machine guns, and ammunition. The Acting Secretary of State (James E. Webb) to the Secretary of Defense (Johnson), May 25, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 913-915.

³⁷¹ Israel had stubbornly maintained official neutrality in the Cold War, hoping to be able to enjoy aid from the West while also keeping close enough ties to the USSR that the Soviets would allow the millions of Jews who still lived in the Eastern Bloc to immigrate to Israel. Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Satterthwaite) to the Secretary of State, March 24, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 864; Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense (Johnson) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Sowers), May 16, 1949, found in FRUS, 1949, VI, 1011.

³⁷² Memorandum of Conversation, by the Officer in Charge of Palestine, Israel, and Jordan Affairs (Rockwell), August, 31, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 988.

³⁷³ Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Stuart W. Rockwell of the Office of African and Near Eastern Affairs, February 6, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 725, 726.

This was the first time that a visible crack appeared in the Israeli-Soviet friendship, and the State Department was eager to take advantage of the opportunity. For this reason the State Department requested that the Department of Defense grant limited licenses to the Israelis to buy American arms. This policy did not last long, however, as the American government felt compelled to do more to strengthen America ties with the Arabs at the expense of the Israelis. Indeed, the State Department seemed to have come full circle by August, when the State Department intervened and prevented an arms deal with Israel from going through.³⁷⁴ After this point, and for the remainder of the Truman administration's time in power, only a trickle of arms would flow to the Israelis from the United States.³⁷⁵

One huge reason for this about-face in policy toward Israel was that the Israelis essentially revealed their hand early. After the Korean War broke out at the end of June, Israeli officials increasingly expressed their preference for alliance with the US. David Ben-Gurion, for instance, in a conversation with the American Ambassador to Israel, proclaimed that should the Russians attack the Middle East, "Israeli forces would hold their positions until UK and US reinforcements arrived."³⁷⁶ Thus, the Israeli premier unequivocally stated his support of the United States in the Cold War. Ambassador McDonald observed that "Although Israel's attitude strengthened by increasing difficulties internal economy [sic], I believe it basically represents culmination of

³⁷⁴ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the Philippines, August 8, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 967.

³⁷⁵ Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 72, 73.

³⁷⁶ The Ambassador in Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, July 31, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 961.

realization by Israeli leaders that Israel can survive only in world freed from menace of Communist aggression. To defend itself Israel would fight against Russian invaders as desperately as against Arabs.”³⁷⁷ McDonald further observed “that the Korean crisis has acted as a catalytic agent, and that as a consequence the solution that is Israel is now in the process of being cleared of certain impurities.” The reason for this was two fold. One was “that since the beginning of hostilities in Korea, many Israelis have come to the conclusion that should a world war result, Israel would be left to fend for herself” because of her traditional neutral stance. The second reason was that the Israelis desperately needed economic support to survive.³⁷⁸ As a result, the Israelis could be counted on in any coming fight against the Soviets. This development allayed American fears that Israel would go over to the Soviets, and so American leaders did not feel it necessary to pander any more to their needs.

Equally important was the American position vis-à-vis the Arabs at that crucial period. The United States’ prestige in the region had suffered terribly over the previous few years, and the Tripartite Declaration brought Arab anger to new levels. The fact that the United States had even considered allowing the Israelis to buy arms infuriated the Arabs, who insisted that the Israelis only sought arms so that they could prosecute a

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ The Ambassador in Israel (McDonald) to the Secretary of State, August 1, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 962.

second round of battle.³⁷⁹ The storm of protest from the Arabs alone was likely sufficient to persuade the Department of State to change its policy regarding giving arms to Israel.

Frequent pro-Israeli statements by American leaders added fuel to the fire.³⁸⁰ Though the Truman administration considered those statements to be sufficiently innocuous, the Arabs saw them “as evidence of American partiality for Israel”.³⁸¹ As a result, the State Department warned, the Arabs “have gone so far as to threaten a reorientation of their countries towards the Soviet Union if the United States did not convince them of its friendship and impartiality.”³⁸² There was, therefore, “a real danger that Communist influence [would] gain control there.”³⁸³ This fear was reinforced by the Arab states’ votes against the US and in favor of the USSR at the UN in relation to the Korean crisis.³⁸⁴ The State Department therefore sought to “discourage wherever and whenever possible” the “tendency of American officials and private citizens to speak and write about Israel as one of the wonders of the modern world”.³⁸⁵ More importantly, the American government also sought to pursue a policy toward Israel that demonstrated to the Arabs that the United States was completely impartial, and that meant avoiding

³⁷⁹ The Minister in Syria (Keeley) to the Secretary of State, March 6, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 778-780; The Minister in Syria (Keeley) to the Department of State, March 28, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 822-824.

³⁸⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, July 6, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 947.

³⁸¹ Memorandum by the Department of State to the President, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 895-897.

³⁸² Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Lay), September 13, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 1003.

³⁸³ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Officer in Charge of Lebanon-Syria-Iraq Affairs (Clark), April 12, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 852.

³⁸⁴ Memorandum by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (Berry) to the Secretary of State, March 15, 1951, found in FRUS, 1951, V, 596.

³⁸⁵ The Charge’ in Israel (Ford) to the Secretary of State, September 14, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 1009.

shipping arms to Israel. Thus, in the Truman administration's calculation of the state of affairs in the Middle East, the Arabs were most at risk of joining the Soviet camp later in 1950, and therefore required more coddling than did the Israelis, leading to another shift in policy that favored the Arabs.

The Soviets also made it easier for the United States to refuse Israel's request for arms by distancing themselves from the Israelis. The Israelis instigated this development by siding with the United States in the Korean War.³⁸⁶ This action by the Israelis fundamentally transformed the Israeli-Soviet relationship and effectively eliminated any fear that the Israelis would join the Soviets. As Avigdor Dagan points out in his book *Moscow and Jerusalem*, "Israel's stand on Korea transformed the doubts already existing in the minds of the Russians into a certainty that not only could Israel be discounted as a potential ally, but that it could not even be relied upon to remain neutral in a crisis of vital importance for the Soviet Union."³⁸⁷ Relations between Israel and the Soviet Union would continue to worsen until the infamous Slansky trial when the Soviets would break off relations with Israel.³⁸⁸ As Michael Cohen argued in *Fighting World War Three in the Middle East*, American officials could therefore rest easy regarding Israel as the Cold War moved forward.³⁸⁹

Thus, American officials renewed the policy of refusing arms to Israel because they ceased to worry about Israel going over to the Soviets while fears of the Arabs

³⁸⁶ Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 174-176; Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, 201; Dagan, *Moscow and Jerusalem*, 51.

³⁸⁷ Dagan, *Moscow and Jerusalem*, 53.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁸⁹ Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, 201.

joining the Soviet camp increased. After war began in Korea in June, 1950, the United States' fears regarding a Soviet attack on the Middle East increased considerably.

Indeed, NSC 68, which was written in August of 1950, predicted for the first time that the Soviet Union could begin a world war against the West and win.³⁹⁰ Therefore, as the State Department reiterated in response to another NSC report, "The friendship of all the peoples of this strategic part of the world [was] very important to the United States."³⁹¹

Indeed, the importance of America's alliances with both the Arabs and the Israelis was all the more important in light of what appeared to be the beginnings of World War Three.³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 26.

³⁹¹ Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Lay), September 13, 1950, found in FRUS, 1950, V, 1003.

³⁹² Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 589.

STAYING THE COURSE

Toward the beginning of 1951 the State Department issued a policy statement that reiterated the American policy in the Middle East. This policy would continue to hold true through the end of the Truman administration in 1952. The central tenet of the policy statement was “that our policy is one of equal friendship and impartiality toward all of the states in the area”.³⁹³ In accordance with that central premise, the primary American policy goals in the Middle East were (1) “The achievement and maintenance of peace, general stability and economic progress of the Near East as factors essential to world peace” and (2) the “Acquisition for the United States in particular and the West in general of the friendship and support of people and governments of the area.”³⁹⁴ The United States government attempted to carry out these policy goals, which were essentially a continuation of the policies pursued since the beginning of the Truman administration, throughout 1951 and 1952.

The American government essentially stayed the course through the end of the Truman administration so far as American policy in the Middle East was concerned. As an NSC report in April 1952, the final year of the Truman administration, found, the United States’ greatest enemies in the region were not Soviet aggression but rather “acute instability, anti-western nationalism and Arab-Israeli antagonism”. Together, these forces threatened to push all of the states in the region into the Soviet sphere.³⁹⁵

³⁹³ Department of State Policy Statement, February 6, 1951, found in FRUS, 1951, V, 577.

³⁹⁴ Department of State Policy Statement, February 6, 1951, found in FRUS, 1951, V, 570.

³⁹⁵ Statement of Policy Proposed by the National Security Council, April 24, 1952, found in FRUS, 1952-1954, IX:I, 223.

Furthermore, American officials sensed a “gradual but growing distrust of US policy, not only, it should be noted, in the Arab world but also in Israel.”³⁹⁶ In order to combat these worrying trends, the Policy Planning Staff recommended sending increased aid to the region (including massive military aid to Egypt to enable the Egyptians to defend the Suez against Soviet aggression) and working more determinedly to finally settle the Arab-Israeli conflict.³⁹⁷ Thus, as the Truman administration came to an end, the United States government continued its policy of working to stabilize the Middle East and strengthen the shaky peace of the region while attempting to remain close allies of all of the powers in the region.

Because the Middle East was a strategically vital region in allied war plans, the United States under President Truman sought to ensure that the entire region remained on the western side of the cold war. From 1945 to 1948 the Truman administration was split between those who sought to follow a middle-of-the-road course that aimed at keeping both the Jews and the Arabs happy and those who advocated siding with the Arabs. Truman favored the former policy for several reasons, including his desire to alleviate the sorry plight of Jewish refugees in Europe, a desire to find a solution to the Palestine question that would preserve peace and stability in the Middle East, and above all a desire

³⁹⁶ Memorandum by the Acting Regional Planning Adviser, Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (Hoskins) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (Byroade), July 25, 1952, found in FRUS, 1952-1954, IX:I, 258.

³⁹⁷ Memorandum Prepared by the Policy Planning Staff, May 21, 1952, found in FRUS, 1952-1954, IX:I, 232-234; Statement of Policy Proposed by the National Security Council, April 24, 1952, found in FRUS, 1952-1954, IX:I, 225.

to protect American interests in the Middle East. After the Israeli victory in the 1948 war and persistent Soviet efforts to court the Israelis, however, those that had formerly advocated supporting the Arabs came to agree that supporting the Israelis enough to keep them on the western side of the cold war was an important goal. After all, whether the Soviets entered the Middle East by way of Egypt or Israel, the end result would be the same: the compromise of American strategic interests in the Middle East.

No one played a larger role in this drama than did President Truman. A great many pressures came to bear on the president, including domestic politics, key aides and advisors, his religious beliefs, and his humanitarian instincts. The most important influence throughout the period, however, was the unfolding Cold War. This growing conflict with the Soviets influenced every aspect of Truman's decisions regarding Palestine, and ultimately it was the conflict with the Soviets that convinced him to, or not to side with the Jews. Thus, his decisions to support the immigration of 100,000 Jewish DPs to Palestine, to support partition, and to extend *de facto* recognition to Israel were all made with the Cold War as the primary factor. Likewise, his decisions to pressure Israel to comply with the peacemaking efforts, to withhold vital financial support, and to block arms sales to Israel all reflected the same strategic logic. Even Truman's humanitarian efforts were reinforced by the Cold War since the sorry plight of the refugees, both in Europe and the Middle East, was considered a dangerous breeding ground for communist extremism and a golden opportunity for the Soviets to extend their influence abroad.

Of course, Truman and his administration did not *have* to grant Israel the support they did, and they also could have granted much more support than they did. One of the

biggest opportunities missed by the United States was the refusal to support the Israelis in the 1948 war. The fact that Israel was left to fend for itself (at least in their own eyes) fueled Israeli feelings of isolation which likewise prompted greater Israeli belligerence. If the United States had sided more whole-heartedly with the Israelis, it is possible that more would have been done to secure better peace agreements between the Israelis and the Arabs. Had Israel felt secure because of American security guarantees, it is possible that many of the subsequent wars and decades of bloodshed could have been avoided.

Likewise, however, the United States could have sided more fully with the Arabs. In light of Israeli belligerence, the United States could have done more to pressure Israel to respect armistice lines and ceasefires as well as to ensure that the Palestinian refugees could return to their homes. This would certainly have helped the Arabs to feel more secure and would have gone a very long way in satisfying Arab demands. Since the return of the refugees was a *sin-qua-non* for peace, had the US coerced Israel to comply with this requirement it is possible that real peace treaties could have been signed many decades before they actually were, and many of the subsequent wars could have been avoided. Essentially, had the United States been more partisan in its approach to the Arabs and Jews rather than towing a middle-of-the-road policy, perhaps the Arab-Israeli conflict would not have become so intractable.

As it was, the United States certainly did succeed in maintaining relations with both the Israelis and the Arabs, though those relations were very strained. In some cases those strains proved too much and would lead to breaks in relations in coming administrations, most notably with Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. The American fear that the

presence of Soviet troops in the Middle East would completely destroy allied interests in the region proved, later, to be exaggerated. Indeed, Soviet soldiers and technicians in Egypt did not succeed in setting up a Soviet satellite there, and they did leave without force of arms. But the United States has successfully maintained close relations with other key Arab states, such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, ever since 1948. And during President Truman's term the United States succeeded in keeping all of the Middle Eastern states on the western side of the cold war. Since that was the ultimate goal of American policy in Palestine during those years, that policy was successful.

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