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American League for a Free Palestine, 1947.

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AMERICAN LEAGUE FOR A FREE PALESTINE

April 11, 1947

Hon. Robert A. Taft
Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C.

My dear Bob:

As you may recall, I have been, for a little over a year, working with the American League for a Free Palestine, giving what aid I can to helping the progress toward a just solution of the Palestine problem. In doing so, I have been motivated by a deep conviction that in problems such as pertain to Palestine's future lies the test as to whether the machinery which the nations of the world have set up for international justice, peace and security can effectively function. If the fate of such areas as Palestine is to be determined by the real or fancied imperial, political or financial interests of one or more of the so-called "Great Powers", then our loud protestations of adherence to basic freedoms become "as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal." And our ornate structure for international action collapses and we revert to the viciousness of power or block groups struggling to place themselves in positions of dominance over weaker states and people.

To see America become a participant in this reversion and abandon in any degree her leadership in the field of protection of human dignity, with its concomitant basic liberties, ~~xxx~~ makes me sick at heart. There must be a firm and uncompromising American position taken. That is why I am writing this.

Much of the work of the American League for a Free Palestine has been in a way that is highly critical of what we believe to be a negation of the clear injunctions of the Mandate given by the League of Nations to Great Britain and the usurpation by the British Government of powers over the Palestine area which she does not have. However, I am forced to the conclusion that our nation has also been lax in its duty and derelict in its responsibilities in this particular question.

With the purpose of a possible refreshing of your mind as to the historical events in connection with the question, it will be remembered that at the close of the first World War certain areas formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire were, by treaty of peace signed at Lausanne, transferred to the Allied and Associated Powers, signatories to that treaty. These areas -- Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq -- were, by subsequent action of the powers who came into control of them, transferred to the League ~~xxx~~ of Nations. This body,

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in turn, designated these states as "Class A Mandates" and held them ready for independence, subject to advice and guidance of some mandatory authority in setting up the machinery of their respective governments. It was ordered that each mandatory instrument should clearly define the powers to be exercised.

In the case of Palestine the decision was made that the policies and purposes of the Mandate should be that the immigration of Jews into the area should be facilitated, their settlement on the land encouraged, and an opportunity be given for them to set up a state in their historic homeland. Great Britain accepted the Mandate on these terms, with the provision added that no change should be made in the policies without the consent of the League of Nations Council. The United States, not being a signatory of the Treaty of Lausanne, and having failed to ratify the covenant of the League of Nations, entered into a bilateral treaty with Great Britain in 1924 in which the Mandate and its policies were set out word for word, and we endorsed these purposes and policies, underwrote them with the added provision that no change should be made in these policies without the prior consent of the United States. As you know, such change in the terms of a treaty can only be made by a document of equal dignity and authority.

Despite this treaty and despite the mandate provisions, Great Britain issued, in 1939, her so-called "White Paper on Palestine, by the terms of which she arbitrarily slammed the doors of Palestine in the faces of further Hebrew immigrants, and adopted drastic provisions to prevent their acquisition of further land. This new policy came into full force April 1, 1944. Prior to the issuance of this White Paper -- if my memory serves me -- Great Britain tried to obtain the consent of the League of Nations Council, but such proposed changes as she had in mind did not receive this consent. So far as I am advised or have been able to ascertain, she did not make any attempt to secure the approval of the United States to her proposed changes in policy, as she was bound by her treaty with us to do.

The change of policy which she has been trying to put into effect since April 1, 1944, has resulted in chaos and strife and actual warfare in Palestine. You will recall, of course, our various attempts to gain her consent to modification of the policies to admit certain numbers of immigrants and the delays and temporizing incidents thereto. It is clearly apparent to me that, while Great Britain is justly subject to severe censure for her assumption of powers over and above her legal rights and for her attempts to maintain Palestine as a colonial administrative unit of the British Empire, that there is severe censure also to be made against our nation because of our failure under our treaty obligations.

I believe steps are now being taken to gain the consent of the United States to certain partition policies in Palestine even more drastic and unjust than the Trans-Jordanian episode. It has seemed to me that it is of prime importance that the country and the administration be put on notice that the United States desires to continue its record of strict adherence to its national pledges and responsibilities. Whether or not there were secret conversations under which the United States became committed to approval of Britain's changes of policy, I do not know, but I seriously doubt it. Of course, there has been some long delay since Britain initiated her changed policy, but these were years when we were engaged in war and certainly an inopportune time to introduce elements of friction among the allies. But the problem has now reached a point where it seems to me essential that a resolution be introduced in Congress, either as a Senate resolution and possibly a companion House resolution, or as a concurrent resolution of both Houses -- something which will bring the matter to a definite head so far as

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public information is concerned. I have drafted a tentative form of such a resolution. The "Whereas'es" would set out briefly the historical picture as I have suggested in this letter, and then set out the resolution by the Legislative Branch that the Executive Department inform the Congress of the facts as to whether American consent was sought or given in any way to the changes of policy in Palestine, and if not, to request the Executive Department to immediately open conversations with the Government of Great Britain with the view to inquiring with reference to the actions she has taken unilaterally, and further inquiring as to why she has not sought American approval of the change of policies, as bound by strict treaty obligation to do.

In my judgment such a resolution would be not only of real value in aiding hundreds of thousands of distressed people, but would be an earnest of the fact that America adheres to the humanitarian principles to which she has subscribed and upholds the sanctity of her international responsibilities and her pledged word.

It also seems to me that it is essential for the Legislative Department to act. If the Congress does not act in a matter of treaty obligation such as this, they certainly are guilty of dereliction or at least negligence in their Constitutional responsibilities, and the onus and burden of criticism must be shared by them. If, however, such a resolution is introduced, urging action such as I have suggested, Congress will have taken the only action that is indicated for them to take at this time and has placed the matter squarely before the State Department.

I am writing a letter of similar import to this to Senators Styles Bridges, Alexander Wiley, Francis J. Myers, and Charles Tobey as well as Warren Magnuson. Needless to say that I shall be glad to cooperate personally in any way I can, and the organization with which I am connected is ready to give its assistance.

With my assurance of high personal regard and friendship, I am

Sincerely,

(Signed) Guy M. Gillette
President

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SUGGESTED FORM FOR EITHER SENATE RESOLUTION
OR CONCURRENT RESOLUTION IN RE. BREACH OF
TREATY COVENANT RELATIVE TO PALESTINE.

WHEREAS, on the 3rd day of December, 1924, the United States entered into a bilateral treaty with Great Britain, by the terms of which a certain Mandate, which had emanated from the League of Nations, and which designated Great Britain as Mandatory Power to supervise and advise the people of Palestine in setting up the machinery of independent government; and

WHEREAS, explicit provisions of the said Mandate enjoined the Mandatory authority to facilitate immigration of Hebrews into the Palestine area; to encourage their close settlement on the land and to enable them to establish a homeland for the Hebrew people within the Palestine area; and

WHEREAS, by the terms of the treaty aforesaid, the United States, as signatory to the bilateral agreement, endorsed and approved the provisions of the Mandate and became a party to the responsibility for carrying out its terms in letter and in spirit; and

WHEREAS, the aforesaid treaty made specific provision that no change should be made in the terms and policies of the Mandate without prior consultation with and approval of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Great Britain has, unilaterally, in various instances changed and altered the terms and policies of the Mandate without consultation with or consent of the United States, including, among others, the restrictions of the White Paper of 1939 and the partition recognition of the larger part of Palestine as a separate kingdom in 1946; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Executive Department be requested to report to the Congress, at as early date as possible, whether the consent of the United States had been requested to the changes in policy of the Mandate as required by the provisions of the bilateral treaty of 1924, and whether the United States had consented to such changes and given its approval thereto; and be it further

RESOLVED, that in the event such approval was not given, that the United States immediately enter into conversations with the representatives of Great Britain, expressing the deep concern of our Government over the unilateral alteration and repudiation of the provisions of the Mandate and the Convention of 1924 aforesaid; and that formal representation be made to the Government of Great Britain, urging that the Government of Great Britain immediately so alter its policies now being pursued with reference to Palestine in such a way as to strictly conform to the terms and policies of the Mandate and the Convention of 1924; and to further urge that, if the Government of Great Britain desires to retain her Mandatory Authority in Palestine and desires to alter the policies enjoined by the Mandate terms, that it enter immediately into negotiations with the Government of the United States for the amendment of the aforesaid Convention, so that the proposed treaty amendment may be submitted to the Senate of the United States for its advice and consent, pursuant to Constitutional requirements.