VI

THE TRIUMPH OF AMERICAN ZIONISM

AMERICAN ZIONISTS CONFRONT THE POSTWAR WORLD

Adolf Hitler’s suicide in April 1945 and the American Army Air Corps’ bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August brought World War II to a close. On V-J Day thousands of Americans celebrated the end of a long and costly conflict. American Zionists joined in the rejoicing, but they understood that their war was far from over. By the summer of 1945, Zionists could legitimately claim to be the leaders of America’s five million Jews. The Zionist Organization of America and Hadassah, the two largest American Zionist groups, claimed a combined membership of 315,000. Nearly half a million American Jews belonged to some form of Zionist organization. Segments of the general American public, the targets of a steady stream of Zionist produced propaganda, were beginning to acknowledge the justice and logic of Jewish nationalism. The Jewish state, however, still did not exist, and the British authorities at the end of the war remained firm in their opposition to the Zionist program.

Several new and important factors confronted American Zionists after the surrender of the German and Japanese forces. On the domestic political front, Zionists found themselves confronting a new American president. On April 12, 1945, as Allied armies were advancing through Germany, Franklin Roosevelt died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Stephen Wise forwarded the American Zionist Emergency Council’s condolences to the president’s widow. Wise considered Roosevelt to be a friend and believed that he “deeply sympathized with my people and their aspirations.” The elderly rabbi found it impossible to blame the president for American policies that injured the Zionist cause. To associates and subordinates he explained that the “anti-Zionist” State Department
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was not following Roosevelt’s directives, that “he plans and recommends one course; they execute another.”

Other Zionist leaders did not share Wise’s dismay at Roosevelt’s passing. Publicly, they expressed their sorrow, acknowledging Roosevelt’s greatness as a leader during depression and war. Privately, they realized that the Zionist task would be eased by his passing. Nahum Goldmann admired Roosevelt as a humanitarian but recognized that the president’s commitment to political Zionism and the creation of a Jewish state was weak. Emanuel Neumann, unlike Stephen Wise, believed that the State Department’s anti-Zionist bias reflected Roosevelt’s position and reported that Abba Hillel Silver was “thoroughly disillusioned and disgusted with the tactics of the White House and the State Department.”

During his presidency Roosevelt was an obstacle for American Zionists. Shortly before his death, Roosevelt, returning from the Yalta conference, stopped in Cairo to confer with Saudi Arabia’s ruler Ibn Sa’ud. After the meeting, Roosevelt, to the dismay of Zionist leaders, commented: “I learned more about the whole problem, ... the Jewish problem, by talking with Ibn Sa’ud for five minutes than I could have learned in an exchange of two or three dozen letters.” Despite their concern, there was little that Zionists could do to Roosevelt. His overwhelming popularity with American Jews made any Zionist threat of political retaliation appear empty if not ludicrous. This immunity from attack was not transferred with the White House to Roosevelt’s successor. Harry Truman, who had not forged strong ties to the Zionist organizations during his political career, attempted to devise a Palestine policy that would satisfy some of the demands of the Jews, Arabs, and British. To his dismay he found himself under intense attack from a Zionist community that now discovered itself free to unleash all its impressive political weapons against the White House’s occupant.

Zionists also found themselves confronting a new power alignment in the Congress following the elections of 1946. After more than a decade of Democratic domination, Republicans gained control of the Senate and House of Representatives. This development increased the importance of Abba Hillel Silver within the Zionist leadership, as he was one of the few American Jewish leaders to have intimate contacts with the national leadership of the Republican Party. Silver was on particularly good terms with Senator Robert Taft from his home state of Ohio.

American Zionists also found a new political leadership in London after World War II. In the summer of 1945, to the surprise of the world, the British Labor party succeeded in gaining a majority in Parliament. Clement Attlee took Winston Churchill’s place at 10 Downing Street, and Ernest Bevin assumed command of the Foreign Ministry. At first, Zionists assumed that the Labor party would support the creation of a Jewish state. As an opposition party, Labor had supported the Zionist program and had opposed the White Paper of 1939. To the chagrin of American and world Zionists, however, Labor leaders abandoned their pro-Zionist
American Zionists were at least able to confront the postwar situation with a united leadership dedicated to vigorous action. Near the end of 1944, tensions within the top echelons of the American movement had threatened to destroy Zionist unity. Abba Hillel Silver was a talented political leader. His colleagues respected his gifts, but many found it impossible to like the man. Silver's fiery temper and lack of personal charm disturbed many of his associates. After becoming cochairman of the AZEC in August 1943, Silver and Nahum Goldmann, the director of the Washington office of the Jewish Agency, squared off in a bitter jurisdictional dispute over who would have authority for carrying on Zionist diplomatic work in America. Although there was little love lost between Silver and Goldmann, their differences seemed trivial when compared to the tenuous relationship that existed between Silver and Stephen Wise. Following the American Jewish Conference, the two leaders of the AZEC were able to work out a viable but uneasy partnership. By the end of 1944, however, the two rabbis found themselves moving in entirely different directions. Silver, a Republican, believed that Wise's allegiance to Franklin Roosevelt undermined the effectiveness of the American Zionist lobby. Wise trusted Roosevelt's decency and refused to sanction Silver's attacks on the president and his administration. In December 1944, the two chairmen of the AZEC resigned their posts. Wise, supported by the leadership of Hadassah and Poale Zion as well as by Israel Goldstein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, then assumed the undivided leadership of the AZEC. Silver and his loyal lieutenant Emanuel Neumann left the AZEC but did not turn their backs on the Zionist movement. With their followers, Neumann and Silver began to gather support for Silver's return to power. Realizing that a large portion of the Zionist rank and file remained loyal to Silver and that his political skills and energy were irreplaceable, the AZEC welcomed him back as its leader in July 1945. During the postwar years Silver forged a strong alliance with David Ben-Gurion, who in 1946 finally succeeded in ousting Chaim Weizmann to become the undisputed leader of the international Zionist movement. The two men, one a socialist pioneer, the other a Republican rabbi, would engineer and execute a militant campaign that succeeded in establishing the State of Israel in May 1948.

Before the Jewish state could be created, American Zionists had to deal with one of the most tragic results of World War II. Following the German surrender, it became apparent that the Nazi murder machine had been more efficient than anyone had expected. Of the nearly 3.5 million Polish Jews alive when German armies invaded their country in 1939, a mere fifty thousand survived to see the defeat of their tormenters. Only 14 percent of the Jews of Holland were alive on V-E Day. The Jews of Hungary, a German satellite state, were "lucky" enough to be among the last Jewish communities dispatched to the extermination camps.
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They suffered a mortality rate of 50 percent. Postwar studies revealed that Hitler's henchmen had murdered between five and six million Jewish men, women, and children.9

The magnitude of the Nazi slaughter did not cause Zionists to question the policies they had pursued during the war. Shortly before V-E Day, even as the shocking number of Jewish dead was becoming ever more apparent, David Ben-Gurion lamented that, had a Jewish state in Palestine existed, the Nazis would never have exterminated European Jewry. Almost two years earlier, Emanuel Neumann and other American Zionists had made the same point at the American Jewish Conference. Senator Robert Wagner, a staunch Zionist ally, explained that the death of six million Jews was "a tragic and conclusive demonstration of the necessity for a Jewish Homeland."10

Judith Epstein, president of Hadassah, believed that Zionist efforts in Palestine had eased the pain of European Jewry during their imprisonment and torture. Shortly after meeting with some death camp survivors, Epstein told an American Zionist audience that:

They had not been afraid to die because they knew that life was good and because they believed life was worth living with dignity and with beauty . . . and what made life beautiful? The fact that there was a Palestine; that the Jews could look forward if not to personal happiness, to future happiness for their descendants, that there would be a collective Jewish future which was well worth dying for.

Other American Zionists shared Epstein's view that Hitler's Jewish victims were casualties in a war being fought for Jewish survival. In November 1945, the entire annual convention of the ZOA stood in a moment of silent tribute "as a mark of respect for those who suffered and died in the cause of freedom—our cause." American Zionists, believing themselves engaged in a holy crusade to change the course of Jewish history, knew that in all wars, soldiers fell. The Jewish nation, just like the Allied nations, had to be willing to make huge sacrifices in the struggle against tyranny. Thus, American Zionists tended to perceive of the Holocaust victims as fallen soldiers of a great Zionist army.11

THE DISPLACED PERSONS

While the soldiers of other armies demobilized and went home, those Jews who managed to outlive the Third Reich began to contemplate just where their homes were. Many made their way back to their cities and towns and began the slow process of rebuilding their lives. Only some managed to succeed in this painful
task. The war left Europe's economy in ruins and many Jewish survivors found it difficult to support themselves. Jews often found their homes occupied by Christian families and sometimes survivors encountered intense anti-Semitism. One day in the summer of 1946, a young boy in the Polish town of Kielce accused local Jews of having kidnapped him and claimed that the Jews were killing Christian children. The citizens of Kielce responded to this charge by murdering forty-one Jews who had somehow managed to survive Hitler's extermination program.12

Allied occupation armies in Germany established camps for those Jews who could not create new lives for themselves. These refugee centers, sometimes located on the sites of former Nazi concentration camps, also housed Jews who had not even attempted to return to their old homes. Many of the survivors of the extermination camps, suffering from starvation and disease, required long periods of care and recuperation. The psychological wounds endured by these people were often even more severe than the physical, and many understandably wanted to escape from the scene of their suffering.

The Jewish displaced persons (DPs) cared for in the American, British, and French zones of occupied Germany numbered about a quarter of a million by the end of 1946. They created serious problems for the occupation authorities who had to provide them with food, clothing, and medical care. Aside from a financial burden, the DPs also were a political problem for Great Britain and the United States. The DPs, like the Jewish refugees of the prewar period, were in need of a home, and few nations in the world seemed to be willing to welcome them. London, after the war, continued to believe that supporting the Zionist development of Palestine would undermine British imperial interests, and thus maintained that the DPs could not find a home in Palestine. Restrictionist sentiment in the U.S. Congress remained strong after the end of World War II, and many Americans expected a dramatic increase in the unemployment rates as discharged soldiers attempted to re-enter an economy making the difficult adjustment to peacetime. The massive influx of DPs would only intensify the competition for jobs.13

Despite these difficulties, the Jewish displaced persons did not constitute as grave a problem as Zionists had anticipated. During the war Zionist strategists assumed that European Jewry would play a crucial role in their postwar campaign. Zionists expected world opinion to support the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine for practical, not humanitarian, reasons. Millions of homeless Jews, wartime Zionist propaganda had predicted, would threaten the political stability of postwar Europe and might even serve as a vehicle for new demagogues to gain power. But the relatively small number of Jewish DPs did not jeopardize the political equilibrium of postwar Europe.

Although the small number of Jewish survivors did not threaten the stability of Europe, the DPs did significantly contribute to the establishment of Israel in
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1948. Wartime Zionists, as events would prove, had not only overestimated the extent of the postwar Jewish problem, but had to some extent underestimated the sympathy and compassion that the Christian world would extend to those who endured the Nazi horror.

Revelations about the true nature of Nazi atrocities disturbed the American public, which had largely ignored or disbelieved wartime reports about German brutality. General Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, asked Washington to dispatch a select committee to inspect the death camps because he did not want anyone to doubt the validity of his reports. Edward R. Murrow, in a moving radio address, stood in the middle of a Nazi concentration camp and begged his audience to believe the nightmarish scene he described. On April 30, 1945, Newsweek published photographs of the liberated Buchenwald concentration camp, and on May 12, the New Yorker carried a short, but graphic account of Nazi atrocities against the Jews. The more scholarly audience that read the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science learned about Nazi extermination practices in Holland, while the Presbyterian, a leading Protestant periodical in October 1945, expressed its horror at the extermination of European Jewry and concluded that the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine would be just compensation for their suffering. Public opinion polls revealed that the American public wanted to do something to relieve the suffering of the Holocaust survivors, but most were not yet willing to liberalize United States immigration quotas, particularly for Jews whom many still regarded somewhat critically. Americans seemed to be searching for some solution to the refugee crisis that would not call on them to make any significant sacrifice.

Zionists hoped that "Christian guilt" could be directed in the interest of Jewish statehood. Zionist propagandists accused the Allies of complicity in Hitler's murders. They argued that the world could begin to pay for its sins by establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. By presenting Jewish statehood as the only suitable compensation for the Holocaust, Zionists were able to abandon the argument that Jewish survivors would undermine the stability of the continent and possibly be the cause of yet another world war.

In September 1945, Senator Robert Wagner remarked that it was "heartbreaking" to calculate how many lives might have been saved had Palestine's doors been open to Jewish refugees. The "small remnant" of European Jewry that survived, Wagner continued, only sought to leave Europe. Whether they would be allowed to enter Palestine was not only a question of importance for Jews, but for all Americans. Palestine was "the crucible in which will be tested the ability of the powerful to deal faithfully with the weak." Other Zionist spokesmen went beyond Wagner's restrained position and indicted the Allied powers as accessories in the extermination of European Jewry. Abba Hillel Silver told a Zionist audience near the end of 1945 that "our six million
dead are a tragic commentary on the state of Christian morality and the responsiveness of Christian conscience.” Had Great Britain and the United States been willing to grant Jewry the same “temporary refuge” accorded to prisoners of war, many lives might have been saved.16

Zionist leaders contrasted the indifference of the Allies toward the Holocaust with the courageous efforts of Palestinian Jewry to rescue their suffering co-religionists. Spokesmen specifically praised the efforts of thirty-two Jewish volunteers who parachuted into Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, Italy, and Yugoslavia to organize resistance and rescue efforts. Axis soldiers captured and executed seven of these agents. The martyrs included Channa Senesh, a young Hungarian-born girl from Kibbutz S'dot Yam, and Enzo Sereni, who had been a leading Italian Zionist.17 Remembering the parachutists, Israel Goldstein asked, “Who was it that dared at the risk of life to bring succor . . . to thousands of Jews trapped in Nazi-occupied Europe during the war?” While the United Nations hesitated and the Jewish relief organizations of the United States waited for authorizations before acting, the “sons of the Yishuv found a way by unconventional methods to help thousands and to rescue hundreds.” Chaim Weizmann also praised the handful of courageous Palestinian volunteers, remarking that had their determination been matched by the United Nations, Hitler’s murderous campaign might have been halted. Weizmann explained, “I am not prepared to say that we could have saved all the millions, but it might have saved hundreds of thousands.”18

Jewish nationalists singled out Great Britain, the Mandatory Power in Palestine, for special attack. Morris Rothenberg, a former president of the ZOA, charged that “tens of thousand of Jews now in nameless graves, whom Palestine might have saved but for the inhuman enforcement of the infamous and illegal White Paper, point an accusing finger at Great Britain for what is now happening in Palestine.” Even Chaim Weizmann, who more than any other Zionist leader admired the English and their traditions, believed that had it not been for the White Paper, many Jews might have been able to flee to Palestine and escape deportation and extermination.19

Nothing could bring the dead back to life, but England and America could begin to make up for their crimes by satisfying the demands of those few lucky Jews who survived Hitler’s inferno. Zionists in the United States argued that these demands included the opening of Palestine’s doors to free Jewish immigration and the creation there of a Jewish state. Louis Levinthal of the ZOA wrote: “Historic justice demands that atonement be made for the needless death of multitudes of innocent victims of bureaucracy and red tape. Historic justice demands the fulfillment, at long last, of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate.”20

American Zionists effectively used the plight of the Jewish displaced persons in Europe to arouse feelings of concern and guilt in the American public. Felix Frankfurter, who had largely withdrawn from Zionist activities after being appointed to the Supreme Court, in a rare public statement cited the urgent need of Jewish
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DPs for a home, which only Palestine could provide. In April 1946, a little less that one year after Adolf Hitler's suicide, a moving portrait of the DP dilemma appeared in the New Republic. Gerold Frank, a journalist with close ties to the American Zionists, reported that the Jewish survivors of Hitler's death camps detested Europe and distrusted the world. Only the hope of going to Palestine kept the survivors from going mad. The DPs understood that in the Jewish Holy Land they would be "wanted by those among whom they live." He warned that if the English and Americans prevented the survivors from casting "off the stigma of an inferior race," they might respond with a violent burst of vengeance and despair. The DPs would accept no answer to their plight other than Palestine, for "they are convinced that their only hope is to begin life anew on their own soil."

Individuals and institutions who had not been strongly committed to the cause of Jewish statehood helped the Zionists to publicize the DP problem. Henry Wallace was convinced "that there will never be peace in the world until justice is done to the Jew." The former vice president supported the complete opening of Palestine's doors to Jewish survivors. Eleanor Roosevelt, who had refused to throw her support behind the Zionists during the war, was moved by the DPs' condition and urged that they be allowed to enter Palestine. She suggested that the United States should unequivocally tell the Arabs that "we intend to protect Palestine." The editors of the New Republic also urged the Truman administration to support large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine.

I. F. Stone accompanied a group of Jewish refugees on their attempt to illegally enter Palestine and published a series of articles describing his journey in the New York liberal daily PM. Stone vividly described the determination of the survivors to reach Palestine and the courage and idealism of the young Palestinians who operated the modern "underground railroad." Stone reported: "The 'pull' toward Palestine I heard expressed again and again, not only from the young Khalutsim on the train, but from older folk who would say, 'I'm not a Zionist, I'm a Jew. That's enough. We have wandered enough. We have worked and struggled too long on the lands of other peoples. We must build a land of our own.'"

The Nation and its publisher Freda Kirchwey played an active role in publicizing the contribution Palestine could make to the solution of the DP problem. In May 1947, the Nation published a special supplement on the Palestine problem. If the DPs were not allowed to enter Palestine, the journal told its readers, there was virtually nowhere else for them to turn. The United States, which could provide a secure future for the European Jews, was virtually off-limits as a result of immigration restriction quotas. Even if America's doors were opened, it was not certain that the Jewish survivors would accept an offer of hospitality. When asked to list a preferred location of resettlement other than Palestine, hundreds of DPs reportedly responded, "the crematorium."

In their campaign to confront the American public with the Jewish problem,
Zionists received help from a most unexpected source—the American government. Harry Truman, shortly after taking possession of the White House, found himself under Zionist pressure to support mass Jewish immigration to Palestine. Media coverage of the DP issue focused attention on the Army's allegedly incompetent and insensitive treatment of Displaced Persons, leading Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., to call for the creation of a special cabinet-level committee to wrestle with the refugee dilemma. Truman opposed Morgenthau's suggestion, but did agree to send a special delegation to Europe to investigate the treatment of the DPs. 29

Truman, Morgenthau, and the State Department agreed that the American delegation should be led by Earl G. Harrison, a lawyer who had had a distinguished career as a government official and law school dean. The Harrison delegation, including Patrick M. Malin of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, Herbert Katzski of the War Refugee Board, and Dr. Joseph J. Schwartz of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, left the United States in July 1945. Harrison's selection to head the group disturbed Stephen Wise, who had hoped that James G. McDonald, the past chairman of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, would be assigned the task. Harrison, unlike McDonald, had few ties to American Zionist leaders and organizations and could not be relied on to make a report that would be favorable to the Jewish nationalist cause. As events would prove, Wise's concern was unwarranted. 30

Harrison's final report filtered through the Washington bureaucracy in last August 1945. The report documented the inadequate living conditions and diet supplied to the DPs by American authorities and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). The Harrison group reported that the great majority of Jewish DPs wished to be resettled in Palestine. Harrison and his associates recommended that British immigration policies be revised to allow for the entrance of the DPs into Palestine, and Harrison threw his support behind a Jewish Agency request for British permission to allow one hundred thousand DPs immediately to enter the Holy Land. 31

The Harrison report seemed to offer official, nonpartisan confirmation of many of the claims being made by Zionist spokesmen. Zionists seized on the Harrison report, and the demand for the immediate settlement of one hundred thousand Jews in Palestine became one of their most employed slogans. I. F. Stone wrote that Harrison had left the United States unsympathetic to the Zionist cause, but in Europe had found that the Nazis had succeeded in spreading anti-Semitism throughout the territories they once occupied. As Zionists claimed, the Jewish survivors “want to go home as others are going home, and this for most of them means going to Palestine.” 32

Harry Truman also threw his support behind the Harrison proposal. The president might have been truly affected by the terrible situation of the DPs, but he
also saw good political reasons for favoring the entrance of one hundred thousand Jews into Palestine. He hoped that this action would pacify the Zionist lobby without distressing British and Arab leaders who would realize that the president’s actions fell far short of endorsement of the creation of a Jewish state. Unfortunately for Truman, his calculations proved to be faulty. British Foreign Minister Bevin angrily denounced the president for meddling in London’s affairs. Arab leaders were dismayed by what they perceived to be Truman’s pro-Zionist position, while American Zionists continued to pester the White House, demanding presidential support for Jewish statehood.

During the long and often depressing years between V-E Day and the establishment of Israel in 1948, the DP problem strengthened the resolve and revived the morale of Zionist activists in the United States, as it won new supporters for the Jewish nationalist cause. In April 1946, shortly after visiting several DP camps, one prominent AZEC official, clearly upset by the suffering he witnessed, privately remarked that “the despair of people standing around in camps with nothing to do and no place to go is heartbreaking to witness. There is no other stand than to be firm Zionists.”

ZIONISM AS ANTI-IMPERIALISM

The misery of the DPs stiffened the resolve of Jewish nationalists but posed serious problems for the Arabs and their supporters. As sympathy for the DPs developed into increased pro-Zionist sentiment within the American public, anti-Zionist spokesmen faced the difficult problem of responding to the Holocaust. Samir Shamma, an Arab lobbyist in Washington, told the editors and readers of the New Republic that all Arabs condemned the Nazi extermination of European Jewry as an “abhorrent crime.” Arabs, however, regarded “it as most unfair to suggest that the problem of the persecuted Jews be solved by persecuting another nation, the Arabs of Palestine.” C. A. Hourani, an associate of Shamma’s, argued that the DP problem had to be considered separately from the future development of Palestine. Both Hourani and Shamma maintained that the Jewish survivors had to be resettled somewhere else other than Palestine.

The Arab position, as presented by Shamma and Hourani, seemed to have some validity. The refugee crisis, as they claimed, was a “global humanitarian problem.” The Germans and their Axis allies were guilty of the murder of six million European Jews. The United States and Great Britain callously refused to undertake large-scale rescue efforts and could be justly branded accomplices in the Nazi crimes. But why should the Arabs of Palestine be asked to pay for the misdeeds of others?
The men and women guiding the American Zionist movement in the postwar period understood that they were competing with Shamma and Hourani in a struggle to capture American public opinion. Zionists, Emanuel Neumann understood, had an advantage because “through our far-flung organization we have roots and units in every community in the land.” Still, the Arab lobby, which Zionists estimated to have an operating budget of three quarters of a million dollars, seemed to be a powerful enemy. Clearly some response had to be made to the Arabs’ claim that they were not responsible for the plight of European Jewry.37

The failure of the Arab states to rigorously support the Allied cause during World War II provided Zionist spokesmen with some valuable ammunition. British attempts to appease the Arabs had failed miserably. As Rommel’s troops approached the Suez Canal, concerned British officials incarcerated pro-Nazi sympathizers including Anwar Sadat, a young nationalist leader. Few Arab Palestinians joined the thousands of young men of the Yishuv in volunteering for British military service. At the end of April 1941, at the height of an Afrika Korps offensive, anti-British elements of the Iraqi Army attempted a coup d’état. Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who had led the Arab uprising in Palestine in 1936, participated in the Iraqi revolt. When the British-officered Arab Legion of Transjordan crushed the pro-Nazi coup, the Mufti found refuge in Berlin where he made propaganda broadcasts for the Hitler regime.38

During and immediately after the war, Zionist propaganda emphasized the dismal Arab war record. In late October 1945, Eliahu Ben-Horin, a Palestinian journalist connected to the AZEC, condemned wartime pro-Nazi Arab sympathizers. He told a liberal American audience that even after Hitler’s fall, Arab leaders remained unrepentant, while the Allies had taken no action against the Nazi collaborators. AZEC leader Abba Hillel Silver and ZOA President Israel Goldstein also publicly denounced the Mufti of Jerusalem as a Nazi war criminal.39

In early 1946, the Mufti, who had been in the custody of French authorities, escaped and fled to Cairo. The American Zionist Emergency Council feared that British authorities, in a further attempt to appease Arab public opinion, would permit the Mufti to return to Palestine. The AZEC Executive Committee decided to fight this possibility with an aggressive publicity campaign that would document the Mufti’s pro-Nazi activities. Eliahu Epstein, chief of the Jewish Agency’s Arab Department, published a devastating attack on the Mufti in the Nation. According to Epstein, the Mufti was not only guilty of collaborating with Nazi attempts to ferment revolts in the Middle East, but had also played a part in the extermination of European Jewry. The Nuremberg judges, the article said, possessed an affidavit from Rudolf Kastner, the former chairman of the Budapest Jewish Council, who reported that a high-ranking Gestapo official had told him that the Mufti had encouraged Hitler to murder all of Europe’s Jews.40

The American Zionist Emergency Council argued that the Mufti’s responsi-
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bility for the extermination of European Jewish constituted a "crime against humanity" and insisted that he be tried as a major war criminal at Nuremberg. The State Department refused to accept the Zionist position and also resisted persistent requests for the United States government to publish the documents that incriminated the Mufti in the liquidation of European Jewry. The AZEC therefore used its own formidable information apparatus to bring the "facts" to the American media and public.41

Arab attempts to respond to the Zionist charge were not particularly effective. Kahil Totah, executive director of the Institute of Arab American Affairs, attempted to put the Mufti's activities into historical perspective. There had been many examples of alliances between nations and groups based on shared interest not principle. The American revolutionaries of the eighteenth century had fought Great Britain with the assistance of the despotic government of France; Communist Russia under Stalin had even forged a short-lived alliance with Hitler's Germany. According to Totah, the Mufti, an ardent Arab patriot, had cooperated with the Nazis because he believed a German victory would facilitate the liberation of Palestine from British imperial control. The Mufti was a patriot, Totah said, not a Nazi.42

Historians of the Holocaust have found no substantial evidence to link the Mufti with Hitler's decision to liquidate European Jewry. However, in the late 1940s, Zionists and their supporters could find little reason to doubt the charge. They could still vividly remember the bloody and murderous attacks of the Mufti's followers during the bitter 1936 civil war in Palestine. For Zionists it seemed reasonable that the Mufti, whom they believed was a rabid anti-Semite, would transfer his hatred of the Yishuv to the Jews of Europe. Not coincidentally, the attacks on the Mufti and other Arab Nazi sympathizers and collaborationists, effectively countered the claims of Arab lobbyists that they were being asked to pay the penalty for a European-engineered crime.43

The attacks on the Mufti were part of a larger pro-Zionist education campaign aimed at portraying the Arab leaders of the Middle East as reactionary despots intent on destroying the progressive Jewish experiment in Palestine. Several months before the end of the war, Stephen Wise, Nahum Goldmann, Hayim Greenberg, Rose Halprin, and the other members of the American Zionist Emergency Council determined that if a Jewish state were to be created, "the idea that the Arabs consent must be obtained . . . must be broken down." Accordingly, they decided that AZEC propaganda should stress that the Arabs represented "a reactionary element in the Middle East."44

Shortly after the meeting of American Zionist leaders, publicist Eliahu Ben-Horin wrote that "Arab social philosophy and the existing forms of Arab society are in harmony with the Nazi-Fascist system rather than with our democratic ideas." The Arab rulers of the Middle East, the last remaining bulwarks of feudalism in the world, "fight bitterly against any democratic or civilizing innovation." Mean-
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while, Ben-Horin complained, Britain and America continued to support Arab leaders who consistently undermined any possibilities for Arab-Jewish rapprochement in Palestine. The Mufti, for example, had killed many progressive Arabs who "regarded sympathetically the social-economic progress brought to Palestine by Jewish-Zionist enterprise."  

Besides attacking Arab leaders as reactionary despots and anti-Semites, American Zionists pressed the point that the Arab masses were unwilling to follow them. Abba Hillel Silver maintained that the "fellaheen," the peasant class of Palestine, bore no responsibility for the anti-Zionist propaganda emanating from the Middle East. The Arab peasant was not "concerned" about the Jewish settlement of Palestine, while "the feudal lords" of the Arab world, knowing "that the establishment of the Jewish homeland means the end of their feudal regime," attempted to destroy the Zionist experiment. Jewish settlement of Palestine had significantly improved the lives of the Arab population. Citing the work of Walter Clay Lowdermilk, Silver maintained that Palestine could easily accommodate three or four million people. Jews, Moslems, and Christians could all share a prosperous life in a Palestine modernized by Zionist investments of money and sweat.  

In May 1947, as the United Nations began to consider the question of Palestine, Silver again attacked the validity of Arab national claims to Palestine. The League of Nations Mandate for Palestine, Silver told a group of reporters, had specifically recognized the "historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine." Silver pointed out that the document made "no mention of the establishment of an Arab National Home." The loss of Palestine would not deny the Arabs of the Middle East autonomy and independence. Zionists, Silver insisted, supported the national aspirations of the Arab people. During the years between 1920 and 1947, Arabs had established five Arab states in the Middle East, which occupied over a million square acres of land. All that the Zionists asked for was "a little notch" of the vast Middle East.  

Silver's comments reflect his and other Zionists' simplistic view of Arab nationalism. No attempt was made to distinguish between the national aspirations of Syrians, Egyptians, Iraqis, and Palestinians. When one reporter raised the issue of the Arab claim to Palestine based on centuries of residence, Silver responded:  

There has never been an Arab country called Palestine. There has never been an Arab government in Palestine. Palestine has been for centuries now a province within the Turkish Empire. The statesmen of the world at the time that they issued the Mandate fully understood the . . . background of Palestine and the historical connections of the Jewish people with Palestine.  

Zionist depictions of Arab society and Arab nationalism after World War II were in most ways similar to the portraits they presented to the American public during the 1930s. During both periods, Zionist spokesmen essentially attempted
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to deny that there was any basic conflict between the goals of the Jewish settlers in Palestine and the aspirations of the land’s Arab majority. Believing that increased prosperity and better health care could win the loyalty of Palestine’s non-Jewish population, Zionists blamed tensions and unrest in the country on unscrupulous leaders committed to protecting their own selfish interests. Zionism, as Silver explained, frightened the Arab leaders of the Middle East because it was importing “irresistible democratic influences which are bound to penetrate to the periphery.”

In one respect however, postwar Zionist explanations of political conditions in Palestine did differ from those made earlier. Before World War II, most influential Zionists in the United States were sparing in their condemnation of Great Britain and its policies. Zionists often had held unenlightened colonial administrators, not the London cabinet, responsible for unsatisfactory conditions in Palestine. As relations between Jews and Britain strained following the Arab revolt in 1936, Zionists began to direct their criticism directly at Whitehall and Parliament. Even then, Zionists continued to hope that a change in Britain’s political leadership would result in the resumption of a pro-Zionist policy. Essentially, Zionists then believed that a community of interest existed between themselves and the “justice-loving” British people. During World War II, Zionists grew disillusioned with the British, who seemed to be doing little to save European Jewry from Hitler’s henchmen. After the war, Zionists increasingly asserted that imperial self-interest dictated British policy in Palestine. Jewish nationalists came to portray themselves as the victims of a partnership between British imperialists and Arab reactionaries.

Frank Gervasi’s To Whom Palestine? (1946), published with the assistance of the AZEC, reflected the Zionists’ belief that the British and Arabs were conspiring against them. Although not a Jew, Gervasi had become strongly attracted to the Zionist cause. He felt compelled to tell the story of Jewish Palestine because, during the war, “I'd seen Jews die alongside Catholics and Protestants and Orthodox Greeks, and their blood, I assure you, is uniformly red. I didn't see any Arabs die in freedom's cause.”

Great Britain’s Palestine policy, Gervasi wrote, was just one element of a larger strategy designed to secure British hegemony in the Middle East. The British government believed that yielding to Zionist demands in Palestine would exact “a price in prestige and power in the Levant out of all proportion to what it would gain by the creation there of a new independent state.” In seeking to maintain the imperial status quo in Palestine and the Middle East, British officials found it easy to forge an alliance with the Arab leaders of the region, who also felt “the pressures gestating within their society.” For both the reactionary Arab leader and the British colonial official, the Jews represented “a force of change and progress” that threatened to upset their domination of the Arab masses.

Non-Jewish Zionist spokesmen, in particular, seemed to be eager to attack “perfidious Albion” and also attempted to portray the Jews of Palestine as victims of
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British imperialism and Arab reaction. Bartley Crum, a liberal Republican businessman, was an American representative on the Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry established in 1946 to investigate the question of Palestine. Crum was sympathetic to the Zionists' goals and in 1947 published an account of the commission's activities. He remembered that:

Albert Einstein had pointed out that the English had two interests; raw materials for industry and oil. Large landowners, he said, found themselves in a precarious situation because "they fear they will be gotten rid of. The British are always in a passive alliance with these land possessing owners." People who are ruled, he pointed out, "will accept rule as long as they . . . know no better, but as soon as they realize that serfdom is not preordained, they begin to resist . . . ." Neither rulers nor landlords wish this, for it means the end of their privileged status; thus the "passive alliance" cited by Einstein.

James McDonald, another American Christian friend of Zionism, concurred with Crum's view, noting "the British natural sympathy with the static Arab civilization and resentment at the pushing dynamic Jewish conception of what Palestine should be."51

Zionist portrayals of themselves as the victims of British imperialism reached a sympathetic American audience. A Gallup poll taken in December 1945 found that 76 percent of those Americans who followed events in Palestine favored allowing Jews to settle there. Only one percent believed that Great Britain should determine the rate of settlement, and one additional percent believed that the Arabs should decide how many Jews entered Palestine. A second public opinion poll in early 1946 found that 33 percent of those Americans who kept abreast of events in Palestine believed that the British were primarily to blame for disorders there. Twelve percent blamed the Jews; 10 percent the Arabs. By August 1946, 38 percent of knowledgeable Americans believed that British authorities treated Arabs better than Jews in Palestine. Only 7 percent believed that Jews received preferential treatment.52

Liberal Americans seemed to be particularly willing to believe that British actions in Palestine were unjustly motivated by selfish interests. Freda Kirchwey, publisher of the Nation, wrote in November 1945 that there was no contradiction between the shooting of nationalists in Java and the British support of Arab nationalists in the Middle East. Both policies were attempts "to suppress those elements which threaten the dominance of the ruling groups to whom the Colonial Office looks for cooperation in maintaining British control." A tour of Europe and the Middle East in the summer of 1946 strengthened Kirchwey's belief that British opposition to Zionism was motivated only by imperial concern. The Jewish development of Palestine, she observed, was bringing progress to the region and threatened to topple the Arab feudal leaders on whom British rule depended. Kirchwey
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urged President Truman to reject British imperialist policies and pursue a new, more progressive strategy in the Middle East. I. F. Stone, like Kirchwey, believed that as the Jewish community of Palestine grew it would “continue to dissolve feudal Arab relationships, to raise living standards, and to make reform inevitable.” Stone, a supporter of the creation of a binational Arab-Jewish state in Palestine, believed that the Arabs and the Jews were both victims of British imperialism. He believed that “a Palestine settlement beneficial to both Jews and Arabs is possible any time the British government wants it.”

While American Zionists waged a campaign against British imperialism, they also sought to prove that American support of Jewish Palestine would further this nation's interests in the developing cold war with the Soviet Union. Eliahu Ben-Horin, the Zionist publicist, told Americans that they were being tricked by Arab leaders who threatened to ally themselves with the Soviet Union if the United States supported the establishment of a Jewish State. The reactionary Arab elite, Ben-Horin wrote, might not be “learned gentlemen,” but they understood that the Soviets advanced their interests by destroying “political reaction” and “social-economic backwardness.” Stalin himself, always the opportunist, understood that a partnership with the Arabs was impossible and was instead beginning to adopt a pro-Zionist line in order to portray himself as the friend of progress and justice. American pro-British policies, Ben-Horin warned, actually benefited Moscow because “the conviction is spreading that the Soviet Union is the true bearer of progressive ideas and that Britain — now joined by America — upholds diehard conservatives and reaction.” Washington could avoid this propaganda defeat by unequivocally giving its support to the cause of Jewish statehood. The Arab states of the Middle East would have no alternative but to support the United States, the only nation in the world willing to give generous oil royalties without getting “anything important” in return. The Arabs would remain loyal allies, Ben-Horin concluded, “as long as America remains the richest and least imperialistic power in sight.”

THE ANGLO-AMERICAN COMMITTEE

While Zionists attempted to influence Allied foreign policy, the British and American governments grappled with the difficult problem of Palestine. Zionist leaders understood that the political development of the Middle East and particularly Palestine was just one of the major issues the Western powers had to consider in their effort to establish a peaceful and secure postwar world. Clearly, as the cold war deepened, Western interests required the development of a Palestine plan that would prevent political instability in the geographically strategic and oil rich Middle East. The size of the Arab population of Palestine, its tradition of violent
opposition to Jewish settlement, and the anti-Zionist positions of important Arab states like Egypt and Transjordan made it politically impossible for Washington to support the establishment of a Jewish state in all of Palestine. Realistically, Zionists had to be willing to accept some territorial compromise and had to begin to consider the kind of concessions they would be willing to make in exchange for American support of Jewish sovereignty.

Any discussion by Zionist leaders of the future Jewish state's boundaries was bound to be difficult and fiery. In 1937 and 1938, the possible partition of Palestine had bitterly divided the Zionist community in the United States. The brutal destruction of six million Jews psychologically prepared most American Zionists to surrender some part of the historic Jewish homeland in return for sovereignty and security, but the actual terms of the Zionist position on Palestine's partition was a source of bitter Zionist debate in the years between V-E Day and the establishment of Israel in 1948.

In November 1945, London and Washington announced the formation of an Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry Regarding the Problems of European Jewry and Palestine. The Anglo-American committee explored various plans for the resettlement of Jewish displaced persons and studied the part Palestine could play in the rehabilitation of the death camp survivors.

The creation of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry (AACI) temporarily divided the Zionist leadership in the United States. Abba Hillel Silver was enraged by the proposal to investigate Palestine's role in the solution of the refugee problem, although he distinguished between the motives of Harry Truman and Ernest Bevin. Truman, Silver explained, had been genuinely moved by Earl Harrison's description of the DPs' plight, but was being manipulated by the British into accepting an investigation instead of action. Bevin's support to the AACI, on the other hand, reflected his basic desire to "liquidate" the Jewish national home in Palestine. Believing that Jews should not cooperate in their own destruction, Silver proposed that the Zionist leadership announce that they would not accept and would not be bound by the decisions of the AACI. Several prominent Zionists lent their support to Silver's radical position. Gedalia Bublick, the Mizrachi representative on the American Zionist Emergency Council, announced that his organization would refuse to cooperate with the AACI. Emanuel Neumann condemned the AACI as a "deadly trap" aimed "to enmesh America in the toils of British policy." It was the duty of all Zionists, he continued, to discredit the committee even before it completed its mission.55

Other Zionist leaders approached the Anglo-American committee suspiciously, but favored cooperation with the British and American investigation. Stephen Wise, always more cautious than Silver and Neumann, counseled against a hasty rejection of the AACI. The leadership of Hadassah strongly supported Zionist cooperation with the investigative body in order to ensure that the committee was given access to the "right information."56
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The Zionist leaders of Palestine and Great Britain supported the moderate position advanced by American Hadassah. They reasoned that the American public would interpret a rejection of the AACI as an act of extremism. This would undermine the work of the movement's publicists who contrasted the noncompromising, aggressive Arab opposition to Zionism with Jewish nationalists' willingness to pursue negotiations and compromise. Zionists also understood that the military forces of the Yishuv were not strong enough to drive the British from the Middle East. A diplomatic solution to the Palestine problem was their only alternative. Even those Americans who had attacked the AACI finally decided to abide by the decision of the World Zionist leadership and cooperated with the Anglo-American investigation.57

After spending months collecting testimony and data, the AACI issued its final report in May 1946, unanimously calling for the abandonment of the White Paper restrictions on immigration to Palestine so that one hundred thousand Jewish DPs could immediately settle there. While they supported Jewish immigration to Palestine, the AACI members opposed the creation of either a Jewish or an Arab state. Instead, they looked forward to the eventual sharing of political power by Jews and Arabs and the creation of a unified Palestinian nation in which neither Jews nor Arabs would dominate. Realistically recognizing that their plan could not be implemented while a near state of war existed between Palestinian Arabs and Jews, the committee recommended that Britain continue to control the Palestine territory until a climate of peace and cooperation could be restored.58

Nahum Goldmann, the head of the Jewish Agency's Washington Office, admitted that the AACI's report was "at best a very poor statement of non-Zionism." However, he continued, Zionists should disregard the AACI's refusal to endorse Jewish statehood and should concentrate on winning implementation of the committee's call for increased Jewish immigration to Palestine. Elimination of British immigration restriction to Palestine would strengthen the Jewish position in the Holy Land and would allow the Zionists to save the lives of at least one hundred thousand DPs.59

Emanuel Neumann accused Goldmann of dangerous defeatism. He agreed that the immediate task for Zionists was to have the American government implement the "100,000 recommendation," but he warned against ignoring the implications of the Anglo-American committee's recommendations for the political development of Palestine. Believing that Jewish nationalists should continue their public demands for the establishment of a Jewish state in all of Palestine, Neumann declared: "We must fight for the positive part of the Report, but we must also fight against the negative aspects."60

Neumann's position prevailed within the American Zionist Emergency Council largely because of the strenuous support of Abba Hillel Silver and David Ben-Gurion, who arrived in the United States for a short visit in May 1946. Ben-Gurion
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agreed that Zionists should work for the implementation of the AACI's proposal for mass immigration to Palestine while attacking the group for not supporting the creation of a Jewish state in all of Palestine. Accordingly, the American Jewish Conference applauded the AACI's criticism of the British White Paper immigration restriction as a "posthumous victory" for the millions of dead Jews who might have been saved from Hitler had it not been for the White Paper. At the same time, it objected to the AACI's proposal for continued British control of Palestine, branding it "unrealistic" and "unfortunate." 61

Zionist leaders could have avoided their acrimonious debates over how to respond to the proposals made by the AACI. Silver, Ben-Gurion, and Neumann probably would have been amused to know how much the AACI's report angered Britain's Labour party government. While Zionists rebelled against the report's failure to endorse Jewish statehood, British leaders fumed about the AACI's refusal to sanction London's Palestine policies. When Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin proposed establishing the Anglo-American Inquiry Committee, they expected that the investigators would conclude that the tenuous nature of Arab-Jewish relations in Palestine made large-scale refugee resettlement impractical if not impossible. The AACI's repudiation of Britain's immigration restriction policies and suggestion that one hundred thousand Jews be allowed to enter Palestine shocked British authorities, who quickly asked Washington to postpone official publication of the committee's report. President Truman's refusal to accede to London's request and his public endorsement of the AACI's report on May 1, 1946, enraged Bevin and Attlee. They quickly maneuvered to soften the impact of Truman's action, announcing that Britain could not assume sole responsibility for acting upon the committee's findings. Bevin and Attlee correctly calculated that Truman's support for increased Jewish immigration to Palestine was motivated by his desire to solve the refugee problem cheaply. They knew that the president was unwilling and unable to commit the United States to share the responsibility for putting the AACI proposals into effect, particularly if this entailed dispatching American troops to Palestine to pacify the Arabs who could be expected to respond violently to the influx of large numbers of Jews to the Holy Land. Bevin's infamous remark that Truman supported Jewish immigration to Palestine because he did not want too many of them in New York was crude, but it accurately described the self-serving nature of the Truman administration's support for a humanitarian policy that entailed little or no expense for Washington. 62

While the politicians attempted to devise a plan for Palestine that would be acceptable to Jews and Arabs as well as serve British and American national interests, the Jewish community in Palestine struggled for control of the Holy Land. In liberated Europe, emissaries from the Haganah, the Jewish underground army in Palestine, and former Jewish partisans prepared the survivors of Hitler's death camps to participate in the struggle against Great Britain. The Haganah
men were especially active in the displaced persons camps, raising the morale of the survivors by describing the lives of dignity and freedom they would one day lead in a Jewish Palestine. Periodically, the Palestinian emissaries transported large groups of homeless Jews to European ports and onto ships, which then attempted to reach Palestine. Only a few of these antiquated vessels, often christened for the occasion with the names of Zionist heroes, succeeded in delivering their passengers to freedom. Usually, British air or naval units intercepted and boarded the ships, interning their refugee cargo in the Atlit detention camp, about ten miles south of Haifa. The leaders of the Haganah and the Jewish Agency did not consider the detentions a defeat because they realized that “illegal immigration” (as the British authorities dubbed it) was a most efficient means of undermining British strength in Palestine. To close off Palestine’s shores to the hapless Jewish refugees, London had to maintain a huge and costly military presence in the Middle East, which significantly added to Britain’s severe economic crisis at the end of World War II. Each illegal immigrant ship captured also kept the plight of the displaced persons and Palestine in the press and seemed to highlight the immorality and inhumanity of Britain’s immigration policies, which prevented Hitler’s victims from returning “home.”

In mid-1946 the Haganah high command decided to escalate their struggle against British immigration restriction and anti-Zionism. Following the lead of Menachem Begin’s Irgun, which had been waging an underground war against the British since 1944, the Haganah secret radio network threatened the British with a campaign of sabotage unless London lowered Palestine’s immigration barriers. On the night of June 17, 1946, soldiers of the Palmach, the shock troops of the Haganah, blew up key railway lines and bridges, totally disrupting Palestine’s transportation system. The Holy Land seemed to be on the brink of open and total warfare.

If Zionist leaders expected to achieve a military victory over the British, they were sadly mistaken. On Saturday, June 29, British military and police units conducted a massive sweep through Jewish Palestine, uncovering and seizing arms caches and arresting over two thousand members of the Yishuv. Most of the Jewish Agency’s leadership found themselves jailed; fortunately, David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency, was temporarily out of the country and avoided arrest. The British agreed to release the Zionist leaders only after they pledged to abandon military action and pledged their cooperation in the suppression of the Irgun. The discovery of a large arms depot on Kibbutz Yagur particularly worried Zionist leaders who feared that the British police action would leave the Yishuv unarmed and open to Arab attack. Zionist concern deepened when the British announced in August 1946 that “illegal immigrants” would no longer be interned in Palestine but would be transported to prison camps on the island of Cyprus. London hoped that the displaced persons in Europe would refuse to challenge the British block-
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ade once they knew that they could not even look forward to incarceration in the Holy Land.65

THE AMERICAN ZIONIST STRUGGLE OVER PARTITION

The intensity and efficiency of Great Britain's repressive measures in Palestine left the Zionist leadership in disarray. Nahum Goldmann was convinced that the Zionists would have to minimize their demands drastically if they were to avoid total defeat. Goldmann's concerns were deep-rooted. As early as May 1946, when the AACI's report was published, he had attempted to convince his fellow Zionist leaders that they had no alternative but to ask Great Britain and the United States to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. In 1946 there were still less than six hundred thousand Jews in Palestine who were outnumbered by nearly two million Arabs. Goldmann knew that a Jewish state could only be established in Palestine when Jews achieved majority status in the land. Goldmann determined that it was impossible for Jews to become a majority in the Holy Land because the British would never be willing to jeopardize their strategic interests in the Middle East by opening Palestine's doors to large-scale Jewish immigration. The only viable Zionist plan, Goldmann argued, was to propose the partition of Palestine. He recommended that Jewish nationalists present the proposal as an ultimate compromise and plead with Washington and London that this statesmanlike act deserved acceptance. Goldmann acknowledged that a Jewish state in a partitioned Palestine would be small, but it would also be autonomous. The Zionists would finally be free of British control and would have the power to establish their own immigration policy.66

Goldmann's position had little support in the summer of 1946. Most Zionist leaders in the United States and Palestine believed that any partition proposal would have to be initiated by Great Britain. They shrewdly calculated that a Zionist partition proposal would seriously weaken their negotiating position because Britain would not accept the Zionist plan as a legitimate compromise. Instead, the Zionist request would become the starting point for negotiations, the outcome of which would surely be less satisfactory than the plan originally put on the table by Jewish nationalist leaders.67

Following the British arrest of Jewish Agency leaders on June 29, 1946, Goldmann again tried to advance his views on partition. On July 11, the New York Times reported that Zionist leaders were contemplating an appeal to the United Nations and that they had reluctantly determined that partition was the only practical solution for the Palestine problem. The Times noted that the Zionist spokesman on partition asked to remain anonymous, yet the careful reader could deter-
mine that Goldmann was the source. His was the only name mentioned in the article and the Times reporter credited him with providing details about Zionist plans regarding the U.N. Goldmann's partition plan, as outlined in the newspaper, was detailed and precise. One-third of Palestine, with the largest concentration of Arabs, would be ceded to Transjordan, while the remaining two-thirds would become a Jewish state.68

From the perspectives of Abba Hillel Silver and Emanuel Neumann, Goldmann's leak to the Times could not have come at a less opportune time. The day after the newspaper report, Ambassador Henry F. Grady brought an American delegation to London to confer with his English counterpart, Herbert Morrison, about devising a plan to act on the proposals of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. Although Morrison and Grady conducted their discussions in secret, details of their negotiations quickly reached the press. Long before the official announcement of their plan on July 31, Zionist leaders in the United States knew that Morrison and Grady proposed to divide Palestine "into Arab, Jewish and British provinces, with full control over the entire country to be vested in the central British administration." Silver, who had been angered by Goldmann's flirtation with partition, quickly went to Washington where he convinced Goldmann to join him in denouncing the Morrison-Grady proposals. Under Silver's skillful leadership, the American Zionist Emergency Council generated enough public pressure to force President Truman to reject the Morrison-Grady proposal.69

Goldmann's willingness to cooperate with Silver did not reflect any change in his attitude on partition. In early August, while Silver remained in the United States to coordinate opposition to the Morrison-Grady plan, Goldmann traveled to Paris for strategic and tactical discussions with leaders of the Jewish Agency and the Zionist Executive who had escaped arrest and internment by the British. Goldmann was able to overcome the suspicions of David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sneh (the commander of the Haganah who had escaped arrest in Palestine) and won their permission to go to Washington to make one more attempt to win American support for Jewish statehood. The Zionist leadership instructed Goldmann to convey to President Truman the Zionist Executive's total objection to the Morrison-Grady scheme, but also its willingness to discuss a partition plan that would establish a "viable Jewish state" in part of Palestine. Goldmann was to request that immigration of one hundred thousand Jews to Palestine begin at once and that the Jewish leaders of Palestine immediately be granted full administrative and economic autonomy in the part of Palestine destined to become a sovereign Jewish state. The Paris meeting specifically wanted Truman's assurance that Zionists would be allowed to determine the rate of immigration into the designated Jewish territory even before formal statehood was declared.70

Goldmann knew that he could not expect to have the full support of the American Zionist leadership for his mission to Truman. At the Paris meeting, Israel Gold-
stein, a nonvoting observer from the Zionist Organization of America, had refused to endorse the partition scheme. Goldmann could expect Abba Hillel Silver to fight any attempt to discuss the division of Palestine before any concrete partition plan had been proposed by Great Britain or the United States. Silver had even opposed holding the Zionist Executive meeting in Paris and had refused to attend because he believed that the entire Zionist leadership should be in Washington lobbying against the Morrison-Grady plan. Ironically, Goldmann was able to use Silver's absence from Paris to divert the Rabbi's attention away from his partition scheme.

At a meeting of the AZEC's executive committee on August 7, Silver described his understanding of what Goldmann's instructions were. Basing his analysis on sketchy information, Silver explained that Goldmann would convey the Zionist Executive's rejection of the Morrison-Grady plan to Truman and would demand the immediate implementation of the AACI's proposal that one hundred thousand DPs be transported to Palestine. If Truman then proposed partition as a compromise solution to the Palestine quandary, Silver acknowledged that Goldmann had the authority to begin negotiations. Goldmann, who had just returned from Europe and was attending the AZEC meeting, announced that Silver's understanding of the Paris decision was correct, even though Goldmann knew that he not Truman would propose the partition compromise.7

Goldmann next turned his attention to winning the Truman administration's support for the partition of Palestine, but he was far less successful in influencing Truman than he was in tricking Silver. He met with Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson several times, but was never able to see President Truman, and he found it impossible to convince the administration to abandon Great Britain and to take the lead in championing a Zionist partition plan.7

When Silver discovered Goldmann's activities, he was furious, but reluctantly concluded that the best had to be made of a terrible situation. He told the AZEC:

It is clear that as of the moment the entire demarche of the [Jewish] Agency has been a failure. The American government did not advance the partition proposal as its own, and the British Government has refused to accept it as a basis of discussion. As to our own position, whether we like it or not, we have to recognize it as a fact that the partition proposal has been put forward officially in the name of the movement and once made, there is no way at the moment for us to go behind or around it. If we are the continue to carry on any political work in Washington we cannot ignore these official proposals made by the Jewish Agency. They are now the maximum that we can ask for and the minimum that we can accept. We must fight hard to make sure that we at least get that which has been asked for, and it will not be easy.

Silver discovered, however, that he, like Goldmann, could find little official support for partition in either Washington or London. He concluded that the Jewish
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Agency's partition initiative had been a total disaster, and he resolved to put a final end to any premature discussion of Palestine's division. His opportunity came in December 1946 when representatives of the entire Zionist movement convened in Basel, Switzerland, for the first World Zionist Congress of the postwar era.73

The Zionists' choice of Basel was most appropriate as the city had hosted the very first Zionist Congress organized by Theodor Herzl in 1897. The delegates arriving in 1946 did not share the optimism and enthusiasm of their counterparts who had heard Herzl's historic call for Jewish emancipation and independence. The extermination of six million Jews and the opposition of Great Britain to Jewish statehood angered all the Zionists at Basel. Their discussions promised to be long and acrimonious.

Debates about the wisdom of both Zionist policies and leaders dominated the deliberations of the World Zionist Congress. Abba Hillel Silver, David Ben-Gurion, and their followers ferociously attacked Nahum Goldmann and Chaim Weizmann, claiming that their lack of intestinal fortitude had seriously undermined the Zionist position. Goldmann, who was frequently involved in controversy and who was endowed with a powerful ego, does not seem to have been very hurt by the criticisms of his associates. He later remembered: “My friends in the [Zionist] Executive held back somewhat and did me the honor of letting the opponents of partition concentrate their fire on me. I mention this in no spirit of complaint; on the contrary, I sometimes enjoy being the target of attack in fair debate.” Weizmann, who was nearing the end of his life and who possessed a far more gentle soul than Goldmann, found it much more difficult to tolerate attack. His autobiography, which graphically chronicles his decades of service to the Zionist cause, barely mentions his painful experience at Basel.74

At first, it seemed as if Weizmann would survive the onslaught of his opponents and continue to play a leadership role within the Zionist movement. On December 10, congress delegates honored Weizmann by naming him president of the World Zionist Congress. Although the congress president actually exercised little power, the overwhelming vote for Weizmann indicated that the “father of the Balfour Declaration” still held the support and respect of many within the movement. While forty-eight Zionist delegates opposed Weizmann's selection, approximately four times that many supported his elevation.75

In a fifty-minute address to the congress, Weizmann attempted to explain why the Jewish Agency had taken the initiative in proposing partition as a solution to the Palestine quandary. His listeners might very well have experienced a sense of déjà vu while listening to Weizmann. His position on the partition of Palestine in late 1946 closely resembled his response to the Peel Commission report of 1937. On both occasions Weizmann reasoned that the plight of the Jewish people and inadequate support from Great Britain made it imperative for Zionists to sacrifice territory for autonomy. Nineteen months after V-E Day, Weizmann's appeal
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seemed to have much merit. Congress delegates could still vividly remember the newsreel film of liberated Nazi concentration camps and the horrible images they captured. Many of the emancipated survivors of those camps were incarcerated in Cyprus detention camps. Their dream of reaching Palestine and the continuing British resolve to keep them out of the Holy Land lent support to Weizmann’s claim that Zionist leaders had to take immediate and extraordinary measures to create a Jewish state in at least part of Palestine. 

Weizmann’s oration moved many of the delegates at the World Zionist Congress and they frequently interrupted his address with applause. Nahum Goldmann, of course, also supported Weizmann and shared his views on partition. Stephen S. Wise, who had bitterly opposed Weizmann during the Peel Commission controversy, now came to the defense of his former adversary. Although he was not a strong supporter of the Weizmann-Goldmann partition strategy, Wise sympathized with Weizmann’s personal plight because it closely resembled his own. Wise, like Weizmann, was struggling to survive the attacks of Silver and his supporters who accused the elderly rabbi of undermining their attempts to forge links with the Republican party.

Weizmann’s prestige, Nahum Goldmann’s cleverness, and Stephen Wise’s fighting spirit were not sufficient to defeat the followers of Ben-Gurion and Silver. Emanuel Neumann, Silver’s long-time friend and loyal lieutenant, organized a block of delegates at Basel to oppose Weizmann’s leadership and Goldmann’s tactics of partition. Neumann’s coalition transcended party organization; at its core were two-thirds of the ZOA representatives and the delegates of the Mizrachi (religious) and Revisionist (right-wing) parties, which were deeply opposed to Weizmann and any premature discussion of partition. Neumann also relied on the support of most of the Labor Zionist delegates who could be counted on to vote against Weizmann out of loyalty to Ben-Gurion. He also attempted to win the allegiance of as many of the Hadassah delegates as possible, though this proved to be difficult because most disliked and disapproved of Silver’s vicious attacks on Goldmann, Weizmann, and particularly Wise.

While Neumann quietly worked to recruit allies at Basel, his comrades used the congress proceedings as a forum to launch their attacks and articulate their views. On December 10, David Ben-Gurion, who had reservedly endorsed Nahum Goldmann’s partition tactics earlier in the year, delivered a long political report to the congress. He unequivocally announced that he would oppose any Zionist overture to Great Britain that proposed to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. Responsible Zionist governing bodies should not even discuss the desirability of dividing Palestine until Great Britain formally presented such a proposal.

As was often the case, Abba Hillel Silver made one of the most effective presentations at the World Zionist Congress. The ideas Silver articulated were not original; almost any of Goldmann’s American Zionist adversaries could have
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made them. However, few could have delivered the message with the same force and eloquence.

Silver's speech reflected his cynical and probably accurate belief that morality and justice would never dictate how Christian governments and leaders responded to Jewish needs. Whereas his arch rival Stephen Wise had devoted his career to fostering Jewish and Christian dialogue and conciliation, Silver by 1946 had determined that Christian society was fundamentally anti-Semitic. Jewish Agency leaders, Silver explained, had overestimated the humanity of the British authorities when they endorsed Nahum Goldmann's partition plan believing that this "supreme sacrifice" would evoke a generous response. They should have realized that

This is not the spiritual climate of our age. If sacrifices could move the hearts of Governments today, the leaking hulks which are transporting our storm-tossed refugees would not be turned away with their cargo of human misery from the shores of Palestine to detention camps in Cyprus. The sacrifice of six million of our people did not move the British Government to deviate by an iota from its illegal and immoral action which shut the one real haven of refuge against their possible rescue.

In the "real" world, governments recognize sacrifices as signs of weakness. The "surest way" for Zionists not to "get" partition was to propose the division of Palestine to the great powers, for Washington and London understood the rules of negotiations, which the Jewish Agency had forgotten: You always ask for more than what you want. When Goldmann made his partition offer, "it became the Jewish solution, and therefore, unavailable as a compromise solution." Silver urged his audience to realize that "every eloquent speech made at this Congress in favor of partition is a nail driven into its coffin." Truman and Bevin would propose "sound and just" solutions to the Palestine problem if Zionists did not lose their "nerve" and if they courageously and determinedly exerted political pressure on the White House and 10 Downing Street. In the future, Silver counseled, all Zionist spokesmen should insist on the establishment of a Jewish state in an "undivided" Palestine.

Silver and Ben-Gurion's arguments, combined with Neumann's skillful negotiations, successfully convinced a majority of the World Zionist Congress to reject the Weizmann-Goldmann position. The delegates at Basel voted to give Ben-Gurion and Silver total control of charting the Zionist political course. After defeating Weizmann decisively, Ben-Gurion asked the congress to pay tribute to the long service and accomplishments of the elderly Zionist leader. Ben-Gurion's praise for the architect of the Balfour Declaration was actually a eulogy. Weizmann left Basel powerless, although he would continue to play a limited role in Zionist affairs. Wise returned to the United States a bitter man and announced that he was resigning from his role as leader in the Zionist Organization of America because he could
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not support Abba Hillel Silver's extremist tactics and demands for the creation of a Jewish state in an undivided Palestine.81

THE TRIUMPH OF AMERICAN ZIONISM

Events following the Basel congress proved the validity of Silver's political analysis. The British Labour government, as Silver had accurately perceived, was firmly committed to pursuing an anti-Zionist policy. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin was simply unprepared to accept the establishment of a geographically viable and fully sovereign Jewish state, and he rejected every Zionist attempt to initiate a compromise solution to end the struggle for Palestine. Therefore, after the Zionist Congress, Jewish nationalists pursued a two-pronged campaign. Publicly, Silver and other Zionist orators repeatedly stated that their goal was to achieve full Jewish control over all of Palestine, while Jews in Europe and Palestine persevered in a much more grueling and demanding conflict. Zionist agents in Europe, under the command of Jewish leaders in Palestine, continued to assault the British blockade of the Holy Land with boatloads of Jewish refugees. Meanwhile, the renegade Jewish terrorist organizations, the Irgun and the Stern Gang, which refused to accept Ben-Gurion's authority, attacked military installations in Palestine and assassinated British officials.82

The Zionists' aggressive war of words and deeds achieved results within an astonishingly short period of time. On February 14, 1947, a weary and frustrated British government announced that it would allow the United Nations to resolve the Palestine problem. In the United States, Silver's championing of an extreme Zionist platform was actually helping to build up American support for the partition of Palestine. The extermination of six million Jews and the DPs' plight troubled Americans, who could also admire the stubborn determination of the survivors of Hitler's death camps to reach their "homeland" in Palestine. Still, they knew that Palestine was a contested territory and that Arabs were equally as willing to kill and be killed for its possession. By posing as an "extremist," Silver allowed Americans to weigh his position against that of militant Arab Palestinian nationalists. The partition of Palestine seemed to be a reasonable and practical compromise.83

The key to this strategy, for Zionists, was not to adopt the partition formula too quickly. Silver understood that it was critical for world opinion to believe that, in accepting partition, the Zionists were making a sacrifice, not winning a victory.

The final act of the partition drama was staged before the United Nations. The General Assembly opened its debate on Palestine in April 1947 and decided to send a special committee to the Middle East to investigate the situation and devise proposals to be submitted for approval by the whole assembly.84
After visiting Palestine, the eleven-nation committee submitted two reports to the General Assembly. A minority report submitted by the representatives of India, Iran, and Yugoslavia essentially called for the cantonization of Palestine into Arab and Jewish semi-autonomous regions united under a federal government. The majority proposal, made by the representatives of Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, and Uruguay, called for the partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states.85

The majority partition proposal was precisely what Zionist leaders had been waiting for. A suggestion for dividing Palestine was now being initiated by a responsible political body, not by the Zionists themselves. According to Silver and Neumann's conception of how the diplomatic game was played, it was now time for the Zionists reluctantly but nobly to accept the division of the Holy Land. Coincidentally, the task fell to Abba Hillel Silver, the only American on the Zionist delegation that had been invited by the United Nations to participate in the proceedings.

Silver played his part beautifully, beginning his address with a strong attack on the legitimacy of Palestinian nationalism. There had never been a “politically or culturally distinct” Arab nation in Palestine, Silver claimed. In fact, the Arabs who took possession of Palestine in 634 A.D. had “held sway” for only 437 years before the region was conquered by “non-Arab peoples,” including the Kurds, Crusaders, and Turks. In contrast, Silver continued, “by the time the Arabs conquered Palestine . . . the Jewish people had already completed nearly two thousand years of national history in that country, during which time they created a civilization which decidedly influenced the course of mankind.” Repeating a common theme of Zionist propaganda, Silver claimed that the Zionist return to Palestine harmed no one. For the Arabs of Palestine, Jewish settlement brought economic and social progress. Zionism was not even a threat to Arab nationalism, Silver continued, pointing out that “the Arabs possess today independent monarchies in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Iraq, and Transjordan, and independent republics in Syria and Lebanon.” All the Jews desired was to return to their homeland, which occupied a mere ten thousand square miles of the vast Middle East.

After presenting the reasons why the Zionists could justly claim control of all of Palestine, Silver turned his attention to the two proposals before the General Assembly. The minority report of the Palestine committee, calling for the creation of an independent Federal State of Palestine consisting of two semi-autonomous regions, was totally unacceptable to the Zionist movement. The Arab majority of Palestine would never allow large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine, thereby condemning the Jews of the nation to permanent minority status. Silver said, “The plan entails for the Jews all the disadvantages of partition—and a very bad partition geographically—without the compensating advantages of a real partition: statehood, independence and free immigration.”
Triumph of American Zionism

The majority report calling for the partition of Palestine was clearly not in the spirit of the framers of the Balfour Declaration, who Silver claimed intended to create a Jewish state in all of Palestine. To propose partition was to ask the Jewish people to make a “very heavy sacrifice,” but the Zionist movement was willing to pay this price because “the proposal makes possible the immediate re-establishment of the Jewish State, an ideal for which our people ceaselessly strove through the centuries, and because it ensures immediate and continuing Jewish immigration which, as events have demonstrated, is possible only under a Jewish State.” Then, attempting to prove that the Zionist leadership was capable of great statesmanship and maturity, in comparison to Arab nationalist leaders who had never been willing to compromise, Silver said the Zionists would also accept partition “as our contribution to the solution of a grave international problem and as evidence of our willingness to join with the community of nations in an effort to bring peace at last to the troubled land which is precious to the heart of mankind.” There were limits to sacrifice, however. The Jews would only accept partition with the understanding that the Jewish state would be fully sovereign and would have full control over its own immigration policy. Silver summed up the Zionist position succinctly:

We have builded a nation in Palestine. That nation now demands its independence. It will not be dislodged. Its national status will not be denied. We are asked to make an enormous sacrifice to attain that which, if uninterfered with, we would have attained long ago. In sadness, and most reluctantly, we are prepared to make this sacrifice. Beyond it we cannot, we will not go.86

After additional debate and deliberation, the General Assembly decided to accept the majority report and partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. The U.N. vote was quite impressive, particularly given the fact that both the United States and the Soviet Union both opted to support the creation of a Jewish state. The Soviet Union’s vote to create a Jewish state was probably the result of Stalin’s shrewd calculations. The Soviets, who had always been hostile to Zionism, recognized that by voting to create a Jewish state they would be promoting the decline of the British Empire in the Middle East while they received credit for supporting a measure that many in the United States considered just and humane.87 Washington’s support of Jewish statehood, on the other hand, was the result of the long, hard political and propaganda struggle of American Zionists.

It was a bittersweet victory for American Zionists. In 1933 they were just a small, beleaguered segment of the American Jewish community. The rise of Hitler had rejuvenated their movement. Responding to the plight of their co-religionists, American Zionists provided the financial and political support necessary to bring large numbers of refugees to Palestine. The Zionists’ ability to provide a practical solution to the refugee crisis brought the movement great prestige and respect among American Jews who were anguished and concerned by Nazi anti-Semitic...
policies. An Arab revolt and increasingly hostile British policies convinced American Zionists that to provide a haven for refugees they would first have to insure the security of Jewish Palestine. Believing that they were waging a war for the survival of the Jewish people, Zionists set out to unite the American Jewish community in a statehood campaign as the first important step to winning the support of the Roosevelt administration. In this context, learning about Hitler's extermination of European Jewry only served to convince American Zionists that their path was correct. Abba Hillel Silver's passionate and eloquent claim that the Nazi extermination program was the latest link in a chain of anti-Semitism that could only be broken by the end of Jewish homelessness, not only expressed the view of most American Zionists, it captured the attention of concerned American Jews who were in agony over the seemingly insurmountable task of rescuing European Jewry. They flocked to the Zionist movement believing, like Silver, that Zionism was the ultimate form of rescue. Together with Silver and other Zionist leaders they worked and sacrificed to gain American public and political support. Tragically, their victory came only after the murder of six million Jews.

Almost all American Zionists could take some credit for Israel's creation. Emanuel Neumann and Abba Hillel Silver had skillfully constructed an efficient public relations machine and had astutely developed an aggressive and tough strategy. Stephen Wise's charm and good works had steadily won support for Zionism from Jews and Christians and gave Zionists an important link to the Democratic party. In spite of their dislike for each other, Neumann, Silver, Wise, and Goldmann made an effective team. The "extremists" provided the force and attempted to influence American policymakers with a stick, while the moderates were always available to mend fences and extend sympathy to Truman and his administration.

The United Nations vote did not end the struggle for Palestine. Other political battles remained to be fought as elements within the State Department unsuccessfully attempted to postpone Jewish independence, which was scheduled for mid-May 1948. Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon responded to David Ben-Gurion's declaration of independence by launching a full-scale military invasion against the new Jewish state of Israel. That long bloody war did not end with a peace settlement, but with an armistice. More conflict was to follow.