

1049

The Situation in Palestine  
Statement at Sabbath services October 15th 1938  
Morris S. Lazaron

Jewish need is great; Jewish tragedy is heartbreaking; Jewish problems so overwhelming Jews alone cannot meet them. But the misery of Jewish life is only a part of the misery of the world and will be mitigated when the world misery is mitigated. Whatever philosophy and program we Jews promote must be an item in a worldwide co-operative enterprise to establish justice and peace among the nations. It is only by viewing the Palestine situation as a part of this world picture that we can see it in proper focus, work harmoniously and helpfully with our natural allies, serve our own good and perform our traditional function as religious teacher.

We must resolutely subject feelings to facts and dreams to realities. This is no easy task. But in the end some measure of these dreams may come true.

Stripped of all collateral issues the Palestine situation poses two major questions to American Jews:

- 1-in the light of the dire need to find homes for persecuted Jews what stand shall be taken with reference to restriction of immigration into Palestine?
- 2-What stand shall be taken with reference to the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate for Palestine?

To answer these questions it is necessary to state the Zionist, Arab, British and United States Government positions.

The Zionist position may be stated as follows: The Jewish title to Palestine is in the heart of the Jew, as well as in the pages of sacred literature. Wherever the Jew lived he looked with hope to the land he called and still calls Erets Israel, the land of Israel. This dream of Zion rebuilt entered the realm of practical politics in 1917 when Britain issued the Balfour Declaration and later accepted from the League of Nations the Mandate to carry it out. Jewish settlement proceeded slowly at first then quickly as conditions of oppression rose in European lands till today there are approximately 450,000 Jews in Palestine. The land Jews own was purchased. Arab standards of living have been raised by the presence of the Jew. The Jew and only the Jew has the means and the mind to develop the land to the advantage of both Arab and Jew. But the

Lazaron, Morris S.

pressing need to find outlet for Jewish immigration necessitates a firm stand before Arab threats and possible British weakness. Britain is obligated by treaty with the United States not to make any changes in the Mandate without consultation with the United States. Jewish immigration into Palestine must continue and whatever plan be adopted must guarantee the establishment of a Jewish State.

The Arab position maintains: Our title to Palestine is our long, uninterrupted residence on the land, 1300 years of continual occupation. Britain made promises to us also when hard-pressed during the last war. We hold her to those promises. Arab nationalism is a fact in Palestine as well as in other parts of the Near East. We shall continue our guerilla war against Jews and British till all immigration is stopped and the demand ~~is~~ for a Jewish state is dropped.

What Britain will finally do is not yet clear. She made two promises under pressure of war need, one to the Jews, the other to the Arabs. Up to the present she has steered a middle course, she declares, attempting to fulfill both and succeeding in satisfying neither. Beleagured by Germany and Italy, her economic and political empire threatened on the continent of Europe and at strategic points throughout the world, Palestine is a vital link which binds together the far-flung commonwealth of nations, dependencies and peoples. With every good will in the world toward both Jew and Arab, the custodians and guardians of the British Empire will and must in the end do what is today necessary to maintain the empire whose very existence is at stake.

The United States finds itself in the midst of these ~~apparently~~ apparently irreconcilable claims and interests. Pressed by Zionists because of the treaty arrangement with Great Britain concerning the Declaration and the Mandate, anxious to fulfill this obligation and at the same time exert a humanitarian influence for an oppressed people, the State Department finds itself forced to consider the position of the British Empire, our ally in the last war and our potential and probable ally in the next, when and if it comes.

The United States government probably will insist upon its right to be consult-

ed by Britain before any change is made in the status of Palestine. It has already announced (yesterday, Oct. 14th) that it will take all measures necessary for the protection of American rights and interests in Palestine. But no matter how deeply our government may feel the humanitarian urge not how strong the pressure it may exert upon Britain, Britain will do what is best for her own self-preservation. Britain may well say: When I accepted the Mandate I showed my good will but conditions are different now. Shall the United States press the issue to the point of irritation? Will our government make no further representations because of the larger issues involved, basing its stand on the changed conditions in Palestine and in the world and pledging further and persistent effort to make more effective the refugee aid begun at the Evian Conference? Is it worth while for American Jews to press a claim which by its very nature cannot be realized and succeed only in irritating all parties who up to now have been friendly to Jewish hope and need? Is it not the part of wisdom to consider what possible good can yet be salvaged from the complicated situation?

The Moslem Congress which adjourned a few days ago passed a nine point memorandum on the Palestine question of which the two most important are:

- 1- The Balfour Declaration must be considered null and void.
- 2- Jewish immigration to Palestine must cease.

Is any compromise possible and what position might American Jews take to further peace in the Holy Land?

The immediate and pressing need is homes for Jews. Many Jews will be willing to concede the first point if the Arabs will eliminate the second. Shall insistence that the Jewish State must be won militate against concessions from the Arabs and guarantees from Britain? The Jews cannot conquer the land. Do they seriously expect England to do so? Particularly with her vast Arab populations in other areas of the east? That means war. Even if such a war were successful the nascent Jewish State would sit uncomfortably on bayonets over a subjugated and rebellious Arab population. What help would such a state be as an outlet for persecuted Jews? Would anyone want to bring Jewish children out of the Nazi frying pan into the Palestine fire?

Hard though it is to run counter to the deepest convictions of so many brother Jews I take the position that American Jews should insist on the primary issue: Homes for our persecuted brethren. American Jews who are not Jewish Nationalists but who still care for Palestine are willing to relinquish the Balfour Declaration for guarantees of immigration possibilities in Palestine to the limit of the land's economic capacity to absorb them and perhaps during the present emergency to help support Jews in Palestine beyond that limit. Many American Jews desire to dissociate themselves entirely from the political aspects of the question in all of its manifestations. We would come to some arrangement with the Arabs by agreeing to such an immigration as would quiet Arab fears of Jewish domination and at the same time afford substantial outlet for the pressure from Europe. We believe we have a right to insist that Britain go that far. Furthermore we believe that a community of over 400,000 souls such as now lives in Palestine is an economic magnet whose ordinary needs with the help which Jews throughout the world are prepared to give will bring the Jewish center normal and healthy growth. We can see both reason and good in the establishment of a Palestine State under the aegis of the British Empire, with local self government for Arabs and Jews. Over a period of years suspicion and ill-feeling would be mitigated and the will to co-operation will develop. In the end such a Palestine State could be a blessing to both Arab and Jew and a bulwark to the British Empire and the free peoples of the world. Such a plan would eliminate the extremists in Palestine. Moreover it will remove from American Jewish life a source of constant and bitter controversy.

In a time when ~~there is~~ there is danger the world may be made a shambles and our own country disrupted by pressure groups of all sorts, ~~may we~~ let us Jews set an example of restraint and sacrifice and forbearance. Zion can be an exalting dream without a state now or in the future as it has been in the past. England has already shown friendliness even though it did co-incide with her need. The democracies are our natural allies. Does it not behoove us to make their hard, perillous way less difficult? Jewish welfare in the world stands or falls with the existence of the free countries. Palestine

1048

and recognize it or they like it and recognize it or not, the destiny of the United States is inevitably linked. Nearly two thousand years ago a figure stepped out of Palestine on the stage of history. The influence of that single Jew has transformed our western civilization. Now perhaps, today, his people, the Jewish people by a supreme act of insight and loyalty to its own spiritual genius may play its part in the great struggle for justice and freedom and human brotherhood.