

PRESIDENT TRUMAN'S RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL

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PREFACE

In 1948 A.D., just over 2,000 years after the Diaspora* of 68 B.C., a Jewish state came into existence in Palestine. This was of considerable significance to the United States. Not only was it an additional consideration in the formulation of foreign policy towards the Middle East, but America had played a major part in the establishment of the state of Israel. President Truman has been subjected to considerable attack as a result of this, by critics who interpret his actions as being motivated by an ethnic pressure group and domestic politics rather than by the national interest.

This study analyzes the factors leading up to the decision by President Truman to recognize Israel. Such an analysis reveals that although tremendous pressure was exerted by Zionist organizations, Congressmen, the press and the Democratic National Committee, on Truman to support the foundation of a Jewish state in Palestine, he was reluctant to do so. Nor was it domestic politics that led him finally to act. Recognition in May 1948; with its implications of winning the Jewish vote in the elections of that year; was not the crucial decision for the future of Israel.

*Diaspora -- the dispersion of the Jews

It was, rather, the decision to support the United Nations proposal for partition in Fall 1947. This enabled the Yishuv to make the Jewish state a reality. In making this decision, and in extending de-facto recognition six months later, Truman pursued a policy balanced between the opposing forces of Zionism on the one hand, and the State Department on the other. His policy rested upon the realities of the situation in Palestine, his belief in the justness of the Jewish cause and the hope that peace in the Middle East would be the outcome.

The investigation is directed primarily towards President Truman himself in his role as Chief Executive and foreign policy maker. It is based largely on the hitherto unused sources of the Truman Library, and tries to assess and analyze, insofar as this is possible, Truman's reactions to the pressures around him, and the situation as he saw it. As a result, the conclusions arrived at differ considerably from those of previous studies.

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CHAPTER I

THE UNITED STATES AND PALESTINE: THE QUESTIONS

Palestine, its future, and the role of the United States in shaping that future was one of the many unanswered questions that the Presidency brought to Harry S. Truman. It was not however, the most important or pressing problem that he inherited. His energies, in the hectic early days of office, were directed mainly towards hastening the end of the War in Europe in preparation for the final assault on Japan. The immediate and urgent tasks of arriving at a satisfactory peace settlement, and ensuring peaceful and rapid reconstruction on the Continent were made more difficult for Truman since in the three months of his Vice-Presidency, he had been largely ignored by Roosevelt, who acted virtually as his own Secretary of State.

At that time the mandated territory of Great Britain, Palestine, was of only minor significance in relation to the many problems facing the Democracies following the defeat of Germany. Thus, when questioned at a press conference shortly after Potsdam on the matter of Jewish immigration into Palestine, Truman did little more than reiterate in general terms the policy of his predecessor: "The American view of Palestine is," he said, "We want to let as many of the Jews into

Palestine as it is possible to let into that country. Then the matter will have to be worked out diplomatically with the British and the Arabs, so that if a state can be set up there they may be able to set it up on a peaceful basis."¹ Although regarded as a denunciation of British policy, the statement reveals Truman's hopes at this early stage, for a negotiated settlement. He flatly stated that he was not prepared to send 500,000 American troops to Palestine. Nor, it should be added, did he expect he would have to make this kind of decision.

When viewed against the background of previous United States relations with the Middle East, this lack of immediate action is not surprising. No definite or comprehensive American policy had been formulated towards Palestine; before 1939 the area had been little known and of concern to very few. The British and French had established spheres of influence in the region at a time when Americans were absorbed with the Civil War and taming the frontier. The activities of Great Britain in the Arab world following the First World War are too well known to be recorded here.

Briefly stated the essence of the relationship between Britain towards the Middle East was that she sought to promote her strategic, economic and cultural interests by means less than full colonialism but consistently short

¹Public papers of the Presidents of the United States. Harry S. Truman, 1945. (United States Government Printing Office, 1961), Press conference, August 16, 1945, p. 228.

of cooperation with respected, freely self-determining indigenous governments. In this framework the Mandate over Palestine approved by the League of Nations in 1923, was the Instrument through which strategic facilities would be sought in return for ending the Mandate and recognition of full sovereignty.

Execution of the Mandate was complicated, however, by the incorporation into the Mandatory Instrument of the British Palestine Policy Statement made in 1917 known as the Balfour Declaration.² This declaration was contained in a letter of Lord Arthur J. Balfour, then Foreign Secretary, to the prominent Zionist leader Lord Rothschild, in which the British Government stated in intentionally broad and uncertain terms its support of a Jewish National Home in Palestine.

The declaration was of considerable significance, not only because it laid the foundation upon which the Jewish community of Palestine was able to build its nation, but because the motivation which prompted the British Government's action foreshadowed the dilemma which it and the United States faced in the years preceding 1948. "It is

²The declaration read: "His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

a delusion," said Winston Churchill speaking in the House of Commons in July 1937, "to suppose this was a mere act of crusading enthusiasm or quixotic philanthropy. On the contrary, it was a measure taken...in due need of the war with the object of promoting the general victory of the Allies, for which we expected and received valuable and important assistance."³ It was, then, a compromise characteristic of the British policy in this area. It was not all that the Zionists had hoped for, but it committed the British to a recognition of the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine.⁴ In a recent study of the question Nadav Safran concludes that the Declaration "was issued out of broad humanitarian considerations, for immediate tactical political advantages, and for long range strategic interests---an irresistible combination to any imaginative Anglo-Saxon statesman."⁵

Between 1918 and 1948, British statesmen, administrators and soldiers tried to carry out two hopelessly explosively irreconcilable policies. While supposedly mandated to prepare Palestinian Arabs for self-determination---

³Quoted by Alfred M. Lilienthal, What Price Israel (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1953), p. 22.

⁴The draft of the declaration as originally submitted by Chaim Weizmann called for recognition of the re-establishment of the country as the national home of the Jews. Weizmann recognized this "painful recession." A. Lilienthal, p. 22-23.

⁵Nadav Safran, The United States and Israel (Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 26.

promise made during World War I, and which the Mandate itself denied--Britain was, at the same time, committed to opening Palestine to mass colonization by Jews who openly avowed a Zionist program of Jewish Statehood. It proved impossible to harmonize these contradictory promises.⁶

American contact, prior to 1939, had been largely concerned with missionaries and philanthropic work, in which the Government's interests had been unpolitical or directed towards assisting Arabs and Jews alike. For a brief period following the First War some activity and interest had been aroused because of the Peace Settlement, in which President Woodrow Wilson on the insistence of Justice Louis D. Brandeis, had supported in a somewhat general and offhand way the principles of the Balfour Declaration. Safran sees in Wilson's casual involvement with Palestine and the Middle East, and the opposing pressures acting on him; the State Department and oil interests, on the one hand, and Brandeis and his Zionist associates on the other, "a remarkable preview of what was to happen on a grand scale with President Truman thirty years later."⁷

It is important to note, when considering the later emphasis and the value the Zionists placed on Wilson's stand

⁶Prime Minister Attlee, under whose Government Britain abandoned the mandate has admitted frankly that the British gave "incompatible assurances".

⁷N. Safran, p. 37.

at the peace conference, that in a letter to Secretary of State Lansing on April 16, of 1919, Wilson described his position in these words; "All that I meant was to corroborate our expressed acquiescence in the position of the British Government with regard to the future of Palestine."⁸ Furthermore in the twelfth of his Fourteen Points Wilson indirectly expresses his support and approval of the Arab nationalist movements of the Middle East. Rather than taking a definitive stand on the issue as Zionists later successfully tried to convey, Wilson left himself and United States policy in much the same quandary that the British placed themselves.

During the twenties and thirties, despite the failure of Wilson's internationalism and the return to isolationism, the United States tried to maintain its influence and protect its interests in the Middle East through an Open-Door policy. American interest soon included a 23.75 per cent share in the Iraq Petroleum Company, and, in 1933, extensive oil concessions in Saudi Arabia.⁹ It was hoped that the Anglo-American treaty signed in 1924 would protect these investments. The treaty which included in its preamble the Balfour Declaration, on British insistence, suited British aims also. It was the first of several attempts to obtain United States assistance. It secured American com-

⁸A. Lilienthal, p. 90.

⁹N. Safran, p. 37.

mitment which, it was hoped, would support Britain's position in relation to the Jewish national home.¹⁰ By the time of the Truman administration, the Arabian-American Oil Company was one of the largest private American investors overseas, and joint British-American investment controlled the fields of Kuwait.¹¹

Out of these contacts and the impressions of numerous travellers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there developed in the mind of the American public a romantic shroud of mystery; a strange combination of attraction and repulsion concerning the Middle East. Mark Twain was one such traveller, and he reveals in his Innocents Abroad, which appeared in 1869, much of the image of the Arab which remained active in America. He was in turn fascinated by relics of the Crusades, contemptuous of the infidel Turk, and repulsed by the oppression and poverty he saw. Yet through it all the image of the wandering Arab of the desert remained foremost.¹²

¹⁰Especially since this had been an even more vague interpretation, by the Churchill White Paper of 1922, which spoke of Palestine as a "Jewish cultural centre".

¹¹Robert H. Ferrell, U. S. Policy in Middle East, American Diplomacy In A New Era, Stephen D. Kestesz, ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), p. 275.

¹²Twain wrote "If ever an oppressed race existed it is this one we see fettered around us under the inhuman tyranny of the Ottoman Empire." In another chapter: "In boyhood I longed to be an Arab of the desert and have a beautiful more..." Innocents Abroad (London: Chatto, and Windus, 1881) quoted in Erskine B. Childers, The Road to Suez (London: Macgibbon, 1962), p. 43-45.

Lowell Thomas, Sr. contributed a good deal to keep this image alive by his lecture-films on Lawrence of Arabia. Thomas, a Princeton University lecturer, officially sent to Europe to cover the War in 1917, accidentally met Lawrence and realized that he had one of the stories of the century. On his return to America his showings of his film, With Lawrence of Arabia, as an immediate success, and gave the Middle East tremendous publicity.¹³ Hollywood and Rudolph Valentino immortalized the image of the 'Sheik of Araby' in the public mind. This image, and the exploitation of it, played a contributing role in turning public opinion against the Arab case and winning support for the Jews in the heated controversy which erupted between 1945 and 1949.

The Second World War brought the United States out of its hemispheric isolation and served as a catalyst in the Middle East. Out of the war came the situation that Truman faced. Large reserves of oil went into production and although President Roosevelt continued to indicate that Palestine and the surrounding areas were primarily a British responsibility, he became increasingly concerned that the Axis powers might over run all of the Middle East.

Roosevelt, during his first three terms regarded Palestine as strictly a British affair; he maintained that the Jewish national home was not an American interest. Zion-

¹³Ibid. Childers discusses the Western image of the Arab at some length in Chapter II.

ists felt he had "little time and less thought"¹⁴ for their aspirations, showing a deep skepticism and cool indifference about a Jewish Palestine. Chaim Weizmann, world Zionist leader, visiting him in 1940 remarked that while the President had been friendly, the visit "was not a satisfactory one".¹⁵ By early 1942 it had become essential that the Arabs remain pacified if the Allies were to keep the area from the German advance across North Africa. The strategic importance of the area thus enabled Roosevelt to avoid taking a stand on Palestine in terms of the ultimate question.

He did not approve, however, of the British White Paper of 1939 limiting Jewish immigration to 75,000 over the next five years, and as the Jewish refugee problem became more acute towards the end of the war he made some personal effort to find a solution. Also, cognizant of increasing Zionist activity within the United States, and its influence on Congress, Roosevelt was not adverse to the Palestine plank in the 1944 Democratic platform. His message to the October Convention of the American Zionists in October 1944, similarly was meant to reassure American Jews of

¹⁴Richard P. Stevens, American Zionism and U. S. Foreign Policy, 1942-47 (New York: Pageant, 1962), p. 93. Stevens points out that the Zionists could not afford to antagonize Roosevelt, however, as he was the only protector to whom they could turn.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 66.

his interest.¹⁶ Roosevelt was confident, however, that he could maintain an independent policy and handle the problem personally, as he had handled America's entry into the war. He hoped in this way by talking to Ibn Saud to ease the conflict between the Arabs and Jews.

Accounts as to the success of this meeting which took place on the President's cruiser in the Mediterranean shortly after Yalta, vary considerably. James A. Byrnes relating the conversation between Roosevelt and Churchill in which the President spoke of his intention to interview the Arab leader states simply, "Churchill wished him good luck but didn't seem very hopeful that the President would meet with success. He didn't."¹⁷ However, Colonel William Eddy, the official interpreter at the meeting, observed that Roosevelt gave a pledge to Ibn Saud that he would not support any move to hand Palestine over to the Jews, and added; "To the King these oral assurances were equal to an alliance."¹⁸ Eddy also claims that he received a letter from the President

¹⁶The message read: "I know how long and ardently the Jewish people have worked and prayed for the establishment of Palestine as a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth. I am convinced that the American people give their support to this aim and if re-elected I shall help to bring about its realization." Quoted by Frank E. Manuel, The Realities of American-Palestine Relations (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1949), p. 312.

¹⁷James F. Byrnes, Speaking Frankly (New York: Harper, 1947), p. 22.

¹⁸William A. Eddy, F.D.R. Meets Ibn Saud (New York: American Friends of the Middle East, Inc., 1954), p. 35.

dated February 16, 1945, describing the meeting as "so outstanding a success."¹⁹ Roosevelt later apparently confided to Byrnes on the other hand: "I had an exceedingly pleasant meeting with Ibn Saud and we agreed about everything until I mentioned Palestine. That was the end of the pleasant conversation."²⁰

Nevertheless, this did not prevent Roosevelt from repeating to Ibn Saud his promise of May 1943, that "no decision be taken with respect to the basic situation in that country without full consultation with both Arabs and Jews." Zionists were shocked by the President's remark to Congress on March 1st that he had learned more about the Palestine question by talking to Ibn Saud for five minutes, than he could have accomplished through dozens of letters.²¹ His soothing words, later that month,²² that he still upheld his October position did little to lessen Zionist doubts.

Zionist doubts seem justified. Roosevelt wrote to Ibn Saud in April 5, 1945 solemnly assuring him that he would "take no action, in my capacity as Chief of the Executive Branch of this Government which might prove hostile to the Arab people....The policy of this government is un-

¹⁹Ibid., p. 35.

²⁰Byrnes, All In One Lifetime (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 242.

²¹New York Times, March 2, 1945.

²²New York Times, March 17, 1945.

changed."²³

President Truman, then, was confronted by a complex and confused Palestine situation in early 1945. The Middle East changed drastically within the next three years. British territory and influence declined rapidly under the assault of Arab nationalism and the area shortly became entangled in Cold-War politics and diplomacy. America's commitment to the support of Greece, Turkey and Iran, linked with Europe's dependence upon its oil reserves, resulted in the Middle East becoming a vital strategic concern to the United States. And Roosevelt, by his pledge to Ibn Saud that both Arabs and Jews would be consulted, had involved America in reaching a settlement regarding the future of Palestine.

Perhaps the single event most disruptive to the precarious political and social balance of the Middle East was the establishment of the State of Israel. In the broadest sense Israel was the creation and triumph of Zionism. Zionism combined the traditional deeply spiritual yearning for return with the practical and political needs of nationalism and directed it toward Palestine. This was the one country they could enter "by right not on sufferance."

The success of Zionism was the combining of the almost universal concern for providing a refuge for the survivors of the massacre of European Jewry with the issue of

²³Roosevelt to Ibn Saud, April 5, 1945. O. F. 204. Truman Library.

ultimate Jewish sovereignty in Palestine. It is obvious, however, that the movement could not have succeeded without the assistance of Britain and the United States.

There can be little question that few post-war acts of the American Government have proved more far reaching in importance for the area for which they were made. Yet the actions and motivation of the Truman administration which played a major part in the establishment and recognition of Israel have remained a controversial issue. Few comments on United States policy have been favorable. Republicans, in 1948, attacked the Truman administration for the weak and vacillating stands it had taken towards Palestine. They claimed that the prestige of the United States and the United Nations had suffered as a result. The press, following a strong Zionist line, was highly critical of Truman's handling of the affair, and accused him of "playing politics" with the lives of millions of Jews. Although approving his final decision, the press condemned the President's acts as hasty, impetuous and undignified. As a result, it was argued, the integrity of America had been brought under suspicion. William Phillips, one of the members of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry of 1946, wrote of American policy: "I am not proud of the way in which our Government handled its responsibility, nor do I like to dwell on the shameful manner in which Washington attempted to secure the Jewish vote in

the approaching National elections."²⁴

Interested ethnic and diplomatic historians have also interpreted Truman's actions in terms of domestic politics and the Jewish vote. H. Bradford Westerfield has described America's policy towards Palestine as, "The classic case in recent years of the determination of American foreign policy by domestic political considerations."²⁵ The Zionists, he argues had determination, wealth, and the advantage that the Jewish population for which they claimed to speak was concentrated in the big industrial states of New York, Pennsylvania and California. The fact that they were virtually unopposed by any other pressure group was an additional, highly important, factor ensuring Zionist success in directing White House policy. Frank E. Manuel in his authoritative work The Realities of American-Palestine Relations, concludes that the requirements of biennial election campaigns and the international crisis both exerted an influence in producing a "display of kaleidoscopically changing policy which was not edifying."²⁶ In tracing the events from 1946-49, Manuel sees the final outcome of recognition and support of Israel only as the result of two reversals by

²⁴W. Phillips, Ventures in Diplomacy (Boston: Beacon, 1952), p. 455.

²⁵H. B. Westerfield, Foreign Policy and Party Politics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 227ff. See especially Chapter II.

²⁶F. Manuel, p. 5. See especially Chapter VIII.

Truman. The first was the March 1948 reversal of support for the United Nation partition resolution, the second being recognition itself.

Louis H. Gerson, in his The Hyphenate in Recent American Politics and Diplomacy, sees the episode as another example of ethnic group pressure altering the direction of American foreign policy.²⁷ He relies heavily on the evidences of John M. (Jack) Redding, director of Public Relations of the Democratic National Committee for the 1948 elections. Redding reveals in his book, Inside the Democratic Party, that Palestine was a sensitive issue in the campaign, and despite the President's insistence that, "The Palestine issue will be handled here, and there will be no politics involved," he could not overcome partisan pressure from the party and the National Committee to bring it into the campaign.²⁸

Redding feels that Truman's victory was due largely to the success of the Nationalities Division of the National Committee in identifying the Democratic Party with the cause of Zionism. He describes this success as, "a classic example of great political returns rewarding competent leadership and

²⁷Louis L. Gerson, The Hyphenate in Recent American Politics and Diplomacy (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1964), see especially Chapter IX.

²⁸John M. Redding, Inside the Democratic Party (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), p. 149. Also see pp. 104-5, 120, 127, 137, 146-7, 166, 205.

strenuous effort, all at small financial success."²⁹

Zionist historian, Richard P. Stevens, regards recognition as a victory for American Zionism in accomplishing the Biltmore program which spelled out Zionist political aims in America.³⁰ Truman gave added credence to this opinion by his bluntness on occasions. "I'm sorry gentlemen," he told a delegation of American Middle Eastern diplomats, "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."³¹

The apparent lack of any firm Presidential policy further supports the case of political advantage as a major motivating factor. N. Safran remarks that all the seesawing and confusion, besides damaging the prestige of the United States, 'has left as residue the notion that the United States' support of Israel and the partition plan had been forced upon a well-meaning but weak President by sinister pressure groups regardless of the damaging effect on

²⁹Ibid., p. 262.

³⁰Stevens, American Zionism and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1942-47. The Biltmore program, formulated at a conference called by the Emergency Council of the Zionist Organization of America and held at the Biltmore Hotel in New York in May 1942, called for the fulfillment of the Balfour Declaration and the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth. See pp. 3-5.

³¹W. Eddy, p. 37.

American interests."³² Robert H. Ferrell in his forthcoming study of Secretary of State Marshall concludes, "circumstances point to a political decision."³³ That recognition was extended during a close election year only adds further support to such conclusions.

These explanations, however, overlook certain aspects of the events leading to the establishment and recognition of Israel. There can be no doubt that Truman was subjected to tremendous pressure; "I do not think I ever had as much pressure and propaganda aimed at the White House as I had in this instance," he later recorded in his memoirs.³⁴ The dramatic British action in preventing ships from bringing refugees into Palestine, the fierce fighting and incidents of terrorism that took place between '45 and '48 enabled the press and Zionist organizations throughout the country to create tremendous public interest, and the White House received thousands of unsolicited letters and telegrams on the subject.³⁵

On the other hand, the State and Defense Departments especially Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, conducted an active campaign aimed at both parties to keep the Palestine

³²N. Safran, p. 43.

³³Robert H. Ferrell, Manuscript of text in author's possession.

³⁴Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, Years of Trial and Hope (New York: Signet, 1965), p. 186.

³⁵See Appendix A, for analysis of the density, regional distribution and subject of this mail.

question out of politics.³⁶ The focal area of American foreign relations in the years following the war, was of course in Europe. Here the outstanding constructive developments were the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine in March, 1947, the establishment of the European Recovery Program, the policy of containment of Russia and the bipartisan Vandenberg Resolution. The passage of this resolution on June 11, 1948, reflected the increasing cooperation and collaboration of the two parties on foreign policy that had taken place since the war. These developments indicated Truman's growing confidence and leadership in foreign affairs. Everyone agreed by Spring 1947, "Harry Truman is becoming President of the United States."³⁷

There were other signs also that the lines of authority were growing tighter. Shortly after his appointment as Secretary of State, George C. Marshall ordered the establishment of a State Department "Policy Planning Staff" early in 1947. Truman was to look more and more to this board of experts, under the leadership of George Kennan, for information and advice in planning his foreign policy.

The sheer force of events in Europe forced Truman into taking a firmer lead in making policy decisions, and

³⁶Walter Millis, ed., The Forrestal Diaries (New York: Viking, 1951), see pp. 309-10, 344-48, 357, 359-363.

³⁷New York Herald Tribune, Spring 1947. Quoted by Eric F. Goldman, The Crucial Decade and After, America, 1945-1960 (New York: Vintage, 1960), p. 62.

gave him new powers. The President added another new policy making machine which extended his power in the planning and conduct of foreign policy. The National Security Council, founded by the National Security Act added a new dimension to his power, and gave Truman greater freedom from congressional and popular pressures and influences. Truman's leadership at a time of uncertainty and flux in world affairs was decisive in his winning and maintaining control of American foreign policy. He was able to act with an independence seldom enjoyed by previous presidents.

Furthermore, if the decisions were made to align New York State's Jewish vote behind Truman, they were very ineptly handled. Truman's pro-Israel policy fell far short of Zionist hopes. They were quick to charge him with betraying his own, and the Democratic Party's pledges. The President had every opportunity, between May and December 1948, to extend de-jure recognition, hasten the promised \$100 million loan, lift the arms embargo and support Israeli membership to the U. N., all clamored for by Zionists, Congressmen, and the press, had political considerations been paramount. As it was, he did little more than give public assurances (as he had in 1946) that he would continue his Israel policy.

The vital United States decision in fact was not recognition, but support of the United Nations partition proposal in November 1947. Recognition, it is true, secured the future of the new state, and brought with it considerable

American aid. But it was the United Nations adoption of the partition resolution that was crucial to Palestine and the Yishuv -- the Jewish community in Palestine. It liquidated the mandate and set a date for British departure. It defined a legal framework in which the Yishuv could, and did, act to establish boundaries and an authorized government. And finally, it made it possible to get material and diplomatic help from abroad, especially through the United Nations at a vital time during the fighting in Palestine, and it enabled them to label the Arabs aggressors and so gain the support of world opinion. From December 1947 to May 1948, the Yishuv worked desperately to establish and maintain control over the partition area, so that they could present the world with a fait-accomplis.

Thus faced with the alternative of recognizing the provisional government, or calling upon the United Nations to take further action he knew it could not enforce, Truman did the only thing open to him and extended de-facto recognition. In so doing he was consistent with his stated policy of pursuing peace in Palestine and following the broad framework of containing Communism by establishing a bulwark against Russian influence. Throughout the period from the defeat of Japan until final de-jure recognition of Israel in January 1949, Truman tried to reconcile the pressures upon him in these terms.

It is the purpose of this thesis to trace the events leading to the recognition of Israel in some detail, and to

examine the role and motivations of the Truman administration. The focus of attention will be on President Truman himself, based largely on the materials of the Truman Library. Little use has been made of these sources in the studies mentioned above. The conclusions of this investigation, as a result, are not always in agreement with previous opinions.

CHAPTER II

PRESIDENT TRUMAN FACES THE PROBLEM

Truman, in April 1945, was only too conscious of his lack of preparation to direct the nation's foreign relations, and he willingly looked for advice. It was not long in coming on the question of admitting Jewish refugees to Palestine. Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, aware of the tenseness of the Middle Eastern situation and anticipating Zionist pressure on the new President warned Truman against endangering the peace by any hasty action.¹ The pressure Stettinius feared came within a few weeks through Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York. Wagner, playing upon Truman's loyalty to Roosevelt and his policies, pointed out in a letter of April 18 that F.D.R. had on several occasions supported the Jewish immigration into Palestine, and the founding there of a Jewish commonwealth.² He pointed out that as late as March 16, the late President had, on his return from Yalta, publicly re-affirmed his position through Zionist leader Dr. Stephen Wise, and he urged Truman to follow this policy.

¹Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 158.

²Wagner to Truman, April 18, 1945, O.F. 204, Truman library.

An unanswered letter of King Abdullah of Transjordan gave acting Secretary of State Joseph C. Grew the opportunity to suggest the opposite course of action based on the same grounds; that of following Roosevelt's policy.³ Grew reminded Truman that several letters had been received from Arab leaders and Roosevelt had promised them he would not act without "prior consultation with Arabs and Jews."⁴ It had become a matter of course, and Grew added, "We believe it would be appropriate for you to acknowledge this letter and renew these assurances." The President could do little more than approve the drafted letter attached, dated May 17.

The approaching Potsdam Conference was the occasion of a further letter from Wagner. With it was enclosed a statement signed by 54 Senators and 250 House of Representative members which read:

We earnestly request you to use your influence with the government of Great Britain, the Mandate for Palestine, to open forth with the doors of Palestine to unrestricted Jewish immigration and colonization; and we hope that you will urge all interested governments to join with the United States towards the end of establishing Palestine as a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth at the earliest possible time.⁵

The President's comments on his return to America indicate that he had both aspects of the problem in mind, but he

³Memorandum of Grew to Truman, May 14, 1945, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

⁴Ibid. Similar letters had been received from Jordan, Syria, and Iraq from time to time.

⁵Wagner to Truman, July 3, 1945, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

refused to associate the refugee question with that of a Jewish Commonwealth.

As a Senator, Truman had more than once expressed his concern for Jewish immigration into Palestine. He strongly condemned the 1939 British White Paper. "It has made a scrap of paper out of Lord Balfour's promise to the Jews. It has just added another to the long list of surrenders to the Axis powers," he told the Senate.⁶ He described it as "Munich Mentality," and a dishonorable repudiation by Britain of her obligations. In May 1944, he had been approached by the Washington Bureau of the Zionist Organization of America to make a statement supporting the Palestine Resolution at that time before Congress.⁷

The Resolution called for unrestricted Jewish immigration to Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth, and promised Congressional action to that end after the War.⁸ In his statement Senator Truman pointed out that as a member of the Resolution Sub-Committee at the Democratic National Convention, he had assisted in drafting

⁶Harry S. Truman, May 25, 1939. U.S. Congressional Record, V.O. 84, Part B. (76th Congress, 1st Session), p. 2231.

⁷Letter of May 2, 1944, Palestine file, Truman Senatorial Papers, Truman Library. In writing to Truman they were prompted by his "...sympathy and support for the movement to open the doors of Palestine to Jewish immigration..."

⁸The resolution read "We favor a free and unrestricted immigration of Jews to Palestine, and such a policy as to result in the settlement there of a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth," loc. cit.

the Palestine plank of the Democratic platform adopted at the Convention. He was utterly appalled at the tragic experiences of the Jewish people of Europe, and that plank reflected his personal opinion, he said.

The remainder of Truman's statement is of great significance. It clearly outlined his view of the problem, and the basic approach he took towards it:

I am of the opinion that a resolution such as this should be very circumspectly handled until we know just exactly where we are going and why. With the difficulties looming up between Russia and Poland, and the Baltic States and Russia, and with Great Britain and Russia, it is absolutely necessary to us in financing the war.

He ended on a far more prophetic note than he knew, "I don't want to throw any bricks to upset the applecart, although when the right time comes I am willing to help make the fight for a Jewish homeland in Palestine."

These comments may have been simply politically profitable at the time; there were large concentrations of Jews in both Kansas City and St. Louis. Yet a pro-Zionist stand might have lost as many votes as it won in provincial and isolationist Missouri. In view of this, and later Zionist denunciations accusing Truman of being a Pendergast Machine politician, it is more likely that they accurately defined his attitude.

The end of fighting in Europe brought home the full horror of the Jewish situation in Europe. Reaching a solu-

⁹This statement was attached to the letter of May 2, referred to above.

tion became even more urgent as the deadline for the British ending of Jewish immigration to Palestine approached in August. Truman describes in his memoirs his mounting anxiety and his steps to find an answer.¹⁰ On receiving Earl G. Harrison's report,¹¹ Truman wrote on August 31 to Clement Attlee stressing the need for immediate action to permit 100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine as requested by the Jewish Agency. But the British Prime Minister offered little hope.

Between August and October 1945, the White House received an increasing amount of mail requesting American action to help the displaced persons.¹² To his critics, Truman's efforts seemed hardly enough. Zionist organizations, by their demands that the United States support their aims for a Jewish state made the President's task more difficult. He wrote in answer to one letter in October. "The Jewish and Arab situation in the Near East is a most difficult one and has caused us more difficulty than most any other problem in the European Theater."¹³

¹⁰Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, pp. 163-5.

¹¹In June, Truman had sent Harrison, Dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, to Europe to investigate the refugee problem, especially the situation of the Jews. Harrison, in a moving report, urged that the proposal of the Jewish Agency to admit 100,000 Jews be accepted. Ibid., pp. 163-5.

¹²See Appendix A, for density of mail.

¹³Letter of Truman to Virginia C. Gildersleeve, October 15, 1945, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

In order to define his position more clearly in relation to the political future of Palestine, Truman authorized the State Department to release Roosevelt's letter of April 5, 1945 to Ibn Saud. By so doing, he indicated United States policy towards any "final decision" which might alter the "basic situation", thus pointing out the limits within which he had to act.¹⁴ The release made it clear that the President and the State Department were in substantial agreement as to immediate action, and that they did not regard the admittance of 100,000 Jews as changing the basic situation. The following day, October 19, the British Government formally proposed an Anglo-American inquiry into the problems of Palestine. The President and Secretary of State readily accepted the suggestion as a step forward.

When this decision was made public on November 13th, Zionists strongly protested to Truman. Rabbis Stephen S. Wise, and Hillel Silver telegraphed, "it was with deepest regrets that we learned of the acceptance by our government of the British proposal."¹⁵ They felt there was no reason for any further investigation, it was just another stalling device of the British. The New York Post described the decision as an American betrayal to oil, imperialism and Arabs¹⁶ -- a theme it developed to an almost pathological

¹⁴Roosevelt to Ibn Saud, April 5, 1945, loc. cit.

¹⁵S. Wise to Truman, November 15, 1945. Weizmann MSS, Truman Library.

¹⁶New York Post, November 17, 1945.

degree over the next thirty months.

Democratic Congressmen, disturbed at the effect this might have on their political futures, also protested the American "capitulation to the British viewpoint" without any valid reasons being given.¹⁷ Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Robert E. Hannegan, received a letter from Mayor Frank Hague of Jersey City pointing out "how seriously the Jewish people look upon the Palestine Question."¹⁸ Hague referred to the Zionist National Committee meeting held in Atlantic City late in November, which had passed a resolution that they were "Disgusted and resentful against President Truman and the State Department in their actions towards the Jews."¹⁹ Obviously alarmed, Hannegan sent this letter to Truman in the hope that the President might take some action to allay this feeling.

Senator Wagner also thought that the Committee of Inquiry was just a delaying tactic, and appealed to Truman to exert more pressure on the British by supporting a Senate Resolution favoring Palestine as a Jewish homeland.²⁰ Truman

¹⁷Emanuel Celler to Truman, November 15, 1945, O.F. 204, Truman Library. Celler wrote that the nation was solidly behind the establishment of a Jewish State, and that this delay did not appeal to the general public.

¹⁸Frank Hague to Robert E. Hannegan, November 26, 1945, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Wagner to Truman, December 6, 1945, O.F. 204, Truman Library. Wagner was referring to Senate Resolution 112, 1945.

offered Wagner little sympathy, and told him that he thought the resolution should wait upon the findings of the Inquiry.²¹

Some indication of the extent to which Truman saw this as a non-political question, and his desire to solve the problem of the Jewish refugees without involving considerations as to the final political outcome in Palestine, can be seen by his choice of the six Americans to take part in the Inquiry.²² As one of their members, former Under Secretary of State William Phillips, wrote later, "I knew very little about the Middle East, that is why I, indeed all the members of our committee were chosen."²³ Truman hoped in this way to obtain a fresh and unbiased approach to the whole problem. In his account of the Commission, Bartley C. Crum who soon became deeply and personally committed to the Zionist position, complained of State Department pressure against reach-

²¹Truman to Wagner, December 10, 1945, O.F. 204, Truman Library. Truman wrote: "I believe that the appointment of the Commission will serve a useful purpose, although I do not intend to decrease my efforts to get some additional Jews into Palestine in the meantime."

²²The members of the committee were: Judge Joseph C. Hutcheson, a highly respected Federal Judge from Texas, who was designated the American Chairman; Dr. Frank Aydelotte, Director for the Institute of Advanced study at Princeton; Frank W. Buxton, editor of the Boston Herald; William Phillips, a veteran of our diplomatic service; James G. McDonald, who had been the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; and O. Max Garner, former Governor of North Carolina. Mr. Garner was unable to accept the appointment, and Bartley C. Crum, a California attorney took his place. Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 172.

²³William Phillips, Ventures in Diplomacy (Boston: Beacon, 1952), p. 421.

ing a decision too favorable to the Jews.²⁴ Crum, however, was unusually sensitive on this matter.

The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry presented its report to Truman on April 22, 1946. Only the following points need be mentioned here: the Committee recommended the immediate authorization of 100,000 certificates for Jewish victims of Nazi persecution into Palestine. It felt that it was essential, at the same time however, to make a clear statement of the following principles: that Jew will not dominate Arab and Arab will not dominate Jew in Palestine; that Palestine shall be neither a Jewish state nor an Arab state; that the ultimate form of government to be established, shall under international guarantees, fully protect and preserve the interests of the Holy Land of Christendom and of the Moslem and Jewish faiths.²⁵ The Committee also warned that any attempt to establish an independent Palestine State or independent Palestinian States would result in civil strife such as might threaten the peace of the world. It recommended, therefore, continuation of the British mandate and an eventual UN trusteeship.

A week later the President announced that he had received the Committee's report, and made his own comments upon it. Maintaining his position of keeping the final out-

²⁴Bartley C. Crum, Behind the Silken Curtain (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1947), p. 31.

²⁵Joint Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry of Palestine, O.F. 204 B, Truman Library.

come separate from the refugee problem, Truman readily endorsed the recommendation for the admission of 100,000 immigrants. But he refused to commit himself concerning the political future of Palestine other than to note that Arab rights were protected, and he did not anticipate any change in the basic situation.²⁶

Truman did not wish to involve the United States in the responsibility for enforcing any final settlement. "I have no intention of attempting to assume the British responsibility in Palestine," he wrote to Senator Walter E. George, Chairman of the Committee on Finance, "my only interest is to find some proper way to take care of these displaced persons, not only because they should be taken care of and are in a pitiful plight, but because it is in our own financial interest to have them taken care of because we are feeding most of them."²⁷

Britain had been trying to get the United States to accept joint responsibility for a policy towards Palestine for some time.²⁸ Harold Laski put it bluntly in a letter to Judge Mosk of California: "On Palestine, it would certainly

²⁶Public Papers...Harry S. Truman, 1946. Statement April 30, 1945, pp. 218-19. His statement ended: "In addition to these immediate objectives the report deals with many other questions of long range political policies and questions of international law which require careful study and which I will take under advisement."

²⁷Truman to Walter E. George, October 17, 1945, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

²⁸New York Times, May 1, 1946. Article by James Reston, Clippings File, Democratic National Committee, Truman Library.

make the task of the British Government easier if the Americans would offer to share in the difficult responsibility of our mandate instead of merely offering us advice by resolution. 5,000 American troops in Palestine are worth 100 resolutions from the United States Senate."²⁹ The basic difference of opinion was whether 100,000 Jews could be sent into Palestine without force. The British were hesitant, while Truman believed that it was possible without bloodshed. For this reason, he wished to press ahead with immigration, and offered ships and finance for this purpose. But, he refused to become involved in a settlement of the question with the possibility of military support.

Zionist pressure increased considerably during the following six months and the President's actions have been interpreted as responses to this pressure. Particularly singled out for attack was his treatment of the Morrison Plan and his Yom Kippur statement issued on October 4. James Reston of the New York Times wrote on October 7; "Domestic politics in general and the New York State campaign in particular are generally believed here to be the reason why Mr. Truman opposed publication of the Cabinet Committee's federation plan and why he insisted on putting out his Palestine statement on Friday."³⁰ A closer examination of this inter-

²⁹Harold Laski to Mosk, October 10, 1945, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

³⁰New York Times, October 7, 1946, Clippings File, Democratic National Committee, Truman Library.

val reveals however, that while this was undoubtedly a factor, Truman was concerned with, and motivated by, far more than domestic politics.

The British response to the Anglo-American report was to refuse to act on any of the recommendations until Jewish terrorism ceased in Palestine and the political future of the country had been decided. Bevin's announcement to this effect, although it expressed his support for an eventual Jewish state, was greeted unenthusiastically by American Jews. For the remainder of the year, discussions took place between the two countries in which America tried to modify the British attitude towards the refugees and at the same time find a political solution acceptable to both Arabs and Jews. For this purpose Truman appointed a cabinet committee comprising the Secretaries of State, War and Treasury. Under Alternate Henry F. Grady, acting for the Secretary of State as chairman, the American committee left for London in July to meet with a British Cabinet committee headed by Lord Robert Morrison.³¹ The British proposed autonomous communities for the Arabs and the Jews under a strong central government, which might lead eventually to a bi-national federal state or partition.³²

³¹For the events and exchange of letters leading up to the formation of the Anglo-American cabinet committee discussions, see Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, pp. 178-180. Morrison, a Labour Party peer, had been on the A.A.C.I.

³²Truman's statement of October 4, 1946, O.F. 204, Truman Library. Also printed in Public Papers...Harry S. Truman, 1946, p. 442.

This scheme, known as the Morrison Plan when it became public at the end of July, was opposed by both Jews and Arabs. The Jews regarded it as falling far short of their promised statehood, and the Arabs would not accept any proposal that envisaged a Jewish State in Palestine. Truman was inclined to support the plan at first. His primary reason for doing so was Prime Minister Attlee's assurance that if the proposal was adopted, Britain would reopen Jewish immigration into Palestine immediately.³³ Rabbi H. Silver, spokesman for the Rabbinical Assembly of America, condemned the proposal as un-American and a reversal of earlier policy. The Rabbinical Assembly, he wrote to Truman, was strongly opposed to it.³⁴

Protests came also from political quarters.³⁵ Paul E. Fitzpatrick, chairman of the Democratic State Committee of New York, claimed, "Looking only at the political side of the question, if this plan goes into effect it would be useless for the Democrats to nominate a State ticket for the election this fall. I say this without reservation and am certain that my statement can be substantiated."³⁶ There

³³New York Times, October 6, 1946.

³⁴H. Silver to Truman, July 31, 1946, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

³⁵Herbert H. Lehman, Governor of Massachusetts, telegraphed that he was horrified by the plan: "It was totally at variance with American policy." Telegram to Truman, July 30, 1946, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

³⁶Paul E. Fitzpatrick to Truman, August 2, 1946, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

had been, he said, a deeply emotional reaction by the Jewish community.³⁷ Bartley Crum wrote to the President warning that, from information he had gained while on the Anglo-American Inquiry, the aim of the British government was to destroy the Jewish national home.³⁸

The British proposal as it stood clearly offered little hope of easing the situation, and promised only further violence. Alarmed at the reports of existing fighting, Truman did not want to reach any final conclusions concerning the future of Palestine which neither side would accept.³⁹ Accordingly he instructed the United States delegation to continue the discussions. Writing a year later to Judge Simmons of the Supreme Court of Nebraska, Truman explained his reason for not going ahead with the federation plan: "Neither the Jews nor the Arabs seemed to

³⁷Joe T. Higgins, a New York Lawyer, wrote to the National Democratic Committee, "We need all the help we can get from the Jewish people who are pretty wrought up over the Palestine question here. They think the President could do more." Letter of July 11, 1946, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

³⁸The British had an extraordinary plan if Crum is to be believed. They proposed "one, to eliminate the Jewish Agency in Palestine; two, to extirpate the Haganah; three, to set up a so-called Democratic Commonwealth in Palestine which in reality will be an Arab State, the head of which will be the notorious Grand Mufti." Letter to Truman, October 25, 1946, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

³⁹In a press conference on August 9th, Truman denied that he had received any specific recommendations from the Grady mission. Public Papers...Harry S. Truman, 1946. Press Conference, August 9th, 1946, p. 410.

want it."⁴⁰ In a statement released on August 16, Truman clarified his position when he wrote: "Although the President has been expressing views with Mr. Attlee on the subject, this Government has not presented any plan of its own for the solution of the problem of Palestine." He went on to say:

It is clear that no settlement of the Palestine problem can be achieved which will be fully satisfactory to all of the parties concerned and that if this problem is to be solved in a manner which will bring peace and prosperity to Palestine, it must be approached in a spirit of conciliation.⁴¹

In answer to a further question on the subject at a press conference on September 5, Truman said that all the negotiations had been made public and were still in progress. "All I was trying to do," he said, "was get a hundred thousand Jews into Palestine. [I am] still trying to do that."⁴² A letter of Truman's to McDonald suggests, however, that he was not very hopeful. "It has been a most difficult problem and I have reached the conclusion that there is no solution, but we will keep trying."⁴³

⁴⁰Letter to Simmons, June 9, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library. Truman refers to a similar letter in his memoirs. Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 181.

⁴¹Public Papers...Harry S. Truman, 1946, p. 421.

⁴²Ibid. Press conference, September 5, 1946, p. 424.

⁴³Truman to McDonald, July 31, 1946, O.F. 204, Truman Library. McDonald had written to Truman encouraging him to continue his efforts.

Britain, meanwhile, was conferring with the Arabs and Jews, trying to reach some agreement. The Jewish Agency of Palestine, official spokesman for the Zionists, presented to Britain and America a proposal for partition whereby a Jewish state would be established within Palestine. In the hope that out of this a solution would emerge which, even if not fully acceptable to both sides, might possibly be implemented without gravely endangering the peace of Palestine and the Middle East, Truman passed the proposal on to the British with his approval.

At this stage the British did not believe that the Arabs would go as far as open warfare in Palestine. "The Arabs are practical people," said British Ambassador Lord Inverchapel to Eliahu Epstein,⁴⁴ "when they were faced with a fait-accomplis they will make the best of it that they can from a Jewish state."⁴⁵ This feeling was shared in the White House. David Niles, Presidential Assistant to both Truman, and Roosevelt wrote in a memorandum to Truman in May, that he could discount the danger of violence from a unified Arab world "because a good part of the Moslem world follows Ghandi and his philosophy of non resistance." He also added this interesting comment; "President Roosevelt

⁴⁴Eliahu Epstein was the Washington representative for the Jewish Agency.

⁴⁵Epstein to Nahum Goldman. Jewish Agency, London, October 9, 1946. Weizmann MSS, Truman Library.

said to some of us privately he could do anything that needed to be done with Ibn Saud with a few million dollars."⁴⁶ Still skeptical, but slightly reassured by this misinformation, Truman agreed to approve the proposal as the basis for negotiation.

The Washington office of the Jewish Agency, aware of the importance attached by the Democratic Party to retaining Jewish support in the approaching Congressional election, began to put pressure on the White House for a Presidential statement which would publicly announce American support of the partition proposal. The Agency hoped that a statement, addressed to Chaim Weizmann indicating United States approval of the plan, would lead to its acceptance at the London conference which was still in session. Epstein, in a letter to the Agency's London office describing the events leading up to the President's statement, relates that Rabbi Stephen Wise visited the President in September and convinced Truman, who was by this time disillusioned by the way things had gone since July, to issue a statement. Epstein wrote:

The last but not the least factor in the situation was the activity of the Republican candidates in the forthcoming elections, and especially in New York, who overtly showed their determination to make the Palestine issue one of the focal points of attack on Truman and the Democratic administration.⁴⁷

⁴⁶David Niles to Truman, May 27, 1946, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

⁴⁷Epstein to Goldman, October 9, 1946. Weizmann MSS, Truman Library. In this letter Epstein re-

Truman's statement, issued on the eve of Yom Kippur,⁴⁸ was interpreted by the press and congressmen, as the agency had hoped it would be, as a shift in American policy to support of partition as a solution.⁴⁹ New York Democratic Congressman Immanuel Celler wrote enthusiastically to Truman congratulating the President on his statement, adding, "It should also have the very desirable political effect upon our chances in New York."⁵⁰

The statement, although designed and timed to assist the Democrats in the elections, did not, however, indicate any departure in United States policy or any shift in Truman's position. "It is merely a reiteration of the policy I have been urging since August 1945" Truman wrote to Celler, "but it was necessary to make [it] at this time."⁵¹ In the statement, the President expressed his regret at the adjourn-

lates in some detail the drafting of the statement. Epstein's original draft was considerably altered by the State Department Near Eastern Officer, Loy Henderson, and only after considerable effort by a 'friend' in the White House, probably Niles, was a compromise reached. A significant factor also was a letter of Democratic National Chairman, Hannegan, pointing out that Dewey was going to make a speech and the need for Truman to do likewise. Some of this, at least, was generally known as Drew Pearson gave "the inside story" over the radio. Philadelphia Record, October 11, 1946, Press Cutting File, Democratic National Committee File, Truman Library.

⁴⁸Yom Kippur is the Jewish day of Atonement.

⁴⁹New York Herald Tribune, October 5, 1946. Philadelphia Record, October 11, 1946.

⁵⁰Celler to Truman, October 7, 1946, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

⁵¹Truman to Celler, October 10, 1946, O.F. 204, Truman Library (emphasis mine).

ment of the London conference. Reviewing the two proposals under discussion, the Morrison plan and the partition plan of the Jewish Agency, he asserted, "I cannot believe that the gap between the proposals which have been put forward is too great to be bridged by men of reason and good will....To such a solution our government could give its support."⁵² He repeated the urgency of reaching some conclusions speedily and added, "should a workable solution for Palestine be devised, I would be willing to recommend to the Congress a plan for economic assistance for the development of that country." Epstein recognized the President's position only too well. In the letter to Nahum Goldman referred to above he wrote:

After the publication of the statement, I found it necessary to frankly express to our friend disappointment over some parts of it, especially where it comes out for "bridging of the gap" between our plan and the Morrison Plan, instead of supporting our plan completely.⁵³

He pointed out, however, "that not a single newspaper has pointed up this part of the statement and all the headlines carried by the papers read "Truman's support of a Jewish State." Epstein described Reston's New York Times article which queried the extent to which domestic politics was influential in this statement as "vicious."

Domestic politics had indeed been brought into the

⁵²Truman, October 4, 1946, loc. cit., (emphasis mine).

⁵³Epstein to Goldman, loc. cit.

Palestine issue, and the press, Congressmen and Zionist organizations made sure that it remained an ever present factor in the mind of the public, the Democratic National Committee and Harry S. Truman. The President, however, never lost sight of the broad implications of the Palestine question on his foreign policy. When in the next nine months he moved to a position of supporting the establishment of the State of Israel, it was not for reasons of domestic politics or his dislike of the "striped pants boys" of the State Department as his critics claimed. It was more his desire to settle the problem of the displaced Jews of Europe as peacefully as possible, and the expectation of securing stability in the region.

In the years following the end of the war it was the immediate purpose of American foreign policy to create political and economic stability in Europe. By the end of 1946 it had become apparent that Great Britain was unable to carry on her commitments to Greece and Turkey. Russian intentions in Eastern Europe were becoming increasingly more obvious, and Truman saw the urgency of decisive American action to prevent the remainder of the area falling under Russian domination. Already by 1947 Communists held top positions in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Albania, Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria. Britain announced that she would have to end her economic and military aid to Greece by the end of March. Truman responded immediately with his March 12

message to Congress outlining the Truman Doctrine. The implications of this policy were not long in following. On June 5, Secretary of State Marshall proposed the European Recovery Program designed to bring economic and political stability to Europe. The declaration and implementation of these two policies committed the United States directly to the protection of Greece, Turkey and Iran. The announced American intention was to contain Communist aggression everywhere.

In a real and immediate way the Middle East became of vital significance to the United States. If the efforts in Europe were to be successful, a stable Middle East was essential. Control of the region's oil was a serious consideration in ensuring the continuation and completion of American foreign policy aims. The President realized that outbreaks of violence, or the existence of American troops in Palestine would result in repercussions far more wide reaching than the local difficulties.

Consequently, Truman did not commit himself to any particular formula for Jewish Statehood or set of circumstances. Throughout this period, Truman's primary and very real concern was the fate of the Jewish refugees remaining in Europe. His energies were directed towards the solution of this problem rather than the exact nature of any Jewish National Home in Palestine. In his statement on August 16, 1946, Truman had asserted: "It is also evident that the solution of the Palestine question will not in itself solve

the broader problem of the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons in Europe." He added that he had been giving this subject his special attention. He hoped that countries outside Europe, including the United States, would admit those in this plight as permanent residents.⁵⁴ He repeatedly emphasized this as his main concern in finding a solution to the problems confronting Palestine.

Truman made his position very clear in a letter to Ibn Saud on October 28. The Arab King had written to the President angrily accusing him of breaking his promises to the Arabs in his speech of October 4. Truman first drew the attention of Ibn Saud to the tragic situation of the survivors of Nazi persecution, and pointed out that the United States had a considerable responsibility for the fate of the people liberated at the end of the war.

The United States, which contributed its blood and resources to the winning of the war, could not divest itself of a certain responsibility for the manner in which the freed territories were disposed of, or for the fate of the people liberated at that time. It took the position, to which it still adheres, that these people should be prepared for self government and also that a national home for the Jewish people should be established in Palestine.⁵⁵

It was only natural, therefore, Truman wrote, "that this government should favor at this time the entry into Palestine of considerable numbers of displaced Jews in Europe, not only that they may find shelter there, but also that

⁵⁴Public Papers....Harry S. Truman, 1946, p. 421.

⁵⁵Public Papers....Harry S. Truman, 1946, pp. 467-69.

they may contribute their talents and energies to the up-building of the Jewish National Home." The President, after tracing his efforts to gain the admittance of 100,000 Jews into Palestine, commented hopefully: "I sincerely believe that it will prove possible to arrive at a satisfactory settlement of this refugee problem along the lines which I have mentioned above." Truman told Ibn Saud that he did not regard this position as a contradiction to earlier promises made to him. "I do not consider that my urging of the admittance of a considerable number of displaced Jews into Palestine or my statements with regard to the solution of the problem of Palestine in any sense represent an action hostile to the Arab people." Truman still had not committed himself to any specific proposal by February 1947.] He wrote to Washington Attorney, Hurton Thompson: "I wish we could find a solution -- we have been trying to find one since July 1945, but we seem no nearer to the solution now than then. I regret it very much.⁵⁶ [It was the failure of the Zionists to realize this that led them to accuse the President of betrayals and reversals in his Palestine policy. They hoped by this method to create enough political pressure to force Truman to support their own political aims for the future of Palestine. In the course of the events of the next nine months Truman took the stand of support for the partitioning of Palestine. But it had little to do with pressure of domestic politics that led him to this decision.

⁵⁶Truman to Thompson, February 25, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

CHAPTER III

UNITED NATIONS PARTITION AND AMERICAN RECOGNITION

It was evident to the British long before January 1947, that Palestine was no longer a Colonial or Foreign Office problem, but an international one.¹ They had failed to get United States responsibility to any larger degree, and they could not get any agreement between the Arabs or Jews on the three alternatives offered; an Arab State, a Jewish State or a Federated State. The London Palestine Conference which resumed on January 25, after its adjournment early in October, showed no sign of reaching agreement, and on February 18, Bevin with little other alternative, announced Britain's decision to submit the matter to the United Nations.

The General Assembly, in its first regular session, agreed to the British request for a Special Session to consider the problem. This Special Session of the General Assembly, the first such, was convened three weeks later in New York on April 28. It quickly appointed a United Nations

¹Bevin suggested this as early as June 1946 in his speech charging that the United States was willing to give advice but little assistance. *Washington Post*, June 13, 1946. Clippings file, Democratic National Committee, Truman Library.

Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) of eleven Nations² on a fact-finding mission to report to the second regular session in September. By this move, Britain forced the American Government into accepting at least some of the responsibility for the future of Palestine.

The significance of this was not lost on either President Truman or those interested in a favorable outcome for the Jews. Truman felt that this was the kind of problem for which the United Nations was intended.³ He was acutely aware that if the UN was to become an effective agent for peace, and an instrument through which United States policy might be implemented, it was essential it succeed in this first major international dispute. For these reasons he was determined to support any resolution passed by the General Assembly which it was able to enforce. The role of the United States was no longer advisory, it was now committed to finding and assisting in carrying out a solution. For this reason, also, the President was subjected to intense pressure in the months leading up to the UN decision.

Zionist pressure was applied at the outset with renewed vigor. The American delegate at the United Nations, Herschel Johnson, in the opening meeting of the Special Com-

²The nations on the committee were Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, India, Iran, Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay, and Yugoslavia. Justice Emil Sandstrom of Sweden was chairman.

³Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 166.

mittee indicated that the United States would do little more than support any majority resolution passed, and he stressed that the criteria for American support was that the decision be enforceable with the machinery at the disposal of United Nations. The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) regarded this as, "utterly at variance with the attitude of our Government throughout a whole generation."⁴ But as Walter Lippmann pointed out in his 'Today and Tomorrow' column in the Washington Post, the only thing the United Nations could really do in its present form, was guarantee a lawful political boundary line. Since this was the best kind of international enforcement, he regarded partition was almost the only logical outcome.⁵ The ZOA and other Zionist groups were concerned that the Jewish Agency was not permitted to take part in Assembly discussions and they petitioned the President to support their efforts to remedy this.

Similar pressure came from Congress. Senator Wagner telegraphed early in May reminding Truman once more that the United States was committed to a Jewish State through resolutions passed in both houses. He urged the President to

⁴Wise to Truman, April 30, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library. The "Nation" Associates also expressed their surprise at the "contradictory" policy of the U.S. They saw the United Nations statement as coming from the State Department and urged that Truman to deal with the matter himself. 'Nation' to Truman May 5, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library

⁵Washington Post, May 3, 1947. Democratic National Committee Press Cutting File, Truman Library.

actively support Israel in the United Nations, allow Jewish immigration into Palestine and enable the Jews to be represented at the General Assembly.⁶ Telegrams expressing identical sentiments were received from the Governors of almost all the states.⁷

As the British tried to maintain order, the dramatic events taking place in Palestine between May and September gave Zionists all that they needed to arouse public and political support for their case.⁸ The White House received a flood of telegrams and letters protesting the violence of the British and indignation at what was termed the "monstrous indifference" of the United States towards these acts.

Truman, disturbed that the deteriorating situation in Palestine might prejudice an early settlement, spoke out in June against the terrorism taking place, although he had been warned by Marshall, "that the issuance of such an appeal might be unwelcome to certain groups in this country who are actively engaged in facilitating immigration into Palestine in violation of the laws of that country and in encouraging

⁶Wagner to Truman, May 5, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

⁷Some of the more persuasive letters came from Governors Blue of Iowa, Donnelly of Missouri, Turner of Oklahoma, Green of Illinois, Carlson of Kansas, Tuck of Virginia.

⁸The "Exodus 1947" episode, in which several Jews were killed as the British seized the refugee ship on July 18 to prevent it landing in Palestine, created a wave of Anglophobia throughout the country. Letters came in from the American Jewish Conference, Bnai Brith, the Jewish War Veterans and many prominent Jewish leaders appealing for some presidential action as a protest against this action.

the activities of terrorists."⁹ Rabbi Baruch Korff of the Political Action Committee for Palestine, one of the organizations referred to in the above memorandum, accused the State Department of aiding the avalanche of Anti-Semitism in the United Nations, and appealed to Truman to put a stop to this support of the British.¹⁰

These demands became so strident and insistent that Truman, by now thoroughly annoyed, wrote to Wise after one such telegram: "I read your telegram with a great deal of interest and appreciate your viewpoint, but there seems to be two sides to this question. I am finding it rather difficult to decide which one is right and a great many other people in the country are beginning to feel just as I do."¹¹

The Special Committee on Palestine presented its report to the General Assembly when it met for its second regular session on September 1. Although the Committee had not reached unanimous findings, a majority -- Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, Netherlands, Peru, Sweden and Uruguay -- recommended the partition of Palestine into

⁹Undated memorandum from GCM (George C. Marshall) to Truman accompanying a draft of the statement issued by the President on June 5, 1947, O.F. 771, Truman Library.

¹⁰Rabbi Baruch Korff, to Truman, May 1, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library. Korff said that the United States stand at the United Nations was tantamount to a disavowal of earlier policies.

¹¹Truman to Wise, August 6, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

Jewish and Arab states. A minority -- Indian, Yugoslavia and Iran suggested a single Federal state. Two days later the Assembly designated itself an Ad Hoc Committee to consider the two proposals. All members of the United Nations were represented on the Committee. Between September 25 and November 25, the Ad Hoc Committee held thirty four meetings. Both the Jewish Agency and the Arab High Committee were given the opportunity of being heard.

During this interval, the pressure on Truman to intervene directly to gain a partition vote became frantic. The President's decision not to make any public comment at this stage caused considerable alarm to supporters of the partition plan. It was, said the American Christian Palestine Committee of New York; "a shameful mockery of the promises that had been given the Jews."¹² In addition to that from Jewish groups, a good deal of pressure came from Democratic Committees throughout the country, especially as could be expected, in the areas of high Jewish population concentration of New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island.¹³

¹²American Christian Palestine Committee of New York to Truman, October 15, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

¹³Senator Howard McGrath, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee and Gael Sullivan, Publicity Officer, both forwarded telegrams to Truman that they had received. The Democratic Chairman of the New Haven Committee wrote to Sullivan: "It is imperative that the administration take an unequivocal and strong stand in favor of UNSCOP majority report on Palestine." Telegram of October 9, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

The Palestine issue was now being placed, in these telegrams, within the broader framework of American policy in relation to Communism and the Middle East. "If it is the aim of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall plan to protect our Western way of life from the encroachment of totalitarianism and Communism, a free Jewish state in Palestine would be symbolic of our fidelity as a nation to this program."¹⁴ A Jewish state established by America, its supporters predicted, would be a bastion of democracy in the Middle East, a symbol of the fidelity of American promises, and a clear indication of the role of world leadership America was to assume. These arguments, whether simply used by Zionists as propagandistic pressure on the White House or not, influenced Truman much more than those suggesting the political expediency of gaining Jewish votes. Truman expressed his views frankly to long standing friend Rabbi Thurman. Thurman who was certainly not a Zionist, defended Truman against the charges levelled at him that the predominant motivation of his action was consideration of domestic politics. Truman responded with these words of thanks: "I told you exactly how I felt with regard to the world situation and I am certainly pleased to have gotten it over with you."¹⁵

¹⁴Essex County Democratic Committee, Newark, N.J. to Truman, October 7, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

¹⁵Truman to Thurman, November 8, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

Little had been done, however, to work out any comprehensive American policy in relation to the Palestine question. Differences of opinion emerged between the President and the State Department during the three months that the matter was debated before the United Nations over the degree to which America should support the United Nations Palestine proposals, without endangering her broad foreign policy considerations. Over the basic issue there was little dispute, but the State Department emphasized the need for Arab friendship and oil concessions, while Truman's primary concern was the welfare of the Jewish refugees, and international justice.

It was Eddy Jacobson, a figure hitherto neglected by historians of this episode of American foreign policy, who was most responsible for bringing President Truman to the conviction that the United States should support the majority report of the UNSCOP without reservations or modifications. Eddy Jacobson was for many years one of Harry S. Truman's closest friends. Yet little is known of him, or the role he played in the foundation of the Jewish State.¹⁶ He appears only briefly in the President's memoirs. Truman relates their World War I experiences and their subsequent unhappy venture in haberdashery in the early 1920's.¹⁷ The

¹⁶This information on Jacobson which follows is the result of an interview by this writer with A. J. Granoff, and letters which Granoff has in his possession. Some of this information appeared in two articles in the Kansas City Times, May 13, 1965.

¹⁷Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, I, pp. 153-55.

warmth of their friendship is evident, however, even from these brief comments of Truman's. "Eddy Jacobson was as fine a man as ever walked," he wrote. The President further revealed their closeness on Jacobson's death in October, 1955. Visibly shaken after having been called to Jacobson's house in the middle of the night, Truman stated the following morning: "Eddie was one of the best friends I had in this world. He was absolutely trustworthy. I don't know how I am going to get along without him."¹⁸ Truman also later recorded:

And when the day came when Eddie Jacobson was persuaded to forego his natural reluctance to petition me and he came to talk to me about the plight of the Jews and the struggles confronting the State of Israel then being formed -- I paid careful attention. Although my sympathies were already active and present in the cause of the State of Israel, it is a fact of history that Eddie Jacobson's contribution was of decisive importance.¹⁹

Truman's memoirs describe Eddie's visit to him in February of 1948, and note was taken of this at the time by Drew Pearson.²⁰ But Jacobson had been recruited as early as June 1947. The non-Zionist organization B'nai B'rith, had approached Jacobson to seek Truman's help in assisting the refugees interned on Cyprus. Frank Goldman, National President, and Maurice Bisgyer, National Vice-President, were introduced to Jacobson in Kansas City by his friend and lawyer A. J. Granoff.²¹ Jacobson agreed to speak to Truman.

¹⁸New York Times, October 26, 1955.

¹⁹Statement read by A. J. Granoff for H. Truman, May 22, 1965, in Tel Aviv.

²⁰Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, o. 189.

²¹Kansas City Times article, May 13, 1965.

Between June and November, Eddie made several visits to the President, sometimes alone and sometimes with Granoff. Eddie's pleas for the Jewish refugees were received by a sympathetic listener. Truman's grandparents had been uprooted during the Civil War, and had been forced to move to Missouri. From their reminiscences the President had gained some insight and understanding of the dislocation and misery associated with being a displaced person.

Under Granoff's guidance, Jacobson who had little formal education, soon came to realize the significance of Palestine as a future Jewish homeland, and the importance of American support for the UNSCOP partition recommendation in gaining this end. At first his primary concern remained the problem of Jewish immigration into Palestine. But he did not fail to stress in his visits to the President during October and November, the value to American interests of the presence of a democratic state in the Middle East.²²

Secretary of State Marshall in his opening address to the Assembly on September 1 had cautiously indicated, without making a definite commitment, that the United States gave great weight to the majority report. This attitude was reconfirmed by American representative, Herschel V. Johnson, on October 11.²³ Truman maintained his position of support

²²The B'nai B'rith President, F. Goldman, stressed this aspect in a telegram of September 29, 1947. O.F. 204, Truman Library.

²³New York Times, October 12, 1947. Press Cutting File, Democratic National Committee, Truman Library.

for partition, as consistent with his overall foreign policy concepts. The State Department, however, had reservations over the partition boundaries as outlined in the majority report. These divisions were a testimonial to the perplexity, sincerity and ingenuity of its authors. But Marshall had hoped that the Negev would remain under Arab control. This would leave open the possibility of later negotiation for an oil pipeline directly to the Mediterranean sea through Jaffa. He proposed consequently that the boundaries be redrawn to gain this end, and urged Truman not to agree to those of the UNSCOP report.²⁴

The news that such a modification to the partition boundaries was under consideration by the State Department aroused considerable concern among the Jewish leaders.²⁵ Nevertheless it did not represent, any fundamental shift in Truman's support for partition, although Zionists in their efforts to bring added pressure on the President portrayed it as such.

Jacobson played a key role in the deliberations that took place on this boundary question. He discussed it with Truman on several of his unofficial and unpublicized visits to Washington. And he was instrumental in bringing Chaim Weizmann, the Grand Old Man of the Jews, to the White House.

²⁴E. Manuel, p. 133.

²⁵The Palestine Resistance Committee, and other Jewish organizations telegraphed Truman protesting vigorously this "shocking shift" of his stand. O.F. 204, Truman Library.

Weizmann and Jacobson pointed out the importance of the Negev area to the economic development of the proposed Jewish State. Already, they explained, small self-contained villages had been established. It was essential if the country was to absorb the vast number of immigrants that the land be available to the Jews for settlement and development.²⁶ Such schemes were not new to Truman. Franklin D. Roosevelt had been deeply interested in the possibilities of agricultural and industrial developments in Palestine.²⁷ Economic assistance for such projects had always occupied a central place in Truman's hopes for Palestine.²⁸ They prevailed upon the President not to allow Marshall's proposed modification. Truman acted directly. He instructed the American Ambassador to the United Nations, Warren Austin, to accept the boundaries recommended by the majority report.²⁹

The Ad Hoc Committee finally accepted the majority report as it stood, and the General Assembly met at Flushing

²⁶Interview with A. J. Granoff, Kansas City, August 22, 1965.

²⁷F. Manuel, p. 316.

²⁸H. Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 184. Truman's interest in the development of Palestine can be seen in almost all his public statements on the problem. As early as April 30, 1946, he wrote when speaking of the Anglo-American inquiry: "It is also gratifying that the report envisages the carrying out of large scale economic developments in Palestine which would facilitate further immigration and be of benefit to the entire population." Letter of Truman to D. Acheson, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

²⁹A. Lilienthal, p. 70.

Meadows, Queens, to take the final vote. The date set was November 26, and after a series of delaying adjournments, balloting took place on the 29th. By a vote of 33-13, with 10 abstentions, the proposal to partition Palestine into an Arab state and a Jewish state with economic union, was passed with the necessary two-thirds majority.³⁰

The role played by the United States, and President Truman, in securing this outcome is another question which remains disputed. Such a result was not indicated by the last votes of the Committee.³¹ There is no doubt that a great deal of lobbying took place to gain the vital extra support for partition: only twenty hours before the ballot took place there was considerable uncertainty as to how successful this attempt would be.³² The question is who was responsible for the lobbying?

Sumner Welles, in We Need Not Fail attributes it directly to the instigation of the White House: "By direct order of the White House every form of pressure, direct and

³⁰A. Lilienthal, p. 62.

³¹At the concluding meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee the partition plan passed by a vote of 25-13 with 17 abstentions. If delegates did not change their minds, partition was 1 vote short of the two-thirds necessary. A Lilienthal, p. 57.

³²Partition proponents were shocked to learn on November 27 that the Philippines and Haiti, who had both abstained from voting on the Ad Hoc Committee would vote in the negative. It was at these two countries that most pressure was directed. A Lilienthal, pp. 60-61.

indirect was brought to bear by American officials upon the countries outside the Moslem world that were known to be either uncertain or opposed to partition."³³ The press also shared this view: "It was the Truman administration that took the lead in securing United Nations approval of partition, pushing through the partition against considerable opposition."³⁴

Truman in his memoirs denies any such action, and there is considerable evidence to support his contentions. The President was certainly under pressure to act directly to gain support for partition. "The facts were", he writes,

that not only were there pressure movements around the United Nations unlike anything that had been seen there before but that the White House, too, was subjected to a constant barrage....The persistence of a few of the extreme Zionist leaders -- activated by political motives and engaging in political threats -- disturbed and annoyed me. Some were even suggesting that we pressure sovereign nations into favorable votes in the General Assembly.³⁵

Congressman E. Celler of New York was one who urged this course of action on the President. On November 26 he wrote to Truman asserting that such action was necessary to prevent all the previous good work going to waste "by a failure to gain sufficient votes in the Assembly on this matter."³⁶

³³Sumner Welles, We Need Not Fail (Boston, 1948), p. 63.

³⁴Wall Street Journal, February 26, 1948. Democratic National Committee Clipping File, Truman Library.

³⁵Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 186.

³⁶Celler to Truman, November 26, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

This kind of direct approach, Truman writes, "could never gain my support." He did not approve, he said, of the strong imposing their will upon the weak, and this included compelling nations "to vote with us on the partitioning of Palestine or any other matter."³⁷

It was the Zionist leaders themselves who seem to have done most of the lobbying. Emanuel Neumann wrote later: "Every clue was meticulously checked and pursued. Not the smallest or remotest of nations but was contacted and wooed. Nothing was left to chance."³⁸ Robert Lovett commented on the pressure on the White House: "Never in his life had he been subjected to as much pressure as he had in the days beginning Thursday morning and ending Saturday night." Jewish zeal was so intense he added, "that it almost resulted in defeating the objective sought."³⁹

The United States, Dean Rusk explained some months later in a press conference, never exerted pressure on countries of the United Nations on behalf of one side or the other. "Certain unauthorized officials and private persons violated propriety and went beyond the law to exert such pressure," he stated. "As a result partition was construed as an American plan."⁴⁰

³⁷Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 187.

³⁸American Zionist, February 5, 1953.

³⁹A. Lilienthal, p. 65.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 67. Rusk at that time was director of the State Department's Office of United Nations Affairs.

The passage of the United Nations partition resolution in November virtually assured the emergence of a Jewish State in Palestine. The resolution liquidated the mandate, defined the legal framework in which the Yishuv could establish its state, and it gave to the Yishuv a definite goal about which it could rally its forces. Passage of the resolution was, however, merely the acceptance of a principle, not a specific blueprint. This must be kept in mind when considering the events of the next six months. As Truman later wrote: "The way in which this principle might be translated into action had yet to be found. It was my constant hope that it would be a peaceful way."⁴¹ He wrote to former Secretary of the Treasury Henry E. Morgenthau on December 2, 1947:

I appreciated very much your telegram of November twenty ninth but I wish you would caution all your friends who are interested in the welfare of the Jews in Palestine that now is the time for restraint and caution and an approach to the situation in the future that will allow a peaceful settlement. The vote in the United Nations is only the beginning and the Jews must now display tolerance and consideration for the other people in Palestine with whom they will necessarily have to be neighbors.⁴²

The Yishuv, and the Arabs, realized that the success or failure of the resolution depended upon themselves as much as the United Nations decision. Before adjourning in December, the Assembly had formed a Commission to act as the

⁴¹Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 187.

⁴²Truman to Morgenthau, December 2, 1947. Weizmann, MSS, Truman Library.

agency to carry out the plan. But nothing had been done to secure or organize the forces necessarily required, and the war in Palestine nullified these practical efforts.⁴³ The United Nations made a somewhat half hearted and ineffectual move to avoid violence by imposing an arms embargo on Palestine. The United States agreed to this step; an action that later brought Truman much abuse.⁴⁴ The President had hoped in November, albeit faintly, that American support for partition would discourage a violent Arab reaction to the proposed new state, despite the threatening letter he had received from Iraq in October. The Iraqi Senate had informed Truman that it would never accept a Jewish state and that such a move would destroy the peace in the Middle East.⁴⁵

In view of the lack of any United Nations military strength to support the partition plan, the Arabs felt secure in carrying out their threats. Disorder, violence and bloodshed erupted, with the British once more vainly attempting to establish some rule of law. By mid-January, Palestine was in chaos. Truman's worst fears had been realized. He revealed his concern and anguish over the situation in a letter to Senator Carl A. Hatch of New Mexico on February 10:

⁴³N. Safran, p. 34.

⁴⁴This embargo went into effect on December 6, 1947.

⁴⁵Letter from Iraqi Senate to Truman, October 6, 1947, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

"The State Department and our representative at the United Nations are making a most sincere effort to get this matter properly ironed out. It has been a most difficult problem.... I hope that the situation will eventually work out. I've done everything I possibly can to get a fair settlement and I am still working on it."⁴⁶

The United Nations Palestine Committee reported the worsening state of affairs to the Security Council on February 16. It advised that an international police force would be required to put partition into effect. The following week, United States delegate, Austin told the Council of American doubts as to the ability of the United Nations to carry out partition. Austin did not formally present any specific American alternatives for consideration, but his comments revealed the President's dilemma on how to proceed at that time. The United States, Austin said, was not prepared to impose partition by force, but it would join any United Nations efforts to safeguard international peace and security. He suggested that the Big Five might work out the nature of this effort.⁴⁷

Reports that the American position was being reconsidered came in mid-February. Throughout January there had fears of a softening of the United States position because

⁴⁶Truman to C. Hatch, February 10, 1948, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

⁴⁷F. Manuel, p. 344. Washington Post, February 27, 1948.

of pressure of "Oil Interests." The silence of the Administration and Secretary of State Marshall's refusal to discuss the matter when questioned by the press early in February, only encouraged rumors to this effect.⁴⁸ Congressman Frank Buchanan, Democrat of Pennsylvania, in an attempt to ease the pressure made public a reassurance he had received from Truman. The President reaffirmed to Buchanan his stand supporting the United Nations. But he also expressed his anxiety at the deterioration of the situation in Palestine.⁴⁹ Truman did little but add to the general uncertainty when he refused, on the following day, to elaborate his attitude.⁵⁰ The New York Times correctly concluded from this that the partition proposal was under discussion at the topmost policy levels.⁵¹ Truman made another final appeal to the Arabs for pacification, but it was rejected out of hand. There were signs that they were planning massive military action towards the end of March.⁵²

Faced with this prospect, Truman agreed to Marshall's suggestion that Palestine be placed under a temporary United Nations trusteeship. He had little choice. If he stood by and did

⁴⁸The Nation, January 31, 1948. Also New York Herald Tribune, February 13, 1948, Press Cutting File, Truman Library.

⁴⁹H. Truman to F. Buchanan, February 9, 1948, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

⁵⁰Public Papers....Harry S. Truman, 1948, Press Conference, February , p.

⁵¹New York Times, February 13, 1948.

⁵²Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 188.

nothing it seemed almost certain that the Jews would be driven into the sea. To suggest reopening the discussion of the November settlement itself would be an admission of defeat. And to take responsibility for enforcing partition would mean sending American troops into Palestine. This was not only highly impractical at that time, but risked serious racial repercussions throughout America.⁵³ On the other hand, an international police force drawn from the members of the Security Council would result in the admission of Russian troops into the Middle East. At a time when the policy of containment was being formulated, this was to be avoided at all costs. Austin's February 25 statement, made in the midst of these considerations, reflected the President's uncertainty, and was little more than an attempt to mark time until some satisfactory solution could be found.

The Wall Street Journal felt that Truman was partly responsible for the unsatisfactory state of affairs in Palestine. The Administration ought never to have supported partition knowing that it would never send troops to back it up, ran the editorial of February 26, 1948. All this was the outcome of the Administration's use of Palestine for a political football: "Mr. Truman wants and needs the Jewish vote. Yet he knows that it would be political suicide to get American troops into a shooting fray in Palestine. Hence our shifting policies have been aimed at getting the one

⁵³Washington Post, February 27, 1948. Joseph and Stewart Alsop's column "matter of fact" analyzed the President's predicament.

without the other. In the vernacular, the Administration wants to have its cake and eat it too."⁵⁴

President Truman did not lack advice or political pressure during January and February, 1948. The editors of The Nation, always pro-Zionist and bitterly critical of State Department policy and personnel, were very busy. Freda Kirchwey, in a series of violent letters warned Truman of a "double cross" being planned by Loy Henderson of the Near Eastern desk, the British and the Arabs to sabotage the United Nations resolution. This, Kirchwey asserted in a letter to Senator H. McGrath, would be tragic for United States honor, peace, security and, "in this crucial election it dooms the chances of the President." She added with a curious sense of logic that this, "apparently seemed to the State Department a small price to pay for bringing Palestine and the Middle East within the scope of the Truman Doctrine."⁵⁵

Zionist leaders and Democratic committees continually petitioned Truman to repeal the arms embargo, and to take direct action to secure partition. Democrats urged him to act for two reasons. It would be seen as following the humanitarian tradition of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the remarkable unity of political support of the Jews for the

⁵⁴Wall Street Journal, February 26, 1948.

⁵⁵F. Kirchwey to H. McGrath, January 27, 1948. McGrath MSS, Truman Library.

Democratic Party deserved more than just platitudes. Lifting the arms embargo, they argued, would indicate to the Arabs that America would not let their challenge to the United Nations go unanswered.⁵⁶ The Democratic Senator from Minnesota, Hubert H. Humphrey, wrote to Truman: "There are forces trying to default on the partition decision even though it would mean the breakdown of the United Nations. Our only hope for world peace lies in the survival of the United Nations. The reversal of the Palestine would mean the end of that hope."⁵⁷ Exasperated by a particularly insistent letter from the President of the St. Louis Council of the American Jewish Congress, M. J. Slonin, Truman angrily replied:

One of our principle difficulties in getting the Palestine matter settled...in the manner suggested by the United Nations Commission on the same subject, has been that there are so many people in this country who know more about how the situation should be handled than do those in authority. It has made the matter exceedingly difficult and is not contributing in any manner to its solution.

Of course I appreciate the emotional feelings of you and your friends...However, the matter is now in the hands of the United Nations and the United States is making every effort to maintain the position of the United Nations Commission. So much lobbying and outside interference has been going on in this question that it is almost impossible to get a fair minded approach to the subject.⁵⁸

⁵⁶R. Hughes to Congressman Mrs. M. Norton, February 12, 1948. Richard Hughes was the chairman of the Mercer County, N.J. Democratic Committee. Mrs. Norton forwarded the letter to Truman. O.F. 204, Truman Library.

⁵⁷H. Humphrey to Truman (and McGrath), February 14, 1948, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

⁵⁸Truman to M. Slonin, March 6, 1948, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

Austin's speech had made it clear, however, that the President was searching for an alternative. Truman relied a great deal on the advice of Marshall whom he trusted implicitly. He agreed consequently, to the Secretary of State's plan for a temporary tripartite United Nations trusteeship.⁵⁹ But Truman also had great faith in Jacobson, and once again he listened to his old partner.

It was essential to the success of the Yishuv, once the British had announced their intention of terminating their mandate on May 15, that partition not be abandoned by the United Nations. Partition was in fact crystallizing in Palestine. Both Jews and Arabs were, in a large degree, obedient to their own institutions. The central British administration was in a state of virtual collapse. The Yishuv intended to proclaim the state of Israel on midnight of May 14. But without continued American support for partition this would be impossible.

Chaim Weizmann sailed from Palestine to put the Jewish case before Truman. By this time, however, Truman refused to discuss the matter with anybody.⁶⁰ Jewish leaders realized that this might well be the turning point. B'nai

⁵⁹Marshall's plan involved a trusteeship administered by Britain, France and the United States. The bulk of the forces used would be those British forces already in Palestine.

⁶⁰Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 188.

B'rith President Frank Goldman once again went to Jacobson.⁶¹ He readily consented to intercede with Truman for Weizmann. When, at first, he received a refusal from the President to an appeal by letter, he decided to visit Washington personally. On March 13 he went to the White House. Jacobson described that visit later in a letter to A. J. Granoff.⁶²

Although warned by Presidential Assistant, Matt Connolly, not to do so, Jacobson went ahead and brought up the matter of Weizmann's visit. Truman responded angrily that he had no intention of seeing the Jewish leader. Jacobson, almost at the point of despair, made a final appeal through the President's hero Andrew Jackson. Weizmann, Jacobson said, was his hero just as Jackson was Truman's. He was surprised that Truman refused to see him because of the insults he had received at the hands of some of the American Jewish leaders: "It doesn't sound like you, Harry, because I thought that you could take this stuff they have been handing out. I wouldn't be here if I didn't know that if you will see him you will be properly informed on the situation as it exists in Palestine, and yet you refuse to see him."⁶³

⁶¹Interview with A. J. Granoff, Kansas City, August 22, 1965, Kansas City Star, May 13, 1965.

⁶²This letter appears in a feature article on Jacobson and Granoff in the Kansas City Star, May 13, 1965.

⁶³E. Jacobson to A. Granoff, Ibid.

Jacobson described Truman's reaction:

I don't know how many minutes passed in silence but it seemed like centuries. All of a sudden he swiveled around again, faced his desk, and looked me straight in the eyes and said the most endearing words I ever heard: "You win you bald headed ... I will see him. Tell Matt to arrange this meeting as soon as possible after I return from New York on March 17."

Weizmann saw Truman on March 18. No account of the meeting itself exists but the major points that Weizmann emphasized may be learned from a letter he wrote to the President shortly after this meeting.⁶⁴ Weizmann stressed that abandonment of partition at a time when Palestine was threatened by foreign Arab aggression, torn by internal warfare and already moving towards partition, would be disastrous. The problem of enforcing any United Nations decision would be made no easier by such a step. Nor was there any assurance that an alternative was available. Arabs and Jews appeared unlikely to accept or cooperate in instituting a trusteeship, even if a trustee was available and the General Assembly approved an agreement and could take effective steps before May 15. During the meeting the President assured Weizmann that he would continue to support the partition plan. He records in his Memoirs: "And when he [Weizmann] left my office I felt that he had reached a full understanding of my policy and that I knew what it was he

⁶⁴C. Weizmann to Truman, April 9, 1948, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

wanted."⁶⁵

On the following day, however, March 19, Austin told the Security Council of the United States trusteeship proposal. He called for suspension of all efforts towards partition, for an immediate truce in Palestine and a special session of the General Assembly, to meet early in April, to approve United Nations trusteeship.

Austin's announcement, made as it was the day following Weizmann's visit, considerably embarrassed Truman. Although he had approved Marshall's suggestion earlier, he had not given any direction for its implementation. Truman was greatly disturbed for it looked as if he had broken faith with Weizmann. Through his advisor, Clark Clifford, he discovered what had transpired.⁶⁶ Marshall had forwarded a memorandum to the President outlining the procedure for introducing the trusteeship proposal to the Assembly. This had been acted upon in the belief that Truman had given his formal approval. Apparently he had not. Truman felt that this time had been chosen for the release of the plan in an attempt to force his hand. Weizmann, at any rate, remained

⁶⁵Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 190. Interview with A. J. Granoff, Kansas City, August 22, 1965.

⁶⁶Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, II, pp. 190-193. A. Lilienthal, p. 77. R. Ferrell, manuscript in author's possession. Ferrell relates Truman's conversation with Admiral William D. Leahy, that the announcement had come without his permission or knowledge. Leahy was highly critical of the State Department, particularly Secretary of State Marshall.

unshaken. He telephoned Jacobson on March 22 reassuring him: "I do not believe that President Truman knew what was going to happen in the United Nations on Friday when he talked to me the day before."⁶⁷

There was an immediate and violent outcry by Zionists, the press and congressmen against Austin's speech. It was labelled by New York Democrat Arthur Klein: "The most terrible sell out of the common people since Munich."⁶⁸ Telegrams and letters poured in to the White House voicing shock and anger at this "infamous betrayal", "brutal reversal", and "cynical denial of all that is fine and honest in the American tradition."⁶⁹ The Jewish newsheet, PM, bitterly complained: "We who thought the United States had been fumbling and bumbling along were very much mistaken. Behind the mask of the bungler was the face of the deceiver."⁷⁰ Feeling ran very high. Even the New York Times

⁶⁷E. Jacobson to A. Granoff. Quoted in Kansas City Star, May 13, 1965.

⁶⁸New York Times, March 20, 1948, Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

⁶⁹The Tuscon Jewish Community Council, representing several local chapters of the major Jewish organizations of America, telegraphed Truman on March 24, 1948 using similar phrases to describe Administration policy. O.F. 204, Truman Library.

⁷⁰PM, March 21, 1948, Press Cutting file, Truman Library. PM viewed the decision as a victory for the Truman Doctrine and oil diplomacy. But it was not a move for peace, rather it was another and gigantic step towards war.

described Truman's policy as: "A series of moves which has seldom been matched for ineptness in the handling of any international issue by an American administration."⁷¹

New York Democrats threatened revolt. Dr. Isaac Levine, Brooklyn representative and State Democratic Committeeman wrote to Truman: "Unless this calamitous and un-American policy is immediately reversed we shall do everything in our power to see that the Democratic party rejects your candidacy at the Democratic National Convention."⁷² The Washington Star commented on March 22: "With his reversal of the partition of Palestine, the President created a pressure around party heads in pivotal states which roughly compares in emotion and intensity with that engendered in the South by the civil-rights issue."⁷³ Warren Moscow in the New York Times was alone in suggesting that such protests might be only for public consumption.⁷⁴ Senator Hatch was one of Truman's few supporters in this

⁷¹New York Times, March 21, 1948, Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

⁷²I. Levine to Truman, March 23, 1948, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

⁷³Washington Star, March 22, 1948, Press Cutting file, Truman Library. The Star editorial went on to say that the Democratic Chairmen for New York, Illinois and California said that they did not think they could carry their states with Harry Truman at the moment. The Star commented that Truman got little support from Capitol hill in his hard choices because he cut himself off from Congress.

⁷⁴New York Times, March 23, 1948, Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

turmoil of criticism. Hatch told reporters" "He [Truman] has cast aside politics and he doesn't care what happens to him politically. He has told me that he intends to do what he thinks is right without regard to the political consequences."⁷⁵

Truman's public statement on March 25, that the United States had not rejected partition, did little to lessen the attacks and pressure directed at him. The New York Daily News reported on March 26: "President Truman's latest attempt to pour soothing oil on the troubled waters of Palestine left him worse off politically than before he opened his mouth at the White House press conference to sound off with a 450 word prepared statement sweated out by the most inept political staff that a harrassed Chief Executive has ever been cursed with."⁷⁶ A poll of every New York Democrat member of Congress indicated, said the News, that the President could rely upon about one half of the delegation to back him at the Democratic Convention in July.

Yet the trusteeship proposal was not an abandonment, reversal or substitute for the partition plan. It was, as Truman pointed out in his March 25 statement: "...an effort to fill the vacuum soon to be created by the termination of

⁷⁵New York Times, March 24, 1948, Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

⁷⁶New York Daily News, March 26, 1948, Press Cutting File, Truman Library. The paper described the events of the previous few days as, "...one of the most amazing developments in the history of American politics since the Civil War."

the mandate on May 15. The trusteeship does not prejudice the character of the final political settlement. It would establish the conditions of order which are essential to a peaceful solution."⁷⁷ Truman's concern was that there would be no public authority in Palestine capable of preserving law and order.⁷⁸ Trusteeship seemed the only solution. In the meantime the President was making strenuous efforts to arrange a truce between the Jews and Arabs. "With such a truce and such a trusteeship, a peaceful settlement is yet possible;" Truman believed. Without them, "open warfare is just over the horizon. American policy in this emergency period is based squarely upon the recognition of this inescapable fact."⁷⁹

George Marshall explained the American position in more detail to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee a few days later. There was in November 1947, he said, a belief that there would be little violence in Palestine. This forecast had proven to be incorrect. Implementation of

⁷⁷Harry S. Truman, Statement issued March 25, 1948. O.F. 204, Truman Library.

⁷⁸"Unless emergency action is taken," the President voiced his alarm, "there will be no public authority in Palestine on that date capable of preserving law and order. Violence and bloodshed will descend upon the Holy Land. Large scale fighting among the people of that country will be the inevitable result. Such fighting would infect the entire Middle East and could lead to consequences of the gravest sort involving the peace of this nation and the entire world." Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

partition through the United Nations would mean the involvement of Russian troops. They had shown the tendency to remain in areas which they occupied. This would press down again on Greece, Turkey and the Arabian oil fields which were vital for the entire European recovery program. The fact that Russia was looking for a warm water port added to the danger of Russian troops in the area. The only solution, Marshall argued, was to turn the matter over to the United Nations Trusteeship Council. As Russia was not represented on this Council, the danger of Russian military intervention would be avoided. "Absolutely no domestic political questions," he concluded, were involved in this decision.⁸⁰

An unsigned Senate Memorandum, filed in the McGrath papers, supports Marshall's interpretation of the factors involved in the decision. The memorandum traces Truman's Palestine policy through to recognition in a defence of the Administration's position.⁸¹ 100,000 troops would have been required to enforce partition the memorandum claims. This figure was the estimate of the Department of Defence. Japanese and German troop commitments made this impossible. Furthermore, the use of American troops to preserve international peace could be defended. Their use to enforce partition could not. Regarding the claims that the decision

⁸⁰New York Times, March 25, 1948, Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

⁸¹Senate Memorandum, McGrath MSS, Truman Library.

was made for reasons of domestic politics, the memorandum went on, the facts belied the charge. When Austin made the situation in Palestine known to the Security Council:

His plea was misunderstood and the plan labelled an "abandonment" of partition...The incident was magnified by Communists and Republicans who saw in the misunderstanding the possibility of weaning the Jewish vote from the President...The fact that the plan was definitely part of the bipartisan foreign policy was gleefully ignored and the President was excoriated.⁸²

Why, it asked, if he were playing politics, would the President have made such an unpopular decision? Zionists had allowed their emotions to be played upon, especially by Wallace supporters. Truman's decision had been made in the best interests of the United States and to protect the Jews from further bloodshed.⁸³

Joseph and Stewart Alsop in one of their "inside stories" related an incident that also suggests that domestic politics did not play any large part in formulating Truman's Palestine policy at this time.⁸⁴ The Alsops revealed that in the first week of February, Truman had warned the Democratic National Committee against interfering in the Palestine question. He told McGrath and Gael Sullivan, Executive Director, that the task of policy making was now

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Joseph and Stewart Alsop, "Matter of Fact," New York Herald Tribune, February 11, 1948, Press Cutting File, Truman Library.

in the hands of the newly formed National Security Council. He did not want them offering unauthorized encouragement to Zionist leaders, the Alsops wrote. McGrath and Sullivan assented to the President's injunction, they added, "because of their sense of the terrible dangers inherent in this problem."⁸⁵

Another significant point in this question of motivation through reasons of political expediency, is the fact that many Jewish groups regarded America's Palestine policy as bipartisan. Describing the policy as being, "in the interests of a handful of oil magnates and imperialists who are more concerned with profits than the well being and democratic rights of people," one group stated: "The American people realize that the present policy is a bipartisan betrayal and that the Democratic and the Republican parties are equal partners in guilt. For the Palestine policy is an integral part of the general foreign policy which both parties shared equally in forming."⁸⁶

The second Special Session of the General Assembly met briefly to discuss Palestine on April 1, and adjourned until April 16. There was little it could do until the United States presented its proposals for discussion. Four days later the American delegate submitted a working paper

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶United Committee to save the Jewish State and the United Nations, to H. McGrath, April 15, 1948, McGrath MSS, Truman Library.

entitled, "Draft Trusteeship Agreement for Palestine," which embodied proposals similar to those which Austin had presented to the Security Council on March 19.⁸⁷ It soon became apparent that discussion on the proposal was going to be desultory and drawn out. It was also obvious that trusteeship, just as partition, could not be enforced without an adequate armed neutral force. Britain was determined not to remain longer than May 14, a fact only now being fully realized by the Administration and both protagonists in Palestine.

The crux of the trusteeship proposal remained then, would America send troops. The British had been unable to maintain peace with a force of 90,000 men. Truman in his March 25 statement had asserted, "We must take our share of the necessary responsibility."⁸⁸ These months were full of uncertainty and confusion as to the future of Palestine. In January the "Arab Liberation Army" organized, trained and armed by Syria for the Arab League States began entering Palestine. By the end of March 5,000 men had infiltrated.⁸⁹ The pattern of Arab strategy was to dominate the roads, thus controlling the lines of communication. The Arabs hoped in

⁸⁷A. Lilienthal, p. 79. The proposal failed to gain the required two-thirds majority.

⁸⁸Harry S. Truman, Statement issued March 25, 1948. Truman Library.

⁸⁹Edgar O'Ballance, The Arab Israeli War, 1948 (London: Faber, 1956), p. 35.

this way to isolate the outlying villages from the main centres of Jewish population in Jerusalem, Haifa and Tel Aviv. They had considerable success at first. The Yishuv were completely demoralized by Arab successes by the end of January.⁹⁰ At the time Truman was defending temporary trusteeship as the only way to secure peace and stability, Jerusalem was virtually in the hands of the Arabs. Jewish hopes looked very small without outside assistance. It was with the knowledge of these circumstances and prospects that Truman stated that he was prepared to send troops to Palestine. Rather than a betrayal of partition this was a desperate effort to save it until Jews and Arabs could reach a peaceful settlement.

During April the balance swung in favor of the Yishuv. Armed with a shipment of arms which arrived from Czechoslovakia at the end of March, the Jewish Defence Organization, the Haganah, took the offensive. Their most significant victory was the capture of Haifa on April 22.⁹¹ By early May they also had control of Jaffa and most of Eastern Galilee. And Jerusalem had not fallen. The most surprising aspect of this offensive was the complete evacuation of the Arabs from their towns and villages as the Jews advanced.⁹² It appeared that the strength and tenacity of the Arab forces had been much exaggerated.

⁹⁰Jon and David Kimche, A Clash of Destinies. (New York: Praeger, 1960), p. 90.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 117-124.

⁹²O'Ballance, pp. 63-67.

Amidst this confusion, the United Nations hesitated and delayed making any decision. By May 2, the Yishuv had carved out for itself a state roughly that approved by the United Nations in November. They went ahead with plans to announce an independent state on May 15. Truman's appointment of pro-Zionist General John Hildring as Assistant Secretary of State for Palestinian Affairs, indicated that the United States would not press its trusteeship proposal.⁹³ The United Nations was prepared to make a decision by default.

On May 14, 1948 the Union Jack was hauled down from Government House in Jerusalem and the British mandate came to an end. Already that afternoon, the State of Israel had been proclaimed.⁹⁴ Within minutes of the expiration of the mandate at Midnight, May 15, the United States extended de facto recognition. Truman's announcement came shortly after 6:00 P.M. Washington time on the afternoon of May 14: "This government has been informed that a Jewish state has been proclaimed in Palestine, and recognition has been requested by the provisional government thereof. The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de facto authority of the new State of Israel."⁹⁵

⁹³A. Lienthal, p. 81. Wallace R. Deuel, St. Louis Post Dispatch, June 20, 1948, gives an account of this appointment. Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

⁹⁴J. and D. Kimche, p. 155.

⁹⁵Harry S. Truman, Statement issued May 14, 1948, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

The response to Truman's act of recognition was strangely subdued. Everybody agreed with the Washington Star of May 16 that; "It is a wise decision and a heartening one."⁹⁶ Harry S. Truman had recognized an inescapable fact, editorialized the New York Herald Tribune, "this step was the only one which was consonant with American traditions and the realities of the case."⁹⁷.

But the press was highly critical of Truman's handling of the matter; an attitude followed, as was seen in Chapter I, by later historians. The Washington Post commented on May 17:

Diplomats were shocked because the United States so suddenly flipfopped from a policy of confusion and indecision on Palestine to a positive act taken in unprecedented haste. Regardless of the merits of any particular action that is taken this erratic manner of conducting our foreign policy costs the United States dearly in terms of prestige and world leadership.⁹⁸

The Philadelphia Enquirer of May 15 explained Truman's behavior as a response to the danger, in recent weeks, of his losing considerable Jewish support.⁹⁹ The New York Herald Tribune described Truman's conduct as "porpoise like." It not only caused the loss of dignity of American

⁹⁶Washington Star, May 16, 1948. Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

⁹⁷New York Herald Tribune, May 15, 1948. Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

⁹⁸Washington Post, May 17, 1948. Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

⁹⁹Philadelphia Enquirer, May 15, 1948. Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

diplomats but gave the suggestion that the United States was a "fumbling giant."¹⁰⁰ The New York Times was disturbed by the spectacle of American delegates at the United Nations apparently unaware of United States policy.¹⁰¹

This decision was not a matter of a snap judgment made on the spur of the moment, Charles G. Ross, White House Press Secretary pointed out.¹⁰² It had been in mind for a good while. As suggested above, the favorable turn of events for the Yishuv since early May was a major factor in Truman's considerations. The crisis came in the last few days of the mandate. Weizmann wrote a personal letter to Truman on May 13, requesting that he extend prompt recognition to the provisional government.¹⁰³ Truman met with Marshall, Lovett and Clifford on May 12 at Blair House, to make a decision on recognition. According to the account of this meeting by Jonathan Daniels, Marshall heatedly objected to Clifford's advocacy of recognition on political grounds. "Mr. President," he said, "this is not a matter to be determined on the basis of politics. Unless politics were involved, Mr. Clifford would not even be at this con-

¹⁰⁰New York Herald Tribune, May 16, 1948. The result would be, said the Tribune, that there will be no confidence in the moral purpose and integrity of America. Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

¹⁰¹New York Times, May 15, 1948, Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

¹⁰²Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 16, 1948, Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

¹⁰³A. Lilienthal, p. 82.

ference. This is a serious matter of foreign policy determination and the question of politics and political opinion does not enter into it."¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the following day, Marshall agreed to recognition providing he had a few days to consult with the British and the French.¹⁰⁵

A cable of Eliahu Epstein to Moshe Shertok (later Sharett, who became Foreign Minister of Israel) reveals the activities of May 14.¹⁰⁶ During the morning, Loy Henderson telephoned Epstein to ascertain the boundaries of the new State. Epstein advised him that they were in accord with the United Nations resolution. Some hours later, Clark Clifford advised Washington supporters of the Jewish cause that at noon the State Department agreed to extend immediate recognition in the event of their receiving such a request. Epstein, together with Ben Cohen, former counselor of the Department, drafted a letter and sent it to the President and the Secretary of State. Epstein concludes with the statement that the circumstances required that he take full responsibility for sending the letter.

Truman issued his recognition statement on the basis of the letter from Epstein on behalf of the provisional government.

¹⁰⁴Jonathan Daniels, The Man of Independence (New York: Lippincott, 1950), p. 319.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 319.

¹⁰⁶Epstein to Shertok, May 14, 1948. Weizmann MSS, Truman Library.

EPILOGUE

President Truman's recognition of Israel was not an act taken to gain Jewish votes. It was done with the conviction that recognition was in America's national interest. It held out the hope that Palestine might be rescued from all out warfare. There were many encouraging factors. The unity of the Arab League Nations was questionable and the strength of their armies doubtful.¹ If faced by a resolute nation supported by the United States, Britain, Russia, France and the United Nations, it seemed unlikely that they would vigorously carry out their threats of invasion. Certainly there was the very strong possibility of a truce being effected through a United Nations mediator. Furthermore, Truman was on firm ground in recognizing the only professed democratic country in the Middle East. Especially as the future of the thousands of Jewish refugees depended upon the survival of the new state.

The President felt very keenly that foreign relations was no place for political maneuver. The extent to which he regarded Israel as a non political question can be seen from

¹The Baltimore Sun commented on May 16, 1948. "It would be a miracle if they [the Arabs] managed to overlook these jealousies and act as a unit against Israel." While this was overly optimistic, it was a widespread opinion. Press Cutting file, Truman Library.

his handling of the situation between May and December 1948.

In the first place, de facto recognition of the provisional government of Israel was simply the recognition of a reality. It was a minimal step to gain the ends outlined in the previous chapter. American Zionists constantly pressed Truman to extend de jure recognition. Truman refused to do so until elections had been held and the government became permanent. There was no reason or warrant for making the nature of recognition dependent upon whether the government was provisional or permanent. The United States had fully recognized the provisional governments of Russia in 1917 and Poland immediately after World War II, under conditions far more precarious than those which existed in Palestine in May 1948.² America was, in fact, the only country of the United Nations, other than South Africa, to limit recognition to de facto.³ Yet between May and the elections of November, Truman did not alter his position on this, despite the obvious political advantage to be gained by doing so.

A second issue related to the arms embargo and the United Nations mediation. On May 14 the General Assembly passed a resolution providing for the appointment of a

²Memorandum from David Ginsberg to David Niles, July 21, 1948. O.F. 204, Truman Library.

³B. Crum to Truman, September 21, 1948. O.F. 204, Truman Library.

United Nations mediator in Palestine. He was to cooperate with the Truce Commission of the Security Council and "promote a peaceful adjustment of the future in Palestine."⁴ Two weeks later the Assembly issued a cease-fire order and the imposition of a four week truce. This truce went into effect from June 11 to July 9 and was followed by another shortly after which lasted from July 18 until October.⁵ In the course of these months the Arabs gained little more than about half a million destitute Arab refugees from Israel. But this period had been a harrowing one for the supporters of Israel. The new state urgently needed arms and the President received endless requests to lift the arms embargo on the Middle East.

The situation became desperate in September. The United Nations Mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte, was assassinated in Jerusalem on September 17. The next day the General Assembly released his report proposing new territorial divisions in Palestine.⁶ This revision, which Bernadotte had first suggested in July, drastically reduced the area of Israel. It recommended that the Negev be awarded to the Arabs. If the Jews were to retain this region, which was essential for the settlement and economic development of Israel, military equipment and United States

⁴F. Manuel, p. 350.

⁵E. O'Ballance, pp. 126, 165.

⁶F. Manuel, pp. 351-2.

support were indispensable. But within a week, Secretary Marshall told the Assembly that America accepted the new proposal.⁷

Zionists protested vigorously to Truman at this "shocking acceptance by Marshall," this "betrayal of American policy."⁸ Several letters threatened that it would seriously injure the President's election hopes. McGrath anxiously pressed Truman to take a forthright stand against the plan. He suggested that Truman make a concrete announcement just before the Jewish Rosh Hashanah holidays. It would become, he said, "rich material for the holiday sermons. Praise and thanksgiving would be echoed from every Jewish home and no Jewish leader could fail to sing the President's praise."⁹ Truman refused to make such a statement, or to lift the arms embargo.

Weizmann wrote hastily to Jacobson to see the President and remind him of his earlier encouragement to the Jewish state.¹⁰ Jacobson replied in November that

⁷Ibid., p. 352.

⁸Rabbi David Aronson, President of the Rabbinical Assembly of America, to Truman, September 24, 1948, O.F. 204, Truman Library. F. Kirchwey to H. McGrath, August 4, 1948, McGrath MSS, Truman Library.

⁹This plan was suggested to McGrath by Harry M. Fisher on September 28, 1948. McGrath MSS, Truman Library.

¹⁰Weizmann to Jacobson, September 27, 1948, O.F. 204, Truman Library. Jacobson wrote to Matt Connelly passing on this letter with the comment, "Help convince the boss how urgent it is for him to act immediately."

during these months the President had retained his friendship for Weizmann and had told him there was nothing to worry about concerning Israel.¹¹ As late as October 13, when he was on his famous whistlestop trip, Truman refused to introduce the Palestine issue into the campaign. He received a memorandum from New York Congressional delegation urging him to speak out against the Bernadotte Plan.¹² Only after Governor Dewey issued a strong statement accusing Truman of betraying his pledges to Israel, did the President make a statement of his own. This was in his Madison Square Garden speech of October 24. Truman reiterated his support for the Democratic plank on Palestine accepting the boundaries set up by the partition resolution.¹³ But he made no further promises or commitments.

President Truman's policy and action between May and November 1948 do not suggest a course based on political expediency. They reflect more, as had all of Truman's decisions on this matter, the tremendous uncertainty and complexity of the Palestinian affair. Truman wrote to Weizmann on the first anniversary of the United Nations partition resolution. "As I read your letter," the President reflected

¹¹Jacobson to Weizmann, November 29, 1948, Weizmann MSS, Truman Library.

¹²William M. Doyle to M. Connelly, October 13, 1948, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

¹³Harry S. Truman. Statement issued October 24, 1948, O.F. 204, Truman Library.

"I was struck by the common experience you and I have recently shared. We had both been abandoned by the so called realistic experts to our supposedly forlorn lost causes. Yet we both kept pressing for what we were sure was right -- and we were both proven to be right."¹⁴

He could hardly foresee the nature of the problems that lay ahead.

¹⁴Truman to Weizmann, November 29, 1948. O.F. 204, Truman Library.

APPENDIX A

TABLE I

Palestine Mail in Storage

	Total Number	Palestine Pales.		Percentage Distribution		
		Telegrams	Other Pales. Mail	Telegrams	Palestine Cards	Other Pales. Mail
1947						
Q I	2,200	11,000	2,900	4.3	1.3	3.4
Q II	4,400	43,600	15,000	8.6	5.2	17.3
Q III	1,400	62,850	1,100	2.7	7.4	1.3
Q IV	9,000	52,850	7,500	17.5	6.3	8.7
1948						
Q I	17,200	214,725	27,600	33.4	25.5	31.9
Q II	7,200	201,900	10,100	14.0	35.8	11.7
Q III	4,000	33,200	3,400	7.8	4.0	3.9
Q IV	3,200	70,450	13,600	6.2	8.4	15.7
1949						
Q I	400	19,550	1,700	.8	2.3	2.0
Q II	**	78	***	-	.0	-
Q III	800	2,690	***	1.6	.3	-
Q IV	1,600	29,010	3,600	3.1	3.5	4.1
	51,400	841,903	86,500	100.0	100.0	100.0

** Fewer than 100 telegrams were on hand for this Quarter.

*** No mail for these quarters was found in the boxes storing Palestine mail. As suggested by the comparison with cards received, very few letters were probably received during these quarters.

HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY
From the Files of Philleo Nash

TABLE II

Quarterly Distribution of Palestine Mail in Storage
By Type of Correspondence, 1947-1949 *

	Personal letters	Form letters**	Petitions & Resolutions	Unsigned Clippings	Non-Palestine Mail
1947	Q I	47%	45%	6%	2%
	Q II	71	24	5	-
	Q III	94	2	4	-
	Q IV	77	18	5	-
1948	Q I	55	35	9	1
	Q II	53	17	27	3
	Q III	58	29	12	1
	Q IV	30	61	9	-
1949	Q i	69	24	6	1
	Q II	-	-	-	-
	Q III	-	-	-	-
	Q IV	75	22	2	1

* Based on representative samples of 100 items of mail for each quarterly period. This does not include telegrams and post cards.

** Includes printed, mimeographed, multigraphed, dittoed letters, and news-paper form letters and signed editorials.

TABLE III

Quarterly Percentage Distribution of Palestine Mail in Storage,
By Region of Origin *

	1947				1948				1949				Total Adult Pop.	Jewish Pop.
	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV		
NEW ENGLAND	9	7	16	7	10	10	6	11	4	22			6.69	8.38
MIDDLE ATLANTIC	49	62	53	49	57	58	49	59	48	20			22.03	62.03
EAST NORTH CENTRAL	21	13	14	32	6	9	6	5	29	34			20.91	15.43
WEST NORTH CENTRAL	1	1	4	-	1	6	1	-	1	5			10.34	3.32
SOUTH ATLANTIC	4	3	5	7	8	5	19	3	7	3			12.46	3.80
EAST SOUTH CENTRAL	-	1	-	1	3	2	-	1	1	-			7.30	1.13
WEST SOUTH CENTRAL	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	1	-	-			9.21	1.46
MOUNTAIN	10	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-			2.97	.57
PACIFIC	5	10	6	2	9	8	18	4	9	12			8.09	3.87
	99	98	99	99	95	99	99	84	99	96			100.00	100.00
REGION UNKNOWN or Non-Palestine	1	2	1	1	5	1	1	16	1	4				
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100				
NEW ENGLAND, MIDDLE ATLANTIC AND EAST NORTH CENTRAL STATES combined														
Percentage of all mail	79	82	93	88	73	77	61	75	81	76			49.63	85.84
Percentage of personal letters only **	85	82	83	87	78	77	79	80	75	82				

* Based on representative samples of 100 items of all Palestine correspondence except postcards and telegrams on hand for each quarterly period.

** Since the personal letters were a varying part of the total mail, the number of cases used in calculating the personal letter distribution differ from quarter to quarter. These data are summarized in Table III.

APPENDIX B

Table Indicating Type of Message of Telegrams Received on Palestine Situation, 1946 to 1949 *

	1946	1947	1948	1949
	II III IV	I II III IV	I II III IV	I II III IV
<u>Freer Migration of Jews:</u>				
Favor immediate Jewish Immigration into Palestine; Anglo-American Commission recommendation	85 47 52**	59 37 2	1 4	
Favor immigration of Jews into U.S.	1 6	2 2 2		
Oppose immigration of Jews and other refugees	2 4			
<u>Conditions within Palestine:</u>				
Favor removal of land restrictions, support colonization plan	2	19 3		
Urge loan, economic aid			1 9 14	4

* Based on analysis of representative samples of 100 telegrams for each quarter for which sufficient telegrams were available.

** During this quarter, an additional 24% approved President's statement favoring immigration into Palestine, without specifically referring to the subject itself.

Percentage of Telegrams Specifically Referring to Topics

	<u>1946</u>	<u>1947</u>	<u>1948</u>	<u>1949</u>
	II III IV	I II III IV	I II III IV	I II III IV

Conflicts Within Palestine:

Protest conditions in Palestine
 Br. practices, martial law, terror,
 arrest of Jew. leaders, urge
 action

16 36 12 31 1 6

Oppose aid to Br. to support Arabs

1 13

Protest Br. action against Israel;
 Br. opposes UN; stop aid to Br.

78

Oppose embargo of arms to Pales.;
 make arms available

69 51 75 4

Urge UN sanctions against Arabs

1 49

Protest truce plan as unfair to
 Jews

9

Support UN truce

1

Protest sanctions against Israel

4

Percentage of Telegrams Specifically Referring to Topics

	1946		1947		1948		1949	
	II	III	I	II	I	II	I	II
	IV	IV	IV	III	IV	III	III	III
	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV
Future Government of Palestine:								
Oppose partition plan and/or favor trusteeship	31	7						
Policy based on Mandate should be implemented, revoke White Paper			16	3				
Urge Jewish representation at UN debate			26					
Support UN majority report; estab. Jewish state				90	72			
Approve President on Partition				6				
Urge UN decision be implemented by action*					60			
Protest US abandonment of partition; urge orig. partition plan and/or Jewish state				19	12	22		
Protest US support of the Bernadotte Plan; keep Negev						13	82	
Protest UN plan to internat. Jerusalem								100
Favor UN plan to internat. Jerusalem								67
Refer to Pales. as Jew. State or Homeland	1	6	12					33
Favor estab. Jewish State			13	39				
Opposed to Jew. state & Partition					1			
Favor recog. of Israel (before recog.)						12		
Congrat. on Recog. of Israel						31		
Favor de jure recog. of Israel							7	21
Favor sponsor. Israel Mbrshp. in UN							2	4

* About one-third of this group favored action by an international police force.

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PRESIDENT TRUMAN'S RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL

by

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ABSTRACT

In 1948 A.D., just over 2,000 years after the Diaspora* of 68 B.C., a Jewish state came into existence in Palestine. This was of considerable significance to the United States. Not only was it an additional consideration in the formulation of foreign policy towards the Middle East, but America had played a major part in the establishment of the state of Israel. President Truman has been subjected to considerable attack as a result of this, by critics who interpret his actions as being motivated by an ethnic pressure group and domestic politics rather than by the national interest.

This study analyses the factors leading up to the decision by President Truman to recognize Israel. Such an analysis reveals that although tremendous pressure was exerted by Zionist organizations, Congressmen, the press and the Democratic National Committee, on Truman to support the foundation of a Jewish state in Palestine, he was reluctant to do so. Nor was it domestic politics that led him finally to act. Recognition in May 1948; with its implications of winning the Jewish vote in the elections of that year; was not the crucial decision for the future of Israel.

*Diaspora -- the dispersion of the Jews.

It was, rather, the decision to support the United Nations proposal for partition in Fall 1947.

American interest and activity in the Middle East before 1939 had been desultory. During World War I, Britain had made incompatible promises to the Arabs and Jews in Palestine; while promising Arab independence she had issued the Balfour Declaration supporting a Jewish National Home in Palestine. The American Government had from time to time supported this Declaration. The situation was brought dramatically to a head by Hitler and World War II, and this was the problem Truman inherited.

Truman, at first concerned only with the fate of Jewish refugees, became alarmed at the growing unrest and violence in Palestine. He welcomed the British decision early in 1947 to turn the matter over to the United Nations and hoped a peaceful solution would be possible. His old business partner and friend Eddie Jacobson dispelled any doubts he may have had as to the justness of the Jewish case. Truman saw Israel, furthermore, as a vital stronghold in the Middle East to act as a bulwark of democracy in containing Russia and Communism.

The President's solution was to support the United Nations partition plan. By taking this action he pursued a policy balanced between the opposing forces of Zionism on the one hand and the State Department on the other. His decision to recognize Israel on May 14, 1948, was based on

the realities of the situation which existed in Palestine at that time, and on the hope that peace would result. Truman's decision may have brought added United States problems to the Middle East, but this was because of factors in the emerging world situation which he could hardly have anticipated.