

March 24, 1948



Hon. Robert A. Lovett  
Under Secretary of State  
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Bob:

The recent action of our Government on the Palestine issue at the Security Council is a most disturbing and discouraging one to me. Our new policy strikes me as a tragic mistake which can lead only to more trouble and greater difficulties for all parties concerned, including the United States. In view of these implications, I feel compelled to transmit some views to you for whatever use they might serve.

As was clear from the very beginning, the Palestine security problem divides itself into external and internal influences. It has always been thought that the internal security problem would not be a very serious one. That judgment is still valid. If the surrounding countries had been given to understand from the very beginning that the United Nations solution was an accomplished fact and that no armed interference and violence would be condoned, I believe that Syria and Iraq and the others would have stayed out of the picture. Instead, the imposition of the arms embargo by the United States and the failure of the leading powers to make their position clear and strong and unequivocal gave the Arab States reason for feeling that armed interference in Palestine would not make any difference whatsoever in their standing with us and in the United Nations. The Arab countries were, in effect, encouraged to participate in violence as a means of disrupting and changing United Nations policy. Therefore some blame for the degree of violence is on our doorstep.

I recall distinctly that much of the argument and influence exerted by those in favor of Palestine partition during the United Nations hearings was resented by our Government officials. Yet the recent vacillation and then reversal indicates how important that pressure was. No matter how preponderant the evidence and great the merit, there is no point in assuming that right will somehow prevail and that continued argument for the right solution is unnecessary. Since partition was voted by the United Nations, there has been very little opportunity for those in favor of partition to continue to express their views in high quarters in our country. On the other hand, those who were against partition, including Mr. Henderson and Mr. Wadsworth, continued to have their influence felt day by day. Certainly they have the right to their judgment, and I do not in any way question their motives. Yet it was only fair that the other side should have been heard as well. Sustained critical examination of

strategic, political and economic factors would have helped avoid making what I'm fearful will prove to be a fateful mistake. The lack of effective liaison and channels of communication were in large measure responsible, in my judgment for the acceptance of an unsound policy.

There is much talk about the fact that the United States was entirely responsible for the United Nations decision on partition. In the first place, had it been so it would be very much to our credit. Partition was and continues to be the only feasible and just solution. However, from my experience at Lake Success, the decision was not arrived at primarily as a result of United States pressure. Uncertainty on the vote did prevail until the United States asked other governments to support the plan, but you know better than I that there was no bludgeoning or great pressure brought on other countries. The United States failure on the Balkan issue and on the vote for membership on the Security Council indicated clearly at the last Assembly meeting that the United States could not have its way on any issue at any time under any circumstances. The partition plan was arrived at democratically and freely, and no one nation was responsible. Every nation in Europe, except Yugoslavia, and every British dominion voted for the plan. It is important to keep all this in mind because the Palestine problem has been and continues to be a world problem rather than one involving only our country.

It seems to me that the moral and political status of the United States is most seriously undermined by our turning away from partition and advancing the proposal for temporary trusteeship. No doubt there were many factors taken into account earnestly in arriving at the latest policy. Yet to the laymen it appears as though we have backed down in the face of armed interference by small nations to upset the will of the United Nations. We as a major power - the strongest power on the face of the earth - must believe in peaceful and democratic solution of international problems or we must abandon the whole concept of right rather than might in the settlement of international issues. All over the world free men are increasingly discouraged.

The prestige and status of the United Nations has been lowered further than ever by our action. Since last Friday, there are rumblings that the whole United Nations secretariat is talking of resigning and going into some other activity with greater promise. If the new proposal of the United States truly had strong prospects of a peaceful solution then this severe blow to the United Nations could be weathered. However, prospects for success under the new policy are not very bright and it looks like greater rather than less trouble ahead.

The Jews in Palestine are clearly against trusteeship. The Palestine Arab Higher Committee has also spoken vigorously against it. It is my conviction that before long all the Arab States will also be openly against trusteeship in any form acceptable to the United States.





A good part of the trouble in Palestine over the years can be traced to vacillation and uncertainty and constant shifting of policies by the Mandatory power. Now we seem to be following the same pattern. This shifting back and forth will increasingly complicate the problem and make a permanent solution more and more remote. As time goes on an international force much larger than that required by the British will be needed to impose peace in Palestine. Even then it will not be true peace. It will be more akin to a reign of terror and violence by armed forces against individuals and groups. I shudder to think of the possible - and even probable - implications of our new policy in Palestine, in the United States and around the world.

Whether anything can be salvaged now is problematic. It is much more difficult to rectify mistakes than to start something de novo. The moral authority and persuasiveness of the United States in this question has been seriously impaired. However, the realities of the situation will require that some things be done.

First of all, it seems inevitable that there will be some vacuum or gap after the British departure. I think the United States should immediately lift the arms embargo so that there will be the possibility of defense by those who are being attacked. The embargo never did have any justification and it certainly has less and less as the May 15th date approaches.

The United States and the rest of the major powers should express themselves clearly and strongly that they will not condone, nor further ignore armed interference by Syria and Iraq and other Arab countries in the Palestine conflict. As member nations of the United Nations they are violating the basic principles of international peaceful relations. If necessary, they should be threatened with economic sanctions, which should be imposed if they refuse to withdraw their armed nationals from Palestine.

The United States should express itself in favor of continued Jewish immigration on a scale of 100,000 or more per year even during a period of temporary trusteeship. The IP problem is not being solved, and its solution is a must if a healthy Europe is to be reestablished. This cannot be delayed further.

Finally, the United States should make its position clear that it will support whatever decision the Assembly arrives at, whether it be permanent partition now or a short term temporary trusteeship leading to partition or anything else. Without such an advance commitment any new decision is meaningless. In fact, a new decision is unlikely without such a commitment and in view of past experience the commitment must be clear and specific if it is to carry weight.

This country is now deeply involved in a very complex issue which cannot be solved to the full satisfaction of both parties. We

shouldn't kid ourselves into believing that such a solution by agreement is possible. Therefore we must be realistic, fair and courageous. Without these basic attributes we will be lost on this issue as well as on other issues. We can help lead the world to the democracy, peace and prosperity but only by facing issues fairly and squarely.

I feel better having gotten this off my chest and hope you will receive this in the sincere and constructive spirit in which it is sent. If you ever have a moment I should like to talk with you in person about some of these matters.

Very best wishes.

Cordially,



Robert R. Nathan

RRN:mp