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American Zionist Emergency Council, I. B. Berkson's Plan for
Palestine Partition, 1946.

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Rough Draft

I.B. Berkson
August, 1946

OUTLINE OF A VALID PLAN FOR THE PARTITION OF PALESTINE

I. The Cabinet Committee Proposal for Partition - A Sham.

The terms "partition" and "federalization" applied to the present British proposal are misnomers. What the plan actually does is to divide Palestine into administrative districts within a Crown Colony government firmly controlled by the British, with no autonomy for the Jewish and Arab sections. The proposal is calculated to confine the Jews to a small section of Palestine already densely populated with a large ratio of Arabs who own the greater part of the land. True, this section is one of the most fertile of Palestine, but under the circumstances this fact militates against further Jewish development. Since the land has already been well developed - in no small measure because of Jewish effort - the Arabs will not be ready to dispose of their holdings.

Even if the area could accommodate a certain proportion of the 100,000 refugees in agricultural pursuits, the situation permits no expansion for the Jewish community in the direction of securing the Jewish National Home. In addition, the New City of Jerusalem with its environs, where 100,000 Jews live, is completely separated from the Jewish sector. Essentially what the plan does is to create in Palestine a Pale of Settlement with a large Arab minority, a situation which is bound to create trouble.

Bad as the plan is for the Jews it is no better for the Arabs for, as the analysis of the Partition Commission has shown, the Arab sector could not possibly be self-supporting and would require a subsidy. The British Government now apparently expects the United States to shoulder the burden of the development of the Arab province. There is nothing of positive value in the plan and it can in no wise be considered a basis for discussion.

II. Principles of Partition

The principles of a valid plan for partition were laid down by the Palestine Royal Commission and confirmed by the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations. The following assumptions are basic to any plan of partition which is to have any hope of success:

1. The country is to be divided into three sections - a Jewish autonomous area, an Arab autonomous area and British enclaves needed for strategic reasons or for protection of the holy places.
2. Any plan proposed must conform to the obligations undertaken by the Mandatory power in respect to securing the establishment of the Jewish National Home, facilitating Jewish immigration and encouragement of close settlement by Jews of the land.
3. The plan must afford a reasonable prospect of the eventual establishment of Jewish and Arab states with adequate internal security and the possibility of defense against attack.
4. The Arab and Jewish states must have a prospect of economic self-support and particularly "the areas allotted to the Jews should be sufficiently extensive, fertile and well situated...to be capable of intensive economic development and, consequently, of dense and rapid settlement."
5. Each state must be in control of immigration and land policy, with safeguarding of the rights of tenants and small owners.
6. Each state must be relatively homogeneous; "the fewest possible Arabs and Arab enterprises should be included in the Jewish area and vice-versa." In order to achieve this, voluntary transfer of populations should be permitted.

III. Basic Principle enunciated by the Permanent Mandates Commission

M. Orts, the Chairman of the Permanent Mandates Commission, at the 32nd Session in 1937, when the plan put forward by the Palestine Royal Commission (Peel Report) was under discussion formulated the matter succinctly as follows:

"In order to be in conformity also with the spirit of the Balfour Declaration, it must result in the creation of a Jewish State capable of setting up the Jewish National Home within its frontiers.

"A territory of the limited size defined in general terms in the Royal Commission's report would not fulfil that condition, particularly if the proposed transfer of the Arab rural population proved to be impracticable.

"The Chairman was afraid that once again it would be quite illusory to imagine that that population would willingly migrate to Trans-Jordan.

"The worst error of all, the Chairman added, would be to create a Jewish State that could not live, and the worst mistake would be to constitute it in such a form that its creation would mark the end of the effects of the Balfour Declaration, which was confirmed by the mandate."

IV. Deficiencies of the Royal Commission Proposal

Of the various concrete plans suggested thus far by the British, the proposal made by the Peel Commission is still the least unsatisfactory. However, as the Partition Commission-which was delegated to work out the technical aspects of the plan - concluded after a most exhaustive analysis, the Royal Commission partition plan did not adequately fulfill the terms of reference laid down by itself and by the Permanent Mandates Commission. It fell short in the following respects:

1. While the Jewish State under the boundaries proposed, might possibly, although with difficulty, become self-supporting, the Arab State, although larger in area, would not be able to do so. The Arab State would require a permanent subsidy either from the Jewish State - which the Partition Commission regarded as inequitable - or from the British Treasury.
2. The plan did not fulfill the condition that the Jewish State, like the Arab, should be fairly homogeneous with a predominant majority of Jews. Under the boundaries suggested, almost half of the population in the Jewish State would be Arabs and two-thirds of the land would be owned by Arabs.
3. It was not practicable to expect any but a small proportion of Arabs living in the Jewish State to transfer to the Arab State. Considerable increase in the hilly country was out of the question since this section was already congested. The development of irrigation and water conservation, possible in other sections of Palestine, would be very costly. In any case it was questionable whether the Arabs would be willing to leave their old homes in the more developed part of Palestine to start life afresh in a new area under a modern type of cultivation, even if they received full financial assistance.
4. In addition to these practical difficulties, there was the political issue. Arabs would not wish to lose hold of any part of Palestine. Thus, by leaving a large minority of Arabs in the Jewish area "a running sore" in the body of the Jewish State would be created. The gravity of the situation would be accentuated by the fact that the Jewish State would be surrounded by Arab States on all sides.

5. The Jewish State could not be easily defended since no boundary could be found West of the Jordan River to afford a satisfactory strategic line. Apart from the political difficulties, moreover, there were administrative and fiscal problems which precluded a practical solution.

V. The Jewish Criticism

The Jewish Agency meeting in 1937 rejected as unacceptable the particular scheme of partition put forward by the Royal Commission, but directed the Executive of the Jewish Agency to continue discussions with the British Government on the subject. The Executive of the Jewish Agency never submitted formal representations on the question of partition, but Jewish authorities in Palestine presented criticisms to the Palestine Partition Commission and made suggestions which indicated their own view.

1. One difference between the Jewish and British approach to the problem is crucial. The British approach is static; it divides up the country between the Jews and the Arabs on the basis of the existing situation; some account is taken of possibilities of development, but this is not the major factor in the plans. Underlying the Jewish view is the belief that Palestine's economic potentialities can be greatly developed if modern large-scale conceptions were utilized and if scope were given to the Jewish initiative and interest in the development of Palestine.
2. From this results a difference of attitude with reference to the need of transfer which the Royal Commission tended to view as indispensable. Although the Jewish authorities are not opposed to a genuinely voluntary migration of Arabs, they do not think it essential to the establishment of a Jewish numerical preponderance. The Jews wish to change the ratio by encouraging a large Jewish immigration not by reducing the Arab population.
3. A second major criticism of the Royal Commission partition plan was that the area assigned to the Jewish State was too small and even more important, that it gave inadequate opportunities for new developments. The Jewish plan proposed adding the following areas to the Jewish State: (a) an additional area in the Gaza sub-district, in which the Royal Commission included only a small portion for the Jews; (b) a part of the Beersheba sub-district, entirely left out; (c) the southern portion of the Beisan Plain, where there were already some Jewish settlements; (d) an area in Transjordan near the Yarmuk River, where the Ruttenberg electric station was situated.

4. A point that was severely attacked by Jews of all parts was the exclusion of Jerusalem from the Jewish State. The Jews agreed that the Holy Places in Jerusalem should be entrusted to the Mandatory power. These, however, were concentrated in the old city which could properly be included in a special regime. However, the new Jewish Jerusalem, together with the suburbs and the Hebrew University, it was submitted, should be included in the Jewish State. The population in this area is more than 90% Jewish. It was further proposed that the lines of the British Jerusalem enclave be redrawn so as to permit Jewish Jerusalem to be included in the Jewish State.

VI. A Proposal for Partition and Federation with Transjordan

On the basis of the discussions in the recent years of various partition proposals, a plan has been evolved which meets the major objections indicated above and which conforms to the principles laid down by the Palestine Royal Commission and the Permanent Mandates Commission. The plan involves considering Palestine and Transjordan, originally included in the single British Mandate, as one unit. The plan might be called "The Confederated State of Palestine and Transjordan."

1. Great Britain will retain powers which are necessary to protect her own strategic interests, to safeguard the international interest in Palestine as a Holy Land, and to supervise a number of interests common to both States. In fulfillment of these functions, the old city of Jerusalem and its holy places, Bethelhem and Nazareth would be in British enclaves; the Port of Haifa, the Lydda airport and railway junction and the southern part of Beersheba would be controlled by the British; and a customs union for both countries would be under British Administration.
2. Western Palestine, less the Samarian District (including sub-districts of Jenin, Tulkarem and Nablus), would be set aside for a Jewish State. The area of the Jewish National Home would thus be reduced by 4,000 square kilometers and the Jewish State would comprise some 23,000 square kilometers. This area would be added to Transjordan; the Arab State would comprise 95,000 square kilometers. *
3. The two States would stand in treaty relation with each other and with Great Britain. Cultural autonomy would be guaranteed for the Arab minority in the Jewish State and for the Jewish minority in the Arab State. Immigration would be subject to the control of each State, but mutually advantageous arrangements would be made. Rights of travel and residence would be reciprocal for the citizens of each country. Etc.

*The area taken from Western Palestine, roughly a quadrangle, would be bound on the East by the Jordan River; on the North, by a line running somewhat above Jenin; on the West, by a line East of Tulkarem, but curved so as to include this town; and on the South, by a line running approximately South of Ramallah.

4. An essential part of the plan would be the early establishment of a Jordan Valley Authority to develop irrigation and water power along the lines advocated by Dr. W. E. Lowdermilk and others. Western Palestine could thus enormously increase its absorptive capacity, the Negev would be transformed from arid to fertile land, and Transjordan would be lifted from its stagnant, poverty-stricken condition and brought to the level of the advances achieved in Western Palestine.
5. In the framework of such a large development scheme, joined with political confederation, the whole question of the transfer of a part of the Arab population of Western Palestine to Eastern Palestine would assume an entirely different character. A properly financed and planned resettlement under British control of a portion of the Arabs of Palestine would be beneficial for sparsely settled Transjordan and could be made attractive to the Bedouin and to those Fellahin who are less favorably situated in Palestine. The movement would now be - not as in previous proposals, from the fertile and well-developed sections of Palestine to the under-developed sections - but from the congested hills to the broader spaces in the developed valleys and hillsides of Transjordan.

There has been much talk about Arab-Jewish cooperation and rapprochement, but cooperation cannot be developed in the abstract as a result of moral exhortation. A plan of confederation with Transjordan outlined above will give Jews and Arabs concrete objectives and common interests to work for. This could be a beginning of a rapprochement with all the neighboring Arab countries.

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