
OUR
AMERICAN
ISRAEL
THE STORY OF AN ENTANGLED ALLIANCE
AMY KAPLAN

OUR AMERICAN ISRAEL

An essential account of America's most controversial alliance that reveals how the United States came to see Israel as an extension of itself, and how that strong and divisive partnership plays out in our own time.

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THE STORY OF AN ENTANGLED ALLIANCE

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For Paul

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INTRODUCTION

In 2009, President Barack Obama delivered a historic speech in Cairo, Egypt, where he reached out to Arabs and Muslims to repair some of the damage inflicted by the war on terror. At the same time that he was seeking common ground with the Arab world, however, Obama made a familiar and long-standing claim: "America's strong bonds with Israel are well known. This bond is unbreakable."[1]

Obama's statement was an affirmation that American presidents have routinely voiced since John F. Kennedy spoke of the "special relationship" between the United States and Israel in 1962. In Cairo, Obama's reiteration of this sentiment was clearly strategic. He had just pointed to the conflict between Israel and Palestine as a major source of tension between the Arab world and the United States. Addressing the human suffering on both sides, he needed to reassure Israel and its American supporters that this balance would not tip the scales against his primary allegiance. He was telling his audience something they already knew well, that the relationship with Israel took precedence over that with the Arab world, and in some way set its parameters. Obama's statement tapped into a vast reservoir of narratives and images, emotions and beliefs about America's special kinship with Israel. This bond, he said, "is based upon cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied."[2]

Both proponents and critics have long understood the partnership between the United States and Israel as an exception to the norms of international alliances. The United States has given more monetary aid

to Israel than to any other nation and has committed itself to maintaining Israel's military edge in the region. In December 2016, the Obama administration agreed to a record $38 billion package of military aid over ten years. Diplomatically as well, the relationship is in a category of its own: the United States has protected Israel from international criticism, most notably by casting many vetoes on its behalf in the Security Council of the United Nations.[3]

The fact that this political relationship is expressed as an "unbreakable bond" implies an affiliation beyond the realm of statecraft. As much a future pledge as a historical description, the phrase has a ring of consecration, like a marriage. A "bond" connotes both identification and obligation. "Unbreakable" conveys an aura of timelessness and immutability, a bedrock connection that transcends the vagaries of political alliances.

This book aims to recover the strangeness of an affinity that has come to be seen as self-evident. In 1945, it was not inevitable that a global superpower emerging victorious from World War II would come to identify with a small state for Jewish refugees, refugees who at that time were still being turned away from the United States. How did Zionism, a European movement to establish a homeland for a particular ethnoreligious group, come to resonate with citizens of a nation based on the foundation, or at least the aspiration, of civic equality amid ethnic diversity? How was the creation of a Jewish state in the Middle East translated into a narrative that reflected cherished American tales of national origins? How, in other words, did so many come to feel that the bond between the United States and Israel was historically inevitable, morally right, and a matter of common sense?

Our American Israel is the story of popular perceptions of Israel and of the ways Americans have understood this special relationship. It starts at the end of World War II, with debates about the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, and concludes with the war on terror, when the United States adopted a distinctively Israeli conception of homeland security. The political relationship between the two nations has always been entangled with powerful myths about their kinship and heritage, their suffering and salvation. During the seventy years since Israel's founding, certain themes have taken on the stature of hallowed beliefs: that the kinship is rooted in a common biblical heritage and shared political values, that the Holocaust created a

legacy of unique moral obligations, and that the two countries face threats from common enemies.

The process by which these beliefs developed mythic status and tenacious appeal is a dynamic one. They were created, contested, and transformed over time through metaphors, analogies, and symbols that shaped popular views of political realities and imparted emotional meaning and moral value to political policy. The belief that America is an "exceptional" nation of moral force and military power underwrote and strengthened its special bond with Israel. The United States would protect and secure Israel, a moral community of both concentration camp survivors and heroic warriors. At the same time, Israel was seen as unique in its own right—a state that is both vulnerable and indomitable, an invincible victim.

Diplomatic historians have researched the strategic alliance between the United States and Israel in the international arena, scholars of Jewish history have studied the importance of Israel to the lives of American Jews, and political scientists have examined how the domestic Israel lobby influences geopolitical strategy. However, it is in the wider crucible of American culture that the diverse meanings of the "special relationship" have been forged, disputed, and remade. Looking at popular narratives about Israel, and the ways in which different individuals and groups have understood America's relationship with the Jewish state, can reveal the making of this special relationship. From a diverse array of representations and cultural expressions, patterns coalesced to form a broad consensus about America's attachment to Israel, a consensus that came to seem like common sense. The cultural alchemy that transformed the story of Israel from a particular tale about a specific ethnic state into one that resonates with the American nation as a whole has, in turn, shaped political discourse in America.[4]

Cultural perceptions, to be sure, do not dictate policies. They do, however, create a perceptual field in interaction with those policies and political ideas from which a consensus emerges about the unbreakable bond between the two nations. Cultural artifacts—whether a novel, film, newspaper article, or museum—do not work by imposing a singular and monolithic meaning on the relationship between the two nations. But they are effective precisely because they are capacious, inviting different meanings from diverse perspectives while effectively ruling out others.

The special relationship has never been just about the United States and Israel. It has included the Palestinian people from the start, even in mainstream narratives that have denied their existence, or popular images that have made them invisible to the American eye. Dominant narratives that identify Israelis with Americans have always been contested by counternarratives from both inside and outside the United States. The most popular American story of the founding of Israel is modeled on the American revolution as an anticolonial war of independence against the British, as told in the novel and film *Exodus*. A counternarrative endorses a Palestinian perspective that views the founding of the State of Israel as a colonial project bolstered by Western imperial powers. In the 1940s, American debates about the establishment of a Jewish state revolved around these conflicting interpretations, as did debates in the 1970s about Israel's occupation of territories captured in the Six-Day War. Indeed, conflicts over narratives about the founding of Israel as being an example of either colonialism or anticolonialism have reemerged with different emphases in every decade.

Parallel histories of settler colonialism expressed in biblical narratives of exceptionalism have formed the basis of American identification with Israel. Both nations have generated powerful myths of providential origins, drawing on the Old Testament notion of a chosen people destined by God to take possession of the Promised Land and blessed with a special mission to the world. Both nations were initially founded by colonists from Europe who displaced indigenous people, appropriating and transforming their land in the process of creating a new nation of immigrants. Both nations celebrate their anticolonial origins as a struggle for independence against the British Empire, and disavow their own histories of conquest.

The providential narrative has made the special relationship seem inevitable, as though it primed Christian Americans to embrace Israel long before the founding of either nation-state. In reality, it took many changes in twentieth-century America—the emergence of the idea of the Judeo-Christian tradition, post-Holocaust theology, and the politicization of evangelical Christians—to generate new stories and forge modern bonds between American Christianity and the Jewish state.[5]

Similarly, parallel conditions of settler colonialism did not alone create an American identification with Zionist pioneers. This identification came about through the development of the myth of the fron-

tier, which found its apotheosis in the Hollywood Western, a genre that shaped how Americans viewed the founding of Israel. By the second half of the twentieth century the United States had become an imperial power itself. Stories of Israel mirroring American development arose in the context of the modern struggle for power in the Middle East, and the concurrent global movement toward decolonization.[6]

The phrase "our American Israel" comes from a Puritan expression of colonial American exceptionalism. In 1799, Abiel Abbot, a Massachusetts minister, preached a Thanksgiving sermon titled "Traits of Resemblance in the People of the United States of America to Ancient Israel." The sermon starts by noting common usage at the time: "It has been often remarked that the people of the United States come nearer to a parallel with Ancient Israel, than any other nation upon the globe. Hence, 'OUR AMERICAN ISRAEL,' is a term frequently used; and common consent allows it apt and proper."[7] This parallel with biblical Israel conferred an exceptional identity on the United States right from the start.

After World War II, similar parallels again made the modern state of Israel appear exceptional in American eyes. The phrase "our American Israel" originally used the biblical nation metaphorically to refer to the United States, yet the possessive construction also expresses how Americans have made Israel their own. This process in the twentieth century involved projection—of desires, fears, fantasies—onto the modern state of Israel. It also entailed concrete exchanges and intimate interactions fueled by the circulation of individuals and institutions between the two countries. This combination of identification, projection, and possession has contributed abundantly to ideas of American national identity, and to support for Israel as well.

Abbot's eighteenth-century sermon grounded the unstable identity of the new American nation-state in the known typology of the biblical Israel. The sermon helped to constitute the new nation as an "imagined community."[8] The word "our" conveyed a sense of national belonging to the community of white Protestant settlers, now citizens of the new nation, in part by excluding outsiders from the circle of possession. It not only distinguished the United States from "any other nation on the globe" but also effaced the memory of the Native communities that had been exterminated by warfare, disease, commerce, and agriculture to make way for the divinely chosen nation.

Viewing America in the mirror of Israel has continued to efface such memories of the settler colonial past. Yet "our American Israel" today has many more connotations: Israel can be seen through American eyes as a model of liberation from persecution, an imperial proxy doing the bidding of a superpower, a unifying object of affection, or the exclusive possession of a particular group. Israel has embodied multiple and conflicting meanings for diverse groups of Americans, and divergent interpretations have clashed during the ongoing process of creating and maintaining a special relationship between the United States and Israel.

The idea of American exceptionalism may seem ill fitting for the particular ethnoreligious identity of a Jewish state. Exceptionalism involves two components: that the United States is uniquely different from all other nations, and that, paradoxically, it also serves as a universal model for all other nations to emulate. Israel is a kind of exception that proves the rule of American exceptionalism. In the early decades of Israeli statehood, journalists and promotional material depicted the new nation as a successful replica of America—an even shinier, more robust model. It was a country built by idealistic pioneers, a haven for the persecuted, a nation of immigrants, a paragon of modernization. Israel's emulation of the United States confirmed its exemplary qualities. Americans projected onto Israel redemptive images of their own power in the world. This affinity has idealized the exercise of military force through narratives of rescue: rallying to support the besieged underdog, preventing the recurrence of genocide through humanitarian intervention, launching a war on terror to save the world from apocalypse.

Americans and Israelis alike have attributed universal meanings to Israel's founding as transcending nationalist aspirations, as a beacon to the world, a model of regeneration, an exemplar of anticolonialism. For liberals in the aftermath of World War II, Israel's U.N.-sponsored birth fulfilled internationalist ideals. Eleanor Roosevelt believed that Israel's "model state" had the potential "to promote an international New Deal."[9] In the 1958 novel *Exodus,* Leon Uris wrote of Israel's founding as "an epic in the history of man" and quoted from the 1948 Declaration of the State of Israel that the Jews had returned to their original homeland, where they had "created cultural values of national and universal significance."[10] The oft-repeated claim that Israel is the "only democracy in the Middle East" not only mirrors American values, but also renders Israel both unique and exemplary among its neighbors.

Israeli exceptionalism has its own tensions, which cannot be collapsed into a mirror of America. At the heart of Zionism was a conflict between the search for normalcy and the desire for uniqueness. A nation-state would end the persecuted status of Jews as outcasts, by making them just like other nations. Nonetheless Israel was bequeathed with a uniquely moral and uniquely vulnerable legacy from the history of Jewish suffering. This tension would take many forms from different political perspectives in debates about Israel in the United States, as to whether Israel would be held to a higher standard than other nations or would be exempted from international norms.

Key to the American understanding of Israeli uniqueness is a belief in its exceptional suffering. The paradox of vulnerability and invincibility has framed many different views of Israel, even as they have changed over time. Israelis have appeared simultaneously as innocent victims and triumphant soldiers, and Israel as both threatened with extermination and saved by its superior strength of arms. A long-standing image of Israel's uniquely humane army stemmed from popular narratives of reluctant warriors intrepidly seizing victory from the jaws of annihilation. Existentially imperiled by potential extermination, Israel's only option for survival was military preeminence, a logic that has explained the perpetual state of war forced on a peace-loving people.

The representation of America's special relationship with Israel has undergone major shifts from 1945 to the present: from the Americanization of Israel to the Israelization of America; from the admiration of Israel as a mirror of America's idealized self-image to emulation of Israel as a model for fighting America's worst nightmares. The figure of Israel as the invincible victim reflects this shift in changing narrative forms—from the heroic to the apocalyptic. Heroic narratives follow a progressive momentum in which the protagonist is the plucky underdog who fights against all odds to overcome adversity. At the end, he defeats the enemy with ingenuity and an indomitable spirit. This structure underlay the many popular stories that formed an American liberal consensus about Israel through the 1960s. In the aftermath of the Six-Day War, many Americans romanticized Israel's way of making war as a humane and muscular alternative to the American approach, which had led to the quagmire in Vietnam. As these progressive images were challenged throughout the world, Israel began to appear less as a replica of America's past than an augury of possible futures. Israel's invasion of

Lebanon in 1982 precipitated a crisis in mainstream liberal views of Israel and shattered this heroic narrative of the invincible victim.

During the 1980s, apocalyptic narratives started to supplant and reformulate heroic ones, as discourse about Israel took on a heightened moralistic and religious tenor. Apocalyptic narratives took a range of forms, many of which have continued into the twenty-first century, including those that told of the threat of a second Holocaust, and those that told of Israel's central role during the Second Coming and the end days.

After September 11, 2001, Israel's experience of terrorism offered Americans a ready-made vocabulary for articulating their own sense of unprecedented trauma. During the Cold War, the paradox of vulnerability and invincibility had already implicitly informed American perceptions of threats to national security. The paradox became even more resonant after 9/11, when the United States looked to Israel as a model for fighting the war on terror. Recasting the United States in Israel's image as existentially threatened joined the nations to each other as innocent victims of evil forces and bestowed moral righteousness on their pursuit of indomitability.

Many of these narratives and images that circulated in popular and political culture have been deployed by groups with the overt purpose of influencing U.S. policy toward Israel. More often, these narratives displayed how the story of Israel could become a generic story of relevance to all Americans, not just American Jews or Zionists. Indeed, other minorities and ethnic groups, such as African Americans, Irish Americans, and Cuban Americans, have also lobbied around foreign policy issues in South Africa, Ireland, and Cuba, all of which achieved wide political and emotional significance that captured the national imagination at particular historical and political junctures. In the case of Israel, however, what might have been the foreign policy concerns of a particular ethnic group came to have long-term symbolic associations with American national mythology. Israel became as much a domestic as a foreign issue.

The cultural work of American Jews played a major part in the development of this association. As novelists, filmmakers, journalists, intellectuals, and museum curators, they have at times been more effective than formal lobbyists in communicating their passions and ambivalences to a broader public and in shaping the way a diverse swath of Americans

have made Israel their own. The American Jews discussed here were not professional advocates for Israel, nor did they identify with Israel as their major life work. Rather, they were cultural mediators who interwove their visions of Israel with compelling myths or critiques of America, and who translated their attachments or disillusionments with particular ethnic meanings into universal idioms.

In seeking to explain the strength and longevity of the myth of the unbreakable bond between the United States and Israel, it is easy to portray both countries as more homogeneous and less diverse than they are in reality. Indeed, that is in part an effect of the myth, which not only views Israel in an idealized mirror, but also projects idealized visions of American nationhood onto the image of Israel. Examining the exclusive relationship between the United States and Israel risks reproducing the myth of the exceptional relationship. Many cultural narratives and images of Israel are not unique to the United States but have been shared and elaborated in other nations that have divergent and overlapping histories in their relationship to Israel and to the United States. There are other ways to tell this story. One way would be to focus on the domestic history of the shifting alliances and divisions among different groups of Americans in relation to Israel and Palestine. Another way would be to understand how and when U.S. views of Israel dovetailed and diverged from those of other nations in different international alliances and configurations. But that is not the task here.

In his 1799 sermon, Abbot confirmed a way of speaking about the new nation that was already circulating in the public sphere. It was a matter of "common consent," he remarked, that the term "our American Israel" was an "apt and proper" one. This book explores the creation of "common consent" over the last seventy years about the "apt and proper" ways of speaking about Israel in the United States.

1

LANDS OF REFUGE

In the 1947 Oscar-winning film *Gentleman's Agreement,* a journalist played by Gregory Peck decides to pose as a Jew to gather material for a story about anti-Semitism in America. At a cocktail party he awkwardly approaches a famous Jewish physicist, played by Sam Jaffe as a thinly veiled Albert Einstein, suggesting that the two "hash over some ideas":

> "What sort of ideas?"
> "Palestine, for instance. Zionism."
> "Which? Palestine as a refuge . . . or Zionism as a movement for a Jewish State?"
> "The confusion between the two, more than anything."
> "If we agree there's confusion, we can talk. We scientists love confusion."

Smiling at his earnest listener, the scientist rambles through a thicket of ideas about Jewish identity, questioning whether Jews constitute a religion, a race, or a nation. He pokes fun at the logic of each; to a secular Jew, religion seems irrelevant; to a scientist, race is unscientific; to a worldly refugee, nationalism is suspect. The confusion he sows about Jewish identity underscores the questions he first raised about the nature of Zionism.[1]

This Hollywood banter reflected serious questions that were being asked about the meaning of Zionism after World War II. Some Americans viewed the movement to settle Jews in Palestine as a humanitarian cause, one that would provide refuge for the homeless survivors of Nazi

extermination camps in Europe. Others viewed Zionism as a political movement to establish a sovereign state in Palestine for Jews from around the world. Many blurred the distinction between these two ideas, while others found them irreconcilable.

It is often presumed that the revelation of the Holocaust led Americans to embrace the Zionist cause. A Jewish state, however, was by no means a universally applauded or uncontested idea in the aftermath of the war. Sympathy for the suffering of European Jews did indeed motivate many Americans to support their emigration to Palestine. But humanitarian sympathy often foundered on the political notion of a state based on an exclusive ethnoreligious identity. This notion struck some Americans as counter to their democratic values, especially in a postwar world recovering from the devastating outcome of virulent nationalism. The idea of a Jewish state in a land inhabited by an Arab majority alienated others who understood democracy as majority rule. A religious basis for national identity appeared foreign to those who believed that citizenship—irrespective of creed—should provide the basis of national belonging. Such reservations and ambivalences were widely expressed in the mainstream press, within Jewish organizations, and in government commissions.

These debates about Zionism have virtually disappeared from the American memory of the founding of Israel. Historians have focused on the political struggle between representatives of Zionist organizations and State Department diplomats for the heart of President Harry Truman, viewing it as a conflict between domestic electoral pressure and national geopolitical interests. They have also highlighted the interplay of other geopolitical and domestic factors: big power rivalries, the founding of the United Nations, Arab nationalism, oil politics, the rebuilding of Europe, and the status of Jews in the United States.[2]

But for the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine to achieve widespread acceptance, more was needed—the idea had to be Americanized. Its proponents attributed New World meanings, symbols, and mythologies to a European movement to establish a Jewish polity in the Arab Middle East. They drew parallels between *Mayflower* Pilgrims and Jewish pioneers in the familiar landscape of the biblical Promised Land, and they presented Zionist settlement as enacting American ideas of modern development. This project of Americanization took on particular urgency in the post–World War II effort to establish a Jewish state, and it had

to grapple with all the ways in which Zionism appeared misaligned with American values.

In the 1940s, American liberals enthusiastically championed this project. The most powerful arguments on behalf of Zionism appeared in left-leaning publications, such as *The Nation,* the *New Republic,* and *PM*—not in the *New York Times, Commentary Magazine,* or *Life,* all of which took skeptical or noncommittal stances toward the Zionist movement. Liberal journalists, activists, and politicians fused humanitarian and political understandings to create an influential and enduring narrative of Zionism as a modern progressive force for universal good. Their way of narrating the founding of Israel was not a historical inevitability, but rather the outcome of a struggle in which the stories we are so familiar with today prevailed over others.

Contested Narratives

The United States first confronted the question of Palestine in the displaced persons camps of occupied Germany. At the end of the war, the army was holding tens of thousands of Jewish concentration camp survivors in the American sector. Haunting images of gaunt refugees behind barbed wire—some still wearing prison garb—filled newspapers and newsreels for months after the liberation of the death camps. President Truman appointed attorney Earl Harrison to lead an investigation, and his report on the crowded, unsanitary, and dismal conditions in the camps concluded chillingly: "We appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them except that we do not exterminate them." Harrison recommended that one hundred thousand displaced persons (DPs) be permitted to settle in Palestine immediately. Truman agreed and called on Great Britain to end its restrictions on Jewish immigration, which had been in effect since 1939.[3]

British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin responded by inviting Truman to convene a joint commission to investigate the impact of mass immigration on the inhabitants of Palestine and its governance. Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, Britain had ruled Palestine under a mandate endorsed by the League of Nations in 1922. The mandate incorporated the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which expressed

British favor for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home of the Jewish people" with the caveat that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine." From the start, the meaning of the declaration had been open to interpretation and criticism—and it continues to be controversial today. The Zionist movement welcomed it as the legal foundation of the right to statehood, while Arab spokesmen denounced it as an imperial imposition with no legal standing. The British government considered that it had fulfilled its obligation by facilitating the creation of a home for those Jews who settled in Palestine, without regard to statehood.

Formation of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry represented a last-ditch effort by the British to maintain a foothold in their increasingly vulnerable empire in the Middle East. For its part, the United States was now, for the first time, officially participating in policymaking for Palestine. Each government appointed six members, selected for their supposed impartiality (that is, they could not be Jews, Arabs, Muslims, experts in the field, or women). Federal Judge Joseph Hutcheson, a Texas Democrat, chaired the American delegation, which included Frank Aydelotte, director of the Institute for Advanced Study; Frank Buxton, editor of the *Boston Herald;* Bartley Crum, an attorney from California; William Phillips, a career diplomat; and James G. McDonald, who was the League of Nations high commissioner for refugees from Germany in the 1930s and would later be appointed the first U.S. ambassador to Israel.[4] In the first four months of 1946, the committee held public hearings in Washington, D.C., London, Cairo, and Jerusalem, and members visited DP camps in Europe, as well as Arab capitals throughout the Middle East.

The committee focused primarily on the problem of resettling Jewish refugees, and secondarily on the consequences of this resettlement for Arab inhabitants of Palestine. The final report recommended the immediate immigration of one hundred thousand Jewish refugees on humanitarian grounds, but it rejected the political establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.[5] The report antagonized both Arabs and Zionists, and the United States and Great Britain never agreed on its implementation. Escalating violence by Jewish militias made the British Mandate increasingly unpopular and costly to a nation recovering from

The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry at the Jerusalem train station, 1946.

a devastating war. In 1947 the British government decided to end the mandate and to place the question of Palestine's future in the hands of the newly founded United Nations.

Although the Anglo-American Committee ultimately failed to direct policy, its proceedings remain invaluable today. They offer a kaleidoscopic perspective on the passionate debates about what the *Christian Science Monitor* called "the explosive, nettlesome, Gordian knot—call it any of these—of the Palestinian problem."[6] The committee's public hearings provided an international stage on which almost every major actor in the struggle over Palestine played a role. An avid press covered testimonies by leaders of the Zionist movement, representatives from Arab organizations, refugees in the DP camps, British officials, demographers and agricultural specialists, and celebrity intellectuals.

Two notable committee members, one American and one British, published books about their experiences. Bartley Crum, an ambitious civil rights attorney from San Francisco, wrote *Behind the Silken Curtain: A Personal Account of Anglo-American Diplomacy in Palestine and the Middle East*. Richard Crossman, a socialist Labour Party MP with an Oxford PhD, wrote *Palestine Mission: A Personal Record*. Published in 1947, the two books offer more than insider accounts of the committee's travails. Through a combination of travelogue and memoir, political meditation and polemic, both authors convey the personal reckoning that led them to champion the cause of an independent Jewish state. Crum and Crossman were the youngest and most progressive members of their national delegations. They were the only committee members to argue for Jewish statehood, although they disagreed about the impact of Zionism on the Arab inhabitants of Palestine. Written from a critical stance on the waning British Empire, Crossman's book provides a valuable contrast with the views of his American colleagues, whose nation was becoming a greater power in the Middle East. Even though their stance on statehood was a minority position within the committee, their writings presage views that would become dominant in the United Kingdom and the United States.

The last American to be appointed to the committee, Bartley Crum was promoted by David Niles, Truman's liaison with labor and minority groups and his intermediary with Zionist organizations. The State Department tried to block Crum because of his left-wing affiliations, which earned him the moniker "Comrade Crum." As an attorney, he had

campaigned against discrimination toward black employees by southern railroads, and he had served as counsel at the founding of the United Nations. At the time of his appointment, he was preparing to leave for Spain to defend two members of the anti-Franco underground. While writing his book after the committee disbanded, he joined Paul Robeson and W. E. B. Du Bois in endorsing the American Crusade against Lynching.

A journalist traveling with the committee described Crum as a liberal playboy of sorts, "serious, courageous, and prepared like a trained prizefighter to battle for his convictions. He preferred drinking to eating and was so good looking that the people often turned to stare at him on the German streets." Richard Crossman eyed him as cynically angling for a political career "which could be made or marred by the attitude he adopted toward the Jewish question." Because of Crum's White House connections, committee members would avoid speaking freely in front of him, and his contacts sometimes worried that his overzealousness marred the reliability of the information he passed on to them.[7]

A story of political and spiritual awakening, *Behind the Silken Curtain* shows how an American progressive, a liberal Catholic with little knowledge of the Middle East and no experience outside the United States, confronted manifold arguments about Zionism from points of view he had never before encountered. Crum describes in detail how he listened to multiple Jewish and Arab testimonies, only to be convinced of the justice of the Zionist cause. Crum played a noteworthy role in the Americanization of Zionism precisely because he was not a government official or a Jewish member of a Zionist organization, although he interacted with major figures in both groups. His story exemplifies the synergy between an early Zionist lobby seeking to galvanize U.S. public opinion and the larger American culture in which it operated. His views can neither be reduced to pure pandering nor attributed to independent thinking alone. He understood Zionism as a liberal cause, and he made it a personal one.

In 1940, Crum had served as a close advisor to the presidential campaign of Wendell Willkie, who was running as a liberal Republican. *One World,* Willkie's 1943 runaway bestseller, became Crum's guidebook for his first trip abroad with the committee. Willkie's popular book described his world tour at the behest of President Franklin Roosevelt to muster support for the war and to counter isolationist sentiment in the

United States. Willkie's internationalist vision linked the wartime battle against fascism to the fight for social equality at home and the struggle against colonialism abroad. He tied future international stability to economic improvements in the global standard of living, which would remake the world in the image of modern, middle-class America. Crum relished Willkie's utopian ideal of ameliorating social inequality without social conflict.

Crum's "one world" ideal contrasted with the conflict-ridden worldview of his British colleague Richard Crossman. On his plane ride across the Aegean on the way to Cairo, Crossman pondered the difficulty of fulfilling the committee's charge: "We are trying to link up five different worlds in one solution: Washington, London, Vienna, Cairo, Jerusalem. It can't be done."[8] Crossman's tragic vision of the irreconcilable differences between colliding worlds was rooted in his commitment to democratic socialism and his awareness of the consequences of British colonialism.

On January 4, 1946, the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry opened its hearings in Washington, D.C., where witnesses presented divergent and incompatible perspectives on the fate of Palestine and the desirability and feasibility of a Jewish state. From the start, Jewish organizations took center stage, though they by no means presented a united front.

At the end of World War II, the Zionist movement—founded in 1897 by Theodore Herzl in Basel, Switzerland—consisted of many organizations both inside and outside Palestine. The Jewish Agency for Palestine, headed by David Ben-Gurion since 1935, had responsibility for all aspects of Jewish settlement, including immigration and defense, and it conducted many state-like functions, including posting representatives abroad and running a press agency. Outside Palestine, the onset of World War II had shifted the center of Zionist advocacy from Europe to the United States. In 1942, in response to emerging reports of the mass murder of Jews, American Zionists held an emergency conference at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City, which became a political watershed for the movement. Rejecting the gradualist efforts of the past, delegates from around the world unanimously called for unfettered Jewish immigration to Palestine and demanded that "Palestine be established as a Jewish Commonwealth integrated in the structure of the new democratic world."[9]

The leaders of the American Zionist Emergency Council (AZEC), the group that coordinated political advocacy in the United States, distrusted the Anglo-American Committee. They regarded the establishment of a Jewish state not as a question to investigate, but as an international commitment to fulfill with all due haste.[10] Although the outspoken head of AZEC, Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, refused to participate in the committee's Washington hearing, two well-known representatives of the group did testify. Rabbi Stephen Wise, the seventy-two-year-old veteran leader of American Zionism, moved the audience to tears. Wise, whom Crossman described as "speaking and looking like the prophet Micah," recounted the history of Zionism as a heroic response to modern anti-Semitism, from Tsarist Russia to Nazi Germany. He called on Christians worldwide to set right their historical guilt for Jewish suffering by guaranteeing that "Palestine shall be yours." Emanuel Neuman, the official representative of AZEC, argued from legal rather than moral grounds, "not to plead a favor, but to assert a right" of the Jewish people to "rebuild their national existence." To fulfill the goal of achieving a Jewish majority, Neuman proposed a population exchange that would entail transporting Jewish refugees to Palestine while transferring the Arab inhabitants of Palestine to other Arab countries.[11]

Leaders of non-Zionist Jewish organizations also testified. Without addressing the issue of statehood, the director of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Judge Joseph Proskauer, made an urgent humanitarian plea for the immediate transport of the displaced persons "to the only available haven, Palestine." The difference between the Zionists and non-Zionists, as Crum explained, was that the former "defined the Jewish case for Palestine as more fundamental than an answer to refugeeism." The political demand for a state included all of world Jewry, and "it involved the security of the position of Jews in a world composed of nationalities each with territorial centers." In the postwar world order, this view implied, only a nation-state could guarantee full human rights and freedom from oppression.[12]

To the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, founded in 1942, the idea of Jews as a nation—rather than a religion—was an anathema that would only provoke anti-Semitism and charges of dual loyalty. The president of the organization, Lessing Rosenwald, rejected the "Hitlerian concept of a Jewish state" and warned of the dangers of "Jewish

nationalism." He proposed that the refugees languishing in DP camps emigrate to a variety of countries that were members of the newly established UN. This minority view raised such hostility at the hearing that Wise interrupted Rosenwald from the floor, and Crossman felt the "mental daggers in the audience behind him." Nonetheless, the American co-chair, Judge Hutcheson, agreed with Rosenwald that a Jewish lineage no more determined nationality than did his own Scottish heritage.[13]

In a more popular appearance, Albert Einstein took the stand with flash bulbs going off and "adoring women gazing up at him like Gandhi." The audience cheered his condemnation of British imperialism for its divide-and-conquer colonial strategy. He insisted that when freed from this yoke, Arabs and Jews could live together, and he opposed the idea of a Jewish state. "The State idea is not according to my heart," he testified. "It is connected with narrow-mindedness and economic obstacles. I believe it is bad. I have always been against it." He criticized the idea of a Jewish commonwealth as "an imitation of Europe" and said that recent history proved that "the end of Europe was brought about by nationalism." Questions of whether Jews were a nation or a religion troubled the committee throughout its deliberations, as did Einstein's warnings about the dangers of nationalism.[14]

At the hearings later that day, another famous American intellectual refuted Einstein's views. Reinhold Niebuhr, a renowned liberal Protestant theologian, represented the Christian Council on Palestine. He based his case not on the biblical covenant, as other ministers from the council did, but on the ravages of Nazism. Only national sovereignty, he argued, could protect world Jewry from persecution, as well as from the potential "racial suicide" of assimilation in the United States. As a realist, he recognized the injustice of any political solution, but he agreed with Neuman that the Arab population could be transferred to the "vast hinterland of the Middle East" in order to create a Jewish majority in Palestine.[15]

The prospect of resettlement was contested by representatives from the Institute for Arab-American Affairs who spoke before the committee. Philip Hitti, professor of Semitic literature at Princeton University, testified that the Arab claim to Palestine rested on the "very simple fact" of "continued and uninterrupted physical and cultural association between land and people." Rejecting the humanitarian

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