



The State Department vs. the Zionist Project at the Dawn of the Cold War

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As the files of the US State Department, Pentagon, and Central Intelligence Agency demonstrate, in the months and years of what I have called “Israel’s moment,” when the fate of the Zionist project hung in the balance, the opposition to the Zionist project by leaders of American national security institutions was intense and consequential.¹ Their opposition placed severe limits on what President Harry Truman was able and willing to do to offer tangible and much needed support to the Zionists, especially military support when it was needed.

The contours of the controversy between Zionists and their opponents, and between the State Department and the Truman White House, began to crystallize in the spring and summer of 1947. In March, Truman announced what became known as the Truman Doctrine of economic and military assistance to countries, Greece and Turkey first of all, to oppose communism. In June, Secretary of State George Marshall, in a speech at the commencement ceremonies at Harvard University, announced plans for loans and aid to the economies of Western Europe, which became known as the Marshall Plan. It was the economic aspect of the emerging American policy of containment of communism. However, that May the United Nations held a special session on “the question of Palestine.” There, the Soviet representative, Andrei Gromyko, surprised American and British officials by announcing that if the Jews and Arabs were unable to agree to living together in a binational state, the Soviet Union would support the establishment of an Arab as well as a Jewish state in the territory of former British Mandate Palestine.

Over the summer of 1947, public sympathy for the Zionist project grew in Europe and the United States. The *Exodus* affair drew attention to the plight of Jewish refugees seeking to get to Palestine. With memories of Nazi Germany, World War II, and the Holocaust still fresh, liberal and leftist opinion in Europe and the United States viewed

the establishment of a Jewish state as the logical outcome of the anti-Nazi passions of World War II. In the United States, members of Congress and left-leaning journalists in New York supported the energetic but unsuccessful efforts by the American Zionist Emergency Council to indict the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, for war crimes associated with his collaboration with Nazi Germany during World War II. The issue mattered because he and his associates were leaders of the Arab Higher Committee, which was speaking for the Palestine Arabs at the UN. To his American critics, the committee's rejection of a Jewish state in Palestine appeared as a continuation of a mixture of Nazi and Islamist antisemitism, not as one of justified anticolonialism.

When the British government decided to hand the Palestine issue over to the United Nations in January 1947, it assumed that there would be a firm majority against establishment of a Jewish state. The support of the Soviet Union, as well as the communist governments of Poland and Czechoslovakia, came as a surprise. In September 1947, Zionist aspirations received even broader support when a seven-member majority of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), composed of the representatives from Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, and Uruguay, supported the creation of separate Arab and Jewish states in what had been the British Mandate in Palestine. The internationalization of the Zionist-Arab conflict in Palestine in the United Nations was leading to a likely UN legitimization of Zionist hopes.² Officials of the British Foreign Office and the US State Department viewed this trend with alarm.

In September, the CIA, led by Rear Admiral Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter, expressed its concerns.³ Theodore Babbitt, the agency's assistant director for reports and estimates, in a memo titled "Probable Arab Reaction to the Partition of Palestine by the UN," argued that the reaction of the Arabs was "the most important factor [in] determining the future stability of the Near East."⁴ The Arabs would violently oppose partition, possibly adopt an economic boycott of the USA and UK, and reorient their foreign policy to the USSR. "A pro-Zionist development in Palestine would seriously endanger US strategic and commercial interests. . . . Communist activity would increase, and with it, Soviet influence. Western strategic and economic interests would 'be seriously endangered.'"⁵ Consequently, "a pro-Zionist US policy will make it all the more difficult to build the Arab states into a bastion against the USSR."⁶ Conversely, an American tilt to the Arabs would help build an anticommunist bulwark in the Middle East.

Similar arguments appeared in the State Department, in particular from William Eddy, whom Secretary of State Marshall had recently appointed to be his special assistant. Eddy was former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia, from 1944 to 1946, and just before joining the State Department, a consultant to the Arab-American Oil Corporation, ARAMCO. On September 13, 1947, he wrote a "Comment on the UNSCOP Report."⁷ Marshall's assistant wrote that US adoption of the majority UNSCOP report would damage US interests. The proposed Zionist project was "a theocratic sovereign state characteristic of the Dark Ages."⁸ Its creation would alienate the United States from

“the goodwill of the Arab and Moslem world, with repercussions that would reach to Indonesia and Pakistan.” The Arab League would “promptly ally itself with Russia for survival.”⁹ In an address to the UN General Assembly on September 17, Marshall only said that the United States gave “great weight” to those of the UNSCOP committee recommendations “which have been approved by a majority of that Committee.”¹⁰ American ambiguity now stood in contrast to Soviet clarity regarding the Zionist project.

On September 22, Loy Henderson, director of the Division of Near Eastern and African Affairs and a leading opponent of the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, sent a detailed memo to Marshall opposing the UNSCOP report recommendations. He wrote that “the views expressed in this memorandum with regard to the partitioning of Palestine and the setting up of a Jewish State are shared by practically every member of the Foreign Service and of the Department who has been engaged in work intimately connected with the Near and Middle East.”¹¹ Support for a partition of Palestine or the establishment of a Jewish state there “would be certain to undermine our relations with the Arab and to a lesser extent with the Moslem.” A Jewish state in Palestine could push the Arabs into the Soviet camp and strengthen the hands of the “extremists.”¹² He agreed with Eddy that the Zionist project rested on “the principle of a theocratic racial state” and was in conflict with American principles of dealing with citizens “regardless of race or religion.”¹³ It was an odd argument for an American official to make when legal segregation was intact in the American South. Henderson did not cite any Zionist documents that conflicted with the “American principles” of nondiscrimination. In accord with Deputy Secretary of State Robert Lovett’s instructions, the American delegation at the UN adopted a stance of public ambiguity and cool reserve about the possibility of partition.¹⁴

Especially in view of Eddy’s and Henderson’s association of Zionism with racism and their refusal to address the issue of racism and antisemitism in Arab societies, the statement by Jamal Husseini, the Arab Higher Committee’s representative at the UN, on September 29 to the UN’s Ad Hoc Committee on Palestine is of particular interest—and historical importance.¹⁵ Husseini said that the Arab “struggle against the Zionist invasion” had “nothing to do with anti-Semitism,” which was a strictly Western bigotry. The Zionist claims to Palestine had “no legal or moral basis.”¹⁶ However, he then articulated an implicitly racist argument. The Arab world was “a racial homogeneity.” Its people spoke “one language and have the same history, traditions, and aspirations.” The Arabs’ “unity in all those matters” was “a basis for mutual understanding and a solid foundation for peace.” It was in stark contrast to nations with “different nationalities and non-homogenous communities. . . . This condition created always an atmosphere of antagonism that culminated in a calamitous war.” It was “illogical” for the UN, “the peace-making machinery of the world,” to

associate itself or lend a helping hand to weaken or to break up an existing natural old homogeneity [such] as that of the Arab world by the introduction in its midst of an alien body as is now being contemplated by the sponsors of the Jewish state in Palestine. If

such a political monstrosity is carried out, no sane person could expect peace to prevail in that part of the world. Its existence, no matter how and by whom it is being supported and protected, is bound to become a running sore, a new Balkans in that part of the world.¹⁷

Conversely, “an Arab state in the whole of Palestine” was “the only” option that was “compatible with the principles of modern civilization.” The threat of big power intervention would “not deter us from drenching the soil of our beloved country with the last drop of our blood in the lawful defense of all and every inch of it.”¹⁸

Husseini’s statement to the UN Ad Hoc Committee on Palestine, now on the desks of Eddy, Henderson, Lovett, and other even higher-ranking officials in the State Department, was a ringing defense of racial homogeneity, that is, of racism, and an equally emphatic rejection of a diverse and multi-ethnic, multireligious Middle East. His was a reactionary form of nationalism, one that, like its European predecessors, was inseparable from racism. It was, to use more modern terms, an unvarnished attack on difference—in this case, the Jews as the intolerable other. Yet at no time during the crucial months of 1947–48 did the US State Department denounce the racism evident in Jamal Husseini. Nor did it draw public attention to the Nazi collaborationist past of key leaders of the Palestine Arabs. In the ocean of subsequent commentary on the establishment of the state of Israel, Jamal Husseini’s ringing defense of “racial homogeneity” has been long forgotten, never known, or ignored.

At a meeting in the last two weeks in October 1947 in Washington, American and British military and diplomatic officials gathered to discuss the implications of the gathering Cold War with the Soviet Union for security policy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The “Pentagon Talks,” as they were called, were a crucial event in the gathering Anglo-American political and diplomatic counteroffensive against the Zionist project. One of the organizers of and leading participants in the Pentagon Talks was George Kennan, by then well known as author of the “long telegram” of February 1946 on the sources of Soviet conduct. On January 24, 1947, three days after Truman appointed him secretary of state, George Marshall had appointed Kennan to be the first director of the Policy Planning Staff (PPS), a new unit within the State Department for review and planning of national security policy and strategy.¹⁹

On October 9, the Pentagon Talks planning group, which included Kennan and Henderson, wrote “any plan for Palestine which might give the Russians a foot in the door in that area would be dangerous and should be avoided.”²⁰ An impressive list of British and American diplomats and military leaders joined Kennan and Henderson, including Robert A. Lovett, deputy secretary of state, and Lord Inverchapel, the British ambassador to Washington.²¹ The assembled agreed that preservation of the British presence in the region was essential to deterring Soviet influence. On September 8, Marshall told US Ambassador Lewis Douglas in London to assure British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin

that the “fundamental cornerstone of our thinking is the maintenance of Britain’s position to the greatest possible extent” in the Middle East.²²

Yet, as the Zionists wanted to replace the British presence in Palestine with an independent Jewish state, they threatened Marshall’s “cornerstone.”²³ In view of the Soviet threat and the limits of British capabilities, the American participants concluded that it was necessary to expand American activity in the region.²⁴ Such an expanding role required that Britain retain its current “strong strategic, political and economic position in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean.”²⁵ The policy implication of pursuing “parallel” policies with Britain to counter Soviet efforts in the region was to support Britain’s opposition to the Zionist project in Palestine. In November, the National Security Council, and then President Truman, approved the recommendations expressed in the Pentagon Talks.²⁶ This fundamental strategic perspective outlined in October 1947 shaped the views of the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the CIA throughout the key period of events in the United States, Europe, and Palestine/Israel in 1947–48.

On November 25, as the UN approached the crucial vote on the Partition Plan and when the Soviet Union had publicly declared its support for it, Secretary of State Marshall instructed the US delegation to the UN that it should ensure that any recommendation about “the Palestine problem” be a “*United Nations*” one (emphasis in original) “in such a way that the final recommendation of the General Assembly cannot be regarded as an ‘American plan.’”²⁷ It was a tone at odds with the White House and now pro-Zionist public opinion.²⁸ On November 29, 1947, the United States voted in favor of the UN Partition Resolution. In so doing, it contributed to the two-thirds majority in the General Assembly in favor. Yet at the UN, the most emphatic support for a partition of Palestine, and thus for a Jewish state in part of it, came from the Soviet Union and the communist regimes of Eastern Europe.²⁹ Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet ambassador to the UN, said that the Partition Plan was of “profound historical significance because this decision will meet the legitimate demands of the Jewish people, hundreds of thousands of whom, as you know, are still without a country, without homes, having found temporary shelter only in special camps in some western countries.”³⁰

The day before the UN vote, the CIA issued a seventeen-page report, “The Consequences of the Partition of Palestine.”³¹ It concluded that “the US, by supporting partition, has already lost much of its prestige in the Near East.” It was “possible that the responsible governments will refuse to sign pipeline conventions, oil concessions, civil air agreements, and trade pacts.” American projects, which were “necessary to raise the standard of living,” would “be shelved indefinitely,” intensifying “poverty, unrest, and hopelessness upon which Communist propaganda thrives. . . . Soviet agents (some of whom have already been smuggled into Palestine as Jewish DP’s [displaced persons]) will scatter into the other Arab states.”³² If the UN recommended partition, it would be “morally bound” to enforce it “with the major powers acting as the instruments of enforcement” resulting in “dangerous potentialities” for “US-Arab and US-USSR relations [which] need

no emphasis." Arab nationalism and "religious fanaticism" in groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood would be intensified.³³

The CIA analysts described the Soviet Union's three primary aims in the Middle East as ending the British Mandate and causing the removal of British troops from the area; keeping the situation unsettled and thus finding pretexts to introduce troops into the region; and then gaining a "base in the heart of the Near East from which to disseminate propaganda, carry on subversive activities, and attempt to organize 'democratic movements' in the Arab states." The Soviet Union had "been actively but secretly assisting the Jews." In addition to aiding "Jewish underground agents in Europe, large ships filled with illegal immigrants" had "been leaving the Romanian port of Constanza."³⁴ The CIA report viewed Jewish migration to Palestine as an effective cover for communist infiltration and subversion in the Middle East. Drawing on previous CIA and British and American military intelligence reporting, it noted that there was "already in existence a well-organized system for transporting Jewish DP's from Eastern Europe southward, particularly through the Balkans, to Palestine. In the event of an Arab-Jewish conflict, this system would be employed to furnish manpower to the Jewish forces in Palestine."³⁵ The clear policy implication of the CIA's intelligence assessment and the Pentagon Talks and National Security Council recommendations that fell was to overturn the UN Partition Resolution as a typical example of foreign policy driven by sentimentalism in public opinion rather than by sober assessment of the demands of US national security.

By fall 1947, it was clear that American policy toward the Arab-Zionist conflict was proceeding on two contradictory tracks. Track one, determined by President Truman's decisions, led to American support for the UN Partition Resolution of November 29, 1947. Track two, determined by the Marshall-era State Department in cooperation with the Pentagon and the CIA, sought to undermine that resolution and strip it of the enforcement powers needed to implement it, in the hope of thereby preventing the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Very importantly, it included imposition of an arms embargo that fell disproportionately on the Jewish Agency, a nonstate actor faced with the hostility of the Arab states; efforts to prevent Jewish immigration from Europe to Palestine; and requests to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of the Treasury to stop American supporters of Israel from assisting clandestine Jewish immigration. At the United Nations, track two entailed a diplomatic effort to replace the Partition Resolution with proposals for "trusteeship" in Palestine that would preclude a Jewish state.

In a series of memoranda prepared early in 1948, George Kennan, as director of the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department, repeated the arguments made in the Pentagon Talks that the Zionist project was irreconcilable with the policy of containment of communism. Since writing the "long telegram" of February 22, 1946, Kennan had emerged as the intellectual architect of American global strategy in the emerging confrontation with the Soviet Union and communism. That, plus his association with Secretary of State Marshall, and his leadership of the PPS, meant that his views both mirrored and shaped a consensus that influenced the US national security establishment

as a whole.³⁶ Kennan and his staff did not invent that consensus; his accomplishment was to extend it beyond the anti-Zionists among the Arab specialists in the State Department, the CIA, and the military and connect it to the core strategic policy of the United States in Europe and around the globe in the first years of the Cold War.

On December 1, 1947, President Truman approved a National Security Council recommendation for a review by the PPS of “the entire United States position with regard to Palestine.”³⁷ Kennan’s staff requested input from Eddy.³⁸ On January 5, 1948, writing on ARAMCO letterhead, Eddy wrote that “overshadowing all other matters is the adverse effect on Aramco and Taplien [sic] of The Pro-Zionist Policy of the United States Government. . . . The prestige of the United States Government among Arabs has practically vanished.”³⁹ All Arabs “viewed American policy as ‘unfriendly’ to them.” The Soviet Union benefited from the pro-Zionist policy of the Truman administration.⁴⁰ “If the United States supported ‘a Zionist state’ and financed, armed, and furnished troops for the Zionists against the Arabs, then American individuals, companies, schools, universities, and property in the region and the Jews in Palestine, and elsewhere in the region would be attacked.”⁴¹

According to Eddy, American support for the Zionist project was also “jeopardizing the good will of 30,000,000 Arabs and 220,000,000 Muslims,” its cultural and educational leadership in the region, millions of dollars in investment, and “the strategic loss of access to air and naval bases throughout the entire Muslim world.” Of the four interested parties, the United States, the Arabs, the Zionists, and Russia, “only Russia stands to gain.” That was why Russia supported partition and “was glad to see the United States Government committed to the forced establishment of a racial state” into which it was “already pouring Communist immigrants.”⁴² In the ensuing weeks, Eddy’s analysis and some of his exact language reappeared in memoranda of the PPS under Kennan’s direction.

On January 20, 1948, George Kennan sent a PPS memorandum to Secretary of State Marshall regarding Palestine policy. It had been prepared “in close collaboration with” Loy Henderson and had “his general approval.”⁴³ Attached was a “Report by the Policy Planning Staff on Position of the United States with Respect to Palestine,” which assessed the geostrategic significance of Palestine.⁴⁴ The “present irreconcilable differences between Arabs and Jews in Palestine,” meant that the area could “become the source of serious unrest and instability which could be readily exploited by the USSR unless a workable solution can be developed.”⁴⁵ Intense Arab opposition meant that “less moderate” elements in Saudi Arabia would urge King Ibn Saud to sever links with the United States. Important US oil concessions and air base rights would be at stake “in the event that an actively hostile Government should come to power in Saudi Arabia.”⁴⁶ As the Arabs were determined to “resist partition with all means at their disposal,” it was likely that if the UN attempted to implement partition, with or without US support, moderates in the Arab states, among whom Kennan included Azzam Pasha of the Arab League, “will be swept out of power by irresponsible elements” and “displaced by extremists such as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem.”⁴⁷

Kennan repeated Eddy's grim predictions regarding the dire consequences of US support for the Zionists. They included enduring antagonism to the United States

in many sections of the Moslem world over a period of many years . . . suspension or cancellation of valuable U.S. air base rights and commercial concessions, cessation of U.S. oil pipeline construction, and drastic curtailment of U.S. trade with that area; loss of our present access to the air, military and naval facilities enjoyed by the British in the area, with attendant repercussions on our overall strategic position in the Middle East and Mediterranean; closing or boycotting of U.S. educational, religious and philanthropic institutions in the Near East, such as the American University at Beirut established in 1866 and the American University at Cairo

and possible "deaths and injuries" to American citizens in the area.⁴⁸ Support for Partition and establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine created "a serious threat to the success of the Marshall Plan." Oil from the Middle East was essential, but it would be "impossible" for US oil companies to proceed with such "if the present situation continues."⁴⁹

Kennan concluded that US support for the Partition Plan would damage vital American national security interests in the Middle East and in the core area of the Cold War, Europe. To make matters worse, the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine was also a boon to the Soviet Union's prospects in the Middle East.

The USSR stands to gain by the Partition Plan if it should be implemented by force because of the opportunity thus afforded to the Russians to assist in "maintaining order" in Palestine. If Soviet forces should be introduced into Palestine for the purpose of implementing partition, Communist agents would have an excellent base from which to extend their subversive activities, to disseminate propaganda, and to attempt to replace the present Arab governments by "democratic peoples' governments."⁵⁰

Arab hostility and Soviet political and military penetration could unravel the whole structure of peace and security in the Near East and Mediterranean.⁵¹ Hence, for these reasons as well, partition and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine would be "certainly injurious to U.S. interest."⁵² Kennan concluded that the task now was to limit the damage that had already been caused by US support for the Partition Plan. US strategic interests in the Mediterranean and Near East had "been seriously prejudiced. Our vital interests in those areas will continue to be adversely affected to the extent that we continue to support partition."⁵³

Moreover, implementation of the Partition Plan would intensify antisemitism both abroad and in the United States. It would provide a basis

for anti-Jewish agitation in other parts of the world. The process of assimilation or integration of the individual Jew in the life of the country of which he is a citizen, which has been

strongly advocated by World Jewry in the past, would be made more difficult and he would be singled out for attack as an alien political factor. In the U.S., the position of Jews would be gravely undermined as it becomes evident to the public that in supporting a Jewish state in Palestine we were in fact supporting the extreme objectives of political Zionism, to the detriment of overall U.S. security interests.⁵⁴

Kennan's choice of words suggested that the Zionist project constituted a danger to Jews around the world because it appeared to justify "anti-Jewish," not only anti-Zionist, agitation. It would reverse assimilation of "the individual Jew," who "would be viewed as an alien political factor," thereby reversing the goals of an entity called "World Jewry." Kennan's reference to "the individual Jew," to a political subject called "World Jewry," and suggestions that "the individual Jew . . . would be viewed as an alien factor" repeated the clichés that in the past had accompanied antisemitic skepticism about the Jews' loyalty to their native lands. It read less as an expression of empathy than as a suggestion that such accusations might have some basis, and more as a patrician's fear of popular hatreds than as a determination to fight against them.

In effect, the PPS memo of January 19, 1948, concluded that appeasement of Arab rejectionists rather than confrontation with antisemitism served American foreign policy. In the early months of the implementation of the policy of containment of communism, its intellectual architect argued that the Zionist project aided, rather than deterred, the expansion of Soviet and communist influence in the Middle East. Kennan concluded that the United States "should take no further initiative in implementing or aiding partition." It should not send troops and should oppose recruitment of volunteers. It should maintain the embargo on arms to Palestine and neighboring countries and attempt to "divest ourselves of the imputation of international leadership in the search for a solution to this problem." Then, "when and if the march of events has conclusively demonstrated" that the UN Partition Plan could not be implemented "without the use of outside armed force," the United States should take the position that "it is impracticable and undesirable for the international community to attempt to enforce any form of partition in the absence of agreement between the parties, and that the matter should go back to the UN General Assembly." Once there, the US position would be to encourage a peaceful settlement between "Palestine Arabs and Palestine Jews" and investigate the possibility of "a federal state or trusteeship, which would not require outside armed force for implementation."⁵⁵ The PPS recommendations had the effect of giving Arab threats of violence a veto over the UN Partition Plan.

An alternative Palestine policy would have been to wage a public campaign against the racism and antisemitism that was fueling Arab rejection of the UN Partition Resolution. Such a campaign could have drawn on the US government's diplomatic, military, and intelligence files on the Grand Mufti's support for the Nazis before 1939 and his active collaboration during the war, all of which was documented in the State Department's own extensive verbatim transcripts of Arabic-language radio broadcasts to the Middle East in World War II.⁵⁶ It could have also shone a spotlight on the racist arguments made by Jamal Husseini in September at the United Nations. Instead, Kennan focused

on Zionism as the cause of Arab anger. Such an alternative foreign policy was a live option in American politics and public life, but not in the halls of power. Instead, there was an unfortunate absence of institutional memory of what the State Department and intelligence agencies had learned about the Middle East during World War II and the Holocaust.

On November 30, 1947, the Arab Higher Committee responded to the Partition resolution by beginning attacks on Jews in Palestine. By March, a full-scale civil war was raging. On March 19, the State Department's rejection of the UN partition plan burst into public view when US ambassador to the UN, Warren Austin, informed the Security Council that the United States had changed its policy and now opposed enforcement of the Partition Resolution.⁵⁷ The United States now believed that "a temporary trusteeship for Palestine should be established under the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations to maintain peace." An immediate session of the General Assembly was needed to consider the proposal. The Security Council "should instruct the Palestine Commission [at work in Palestine] to suspend its efforts to implement the proposal partition plan."⁵⁸

Austin's speech landed like a bombshell at the White House as much as at the UN. The *New York Times* reported that his announcement was received with "shock" and "gloom" at the UN. "Zionist leaders seemed stunned; some seemed near tears" amid fears that Zionist forces "were not strong enough to hold up under the combined weight of Arab attacks and the possibility that the United States might drop partition formally."⁵⁹ In Jerusalem, David Ben-Gurion said the United States had surrendered "to the threats of Arab bands armed by the British Foreign Office and brought to Palestine with its support." In Jerusalem, the Arab Higher Committee welcomed the decision as a "step in the direction of justice."⁶⁰

The leftist daily *PM* called the day "Black Friday." The *New York Post* deemed the speech a "dishonorable and hypocritical betrayal of Palestine." The *New York Times* called it "a plain and unmistakable surrender to the threat of force." "Obviously and admittedly Arab intransigence has forced the American government to change its policy and to bow to Arab threats, and to propose that the whole United Nations retreat with us in the face of Arab scorn and fury."⁶¹ The German novelist Thomas Mann, writing in the pages of *Aufbau*, a German language newspaper read by anti-Nazi émigrés, wrote that "this surrender to brazen Arab threats is the most humiliating and shocking political event since the democracies betrayed Czechoslovakia in 1938."⁶² On March 24, facing an absence of support for calling a second Special Session of the General Assembly, the United States allowed the Security Council to adjourn without considering Austin's proposal to do so.⁶³

On March 6 and 8, 1948, President Truman received strategic arguments from a high-ranking official in his own administration that implementation of the Partition Plan and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine would enhance American interests. Clark Clifford, then a special assistant to the president, criticized what he called

"appeasement toward the Arabs."⁶⁴ The United States "should immediately lift its unilateral embargo on arms to the Middle East." Doing so would "give the Jewish militia and Haganah, which are striving to implement the UN decision, equal opportunity with the Arabs to arm for self-defense."⁶⁵ The United States should assist in the formation of an international security force recruited from volunteers to assist the UN Palestine Commission, but those forces should not include troops from the United States, Russia, or Great Britain.⁶⁶ In a second memo on March 8, Clifford reminded Truman that support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine had been "settled policy of the United States" since President Woodrow Wilson approved the Balfour Declaration in 1917.⁶⁷ It was a consensus in the Democratic and Republican parties, and in majorities of both Houses of Congress. Abandoning Partition now would be a departure "from an established American policy."⁶⁸

Clifford argued that partition was the "only course of action with respect to Palestine that will strengthen our position vis-a-vis Russia."⁶⁹ Clear US support for partition would deter the Arab states from launching a war. Clifford also addressed concerns about access to Arab oil. Further, "the Arab states must have oil or go broke." The United States was a major customer. The Arabs' "social and economic order would be irreparably harmed by adopting a Soviet orientation, and it would be suicide for their ruling classes to come within the Soviet sphere of influence."⁷⁰ The prediction that partition would never work came "from those who never wanted partition to succeed and who have been determined to sabotage it." The United States had imposed an arms embargo on Palestine "while Britain fulfills her 'contractual obligations' to supply arms to the Arabs." The US appeared "in the ridiculous role of trembling before threats of a few nomadic desert tribes."⁷¹ Contrary to the reports that Truman was receiving from the CIA and the British government, "Jewish Palestine" was "strongly oriented to the United States, and away from Russia" and would "remain so unless a military vacuum in Palestine caused by the collapse of UN authority brings Russian unilateral intervention into Palestine." Reversal of the partition decision taken by the UN "at the insistence of the United States" would cause a "serious loss of American prestige and moral leadership all over the world."⁷²

Clifford concluded with the following riposte to the advice coming from the State Department, CIA, and the Pentagon. "American self-interest, American military security, American interests in Middle East oil, and American prestige in international affairs all demand effective implementation of the UN Palestine decision. The most effective way to prevent Russian penetration into the Middle East and to protect vital American oil interests there is for the United States to take the immediate initiative in the Security Council to implement the General Assembly's Palestine resolution."⁷³ Clifford gave Truman the argument that support for the partition and a Jewish state in Palestine was not only or even primarily a matter of empathy for Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Turning the State Department's assertions on their heads, he argued that a Jewish state in Palestine would become an important element supporting Truman's own policy of containment of communism.

Clifford's arguments found no echo in the top ranks of the State Department, the Pentagon, or the CIA. The Kennan PPS memos of January and February 1948 articulated a consensus that persisted in the emerging Cold War national security establishment for the duration of the Arab-Zionist war of 1947-49, and for many years thereafter. According to that consensus, the United States had to choose between an alliance with Britain, access to oil, and containing communism or support for the Zionists and then Israel at the expense of vital US security interests. Kennan's memos of January and February 1948 connected the views of the Arab area specialists to global American diplomatic strategy at the top decision-making levels within the State Department. Kennan, and then Secretary of State Marshall, turned what had been the provincial preoccupation of the Department's Arabists into a State Department consensus linked to the emerging global strategy of the containment of communism in the first years of the Cold War.

Truman, embarrassed and angered by the State Department's reversal of policy, brought Palestine policy into the White House. However, before and in the six crucial months after the Arab state invasion of Palestine on May 15, 1948, there were limits on what the president was willing to do. Though he immediately recognized the state of Israel when it was declared on May 14, he did not lift the American embargo on arms to Israel before or after the invasion, when the outcome of the war hung in the balance. In the course of complex negotiations over UN peace arrangements that spring and summer, the United States adopted positions, especially the "Bernadotte Plans," that restrained or sought to push back Israeli battlefield gains, and it would have deprived the new Jewish state of the Negev desert, which it had been allotted in the Partition Resolution. The policies articulated by the State Department in fall 1947 and winter 1948 that led to the arms embargo and efforts to restrict Jewish migration persisted over the course of the 1948 war. The arms that the Zionists needed came instead from communist Czechoslovakia.⁷⁴

The opposition of the American national security establishment to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 should be understood as an important chapter in the shift of mentalities from the predominance of anti-Nazism to that of anticommunism in the early days of the Cold War. In addition to the Zionist project, there was another legacy of wartime anti-Nazism that aroused the ire of American critics eager to shift focus away from the crimes of the Nazi regime, namely the Nuremberg war crimes trials. In a PPS analysis of February 24, 1948, George Kennan expressed opposition to US occupation policy in Germany, especially the programs of denazification and the Nuremberg trials. Kennan was skeptical about Germany and the Germans. They were in "a state of mind which can only be described as sullen, bitter, unregenerate, and pathologically attuned to the old chimera of German unity."⁷⁵ One might think that in light of this bleak view of the Germans, Kennan would look favorably upon the judicial reckoning with the crimes of the Nazi regime that was taking place in Nuremberg. To the contrary, he wrote that the United States should terminate "our establishment in Germany" (the occupation), for "the presence of a victor nation in a devastated conquered area is never helpful." Second, "we must terminate as rapidly as possible those forms of activity (denazification, re-education, and above all the Nuremberg Trials) which tend to set [us] up as mentors and judges over internal problems."⁷⁶

In opposing continuation of the Nuremberg war crimes trials, Kennan offered views that overlapped with those of the German nationalists he disdained—people whose every impulse was to avoid an Allied reckoning with the crimes of the Nazi regime.⁷⁷ It is difficult to understand how Kennan foresaw a better Germany emerging if the process of judicial reckoning was prematurely ended. His plea to end the Nuremberg trials in 1948 implicitly associated the anticommunism of containment with an end to judicial reckoning for the crimes of Nazism. Though Kennan did not make the connection explicit, his views suggested that the mentalities of the emerging Cold War in the West were at odds with a policy of judicial reckoning on Nazi crimes of the past in Germany as well as with the Zionists' hopes for a Jewish state in Palestine.

CONCLUSION

In May 1949, in a conversation with James McDonald, the US ambassador to Israel, David Ben-Gurion, then Israel's first prime minister, was "unable to recall any strong action" to enforce the Partition resolution, or "prevent aggression" by the Arab states in May 1948. "Instead [the arms] embargo encouraged aggressors against Israel whose very existence was in danger. Had [the Jews] waited on US or UN they would have been exterminated."⁷⁸ In the following two decades, the United States kept its distance from the new Jewish state. After Stalin launched the anticommunist purges in late 1948 and turned *Zionism* into a term of abuse in the communist world, Israel's most important ally, and the source of its most important weapons, was France, where the legacy of the French Resistance against the Nazis led Gaullists, liberals, and noncommunist leftists to support for Israel.

The realities of international politics surrounding the establishment of the state of Israel remain forgotten or never known. The American alliance and associated weapons deliveries arrived only after Israel had won the Six Day War of 1967, in part with aerial strikes from French Mirage jets. The Jewish state never became an instrument of Soviet policy in the Middle East, and it eventually became a very different cornerstone than one imagined by George Marshall in 1947, that is, one for, not against, American interests in the region. During Israel's moment, the Zionist project did not fit easily into the categories of policy makers in Washington and Moscow, and perhaps also not into the categories with which that history is discussed—or ignored—in contemporary politics and scholarship.

NOTES

1. This essay draws on Jeffrey Herf, *Israel's Moment: International Support for and Opposition to Establishing the Jewish State, 1945-1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
2. On the growing momentum in the United States and at the United Nations in favor of the Zionist project, see Herf, *Israel's Moment*, chaps. 2, 3, and 5.
3. For further details, see Herf, *Israel's Moment*, chap. 8.
4. Theodore Babbitt to Charles Bohlen, Washington (September 11, 1947), Central Intelligence Group, NACP RG 59 CDF 501.BB Palestine/9-1147, Box 2115.

5. Babbitt, 3-4.
6. Babbitt, 5.
7. W. A. Eddy, "Comment on the UNSCOP Report," Washington (September 13, 1947), NACP RG 59 CDF 501.BB Palestine/9-1347, Box 2115.
8. Eddy, 1-2.
9. Eddy, 2.
10. Robert Lovett to Certain American Diplomatic and Consular Officials, Washington (September 17, 1947), NACP RG 59 CDF 501.BB Palestine/9-1747, Box 2115. The memo went to US embassies in Baghdad, Beirut, and Cairo; to US legations in Jeddah and Damascus; and to the American consul general in Jerusalem.
11. Loy Henderson to Secretary of State George Marshall, Washington (September 22, 1947), NACP RG 59 CDF 501.BB Palestine/9-447, Box 2115.
12. Henderson.
13. Henderson, 5.
14. Lovett to US Delegation, New York, Washington (September 13, 1947), NACP RG 59 CDF 501.BB Palestine/9-1747, Box 2115.
15. Jamal Hussein statement to the UN Ad Hoc Committee on Palestine cited in Warren Austin to Secretary of State, New York (September 30, 1947), NACP RG 59 CDF 501.BB Palestine/9-2947, Box 2115. The statement was sent as well to Lovett and twenty other officers in the State Department. Cited in Herf, *Israel's Moment*, 237-38.
16. Hussein, 3.
17. Hussein, 23-24.
18. Hussein, 25-26. On the aftermath of Nazism, see most recently Matthias Kuentzel, *Nazis, Islamic Antisemitism and the Middle East: The 1948 Arab War Against Israel and the Aftershocks of World War II* (London: Routledge, 2024).
19. On Kennan's appointment, see John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 252-53.
20. "Memorandum of Conversation: Discussion Prior to Talks with the British on the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East" (October 9, 1947), NACP RG 59 PPS Staff/Council, Area Files 1947-1962), Box 7. For a summary of American-British preparations for joint talks that came to be known as the "Pentagon Talks," see "Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State," Washington (n.d.), NEA Files: Lot 55-D36, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947 The Near East and Africa*, vol. 5, part 2 [hereafter *FRUS*, 1947, vol. 5].
21. "General Statement by the American Group, Top Secret," Washington (n.d.), NEA Files: Lot 55-D36, *FRUS*, 1947, vol. 5, pp. 582-83.
22. Secretary of State George Marshall to American Ambassador [Lewis] Douglas, "Material for Use in Talks with British Concerning Eastern Mediterranean, and Near and Middle East, Annex 11 (September 8, 1947). For the Ambassador from the Secretary," NACP RG 59 PPS Staff/Council, Area Files 1947-1962), Box 7.
23. "Part 2: The British and American Positions, Material for Use in Talks with British Concerning Eastern Mediterranean, and Near and Middle East, Annex 11 (September 8, 1947). For the Ambassador from the Secretary," NACP RG 59 PPS Staff/Council, Area Files 1947-1962), Box 7, 6. Also in *FRUS*, 1947, vol. 5, 513-14.
24. "Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, Top Secret, The American Paper," (Washington) (n.d.), *FRUS*, 1947, vol. 5, 575-76.
25. "Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, Top Secret" 576.
26. Secretary of State George Marshall to Admiral Sidney Souers (November 18, 1947), "Enclosure A: Documents Resulting from Conversations with the British in Regard to the

Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East," (November 18, 1947), NACP RG 59 PPS Staff/Council, Area Files 1947-1962), Box 7.

27. "Memorandum by the Deputy Director of the Office of Special Political Affairs (Thompson) to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett)," Washington (November 25, 1947): <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1947v05/d889>.

28. On the Partition Resolution debate and vote, see Herf, *Israel's Moment*, chap. 8; Allis Radosh and Ronald Radosh, *A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

29. See, for example, Oskar Lange, New York (November 26, 1947), 125th Plenary Meeting, UNGA, 1332: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/734600?ln=en>.

30. Andrei Gromyko, New York (November 26, 1947), 125th Plenary Meeting, UNGA, 1359: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/734600?ln=en>.

31. "The Consequences of the Partition of Palestine," Washington (November 28, 1947), CIA CREST system (Release date: May 20, 2013): <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-01617A003000180001-8.pdf>.

32. "Consequences of the Partition," 1-2.

33. "Consequences of the Partition," 4-5.

34. "Consequences of the Partition," 4-5.

35. "Consequences of the Partition," 15-16.

36. On Kennan and the Policy Planning Staff memos of January and February 1948, see Herf, *Israel's Moment*, chap. 9.

37. Sidney W. Souers, Executive Secretary, National Security Council, "Memorandum for Mr. Kennan: The Problem of Palestine" (December 1, 1947), NACP RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Policy Planning Staff/Council, Area Files, 1947-1962, From 1947-53 Europe, East To: 1947-53 Near and Middle East, Box 6 (hereafter RG 59 PPS Staff/Council, Area Files 1947-1962).

38. William A. Eddy to George Kennan, San Francisco (January 5, 1948), RG 59 PPS Staff/Council, Area Files 1947-1962, Box 6. On Eddy see Wikipedia, "William A. Eddy," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_A._Eddy.

39. "Excerpt from Report of W. A. Eddy, December 31, 1947," in Eddy to Kennan (January 5, 1948).

40. "Excerpt from Report of W. A. Eddy," 1 (emphasis in original).

41. "Excerpt from Report of W. A. Eddy," 3-4.

42. "Excerpt from Report of W. A. Eddy," 4.

43. George F. Kennan, "Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Kennan) to the Secretary of State," Washington (January 20, 1948), in *Foreign Relations of the United States The Near East, South Asia, and Africa* [hereafter *FRUS*, 1948, vol. 5, part 2], <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v05p2/d10>. Also see Kennan's diary entry on the subject in George F. Kennan, *The Kennan Diaries*, ed. Frank Costigliola (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).

44. George F. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff on Position of the United States with Respect to Palestine," Washington (January 19, 1948), *FRUS*, 1948, vol. 5, part 2: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v05p2/d10>. Though the report was the product of the Policy Planning Staff, I list Kennan as the author as he was its primary author and approved the final text.

45. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff," 1.

46. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff," 4.

47. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff," 4.

48. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff," 4.

49. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff," 4.
50. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff," 4.
51. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff," 5.
52. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff," 5.
53. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff," 5.
54. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff," 5.
55. Kennan, "Report by the Policy Planning Staff," 6. Kennan repeated and elaborated on these views in Policy Planning Staff, "The Problem of Palestine," Washington (February 11, 1948), NACP RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Policy Planning Staff/Council, Area Files, 1947-1962, From 1947-53 Europe, East To: 1947-53 Near and Middle East, Box 6, Entry A1-558CB; also in *FRUS*, 1948, vol. 5, part 2, "Annex: Memorandum of the Policy Planning Staff" (February 11, 1948): <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v05p2/d37>.
56. See the examination of World War II files from the State Department reports from the US embassy in Cairo, and from the OSS and US military intelligence in Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
57. "Statement Made by the United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) Before the Security Council on March 19, 1948," *FRUS*, 1948, vol. 5, part 2: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v05p2/d105>; also see "U.S. Abandons Palestine Partition: Asks a Special Assembly Session, U.N. Trusteeship Till Final Solution," *New York Times*, March 20, 1948, 1; and "Declaration by Austin on Palestine Situation," *New York Times*, March 20, 1948, 2.
58. "Statement Made by the United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin)."
59. "Zionists Here Pledge Fight: Arabs Hold Partition Dead, Bewilderment Follows Austin's Palestine Bombshell - US Said to Have Notified Mid-East Spokesmen in Advance," *New York Times*, March 20, 1948.
60. "Ben-Gurion Spurns a UN Trusteeship: Seeks Arab Treaty," *New York Times*, March 21, 1948.
61. "The Switch on Palestine," editorial, *New York Times*, March 20, 1948.
62. Thomas Mann, "Gespenster von 1938," *Aufbau*, March 20, 1938.
63. Thomas J. Hamilton, "Opposition to Our Trustee Plan for Holy Land Will Be Studied," *New York Times*, March 25, 1948.
64. "Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel (Clifford)," Washington (March 6, 1948), *FRUS*, 1948, vol. 5, part 2: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v05p2/d78>.
65. "Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel."
66. "Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel."
67. "Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman," Washington (March 8, 1948) *FRUS*, 1948, vol. 5, part 2: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v05p2/d79>.
68. "Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman."
69. "Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman."
70. "Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman; Proposed United States Policy."
71. "Proposed United States Policy."
72. "Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman, Summary of Proposals for American Policy in Palestine."
73. "Proposed United States Policy."
74. On the details of these complex and consequential developments, see Herf, *Israel's Moment*, chaps. 10 to 14.

75. Policy Planning Staff, "Review of Current Trends U.S. Foreign Policy," Washington (February 24, 1948), NACP RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Policy Planning Staff/Council, Area Files, 1947-1949, From Index/PPS-1 To: PPS-33, Box 1.

76. Policy Planning Staff, "Review of Current Trends U.S. Foreign Policy," pp. 9-10.

77. On the *Schlussstrichmentalität*, the urge to "draw a line under the past," in West Germany, see Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

78. James McDonald to Secretary of State, Tel Aviv (May 29, 1949), No. NIACT 406, NACP RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, 1945-1949, 501.BB, Palestine, Box 2124. Also see "Israel's Admission to the UN, and Sharrett and Ben-Gurion's Retrospectives," chap. 15, Herf, *Israel's Moment*.

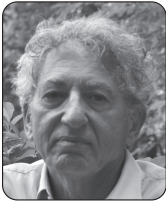
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