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**AFTER THE  
U.N. DECISION  
ON  
PALESTINE**

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**DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER**

*This is the text of an address delivered in New York City on December 29, 1947 — the eve of his departure for Palestine — by Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, Chairman of the American Zionist Emergency Council and of the American Section of the Jewish Agency for Palestine.*

**I**T WAS just a month ago that the Palestine decision was taken in the Assembly of the United Nations. This has been a month of unprecedented exaltation for our people all over the world. Their spirits leaped up like a brilliant flame in the glad surprise of the long hoped for and never quite expected victory. Their parched and thirsty souls drank deep of the waters of salvation. The nations of the world had again vindicated our claim to national restoration. By an overwhelming vote — only two Christian States dissenting — they had decreed that the Jewish State shall be re-established and set the date for its establishment as October 1948.

Thus the messianic drama of Israel which had been unfolding in many lands through long centuries of tragic acts and sorrowful scenes suddenly reached a triumphant climax in the dramatic setting of an international council chamber, where in an atmosphere of unspeakable tension, the nations voted, each in its turn, and when the vote was tallied, they had decreed the end of the diaspora — the *Galut!* “When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing . . .”

Our tired hearts were refreshed and uplifted when we witnessed the fine championing of our cause of liberation by one noble country after another — by the many countries of South and Central America, by the countries of Western Europe, by all the dominions of the British Commonwealth and by other countries of good will. We were deeply moved by the strong, unfaltering support which we received from the Soviet Union and from Poland and Czechoslovakia. And we were, of course, profoundly pleased and happy with the role which our own Government came to play in the final hour of decision. Especially gratifying was that rare phenomenon — baffling and disturbing to all those who prescribe cold

war as the remedy for an ailing and war-sick world and proscribe all suggestions of unity and reconciliation — which showed the two greatest world powers working in complete accord and unity of purpose to solve a grave international problem, and reaching a solution.

Those who are despondent over the turn of affairs in international relations and the seemingly irreparable rift which has been created between the East and the West, might well take heart in contemplating the full and ready cooperation which existed between the United States and the Soviet Union on the issue of Palestine. Here was an area where, we were told, imperial interests were inevitably destined to clash, and where power politics would most certainly tear East and West hopelessly apart. Nothing of the sort happened, to the utter consternation of all the preachers of the irresistible conflict. On the contrary — there was ready and friendly agreement. In my humble judgment, there is much food for thought here, and strong warrant for a more hopeful world outlook and a less intractable statesmanship.

**I**N THIS connection it should be stated that those who were responsible for the earlier and now discredited propaganda that the Soviet Union, in its desire to penetrate the Middle East and its rich oil fields, would side with the Arabs against the Jews, and that Great Britain and the United States must therefore not favor the Jewish cause for fear of driving the Arab States into the arms of the Soviet Union, have now slightly revised their propaganda. The Soviet Union, it is now proclaimed, favored the setting up of a Jewish State in Palestine in the confident expectation that this would arouse the Arabs, create disturbance and necessitate the intervention of the Security Council. The Security Council would have to send troops. The Soviet Union, being a member of the Security Council, would then have its own troops included in whatever international force is sent to Palestine. Once there, they will never be dislodged.

This is the new, or rather the revamped, propaganda which is being peddled about today in Washington by agents of all sorts — British, American and Arab — as well as in the public press, and which, along with the supplementary propaganda that the so-called illegal immigrants coming into Palestine are really communist agents in disguise, is being adroitly spread to destroy U.S.-U.S.S.R. cooperation on Palestine, and to prevent the implementation of the United Nations' decision. Every effort is being made to thrust Palestine back into the dangerous arena of power politics from which the U.S.-U.S.S.R. agreement and the action of the United Nations have most opportunely lifted it. There are even some members of the Congress of the United States who, out of ignorance or malice, are lending themselves to the spreading of this baseless and mischievous propaganda. Needless to say the Zionist movement has no orientation either to the West or to the East. If we need to define our orientation, it is definitely and unmistakably to the United Nations. We are happy that our problem received a solution by international agreement in which the East and the West harmoniously cooperated. We hope that this cooperation will continue in the future.

IT MIGHT be noted, in passing, that our frank joy in the decision of the United Nations to re-establish the Jewish State was not prompted by an infatuation with the idea of nationalism as such, or by idolatry of statehood. We are not chauvinists. Zionists have been denounced as secularists and political nationalists. Of course we are secularists insofar as we oppose a theocratic state, and we are political nationalists insofar as we believe in the re-establishment of the Jewish State. But this does not exhaust the full content of our aspirations.

Israel's resolution through the centuries to rebuild its national life in its ancestral home was guided by sound instinct and inspired by the same prophetic idealism which twice beckoned our ancestors from exile to national restoration

in Palestine. In both instances, at Sinai and by the rivers of Babylon, there stirred a deep, mystic conviction that only in a free national existence, could that which was best and unique in Jewish life find full scope and opportunity, and what was best and unique was always conceived of as transcending the moiety of political independence or the customary compensations of national status and security. It reached beyond that to a vision of "new things, things kept in store, not hitherto known . . ." to a redeemed humanity and a world order reconstructed after the pattern of the Kingdom of God.

In 1929, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Theodor Herzl, I wrote in a Herzl Memorial Volume which was published in that year:

"It is well that the political phase of Jewish Messianism is coming to a close in the upbuilding of the National Homeland. We shall not have to lay so much stress in the future on the importance of nationalism. We shall henceforth be confronted not with its lack but with its consequences. Hitherto, wanting the full complement of the attributes of nationalism, we were constrained to over-emphasize its virtues. Many of the spokesmen of our cause were driven to extol nationalism, *per se*, which is after all a quite recent and, demonstrably, a quite inadequate human concept. It is not mankind's ultimate vision. Certainly, it is not the substance of our own ancestral tradition whose motif is not nationalism but prophetism. Nationalism is not enough. It is a minimum requirement, not a maximum program. Our national rebirth was made possible by a war in which nationalism was thoroughly exposed and discredited. Nationalism is a means, not an end. 'What is great in a man,' said the philosopher, 'is that he is a bridge and not a goal.' This is true also of men collectively — of nations and of national cultures.

"Nationalism will not suffice the eternally questing soul of our people. After its national life is secure, Israel must push on to the frontiers of

the new world — the world of internationalism, of economic freedom, of brotherhood and of peace.”

I believe that this motif of authentic Jewish lineage has not been wanting in the humble and consecrated labors of the present-day nation-builders in Palestine, and I am convinced that Palestine will in the days to come become the workshop of our people’s highest ideals and aspirations.

OUR builders in Palestine will have much to endure and much to overcome, but they will assuredly match their hour. They have still to discover their political eyes. They are children of the crucible. They have come from the four corners of the earth and from all parts of the *Galut*, and the *Galut* leaves its mark on everyone. They hail from all cultural zones and from all political backgrounds. They represent most diverse personal experiences and they must all be fused into an organic whole. They must learn unity in diversity, patience under stress, and the knack of subduing the voices of the partisan, the doctrinaire and the fanatic in the joyous tumult of building.

Edmund Burke defined the religion of the early American colonists as being a refinement on the principle of resistance. “It is the dissidence of dissent and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion . . . agreeing in nothing but in the communion of the spirit of liberty.” That might well define also the temper and character of our pioneers in Palestine. There is marvellous promise in all this for a free and unshackled life, but also much danger.

Our people will live in a land which is not a “fortress built by nature for herself against infection and the hand of war,” as Shakespeare sang of England, but in a very open land whose borders are difficult to defend, and whose security must rest on the stout hearts, the political wisdom and the national discipline of its people. What they have gained with courage, they will have to keep with prudence.

But the spirit, the will and the capacity are there, and they will not be found wanting.

The Land of Israel will be small, made smaller by partition, but the people of Israel will make it great. The monumental contributions to civilization have been made by great peoples which inhabited little countries. Mind and creative endeavor will compensate for what our people have been forced reluctantly to relinquish. Generations to come, living in that land of challenge and renewal, will speak great words and do great deeds, and in the magnitude of their upsoaring, there will tower the majesty of that little land of revelation which, like some precious jeweled clasp, draws three continents together on the shore of the Western Sea. Not in opulence but in eminence will their destiny be fulfilled, and the elixir of their pride will be distilled not out of dominion or far-flung borders, but out of the faithful and skillful building of the good society.

IT IS now a month since the historic decision, and while our happiness is unabated, our minds are turning soberly to the pressing and difficult problems involved in the implementation of that decision.

Those problems are ours — but they are also those of the United Nations. The United Nations accepted the responsibility for deciding the future government of Palestine. It accepted, after long and careful examination and debate, the report of the Special Committee which it had appointed to make a complete and thoroughly objective survey of the entire situation. It has set up the machinery and fixed the time schedule for implementation. It was completely aware of all the difficulties involved, and was forewarned, not once but many times, by delegates of Arab States of their resolve to thwart by violence a decision of the United Nations favorable to partition. Nevertheless, despite these threats and in the full knowledge of all that was involved, the United Nations acted, convinced that there was no other way out, and that a solution could no longer be postponed.

If the United Nations were now to be deterred from its course by planned violence, by riots and demonstrations, calculated to convince the world that the UN decision is impossible of implementation, and thus by force to alter the settlement which it decreed, the United Nations would not only suffer an irreparable loss of prestige and authority, but its future effectiveness as the agency "to bring about by peaceful means and in conformity with the principles of justice and constitutional law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace" — would be disastrously undermined.

The ex-Mufti and his henchmen are attempting to sabotage the establishment of the Jewish State, but they and their collaborators in the neighboring Arab States, which are covenanted member states of the United Nations, and as such pledged to abide loyally by its decisions, are engaged as well in a shameless, frontal attack upon the very life of the United Nations itself.

We are confident that the United Nations will not permit itself to become the victim of insolent intimidation and the sport of organized hoodlumism. We are also confident that the Security Council of the United Nations, which is to act as the guide of the Commission appointed by the Assembly to implement its decision, will give this Commission every measure of support and encouragement; and should the situation in Palestine come to constitute a threat to the peace, as a result of the attempts to alter by force the settlement envisaged by the resolution of the Assembly, the Security Council will, we are convinced, act with decisiveness and dispatch. The confidence of some Arab delegates that the Security Council will fail to back up the action of the Assembly will prove as vain as was their earlier confidence that they would prevent a two-thirds vote in the Assembly itself.

**T**HE future of the United Nations will be enormously strengthened in the difficult months ahead if our own Government will remain in-

dubitably firm throughout, and ardently cooperative with the United Nations in this matter. It has not always been so in the matter of Palestine. It was not always so during the protracted Palestine deliberations in the United Nations. Our officials were not always of one mind, and this resulted in confused counsel and stultified action, as well as in the bewilderment of governments who quite naturally looked to the United States for guidance and leadership.

Our Government has, since the last war, assumed unprecedented diplomatic initiative and pre-eminent leadership in world affairs. It has not been content to remain passive, or only mildly active, as just one nation among many, in the tasks of world reconstruction. Destiny has singled it out for leadership in this century and, regardless of cost, it has boldly and wittingly assumed that role. In many parts of the world the impact of that political direction is now felt. Palestine is definitely within the orbit of those great political problems which America, true to its assumed role, must face, and to which it must bring the same determined leadership which has characterized its approach to other world problems. Should it fail to do so, and should it evidence, as on occasion it has, only a formal and passing interest, for the sake of the record or to allay criticism, the Palestine problem, in spite of the United Nations' decision, will sag hopelessly, and the situation will move from bad to worse.

Time and again, both at Lake Success and Flushing Meadow, we heard from some American spokesmen the ominous slogan: "The Palestine issue is a matter for the United Nations, not for the United States. We will vote for the UNSCOP Report when the time comes, but we will do no more than that." We knew who was the author of this quite transparent slogan and who defined that line. Fortunately he did not prevail. Involved in this slogan was the total renunciation by our Government of the clear responsibilities of the new diplomatic leadership which it has assumed in the world, and in that very part of the world. Our Government did not announce that Greece

and Turkey, or the political and economic fortunes of Western Europe, or China, were matters for the United Nations and not specifically for the United States.

When the crucial hour of decision arrived, however, our Government rose to the challenge of the hour and the mandates of its destiny. Its voice rose clear and unmistakable; and, in so doing, it encouraged other states to back up the recommendations of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine. As a result, the resolution was overwhelmingly adopted. Our Government now stands committed to its implementation. The United Nations' plan is now definitely a part of American foreign policy and should be as aggressively and determinedly advanced as other major policies of our Government. Our Government should assist the United Nations in every way possible and should employ all its diplomatic machinery and influence to expedite the matter. Delay is dangerous. Defeat will be catastrophic.

**T**HE problem is to tide over the next ten months. Once the Jewish State is established and admitted to the United Nations, and the neighboring Arab states are confronted by an accomplished fact, they will, as a matter of practical politics, seek ways for mutually satisfactory arrangements with the Jewish State and for peaceful cooperation — and the way will be open. Peace with the Arab world will then be possible. The dangerous period is the short formative one of the next few months. Here is where our Government can be tremendously helpful.

There is no provision in the United Nations' resolution for an international police force to insure law and order during the transition period. Great Britain announced that it would be responsible for law and order as long as it remained in the country. It is clearly not doing this. If 100,000 soldiers and police cannot insure security in that small country, or even patrol properly one main artery of travel in Palestine — the 42-mile road between Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem — to enable men to travel on it without being killed by snipers,

one is forced to question the sincerity of the British Government's declaration.

It would be highly desirable to have an international force accompany the Commission of the United Nations when it arrives in Palestine to carry out the instructions of the United Nations. It need not be a large force, but it must know what it is there for. The present military force in Palestine is the blunted instrument of the hopelessly blundering policy of Mr. Bevin, which amounts to this: His Majesty's Government "loyally accepts the Assembly's resolution," but it will do nothing to implement it. The British forces in Palestine will maintain law and order, but they will remain neutral when clashes result between the Jews who have loyally accepted the decision of the United Nations and who seek peace — and the Arabs who are violently resisting it and provoke war!

But whether an international force is sent to Palestine or not — it is immediately imperative that the Jewish people of Palestine shall be enabled forthwith to defend themselves. They have the manpower. They need arms. Surely those States — and foremost among them the United States — which voted to create a Jewish State must feel honor-bound and duty-bound to see that the citizens of that State-in-the-making are properly protected against the murderous assaults of those who have resolved to defy the will and the conscience of the nations of the world. Here, again, the United States holds the key to the situation, both as regards the formation of an international force, and the equipment of the Jewish militia. Our Government has not hesitated to send arms and military missions to other parts of the world to back up its foreign policy.

**T**HE problem of our refugees still remains most pressing. When will our refugees begin at last to move in large numbers into Palestine? What conceivable purpose is served by keeping these men, women and children pent up in detention camps where they have languished for so long; or in driving them away from the shores of Pal-

estine now that the United Nations has finally decreed that the Jewish State shall be set up in Palestine in 1948? What else but the meanness of spirit of a defeated statesmanship and the spitefulness of a disgruntled bureaucracy can account for it? There are thousands of refugees in various parts of Europe who simply can no longer wait. They will not be permitted to remain where they are. They must move. Surely it cannot be Great Britain's wish to climax and close her political career in Palestine with more stark tragedies like that of the "Exodus." Why cannot the act of parting be sweetened by an act of generosity and humanity which will help to reconcile friends who should never have been estranged?

My dear friends, American Jewry has deserved well at the hands of the Jewish people. History will pay homage to the role which it played in this searching and heroic hour. It rose to the occasion splendidly. It knew how to close ranks. It acted with wisdom, dignity, and courage. It spoke effectively to the hearts and minds of the American people and its representatives in government, and to the responsible heads of our Government. It is generally acknowledged that what was achieved was due in a large measure to the magnificent labor of American Jewry.

But much remains to be done. November 29 was only the evening and the morning of the first day — the day when light broke through the darkness of our world. Our great community, providentially spared for this hour, must now shoulder the vast economic burdens involved in the setting up of the Jewish State. Judging by the remarkable demonstration a few days ago at the conclave of the leaders of American Jewry in Atlantic City, our people are fully aware of their new responsibilities and are resolved to meet them. Whatever aid may come from other sources, the primary responsibility is ours.

We shall also have to stand on guard during the next critical period to see that no political conspiracy of evil doers shall undo or harm the Jewish State, as its builders proceed to lay its

foundations. The Jews of America, proud and loyal citizens of this great country who have demonstrated time and again in peace and in war their devotion and patriotism, will in the spirit of American democracy wish to assist this new free and democratic country which will rise on the shores of the Mediterranean, and which will embody those same great biblical ideals of justice, brotherhood, and peace which inspired the founding fathers of this Republic.



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