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THE ARAB POSITION ON PALESTINE

by

Kermit Roosevelt

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MR. WINNACKER: Gentlemen, as the first of two lectures today on the Palestine problem, you will hear the Arab position in Palestine explained by Mr. Kermit Roosevelt. In looking around for a lecturer on this subject, we felt that the present secretary of the Committee for Peace and Justice in the Holy Land would be by far the best man for this task. Mr. Roosevelt has written and lectured extensively on this subject, and he has participated in many radio debates and round tables in which he explained and defended the Arab case in Palestine.

I think little need be said about the importance of the subject. This subject should be uppermost in the minds of the committees since last week you heard a lucid explanation of the Middle East from the Middle Eastern Study Groups. It seems to me there is no issue on foreign policy today where there is a greater difference of opinion existing with the possible exception of China. There is no subject on which it is more difficult to cut through the irrelevant arguments, to smell out the red herrings and to coordinate the nation's interests with the imponderables of domestic politics and with the principles in which we all believe. I am sure that Mr. Roosevelt will remove some of the red herrings in his explanation of how the Arabs feel about the creation of a Jewish state in the Near East. Mr. Roosevelt.

MR. ROOSEVELT: Admiral Hill, gentlemen: It is a great pleasure and honor to be here. Before beginning my talk, I would like to make just one comment about the very kind introduction I received. I do not conceive my job to be that of defending the Arab case particularly, but I conceive it to be my job to report on it and, particularly, to report on its implications so far as

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the United States and the Soviet Union are concerned. The point has been reached, I think, where there is no future for Americans in defending either one case or the other. We are presented with an accomplished fact; a situation which exists. We want to understand it as best we can, and we want to do what we can that is best from now on. But the Arab case, as I am going to report it to you now, is something which to defend would be purely an academic exercise.

Now as I understand it, my job is not to dwell upon the strategic significance of the area, which makes an understanding of the Arab case important; and it is not to explain to you about oil or any of the other implications of the area. What I would like to do first is set out briefly the Arab case which, as I say, is now largely an academic case; secondly, to discuss its implications in the area specifically, and by that I mean its implications for the inhabitants of the area; and thirdly, to describe what I conceive to be the implications in the area which have tremendous importance outside the area mainly, to this country and to the Soviet Union.

Now we come to the Arab case for Palestine. I assume I don't have to spell out the Zionist case so you will understand what the Arabs are up against. The Arab case for Palestine is an extremely simple one, as you know. It is based upon the assumption that people who have inhabited a land for many generations have the best possible claim to that land. As a matter of fact, most of the Arab arguments for their case in Palestine are taken from American and democratic thought. Many of the leading Arabs, for instance, have been trained in American schools and colleges in the Middle East and, of course, a number of them have received further training in this country. The American University at Beirut has trained an amazingly high percentage of the important Arab leaders. Those Arab leaders were told by their instructors and professors

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at the AUB what the basic principles of American democracy were. They were told that we believed, for instance, in the self-determination of peoples. They were told we believed in the right of people inhabiting a land to determine the future of that land by a free, uncoerced election, and the Arabs said that was just what they wanted in Palestine. They said, "What we want is entirely consistent with what you people told us democracy was, and now we cannot see why you don't support us."

The disillusionment which has been created in the Arab mind by American policy on Palestine is one of the most extreme forms of disillusionment I have seen anywhere in the world. You can talk to a farmer in a little Arab village in Palestine who has never seen an American, who has never had any contact with American life, and yet he has known over the last years that the people he has most admired in his Arab community, in his larger Arab community, were people who were trained at Americans schools and who told him what the American views on politics, on world order and on the dignity of human beings were. Even without having had any contact with Americans, he still built up this very impressive image of what America stood for, and tears would run down his face as he told you of his extreme disappointment in what he understood American policy to be. As far as he can understand it, what the United States has been doing has been in direct violation of everything that we stood for. We have been supporting what the Arabs and the other oriental peoples generally regard as a straight imperialist venture.

Now it may seem surprising to many Americans to hear political Zionism described as imperialism, and yet the Arabs, the Chinese, the Indians and a host of other oriental peoples say, "What is imperialism?" Imperialism is the invasion of one country by the inhabitants of another country with the announced purpose of establishing their rule over that country, and over the inhabitants

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of that country. They say that is what Zionism has done, first with the backing of British guns, and now with the backing of guns they have procured for themselves and used for themselves. It is a straight imperialist venture so far as the Arabs and the other orientals see it. They profess themselves that they are profoundly disillusioned that the United States and the United Nations should support such a move. It confirms, of course, in their opinion, many of the harsh things which Russian agents and propagandists have been saying about the United States and the United Nations; namely, that all our protestations that we didn't believe in imperialism were empty and a hoax. The pretense that the United Nations was set up to do away with imperialism, to give the peoples of the world a voice in their own destiny is an argument which the Russians describe as a pretense, a hoax. The fact that the United Nations policy in Palestine, by a vote of 33 to 13, managed to act against the interests and against the views of about half the peoples of the world, and particularly the peoples most directly concerned with Palestine, confirms, in the minds of many orientals, the Russian statement that the United Nations is simply a new device for old Western imperialism. That is a dangerous idea to have around in the world, particularly in view of the present tensions between the Russians and ourselves.

It is a view which is gaining ever increasing power.

Before going on to my second topic, I would like to deal with just one more argument on the Arab case; one more illustration of the Arab point of view. It has been argued many times on behalf of the Zionists that because they are able to do more for Palestine, in Palestine — resources — therefore, they should be given the right to develop Palestine. The Arabs say in the first place that if they had an equal amount of financial backing from outside the country, without any expectation of having to repay it, they too could do a lot

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more for Palestine than they have been able to. But in any case they say the argument is irrelevant. If you are going to determine the rights to a land on the basis of who could most efficiently develop that land, then you are going to have a pretty disastrous series of world shifts and revolutions. And if that was our theory, then on what ground did we, for instance, oppose the Nazis when they took over various parts of Europe? Americans always admired the technical efficiency of the Germans, they always considered the Germans were far more efficient than any other European peoples, and if it is just a matter of efficiency then why did we go to war with Germany over Germany taking over the land of people who were less able to develop them technically than the Germans? Yet, in Palestine the Arabs say we are supporting exactly the same case.

The Arabs put the matter this way: They say, suppose you and your family are living on a little plot of land in a house. You haven't had as much money as you might and the house could use several coats of paint and a little work done on it. Let's say also that you have been pretty hard worked, your energy has gone out in other things and you haven't been able to clear and utilize every inch of the land on which you are living. Say there are a lot of rocks and weeds around, but even so it is your home, your family has lived in it for many years and you love it. Now along the road one day come some cousins of yours. They knock on the door and they say, "We are in awful shape" — as a matter of fact, you can see that they are. "The world has been giving us a bad licking. We need refuge some place." Of course, the Arabs pride themselves on their hospitality. They have an expression, Ahlan Wa Sahlan, which can be interpreted as meaning "my house is your house." But the Arabs say, we don't mean that to be taken literally. They invite these people in, and they turn out, let's say — an Arab will occasionally admit this — to be very useful

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citizens. They pay for their room and board, they do some painting in the guest room, they fix up the woodwork, they fix a leaky tap in the bathroom which has been dripping for a long time and they find a little plot of land outside which had been so covered with stones and weeds you hadn't had time to do anything about it. They work and work on this little plot of land, and finally they grow a few radishes on it. That is fine. But meanwhile more and more of them have been coming and knocking on the door and saying, "You have got to let us in." Finally, you decide that things are getting pretty rough. You have to climb over bodies to get to your bed at night, and when you want to shave in the morning you have to stand in line for an hour or so to get into the bathroom. You say, "I am sorry. This has gone far enough. We cannot take any more visitors, paying or otherwise." Whereupon howls of protest go up. You are told you are an ungrateful so and so, only they don't say so and so. You are told, look at all that has been done for you, the painted woodwork, the tap fixed in the bathroom and the radishes. You are told you have absolutely no right, in view of all that has been done for you, to refuse further admission to other people who want to come into your house. Worst of all, you find that some big neighbors, quite a distance away who don't know what has been going on at all, say, "Yes, these guests of yours are absolutely right, you have to give in and do as they say." The Arabs say, your house is no longer your own. And they say, "That is a hell of a price to pay for some radishes." That is obviously an oversimplification of a pretty complicated problem, but it represents, as well as any other story I know, what is the basic Arab position on Palestine.

Now I will give you one more point about the Arab view on Palestine. It is not only the Palestinian Arabs who feel strongly about it, it is the Arabs in the surrounding countries as well. They feel very strongly about it,

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as we shall see, and as you have probably heard already and have certainly read in the newspapers. They haven't been very effective about doing much about it, but their feelings are definitely strong, not only in Palestine, but in the surrounding countries where popular opinion — which may have been originally encouraged by the Arab Governments — is now the main thing which stands in the way of certain of those governments trying to work out a peaceful settlement with the new state of Israel.

That brings us pretty directly to the next subject, which is the implications of this struggle for the Middle Eastern peoples. The most important aspect, so far as the immediate implications go, is the fact that the Arabs have taken a terrific licking. There is no doubt about that. The only people who don't know it are the Arab peoples themselves. Their news has been so heavily censored that in many countries they simply don't know the facts at all. They don't realize that their armies, or what they had in the way of armies there, have been licked.

Now the Arabs made two serious errors in their judgment on this — the Arab Governments rather than the Arab peoples. They underestimated entirely the strength of the Jewish forces, and they overestimated their own fighting capacity. They thought they could do a job on Israel in a very short time with comparatively little effort, and they told their peoples that too, which was about the worst mistake of all. If this fighting continues — and as it develops it becomes more and more difficult, in fact, impossible for the Arab Governments to conceal the true facts of the situation from their peoples — you are going to have pretty serious repercussions. Now just what form those repercussions will take in each individual country, may be a matter for some doubt. For instance, the two countries in which I expect the repercussions to be most immediate and most severe would be Egypt and Iraq. Syria and Lebanon

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are more stable, and Trans-Jordan is pretty well held in order by the Legion. But in both Egypt and Iraq the governments are very shaky anyhow. In Egypt the government turned to the Palestine adventure partly with great relief because it gave them something which would take the eyes of the people off internal conditions and off the weaknesses of the government at home. It is the old business where if you have bad trouble at home, then make trouble away from home so it will distract attention from what is happening at home. Only in this case it is likely to backfire very badly.

Now it is very difficult to say what form the new governments might take when and if the present governments are overthrown. That depends to a great extent upon outside powers. For instance, in Iraq I would say that there is a distinct possibility that if a popular upheaval comes and overthrows the present government there is a chance that a new government might come into being which would be pro-Soviet in spite of the fact that the Arabs know perfectly well the Soviet Union has backed Israel just as strongly, if not more strongly, than the United States. In Egypt it seems extremely unlikely that there would be any pro-Soviet Government, although it is not beyond the realm of possibility. I think you can say this pretty definitely about any new government produced as a result of disturbances created by the Palestine situation: I think you can say any new government created from this cause is going to be, in the first place, more anti-foreign than its predecessors, and specifically it is going to be more anti-American and perhaps anti-British as well. That is one form of the immediate repercussions which might be expected.

What makes it all the more likely to happen is the very deeprooted Arab fear of political Zionism, a fear which is explained not only by the dangers they see in the existence and the injustice they see in the existence of this present state of Israel, but what the Arabs fear deep down inside of

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them, particularly those who know now that for the moment at least Israel is the strongest military force in the area, is the further expansion by this little state.

Now one thing which hasn't been very widely realized in this country has been the extent to which partition was refused acceptance as a final settlement by the Zionists in Palestine. Strong elements of the Palestine Zionists, from the very beginning, made it emphatically clear that they could not accept partition as a final settlement. I believe it was yesterday that a reception was held at La Guardia Airport for a gentleman named Beigin, who is the head of the Irgun Zvai Leumi. This is a Jewish terrorist organization, which, aside from the fact it has already perpetrated a number of what you might call gruesome terrorist activities, such as the garroting of the two British soldiers kidnapped in the summer of 1946-47, and the booby-trapping of their bodies and the massacre at Deir Yassin in April which started the great wave of Arab refugees from Israel when the Irgun forces entered this little village and slaughtered practically every living soul; aside from that, which might serve as a slight hinderance to this man's being received so graciously by — I don't know how many senators and representatives are receiving him — there is the further fact, which you would never get from reading the literature put out on this reception, that Beigin and his followers, as well as a lot of other Zionists, are specifically stating that they cannot be satisfied with Palestine alone, that they must have not only all of Palestine, but Trans-Jordan, parts of Syria and Lebanon, parts of Iraq and parts of Egypt as well. It sounds like an ambitious undertaking. On the other hand, the idea that they might take even as much of Palestine as they have taken already sounded like a very ambitious undertaking some years ago. The thing, of course, that frightens the Arabs is not only the sight of these ambitions in the Jews of Palestine, but the fear that the same

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forces which have supported Zionism so far in its career will also support these new ambitions. You can be sure that the reception given to this head of the Irgun is going to be reported very fully in the Arabic press. You can also be sure that it is going to have a very disturbing effect indeed.

In the eyes of the Arabs the United States in the United Nations has served very much as a stooge for the new state of Israel, and they are afraid that process will continue. They see that Mr. Jessup is saying in Paris now that the United States feels that Israel should make compensation for any additional territories it should gain over the original partition proposal. On the other hand, unhappy experiences in the past would not make them surprised if our position should shift again. It is disturbing to them, and it must be disturbing to them, to see Beigin, with his very strong expansionist ambitions, welcomed in this country by hundreds of prominent Americans and spoken of as the possible next Prime Minister of Israel. That, of course, is the fear which is responsible for the great uneasiness which pervades the Arab world today.

There is one more immediate effect of this Palestine issue which contributes to instability in the area, and that is the refugee problem. As you know, about half a million Arab refugees, mainly women, children and old men, have fled from the fighting in Palestine. They started fleeing right after the Deir Yassin massacre, and the result has been that there are very few Arabs left in the Israeli occupied part of Palestine. Now the Arab countries are weak enough anyhow. They are always just on or just under the margin of starvation, and their political stability is a myth. There is no such thing, except perhaps in Saudi Arabia and other of the countries which have been far removed from this Palestine crisis. There is no such thing as political stability in Egypt or Iraq, and there is very little in Syria and Lebanon. Now these refugees create a tremendous burden upon the countries to which they have gone; a

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burden which those countries are absolutely unable to meet all by themselves. Unless very effective measures can be taken by the United Nations these refugees in themselves might create sufficient problems and uneasiness and disturbances to disrupt the stability of certain of the countries, if not of the whole region.

Now I am going on the assumption throughout this lecture, of course, that the interests of the United States, as well as the interests of the people of the region, require as much stability, as much peace as possible in the area. That serves as a perfectly good springboard for a discussion of the implications of these repercussions outside the area. What I would like to do is discuss the two main interests, and let us assume that in broad terms the British and American interests in the area are largely identical. Let's talk about the democratic interests in the area, or the Western interests in the area, as opposed to Russian interests in the area.

Back in the fall of 1947 when the Soviet Union announced that it would support the partition proposal for Palestine there were a number of Americans who threw their hats up in the air and said, "Hurrah, the Soviet Union has seen the light at last. It is going to work with us from now on in the establishment of a better and a peaceful world." It didn't take long for most of them to be rather disillusioned on that score. What has happened since does not indicate any very wholehearted desire on the part of the Soviet Union to work with the United States in such an aim. Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine the Soviet decision to support partition in somewhat different terms. We might ask ourselves what the overall strategic objectives of the Soviet Union in the Arab World are. The first thing to recognize is that the Soviet Union had no positive advantages, no positive assets in that part of the world. On the contrary, the British and the Americans did. We had, and we still have, of

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course, very definite and very important assets in that part of the world. When a rather hardheaded bunch of politicians and military men, say, in the Soviet position, are confronted with a situation like that where their enemies have something to gain from a region and they have nothing, they come up with one definite answer on it; that is, their own position cannot fail to be improved, if only by the weakening of their enemy, by anything which will spread violence and political and economic chaos in that area in which their opponents have definite assets. That is a perfectly simple principle. It conforms to the policy which the Soviet Union has been following all over the world. There is no reason to think that they deviated from it in Palestine or in the Middle East as a whole. I think it is perfectly fair to assume that Russian experts agreed with many British and American experts in foretelling that the attempted partitions of Palestine would create violence not only in Palestine, but spreading violence and chaos throughout the whole of the Middle East area. The only difference perhaps was that the Soviet Union acted on the advice of its experts who said that, whereas the American Government chose to go on the assumption, which we stated over and over again, that the partition of Palestine would bring peace to Palestine and to the Middle East as a whole. That assumption would not have been wrong.

The partition of Palestine had certain other obvious advantages to the Soviet Union. In the first place, the Russians liked the very idea of partition, the principle of partition, and over and over again in the United Nations they would get up and they would say, "We believe in the principle of partition. We believe a minority living in a country, which cannot get along with the majority in that country, has the right to break away and form its own independent state." Well, that has obvious implications outside Palestine. To take the Middle East alone, take the countries which border on the Soviet

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Union which are now trying to resist and withstand Soviet pressures, take Iran, for instance. The Soviet Union has already sponsored one effort to carry out this principle of partition in Iran. There has been an attempt made to set up an Azerbaijani and a Kurdish state there. A Kurdish state could be set up drawing not only from Iran, but from Iraq and Turkey. You could have an Armenian state drawing from Turkey and from other of the Middle Eastern countries. In Greece you could set up or foster the advance of a Macedonian state. All of these states have two points in common: First, that they would be created at the expense of countries which now form a barrier to further Soviet expansion; and secondly, that from the moment of their creation they would be under Soviet domination. The principles of partition have obvious advantages for the Soviet Union not only in the Middle East, but elsewhere, and I don't think we have heard the last of this idea by a long shot. The way the Soviet representatives time and time again went on record and tried to put the United Nations on record as favoring this principle, indicates that they really do have expectations of finding it useful.

There is, of course, another way in which the Soviet Union has benefited and hopes to continue to benefit from this partition of Palestine. The Soviet Union has been trying to make appeals to the Arabs, of course, on this. They have offered to provide, and I expect have provided, arms to the Arabs, not only to the Arab Communist Parties which are not strong anywhere, but also to other parties among the Arabs. They have made, however, very little attempt to win explicit Arab backing for the Soviet Union. Since that would obviously be very difficult, they have preferred to finance sub rosa Arab extremists and anti-foreign groups on the same old theory, which has directed their policy in all matters, that anything which creates trouble for foreigners in the area works out to their advantage. I don't think it is possible to prove, at least

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I cannot prove it, that the Soviet Union has been financing the Ikhwan at Kuslimin, the Moslem Brotherhood, which is this violent foreign reactionary Moslem group which started in Egypt and which is now commanding a pretty strong following in Syria and Iraq, and they claim in Trans-Jordan as well. Now at first glance, What are the interests of the Soviet Union in the Moslem Brotherhood? Anything that is bound to be more anti-Soviet than the Moslem Brotherhood would be hard to find on ideological grounds. But the Ikhwan is a fanatical group, and it doesn't care where the money comes from. Although it would be anti-Soviet, although its preachings encourage hatred of all foreigners including the Russians, the Russians think they have a lot to gain by encouraging anything which goes against the Americans and the British.

Now, as I said, the Russians have not made an effort to gain positive Arab friendship. They have stuck to the business of divisive propaganda and propaganda encouraging hatred against others. They had, however, hopes of gaining the friendship of minority groups in the area, not only the Kurds, the Armenians and others, but also very definitely the Jews, including the Jews in Israel. One thing should be made clear from the beginning, and that is that the government of Israel and the majority of Israel's inhabitants are not communist, and are in no way sympathetic to communism. The actual Communist Party in Israel is a small and, by itself, insignificant body. On the other hand, of course, the conditions of illegal immigration into Palestine over the last, say, three years have been absolutely ideal from the Soviet point of view, from the point of view of a group trying to infiltrate agents into the country. For one thing most of them have been using forged papers anyhow, so it doesn't really matter whether the papers turn out to be forged because it is no tip-off on whether a man is what he pretends to be or not. The movement started from the Russian Zone, and it provided a perfect occasion for the planting of agents

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among genuine refugees. As a matter of fact, in the last year or so there has been considerable direct movement from behind the iron curtain to Palestine, just direct, and not even by way of the British and American Zones. So it seems practically inevitable that there have been certain numbers of Soviet agents infiltrated with these refugees, and that they have the nucleus, and a pretty effective organization in Israel.

They also realize that while the people of Israel are not communistically inclined, it still is possible to take advantage of their extremely emotional conditions, of their extreme sensitivity and the way they react to anything which appears to be a slight which has been shown over and over again in the reaction to the policy of this country, where if we don't do precisely what Israel wants the Israelis are tremendously hurt and upset by it, as they are today, for instance, by Jessup's statement of yesterday which they do not consider to be adequate in their support, and by which they are therefore very offended. The Soviet Union has been going right straight down the line for Israel, and as a result American correspondents report from there that the Soviet Union is presently the most popular of the world governments in Palestine. They say that basically the United States is far more popular with more of the people, but for the time being anyhow we at least periodically end up in the dog house; whereas the Soviet Union is always occupying the best guest room.

There is another way in which the Soviet Union has been benefiting from this fighting in Palestine, and expects to continue to benefit. We have been urging that truces be established in Palestine, and during the truce period neither side be allowed to gain any advantage either militarily or politically. Therefore, during the truce periods we, and most of the world, have at least officially tried to stop the shipment of arms to either side.

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Israel, naturally, is more anxious than anything else to buy arms, and to buy oil which it needs for military and other purposes to make itself strong against the feared Arab attack. And during this period when the United States and the other Western countries would not sell arms to Israel, Israel has turned naturally to the one source where she has been able to get them; namely, to the countries behind the iron curtain. She has been buying oil from Rumania to refine at Haifa to make up for the fact that she cannot get oil from the Arab Countries. She has been buying arms, planes and other weapons from Czechoslovakia, also behind the iron curtain, and she has been having to pay for these purchases in dollars. She still gets plenty of dollars from this country each year. I should say dollars are now going to Israel at the rate of 200 million dollars a year. The Soviet Union needs dollars, and of course what gets into Czech or Rumanian hands will not stay out of Russian hands if the Russians decide they want it. So, on the one hand, while we have been spending dollars to strengthen, say, the economy of France, the Soviet Union has been spending dollars to weaken the economy of France by promoting coal strikes and other devices of the sort. And as long as the struggle in Palestine goes on they are pretty well assured, unless the United States should clamp down an embargo, of a continuing stream of dollars from Israel to finance their operations in France against the Marshall Plan or against any similar American project.

Now I have talked chiefly about the Russian interests in this struggle, but it seems to me a perfectly good way of illustrating what American and British interests are. We gain from the reverse of the picture. Where the Russians want instability and chaos, we want stability, security, peace and, so far as possible, the progressive development of these countries under their own steam but with our help so that they will form a healthy part

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in the future of world society, a part which is sound, strong and well-founded enough so that it can serve as a barrier to the spread of communism. We know that communism thrives upon disorder and insecurity. We also know, on the other side of the picture, that democracy must depend upon a large degree of stability, peace and prosperity particularly in its early development. Therefore, every gain that the Soviets make as a result of fighting and instability in the region is correspondingly a loss to us.

It seems to me my job here is certainly not to recommend what American policy should be; but, on the other hand, I think a few comments on the way in which peace and stability could be furthered in the area would not be wholly out of place. We have seen a pretty serious shock to our strength in the area; we have seen our natural friends in the area, in the Arab Countries, let us say, seriously weakened by what has been going on. I mentioned the American University at Beirut, and the American University, as I said, has trained a large number of the most important Arab leaders. Those people were naturally and instinctively our friends. Our normal friends in this area have been people who were interested in progress and the improvement of their own lot in accordance with Western liberal standards, and in turn those people have been largely oriented toward the West and very often largely trained by the West. One of the most serious results, perhaps, over the long range of this Palestine situation, has been that those elements in Arab society have been very gravely discredited. I was talking to some Arab students just a couple of days ago studying at the state college in Michigan -- some students from Iraq, some students from Egypt and so forth -- and they said to me, we are not only profoundly upset by the actions of America in this matter, because we love America, but we think that America might figure that democracy is something which could exist in other areas of the world as well as here. But, they

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said, you know this is going to have a very serious effect on all our futures. When we go home we are going to be suspected, and we are going to be prey for any demagogue who comes along and wants to attack us and says, "This man is pro-American, he went to school in America, he is no good." They said that is going to be a very serious and perhaps insurmountable obstacle for anyone in the future who has been to American schools either in or out of the region. That is another illustration of the way in which our position has been hurt.

What I want to conclude with is a suggestion, or at least an observation, on the strength of the United States in this position. I have reported to you the various ways in which the situation there has benefited the Russians. Our position was tremendously strong before this all began, and it still is fundamentally fairly strong. Now how long it can stand up under a continuance of the present situation, or a worsening of the present situation, is another question. But right now the United States is in a position where if it wanted to it could put a stop to the fighting in Palestine. That is because both sides are amenable to American appeal either for one reason or another. Let us take Israel first because that is the most obvious thing. If the United States were to declare that any further fighting or any further infringement of a truce or an armistice in Palestine would result in a firm embargo by the United States on any kind of shipments, including specifically dollars, to whichever side started the violation, then the state of Israel would have to hold its forces in check as best it could. Of course, it might not be able to control the Irgun, but it would have to make the effort. That is because, even though the Soviet Union might go on providing Israel with arms, Israel has got to have strong outside financial support if she is going to survive. She cannot survive otherwise. She has to be able to count on a steady and large flow of American dollars, or otherwise economically her position is absolutely hopeless, particularly in view of her ambitions for bringing in

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large numbers of immigrants. It would cost an awful lot to do that. Therefore, Israel would have to heed any such warning by the United States.

Now the Arabs, on the other hand, would also have to heed it. Even though they are all bitter against us now, and even though they are extremely bitter about the Palestine situation, the fact is that they have taken a licking and they are afraid they may go on and take an even worse licking. They also need American support in the way of financial and economic assistance, and they are hopeful that maybe they can get it. The main thing that keeps the Arabs fighting now, in my opinion, is the fear that Israel will not be content to stop where she is; the fear that Israel may go on and expand almost without limit at their expense. If they could be told that the United States will guarantee them against any further violation of a given set of boundaries by the state of Israel, then I think the movement for peace among the Arab states would be very difficult to block. There would be extremists on both sides. There would be extremists who would not want to give up fighting, but I think even though they might continue to commit spasmodic acts of violence that it would be possible over the long run to control them, and at least we would be containing the situation pretty much and not allowing it to get worse.

I don't feel that there is any other chance of bringing peace to Palestine, particularly in view of the fact that Israel is obviously the stronger now. I don't feel there is any chance of bringing peace there as long as we continue to say in effect to two people who are fighting now, "Boys, you have got to stop fighting. We don't like this business of fighting one bit, and you have got to stop." And then in the next breath say, "But, of course, if one of you doesn't stop, why we are not going to do a thing about it." That is what we have said so far. We refused to back the resolution in the Security Council sponsored by the Chinese and the British which provided for the use of sanctions against

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either side violating the truce. I think so long as we refuse to back such a resolution, then there is the extreme danger that the fighting will continue in Palestine, that it will spread from Palestine and that it will threaten the stability of the whole of the Middle East. Thank you very much.

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Discussion following Lecture
on
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Kermit Roosevelt
(24 November 1948)

CENERAL WEYLAND: Gentlemen, I think you have seen from Mr. Roosevelt's very capable presentation that he will probably handle the questions as capably. The floor is open.

MR. HASELTON: Would you estimate for us the possibility of the Arab states really getting together and putting up some effective opposition?

MR. ROOSEVELT: It is very hard to estimate the possibility of the Arab states getting together and putting up some effective opposition. So far the Arabs have shown a complete lack of organization in this matter. Their estimates of the situation have been bad, and their military efforts have been lamentably weak. It is difficult to say whether the licking they have taken will wake them up and put new life in them, new determination, or whether they will simply fold under this pressure and fail to provide any effective opposition at all.

I would say that unless some kind of international assistance is given them in containing the present Palestine conflict that they will not be able to put up any effective defense for some time. Of course, they talk about the fact that they will fight forever about this if necessary. They point to the fact that during the Crusades it took them 70 to 80 years to wipe out the Crusader Kingdom in Palestine. What they are actually hoping in this case is that there will be another war.

The Egyptian and the Iraqi students I mentioned said to me--

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"Frankly, we are praying for another world war." Of course, they think if another war comes, then in the confusion and chaos and so on they will be able, by sheer force of numbers, to overwhelm the state of Israel. But I would say the prognosis for their getting any effective organization in the near future is poor. They are not likely to be able to.

COLONEL ALLEN: You have stated that the Zionists probably aspire to achieve a national domain considerably in excess of the area they now hold, or even of all Palestine. What action do you consider would be appropriate on our side to influence them to accept a more reasonable boundary, and put it in writing, in order that if they should ever overstep it that they at least will have been discredited in the eyes of the world and give us a greater lever with which to oppose them?

MR. ROOSEVELT: It seems to me that should be done through the United Nations. The United Nations should be urged to reach a quick decision, as quick as possible, on a given set of borders. We seem to be pursuing that policy at the moment. We have proposed that the original partition resolution, the borders proposed there and the revision of that proposed by the late mediator, Count Bernadotte, be taken and considered together. We have said we will not agree to any change in the territorial provisions of the first partition resolution which is not acceptable to the state of Israel; but we have said, on the other hand, that if they are to gain more than they were originally promised, to gain territory which was outside the original partition proposal for the Jewish state, that they should compensate for that gain of territory by giving up something else. If we can adhere to that policy, and if we can get the United Nations to agree upon a given set of boundaries, then it would be natural for the

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United Nations to guarantee those boundaries, and for the United States particularly to guarantee them and to say that any attempt to invade either side would be punished. If the Arabs were then to try to take away something assigned to Israel we would act against them, and if the Israel government tries to take any further Arab territory we would act against them. I think the course before us is perfectly clear if we want to and can follow on it.

COLONEL SCHLATTER: I would like to ask a question as to the bases for the division of Palestine as it has been divided. I imagine one important basis was that of the density of the Jewish population. Yet, it seems to me historically that the corridor arguments have always been a source of great trouble.

MR. ROOSEVELT: The explanation is quite simple, it was one of the largest gerrymandering operations in history. The idea was to find -- and this is what it amounted to -- a division of Palestine which would give as large an area to the Jews as possible, while retaining for them a majority in the whole of the area. Now the Negeb, for instance, was assigned, or most of it was, to the state of Israel, although actually so far as population was concerned the few Jewish settlements already in the Negeb constituted only a small fraction of the population. Also the predominantly Arab areas in Galilee were assigned to the Jews, that is, the Jewish state as originally set up. In fact, some of the Arabs argued there was actually an Arab majority if you counted the Bedouins in the original state proposed for Israel. But it was very noticeable that even if you took the United Nations' official figures there as a 45 per cent Arab minority in the proposed Jewish state, and a very, very tiny Jewish minority left in the

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Arab state. The governing idea obviously was to set up as nearly viable a Jewish state as possible, and the only way you can explain the curious checkerboard which resulted is on the assumption that the people who drew the original boundary lines must have assumed that this could be peacefully carried out. Now without peaceful acceptance of it, it is obvious that such crazy patchwork couldn't possibly form an effective operating state. That was what Count Bernadotte was after in proposing that the areas be consolidated. He felt you should eliminate the corridors and set up two chunks where the Jews would have eastern Galilee, and give the Negeb to the Arabs.

MR. HEUN: Mr. Roosevelt, assuming the Israelis depend on the United States for their financial contribution, how long do you think the United States will continue to pour money in short of an embargo? Won't that wear out, and then where will they get their resources?

MR. ROOSEVELT: I don't know how long it will continue. Of course, it would be contributions from chiefly individual citizens, and it has been contributions, raised under considerable pressure I may say, from individual citizens which has been supporting the Zionist case in Palestine. Now how long they could continue to count on heavy contributions from this country, I think, is a question which has been causing the Israeli Government considerable concern. You can see that the prospect that the American contributions may dwindle over the years acts, in a sense, as a force behind expansion. The Israeli state would have a much better chance to stand on its own feet economically and politically if it could take in a lot of the surrounding area. Therefore, while the threat of withholding American contributions can act as a deterrent on further expansion, if

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at the same time we don't put pressure on further expansion they are going to have to go on getting some contributions from here. Actually it seems to me that unless the Israelis can accomplish a miracle, which so far they have shown no desire to accomplish, of creating friendly and neighborly relations with the Arab states nearby, then they are always going to be dependent on outside financial support. Certain of the Arabs who take the long view of this are counting upon that to provide for an ultimate settlement. They figure: "All right, Israel exists and we are not going to be able to eliminate it, but eventually the pressure of the economic facts of life is going to make it clear to the Israelis that either they are going to have to conquer us or live with us. And if the United Nations won't let them conquer us they will have to get along with us." Then the Arabs hope they might achieve some kind of federation in which Israel would make certain surrenders in the field of sovereignty, but as a result of which Israel would obtain certain economic advantages. Now that, to a few far-sighted Arabs, seems to be the best hope for peace over the long run.

MR. MORRISON: On that last point you made about the possibility of Israel being a part of a federated state in the Near East, surrendering some of its sovereignty, I would think that the same Arab leaders who look toward that as a possible ultimate solution would fear the Jews, because of their greater experience economically, the greater resources, would end up by dominating the whole federation. If that happened to be the case, then the Arabs would be in the same position over the whole Arab area that they are now in Palestine.

MR. ROOSEVELT: There is no doubt but that there is such a fear

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on the part of many Arabs that if they took the Jews in they would eventually lose their economic power to the Jews. You see one of the tremendous weaknesses in Arab society is that there is no middle class - or very little middle class - and here you have a ready-made middle class coming into the Middle East, and the middle class in most societies is the ruling class. So obviously this whole thing concerns the Arabs, because in the future they may find this ready-made middle class, which has come into the area, has taken over the economic control of the whole area. On the other hand, I think they hope that with American assistance, and with the assistance of other countries outside the area, they may be able to develop over the next years a middle class of their own, that they may be able to develop economic stability and security. They don't believe this federation which I mentioned is likely to come for at least several generations. They hope by that time they will be strong enough to stand the infusion of a Jewish middle class into the whole of the area. Whether that is a well-founded hope or not is another question, and I would be inclined to doubt it myself.

COLONEL FARRAND: In view of your remarks regarding the clamping down of an embargo, specifically dollars to Israel, and of the large Zionist influence in this country, and frankly in pretty high positions, do you believe the chances of that embargo are possible?

MR. ROOSEVELT: I would say the odds are definitely against it. On the other hand, I just don't see how we can go on indefinitely allowing this situation to deteriorate. I don't see how we can allow the Jewish state of Israel to invade beyond the borders of Palestine for instance,

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because that would throw the whole area, probably not only the Arab countries, but the other countries as well into complete turmoil. I think then you would get a situation which would result in a pretty serious war. I think perhaps in that case you would get the Oriental countries sending military assistance to the Arabs. They have promised that in the past, you know. Pakistan, for instance, proposed to send military troops to assist the Arabs, and they didn't simply because the truce came along. At least that is the story we have on it. If it became clear that Israel was going to invade outside the borders of Palestine, then I believe that, for instance, Saudi Arabia - which so far has done comparatively little to aid the Arabs in Palestine - would get scared, and if they did that would have obvious effects on us. I don't see how, as I said, we can indefinitely allow the thing to go on. If worse comes to worst, I think we would have to impose an embargo much as it would hurt many politicians to do so.

COLONEL KELSEY: Many of the Arabs must accept the fact of the Israel Government being established and the force of the Israel Army. Have they expressed any opinion as to what boundaries they would be willing to accept?

MR. ROOSEVELT: The answer, as far as I know, is "no". The Arabs have not given any indication, unless they have done it in great secret, of a boundary settlement which might be acceptable to them. I think the reasons behind that are partly a desire to preserve face as long as possible, and partly a fear that if it became known they had gone that far in making concessions to the existence of a Jewish state the repercussions for them personally would be bad. I think it is also because of their tradition

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of bargaining, because they don't like to admit before the final bargaining starts that they are even willing to agree to the creation of a Jewish state at all. Then when they do reach that point they will probably propose that a small area around Tel Aviv be given to the Jews for a state. Now that would be wholly ridiculous, of course, but they will make that as a first gesture in the bargaining. But until they are really hopeful that a final and conclusive bargaining can be reached, I don't think they will go that far.

COLONEL DEWEY: We have often heard that the Arab point of view is not expressed in our radio or press, and I wonder if you would comment on the influence that the Zionists in this country have on press coverage of the Arab position in Palestine.

MR. ROOSEVELT: Obviously the influence is very extensive and thorough. The rate at which the Zionists are able to dragoon big names into supporting their case is illustrated by the reception I referred to which was going to be given for the head of the Irgun Zvai Leumi. In the New York Times of November 23 there was a full page advertisement - at least I think it was a full page - listing, I don't know how many Senators, about a hundred members of Congress and a whole list of extremely prominent men in public, educational, and artistic life giving a welcome to this man. I'll bet 75 per cent of the people on that list didn't know who they were welcoming, and didn't know what he stood for, but they signed the thing. The press has been pretty much the same way. It has been extremely hard to get anything into the press, whether coming from the area or coming from this country, which set forth the Arab case. I am told that correspondents out in the Middle East have sent home time after time stories about

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the very hard treatment that the Arabs remaining in Israel have been receiving from the Israeli Government, and none of those stories have been printed back home. The correspondents out there, as long ago as when I was out there in 1947, were a very frustrated bunch of guys. They must be even more frustrated now when they write one thing down and have something entirely different come out back home. There has been in the last year signs of independence on this question in the press. Life, for instance, ran an editorial which was certainly not pro-Zionist, and Time has occasionally been quite critical of the Zionists.

The newspaper press has been less likely to be critical of the Zionists, and I believe it is due to the fact that they are so dependent on big advertising which comes from department stores. That is the really important advertising, and the department stores are in the hands of people who may not be Zionists themselves, but they are subject to very strong pressure from the Zionists. I have talked to many newspaper men about this, and they say the main difficulty seems to be with the advertising side. Of course, some of the newspaper publishers are also subject to an emotional appeal, a kind of friendly insistence that they not allow anything to appear in their papers which could encourage anti-Semitism. One of the most dangerous elements in this situation, so far as our own internal conditions are concerned, has been the way in which the Zionists have identified anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism. Sooner or later there is bound to develop in this country strong anti-Zionism. There is no strong reason why that should mean anti-Semitism, but the Zionists are making it all the more likely by their insistence that if you are an anti-Zionist you are an anti-Semite.

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That is one pressure which is put on newspaper publishers. There is no doubt that the coverage in the American press of this whole issue has been willfully inadequate and one-sided.

GENERAL WEYLAND: I regret that our time has expired. Mr. Roosevelt, you have given us a very clear and a very fair analysis of the Arab position in Palestine. The points which you have brought up will be extremely valuable to the class in its future consideration of the security of the United States. Thank you very much.