



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series I: General Correspondence, 1914-1969, undated.

Sub-series A: Alphabetical, 1914-1965, undated.

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American Zionist Emergency Council, Palestine - questions and  
answers, 1945.

## SOME FACTS ON THE PALESTINE SITUATION

### I. The United States and the Jewish National Home Promise.

i. President Wilson. Official support for the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth was first expressed on behalf of the United States Government by President Wilson when in March, 1919, he stated:

"The Allied Nations, with the fullest concurrence of our Government and people, are agreed that in Palestine shall be laid the foundations of a Jewish Commonwealth."

ii. Resolution of the United States Congress in 1922. In 1922 the Congress of the United States unanimously adopted a joint resolution approving the Jewish National Home pledge.

iii. The 1924 Anglo-American Convention set out in full the terms of the Mandate for Palestine and recorded American assent to British administration in Palestine subject to those terms.

iv. 1944 Republican and Democratic Party Planks. In the 1944 Presidential Campaign the two major parties both adopted planks favoring the opening of Palestine to unrestricted Jewish immigration and colonization and, in the words of the Democratic platform, "such a policy as to result in the establishment there of a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth."

v. President Roosevelt's Statement of October 1944. On October 15, 1944 the President gave his support to the Democratic Party plank on Palestine in the following statement:

"Efforts will be made to find appropriate ways and means of effectuating this policy as soon as possible. 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."

vi. President Roosevelt on his return from Yalta. On March 16, 1945, on his return from Yalta and subsequent to his interview with Ibn Saud, the President stated:

"I made my position on Zionism clear in October. That position I have not changed and shall continue to seek to bring about its earliest realization."

vii. Statement by President Truman. On April 20, 1945 President Truman authorized the issuance of a statement that he intends to carry out President Roosevelt's policy in regard to Palestine with which he is fully familiar.

viii. State Legislatures. Within the last eighteen months thirty-three states, representing 85% of the population of the United States have, through resolutions of their State Legislatures, gone on record in favor of the Zionist objective.

ix. Petition by State Governors. Immediately prior to the President's departure for the Potsdam Conference, forty State Governors joined in a petition to the President favoring the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth.

x. Congressional Support. In June, 1945, a "Letter to the President," with the like objective, was signed by a substantial majority of the members of both Houses (55 Senators and 262 Congressmen).

xi. The Labor Organizations, Educators, etc. Both the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, by resolutions adopted at their national conventions, have pledged their support for the free entry of Jews into Palestine and its reconstitution as a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth. Recently 818 leaders of trade unions likewise endorsed this objective.

The American Palestine Committee and the Christian Council on Palestine have served as a medium through which thousands of leading Americans in all

walks of life are associating themselves with this objective. Recently more than 2,000 university presidents and professors have subscribed to a petition in favor of the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth.

## II. British Support

i. Winston Churchill. Speaking in the House of Commons in the debate on the Palestine White Paper of May 1939, Mr. Churchill said:

"The provision that Jewish immigration can be stopped ... is a plain breach of a solemn obligation ... I cannot understand why this course has been taken ... I cannot believe that the task to which we set our hand twenty years ago in Palestine is beyond our strength, or that faithful perseverance will not, in the end, bring that task to a glorious success."

ii. Mr. Herbert Morrison. Speaking as a member of the Labor Party in the same debate, Mr. Herbert Morrison said:

"If we do this thing today we shall have done a thing which is dishonourable to our good name, which is discreditable to our capacity to govern and which is dangerous to British security, to peace and to the economic interest of the world in general and of our own country. Moreover, it will not work ... the Government must understand that this document will not be automatically binding upon their successors in office, whatever the circumstances of the time may be."

iii. Resolution of the British Labor Party, May 1945. The following statement adopted by the Executive Committee of the British Labor Party in December 1944 was approved by the Conference of the Party in May 1945:

"There is surely neither hope nor meaning in a 'Jewish National Home,' unless we are prepared to let Jews, if they wish, enter this tiny land in such numbers as to become a majority. There was a strong case for this before the war. There is an irresistible case now, after the unspeakable atrocities of the cold and calculated German Nazi plan to kill all Jews in Europe ... The Arabs have many wide territories of their own; they must not claim to exclude the Jews from this small area of Palestine, less than the size of Wales."

## III. Arguments Successively Used to Defeat the Jewish National Home Policy

i. "Palestine is too small." At various times further Jewish immigration into Palestine has been opposed on the ground that Palestine is unable economically to support a larger population. Thus in 1930 when the

Jewish population was 170,000, it was stated on the basis of the Hope-Simpson Report that Palestine could not absorb further immigration. Since then the Jewish population has increased to 600,000 while a like increase has been recorded in the Arab population.

So far as the Arabs are concerned the effect of the Jewish National Home policy was summarized by the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Mr. Malcolm MacDonald) in the House of Commons, 1938, as follows:

"The Arabs cannot say that the Jews are driving them out of their country. If not a single Jew had come to Palestine after 1918, I believe that the Arab population today would still have been round about the 600,000 figure (instead of over 1,000,000 as at present), at which it had been stable under the Turkish rule. It is because the Jews who have come to Palestine bring modern health services and other advantages that Arab men and women who would have been dead are alive today, that Arab children who would never have drawn breath have been born and grow strong."

The developments of the past twenty-five years in Palestine have shown the possibilities which exist today for further large-scale absorption of Jewish immigration. Apart from industry and commerce which are capable of great expansion at this crossroads of three continents, hundreds of thousands of new settlers can find a livelihood on the land by the introduction of large-scale schemes of irrigation. It is estimated on the basis of studies made by Dr. Walter Lowdermilk, Assistant Chief of the U. S. Soil Conservation Department, and by two great American irrigation specialists, Mr. J. L. Savage and Mr. J. B. Hayes, that at least a million acres can be put under irrigation as compared with less than one-tenth of that figure at the present time. Dr. Lowdermilk estimates indeed that with proper development Palestine can maintain another four million inhabitants. During the past two years the Jewish Agency has been working out plans for the speedy transfer to Palestine of the first million Jews and their settlement in Palestine in the shortest possible time.

ii. "Too Few Jews Left." The argument was frequently heard during the war that one result of the Nazi extermination policy would be that too few Jews would be left in Europe at the end of the war to create an emigration problem and that in any event the end of the Nazi tyranny would also reduce the desire of the surviving Jews to leave their countries of origin. It is now clear that although the Jews of Europe have been reduced in numbers to perhaps one and a half millions, the desire to leave the scene of their giant tragedy is, if anything, stronger than ever. To quote from the London "Economist" of July 14, 1945 (a journal by no means pro-Zionist):

"All observers now returning from Germany -- whether journalists, UNRRA officers, American or British soldiers -- confirm that unexpected numbers of the Jews left in central Europe want to go to Palestine because it is the only place in the world where they will get the welcome which they have been denied for years. This fact puts a new complexion on British policy in Palestine, which has been inclined to temporise in the belief that, after the war, the pressure for large-scale immigration would be relaxed."

The poison of anti-Semitism has not been eliminated with the death of Hitler. Nor can the survivors of the Hitler massacres be expected to remain in surroundings associated for them with horror and suffering.

iii. The Arabs. It is argued that the pledge to the Jewish people can be fulfilled only in the face of violent Arab opposition and at the cost of serious bloodshed. The fact is, however, that there was never a time when the Arabs were so dependent on the Great Powers nor when the latter's prestige and authority were greater than they are today. A clear decision backed with the determination to use force will make the use of that force unnecessary. Certainly as long as there is hope by agitation and threats of violence to influence the decision, the Arab leaders will continue to employ these tactics. No Arab leader will talk in terms of cooperation if there is hope that the White Paper may still be implemented. Let there once be a clear and unequivocal decision, however, by the Great Powers acting in concert and followed immediately by determined action and the whole Arab "bogey" will be found to be the myth it is.

A brief examination of the actual military potential of the Arab countries reduces to very small proportions these threats of violence. The Arab countries that come under consideration are Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Trans-Jordan. The total Arab population of this area is about twenty-five millions, of which some sixteen millions are in Egypt.

a. The Egyptian army consists of 22,000 ill-armed and ill-trained conscripts. It is without armor, without an airforce, and without a single submarine or other warship. During the war not a single Egyptian fought in defense of the soil of his own country even when the Axis forces were outside Alexandria. Eighty-five percent of the people of Egypt are illiterate; the great masses of the population live in unbelievable poverty and squalor. In terms of military power the Egyptian army is inconsequential.

b. What is true of Egypt applies in even greater degree to Iraq. The pro-Axis military putsch of the Rashid Ali government at a most critical time in the war was suppressed by two battalions of British troops. The government of Iraq has just shown itself (September 1945) incapable of suppressing a revolt of Kurdish tribesmen without the assistance of British troops.

c. Saudi Arabia has a population of about six millions scattered over an enormous desert area. The desert horsemen of Ibn Saud might have been effective fighters in the days of Mahomet. Today they could be dispersed by a single squadron of planes long before they reached the lands of the "fertile crescent" along the Mediterranean.

d. The military effectiveness of Syria may be judged from the fact that but for the intervention of Great Britain and the United States the small force of French troops in Syria would undoubtedly have compelled the submission of the Syrians in the recent crisis.

e. Transjordan with a population of 350,000 is still de facto under British control and the small Transjordan Frontier Force is under British

command and direction.

f. Conclusion. When it is remembered that the Arab countries are spread over great distances and in many cases separated by formidable deserts in which even modern mechanized armies would find it difficult to operate, the hallowness of the Arab threat of a giant uprising becomes obvious. The fact is that the Arab countries are not merely wholly incapable of offering any real resistance to a clearly defined policy on the part of the Great Powers, but they depend upon these Powers as never before for their very existence. Nevertheless, to permit the Arab groups to remain under the illusion that our Government may be influenced by threats would be nothing short of an encouragement to terrorism. So far as the situation within Palestine is concerned, it is to be added that the Arabs have successively opposed each stage of Palestine's development but have consistently reconciled themselves to realities. They opposed Jewish immigration in 1920 when there were only 80,000 Jews in Palestine and they opposed each successive wave of immigration thereafter. But they were in due course ready to reconcile themselves to the existence in Palestine of those already there. Today they accept as an accomplished fact the 600,000 Jews in Palestine. They will likewise accept the Jewish State.

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iv. Palestine Promised to Both Jews and Arabs. It is often suggested that while the Balfour Declaration promised Palestine to the Jews, a conflicting promise was made to the Arabs in terms of the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence of 1915. Sir Henry McMahon himself, however, who conducted the negotiations with King Hussein, has made it emphatically clear that his pledge to King Hussein was never intended to cover Palestine and that it was thus understood by the King. That this was so was also confirmed in an official statement in 1922 by Mr. Winston Churchill in his capacity as Secretary of State for the Colonies. But if any further proof were required that Palestine was not included within the terms of this undertaking, it is to be obtained from the fact that at Versailles in 1919 the

Emir Feisal in asking on behalf of his father, King Hussein, for independence for the Arab countries, expressly excluded Palestine which "for its universal character he left on one side for the mutual consideration of all parties interested." This statement of the Emir supplemented an agreement between Dr. Weizmann, President of the Zionist Organization, and himself, signed a month previously, in accordance with which the Emir recognized the right of the Jews to immigrate into and to develop Palestine provided Arab independence was achieved in the Arab lands outside of Palestine. That independence is today a reality.

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v. Oil. The oil resources of the Middle East have become an American interest, the importance of which is likely to increase as these vast deposits are developed. It is altogether unrealistic, however, to believe that the Arab states will allow their opposition to a Jewish Palestine to interfere with the flow of oil and thus with the steady receipt of oil royalties which constitute a major part of their revenue. It is to be added that the United States is the only major Power which has shown itself prepared to exploit these oil resources and to pay royalties without seeking to interfere with the policies of the local governments. Irrespective of American policy on Palestine, therefore, the United States remains, from the point of view of the Arab rulers, the most desirable partner in the development of their oil resources.

vi. Will the Jewish State be a Theocracy? The Zionist movement believes emphatically in the separation of Church and State. It does not, nor has it ever aimed to set up a theocratic state in Palestine. Under the Constitution of the Jewish State, as specifically affirmed in resolutions of the General Council of the Zionist Organization, all inhabitants of Palestine will be entitled to full equality of rights without distinction of religion or race. The term "Jewish State" therefore does not mean Jewish Religious State, but

that the Jewish people will constitute a majority in the country. All communities within Palestine will enjoy full autonomy for the administration of their religious, educational, cultural and social institutions, and all citizens will have the privilege of voting and holding office within the State.

vii. Jews Divided Among Themselves. Jews (again like other people) are not unanimous in their approach to any problem and it is not surprising that there should be differences of opinion among them on the question of Zionism. The evidence is incontrovertible, however, that the overwhelming majority of Jews, including the Jews of this country, do in fact support the proposal to establish Palestine as a Jewish State. As regards the five million Jews of America, this was reflected at the first American Jewish Conference which took place in September, 1943. 480 out of 502 delegates representing all Jewish communities throughout the country, as well as the leading Jewish national organizations, voted in support of a program for the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth. Although a numerically small but financially prominent Jewish group continues actively to campaign against the proposal for a Jewish State, the Jewish masses as a whole, retaining as they do a strong Jewish consciousness and a warm fellow-feeling for their brethren abroad, are wholeheartedly in favor of the Zionist program.

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September 1945.