

The American President Harry S. Truman's Administration and the Palestine Question, 1945-1948

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Abstract: *This research explores the role of American president Harry S. Truman in supporting the Zionists ambitions in Palestine, and the establishment of Israel. In so doing, he was guided by his personal background as a conservative Christian, domestic political consideration i.e. Jewish vote, and the growing American public opinion sympathy to holocaust Jews.*

This official Commitment by the president toward the Zionists had its negative ramifications on the Arab-American relations at the time of growing American economic and strategic interests in the Arab world. The president's dedication to Israel became a pattern that was followed by all American administrations until now. This policy encouraged Israel to continue its aggression against the Palestinians and the Arabs, and increased the Arabs antagonism against the U.S. and its friends.

Introduction:

World war II brought the United States to the Center stage of Middle East Affairs. After the war, the U.S. shared responsibility with Britain in determining the fate of Palestine. The American involvement in the Palestine issue occurred at a time when the post-holocaust sympathies ran high and public opinion was pro-Zionist, particularly among urban Democrats in the eastern part of America. Despite growing economic and strategic interests in the Arab world, the U.S. government identified itself with the Zionist ambition in Palestine. In so doing, it disregarded Arab opposition. Expedient, short-range national interests, directed president Truman's policy toward Palestine American Zionists were able to rally Jewish and non-Jewish public opinion to support their cause. They were also "able to create in the minds of American political leaders an awareness of a Jewish vote." Because of growing Zionist influence in the U.S., the American administration began to "consider the Palestine question in terms of national politics rather than American foreign policy."⁽¹⁾

Truman pro Zionist policy

Right after President S. Truman assumed the presidency in April 1945 he departed from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's policy toward Palestine. Up to the time of his death, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was still following the policy of consulting both the Arabs and Jews in matters related to the Palestine issue.⁽²⁾ President Truman, as did other Americans, knew of the biblical background of Jewish aspiration for a homeland. This, his humanitarian feelings toward the Jewish displaced persons in Europe, a receptive U.S. Congress, sympathetic public opinion, and pressure by an active American Zionist lobby influenced Truman to commit himself publicly in support of Zionist goals in Palestine.⁽³⁾ The President's policy was focused more on the short-range objective of Jewish refugee relief than on the long-range problem of the future of Palestine.⁽⁴⁾

During his second week in office, President Truman met with a key American Zionist leader, Rabbi Stephen Wise, who reminded him to be "aware of the reasons underlying the wish of the Jewish people for a homeland." The Rabbi warned the President of the State Department's anti-Zionist policy. President Truman assured Rabbi Wise that "the United States would do all that it could to help the Jews set up a homeland." Truman reassured Wise that he was the one who "made policy" and the State Department's duty was "to carry it out, and if there were some who did not like it, they could resign any time they felt like it."⁽⁵⁾

When the President shifted away from the established American policy toward Palestine and supported the Zionists' goals of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine without "full consultation with the Arabs," he was appraised of this by the State Department. In a direct communication with the President, Secretary of State Edward Stettinius explained that the Zionists would try to extract from him some commitment in favor of their program and this would have negative ramifications. The Secretary concluded that the State Department felt that "this whole subject is one that should be handled with the greatest care and with a view to the long-range interests of this country."⁽⁶⁾

The President was neither convinced nor deterred by the argument of the State Department. He continued to follow a sympathetic policy toward the Zionist cause. Truman even accused members of the State Department of being anti-Semitic.⁽⁷⁾ At the Potsdam Conference in 1945 he wrote Churchill urging him to relax the immigration laws imposed on Jews by the 1939 British White Paper and to allow Jewish refugees to settle in Palestine, but, during Potsdam, Churchill was replaced by Clement Attlee as Prime Minister. The latter informed Truman that his government needed more time to evaluate the whole situation.⁽⁸⁾ After the President returned from Potsdam, he declared in a press conference that he did discuss the Palestine issue with Churchill and Attlee and "we want to let as many Jews into Palestine as is possible."⁽⁹⁾

Truman increased his pressure on the British government after he received Earl G. Harrison's report in August 1945. Harrison, former Dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School and advisor on refugee affairs, was sent on a fact-finding mission to Europe to explore the problems related to displaced Jews. He visited Germany, Poland, Austria, Italy and Czechoslovakia. After describing the conditions under which the Jewish refugees were living, Harrison suggested to the President that "with respect to possible places of settlement for those who may be stateless or who do not wish to return to their homes, Palestine is definitely and preeminently the first choice."⁽¹⁰⁾ Harrison reminded the President that the Jewish Agency (the semi-official Zionist body in Palestine) had submitted a request to the British government asking for 100,00 immigration certificates to be issued immediately. He suggested that if the British agreed, it would "contribute much to the sound solution for the future of the Jews."⁽¹¹⁾

Harrison's report stirred Truman's sympathy for the Jews and alerted him to an issue that would arouse the political as well as the humanitarian emotions of the American public. He began to pressure

the British government to permit 100,000 Jewish refugees to enter Palestine. On 31 August 1945, Truman sent a letter to Prime Minister Attlee explaining the Harrison findings and urging him to permit entry of the Jewish refugees into Palestine. The President asserted “on the basis of this and other information which has come to me I concur in the belief that no other single matter is so important for those who have known the horrors of concentration camps for over a decade as is the future of immigration possibilities into Palestine.”⁽¹²⁾ Attlee’s reply was a disappointment to the President. Attlee suggested that some of the Jewish refugees could be absorbed in North Africa and elsewhere. Palestine, however, was not the right place because, Attlee concluded, “we have the Arabs to consider as well as the Jews and there have been solemn understandings..... before we come to a final decision and operate it, there would be consultation with the Arabs. It would be very unwise to break these solemn pledges and so set a flame the whole Middle East.”⁽¹³⁾ Within the Truman administration there was a considerable disagreement among the cabinet members about the President’s declared Palestine policy. Both Secretary of State Stettinius and Secretary of war Forestal argued that an American commitment to support the Zionists would jeopardize American national interests in the Middle East.⁽¹⁴⁾

The Anglo – American committee of Inquiry

The President rejected both Attlee’s and State Department’s recommendations. On 29 September 1945, Truman endorsed the Harrison report. Again, he did this despite the fact that this policy antagonized the Arabs, confounded the British, and was opposed by the State Department. The Arabs accused the administration of breaking a solemn promise that had been made by President Roosevelt to King Ibn Saud that Arabs would be consulted. Also quick to criticize Truman’s action was Amir Abdallah of Trans Jordan. He voiced disapproval of Truman for his support to the Jewish immigration into Palestine.⁽¹⁵⁾ The British government publicly opposed Truman’s request to open Palestine for settlement by Jewish refugees. It proposed the establishment of a Joint Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry to examine the Jewish refugee problem both in Europe and Palestine. The suggested framework under which the Joint Committee was supposed to work was not fully acceptable to either side. The British government wanted the Americans to accept their policy of restricting Jewish immigration into Palestine with the aim of gaining Arab good-will, while seeking an overall solution to the Jewish refugee problem. The American administration, however,

wanted the British to give priority to immigration in the Joint Committee's agenda.⁽¹⁶⁾

Pressure was put upon the Truman administration by the Zionist lobby and their friends in Congress. Senator Robert Wagner (D-NY) and Senator Robert Taft (R-OH) introduced a Palestine resolution calling for the U.S. "to use its good offices" in behalf of opening Palestine to "the free entry of Jews" and to help in establishing "the Jewish national home" there.⁽¹⁷⁾ Likewise, Rabbi Abda Hilale Silver, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the American Zionist Emergency Council, and Rabbi Stephen Wise consistently asked the President to apply leverage on Britain to ease her restrictions on immigration and to accept the idea of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine. Also, the Jewish community and their supporters launched a national publicity campaign to gain public and official American support for their cause.⁽¹⁸⁾

Arab-Americans played a minor role in influencing the American policy towards Palestine. Their number was less than that of Jews, and they were not as well-organized as Jews. They, however, established many organizations such as the Arab American League of Democracy, Arab – American Affairs, and the Arab-American press. The Arab-American, their American supporters and non – Arab Muslim proponents had a partial impact on the American public opinion and the U.S. Administration concerning the Palestine cause.⁽¹⁹⁾

On November 13, the two countries agreed on the nature and duty of the Committee of Inquiry. The British agreed that the main focus would be on Palestine--not just the European Jews, and Jewish immigration would continue at the same current rate. The British wanted to find a durable solution where Palestine would become a stable area and the Soviets would remain out of the region. They were suspicious that the Russians might use the Palestine dispute to eliminate British influence in the region. Moreover, the British wanted the Americans to become involved in solving the Palestine problem.⁽²⁰⁾ The Americans were represented at the Committee of Inquiry by a team which included Judge Joseph Hutchenson as chairman, Frank Aydelotte, Frank Buxton, Bartley Crum, James McDonald, and William Phillips.⁽²¹⁾ Crum and McDonald were pro-Zionists, while Phillips was against the proclaimed aims of Zionists.⁽²²⁾

On 20 April 1946, the Committee completed its inquiry and released its report on April 30. The Committee called for the creation of a binational state under a United Nations trusteeship and recommended that "100,000 certificates be authorized immediately for the admission into Palestine of Jews who have been the victims of

Nazi and Fascist persecution.”⁽²³⁾ Even though the British government had urged the American administration not to release the report concerning Jewish immigration, the President ignored their request. Truman was pleased that his proposal was accepted by the committee. He also tried to show some public sympathy toward the Arabs in Palestine. President Truman stated that:

I am very happy that the request which I made for the immediate admission of 100,000 Jews into Palestine has been unanimously endorsed by the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry--One of the significant features in the report is that its aims to insure complete protection to the Arab population of Palestine by guaranteeing their civic and religious rights, and by recommending measures for the constant improvement in their cultural, educational, and economic position.⁽²⁴⁾

Neither Jews nor Arabs accepted the Committee's recommendations. The Zionists rejected the idea of creating a bi-national state and stressed the call for the immediate admission of 100,000 Jews into Palestine. Meanwhile, armed Jewish militants in Palestine intensified their terrorist actions against British and Arab targets. The British reaction to this violence was negative in tone. In his speech before the House of Commons, Prime Minister Attlee attacked the Jewish Agency for helping Jewish terrorists. He asserted uncompromisingly “that no immigration could be considered until the terrorists' cells were disbanded.”⁽²⁵⁾ The Arabs, on the other hand, were not satisfied by the President's assurances that their “civic and religious rights” would be protected. From the beginning, the Arabs opposed the formation of any committee and any plan that would help Jewish refugees to emigrate to Palestine. Representatives of the Palestinians, as well as spokesmen of the Arab states, protested against the pro-Zionist American policy. The Arabs requested that other nations should take the responsibility of solving the Jewish refugee problem by permitting settlement of homeless Jews.⁽²⁶⁾

Because of Arab and British opposition to the implementation of the commission's report, the Truman administration began to accept the notion of a further bilateral U.S.-British investigation of possible solutions. The President seemed to be persuaded by the British government and the State Department that the immediate admission of 100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine was not going to resolve the problem. Rather, it would exacerbate it. It would antagonize the Arabs, weaken the British, invite Soviet intervention, and involve the U.S. militarily in the conflict. Based on a suggestion from the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs, Loy Henderson, the

President soon appointed a cabinet committee on Palestine which included the Secretaries of State, War, and Treasury. The committee was charged with the implementation of the report of the Anglo-American commission. They met once or twice. The actual work was delegated to the alternates to the three cabinet members under the chairmanship of Henry Grady, former assistant secretary of state.⁽²⁷⁾

At that time, July 1946, the British government would not discuss the refugee problem with the Americans because of the bloody violence in Palestine. Jewish terrorist groups launched a campaign of violence against the British, accusing them of thwarting Zionist ambitions in Palestine. Meanwhile, American Zionists urged the President to use his prestige to ease the newly imposed British restrictions. Indeed, the President issued a statement in which he advocated that the British government change its policy and release Jewish terrorists.⁽²⁸⁾

The Grady committee, meanwhile, met with the British delegates to discuss different aspects of the Palestine problem. The American team clearly pointed out that the U.S. could not send military forces or act as a trustee or co-trustee in Palestine. The U.S., however, would facilitate and fund the moving and settlement of 100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine.⁽²⁹⁾ Finally, the Grady mission reached a compromise with the British via the Morrison Grady Report in which Palestine would be divided into a separate Arab and Jewish autonomous states guided by a central government under the British mandate. Britain would have control over Jerusalem and Southern Palestine (Nagab) and the central government would decide the exact number of refugees who could enter the country.⁽³⁰⁾

President Truman accepted the Morrison-Grady Report and described it as “really fair.” It gave the Jews “the best part of Palestine,” he acknowledged, “the only part that can be cultivated and all that section where their historical background is.”⁽³¹⁾ Britain was delighted and began to arrange for the London Conference between Palestinian and Jewish representatives. The conference, which was opened on September 9 and ended on 14 February 1947, was designed to bring Arabs and Jews together to reach a mutually acceptable solution. The British goal at this time was to contain the conflict and keep her access to the oil fields and prevent any Soviet influence in the region.⁽³²⁾

The British aims were soon foiled. The Morrison-Grady Plan and the results of the London Conference were totally rejected by the Arabs, the Zionists and pro-Jewish elements in Congress. The Morrison-Grady Plan was described by Rabbi Silver as a “conscienceless act of treachery” and by Senators Wagner and Taft

called it “a deceitful device.”⁽³³⁾ Under this pressure, and despite the advice of the State Department to go ahead with the plan, the President decided to reject the Morrison-Grady plan. The President’s answer to the State Department and the American diplomats who served in the Middle East was that:

I am sorry, gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs in my constituents.⁽³⁴⁾

Perhaps there were hundreds of thousands of Arab Americans and pro-Palestinian American Voters who could be counted in the elections. The President, however, ignored these people either because they were not as well organized as the Zionists or he wanted to implement his policies regardless of the pro-Arab groups. There was a competition between the Democrats and Republicans to win the Jewish vote in the 1946 congressional election. David Niles, a presidential advisor, consistently urged President Truman to issue a statement favorable to the Zionists or, as he put it, “New York State would surely be lost to the Democrats.”⁽³⁵⁾ The President, therefore, used the Jewish Holy Day, Yom Kippur, to spell out his policy. In his statement, Truman not only rejected the Morrison-Grady Plan and the London Conference, but he reiterated his previous request for “the immediate issuance of certificates for 100,000 immigrants.” Furthermore, Truman called for “the creation of a viable Jewish state in Palestine.”⁽³⁶⁾ By committing himself, the President endorsed the ultimate goals of the Zionists and their version of solving the Palestine problem.⁽³⁷⁾

UNISCOP and the British decision to Evacuate

Finally, the British government decided to submit the Palestine question to the United Nations. They did so because of the following reasons:

- 1) The tremendous American pressure on Britain in order to open the doors of Palestine to unlimited Jewish immigration, and the American hesitation to share responsibility with the British over Palestine.
- 2) They (the British) were sure that the national home for Jews in Palestine would be secured after thirty years of British mandate.
- 3) They knew that the United States would continue to champion the Jewish cause and eventually a Jewish state would be fulfilled.
- 4) They were sure that the majority of member states in the U.N. were pro-Zionist and would support the political aspirations of the Jews.

5) After WWII, Britain became weak; It left India and began to suffer militarily, comically and morally in Palestine. Churchill spelled this out clearly when he stated in parliament in 1947. "... there developed abroad consensus of public, parliamentary, and cabinet opinion that recognized military withdrawal (from Palestine) as an economic as well as a political and ethical imperative."⁽³⁸⁾ On 2 April 1947, Britain formally asked the U.N. to summon a special session of the General Assembly by that fall. Furthermore, on December 11, the British Colonial Secretary, Arthur Greek Jones, announced that his government would terminate her Palestine mandate on May 15 and completely evacuate the country by the first of August.⁽³⁹⁾ The British decision was a turning point in the history of the palestine question. Britain was, in point of fact, relinquishing her position as a power in the Middle East. The U.S., however, while not sure of whether it wanted to assume the peace-keeping burden did not use its strong position in the post-war era to exert influence upon other members in the United Nations to secure support for American policy toward Palestine.

Soon after the United Nations discussed the Palestine problem, the international organization appointed the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) on 23 April 1947. The political make-up of the special committee consisted of Western Europe (Sweden and the Netherlands); Eastern Europe (Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia); the commonwealth (Australia and Canada); Asia (India and Iran), and Latin America (Guatemala, Uruguay and Peru).

These representatives were carefully selected because most of them were pro-Americans and pro-Zionists. For example, the representative of Guatemala Garcia

Garandos, author of "Birth of Israel", was a fundamentalist Zionist, Uruguay's representative was selected because Uruguay had a big Jewish community.

Representatives of Western and Eastern European countries as well as Canada and Australia were very sympathetic with the Zionists and Strongly advocated the establishment of a Jewish State.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The committee was given the " Widest power to ascertain and record facts, and to investigate all questions and issues relevant to the problem of Palestine."⁽⁴¹⁾ The Committee was asked to submit its recommendations to the September meeting of the General Assembly.

While waiting for the recommendations of the UNSCOP, the U.S. government was put under tremendous pressure from the Zionists and their sympathizers. They wanted " the U.S. to do its utmost to implement the partition decision if it is voted by the U.N., through

force if necessary.⁽⁴²⁾ This pressure had been intensified when the British authorities permitted only 1500 Jews to enter Palestine each month. The American Jewish community was outraged and began to shower the White House with letters, phone calls, and messages calling upon the administration to pressure the British government and to fulfill the president's Yom Kippur campaign pledge.⁽⁴³⁾ The President, nevertheless, would not take any hasty steps that might jeopardize the UNSCOP investigation.

The members of UNSCOP visited Palestine. There, the Palestinian representatives refused to meet with them on the assumption that the U.N. had no right to divide Palestine. A spokesman for the Arab Higher Committee (Palestine Representatives) stated that "it was obviously the sacred duty of the Arabs of Palestine to defend their country against all aggression, including the aggressive campaign being waged by the Zionists with the object of securing by force a country---Palestine-- which was not theirs by right."⁽⁴⁴⁾ The Jewish Agency, however, fully cooperated with the committee and asked for a Jewish state in Palestine. After visiting Palestine, the UNSCOP visited Beirut where they met with representatives of the Arab states. While meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, the committee drafted its final report and on August 31 it was released.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The UNSCOP committee, composed of eleven members, could not arrive at a unanimous recommendation. A majority report, supported by the representatives of Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, and Uruguay, supported partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states and the internationalization of Jerusalem. The minority plan, supported by India, Iran, and Yugoslavia, supported the creation of one federal state with Jerusalem as its capital. The other member, Australia, supported neither plan.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The American response to the UNSCOP's plan was mixed; some officials favored partition while others opposed it. Those in favor argued that partition was acceptable to the Zionists and consistent with previous American commitments. Also, they reasoned, the U.S. was obligated to abide by and support the U.N. decisions. The opponents of the partition plan, on the other hand, argued that if the U.S. supported it, they would antagonize the Arabs and invite the Soviets into the region. After all, went their logic, partition of Palestine ultimately would require sending U.S. forces in the area. Their alternative was a U.N. "trusteeship" for Palestine.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Ultimately, on 11 October, the United States gave its full support to the partition and was ready to send forces under their "United Nations obligation and as

part of a United Nations police forces or constabulary” to maintain law and order in Palestine.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The U.S. and the U.N. vote:

On 29 November 1947 the General Assembly adopted the partition plan. The resolution passed by a 33 to 13 vote with ten nations abstaining and one absent.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Representatives of Arab and Muslim states in the U.N. unanimously rejected the resolution. The Arab states charged that the U.S. representatives had pressured other delegations to secure a majority vote for partition. Their assessment was valid. While the Zionists exerted all kinds of private and public pressure on American officials to support the partition resolution,⁽⁵⁰⁾ the Arabs had no such influential contacts. There were, however, certain groups in American society who felt that their government's policy would hurt their interests in the Arab World. The Arab Americans, Protestant missionaries, oil businessmen, and American schools' administrators in the region protested vigorously “but these actions came much too late and too weak.”⁽⁵¹⁾

The U.S. government, all the while, pressured the countries who had opposed partition, i.e., Philippines, Haiti, Liberia, Greece, Ethiopia, and China, to vote in favor of partition in order to secure the required two-third majority. These countries rejected the partition because they were neutral in voting over any UN case in previous occasions. They had also unique relations with the Arab countries. Haiti had a large Syrian community; the Philippines had a large number of Muslim population; Ethiopia had strong ties with Arab countries; Greece was anti-zionist, because they were afraid that establishing a Jewish state in Palestine would jeopardize its interests in the Greek orthodox churches in Palestine. China, however, was passing through a national instability as communists were trying to control the country, and they were against Western colonialism.⁽⁵²⁾ In the Liberian case, wrote James Forrestal in a diary entry, “the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, which has a concession in Liberia, reported that it had been telephoned to and asked to transmit a message to their representative in Liberia directing him to bring pressure on the Liberian government to vote in favor of partition.”⁽⁵³⁾ Ten senators sent telegrams to the president of the Philippines, who also received the friendly admonition of Felix Frankfurter and another supreme court Justice, Frank Murphy. American officials used business connections in an abortive efforts to swing the Greek vote. They warned the representative from China and France and other countries that “nothing less than economic assistance would be in jeopardy if they failed to vote in favor of partition.”⁽⁵⁴⁾ American

Senators even considered the opponents of partition as "enemies of the American people."

On the same subject, Sumner Welles stated that:

..... by direct order of the White House every form of pressure direct or indirect, was brought to bear by American officials upon those countries outside the Muslim World that were known to be either uncertain or opposed to partition. Representatives or intermediaries were employed by the White House to make sure that the necessary majority would at length be secured.⁽⁵⁵⁾

Partition or Trusteeship

Ultimate approval of the United Nations' resolution created endless violence in the Middle East. As Henry A. Wallace, then Secretary of Commerce, rightly predicated, "From now on, the U.N., the U.S.S.R., and the British, the Jews and the Arabs are tied together in a drama which can end in degeneration and death or in cooperation between the participants."⁽⁵⁶⁾ The Arabs violently rejected the partition plan and held the United States responsible for all that might happen. They argued that the U.N. had worked against the principle of self-determination. They likewise claimed that the U.N. decision was immoral because it was imposed on the majority (Arabs) for the benefit of the minority (Jews). Demonstrations, protests, and verbal condemnations of the American policy were expressed daily all over the Arab world. The Arab League Council threatened to reevaluate the relations of Arab states with any country that would support a possible Jewish state in Palestine.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Jews, on the other hand, continued their terrorist attacks on Palestinian and British installations. In the U.S., there were rallies and newspaper advertisements to pressure the government to implement the partition immediately. "The Jewish pressure on the White House," wrote President Truman, "did not diminish in the days following the partition vote in the U.N. vote."⁽⁵⁸⁾

Increasing violence between the Arabs and Jews led the U.S. to believe, at least temporarily, that the implementation of partition was not a viable solution. Such quick action, it was thought, would further alienate the Arabs and threaten American strategic and economic interests in the region. Another factor was that in order to enforce the partition, the U.S. would have to introduce American military forces in Palestine. This military commitment would tie down U.S. troops in Palestine and thus lessen American military influence in Europe. Weakening U.S. forces in Western Europe did not seem wise

especially after the communist coup in Czechoslovakia.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Moreover, the American military presence in Palestine might serve to invite a possible Soviet penetration of the Middle East. This, it was feared, was a distinct “eventuality that could result in a thrust at the Suez Canal or at American oil holdings in Saudi Arabia.”⁽⁶⁰⁾ Faced with these new realities, the Office of the Near East Affairs, which had not been convinced of the wisdom of partition, submitted (in 17 December 1947) an appraisal of a new U.S. policy toward Palestine. The report recommended that the Palestine question should be discussed again in a special session of the General Assembly where another attempt to reach a compromise would be tried. If this would not work, it was suggested that “we should propose a U.N. trusteeship for Palestine, pending agreement by the Arab and Jewish communities.” The report recommended that the U.S. should ask Britain “to remain in Palestine” with the United Nations subsidizing “the costs of continued occupation by the British.” Finally, if those measures could not be implemented, the U.S.

..... should take the position that, in view of the manifest impossibility of implementing the partition of Palestine, no steps should be taken to that end. We should oppose sending U.N. troops to Palestine to enforce partition. We should maintain and enforce our embargo on arms to Palestine and neighboring countries.⁽⁶¹⁾

The U.S., therefore, tried to find a possible compromise to the partition plan in the form of a trusteeship for Palestine under the auspices of the United Nations. This plan was stated formally by the American representative at the United Nations, Warren Austin. Speaking before the Security Council on 19 March 1948, Austin stated:

We believe that further steps must be taken immediately not only to maintain the peace but also to afford a further opportunity to reach an agreement between the interested parties regarding the future government of Palestine. To this end we believe that a temporary trusteeship for Palestine should be established under the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations. Such a United Nations trusteeship would be without prejudice to the rights, claims or position of the parties concerned or to the character of the eventual political settlement, which we hope can be achieved

without long delay. In our opinion, the Security Council should recommend the establishment of such a trusteeship to the General Assembly and to the Mandatory Power. This would require an immediate special session of the General Assembly, which the Security Council should request the Secretary General to convoke under Article 20 of the charter.⁽⁶²⁾

Before the establishment of a trusteeship, the spokesman for the American delegation emphasized that the U.N. should bring about a truce between the belligerents. When the General Assembly resumed its session on 16 April 1948, the American proposal was fully discussed.

It was clear that the trusteeship and truce recommendations were initiated by the State Department and were not fully approved by the white House. The President gave his approval to the draft statement of the U.S. representatives in the U.N. only one week before it was delivered.⁽⁶³⁾ Within one week, however, the administration was the focal point of tremendous pressure which forced it to change its declared policy. The Zionists felt betrayed because the sponsored American trusteeship decision was taken one day after President Truman's assurance to a leading representative of the Jewish community that the U.S. would implement partition. Actually, President Truman was pressured by his old Kansas City friend and business partner, Eddie Jacobson, to meet Chaim Weismann, Chairman of the World Zionist Organization.⁽⁶⁴⁾ The Zionists used this meeting to remind the President to stand behind his promise. They intensified their propagand campaign and labelled the day in which the trusteeship was announced as "Black Friday." The President, waffling on his stand, announced on March 25 that the trusteeship was not proposed as a substitute for partition, but was only a temporary solution to fill the gap created by the termination of the mandate.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Outside the U.S. the proposed truce and trusteeship did not receive the necessary support from Britain or other U.N. members. Britain refused to extend their mandate beyond May 15, and the membership of the U.N. was not interested in further discussion of the American plan. Therefore, the U.S. dropped its plan on 12 May 1947.⁽⁶⁶⁾

The U.S. and the Declaration of the State of Israel

The termination date of the British mandate was 15 May 1948. It was also the date when Israel came into being. The Zionists decided to impose their will on the world. In a letter to President Truman dated April 19, Weismann told him that the choice for the Jews

was simply “between statehood and extermination.”⁽⁶⁷⁾ On May 13, he sent another letter to the President informing him that at midnight, May 15, the provisional government of Israel would come into existence. Furthermore, he urged the President to extend diplomatic recognition to the new country. Weismann concluded his letter by saying that he “would regard it as especially appropriate that the greatest living democracy should be the first to welcome the newest into the family of nations.”⁽⁶⁸⁾ Taking into consideration the upcoming 1948 presidential election, the President adopted a more favorable policy toward the Zionists’ cause. Therefore, at 6:11 p.m., May 14, Washington time, the President’s Press Secretary, Charles Ross, released the following White House statement:

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.⁽⁶⁹⁾

By recognizing Israel as a nation state, the President satisfied his religious feelings, pleased the Zionists and their friends, and guaranteed his political future. The President, nonetheless, had to accept the long-range ramifications of his decision. From the beginning of his presidency, he had tried his best to solve the Jewish problem. His priority was to find an immediate solution to the displaced Jews in Europe while the political solution to the Jewish problem was to be delayed. The President was aware of the dire consequences of American support to the Zionists’ cause. The immediate aftermath might result in the threatening of American interests in the Arab World and a possible Soviet penetration into the region. Consequently, he modified his policy along the same lines as the State Department. When the President saw no viable solution to the Palestine problem and, when he realized the political risk of antagonizing the Zionists, he disregarded the State Department’s advice and extended instant recognition to the Jewish state. Truman’s short-term goals had been realized. He was reelected to the presidency in 1948. His long-term goals, to the contrary, were not achieved. Palestine was torn with endless conflict and the American interests in the region soon became jeopardized. The American recognition of Israel, which aimed at forestalling early Soviet recognition and, along with it more Soviet influence in the Middle East, had not been realized. The Soviets shifted their policy from supporting Israel to championing the Arab cause against what they

dubbed Western imperialism and reactionary Zionism. As a result, the Middle East became a new field for Soviet-American rivalry.

As a result of the discussion and analysis of this paper, one may say that president Harry S. Truman demonstrated throughout his presidency his sympathy and dedication to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Despite opposition from the Department of Defense and the state department that American support of the aims of Zionists in Palestine would jeopardize American interests in the Middle East, Truman continued to urge the British government to open the doors of Palestine for unlimited Jewish immigration. He also continued his efforts to secure the establishment of a Jewish state and was the first president of a foreign country to recognize the new state of Israel in May 1948. This American recognition of Israel and its continued moral, economic, political, and military support aroused Arab criticism. It increased their distrust of the United States government. The U.S. tried to reduce the Arab antagonism against the American policy and maintain the status quo through helping the Arabs and Israeli's to sign the Armistice agreements in 1949. They also, along with Britain and France, signed the tripartite Declaration in May 1950. The U.S. also attempted to strengthen its relations with many Arab States through defense and cooperation proposals in order to contain the soviet influence in the area, but they failed merely because of their pro-Israeli policy.

End Notes

1. Michael E. Janson, the U.S. and the Palestinian people (Beirut: the Institute for Palestine studies, 1970)p. 21
2. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945, VIII:696-97.
3. Mohammed Shadid, The United States and the Palestinians (New Yourk: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 33-34.
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- * President Truman once said "There are people on the 3rd and 4th levels of the State Dept who have always wanted to cut my throat."
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16. Joseph H. Fields, "Pawn of Empire" (Doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University, 1975), 212.
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23. *Ibid*, p.165
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40. Salah Agakkad, contemporary history of the Eastern part of the Arab World, (Cairo, The Anglo-Egyptian press, 1983) p. 355.
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44. Yearbook of the United Nations 1947-48, 232.
45. Ibid., 229.
46. *. Ibid., 227.
- * Towards the end of the committee's deliberations in Switzerland, seven of the eleven member made a tour of displaced person camps. The three member who voted against partition did not visit the camps The other three committee members remained impervious to the lobbying , which was of high caliber.
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