8. Holding the Keys

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8. Holding the Keys

The problem is too mighty grown
For our democracies alone.
We do not solely hold the keys
To open door to refugees.
In war we must decline to give
Admission to the fugitive.¹

By the spring of 1943 the war had taken a decided turn in favor of the Allies. In the Far East supplies were rolling regularly over the Hump to Chiang Kai-shek’s headquarters in Kunming. Orde Wingate’s Chindits and Frank Merrill’s Marauders were causing havoc behind Japanese lines in Burma and Indo-China. General Douglas MacArthur was planning the first Allied assault upon territory which had belonged to Japan before the war in the Pacific began—Rabaul and the Bismarck Archipelago. The Russians had repulsed the Germans from Kharkov, and Stalingrad stood as a scarred headstone to the 1,000,000 men lost to Nazi legions on the Eastern Front that year. On May 12, the Mareth line broken, the Afrika Korps in disarray, Americans pouring across North Africa from the west and the British ripping into Tunis and Bizerte from the east, Erwin Rommel ordered the capitulation of 300,000 troops rather than emulate the suicidal fight of von Paulus at Stalingrad, as Hitler ordered. By summer the Allies were poised to strike at Sicily, the first step preparatory to the liberation of Europe.

In the midst of rising optimism and oft-sounded phrases about the necessity for unity, some Americans were startled to
open the pages of the *New York Times* on May 4, 1943 and see a six-column headline in two-inch block letters which read, “To 5,000,000 Jews in the Nazi Death Trap, Bermuda was a Cruel Mockery.” The article, actually another advertisement purchased by the National Committee for a Jewish Army, accused Great Britain and the United States of giving Hitler a free hand with his extermination plans. It went on:

Wretched, doomed victims of Hitler’s tyranny! Poor men and women of good faith the world over! You have cherished an illusion. Your hopes have been in vain. Bermuda was not the dawn of a new era, of an era of humanity and compassion, of translating pity into deed. Bermuda was a mockery and a cruel jest.²

Two days later Scott Lucas, fresh from his labors at the Bermuda conference, rose to harangue his colleagues in the U.S. Senate about the inflammatory advertisement. He denounced its presumption in judging the conference before a complete report could be issued and went on to charge that the advertisement had been purchased without the knowledge of the illustrious personages, including thirty-six senators, whose names were appended to the text. Most of all, Lucas was mortified by innuendoes that he, a lifelong friend of Jews, was callously indifferent to their plight.

As far as publicity was concerned, the final communiqué from Bermuda stated that nothing would be divulged to the press which had not previously been cleared through diplomatic channels. The cables passed back and forth among Long, Hull, and Dodds on the last two days of the conference indicate an American sensitivity to “heavy pressures” and “public relations” at home, but a willingness to go along with the British demand for secrecy.³Apparently, the British were concerned that the Americans would tell everything, as Hull had done with his memo of February 25, and thereby expose the dearth of achievements at Bermuda. Dodds shared this feeling and advocated keeping the results confidential for as long as possible. Thus, while Lucas was assuring his comrades in the Senate that additional clarification of the final communiqué would be forthcoming “shortly,” the public was not fully enlightened as to the
nature of the discussions until 1963, with the opening of the State Department records on the conference.

Lucas’s second point, concerning the illegitimate exploitation of names of notables, led to some interesting soul-searching on the part of his colleagues. Lucas claimed to have polled all the senators involved and ascertained that none had prior knowledge of the advertisement’s contents. To emphasize the point he read a letter from Senator Edwin Johnson, chairman of the National Committee for a Jewish Army, to Peter Bergson, the group’s publicity director. Johnson rather paternally admonished Bergson for impugning “an esteemed colleague” and urged greater care in framing future releases. After he read this, Lucas was asked to yield by a battery of senators, including E. H. Moore of Oklahoma, Albert Chandler of Kentucky, Harry Truman of Missouri, Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin, James Davis of Pennsylvania, and Burnett Maybank of South Carolina, all of whom wished to disassociate themselves from the advertisement and to express confidence in Lucas.¹ The integrity of the senatorial club had to be preserved.

Just three weeks before this same group of senators, along with Mississippi’s Theodore Bilbo and Ohio’s Robert Taft, had made no outcry when the National Committee for a Jewish Army splashed an eight-column headline which read “What is the Shocking Truth About Saving the Lives of the European Jews and What Are the Untruths?” across the pages of the Times. No one objected then, even though the senators again were unaware of what they had endorsed, because the intemperate language of that first advertisement had been directed solely against the British government, which was charged with deliberate inaction and wanton ineptitude where Jewish lives were concerned.²

As for Lucas’s alleged philo-Semitism, his declaration on the Senate floor might be construed as somewhat misleading. In questionable taste, the man who had nagged Backer with hypothetical questions about the prospect of Hitler’s dumping Jews on the West, who had fretted for the “aching hearts” of American mothers whose boys were dying on the battlelines, now affirmed:
NO HAVEN FOR THE OPPRESSED

I yield to no man, regardless of his race, creed, or color, in my humane sympathy for those people who are now locked on the inside of Europe’s conquered lands. I believe that I understand the heartbeats of the underdog. I believe that I understand what it means to make one’s own way in this life. I believe that I understand something about suffering in the early days of life. Some of my best friends I have in this country, Mr. President, are members of the Jewish faith.\textsuperscript{6}

In commenting on this affair, which apparently was resolved with Bergson’s public apology to Lucas on May 8, the Independent Jewish Press Service decried the fact that the Jewish organization’s bungling of the episode had permitted Lucas and the government to assume the roles of the wronged innocents and thus to gain the offensive in stifling criticism of the Bermuda conference. Perhaps, the IJPS noted sarcastically, this incident would serve as a warning to Jewish organizations which actively solicited senatorial signatures for semi-weekly advertisements without first briefing the senators as to the nature of the press release. The wire service looked to the upcoming American Jewish Conference to rectify the situation and coordinate the efforts of Jewish organizations in the United States and added, “Perhaps one of the first achievements of the American Jewish Conference will be to force suspension of letters to Senators asking them to approve the Skidolsky Unterstitzung Society in its latest card party and bazaar of the Organized Association for Upholding Jewish Honor.”\textsuperscript{7}

Despite its rather facile handling of this incident, the U.S. government, like the British, remained under heavy attack from Jewish and non-Jewish sources in the next several weeks. The Jewish National Conference, World Jewish Congress, Palestinian Zionists, American Polish-Jewish Federation, American Synagogue Council, and Sons of Zion all roundly scored what they considered to be the failures of Bermuda.\textsuperscript{8} Governors of seven states set aside May 2 as a “day of compassion” for the Jews of Europe, and protest demonstrations were staged in cities from Boston to Oakland.\textsuperscript{9} Writing in the monthly publication of the School of Social Work of the University of Chicago, Ben Hecht grieved:

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Four million Jews waiting for death
Oh, hang and burn out—Quiet Jews!
Don’t be bothersome; save your breath—
The World is busy with other news.

Oh World be patient—it will take
Some time before the murder crews
Are done. By Christmas you can make
Your Peace on Earth without the Jews.\textsuperscript{10}

Still more eloquent was the anonymous poet “Sagittarius,”
who blasted the conference in Britain’s socialist journal, \textit{The New Statesman and Nation}. The magazine had warned months before the conference that history would one day censure the Allies for their inaction, their sanity, in the face of such horror.\textsuperscript{11} Sagittarius wrote:

\begin{quote}
Where the Bermudas ride remote
This noble (but uncheerful) note,
Voice of inaction and delay
Echoes beyond the Mexique Bay,
(From whence a more inviting strain
 Welcomes Republicans from Spain),
And may (perhaps) be heard afar
In Poland’s steaming abattoir,
Where (doubtless) those about to die,
Would (were it possible) reply,
 Approving of the long-term plans
 Of would-be good Samaritans.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

Such expressions of condemnation in Great Britain were not totally anomalous. Although most British newspapers endorsed the Government’s refugee policies, the acerbic \textit{Manchester Guardian} continued to flail away at Churchill’s refusal to open Palestine with unlimited immigration for Jews.\textsuperscript{13} And on May 19, 1943 the House of Commons subjected Anthony Eden, Peake, and Law to barbed questions and accused the ministers of having failed to appreciate the urgency of the refugee problem and of having draped the conference with “the dreadful spirit of defeatism and despair.”\textsuperscript{14}

It is hardly coincidental that on May 19, 1943 the American government, with the approval of the British, released the
long-sought clarification on the outcome of the Bermuda conference. This new State Department bulletin repeated what had been said previously about wartime security and the requirement of strict secrecy about certain matters. But it did relate that the delegates at Bermuda had: (1) agreed upon financial measures to cover the cost of maintaining refugees in neutral nations; (2) discussed a number of temporary havens to which refugees could be transferred and maintained "if and when shipping could become available"; (3) declared their intention of providing for repatriation of refugees upon termination of hostilities; (4) submitted a plan for an expanded and more efficient intergovernment refugee organization with increased authority to meet problems created by the war; (5) rejected any consideration of negotiations with Hitler "since his entire record has left no doubt that he would agree to such solutions as would be of direct aid to the Axis war aims."  

The State Department must have been satisfied with this amplification of the Bermuda protocol, for in June when it received a four-page letter from Wise outlining a host of rescue proposals and pointing to a growing passion in the Jewish community for revenge against the Germans in one form or another, Long dismissed the note as indicative of "a considerable degree of acquiescence in the recommendations of the Bermuda Conference." As for the rescue suggestions, Long, who never took Wise seriously, claimed they were "now of less emphasis." The next day he wrote in his diary that even though "the recommendations of the Bermuda Conference have not been carried forward," the refugee question had calmed down. "Our information indicates that pressure groups now see the correctness of the position we have maintained from the beginning."  

If anything, pressure to force the government to take more decisive action to rescue the Jews of Europe continued to mount in the summer and fall of 1943. Gigantic rallies sponsored by the revisionist Emergency Conference to Save the Jews of Europe packed Madison Square Garden and Carnegie Hall in June and July. State legislatures in Connecticut, California, Illinois, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Texas passed resu-
tions calling for freer immigration to Palestine. Norman Thomas, chairman of the executive commission of the Postwar World Council, wrote Roosevelt to complain of “the small and sorry results of Bermuda as contrasted with accomplishments at the recently concluded food conference.” Later Thomas told the press, “We are willing to fight Hitler partly because of his anti-Semitic cruelty, but we have not been willing to take any bold and aggressive action to rescue Jewish refugees or even temporarily to modify our immigration laws in this historic land of asylum.” This was exactly what the governing boards of both the national Democratic and Republican clubs urged in September. Appearing before a news conference on September 9, Democrat William Fullen and Republican Thomas Curren recommended a suspension of immigration restrictions for all aliens fleeing religious persecution. The White House received numerous letters from rabbis, governors, and laymen of all faiths who demanded an end to what Pierre Van Paassen termed “the scandal of Christiandom,” “the driving of an ancient people to haunt the corridors of time as ghosts and beggars and to wander about, waifs in every storm that blows.”

To silence such critics the administration fell back upon its standard rationalization—the war effort. Time and time again its spokesmen hammered home at the theme that everything must take a back seat to the primary task of defeating the Nazis and the Japanese. In a recent interview Harold Willis Dodds made reference to this rationalization five times. The same was true in conversations with presidential adviser Benjamin Cohen. Lillie Shultz, when defending Wise, also spoke in terms of actions compatible with winning the war. Adolf Berle, addressing a throng of 20,000 gathered in Boston to pay tribute to the Jews of Europe in May 1943, said, “The only cure for this hideous mess can come through Allied armies.” Hull also emphasized the importance of ultimate victory in his July message to the Emergency Conference to Save the Jews of Europe. “You will readily realize that no measure is practicable unless it is consistent with the destruction of Nazi tyranny; and that the final defeat of Hitler and the rooting out of the Nazi system is the only complete answer,” he said. In Septem-
ber 1943, the secretary tried to assuage the Zionist Organization of America Convention in Columbus, Ohio, by using this same approach and promising that the government would take “every feasible step” consistent with winning the war to ameliorate the plight of the Jews in Europe.24

Some congressmen, however, did not feel that pursuance of the war and rescue of the Jews were mutually exclusive. On Capitol Hill, Dickstein and Celler lashed out against the government’s inaction since Bermuda.25 In the Senate, North Dakota’s lightly regarded junior Senator William Langer repeatedly clamored for more information about what had transpired at Bermuda and what was being done for the Jews six months after Bermuda. In October, Langer charged that “I submit that by doing nothing, we have acquiesced in what has taken place over there.”26 Finally, in response to these verbal recriminations, and against the recommendation of the State Department, Senator Guy Gillette, joined by fellow senators Clark, Ellender, Guffey, Van Nuys, and Taft and Congressmen Baldwin and Rogers, introduced a series of resolutions calling for the establishment of a special commission to save the Jews of Europe.27

On November 26, 1943, Breckinridge Long was summoned before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs (chaired by his friend Sol Bloom) to defend the government’s refugee policy. Long nearly overwhelmed his inquisitors with statistics about the many achievements of the Roosevelt administration in refugee work during the war. Beginning with a recitation of Hull’s oft-cited figure of 547,775 refugees whom Long claimed had been admitted to the U.S. since the rise of Hitler, the assistant secretary went on to tell how the U.S., with Britain, had (1) welcomed scores of persons, including the complete faculties of yeshivas, who had made their way across Siberia to Japan before the war broke out in the Pacific; (2) arranged for the transport of 1,200 stateless persons from Spain to North Africa in 1943 and persuaded the Franco government to keep
Spain’s borders open as a way-station for refugees escaping to permanent havens; (3) found asylum for 6,000 Poles in Persia and 5,000 French children in neutral Sweden and Switzerland; (4) sought shipping through neutral nations like Spain and Portugal; (5) requested the International Red Cross to investigate atrocities against the Jews; (6) issued warnings to Nazi puppets in the Balkans not to assist in the extermination process; and (7) underwritten the expenses of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees on an equal basis with Great Britain.28

Under congressional examination Long once more revealed his insensitivity to the suffering of the Jews. Questioned by South Dakota’s Karl Mundt about the _Struma_ incident, he said, “It was a terrible thing to happen, but it was one of those things that do happen.” He added hastily, “I do not consider it [the refugee question] as concerned with the Palestine question.”29 Long implied that Jewish pressure groups in this country had actually hampered rescue operations and exaggerated the sufferings of Jews to the exclusion of other racial and religious groups which were under the Nazi heel. When Congressman Mundt suggested that any new rescue commission be chartered to aid Jews and non-Jews alike, Long, who opposed the idea of a new commission allegedly because it would duplicate the work of the IGCR, said, “The State Department has maintained that attitude all through, but the situation has come to a state of publicity where I think the Jewish interests have emphasized the fate of Jews as such.”30

That last statement was made almost a year after Nazi genocide against the Jews had been confirmed. It did not take the American Jewish community long to react. The Commission of Rescue of the American Jewish Conference issued its own statement that Long’s testimony “can be read only with mixed feelings in which bewilderment and regret dominate over satisfaction.”31 The conference chided Long on his attitudes toward Jews, the inaccuracy of his immigration statistics, the worthlessness of the IGCR, the impossibility of feeding refugees in Nazi-dominated lands, the unavailability of shipping and the unavailability of havens, and, in the words of AJ
Conference Secretary I. L. Kenen, concluded that he was not only a bigot, but an inaccurate one at that.  

Like all Jews the conference members were offended by Long’s innuendoes about Jewish pressure to secure preferential treatment for their brethren in Europe. The delegates from the largest Jewish bodies in the United States called for aid to all victims of Nazism regardless of race, but again emphasized the uniqueness of the Jewish tragedy. They added, “It is difficult to understand Mr. Long’s repeated implication that specific aid to Jews excludes help to other people or that there is no distinction between the problems of rescuing Jews from Hitler Europe and rescuing refugees in general.”

The Rescue Commission of the conference challenged Long’s statement that 547,000 refugees had been admitted to the U.S. since 1933. Such a figure did not belong in discussions about the rescue of Jews, as its use in conjunction with the State Department’s efforts on behalf of yeshiva students, Jewish children, and stateless persons created the illusion that the United States had saved a half million Jews from the Nazi death-trap. Statistics indicate that only 163,843 Jews reached the United States between 1933 and 1943. Of these, 43,089 were admitted under visitors permits and had to reenter the country under regular quota restrictions. In the process some were counted twice by overzealous government officials. If Long sought to give a true picture of American immigration, he could have spoken of the needlessly cumbersome regulations which had limited immigration in 1943 to 5.9 percent of the number permitted under the 1924 law.

Earl G. Harrison, commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, conceded that Long’s figures were misleading when he later told a refugee relief banquet that no more than 200,000 actual refugees had been admitted to the United States in the previous decade. Even Long subsequently admitted that he had erred in his testimony on this point. Writing to Travers, Chief of the Visa Division, in December, he affirmed his belief that 547,000 visas had been issued, but added, “Which of those persons actually entered the United States is a matter
that is not apparent from the records of the Department of State, as we do not keep such records.”

Long attempted to defend himself by having his subordinates draw up lengthy memorandums on the technical problems involved for European emigrants who were supposed to use their visas within the allotted calendar year. Long would not retract his testimony, however, save to issue a short note to Bloom conceding that he had made an innocent mistake and “more properly should have said, ‘We have authorized visas for [547,000 persons] to come to this country’ instead of ‘We have taken into this country [547,000 persons].’”

Long’s hopes for the IGCR were equally unrealistic and perhaps even insincere. To speak of turning over the refugee question once more to an agency which had been described by its director, Herbert Emerson, as “moribund, honorary and not competent” was an action which could hardly be viewed with jubilation in the Jewish community. Myron Taylor, chief U.S. delegate at Evian, had cautioned against its revival. Emerson had called for the establishment of a new international refugee authority the previous year. Jews could not be expected to have confidence in a man who was criticized at Bermuda as incapable of handling the expanded duties of the IGCR. As late as August 1942, Emerson was still speaking in the prewar jargon of the danger of “flooding countries with large numbers of Jews” and of the necessity of resolving the Jewish problem through minority treaties with Central and East European nations.

Twenty-nine countries sent representatives to the new organizational sessions of the IGCR at London in August 1943. Grandiose pledges of funds were made and an American, Patrick Malin, lately of the American Friends Service Committee, the International Migration Service, and OFRRO, was named vice-director. For all its talk, however, the IGCR had little practical value for the remainder of the war. Three weeks before Long informed the House Committee on Foreign Affairs of the potential of the IGCR, Emerson had informed Hull that the committee had no authority to negotiate with anyone but
neutral or Allied states, and this held out no hope for those behind barbed wire in Europe.\textsuperscript{40} When Long implied that it could rescue refugees from occupied lands, the head office of the IGCR in London swiftly denied this and said that the assistant secretary’s statement was “absolutely incorrect.”\textsuperscript{41} Until it was superseded by the International Refugee Organization in July 1947, the IGCR continued to function, engaging in some token relief work, but concentrating on planning for the postwar disposition of refugees.\textsuperscript{42}

A third point in Long’s testimony which rankled many Jews was his insistence that the democracies were powerless to send food or other supplies into Nazi-dominated lands to assist the Jews. The idea of trans-blockade feeding had been broached on several occasions by Jewish groups before the Bermuda conference but had been rejected by the American delegation as “wholly outside” the realm of that conference.\textsuperscript{43} A suggestion from World Jewish Congress President Nahum Goldmann in September 1943 that the government cooperate in a $10,000,000 food relief project through the International Red Cross was similarly rejected.\textsuperscript{44} The State Department, however, objected to this form of relief for European refugees for reasons which on the surface appeared valid. A special departmental memorandum on refugees prepared for Undersecretary Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., by R. Borden Reams in October 1943 noted that such a food project would destroy the effectiveness of the Allied blockade of Europe; lead to the feeding of European Jews, “many of whom were actually enemy aliens”; contribute to the Nazi war effort because there would be no effective control over the disbursement of food parcels.\textsuperscript{45}

The fear that the Germans might, in fact, confiscate relief supplies was the most powerful deterrent to any trans-blockade relief scheme. According to Sol Bloom, attempts to send $50,000,000 in supplies to Greece and other Nazi-held lands in 1941–1942 had failed, with the Germans taking most of the goods.\textsuperscript{46} Even Long had to admit that this was something of an overstatement. The U.S. continued to ship 18,000 tons of wheat and vegetables to Greece each month in 1943, but only because Greece was beyond the limits of the Atlantic blockade and the
Germans had granted safe conduct to the eight Swedish cargo vessels carrying this produce.\textsuperscript{47}

Although these supplies continued to flow into German-controlled ports in the Aegean, the Allies would not trust the Germans elsewhere in Europe. “If you send food to Antwerp,” Long told Representative John Vorys of Ohio, “the Germans will take it and you contribute to the welfare and fighting strength of the German Army.”\textsuperscript{48} Long did not explain why the Germans in Belgium or Poland would be more inclined to steal medicine and food from the sick and underfed populations of those countries than their comrades in Greece.

In fact, before Long even testified, the U.S. had sent twenty million units of insulin for distribution in France. Countless ragtag garments had also been passed to the persecuted through neutral intermediaries. The American Red Cross through its international affiliate had spent more than $340,000 on drugs and pharmaceuticals for Belgians since the United States became embroiled in the war.\textsuperscript{49} Many thousands more dollars had been spent by the Joint Relief Commission of the International Red Cross and the Swedish Relief Commission to feed and clothe refugees in Poland, Yugoslavia, Norway, the Netherlands, and even in some of the worst “detention camps” like Terezin, Gurs, and Vittel.\textsuperscript{50} Doubtless some of this relief was confiscated by the Nazis, but Jewish leaders like Wise, Goldmann, and Hecht felt that the risks involved were justified on the theory that eventually some Jewish lives might be preserved. The State Department, regarding the matter much more impersonally, could not agree.

Perhaps that part of Long’s testimony which was most unacceptable to Jews, however, was that on the availability of shipping. After telling Bloom’s committee of efforts to secure neutral vessels for the transport of refugees to places of relative safety, Long lamented that no transportation was available. Long claimed that fewer than 200 persons a month could be accommodated on available shipping.\textsuperscript{51} What had happened to the approximately forty passenger vessels belonging to neutrals which had been the subject of serious discussions at Bermuda several months before Long did not specify.\textsuperscript{52} Nor did he ex-
plain how it was that the Swedes, Spanish, Portuguese, and Turks, eager to profit from what Jews in this country estimated in August 1943 to be a potential traffic of 50,000 persons a month, were no longer interested in such fares by the next November. He also did not elaborate on the conditions which existed aboard those vessels which continued to ply the Atlantic trade through 1943. On June 22, 1943 the Serpo Pinto, out of Lisbon, arrived at Philadelphia carrying thirty passengers. Its capacity was 600. Other steamers from neutral nations, the Yasa, the Magallenes, and the Gripsholm, came to the United States in 1943 carrying less than 10 percent of their potential passenger loads.\(^53\)

The failure to obtain neutral shipping resulted from the American government’s reluctance to subject these vessels and their passengers to the “insuperable” hazards of German U-boats.\(^54\) Jews could reply that by the spring of 1943 the Mediterranean was open to Allied shipping at Gibraltar and Suez, and that the U-boat menace in the Atlantic, which had accounted for nearly one million deadweight tons of Allied shipping sunk each month in 1942, was virtually nonexistent by the summer of 1943. During the first half of 1942, 220,000 tons of shipping had been lost for every U-boat sunk. But by May 1943 that ratio had dropped to 5,500 for every German submarine sunk, the equivalent of one ship lost for every U-boat lost. The improvement was based on improved radar, a wider range of Allied aircraft operating out of Newfoundland, Reykjavik, and Londonderry, and the presence of escort carriers in convoys.\(^55\)

On May 20, 1943, Winston Churchill was telling Congress that the submarine menace in the Atlantic was dead. Although his evaluation may have seemed headstrong at the time, subsequent tallies proved him correct.\(^56\) In June 1943 the Nazis lost twenty-one U-boats in return for sinking twenty Allied vessels. The next month thirty-three German submarines were destroyed, while the Allies lost only forty-five surface vessels. Thereafter, the German High Command considered it fortunate if it sank 100,000 tons of shipping in any month. Short on fuel, forced to stay underwater for great lengths of time and then
to battle convoys supported by air power, the average U-boat lasted for only two or three sorties. Vice-Admiral Friedrich Ruge concluded, “Admiral Doenitz thus had no option but to give up the main theatre of operations in the Atlantic. Those that remained were of little use.” The Germans lost 725 submarines during World War II, including 237 in 1943 and 241 in 1944 (up from thirty-five sinkings in 1941 and eighty-five in 1942), but to VE-Day, the Allies remained fixated by the fear of a mythological “U-boat offensive.”

If the American government was unwilling to risk the sinking of neutral vessels in the face of this alleged U-boat menace, were there any American vessels available? Both the navy and the army operated their own transport services during the war, amphibious transport ships, luxury liners, converted Liberty ships, which carried eight million Americans overseas between December 1941 and December 1945. Allegedly these ships were returning empty. Then there were the American merchant vessels, bound for Europe with tons of supplies, returning with what many believed to be empty bottoms. Jewish leaders like Emanuel Celler and Stephen Wise clamored for these vessels to be placed under the flags of the Red Cross to ferry refugees back across the Atlantic.

The office of Naval Operations rejected the idea of using military craft for such an operation in February 1943. Apart from the obvious slowdown in making such vessels available for new troop shipments (American staging areas were chaotic enough at the time), the proposal raised questions concerning reception, quartering, and surveillance of refugees. The matter of passengers on cargo ships presented even greater problems. Most of the Liberty Ships were of the C-l (cargo only) class, with accommodations for fewer than fifty persons, including the crews. Criticized for their lack of speed, with only a top range of eleven knots, these vessels had been streamlined down to the substitution of a steel bell in place of the heavier, standard brass bell to give them an added fragment of maneuverability on the high seas. To load them down with refugees, either housed in inhuman cargo holds or in compartments requiring repeated conversions of the vessels, would have been, in the words of
Harold Willis Dodds, “unthinkable, absolutely impossible.”

As a result, the subject of transporting civilian passengers on cargo vessels was dropped in the summer of 1943 when the navy, army, and War Shipping Administration, unable to agree on a policy since the subject was broached in midsummer 1942, failed to receive the necessary presidential go ahead.

None of these objections—availability of transports, safety of passengers, availability of decent accommodations, compatibility with the war effort—had interfered when the Americans shoe-horned their soldiers into four tiers of bunks, two to a bunk if bunks were available, on every conceivable type of vessel (including the squalid Liberty ships) for the journey across the Atlantic. None of these objections had been raised when the British undertook to transport thousands of Muslim pilgrims from the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea to make the Hajj to Mecca in the spring of 1943. None of these objections had been raised when Great Britain transported 100,000 prisoners of war to Jamaica, Kenya, Tanganyika, and the British Isles in 1943. Nor had anyone objected when the U.S. transported 146,246 civilians, government officials, dependents, contractors and their employees, and Axis POWs, who constituted 41 percent of that figure, back to the United States in September 1944.

In 1943, when fewer than 25,000 immigrants were admitted to the United States and when fewer than 5,000 of these were Jews, more than 200,000 German and Italian prisoners of war were ferried across the ocean. At a time when military planners and the State Department fretted over the cost of setting up camps for refugees from Hitlerism in this country, the War Department was busily constructing 155 base camps and 500 branch camps in forty-five states, which would ultimately hold 371,000 German, 50,000 Italian, and 5,400 Japanese POWs by the end of May 1945.

There were, then, few empty bottoms among the vessels returning to the United States, as available shipping was used for the transport of prisoners, as well as sick or wounded soldiers or soldiers returning on leave. Such movement of prisoners was defended on the grounds that it relieved theater commanders
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of the burden of housing, feeding, and guarding the captured enemy near the frontlines, where they might escape in a counterattack to fight again.\textsuperscript{69} It was, however, difficult to explain to some Americans how it was that some Nazi POWs rode in Pullmans on the way to their detention camps in this country while American troops leaving for San Francisco or New York used coaches.\textsuperscript{70} The Jewish Agency in Palestine summed up the attitude of most free Jews who would have advocated feeding the Nazis nothing and transporting them in the same type cattle car used to expedite the slaughter of the Jews in Poland when it noted acidly that the Allies seemed more concerned about the well-being of the enemy than the persecuted peoples of Europe.\textsuperscript{71}

Actually, the question of shipping should have been academic in 1943. Apart from Palestine, which undeniably was accessible to Jews fleeing the Balkans on foot, aboard leaky tankers, or via the much-debated Turkish railroad system, another sanctuary lay within a few hours ferry service of the European mainland. This was French North Africa. Since Roosevelt announced the invasion of North Africa on November 8, 1942, allegedly to prevent “the systematic plunder of the French by Italians and Germans,”\textsuperscript{72} the British had constantly pressed for its use as a refugee haven, perhaps as much to relieve them of pressure for the opening of Palestine to Jews as anything else.\textsuperscript{73} The Spanish also desired to be relieved of the congestion of displaced persons fleeing France after the Germans had completely occupied that nation on November 11, 1942.\textsuperscript{74} Portuguese vessels were available for transport.\textsuperscript{75} And already in January 1943, General Dwight D. Eisenhower and his civilian adviser Robert Murphy had given their assent to a scheme to remove 4,000 refugees, who might be useful to the Allied war effort, from Spain to North Africa.

That last statement was especially significant, for it indicated that from the beginning Herbert Lehman’s Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations (OFRRO),
created by the president on November 18, 1942 to develop relief policies in territories occupied by U.S. forces, was subordinated to military control. At best, the military high command was committed to a policy of highly selective immigration to Algeria and Morocco. The War Department backtracked on April 22, 1943 from its earlier offer to rescue some of the refugees in Spain and listed several objections to the presence of refugees, principally the Jews. Such persons, the department argued, would only complicate military operations in a war zone not yet secured from the Nazis. Their presence would divert personnel, material, and shelter at a time when every man was needed for combat and when many American soldiers themselves were without adequate supplies or shelter. The War Department cautioned the State Department against making any commitments to the British, Spanish, or Portuguese without first consulting “the French,” who, nominally at least, controlled North Africa. And finally, Major General George Strong, author of this memorandum which reached Long’s desk during the Bermuda deliberations, emphasized that “the Transport of Jewish refugees into the Moslem country of North Africa is of such military concern to the War Department that it should preclude any further consideration of the matter.”

By the time Strong submitted his résumé to Long the Allies were walking a diplomatic tightrope between Charles de Gaulle in Algeria and Henri Giraud in Morocco, representing various divisive factions in the Free French government. To spare either man the onus of refusing to help refugees Hull had issued instructions to the American delegation at Bermuda to strike North Africa from consideration as a haven and to substitute instead Madagascar or French Equatorial Africa.

However, the Axis war effort in Africa had collapsed by early May 1943. General Giraud had notified Eisenhower that he would be amenable to admitting most of the 20,000 refugees now in Spain to areas under his control. Giraud made no specific mention of Jews, but he underlined the fact that he would welcome any emigrant from Central Europe who might aid the Allied war effort. Hull, so fastidious in shunning the word “Jew” in official parlance until now, sought the opinions
of the Joint Chiefs and Eisenhower on introducing Jewish refugees to the area. Neither the Joint Chiefs nor Eisenhower shared Giraud’s optimism. Like Hull, they believed that refugees, particularly Jewish refugees, would have a disruptive influence on North Africa.

The principal rationalization used against the movement of Jews to this region was that their very presence would incite their age-old enemies, the Muslims, to riot and revolution, a detriment to the Allied war effort. On November 14, 1942 the Adjutant General of the War Department received a troubled cable from Allied headquarters in London warning that “any further trouble in Morocco will stir up tribes with disastrous effect.” Although journalist Walter Lippmann three days later reported to Hull that Eisenhower had questioned the reliability of intelligence reports on North Africa, military and diplomatic planners in Washington were still concerned about the earlier report which had also warned that “a huge army of occupation” might be needed in the area.

In February 1943 another civilian adviser, Thomas Lamont, warned Hull that the surest way to stir up the Arab tribes was to introduce more Jews to North Africa and repeal anti-Jewish laws instituted by the Vichy government. He wrote that the Muslims were heirs to an anti-Jewish tradition that went back centuries and that any attempt to aid the Jews “would provoke a grave crisis which would interfere with the speedy outcome of the military campaign.”

On March 20, Lt. Col. Harold Hoskins of army intelligence concurred with Lamont’s analysis when he also warned that a huge army of occupation would be required to secure North Africa if Jews were introduced there. Hoskins linked Arab hatred of the Jews with the problem of Palestine and the holy shrines of the three major faiths. Zionism purportedly aroused the entire Arab world, including the natives of North Africa, who recognized that Jews would only temporarily be detained in this region before going on to Palestine, where they would threaten other Arabs and the sacred shrines as well. As a solution, Hoskins recommended de-Zionizing the Middle East situation by creating a Jewish haven in the desolate and virtually
uninhabited Jebel Achdar region of Cyrenaica. His recommendations received the most favorable attention from Hull and also from Rosenman, who was at this time laboring in conferences with Jewish leaders and government officials to defuse the Palestine situation.

These were the reasons the American delegates at Bermuda were instructed to strike North Africa from discussions as a potential haven and work instead for Cyrenaica, Angola, or some other remote spot in Africa. The American government, Hull noted, was concerned about “any matter which might disturb the political situation” in North Africa and would be unwilling to discuss the subject of refugee transfers to that area, even when military considerations permitted.

For such reasons, also, the American military authorities permitted discriminatory legislation against the Jews, drawn up by the Vichy government in Algeria and Morocco, to remain in force months after the Allied invasion. Moroccan Jews, declassed as citizens, were permitted no sugar, butter, soap, cereals, potatoes, or fresh milk, and little clothing, in the rations established by the Allies. To appease French authorities the Americans made no protest when the Free French banned Jewish officers and noncommissioned officers from combat units, when they denied Jewish soldiers reinstatement in the Free French army unless they had been previously wounded or decorated for valor, and when the Free French established quotas for Jewish physicians and other professionals in North Africa.

As late as January 1944 the Joint Chiefs were cautioning against opening North Africa to additional refugees (Jews) because of the danger of flooding the area with unpopular immigrants. Undersecretary Stettinius, however, objected most strenuously to this policy of sacrificing the Jews for the sake of expediency. Writing to Hull on January 8, he said, “If that is a true expression of military policy, and I question if it can represent the considered opinion of high military leaders, we might as well ‘shut up shop’ on trying to get additional refugees out of occupied Europe.” Stettinius urged Hull to have Roosevelt suggest to the military that the rescue of refugees was
“extremely important and something which should not be brushed aside.”

Stettinius might not have written the above memorandum if he had seen Roosevelt’s earlier letter to Hull on North Africa. The president, who had found the region sufficiently safe to visit for discussions with the British and Free French at Casablanca in January 1943, was convinced that the introduction of “large” numbers of Jews could not fail but be disruptive. He wrote Hull on May 14, 1943:

I agree that North Africa may be used as a depot for these refugees from Spain, but not a permanent residence without full approval of all authorities. I know, in fact, that there is plenty of room for them in North Africa, but I raise the question of sending large numbers of Jews there. That would be extremely unwise.

The people of North Africa traditionally had prided themselves on their tolerance of Jewish dhimmi. One of Algeria’s best governors, Maurice Viollette, once told the French senate, “If there is anti-Semitism in Algeria, be sure that it is Europeans who fan it.” As recently as 1962, French historian Harvey Goldberg was telling American audiences that the Algerian rebels harbored no antipathy toward the Jews or Zionists. Today the phrase that Jews have always lived in peace among their Arab cousins has almost become a bromide.

To assume then that the totally disorganized tribes of North Africa, still a generation removed from the contagion of nationalism that would lead to their own independence, would have risen in revolt because of the appearance of a few thousand more Jews in detention camps of the Magheb or as far away as Palestine is questionable. Likewise, those who attempt to telescope events of recent years into the 1940s and impute strong anti-Zionist feelings to the Moroccans and Algerians then also err, for such feelings were probably minimal twenty-five years ago.

What eliminated North Africa as a haven for the Jews was the same military callousness and foreign office timidity that had ruled out Palestine. Fear, deception, and insensitivity to the suffering of the Jews characterized the practices of the
British and American governments in 1943. Such themes, evident in the testimony of Breckinridge Long, were sufficient to convince Congress that it should drop the idea of creating a special commission for rescue of Jews. Instead the Seventy-Sixth Congress passed two resolutions (H.R. 203 and S.R. 100) applauding Allied actions taken to date on behalf of the Jews.