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The 1948 American Embargo on Arms to Palestine

SHLOMO SLONIM

The 1948 American arms embargo on Palestine and the Middle East stands in stark contrast to the general diplomatic support that President Truman extended to the nascent and fledgling Jewish state. As is well known, President Truman repeatedly countermanded State Department directives that he felt were inconsistent with his pro-Jewish-state policy.¹ It is enough to recall the promotion by the administration of the U.N. General Assembly's partition resolution;² the immediate American recognition of the new state;³ the appointment of James G. McDonald as Washington's special representative to Israel in June 1948;⁴ and the rejection of the Bernadotte proposal to detach the Negev from

¹ See Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, *Years of Trial and Hope* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 190-99; Margaret Truman, *Harry S. Truman* (New York: Morrow, 1972), pp. 424-28.

² In this connection, note Truman's decision to overrule the State Department's proposal to exclude the Negev from the area to be allotted to the proposed Jewish state. See *Foreign Relations of the United States 1947*, vol. V, *The Near East and Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), pp. 1269-71 (hereafter cited as *FRUS 1947*).

³ See minutes of White House meeting of May 12, 1948, which record the opposition of Secretary Marshall and State Department officials to this step. See *Foreign Relations of the United States 1948*, vol. V, part 2, *The Near East, South Asia and Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976), pp. 972-76 (hereafter cited as *FRUS 1948*). For rejoinder of Clark Clifford, who argued that recognition was in the national interest, see *ibid.*, pp. 974, 976. Truman decided not to announce, in advance, an American intention to recognize. He refused, however, to postpone recognition, even momentarily, once the state was proclaimed. Undersecretary of State Robert A. Lovett subsequently claimed: "The President's political advisers, having failed . . . to make the President a father of the new state have determined at least to make him the midwife" (*ibid.*, p. 1007).

⁴ See memorandum by Special Counsel Clark Clifford to President, June 17, 1948, in *FRUS 1948*,

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Israeli territory.⁵ Yet in what was perhaps the most critical issue of all—the issue in which Israel's security and existence hung most in the balance—the approach of the State Department would seem to have prevailed. During the entire course of Israel's struggle for independence the embargo policy was rigorously maintained.⁶

How can one account for this apparent inconsistency in American policy? What were the factors that led to the initial imposition of the arms embargo, and what pressures were brought to bear on the administration for removal of the embargo? Why did all endeavors to modify the arms policy prove futile, even after recognition of the new state? And further, what were the long-range implications of the embargo policy for the peacemaking process in the Middle East?

The relevant diplomatic correspondence of 1947–48, as revealed in the recently opened Department of State archives, sheds new light on this aspect of America's 1948 Middle East policy.

PARTITION AND IMPOSITION OF THE EMBARGO

The suggestion for an arms embargo on Palestine was first raised by Loy Henderson, head of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs in the Department of State, on November 10, 1947.⁷ At this point, the United States was actively engaged in promoting the General Assembly's adoption of the partition resolution that called for the establishment of independent Arab and Jewish states in Palestine.⁸ Already on October 11 the United States had pro-

pp. 1117–19; memoranda of phone conversations between Clifford and Lovett, June 22, 1948, in *ibid.*, pp. 1131–32, and between Lovett and Clifford, June 24, 1948, in *ibid.*, p. 1140; and memorandum of conversation between Lovett and McDonald, June 28, 1948, in *ibid.*, pp. 1151–52. For McDonald's own account of the circumstances surrounding his appointment, see James G. McDonald, *My Mission in Israel, 1948–1951* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), pp. 3–19.

⁵ See *FRUS 1948*, pp. 1415–16, 1430–38, 1512–14, 1565–67, 1570, 1610, 1617. See also *New York Times*, October 28 and 29, 1948. On the United States and the Bernadotte plan generally, see Joseph B. Schechtman, *The United States and the Jewish State Movement: The Crucial Decade 1939–1949* (New York: Herzl Press, 1966), chap. 14. For Truman's account of the Bernadotte episode, see Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, pp. 195–97. In his letter to President Weizmann on Nov. 29, 1948 (after he had upset Dewey in the elections), President Truman wrote: "I remember well our conversation about the Negeb. . . . I agree fully with your estimate of the importance of the area to Israel, and I deplore any attempt to take it away from Israel. I had thought that my position would have been clear to all the world, particularly in the light of the specific wording of the Democratic Party platform. But there were those who did not take this seriously, regarding it as 'just another campaign promise' to be forgotten after the election. I believe they have recently realized their error (*ibid.*, p. 198); also in *FRUS 1948*, p. 1633.

⁶ The United States did not lift the embargo until August 4, 1949, after armistice agreements had been concluded between Israel and all the bordering Arab states. See *Foreign Relations of the United States 1949*, vol. VI, *The Near East, South Asia and Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977), pp. 1283–84 (hereafter cited as *FRUS 1949*).

⁷ *FRUS 1947*, p. 1249.

⁸ On October 22, 1947, Secretary Marshall had given instructions to the U.S. delegation to

posed "the establishment of a special constabulary or police force" to ensure unhampered implementation of the partition scheme.⁹ In the final draft resolution, in place of a constabulary, provision was made for the creation of "an armed militia" in each state "to maintain internal order and to prevent frontier clashes." It also appealed to "all Governments and all peoples to refrain from taking any action which might hamper or delay the carrying out of these recommendations." Additionally, the draft resolution requested the Security Council to "take the necessary measures as provided for in the plan for its implementation" and to "determine as a threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression, in accordance with Article 39 of the [U.N.] Charter, any attempt to alter by force the settlement envisaged by this resolution."¹⁰ Thus, the resolution contemplated the possibility of resistance and the contingency that partition would have to be implemented by force—by local militia forces initially, and, if necessary, by the collective forces of the international community.

Supplying the militia with arms could be considered as a legitimate, and even required, first step toward partition and certainly fell within the entire spirit of the resolution. As Dr. Herbert E. Evatt, Australian minister for external affairs, stated subsequently, the resolution "calls for militia and militias need arms."¹¹ The United States, as one of the prime movers of the partition resolution and one of the permanent members of the Security Council, might reasonably have been expected to assume a prominent role in furnishing the militia with essential weapons and supplies. This would represent a minimal American role in ensuring implementation of the resolution. These considerations, however, do not seem to have deterred Henderson from outlining a policy that would bar the United States from contributing to the effective implementation of the partition resolution. He proposed prohibiting the export of any military material to Palestine or neighboring states "so long as the tension continues. Otherwise, the Arabs might use arms of U.S. origin against Jews, or Jews might use them against Arabs. In either case, we would be subject to bitter recrimination."¹² Henderson's proposal received the endorsement of Undersecretary of State Robert A. Lovett and Secretary of State George Marshall.¹³ On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly, with active American support, adopted the parti-

line up the vote to support the American proposals on the issues "of amendments to the majority plan on partition and manner of implementation" (*ibid.*, p. 1199). In the words of Fraser Wilkins, adviser to the U.S. delegation, this confirmed "active support of our stated Palestine policy" (*ibid.*, n. 3).

⁹ United Nations, General Assembly, Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestine Question, *Summary Records*, 2d sess., 1948, p. 64.

¹⁰ For the final text of U.N. General Assembly Resolution 181 (II), see United Nations, General Assembly, *Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly, Resolutions*, 16 September–29 November 1947, pp. 131. The full text with accompanying maps is reprinted as an appendix in *FRUS 1948*, pp. 1709.

¹¹ Canberra to Secretary of State, April 9, 1948, U.S., Department of State, Decimal File 501.BB Palestine/4-948.

¹² Henderson quoted in *FRUS 1947*, p. 1249.

¹³ *Ibid.*

tion resolution. Barely a week later, on December 5, the State Department formally announced the discontinuance of the licensing of arms shipments to Palestine and neighboring countries.¹⁴ No evidence has been found to suggest that President Truman's authorization for instituting the arms embargo was ever sought or obtained.

The attitude of the State Department is reflected in a message sent the next day, December 6, by Undersecretary Lovett to Secretary Marshall, who was then in London. After describing the scope and nature of the embargo policy, Lovett states:

In view recent disorder Palestine and threats from Arab states, Dept anticipates representatives Jewish Agency . . . will shortly request US Govt to permit export to Palestine from US of military supplies.

Dept proposes if and when approached by representatives Jewish Agency, to reply:

- 1) In period preceding termination mandate, requests for military supplies should be made to British authorities in Palestine.
- 2) In period following termination mandate, requests for military supplies should be made to UN Commission. Commission procedure thereafter is as yet unknown.¹⁵

Under the circumstances it was, of course, vain on Lovett's part to suggest that the Jewish authorities should approach Britain or the U.N. commission to procure weapons for defense. The British had made abundantly clear in the General Assembly debates that they would not consent to transfer power directly to either of the envisaged governmental bodies, since this "would in practice amount to the implementation of this scheme . . . which, failing Arab-Jewish agreement, they [were] not prepared to undertake."¹⁶ They would transfer power only to the U.N. commission which, in turn, would transfer it to the appropriate bodies. At the same time, however, the British Foreign Office had secretly notified Lovett on November 28 that the commission would not be permitted to enter Palestine until two weeks before termination of the mandate, that is, on May 1.¹⁷ Lovett, in a telegram on November 29 (the very day the partition plan was adopted), confirmed American acceptance of these terms.¹⁸ Thus, on December 6, when Lovett dispatched his cable to Marshall, he could have realized that the Palestine commission would not emerge as an effective body in Palestine until it was probably too late. Consequently, there was little point in the suggestion to turn to this ineffectual organization for military supplies. Likewise, it was common knowledge that even at that very moment, the British were busily engaged in disarming Hagana forces who were attempting to

defend the Jewish community from Arab attacks.¹⁹ Thus, there was little reason to expect that the British would be prepared to provide the Jews with arms. Indeed, the United Kingdom was continuing to ship weapons and supplies to the Arab states. The Foreign Office, in reply to an American inquiry, confirmed: "HMG [His Majesty's government] has treaty obligations to supply certain Middle East states with war materials. . . . It is not intended to hold up delivery such items, which form part previous orders. Any new orders from Palestine or Arab countries will be scrutinized with great care before decision is taken on them."²⁰ In a subsequent message the Foreign Office noted: "HMG is bound to assume these will not be used contrary UN Charter."²¹

From all this, it is clear that the American policymakers, no less than their British counterparts, realized from the outset that while the arms embargo would profoundly affect the defense capability of the Jewish community, it would, at most, only marginally affect the Arab states. The latter would continue to receive British supplies in fulfillment of earlier commitments.

RETREAT FROM PARTITION

Even as the embargo policy was being launched, Jewish Agency officials made their first move to obtain American arms for defense. On December 10, 1947, the American consul general in Jerusalem reported that agency officials were preparing a formal request for arms "in keeping with US responsibility for partition decision."²² On the eve of his departure from the United States on December 9, Chaim Weizmann, in a letter to the president, posed the issue:

The only matter which causes us anxiety is our people's deficiency in the equipment necessary for their defense. The Arabs obviously suffer no such lack. It is a paradox of history that the Jews, who are the only people in the Near East threatened by aggression, are the only people who have not been able to provide freely for their own defense. In our efforts to correct this dangerous position we shall have cause to rely on the good will of your administration; and it is for this reason that I venture to bring the matter to your attention.²³

Early in January, Jewish Agency representatives Eliahu Epstein and Abba Eban met with State Department officials in Washington, including Henderson and Rusk, and expressed the hope "that the members of the UN including the United States would be in a position to arm and equip these [militia] forces."

¹⁹ Netanel Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword: Israel's War of Independence 1947-1949* (New York: Putnam, 1961), pp. 47-49. See also *Palestine Post*, December 2, 1947.

²⁰ *FRUS 1947*, p. 1315.

²¹ *FRUS 1948*, p. 562, n. 1.

²² *FRUS 1947*, p. 1309.

²³ Papers of Harry S. Truman, Official File, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Mo. Truman's reply of December 12 did not touch on the arms issue. It simply urged "restraint and tolerance . . . if we are to get a peaceful settlement in the Near East."

¹⁴ U.S., Department of State, *Bulletin*, December 14, 1947, p. 1197; see also *FRUS 1947*, p. 1300, n. 2.

¹⁵ *FRUS 1947*, p. 1300.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1274.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1290.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1290, n.1.

Mr. Eban noted "that the Arabs hoped the UN recommendation to partition Palestine would not be implemented. . . . Strong support by the U.S. for partition in the Security Council and the provision of equipment for the Jewish militia would indicate American determination and would thus have a stabilizing effect on the situation in Palestine."²⁴ Later in the month, Moshe Shertok, in a meeting with members of the U.S. delegation at the United Nations, presented the arms question as a matter of the highest priority. "The most urgent need," he declared, "was to find a means of supplying the Jews in Palestine with arms so that they could defend themselves and prepare for the defense of the Jewish State."²⁵ Following her arrival in New York on January 23, Mrs. Golda Myerson, then head of the political department of the Jewish Agency, announced that one of her goals was to try and persuade the United States to relent on the issue of the arms embargo.²⁶

At the same time, pressures were building up within the United States to persuade the administration to modify its position on arms sales. Several prominent personalities argued that imposition of an arms embargo was inconsistent with support for partition. On January 28, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, herself a member of the U.S. delegation to the U.N. General Assembly, wrote to Secretary of State Marshall: "It seems to me that the decision which was made to support the majority report on Palestine, and our leadership in the UN, place a responsibility on us to see the UN through in actually implementing its policies. . . . The quicker we remove the embargo and see that the Jews and any UN police force are equipped with modern armaments, which is the only thing which will hold the Arabs in check, the better it will be for the whole situation."²⁷ On February 10, 1948, thirty Republican members of the House of Representatives—including Jacob Javits, Christian Herter, Clifford Case, Kenneth Keating, Thurston B. Morton, and Margaret Chase Smith—sent a public letter to Secretary Marshall in which they posed a series of questions regarding the nature and implications of the administration's arms embargo.²⁸ In particular, they wished to know whether it was true that Great Britain was permitting arms to be shipped to Arab nations and whether this would interfere with carrying out the United Nations decision on Palestine. Furthermore, they wished to know what the United States was prepared to do to help implement the U.N. decision.

On February 13, 1948, Representative Charles A. Buckley introduced a resolution into the House calling on the president to lift the arms embargo.²⁹ On the same day, Dr. Clark M. Eichelberger, president of the American Association

for the United Nations, dispatched a letter to the seventy-five chapters of the association urging that immediate steps be taken to set up an international peace force and to lift the embargo. In the event of failure, he warned, "a major blame will be placed upon the Government of the United States."³⁰ In a letter to the *New York Times*, which appeared on February 13, a similar note was sounded by James G. McDonald, a member of the 1946 Anglo-American Committee on Inquiry on Palestine and subsequently Washington's first ambassador to Israel: "Talk of a compromise involving a reversal of the United States decision can only tend to appease and, therefore, to encourage such [Arab] aggression."³¹ On February 15, the American Zionist Emergency Council convened an urgent meeting in Washington, D.C., and adopted resolutions that, inter alia, called upon the administration to take active steps to arm the Jewish militia in Palestine and charged the British with sabotage of the U.N. partition resolution.³² On February 18, former New York Governor Herbert Lehman condemned the British for continuing to ship arms to the Arabs.³³ He joined with Mrs. Roosevelt in a public appeal for an end to the U.S. embargo.³⁴

None of these efforts, however, succeeded in modifying the State Department's stand. The standard reply issued by Secretary Marshall was that the shipment of arms to one side in the dispute would only exacerbate the strife and frustrate ongoing efforts to reach a peaceful solution.³⁵ This logic, however, did not seem to hold for pressuring the British to suspend their arms sales to the Middle East. Perhaps most revealing in this respect is the conversation on January 29 between Undersecretary Lovett and Lord Inverchapel, the United Kingdom ambassador to the United States.³⁶ Three days earlier Lovett had suggested to the ambassador "that the British should if possible, in view of the pressure being brought in Congress to have the U.S. embargo on arms to the Middle East raised, issue a statement to the effect that they have suspended all shipments of arms to the Arab states."³⁷ In reply, London now reaffirmed its earlier stand that only supplies for internal purposes, in fulfillment of "long-standing orders" were being delivered. Lovett thereupon observed "that he had then been given nothing to tell Congress except that the British felt that they must continue to deliver arms for internal security purposes if assured such arms

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 20.

³² U.S., Department of State, Decimal File, 867 N. 01/2-1748; see also *New York Times*, February 16, 1948.

³³ *New York Times*, February 18, 1948, p. 6.

³⁴ Ibid., February 19, 1948, p. 6.

³⁵ See, for example, Marshall's reply to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt dated February 16, 1948: "A decision by the United States . . . to permit American arms to go to Palestine and neighboring states would facilitate acts of violence and the further shedding of blood and thus render still more difficult the task of maintaining law and order. We are continuing, therefore, to refuse to license the shipment of arms to that area" (*FRUS 1948*, p. 629).

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 581-84.

³⁷ Memorandum of conversation by Joseph C. Satterthwaite, deputy director of Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, in *ibid.*, p. 581. See also *ibid.*, pp. 562-63.

²⁴ *FRUS 1948*, p. 538.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 566.

²⁶ *New York Times*, January 23, p. 13 and January 27, p. 7.

²⁷ U.S., Department of State, Decimal File, 867 N. 01/1-2848.

²⁸ See U.S., Department of State, Decimal File, 501.BB Palestine/2-1048; see also *New York Times*, February 11, 1948, p. 15.

²⁹ *New York Times*, February 13, 1948, p. 16.

would not be used in Palestine." Lovett explained further: "A statement in such limited terms might do more harm than good, since it would serve only to emphasize the fact that the British are in fact furnishing arms to certain Arab states. About the only thing we can do therefore is to let the matter ride as it is and hope that the U.S. can nevertheless succeed in maintaining the arms embargo."³⁸

Apparently, Lovett was not overly concerned about the British shipments and was not prepared to pressure them to suspend their sales. What he needed was not a British embargo but simply a British statement in order to deflect congressional criticism and preserve the American embargo. In the absence of such a statement the State Department would "let the matter ride" and hope for the best.

In sum, therefore, the State Department was not moved to consider lifting its one-sided embargo either by virtue of domestic pressures or by virtue of external failure to keep faith with the embargo policy. Nor was it even prepared to use the leverage offered by the presence of its own freeze on shipments in order to compel the British to desist from arms sales and thereby broaden the embargo.

In fact, the State Department was advancing step by step in the opposite direction, toward complete abandonment of the partition scheme. The process of erosion had already gotten underway even before the General Assembly had adopted its November 29 resolution. A week earlier, on November 24, Henderson had sent Lovett a memorandum in which he asserted that, in the view of all the members of his office, support for the partition plan was "contrary to the interests of the United States." He warned of the loss of friendship in the Arab world, and continued: "It is extremely unfortunate that we should be criticizing the British for following the only kind of policy which, it seems to me, they can follow if they are to remain in the Middle East."³⁹ Henderson and other State Department officials obviously felt that Truman's propartition stand was misguided and would seriously endanger American interests in the Middle East. Their misgivings were in no way attenuated by the General Assembly's adoption of the partition resolution with American backing. Thus, by December 17, 1947, barely two weeks after adoption of the Assembly resolution, a report was circulated in the State Department that called into question American support for the partition program that it claimed was "impossible of implementation."⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 582.

³⁹ *FRUS 1947*, pp. 1281-82. With Mr. Lovett's approval the memorandum was transmitted to various members of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations, see *ibid.*, p. 1282, n. 3.

⁴⁰ U.S., Department of State, Decimal File, 501.BB Palestine/12-1747. The purpose of the report was stated to be: "To assess and appraise the position of the U.S. with respect to Palestine, taking into consideration the security interests of the U.S. in the Mediterranean and Near East areas and in the light of the decision of the General Assembly of the United Nations regarding the partition of Palestine." An editorial note in *FRUS 1947*, pp. 1313-14, reproduces the text of the two recommendations presented in the report, and indicates that authorship of the report is unknown.

Only the Russians stood to gain from partition, it was alleged. The report recommended that the United States either call for a special session of the General Assembly to consider a U.N. trusteeship for Palestine or simply wash its hands of the whole issue. In either case, the arms embargo should be maintained and enforced.

This report served as the basis for a more comprehensive Policy Planning Staff Report (PPS/19) issued by its director, George F. Kennan, on January 19, 1948. "The U.S. Government," the report stated, "should face the fact that the partition of Palestine cannot be implemented without the use of force. . . . It should be clearly recognized that such [military] assistance given to the Jewish state, but withheld from the Arabs. . . . would in Arab eyes be a virtual declaration of war by the U.S. against the Arab world."⁴¹ Promoting the implementation of the partition scheme, it was argued, would introduce a Soviet presence in Palestine. This "would constitute an outflanking of our positions in Greece, Turkey and Iran, and a potential threat to the stability of the entire Eastern Mediterranean area." "In the U.S.," the report further warned, "the position of Jews would be gravely undermined as it becomes evident to the public that in supporting a Jewish state in Palestine we were in fact supporting the extreme objectives of political Zionism, to the detriment of overall U.S. security interests."⁴² The report recommended therefore that the United States take no further initiative in implementing or aiding partition, that the embargo be retained, and that the Palestine issue be referred back to the U.N. General Assembly.

On January 29, in response to critical comments on PPS/19 made by Dean Rusk, director of the Office of Special Political Affairs in the State Department, Kennan elaborated upon the analysis presented in the report.

I am concerned at Mr. Rusk's suggestion that armed interference in Palestine by the Arab States to prevent the implementation of the Assembly resolution, even in the form of furnishing arms and assistance for guerilla action, would constitute aggression, and that the United States has a responsibility as a permanent member of the Security Council to act within the limits of the Charter to prevent this. . . . I do not feel that we should put further pressure on the British, with respect to arms shipments to Arab countries. The importation of arms into Palestine is still clearly a question for the mandatory power, which bears responsibility for internal law and order there. As for British relations with the Arabs, the remaining British strategic positions in the Middle East are among the few real assets which we still have in that area.

. . . Mr. Rusk is correct that a hands-off policy will leave Palestine in a state of violence. For that, all of us will share some measure of blame who have been connected with the Palestine question in these past 30 years; but the main responsibility will have to continue to rest with the Jewish leaders and organizations who have pushed so persistently for the pursuit of objectives which could scarcely fail to lead to violent results.

⁴¹ U.S., Department of State, *Report by the Policy Planning Staff on Position of the United States with Respect to Palestine*, in *FRUS 1948*, pp. 546-54.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 553.

. . . In these circumstances, I think we have no choice but to try to extricate ourselves from the existing commitments as rapidly as possible.⁴³

Further memoranda in a similar vein emanated from both the Department of State and the National Security Council.⁴⁴ Together, these two organizations laid the groundwork for the ultimate public abandonment of the partition scheme by the United States. The first public intimation that Washington's Middle East policy was about to take a revolutionary turn was provided by Senator Warren Austin in his speech to the Security Council on February 24:⁴⁵ "The Security Council is authorized to take forceful measures with respect to Palestine to remove a threat to international peace. The Charter . . . does not empower the Security Council to enforce a political settlement. . . . The Security Council's action, in other words, is directed to keeping the peace and not to enforcing partition."⁴⁶

The coup de grace was delivered by Senator Austin in his famous March 19 address before the Security Council in which he called for the immediate convening of a special session of the General Assembly to institute a temporary trusteeship for Palestine. Partition would be shelved for the meantime.⁴⁷ This move, engineered by the State Department, shocked members of the Jewish Agency,⁴⁸ as well as such independent bystanders as U.N. Secretary General Trygve Lie⁴⁹ and Dr. Evatt, Australia's minister for external affairs.⁵⁰ Even President Truman was dismayed, as his papers so glaringly reveal.⁵¹

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 574–81.

⁴⁴ See, for example the memorandum circulated on January 27, 1948, by Mr. Samuel K.C. Kopper of the office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, in *ibid.*, pp. 563–66; the paper prepared by the Policy Planning Staff at the specific request of Undersecretary Lovett on alternative courses of action open to the United States, February 11, 1948, in *ibid.*, pp. 619–25; the Draft Report prepared by the staff of the National Security Council, February 17, 1948, in *ibid.*, pp. 631–32; and the report by the Central Intelligence Agency, February 28, 1948, in *ibid.*, pp. 666–75. This report warned that U.N. authorization of unilateral support for the Jewish state would constitute "a course of action extremely dangerous to world peace" (*ibid.*, p. 674). The USSR would be quick to take advantage of the situation. The report, therefore, recommended that the United States oppose any such U.N. authorization.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 651–54. Reprinted from U.N., Security Council, *Official Records, 3rd Year*, nos. 16–35, 1948, pp. 264–69.

⁴⁶ *FRUS 1948*, p. 653. See further, in this regard, Philip C. Jessup, *The Birth of Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 263–64. But compare the views of the U.N. Legal Adviser Ivan S. Kerno, as reported in *New York Times*, February 27, 1948, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *FRUS 1948*, pp. 742–44. Reprinted from U.N., Security Council, *Official Records, 3rd Year*, nos. 36–51, 1948, pp. 157–68.

⁴⁸ See the reaction of Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, in *New York Times*, March 20, 1948, p. 2, and April 1, 1948, p. 8.

⁴⁹ In his autobiography, *In the Cause of Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 171, Trygve Lie relates that he suggested to Ambassador Austin that the two of them resign their respective positions as a sign of extreme displeasure with the new course of American policy. The ambassador demurred, and the secretary himself was dissuaded from taking the drastic step proposed. See also *FRUS 1948*, p. 744, n.2.

⁵⁰ U.S. embassy officials in Canberra cabled that, in talks with them, "Evatt compared present Palestine situation to Spanish civil war. . . . We are barring arms to Jews (as to Loyalists)

The people in the State Department had finally succeeded in derailing the partition plan. When they first voiced opposition to the partition plan they had been overruled. Nonetheless, they succeeded in obtaining the imposition of an arms embargo that seemingly did not require presidential approval. In this manner, the provisions for self-implementation of partition—that is, implementation by the militias of the two projected states—were hamstrung even before the partition resolution was adopted. The alternative form of implementation contemplated by the resolution—use of Security Council forces—was also ruled out. By March 1948, the cold war was at its height, and the United States would not countenance any arrangement, the effect of which would be the introduction of Soviet forces into the Middle East. Thus, in the view of the State Department, there was no longer any alternative to scrapping the plan entirely.

FROM AMERICAN TO UNITED NATIONS EMBARGO

The full implications of the State Department's antipartition stance were pointed up critically in two memoranda submitted to President Truman on March 6 and 8 by White House adviser, Clark Clifford.⁵² Judged by the sole relevant criterion—America's own self-interest—U.S. support of partition, Clifford insisted, was and remained sound policy. American security and oil in-

while Arabs (like Franquistas) are continuing to receive them (largely from British). . . . Feels President Truman . . . has been put in dreadful position by poor advisers. Says it is shocking. Department is controlled by 'little men'. Claimed some Arab lovers were actually disloyal" (Canberra to Secretary of State, April 9, 1948, U.S., Department of State Decimal File, 501.BB Palestine/4-948).

⁵¹ According to Margaret Truman, the president made the following entry in his calendar on March 19, 1948:

"The State Dept. pulled the rug from under me today. . . . In Key West . . . I approved the speech [of] Senator Austin to U.N. meeting. This morning I find that the State Dept. has reversed my Palestine policy. The first I know about it is what I see in the papers! Isn't that hell? I am now in the position of a liar and a double crosser. I've never felt so in my life.

"There are people on the third and fourth levels of the State Dept. who have always wanted to cut my throat. They've succeeded in doing it" (Margaret Truman, *Harry S. Truman*, pp. 424–25). See also, Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, pp. 190–193.

There has been considerable debate over Truman's foreknowledge and appreciation of the contents of Austin's statements proposing an international trusteeship for Palestine. A three-page editorial note in *FRUS 1948*, pp. 744–46, summarizes the contrasting viewpoints and their supporting arguments. See also the various memoranda relating to Clark Clifford's "investigation" of the Austin episode, in *ibid.*, pp. 749–50, 751–52. For two important new contributions to the literature on this subject, see Zvi Ganin, "The Limits of American Jewish Political Power: America's Retreat from Partition, November 1947–March 1948," *Jewish Social Studies* 34 (1977): 20–24; and Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945–1948* (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 372–79. See also Clark Clifford, "Factors Influencing President Truman's Decision to Support Partition and Recognize the State of Israel" (Paper presented at a panel on The Palestine Question in American History, sponsored jointly by American Jewish Historical Society and American Historical Association, Washington, D.C., December 23, 1976), pp. 9–13.

⁵² *FRUS 1948*, pp. 687–96.

terests in the Middle East required peace, and this was best secured by means of partition.

There are those who say that partition will not work and that another solution must be found. This comes from those who never wanted partition to succeed and who have been determined to sabotage it. If anything has been omitted that could help kill partition, I do not know what it would be. First, Britain, the Mandatory Power, not only publicly declared she would have no part of it, but she has done everything possible to prevent effective action by the Palestine Commission. Next, we have placed an embargo on arms to Palestine, while Britain fulfills her "contract obligations" to supply arms to the Arabs. Thirdly, our State Department has made no attempt to conceal their dislike for partition. Fourthly, the United States appears in the ridiculous role of trembling before threats of a few nomadic desert tribes. This had done us irreparable damage. Why should Russia or Yugoslavia, or any other nation treat us with anything but contempt in light of our shilly-shallying appeasement of the Arabs.⁵³

Clifford then presented a "Program of Action for the U.S.," which included the following points:

The United States should call upon the Security Council to invoke economic and diplomatic sanctions against the Arab States as aggressors threatening world peace.

The United States should immediately lift its embargo on arms to the Middle East, shipments subject only to limitations set by the U.N. Palestine Commission or the Security Council.

The United States should call upon the Security Council immediately to create and arm the Arab and Jewish militias provided for in the General Assembly resolution, and should cooperate fully with the UN Palestine Commission to this end.⁵⁴

Ten days later, Senator Austin delivered his famous "bombshell" address at the United Nations announcing American withdrawal from the partition plan. This event, and the president's earlier receipt of the Clifford memoranda, formed the background to an urgent White House conference on Palestine convened on March 24 and attended by the president; Secretary Marshall, Loy Henderson, Charles E. (Chip) Bohlen, and Dean Rusk of the State Department; and several White House advisers, including David Niles and Clark Clifford. The arms embargo was one of the main subjects discussed. Clifford records that the president and the White House advisers "were in favor of lifting the arms embargo as soon as possible."⁵⁵ However, Secretary Marshall intervened to say "that they were working on plans for a truce and that it was felt that there was a good possibility that a truce could be effectuated." The White House advisers pressed for an early answer on the success of the truce efforts. The meeting concluded with "the general understanding . . . that, if they [the State Department] could not report

that they had been successful in obtaining a truce by April 7 [two weeks later], steps would be taken to release the embargo."⁵⁶

In agreeing to the postponement the White House failed to appreciate what it was actually conceding. The two-week period was allotted for effectuating a truce, but, in fact, only a truce resolution emerged. The distinction is not minor. Even more significant, the White House failed to recognize that the concept that underlay the proposed truce resolution ran diametrically counter to White House desires. In the White House scheme, removal of the embargo and institution of the truce were alternative measures to achieve the identical goal: secure the Jewish community against aggression and enable it to proceed to realize the partition scheme. As adopted, the truce resolution reflected totally the philosophy of the State Department—that partition needed to be discarded and an alternative solution sought. This can be seen from the terms of the April 17 Security Council resolution that provided for a political as well as a military truce. All parties were called upon to "refrain, pending further consideration of the future government of Palestine by the General Assembly, from any political activity which might prejudice the rights, claims, or position of either community."⁵⁷ Clearly enough, this provision would effectively throw up a roadblock to establishment of the Jewish state. Moreover, the truce resolution became a vehicle for strengthening and multilateralizing the State Department's arms embargo policy. Thus, the Security Council called upon all governments "to take all possible steps to assist in the implementation of the measures set out . . . and particularly those referring to the entry into Palestine of armed bands and fighting personnel, groups and individuals, and weapons and war materials."⁵⁸ From a self-denying ordinance of the State Department alone, the embargo had become the fiat of the United Nations. The entire truce resolution was, in effect, the logical sequel to Austin's March 19 speech announcing American withdrawal from partition. This, however, was not the intent of the White House advisers.

Armed with the truce resolution, State Department officials now had a ready instrument to justify before members of Congress nonmodification of the embargo. Aid could not be extended to the embattled Jewish community and the embargo could not be eased, it was explained, because the administration's hands were tied by Security Council Resolution 46, although that resolution was only recommendatory.

An early illustration of the manner in which the Security Council resolution served to deflect attacks on the embargo policy is provided by a letter dated April 27 from Charles E. Bohlen to Congressman Charles A. Eaton, chairman of

⁵³ Ibid., p. 695.

⁵⁴ This part of the document is not reprinted in *FRUS 1948*. It is to be found in the original document, Papers of Clark M. Clifford, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Mo.

⁵⁵ *FRUS 1948*, p. 755.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Resolution 46 (1948), in *ibid.*, p. 827. Reprinted from U.N., Security Council, *Official Records, 3rd Year, Resolutions, 1948*, p. 16.

⁵⁸ *FRUS 1948*, p. 828. Reprinted from U.N., Security Council, *Official Records, 3rd Year, Resolutions, 1948*, pp. 16-17.

the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Eaton had asked for State Department comments on a House draft resolution that provided for the lifting of the embargo. Bohlen replied that the proposed resolution "would seem to contravene the spirit and letter of the Truce resolution adopted by the Security Council on April 17. . . . The United States voted for this resolution and as a Member of the United Nations is obligated to abide by the terms thereof."⁵⁹ Additionally, Bohlen cited the General Assembly resolution of May 15, 1947, in support of the embargo policy. That resolution, endorsed by President Truman in a public statement, had called on all governments and peoples to refrain from any "action which might create an atmosphere prejudicial to an early settlement of the question of Palestine." But Bohlen omitted to emphasize that the Assembly resolution itself spelled out the terms: "pending action by the General Assembly on the report of the Special Committee on Palestine." Subsequently, the Assembly had met and had adopted the partition scheme. Bohlen was less than candid in citing the prepartition Assembly resolution as grounds for not promoting implementation of the Assembly's partition plan.

It is interesting to note that on April 9, only a few days before the Security Council adopted its truce resolution, a moving plea arrived at the White House from Chaim Weizmann.⁶⁰ He welcomed President Truman's assurance (contained in a statement issued March 25)⁶¹ that the United States had not abandoned partition as the ultimate political settlement in Palestine. He went on to say:

Having recognized the right of our people to independence last November, the great powers now expose them to the risk of extermination and do not even grant them the arms to provide for their own defense. Arab aggression is now more confident than ever. Arabs believe that an international decision has been revised in their favor purely because they dared to use force against it. Mr. President, I cannot see how this belief can honestly be refuted. The practical question now is whether your Administration will proceed to leave our people unarmed in the face of an attack which it apparently feels it is unable to stop; and whether it can allow us to come directly or indirectly under Arab domination which is sworn to our destruction. The choice for our people, Mr. President, is between Statehood and extermination. History and providence have placed this issue in your hands, and I am confident that you will yet decide it in the spirit of the moral law.⁶²

The White House itself made no reply to the letter. But in response to a copy sent to the secretary of state, Undersecretary Lovett wrote on April 24: "I sincerely hope that action which has been and will be taken in the United Nations will lead to the restoration of peaceful conditions in Palestine and to agreement between Arabs and Jews resident there on their future government."⁶³ The

⁵⁹ Bohlen quoted in Papers of Clark M. Clifford, Harry S. Truman Library. Also in Palestine Reference Book of Dean Rusk, U.S., State Department Records, Box no. 3.

⁶⁰ *FRUS 1948*, pp. 807-809.

⁶¹ For text of statement, see *FRUS 1948*, pp. 759-60.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 808-809.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 809, n. 1.

last words in particular demonstrate how remote the State Department was from what was happening in Palestine and how tightly the diplomats still clung, as the zero hour approached, to their antipartition stand. Illustrative of their thinking was the May 8 suggestion by Senator Austin to Harold Beeley, a British Foreign Ministry official, that a joint British-American naval blockade be instituted off the shores of Palestine to intercept arms shipments.⁶⁴

Events, however, were taking their own course, and by May 14 the state of Israel was an undeniable fact. President Truman decided to catch up with reality and to abandon the outdated solutions of the State Department by according de facto recognition to the new state moments after its formal proclamation.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT TRIUMPHS

Given the new turn in America's Middle East policy, with the White House apparently reasserting its dominance over the State Department, it might reasonably have been expected that the arms embargo policy would be critically reappraised. Recognition of the state of Israel, even more than America's previous endorsement of the partition resolution, carried with it, arguably, some measure of moral responsibility for the security of the newborn state; thus, speculation was rife that Washington would indeed speedily abolish the embargo.⁶⁵

The prospect of an early end to the embargo, it appears, greatly alarmed State Department officials who moved quickly to forestall any such development. They warned of the repercussions that unilateral lifting of the embargo might have for America's relations with the Arabs, the United Nations, and above all, the West. Thus, three days after recognition, Secretary Marshall met with the president and cautioned, at considerable length, against precipitate action in the matter. As he relates:

I had Mr. Rusk explain to him the present situation regarding the arms embargo and following that I stated that I was not certain that Mr. Rusk had made the facts clear enough. The President then said "I will recite how I understand it" and did so reflecting correct understanding of our point of view.

After Mr. Rusk's departure I again referred to the arms embargo and read the section of the Resolution of April 17 that referred to it and made a particular point of the fact that we must proceed in this matter with extreme care or we will give a final kick to the UN. The President agreed to that view of the matter. . . . That we had to see what happened and he said he agreed. . . . I went on to say that we felt that the United States had hit its all-time low before the UN and that we must be most careful what we do in relation to this arms embargo.⁶⁶

The State Department skillfully managed to escape the necessity of revising its own policies in light of the presidential initiative on recognition, and instead

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 938.

⁶⁵ See *New York Times*, May 17, 1948, pp. 1 and 5.

⁶⁶ *FRUS 1948*, p. 1008.

invoked the recognition policy as a means of maintaining the arms embargo and neutralizing the president. Recognition became a trap that placed Truman on the defensive over the arms issue. U.N. expectations had already received a rude shock, it was argued, when the United States violated the provisions of the April 17 resolution dealing with the *political* truce. The United States, therefore, dare not now add insult to injury by violating the provisions for a *military* truce as well. Otherwise, America's own prestige and credibility would be severely injured. The theme sounded by Marshall was reflected also in a report sent to him by U.S. representative to the United Nations, Warren Austin, on May 19. The recognition policy, he reported, had damaged America's standing in the United Nations; it had "deeply undermined the confidence of other delegations in our integrity." Moreover, "current newspaper comment concerning possible US action on the existing arms embargo is an element mentioned by other delegations as contributing to their mistrust."⁶⁷

Within a week a new factor entered the picture when the British began a relentless campaign to convince the U.S. administration to retain the arms embargo. In secret dispatches they warned repeatedly that lifting the embargo would produce a dangerous, and even ugly, situation. The first shot in this campaign was fired by Sir John Balfour, British charge d'affaires in Washington, when he met with Lovett, Henderson, and Rusk on May 21. He reported that British Foreign Secretary Bevin "hopes that the United States Government will feel able to maintain its arms embargo. If this is raised, HMG will almost certainly be obliged to raise their own embargo on the export of arms to certain Arab states, and the unfortunate position will then be reached of one side being largely armed by the Americans and the other by the British."⁶⁸

Within the State Department, George Kennan, in a May 21 memorandum to the secretary of state, similarly pointed to the dangers of an Anglo-American split resulting from a revision of the embargo policy.⁶⁹ He reminded the secretary that PPS/19 of January 19 and the supplement of January 29 had specifically cautioned against any action that would bring the United States into conflict with the British over the Palestine issue or lead to American "assumption of major responsibility for the maintenance and security" of the Jewish state. "The course of action we are now embarking on," he warned, "threatens not only to place in jeopardy some of our most vital national interests in the Middle East and the Mediterranean but also to disrupt the unity of the western world and to undermine our entire policy toward the Soviet Union."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Austin quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 1013-14.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1019. Britain, it will be recalled, had never imposed an absolute embargo on arms to the Middle East. "Long-standing orders" continued to be fulfilled. Bevin's reference, therefore, to the existence of a British embargo presumably related to orders for *new* deliveries not previously contracted for. On May 17, the British delegate to the United Nations acknowledged that Britain was still making deliveries to Egypt, Iraq, and Trans-Jordan "in completion of existing contracts" (*New York Times*, May 28, 1948, p. 4).

⁶⁹ *FRUS 1948*, pp. 1020-21.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1021.

The American ambassador in London, Lewis H. Douglas, sent frequent dispatches on the consequences that could ensue from a lifting of the American arms embargo. Thus, in a top secret message of May 22, Douglas wrote:

I am convinced that crevasse widening between US and Britain over Palestine cannot be confined to Palestine or even to Middle East: It is already seriously jeopardizing foundation-stone of US policy in Europe—partnership with a friendly and well-disposed Britain. Irrespective rights and wrongs of question, I believe worst shock so far to general Anglo-American concert of policy since I have been here was sudden US *de facto* recognition Jewish state without previous notice of our intentions to British Government. . . . Worst prospect I can see on horizon American-British relations is possibility that we may raise embargo on Middle East arm shipments to favor Jews. If we do so, it will be only short step until British Government, impelled by what it conceives to be its vital interests in Middle East extending as far as Pakistan . . . may lift embargo re arms to Arabs. When this happens, the two great democratic partners will indirectly be ranged on opposite sides of a battle line scarcely three years after May 8, 1945.⁷¹

He returned to the same theme several times in the next few days.⁷²

As these messages were crossing the Atlantic, it seemed a matter of utmost urgency to the State Department to persuade the president of the justice of the department's position on the arms embargo. Chaim Weizmann was scheduled to visit the White House on May 25, and, undoubtedly, he would argue forcefully for removal of the arms embargo.⁷³ In preparation, Marshall garnered all his evidence. As he describes it:

I went over with the President the serious situation regarding Palestine matters particularly with reference to his reception of Mr. Weizman and its possible implication of *de jure* recognition, and also the dangerous aspects involved in the question of the arms embargo. This was done along with reading numerous documents to him including Bevin's current message and Douglas' views. I emphasized the tragic results which might well follow any action not carefully considered, its devastating results to him, not to mention the situation in the Middle East, and I said the only protection that I could see at the present time was a very careful maintenance of a relationship between Clark Clifford and you, Lovett, so that no action be taken that had not been either cleared by the State Department or the conditions implied explained for the President's information. He agreed to this.⁷⁴

In effect, President Truman's acceptance of Secretary Marshall's argument sealed the fate of the embargo question. The arms issue gained a logic or rationale of its own. It was no longer simply part of a scheme to frustrate fulfillment of the partition plan; it was now viewed as an essential element in developing a concerted Middle East, and hence, global policy for the two great Western allies.⁷⁵ The whole issue of the embargo thus became intertwined in the defense

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1031.

⁷² See *ibid.*, pp. 1032-33, 1047-50.

⁷³ This was, in fact, the case. See *ibid.*, pp. 1042-43 and 1050-51.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1036-37.

⁷⁵ See in this regard, *ibid.*, pp. 1027, 1032, 1034-36, 1042 n. 2., 1047-50, 1099-1101, 1178, 1217-18.

blueprint that the British were developing for the Middle East.⁷⁶ In the British scheme, Israel was envisaged as a sharply reduced territorial entity that would not interfere with broader British strategy in the Arab Middle East.⁷⁷ The U.S. embargo policy would henceforth be merged in the overall framework of U.N. peacemaking efforts.⁷⁸ And in this manner the embargo question was detached from the issue and logic of recognition.

THE LONG-RANGE IMPLICATIONS OF THE EMBARGO

What were the repercussions—short and long term—of the embargo policy? The whole process of American withdrawal from the partition plan, it appears, prompted the Arab states to believe that defiance of the United Nations would be profitable. One need only review the 1948 reports of American ambassadors in Arab capitals to realize how their talks with Arab leaders led the latter to believe that the United States was not seriously committed to the U.N. partition plan and would do nothing to see it implemented.⁷⁹ On May 5, State Department official Philip Ireland held conversations in Damascus with Azzam Pasha, secretary general of the Arab League, in an effort to deter the Arabs from invading Palestine. Ireland asked Azzam Pasha if the Arabs “considered the grave responsibilities which they were assuming before the world.” Ireland reported that “every possible argument” had been used to convince the Arab leaders to accept a ten-day truce. Azzam Pasha, however, remained unmoved.⁸⁰ The reason is not far to seek. Ireland was authorized to use every means of persuasion except the one that would really count—that the United States, acting through the United Nations, would take action to repel the invasion, including an immediate lifting of the arms embargo.

But it is no longer necessary to speculate on the effect that the retreat from partition had on Arab plans. Today there is evidence that American tergiversations played a critical role in inducing Egypt to invade Palestine on May 15. In March 1975 the Egyptian journal *Al-taliah* published the debates of the Egyptian Parliament of May 11, 1948, four days before the invasion took place.⁸¹ The

⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 1034–36, 1047–50.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1100, 1133–34, 1134–37.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1027–28. The matter was summed up in a message by Undersecretary Lovett to the U.S. ambassador in London. “You may say to Bevin that this Govt will not lift arms embargo except in conjunction with SC action or inaction” (*ibid.*, p. 1070). In his press conference on May 27, 1948, President Truman made the same point. *Ibid.*, p. 1072. See also *ibid.*, pp. 1110, 1187–88.

⁷⁹ See, for example, memorandum of U.S. ambassador to Iraq, George Wardsworth, of his conversation with President Truman, February 4, 1948, and his prepared “paper,” in *ibid.*, pp. 592–99; and memorandum of conversation between U.S. ambassador to Egypt, S. Pinkney Tuck, and Egyptian Foreign Minister Khashaba Pasha, March 4, 1948, in *ibid.*, pp. 677–78. See also memorandum of conversation between Dean Rusk and Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia, May 3, 1948, in *ibid.*, p. 888.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 916.

⁸¹ The debates were published in Hebrew in the Israeli daily *Ma-ariv*, May 4 and 6, 1976.

following excerpts convey the spirit of the discussions. Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmy el-Nukrashy said:

The valiant defense of the Palestinians of their homeland aroused worldwide attention and particularly that of the United States, so that the United States began to reduce its support of partition. Americans began visiting Arab capitals to convey to their governments, officially or unofficially, the decision of the United States to reduce its commitment to partition. . . . Subsequently, as you will recall, the American representative to the Security Council announced that his country was no longer for partition.⁸²

The debate closed with a ringing call from member of Parliament Muhammad Ali Aluchad Pasha to join the other Arab armies in the struggle.

The United States itself has withdrawn from the partition plan. I consider—and no one is compelled to agree with me—that they thought that partition would be implemented without opposition, namely, with the stroke of a pen. And when opposition by the Palestinians emerged, they had to consider the use of force. Then there developed competition between governments and a dispute arose between the blocs. And since the United States was intent on excluding its rival, it abandoned the partition scheme. Thus, if by means of meagre force the Palestinians managed to achieve this, will not all the Arab states, united, be able to encircle Palestine and to save it from the fate of tyranny and this death? As the Al-mighty liveth, woe to us if history records that the Arab states fled from the battle and allowed the Zionist state to develop and succeed.⁸³

His words were greeted with applause.

Thus, wavering elements in the Arab world were led to believe that with resolute and forceful action they could undo the General Assembly decision. This inspired their invasion of Israel with such disastrous results and such fateful long-range consequences.

The 1948 American arms embargo on Palestine was a product of concerted and consecutive efforts of the State Department and the British Foreign Office. In its initial stages it was launched by State Department officials who were intent on minimizing any American role in the implementation of the projected partition plan—despite the fact that this move was clearly at cross-purposes with the announced policy of the president. President Truman was correct when he charged in his memoirs that certain members of the State Department were less than faithful in supporting his policy.⁸⁴ He was incorrect, however, in asserting that

⁸² *Ibid.*, May 4, 1976 (Translation from Hebrew by author).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, May 6, 1976. It is to be noted that ten days earlier, April 26, 1948, the U.S. ambassador to Cairo, S. Pinkney Tuck, had cabled that the Egyptian prime minister was opposed to the invasion of Palestine “generally, and by Egypt in particular,” in *FRUS 1948*, pp. 862–63; but compare *ibid.*, p. 872.

⁸⁴ “I was always aware of the fact that not all my advisers looked at the Palestine problem in the same manner I did. . . . The Department of State’s specialists on the Near East were, almost without exception, unfriendly to the idea of a Jewish state. . . . I was never convinced by these arguments. . . . Like most of the British diplomats, some of our diplomats also thought that the Arabs, on account of their numbers and because of the fact that they controlled such immense oil resources, should be appeased. . . . But I wanted to make it plain that the President of the United States, and not the second or third echelon in the State Department, is responsible for

only second- or third-echelon staffers were involved. For, in fact, his most senior officials failed to adhere to the policy line that he had set.

With his act of recognizing the state of Israel, Truman jettisoned the whole ballast of the State Department on the Palestine question. It was at this point that the British stepped in and, highlighting the tensions arising out of the cold war, prevailed on the U.S. administration to maintain the embargo policy. Likewise, State Department officials used the shock of recognition to stay the president's hand. Thus, external and internal forces interacted to maintain the status quo.

The American retreat from partition, engineered by the State Department and characterized by the institution and maintenance of the arms embargo, however, encouraged wavering Arab states to believe that their endeavors to frustrate implementation of partition would go unchecked. Thus Egypt was led to intervene in the Palestine conflict with such fateful consequences for Middle East history over the course of the next three decades.*

making foreign policy, and, furthermore, that no one in any department can sabotage the President's policy. . . . In the Palestine situation, as Secretary Lovett said to me after the announcement of the recognition of Israel, 'They almost put it over on you' " (Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, pp. 190-94).

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