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Negev, 1948.

AMERICAN ZIONIST EMERGENCY COUNCIL

Constituent Organizations

Hadassah, Women's Zionist Organization of America
Mizrachi Organization of America
Poale Zion-Zeire Zion of America
Zionist Organization of America

342 MADISON AVENUE
NEW YORK 17, N. Y.
MURRAY HILL 2-1160

October 11, 1948

SPECIAL DELIVERY

Dr. Abba Hillel Silver
The Temple
Cleveland, Ohio

Dear Dr. Silver:

I am submitting the following idea for your consideration:

The "fait accompli" has been one of our chief political weapons, especially during the past half year. In our current efforts to save the Negev for Israel the method of confronting the world with established, ineradicable facts becomes almost mandatory. The existence of Jewish settlements in the Negev today unquestionably constitutes one of the strongest arguments of Israeli Government spokesmen in Paris. However, I believe this approach can and should be expanded, and that American Zionism can play an important role in that connection.

I suggest the speedy formation of an American investment corporation to be known as "The Negev Exploration and Development Corporation", whose purpose will be two-fold: 1. surveying industrial and agricultural development possibilities in the Negev; 2. establishing industries and commercial enterprises in the Negev. We should try to interest some of the leading American industrialists and public figures -- Jews and non-Jews -- to serve on the Board of this Corporation. I believe that men like Bernard Baruch, Herbert Bayard Swope, Sumner Welles, Eric Johnston, Alf Landon and others could be interested in serving either as Advisory members of the Board or as active participants in the Corporation's activities.

It goes without saying that this entire project would be carried out only with the approval and active participation of the proper departments of the Israeli Government. After the Board is formed -- and the initial capital for the Corporation's activities obtained -- an agreement should be drawn up between the Government of Israel and the Negev Exploration and Development Corporation, giving the Corporation the right to conduct its

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surveys and to establish its industrial enterprises in association with Israeli authorities. At this point the project should be announced to the world and the widest possible publicity given to it.

I don't think I need emphasize that this would have a great effect on the United States Government and on the United Nations. It would be a dramatic demonstration on the part of realistic American businessmen who are prepared to back up continued Israeli possession of the Negev with good American dollars.

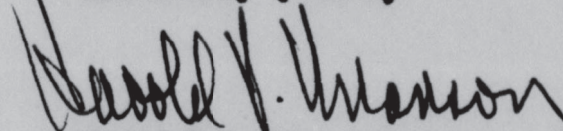
While I submit this idea primarily for its political and public relations value, it would lose its effectiveness unless it is carried out on sound economic lines. In other words, this can't be a bluff. In order to attract the proper persons for the Board and in order to induce Jewish businessmen to invest their capital, the project must make business sense. I see no reason why it could not be included in the over-all foreign investment program of the Israeli Government -- but as a distinct unit concerning itself exclusively with the Negev.

The question of timing is of great importance. I am sorry I didn't think of this some weeks ago, so that -- if the idea had been accepted -- the agreement between Israel and the Corporation could be announced at this stage. However, if you and the responsible Israeli authorities think that the proposal has merit, and action to carry it out is undertaken at once, I think the proper announcement could be made while the issue is still under discussion in Paris.

In order to convince myself that I am not "meshuga" I conveyed the above to Shapiro and Ben-Horin, both of whom liked the idea. I am anxious to hear your opinion.

With best wishes for a chitima tova to yourself, Mrs. Silver and the boys, and with warmest regards, I am

Cordially yours,



Harold P. Manson
Director of Information

HPM:SR

- MEMORANDUM -

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEGEV TO THE STATE OF ISRAEL

1. The territorial changes proposed in the Mediator's report result in an entirely inequitable apportionment of land between Israel and the neighbouring Arab State. They would cut off about two-thirds of Israel's territory, deprive her of the only land reserves available for development, cripple existing and potential prospects for the scientific utilisation of natural resources, and stunt Israel's progress and growth for generations to come. The beneficiary of these changes, which, according to the plan is to be an enlarged state of Transjordan, emerges from the proposed arrangement with an area more than 19 times that of the State of Israel.

2. It is for these reasons, which are elaborated upon in this memorandum that the government of Israel will oppose any plan separating the Negev or any part of it from the territory of the State of Israel.

Area

3. The area of the Palestine Mandate was first partitioned in 1922, when more than three-fourths of the country - some 34,740 square miles - were excluded from the main provisions of the Mandate to form what is now known as Transjordan. The area of Palestine remaining for Jewish settlement was thus reduced to about 10,000 square miles. In the second partition of Palestine, approved by the General Assembly last November 29th, 1947, about 5,678 square miles were assigned to the Jewish State. However, of this area, more than 3,800 square miles are in the Negev, the undeveloped area of Southern Palestine.

4. The Mediator's report now proposes not an adjustment of the situation but an entirely new partition plan under which Israel would be granted Western Galilee (most of which she now occupies and controls), but would lose not only the entire Negev, but also a part of South Judea. The net result would be to reduce Israel's territory to an area of about 2,180 square miles. On the other hand, Transjordan would under the plan gain all the Arab areas of Palestine, as well as the Negev, and her total area would approximate 42,500 square miles.

Population

5. The incongruity of this territorial division becomes even more glaring when one takes into account that Transjordan's existing population is about 350,000 (to which would now be added the 600,000 or 700,000 Arabs of Arab Palestine) whereas the Jewish population of Israel is already close to the 800,000 mark, and constantly expanding by the immigration of Jews in need of a homeland.

Land Use

6. The foregoing quantitative considerations are themselves startling and compelling arguments against any such drastic revision of the United Nations partition plan, but of even greater significance is an examination of the uses to which the lands in question may be put. According to a statement by Justice Emil Sandstroem of Sweden, the Chairman of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, the UNSCOP had considered that since the cost would be considerable,

it would not be possible for the Arabs to develop the Negev area, which had in consequence been assigned to the Jewish State. Transjordan is already the possessor of large tracts of barren land. Its annexation of the Negev would mean nothing more than the acquisition of another item in a collection of arid and uncultivated wastes. Humanity would gain nothing from the perpetuation of sterility. But for Israel, the Negev holds out the promise of agricultural, scientific, industrial and economic development, with important benefits to the Near East as a whole.

Agriculture and Industry

7. Israel has an urgent need for land upon which to settle the many hundreds of thousands of Jews who will immigrate in the next few decades. The soil of the Negev, neglected for many centuries, is itself arable. The factors for development of this area are water and the ingenuity to unite it with the soil. In 1943, the Jews successfully established three experimental settlements in the Negev. Another 15 were established toward the end of 1946. Today there are 27. Water is made available by pipeline, and by the capture and storage of winter rains in reservoirs. Thus, at Revivim, the southernmost Jewish settlement, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine in 1947 inspected a large dam and reservoir and witnessed the fruits of this agricultural venture. Moreover, for several years, engineers have been at work on plans for large-scale irrigation projects which will open large tracts of land for new settlement. The hydro-electric development involved in these irrigation plans will bring low-cost power to the Negev, and furnish an economic base for industrial enterprise. To put these areas of Jewish settlement under the political domination of an Arab ruler would be sowing the seeds of fresh conflict. To sever the Negev from Israel is to separate it from those whose needs guarantee its maximum use.

8. In previous discussion of the Palestine problem it has been argued on the Arab side that the pressure of Jewish immigration would force the Jewish State to become expansionist, and to threaten the existing territory of the Arab States. If the land reserve of the Negev were taken away from the State of Israel, and this large area ceases to be available for Jewish settlement, Arab fears would be intensified, and the prospects of pacific co-operation between Israel and its neighbours would be prejudiced. It must be emphasised that the inclusion of the Negev in the State of Israel is the population safety-valve for any partition plan, and therefore a major factor making for peace and operating against population pressure.

Natural Resources

9. Much of the Negev is unknown and unexplored. As a result of Jewish effort and expenditure, some signs of mineral wealth have been noted. Whether the Negev has oil or mineral resources in any significant quantity is undetermined; but if such is the fact, it would be inequitable to deny the State of Israel a potential so essential for its development. The State of Israel has no coal or iron, nor any important mineral deposit. Its manufactures and industry are therefore dependent in considerable measure on the import of raw materials. The small size of the Jewish State limits its agricultural development. Accordingly, all industrial resources must be exploited to their utmost. The proper scientific utilisation of the Negev's resources would help balance the Israeli economy. In this connection, it is relevant to point out that the Arab States are already rich

in oil, and should not be permitted a monopoly on all potential oil sources.

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10. A major industry in Palestine has been the extraction of potassium and sodium salts from the Dead Sea by the Palestine Potash Company, which is a largely Jewish enterprise. The Company had plants at both ends of the Dead Sea. Under the partition plan approved by the General Assembly last fall, the northern plant was to be left in the Arab State (it has since been destroyed thanks to the initiative of the Transjordan Arab Legion). But the General Assembly deliberately revised the boundary lines between the two states to ensure that the southern plant would be in the State of Israel, and that a stretch of west coast of the Dead Sea would be in Israeli territory, to be available for the expansion of the potash plant. But if the Negev were to be taken from Israel, then all access to the Dead Sea would be denied, and Israel would lose one of its major industries and one of its most important exports.

Aqaba

11. Severance of the Negev from Israel would also cut off Aqaba, once King Solomon's seaport on the Red Sea. The waters here teem with fish, and there are possibilities for large-scale commercial exploitation of a natural resource now neglected. The vital importance of Aqaba to Israel's future is recognized by all who foresee the expansion of commerce and industry in Israel, and the building of rail and highway communications across the Negev. Under Israeli control, Aqaba is to be developed as a port and will be Israel's outlet to South Africa and the Indian Ocean - Israel's window to the Orient.

Conclusion

12. These are but a few of the considerations which played a part in the decision of UNSCOP and later of the General Assembly to award the Negev to Israel. They are considerations which cannot be brushed aside. The Negev is juridically an integral part of Israel's territory and cannot, within the terms of the Charter, be cut off without Israel's consent. Nothing has happened to weaken the legal or moral validity of the General Assembly's decision in this regard. The Arab States resorted to armed force to resist it, but they failed. Not a single Negev settlement within the boundaries of the State of Israel fell into Arab hands, nor are the Arabs in control of any part of the Negev contained within Israel. It would be a grotesque paradox if the General Assembly would now obligingly turn the defeat of Arab aggression into victory, and grant to the Arab States the very fruits they failed to wrest in a war fought against no less than the authority and judgment of the General Assembly itself.