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# Herbert Hoover's Plan for Palestine: A Forgotten Episode in American Middle East Diplomacy

Rafael Medoff

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A lifelong concern for the problems of refugees and a personal inclination to seek economic solutions for political conflicts combined to shape Herbert Hoover's views on the Palestine question. The Hoover plan for Palestine offered an original, if controversial, means of solving the demographic dilemma that faced the Zionist movement by virtue of the presence of a large Arab population in the Holy Land. The response of the American Zionist leadership to the Hoover plan provides valuable insights into the role of American Jews in shaping U.S. foreign policy as well as the limits of public advocacy by the American Zionist movement.

Less than six months after the inauguration of President Herbert Hoover, the attention of his administration was suddenly drawn to the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine. In the city of Hebron, on August 24, 1929, eight unarmed American Jews (and 51 Jews of other nationalities) were murdered by Arab rioters; another 15 Americans were among the wounded.

News of the atrocities outraged American public opinion and triggered a wave of demands for official U.S. intervention. A barrage of telegrams to the White House called on the Hoover Administration to take demonstrative action on behalf of the Jews in Palestine.<sup>1</sup> A number of congressmen urged that an American warship be dispatched to the Holy Land to dramatize American displeasure over the pogroms.<sup>2</sup> Representative Emanuel Celler (D-New York) recommended landing the Marines on the shores of Palestine, citing as precedents the recent dispatching of the Marines when American interests appeared to be threatened in Nicaragua and China.<sup>3</sup> The Administration spurned all such advice. President Hoover sympathized with the victims — and with the Zionist cause in general — but he was reluctant to

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1 *New York Times* (hereafter *NYT*), Aug. 27, 1929, 1.

2 *NYT*, Aug. 26, 1929, 6.

3 *NYT*, Sept. 5, 1929, 8.

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intervene so long as U.S. interests were not directly menaced.<sup>4</sup> Privately Hoover was worried that U.S. intervention might embarrass the British. This view was shared by senior State Department officials, whose isolationist postwar mood was reinforced by a steady stream of anti-Zionist reports from American consulates in the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> Secretary of State Henry Stimson and his aides were so anxious to avoid any impression of U.S. dissatisfaction with British policy that when Hoover was asked, in 1931, to send a courtesy message to a Zionist-sponsored dinner honoring Albert Einstein, they urged him to refuse — for fear “that those present will seize the occasion to attack Great Britain with regard to its Palestine policy or at least to gloat over the recent British retreat from the White Paper of October, 1930.”<sup>6</sup>

Hoover did not again consider the Palestine question during his term as president. Nine weeks after the Hebron pogrom the stock market crashed, and the Palestine problem was completely overshadowed by the pressing need to deal with America’s domestic crisis.

Hoover did, however, remain active in public affairs for many years after he left office. Among the causes with which he associated himself during the 1930s was the plight of German Jews seeking refuge from Hitler. Two decades earlier Hoover had achieved international fame by spearheading wartime relief efforts for Europe’s destitute; now it was the misery of Hitler’s victims that tugged at his heart. When the Nazis unleashed the Kristallnacht pogrom in November 1938, Hoover issued a forceful denunciation.<sup>7</sup> When legislation was introduced in Congress in 1939 to allow 20,000 German refugee children to enter the United States, Hoover publicly endorsed the bill, going against the nation’s anti-immigration consensus.<sup>8</sup>

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4 Hoover to Zionist Organization of America, Aug. 29, 1929, Presidential Papers-Foreign Affairs (hereafter PPFA): Countries-Palestine, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library (hereafter HHPL).

5 Naomi W. Cohen, *The Year After the Riots* (Detroit: 1988), p. 48; Stimson to Hoover, June 25, 1930, PPFA: Countries-Palestine, HHPL.

6 Murray to Beck, Feb. 27, 1931, and Beck to Forster, Feb. 27, 1931, PPFA: Countries-Palestine, HHPL.

7 *NYT*, Nov. 14, 1938, 6.

8 *NYT*, April 23, 1939, 1. Hoover had previously been known as a staunch restrictionist, but he had not had to confront the issue during his term as president, because the Johnson Immigration Act of 1924 had removed the immigration issue from the public agenda and the pressures of the Great Depression had undercut public sympathy for granting haven to European refugees. For Hoover’s explanation of his stance on immigration during his presidential years, see Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: 1929–1941 — The Great Depression* (New York: 1952), pp. 47–48.

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Behind the scenes Hoover worked with Bernard Baruch in promoting a scheme to establish a haven for Jewish refugees in central Africa. Although sympathetic to the reclamation efforts by Zionist settlers in Palestine, Hoover believed that local Arab hostility constituted an insurmountable obstacle to the settlement of larger numbers of Jewish refugees there. The Arabs, after all, were the majority of the Palestine population, and there was no reason to believe they would ever assent to the influx of many Jews. The ex-president therefore set his sights on “the uplands of Central East-Africa, embracing parts of Northern Rhodesia, Tanganyika, Kenya and Belgian Congo,” an area which he was persuaded had “the soil, climate and resources upon which ten to twenty millions of white civilization could be builded.”<sup>9</sup> Hoover, an internationally acclaimed engineer prior to his career in public office, expressed his willingness to “visit the new country and organize its communications, its transport, and the development of its resources.” He estimated that \$500 million would be needed to initiate such development; Baruch believed that “a sum far exceeding \$300 million” could be raised if Jews around the world would each contribute 10 percent of their financial worth to his “United States of Africa” project.

Great Britain, the colonial ruler of the targeted African territories, scuttled the plan before it ever got off the ground by insisting that British Guiana be used instead; rather than risk angering the white residents of its African territories, London preferred that the Jews be settled in the Western Hemisphere. Hoover, however, rejected Guiana as insufficiently fertile to sustain a sizeable refugee population. The Guiana scheme was eventually torpedoed by a combination of experts’ doubts about conditions in Guiana, Washington’s reluctance to promote a project that it felt would only contribute minimally to the overall refugee problem, and the opposition of American Zionist leaders, who favored Palestine as the site of refugee resettlement.<sup>10</sup>

Hoover’s interest in the Jewish refugee problem was destined

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9 Lewis L. Strauss, *Men and Decisions* (Garden City, N.Y.: 1962), pp. 113–116. The idea of a Jewish homeland in central or eastern Africa was not new. A British proposal to establish such a homeland in what is today Uganda was the subject of a vigorous dispute at the 1903 World Zionist Congress and was subsequently championed by dissidents who left the Zionist movement to create the Jewish Territorial Organization. For details of the U.S.-British discussions over the Hoover-Baruch plan, see Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue* (New Brunswick, N.J.: 1970), pp. 102–109.

10 Memo, Strauss to Hoover, Aug. 22, 1939, Post-Presidential Individual (hereafter PPI): Strauss, Lewis, HHPL. For details of the fate of the Guiana proposal, see Feingold, *op. cit.*, pp. 109–111.

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to dovetail with his ideas on resolving intra-European ethnic conflicts. His thoughts on the latter subject were outlined in *The Problems of Lasting Peace*, a book he co-authored in 1941–1942 with his longtime associate Hugh Gibson, a former U.S. ambassador to Belgium. Among the postwar policies recommended by Hoover and Gibson was an effort to conclusively resolve the status of what they called “irredenta” populations:

The nations of Europe will be faced with problems of mixed populations on their borders. . . . Bitter experience for a hundred years shows that these European irredentas are a constant source of war. Consideration should be given to the heroic remedy of transfer of populations.

The hardship of moving is great, but it is less than the constant suffering of minorities and the constant recurrence of war. The action involved in most cases is less drastic than the transfer of the Greeks and the Turks after the last war — and the lessening of tension brought about by that transfer measurably improved both the prosperity and amity of the two nations.<sup>11</sup>

Hoover’s suggestion that such population transfers might be used to resolve postwar European ethnic conflicts, may have been innovative, but there is no evidence to suggest that his peers regarded it as radical. *The Problems of Lasting Peace*, which was on the *New York Times* non-fiction bestseller list for 15 consecutive weeks in 1942, received positive reviews in hundreds of American newspapers and magazines. A minority of the reviews were negative, but none of them criticized the population transfer recommendation.<sup>12</sup>

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11 Herbert Hoover and Hugh Gibson, *The Problems of Lasting Peace* (Garden City, N.Y.: 1943), pp. 235–236. An earlier, abridged version of the manuscript employed the phrase “drastic remedy” in place of “heroic remedy.” See “The World We Want” (no date), in PPI-Gibson, Hugh: Correspondence 1940–1943, HHPL. Under the auspices of the League of Nations, Greece and Turkey agreed in 1923 to exchange some 1.7 million people. Four-hundred thousand Turkish Moslems residing in Greece were compelled to emigrate to Turkey, and 1.3 million Greek nationals living in Turkey were sent back to Greece. See Stephan P. Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities: Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey* (New York: 1932).

12 Winthrop M. Daniels, in the Springfield, Massachusetts, *Republican* did complain about the authors’ use of the Latin word *irredentas* in place of a more readily comprehensible English noun. See Special Collections (hereafter SC)-Book Manuscripts by HH: *The Problems of Lasting Peace: Opinions, Editorial and Reviews*, June-July 1942, HHPL. Several prominent individuals actually went out of their way to praise Hoover’s population transfer proposal. Horace J. Bridges, leader of the Chicago Ethical Society, declared in a public address that Hoover was correct in pointing out that unless troublesome minorities were transferred elsewhere, their presence in border regions would invite “exploitation by intending aggressors, as Mussolini and Hitler have

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Hoover and Gibson did not suggest the application of the transfer idea to the Palestine conflict; indeed, the Palestine issue is nowhere mentioned in *The Problems of Lasting Peace*. The application of the Hoover-Gibson proposal to Palestine was suggested by Eliahu Ben-Horin, a Russian-born journalist and active Revisionist Zionist who settled in the United States in 1940.<sup>13</sup> While at work on the manuscript for his book *The Middle East: Crossroads of History*, Ben-Horin read *The Problems of Lasting Peace*. He later told Gibson that the section about population transfer which he subsequently included in *The Middle East* was “largely inspired by what Mr. Hoover and you had to say — in *The Problems of Lasting Peace* — about the question of mixed border populations.”<sup>14</sup>

What Ben-Horin suggested was that Iraq, or a “United Iraq-Syria,” would provide the ideal destination for Arab emigrants from “Palestine and Transjordania.” Only a “scarcity of peasants” was delaying development of the “inexhaustible irrigation potentialities of the Tigris and Euphrates valleys,” he contended. The Palestinian Arabs — he estimated their number at “about 1,200,000 persons” — would find in Iraq “the same environment, the same language, religion and mode of life” they had enjoyed in their previous places of residence. The Palestinian Arab settler would be pleased to discover that the distance between his old and new homelands was relatively small, the climates were similar, and he could expect to find “better soil and more promising life conditions than he can ever expect to obtain in Palestine.” Meanwhile, Palestine, freshly emptied of its Arab population, “could fully solve the Jewish problem” by absorbing Jewish immigrants from Europe as well as from the Arab world. As precedents he cited the Greco-Turkish transfers, the removal by the Soviet Union of residents of European Russia to the Urals and Siberia, and the 1937 report of Britain’s Palestine Royal Commission, headed by Lord Peel, which recommended a parti-

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abundantly demonstrated.” William Lindsay Young, the president of Park College in Missouri, said he agreed with Hoover that “the foundations of world order” would be insecure “so long as fragments of the French, the Poles, and the Danes are under Germany, the Greeks under Turkey and Bulgaria, the Serbians and Rumanians under Austria-Hungary, and so on. . .” See SC-Book Manuscripts by HH: *The Problems of Lasting Peace: Opinions, Editorials and Reviews*, June-July 1942, HHPL.

13 “Eliahu Ben-Horin (Biographical Sketch),” A300/57, Eliahu Ben-Horin Papers (hereafter EBH), Central Zionist Archives (hereafter CZA), Jerusalem.

14 Ben-Horin to Gibson, June 11, 1952, PPI-Ben-Horin, Eliahu, HHPL.

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tion plan based in part on the forcible transfer of 225,000 Arabs from the projected Jewish state to the projected Arab state.<sup>15</sup>

Although in his book Ben-Horin did not specifically address the issue of whether or not he favored the use of force to implement such population transfers, in a letter to the *New York Times* (responding to criticism of his book by the Arab historian Philip Hitti, who argued that the Palestinian Arabs would object to being transferred), Ben-Horin wrote: "Every child knows that if the United Nations are determined to have order and peace in the world, they will have to take many measures in disregard of the wishes of this or that uncooperative community. . . It is with the elimination of the causes for future friction and wars that we should be concerned, and with very little else."<sup>16</sup>

Ben-Horin's position differed from that of the Revisionist Zionist movement in Europe and Palestine as well as the Labor Zionists and other parties comprising the World Zionist Organization, all of whom were officially opposed to the idea of encouraging the Arabs to leave Palestine. Revisionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky differed only slightly from this consensus in that he said he "refuse[d] to see a tragedy or disaster in their willingness to emigrate" should they voluntarily choose to do so.<sup>17</sup>

Ben-Horin found a warmer reception for his views in the American wing of the Revisionist movement, the New Zionist Organization of America (NZOA), which at its 1942 convention resolved that the emigration of those Arabs "[un]willing to live in a Jewish state" should be facilitated by providing "full compensation for the immovable property left behind them."<sup>18</sup>

In early 1943 Ben-Horin was appointed executive director of the newly-established American Resettlement Committee for Uprooted European Jewry, which was essentially an arm of the NZOA: the address listed on the ARC's stationery was that of NZOA headquarters in New York, and the NZOA organ, *Zionews*, matter of factly referred to the ARC as having been "organized by the NZOA."<sup>19</sup>

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15 Eliahu Ben-Horin, *The Middle East: Crossroads of History* (New York: 1943), pp. 224–231.

16 Ben-Horin to *NYT*, undated, A300/37, EBH, CZA.

17 *The New Palestine* (hereafter NP), Feb. 7, 1930; Vladimir Jabotinsky, *The Jewish War Front* (London: 1940), p. 220. For a detailed examination of the views of Labor Zionist leaders on this subject, see Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs* (New York: 1985).

18 *Zionews*, March 6, 1942.

19 *Zionews*, Sept.-Oct. 1943.

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To some extent the ARC appears to have been created specifically in order to secure non-Jewish surrogates for the NZOA's increasingly militant stance toward the Palestinian Arabs. Even before the ARC had launched a single public activity its letterhead boasted a 165-member "National Committee" consisting overwhelmingly of prominent non-Jews, including five Senators, 19 Congressmen, 17 Christian clergymen and 25 college presidents.<sup>20</sup>

The National Committee seems to have existed primarily for decorative purposes; the ARC was controlled by an executive board composed entirely of senior NZOA activists. The non-Jews who joined the ARC National Committee no doubt did so as a result of their genuine sympathy for the uprooted Jews of Europe and their belief that this new committee would help alleviate the Jews' suffering. Ben-Horin, however, actually had in mind a somewhat different political agenda, i.e. resolving the Palestinian Arab question along the lines he had sketched in *The Middle East: Crossroads of History*.

Ben-Horin's first goal as director of the ARC was to recruit Herbert Hoover as its public spokesman. The former president was still active in public affairs and would have lent the ARC considerable prestige. In May 1943 Ben-Horin sent Hoover a 12-page memorandum outlining the ARC's program, and asked him to accept the honorary presidency of the committee. The memorandum began with standard Zionist arguments against rebuilding Jewish life in postwar Europe and against proposals for the settlement of Jewish refugees in the Biro-Bidjan region of the Soviet Union or in the Dominican Republic, contending that Palestine offered the most promising prospects for large-scale Jewish colonization. But Ben-Horin departed from the mainstream American Zionist line on the subject of Arab opposition to Jewish colonization of the Holy Land: "Should the Palestinian Arabs persist in their opposition to and obstruction of Jewish settlement in Palestine, a sound plan for the transfer of the Palestinian Arabs to Iraq could be evolved, which would be highly beneficial to the country of Iraq, to the Arab settlers from Palestine, and to a final solution of the Palestinian and Jewish problems." He then quoted the irredentas passage from *The Problems of Lasting Peace*.<sup>21</sup>

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20 For the complete list list, see *NYT*, Oct. 4, 1943, 12.

21 "Memorandum for the Hon. Herbert Hoover on the American Resettlement Committee for Uprooted Jewry," Post-Presidential Individual (hereafter PPI)-Ben-Horin, Eliahu, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library (hereafter HHPL),



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Hoover bristled at the memo's emphasis on Palestine — “[t]hey throw overboard my idea of a general refugee area in the highlands of Africa, as it does not meet their ideas of nationality” —<sup>22</sup> but at the same time was sufficiently interested by the idea of applying his own method for dealing with irredentas to the Palestine dilemma to agree to meet with Ben-Horin.<sup>23</sup> Their half-hour conversation failed, however, to persuade Hoover to join the ARC.<sup>24</sup> The ex-president's primary objection was that the depth of “division and conflict” in the Jewish organizational world — “the different organizations seem to be busy trying to destroy each other” — made the ARC's agenda impracticable.<sup>25</sup> He did, however, express his interest “at a later time” in “see[ing] if we could bring the factions together into some sort of council for coordinated and objective action.”<sup>26</sup>

Spurned by Hoover, Ben-Horin set about in search of another non-Jewish spokesman. In July he offered the National Chairmanship of the ARC to Alf Landon, the former governor of Kansas and unsuccessful Republican presidential nominee of 1936.<sup>27</sup> But Landon also declined.<sup>28</sup>

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West Branch, Iowa; Hoover and Gibson, *The Problems of Lasting Peace*, pp. 235–236.

- 22 Hoover to Sokolsky, May 12, 1943, PPI-Sokolsky, George, HHPL.  
23 Hoover to Ben-Horin, May 25, 1943, PPI-Ben-Horin, Eliahu, HHPL.  
24 Calendar: May-June 1943, HHPL; Hoover to Ben-Horin, June 8, 1943, PPI-Ben-Horin, Eliahu, HHPL.  
25 Hoover to Ben-Horin, May 25, 1943, PPI-Ben-Horin, Eliahu, HHPL.  
26 Hoover to Ben-Horin, June 8, 1943, PPI-Ben-Horin, Eliahu, HHPL.  
27 Ben-Horin to Landon, July 28, 1943, Landon Papers (hereafter LP), Manuscripts Department, Kansas State Historical Society-Topeka. The “National Chairmanship” offered to Landon does not seem to have differed from the “Honorary Presidency” offered to Hoover. The question of why Ben-Horin only approached prominent Republicans (Hoover and Landon) is not directly addressed in his memoirs or correspondence, but since the ARC's stance on the Palestine question was in direct opposition to the policies of the Democratic administration, it seems likely that Ben-Horin would have assumed that only a Republican would be interested in his offer.  
28 Ben-Horin to Landon, Sept. 18, 1943, LP. Despite written appeals from two prominent journalists affiliated with the ARC and with whom Landon was friendly, William Hard and Isaac Don Levine, and despite a personal visit by Ben-Horin, Landon would not budge. While “very much inclined to favor your general position,” he explained to Ben-Horin, he was reluctant “to join any committees involving matters of policy because the committee might take a view of major detail that would be entirely different from mine,” thereby placing him in an uncomfortable position. See Landon to Ben-Horin, July 30, 1943, Eliahu Ben-Horin Collection (hereafter EBHC), Metzudat Ze'ev, Tel Aviv; Ben-Horin to Landon, Aug. 20, 1943, LP; Landon to Ben-Horin, Aug. 17, 1943, LP.

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Bereft of a prominent sponsor, the American Resettlement Committee for Uprooted European Jewry never got off the ground. Its sole public activity was the publication of its manifesto as a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* on October 4.<sup>29</sup> The leaders of the major American Zionist organizations refrained from publicly commenting on the ad, evidently preferring to avoid giving the Revisionists any additional attention.<sup>30</sup>

Although Ben-Horin's attempts to recruit Herbert Hoover for the presidency of the American Resettlement Committee ended in failure, there were signs that Hoover's views were moving in his direction. A message from Hoover was read aloud on July 25 at the Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe, held at the Hotel Commodore in New York. Although the statement reiterated the old Central Africa scheme, Hoover also suggested, for the first time, that "three or four million" Jewish refugees could be settled in Palestine, although "that could be accomplished only by moving the Arab population to some other quarter," a problem which was "impossible to settle during the war."<sup>31</sup> Hoover's natural sympathy for the Jewish refugees, his approval of population transfer as a method of resolving ethnic conflicts, and the influence of Ben-Horin were all coming to-

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29 *NYT*, Oct. 4, 1943, 12.

30 The only exception was a vague reference to the ARC advertisement by Dr. Israel Goldstein, president of the Zionist Organization of America. Without mentioning the ARC by name or specifically referring to the ad itself, Goldstein remarked that it was merely another of the Revisionists' "sensational tactics" that violated "Zionist discipline." See Israel Goldstein, "Zionist Discipline," *NP*, 34:9 (Jan. 21, 1944), 205. The only other public comment was made by Hayim Greenberg, leader of the Labor Zionists of America, the longtime political archrival of the Revisionists. Greenberg warned that the premise of the ad was "dangerous" inasmuch as the Jewish claim to Palestine "has validity and force" only because Palestine "is still underpopulated," while the suggestion that resettlement of the Arabs was necessary for the fulfillment of Zionism implied that Palestine was already full. In Greenberg's view, if it was indeed "so densely settled today and if its natural resources were so thoroughly exploited that there was no room for new settlers, justice would demand that we give up our claims to our historic homeland and seek a home in an underpopulated and undeveloped region elsewhere." See Hayim Greenberg, "The Irresponsible Revisionists," *Jewish Frontier* (hereafter *JF*), 10:11 (Nov. 1943), 6-8.

31 *NYT*, July 26, 1943, 19. The Emergency Conference was organized by former Revisionists who were dissatisfied with the response by the Allies and by the American Jewish leadership, to the plight of the European Jews. See Monty N. Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust* (Urbana: 1983).

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gether in Hoover's thinking, forming a coherent new approach to the Palestine question.

On August 6 Hoover met in San Francisco with Judge Louis Levinthal, one of the leaders of the Zionist Organization of America, and outlined some of his still-evolving ideas. He told Levinthal that the Arabs in Palestine would have to be "evacuated to other countries in the Near East" and that "this evacuation cannot be voluntary, but must be compulsory, imposed by the British or the United Nations." But the ex-president expected little from London, noting that "the British are afraid to impose such compulsory evacuation because of the repercussion on the 'Arab world'." In an unusual twist, Hoover added that he intended to continue advocating the Central Africa plan because he believed that "Britain will be so fearful about being required to give up the very rich Kenya and Tanganyika area, that it will much prefer to make a real Jewish State of Palestine, and will even force the Arabs to evacuate to the Arab countries, investing the necessary funds to develop these undeveloped lands so as to receive the Arabs from Palestine."<sup>32</sup>

Hoover's interest in Palestine lay dormant until 1945, when Ben-Horin was retained by the American Zionist Emergency Council as a fulltime adviser on Middle East affairs. The appointment of Ben-Horin was one of the by-products of a long power struggle for leadership of the AZEC, the coalition of all major American Zionist groups. The struggle pitted Stephen Wise, longtime leader of the ZOA and the American Jewish Congress, against Abba Hillel Silver, the Cleveland-based Reform rabbi whose militant brand of Zionism had attracted increasing sympathy among American Zionists as Nazi atrocities intensified. Silver's penchant for aggressive political activity — mobilizing the Jewish masses, wooing American public opinion, lobbying Congress — clashed with Wise's preference for personal diplomatic intercession with President Franklin Roosevelt and his aides. Silver's loyalists characterized the dispute as pitting "Aggressive Zionism" against "the Politics of the Green Light [from the White House]."<sup>33</sup> Silver and Wise had been appointed co-

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32 Levinthal to "Arthur," Aug. 6, 1943, Harold Manson Papers, The Temple, Cleveland, Ohio; Levinthal to Hoover, Sept. 20, 1943, Post-Presidential Subject (hereafter PPS)-Jews, Public Statement 2773, HHPL.

33 Zvi Ganin, "Activism versus Moderation: The Conflict between Abba Hillel Silver and Stephen Wise during the 1940s," *Studies in Zionism* (hereafter *SZ*), 5:1 (Spring 1984), 86. For an analysis of the factors that shaped Silver's attitudes, see Menahem Kaufman, "American Zionism and United States Neutrality from September 1939 to Pearl Harbor," *SZ*, 9:1 (Spring 1988), 29–30.

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chairmen of the AZEC in 1943, but as tensions between the two mounted the following year, Silver was temporarily ousted. Pressure from the Jewish public resulted in Silver being reinstated as co-chairman in July 1945, a decisive development that in effect put the reins of American Zionism in his hands.<sup>34</sup>

Critics of Silver ranging from Nahum Goldmann, who voiced his disapproval during internal AZEC discussions, and Hannah Arendt, who voiced hers in the pages of *Menorah Journal*, a Jewish monthly, denounced Silverism as indistinguishable from Revisionism. Silver's appointment of Ben-Horin to the AZEC staff, a move that reflected his desire for reconciliation with the Revisionists, provided his critics with fresh ammunition. But the truth is that Silver's policies reflected a broad grassroots Jewish desire for increased unity in the wake of the Holocaust.<sup>35</sup>

This new mood of unity no doubt impressed Hoover, who had previously resisted Ben-Horin's attempts to get him to affiliate with the American Resettlement Committee largely because of American Jewish in-fighting. The tragedy of Hitler's victims and the ongoing plight of Jewish refugees in Europe's displaced persons camps also left their mark on Hoover, who had risen to fame during World War I with his humanitarian mission to feed the European masses. When Ben-Horin contacted Hoover in the autumn of 1945 — at the behest of Silver, who was hoping to win Hoover's endorsement for the aims of the Zionist movement — he found the ex-president keenly interested in the Palestinian Arab question. "I was sitting with Mr. Hoover in his office in the Waldorf Towers," Ben-Horin recalled:

When I stated my request, he answered: "I am willing to issue a statement, but not the one you have in mind. I was impressed with the plan you outline in your book for a transfer of Palestine's fellaheen to Iraq. What is more, it is a solution which would greatly benefit all concerned: the Jewish people, the Palestinian Arabs and the State of Iraq. I am willing to propose this solution in a statement to the press."

When Ben-Horin pointed out that the Zionist movement had never advocated such a solution, Hoover "answered with a twinkle in his eye: 'Fortunately I am not a member of the Zionist Organization, and my statement would not be in their name.'" Hoover's only concern was whether or not his proposed declaration "would be welcome to the Zionist movement and would be

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34 *Ibid.*, 83–90.

35 *Ibid.*, 84; Doreen Bierbrier, "The American Zionist Emergency Council: An Analysis of a Pressure Group," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 60:1 (September 1970), 101; Hannah Arendt, "Zionism Reconsidered," *Menorah Journal*, 33:2 (Oct.-Dec. 1945), 167.

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considered a positive contribution to the solution of the Palestine problem." After conferring with Dr. Silver, Ben-Horin answered Hoover's query in the affirmative.<sup>36</sup>

At Hoover's request, Ben-Horin obtained for the former president a large number of books and pamphlets about the economic potential of the Arab countries. Then, with Ben-Horin as his editor, Hoover prepared a 400-word statement recommending that the "Great Powers" finance the irrigation of the Tigris and Euphrates valleys in Iraq, "on the consideration that it be made the scene of resettlement of the Arabs from Palestine," which would then "clear the [sic] Palestine completely for a large Jewish emigration and colonization." It would be, Hoover concluded, "a solution by engineering instead of by conflict." Hoover's proposal marked the first time that an American of his prominence had publicly urged resettlement of the Palestinian Arabs as the solution to the Arab-Zionist conflict.<sup>37</sup>

The Hoover plan must be understood within the context of other developments in postwar international diplomacy. Less than three months earlier, at the Potsdam conference, the U.S., Great Britain and the Soviet Union had decided that the peace of Europe required the forcible transfer of millions of ethnic Germans out of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Hoover saw no reason why such methods could not be used to bring peace to the Middle East.<sup>38</sup>

Hoover's statement on Palestine was released first to the *New York World-Telegram*, which gave it prominent coverage.<sup>39</sup> But

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36 "A Brick for the Bridge" (manuscript of the unpublished autobiography of Eliahu Ben-Horin), 184. Eliahu Ben-Horin collection, Metzudat Ze'ev, Tel Aviv.

37 Hoover to Ben-Horin, Nov. 14, 1945 and two drafts of Palestine statement, PPS-Jewish-Zionist, HHPL. The British Labor Party had included in its 1944 platform a recommendation that the Palestinian Arabs "be encouraged to move out [of Palestine] as the Jews move in. Let them be compensated handsomely for their land and let their settlement elsewhere be carefully organized and generously financed." However, there is no evidence that Hoover was influenced by the Labor platform or that he was even aware of it. In any event, the Labor Party leaders quickly made it clear that they had no intention of implementing the party's Palestine plank. For details, see Joseph Gorny, *The British Labour Party and Zionism 1917-1948* (London: 1983).

38 For details of the Potsdam transfers, see Joseph Schechtman, *Postwar Population Transfers in Europe, 1945-1955* (New York: 1962).

39 *New York World-Telegram*, Nov. 19, 1945, 1. This was evidently by prior arrangement; the article began by falsely asserting that Hoover's plan was "offered in response to an inquiry by the *World-Telegram* as to whether he believes any sound or practical basis exists for settlement of the highly inflammatory Jewish-Arab question."

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few other American newspapers published the story.<sup>40</sup> The Yiddish-language press of New York, on the other hand, accorded the Hoover plan extensive coverage. *Der Tog* published a long, sympathetic story on its front page,<sup>41</sup> while an editorial in the *Der Morgen Journal* praised Hoover's "very practical solution for the Palestine problem" and urged readers to "appreciate the friendship and encourage the plans of Herbert Hoover." The crucial feature of the Hoover statement, the editorial argued, was that it was the brainchild of a non-Jew:

Should this plan have originated from Jewish sources, anti-Zionists would have surely made use of it to say that the Jews intend doing an injustice to Palestine's Arabs. However, if this plan originates with a non-Jew of Herbert Hoover's prominence, the reaction is bound to be entirely different.<sup>42</sup>

Official American Zionist reaction to the Hoover plan was based on the same theory. Stephen Wise summed up the sentiment of the U.S. Zionist leadership when he wrote that those who advocated transferring the Arabs from Palestine went "beyond where we dared to go, though not beyond where we wished to go."<sup>43</sup> In other words, non-Jews might suggest ideas like the transfer of Arabs from Palestine without fear of political repercussions, but public relations necessities required that Jews refrain from going that far. The AZEC's public response to the Hoover plan sought to walk the thin line between where American Zionists wished to go and where they dared to go. "The Zionist Organization never advocated the transfer of Palestine's Arabs to Iraq or elsewhere," the statement began. "On the contrary, we always maintained and still maintain that within the boundaries of Palestine there is room enough for its present population, Jew and Arab, and for several million more of Jewish settlers." Indeed, the statement emphasized, "it was always a matter of pride to us that the Zionist enterprise . . . did not

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40 Nine days after his plan was made public, Hoover complained to a colleague that although the Associated Press had distributed his statement to more than 350 newspapers in the United States alone, only seven chose to publish it. See Eliahu Epstein, "Memorandum No. 30-Strictly Confidential," Z6/2272, CZA. Hoover expressed particular annoyance at the fact that the editors of the *New York Times* "have not deigned to notice it." See Hoover to Friedman, Nov. 25, 1945, PPS-Jewish-Zionist, HHPL and Miller to Strauss, Nov. 26, 1945, PPS-Jewish-Zionist, HHPL.

41 *Der Tog*, Nov. 20, 1945, 1.

42 *Der Morgen Journal*, Nov. 21, 1945, 4.

43 Justine Wise Polier and James Waterman Wise, eds., *The Personal Letters of Stephen Wise* (Boston: 1956), p. 269.

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dislodge the local Arabs, but greatly benefitted them. . .” Then the AZEC statement proceeded to, in effect, endorse Hoover’s proposal: it was “an expression of constructive statesmanship”; it represented an approach “formulated by an unprejudiced mind well trained in statesmanship, relief and rehabilitation”; and the AZEC would be “happy to cooperate with the great powers and the Arabs in bringing about the materialization of the Hoover Plan.”<sup>44</sup>

The American Jewish Conference, a coalition of all major Jewish organizations (with the exception of the American Jewish Committee) established in 1943 to provide for a coordinated Jewish communal response to the Holocaust and the Palestine problem, privately offered Hoover assistance in promoting his plan. In a laudatory letter to Hoover, American Jewish Conference official Allen Roberts declared that the transfer plan “would, if carried out, provide a real solution to the perplexing problem now confronting world statesmen.” The American Jewish Conference, Roberts informed Hoover, “would appreciate it if you could find time to broadcast your views over a national network.” In fact, Roberts confided, the American Jewish Conference had already managed to line up “a tentative promise for time on one of the major networks.”<sup>45</sup> Hoover turned down the offer, citing his busy schedule.<sup>46</sup>

The Palestine Zionist leadership refrained from commenting publicly on the Hoover plan, but some private sympathy was evident. Eliahu Epstein, the New York representative of Palestine’s Jewish Agency, met with Hoover on November 28 and, as he related in a memorandum to his superiors, “explained to Mr. Hoover the political inadvisability of our becoming sponsors for such a plan which might despite all its good intentions for Jews and Arabs alike, lead to all kinds of dangerous conclusions regarding our aims in Palestine.” Epstein did not, however, seek to discourage Hoover from lobbying for transfer; they discussed the potential for “developing Palestine and the neighbor-

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44 Ben-Horin to Hoover, Nov. 21, 1945, PPS-Jewish-Zionist, HHPL.

45 Roberts to Hoover, Nov. 28, 1945, PPS-American Jewish Congress, HHPL.

46 Hoover to Roberts, Nov. 30, 1945, PPS-American Jewish Congress, HHPL.

Hoover’s biographers have noted that throughout his career, Hoover felt uncomfortable delivering radio addresses; this may have also been a factor in his reply to Roberts. See Craig Lloyd, *Aggressive Introvert: A Study of Herbert Hoover and Public Relations Management 1912–1932* (Columbus: 1977), p. 171; and Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (Boston: 1973), p. 140.

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ing countries through methods of irrigation” as well as the subject of “Iraq and its demographic problem.” Epstein “promised Mr. Hoover to supply him with additional data on the subjects of interest to him.”<sup>47</sup>

The Truman Administration, for its part, made no comment on Hoover’s proposal; it deferred judgment on the thorny Palestine question to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine, which it had just established, in conjunction with the British government, in an attempt to address growing international clamor over the plight of Holocaust survivors living in European displaced persons camps. The survivors sought to emigrate to Palestine; Palestine’s Arabs vigorously opposed any Jewish influx. The six Americans and six Britons selected as Committee members were assigned the unenviable task of attempting to reconcile these diametrically opposed positions.

One of the U.S. delegates appointed to the AACIP was James G. McDonald, who during the 1930s had served as the League of Nations High Commissioner on Refugees from Germany. It was McDonald to whom Hoover and his friends turned in the hope of advancing their Arab transfer plan. What they did not know was that McDonald had previously expressed support for a similar Palestine-Iraq transfer scheme that had been proposed in 1937–1938 by Edward Norman, a philanthropist active in the American Jewish Committee and assorted Palestine charities. In 1938 McDonald had drafted a long letter to Malcolm MacDonald, the British Secretary of State for Colonies, strongly recommending Norman’s plan.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, Norman had also been in contact with Ben-Horin: Ben-Horin showed him the manuscript of *The Middle East: Crossroads of History* before publication and referred to Norman (although without citing him by name) in the

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47 Calendar: November–December 1945, HHPL; Eliahu Epstein, “Memorandum No. 30–Strictly Confidential,” Z6/2272, CZA; Eliahu Epstein, *The Struggle for Statehood–Washington: 1945–1948, Volume I: 1945–1948* (Tel Aviv: 1979), pp. 15–16; Eliahu Elath, *Zionism and the Arabs* (Tel Aviv: 1974), p. 15. Some Zionist leaders in Palestine and Europe who publicly opposed the Arab transfer concept privately expressed some interest in it. See, for example, Yehoshua Porath, “Weizmann, Churchill and the ‘Philby Plan’, 1937–1943,” *SZ*, 5:2.

48 McDonald to MacDonald, Oct. 18, 1938, File-Norman, James G. McDonald Papers (hereafter JGM), Columbia University, New York. In the end Norman decided to withhold the letter and travel to London to personally present his scheme to the British government. See Norman to MacDonald [sic], Oct. 19, 1938, JGM. For details of Norman’s plan, see Edward A. Norman, “An Approach to the Arab Question in Palestine - Third Version, 1938,” in CO733/333/75156/35, Colonial Office Papers, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), London.



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book.<sup>49</sup> It may be that Norman was the source of Ben-Horin's discussion of Arab transfer, which in turn influenced Hoover's view.

On November 30, shortly before the composition of the Anglo-American Committee was finalized, George Sokolsky — columnist for the *New York Post*, member of the executive committee of Ben-Horin's American Resettlement Committee, and friend of Hoover's — introduced Hoover to Edward Norman.<sup>50</sup> During their initial meeting Hoover and Norman discussed the possibility of having Norman appear before the Anglo-American Committee to testify about the Iraq plan.<sup>51</sup> McDonald initially expressed interest in the idea, asking Norman for six copies of a "brief memorandum" on the transfer plan to distribute among his colleagues on the Committee and offering to "suggest" to them "that [Norman] be called to testify during their public hearings."<sup>52</sup>

In the meantime Hoover had enlisted Elisha Friedman, an old acquaintance who was active in a variety of Palestine-related philanthropies,<sup>53</sup> to assist in promoting the Palestine-Iraq scheme. At Hoover's request Friedman sent a long letter to the *New York Times* (published on December 16) restating Hoover's arguments and adding a new twist aimed at enlisting the sympathy of sentimental Americans: he drew an analogy between Arabs trekking from Palestine to Iraq and the "hundreds of thousands of farmers from the New England states [who] went West to Ohio, Iowa, Oregon, abandoned poor soil and acquired fertile land." Friedman's symmetry was unintentionally ironic, for traditional American Zionist arguments had always compared the Palestine Jews, not the Palestine Arabs, to the American frontiersmen. Friedman concluded by suggesting that the Hoover plan be made the subject of "earnest study" by the Anglo-American Committee.<sup>54</sup>

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49 Ben-Horin, *The Middle East*, 224. Ben-Horin to Norman, March 7, 1943; Ben-Horin to Norman, March 30, 1943, and Norman to Ben-Horin, April 6, 1943, all in EBH, A300/64; also see Norman to Ben-Horin, Oct. 3, 1943, EBH, A300/37, CZA.

50 Calendar: November-December, 1945, HHPL.

51 Norman to Hoover, Dec. 11, 1945, PPS-Jewish-Zionist, HHPL; Hoover to McDonald, Dec. 11, 1945, File-Hoover, JGM.

52 Norman to Hoover, Dec. 1945 (the exact date is not included in the letter), PPS-Jewish-Zionist, HHPL.

53 Among them the American Friends of the Hebrew University, the Hadassah Medical Organization, the American Economic Committee for Palestine and the Palestine Endowment Funds.

54 *NYT*, Dec. 16, 1945, 4:8.

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Ultimately, however, the idea of presenting Hoover's plan to the Anglo-American Committee never materialized. In January McDonald informed Elisha Friedman that "the terms of reference of the Committee and the heavy schedule of appearances would make it unlikely that the Committee could consider the question of population transfer."<sup>55</sup>

As it happened, the fate of the Palestinian Arabs was raised twice during the Committee's first round of hearings, which were held in Washington. The first occasion was the January 8 appearance by Emanuel Neumann, representing the AZEC. After concluding his presentation — a standard plea for more Jewish immigration to Palestine, coupled with assurances of equal rights for the Palestine Arabs — Neumann was asked by one of the British members of the Committee, Conservative Party M.P. Reginald E. Manningham-Buller, if the Zionist movement proposed "to move the Arabs out of Palestine and place them elsewhere in order to make room for the Jews?" Neumann replied that "no responsible Zionist leader" advocated such a policy. Indeed, he pointed out, it was a British party that had endorsed the transfer idea.<sup>56</sup>

The transfer issue was raised again on the final day of the Washington hearings, January 14, in the testimony of the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr, an outspoken Christian Zionist who had been recruited by Emanuel Neumann to serve as chairman of the AZEC-funded American Christian Palestine Committee,<sup>57</sup> strayed "beyond where American Zionists dared to go" in his testimony before the Anglo-American Committee.<sup>58</sup> Since there was "no way of finding a perfectly just solution for the conflict of rights and priorities between the Arabs and Jews in Palestine," Niebuhr declared, and since "the

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55 Friedman to Hoover, Jan. 15, 1946, PPS-Jewish-Zionist, HHPL.

56 Emanuel Neumann, *In the Arena* (New York: 1976), 219; Bartley C. Crum, *Behind the Silken Curtain* (Port Washington, N.Y.: 1947), 18–19.

57 Carl Hermann Voss, "The American Christian Palestine Committee," *Herzl Yearbook V: Essays in American Zionism* (New York: 1978), p. 259. Voss concedes that the ACPC was financed by the AZEC, but denies the claim by Howard Sachar (in *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*, p. 289) that the ACPC was a "front group" for the AZEC. See Voss, p. 262, n. 15.

58 Four years earlier Niebuhr had hinted of his approach. In a February 1942 essay in *The Nation*, and again later that year in a speech at the founding conference of the American Palestine Committee, Niebuhr asserted that "Zionist leaders are unrealistic in insisting that their demands entail no 'injustice' to the Arab population," since "it is absurd to expect any people to regard the restriction of their sovereignty over a traditional possession as 'just,' no

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Arabs have a vast hinterland in the Middle East,” “perhaps ex-President Hoover’s idea that there should be large scheme of resettlement in Iraq for the Arabs might be a way out.” Under questioning by Committee member Frank Aydelotte, Niebuhr said that he did “not necessarily” favor “forcible removal” of Arabs from Palestine but rather envisioned a “long-run quid pro quo for the Arabs,” according to which Arab emigration would be compensated by “an economic development of the Arab world — soil conservation” and the like, as proposed by Hoover.<sup>59</sup>

While Niebuhr was presenting the Hoover plan to the Anglo-American Committee, Ben-Horin was presenting the details of his work with Hoover to the executive committee of the AZEC. Those in attendance included the full range of American Zionist leadership: AZEC cochairmen Stephen Wise and Abba Hillel Silver; the AZEC’s Washington, D.C., representative, Leon Feuer; Rose Halprin of Hadassah; Louis Lipsky of the American Jewish Congress; Gedalia Bublick of Mizrachi; and I. L. Kenen, who later became chief of the pro-Israel lobby in Washington. The official minutes of the meeting record only that Ben-Horin’s presentation “evoked a lengthy and detailed discussion.”<sup>60</sup>

The discussion concluded with the passage of a resolution on the role of the AZEC in the promotion of the Hoover plan. The details of the resolution are shrouded in some mystery; the only recorded reference to it is found in an exchange of letters between Elisha Friedman and Ben-Horin two weeks later. Friedman had chided Ben-Horin for not being sufficiently forthcoming about the Zionist leaders’ discussion. “[K]indly understand my position,” Ben-Horin replied,

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matter how many other benefits accrue from that abridgment.” Nevertheless, Niebuhr continued, since the Jewish need for Palestine was greater than that of the Arabs, the Arabs would have to be satisfied with the “compensation” they would receive via “a total settlement of Near Eastern claims.” See Reinhold Niebuhr, “Jews After the War,” *The Nation*, February 28, 1942, 255; Voss, “The American Christian Palestine Committee,” p. 247.

59 “Hearings before the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, Washington D.C., State Department Building, January 14, 1946,” Blaustein Library, American Jewish Committee; Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: 1985), p. 226. Ironically, Emanuel Neumann himself was at least as enthusiastic a supporter of the Arab transfer idea as was Niebuhr, to judge by an essay Neumann wrote for *Palestine Review* in 1939, in which he had suggested that “the masses of Palestinian Arabs be transferred peaceably and in orderly fashion to Iraq and the Iraqi (sic) Jews to Palestine.” See *Palestine Review*, 3:43 (Feb. 10, 1939), 682–3.

60 “AZEC Executive Committee Minutes, 1/14/46–3/7/49,” Box 60: Folder 6, Records of the American Zionist Emergency Council (hereafter AZEC), Zionist Archives, New York.

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When the Resolution on this matter was adopted, some people insisted that it should not even be recorded. Whether or not this attitude of strict secrecy is justified, I want you to understand how the thing is being treated by those who decided matters. You will, therefore, understand why I have to be extremely careful and not lay myself open to attack by those who object to the Plan altogether.<sup>61</sup>

The identity of those who objected to the plan “altogether” and of those who demanded strict secrecy is unknown. It may be surmised that the resolution constituted some sort of limited mandate for Ben-Horin to actively lobby on behalf of the Hoover plan, because during the weeks to follow that is precisely what he and Friedman did, under the close supervision of Silver.

After he and Friedman met with Hoover on January 22,<sup>62</sup> Ben-Horin reported to Silver that things looked “encouraging.” The ex-president “takes the matter very seriously and is willing to devote his time, thought and energy to it.” Hoover was especially interested in the idea of bringing together a group of “outstanding people in the fields of engineering, irrigation and agriculture” to “produce an authoritative report of the Plan” for publication. When Hoover raised the question of finances, Ben-Horin told Silver, “I told him in *very careful language* that I can reliably count on a certain source providing the first leg money for the promotion of his Plan,” up to a total of \$25,000. Finally, Hoover inquired as to Silver’s opinion of the plan, to which Ben-Horin replied “that his Plan enjoys the sympathy and interest of the Zionist leadership, and of you [Silver] personally,” but that “for obvious reasons neither the Zionist Movement nor you personally could take the commitment of an official endorsement of his Plan.”<sup>63</sup>

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61 Ben-Horin to Friedman, Jan. 28, 1946, EBH, A300/24, CZA.

62 Calendar: January-February, 1946, HHPL.

63 Ben-Horin to Silver, Jan. 23, 1946, EBH, A300/24, CZA. The only area of disagreement involved Ben-Horin’s recommendation to Hoover that “his plan should be shaped along the lines of exchange of population rather than transfer, meaning approximately 700,000 Jews living in Arab lands who could be transferred to Palestine in exchange for the Palestine Arabs moving to Iraq.” According to Ben-Horin, Hoover agreed that the suggestion was “a great improvement on his original idea.” Silver, however, objected: “I don’t think that it will be helpful at this time to talk about the removal of 700,000 Jews, living in Arab lands, in a population-exchange scheme. The mind of the Jewish public is not yet prepared for it. Many Jews of North Africa, particularly those of Egypt, will raise furious objection, and we will find ourselves involved in a bitter controversy with our own people. What you have in mind may come as a by-product to the development of the scheme. There is no use raising controversial issues at this stage which might defeat the entire project.” See Ben-Horin to Silver, Jan. 23, 1946, A300/24, CZA; Silver to Ben-Horin, Jan. 25, 1946, A300/24, CZA.

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Silver, pleased by Ben-Horin's report, urged him to "let Mr. Hoover organize the committee" since the ex-president "can get prominent people much more readily than we can to join the committee."<sup>64</sup> He did so. Utilizing Hoover's contacts and recommendations, Ben-Horin and Friedman brought together a small group of business executives and engineering experts for two preliminary meetings on February 4 and March 4. The second meeting concluded by appointing a subcommittee to hold further consultations with Hoover,<sup>65</sup> but those consultations were never held, for on March 1, 1946 Hoover agreed to a request by President Harry Truman to chair a Famine Emergency Committee to examine the postwar food shortages in Europe and Asia.<sup>66</sup> By the time Hoover's three-month mission was complete, numerous new causes were competing for his attention and his interest in the Iraq scheme had faded. Ben-Horin and the AZEC, for their part, were by mid-1946 increasingly preoccupied with the diplomatic struggle for Jewish statehood. The Hoover plan was set aside.

It was not, however, set aside for long, because the events that accompanied the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 presented a new opportunity for the promotion of Hoover's ideas. During that war, approximately 700,000 Arabs fled from the new Jewish state.<sup>67</sup> The vast majority of the refugees settled in areas contiguous with the borders of the new state, and their presence in areas adjacent

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64 Silver to Ben-Horin, Jan. 25, 1946, EBH, A300/24, CZA.

65 Fohs to Friedman, Jan. 30, 1946, PPS-Jewish-Zionist, HHPL; Friedman to Hoover, Feb. 5, 1946, PPS-Jewish-Zionist, HHPL; Ben-Horin to Silver, March 5, 1946, EBH, A300/24, CZA; Fondiller to Hoover, March 6, 1946, PPS-Jewish-Zionist, HHPL.

66 On two occasions during his global journal Hoover had the opportunity to further the Palestine-Iraq transfer plan, but he rejected both as diversions from his assigned mission. When he reached Cairo, Hoover received a cable from Silver and Wise urging him to visit Palestine; he replied that such a trip was unnecessary since there was no famine in the Holy Land. See Silver and Wise to Hoover, April 19, 1946, EBH, A300/39, CZA; Hoover to Wise, April 23, 1946, Box 68: Folder 4, Stephen S. Wise Papers, American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Mass. On his way to Iraq, Hoover directed his pilot to "fly up and down the Tigris and Euphrates valley so as to get a glimpse of the old irrigation systems," but during his April 21 meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Hamdi Al-Pachachi, Hoover did not broach the subject of his transfer plan. See entries for April 18–22, 1946, PPS-Famine Emergency Committee-World Mission: General: HH Diary 1946 Journey, HHPL. Also see Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic, Volume IV* (Chicago: 1964), 173, 178.

67 The motive for their flight is the subject of considerable controversy. See Benny Morris, "Israel: The New Historiography," *Tikkun*, 3:6 (November/December 1988), 19–23, 99–102, and Shabtai Tevet, "Charging Israel With Original Sin," *Commentary*, 88:3 (September 1989), 24–33.

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to Israel lent drama and color to the demand by the Arab states that the refugees be permitted to return to their former homes. That demand was endorsed by the United Nations Mediator for Palestine, Count Folke Bernadotte, in September 1948 and soon thereafter by the Truman Administration. Israel resisted the idea, fearful of the security dangers posed by the influx of large numbers of hostile refugees, the economic hardships that such an influx would impose upon the struggling young nation, and the demographic problem that would arise if the Jewish state were inhabited by a substantial Arab population.

In April 1949, as international pressure for return of the refugees intensified, Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Shertok enlisted Ben-Horin — still on the staff of the AZEC — as a one-man lobby for a revived Hoover plan that would press for the refugees to be resettled in Iraq. Working closely with Abba Hillel Silver and the new Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, Aubrey (later Abba) Eban, Ben-Horin spent three busy months writing articles and meeting with politicians in an effort to win converts to the updated Hoover plan. Hoover himself continued to function as a surrogate for Zionist aims, but this time in a far more reserved capacity. Slowed by his age (74), preoccupied with his work as chairman of President Truman's Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, and discouraged by the failure of his private attempt to convince President Truman to include resettlement of the Arab refugees in the Marshall Plan,<sup>68</sup> Hoover gave Ben-Horin his blessing and allowed his name to be used but did little else to further the effort.<sup>69</sup>

More significant assistance — albeit coincidental — was provided behind the scenes by James McDonald. Now serving as the first American ambassador in Israel, McDonald sent Secretary of State Dean Acheson reports in early 1949 urging “detailed study” of the possibilities for resettlement of Palestinian Arab refugees

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68 McDonald to Hoover, Oct. 19, 1948 and Hoover to McDonald, Oct. 29, 1948, PPI-McDonald, James G., HHPL; Hoover to Truman, Jan. 21, 1949, PPI-Truman, Harry, HHPL; Truman to Hoover, Jan. 25, 1949, PPI-Truman, Harry, HHPL. There was only one tangible result of Hoover's approach to Truman; Hoover sent a copy of his letter to W. Hallam Tuck, the director-general of the Geneva-based International Refugee Organization, who was so impressed by Hoover's proposal that he sent the Secretary-General of the United Nations a cable urging implementation of the Iraq transfer scheme. See Tuck to Hoover, Feb. 9, 1946 and April 19, 1946, PPI-Tuck, W. Hallam, HHPL.

69 Ben-Horin to Sharett, 2402/15-A, Records of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter IMFA), Jerusalem.

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in the Arab world, suggesting that such resettlement could be financed in part by “an international loan similar to that which under League of Nations auspices made possible the transfer of more than a million Greeks from Smyrna and vicinity to their motherland.”<sup>70</sup>

Ben-Horin’s opening salvo was an April 12 op-ed piece in the *Christian Science Monitor*, detailing the advantages of Iraq as a site for Palestinian Arab settlement.<sup>71</sup> His initial circulation of the article, together with a more detailed exposition of the new Hoover plan, elicited endorsements from Senators John Sparkman, Margaret Chase Smith, Homer Ferguson and Owen Brewster (who placed the article in the *Congressional Record*); Representatives Eugene Keogh and Emanuel Celler; former Secretary of State Sumner Welles; and former Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter.<sup>72</sup>

Ben-Horin was “especially delighted”<sup>73</sup> by the response of former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who wrote to say that the plan was “excellent” and that she had “sent it to the President.”<sup>74</sup> Ben-Horin immediately telephoned Eban to relay the good news, and dashed off a letter to Silver to announce, “We found a good ‘shaliakh’ [emissary] to the White House.”<sup>75</sup>

Hoping to press the matter further with “people close to the President,”<sup>76</sup> Ben-Horin hurried to Washington for meetings with Senator Paul Douglas,<sup>77</sup> Felix Frankfurter, Representative Christian Herter, Undersecretary of the Interior Oscar Chapman, and David Niles, the President’s liaison to the Jewish community, all of whom, Ben-Horin later reported, “expressed themselves in sympathy with the Plan.”<sup>78</sup> Ben-Horin was convinced that, due in

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70 McDonald to Acheson, Feb. 22, 1949, 501.BB Palestine/2-2249, National Archives (hereafter NA), Washington, D.C.

71 Eliahu Ben-Horin, “Iraq Urged as Refuge for Arab Refugees,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 12, 1949.

72 Ben-Horin to Hoover, May 11, 1949, PPI-Ben-Horin, Eliahu, HHPL.

73 Ben-Horin to Silver, May 17, 1949, Abba Hillel Silver Papers (hereafter AHS), The Temple, Cleveland, Ohio.

74 Ben-Horin to Silver, May 9, 1949, AHS.

75 Ben-Horin to Eban, May 16, 1949, 3037/11, IMFA; Ben-Horin to Silver, May 9, 1949, AHS.

76 Ben-Horin to Silver, June 2, 1949, AHS.

77 Ben-Horin to Douglas, May 9, 1949, Box X: Folder 4-“1949 AZEC-AZC Correspondence,” AZEC.

78 Ben-Horin to Buxton, May 27, 1949, EBH, A300/16, CZA. Niles asked Ben-Horin for a memorandum about the plan, promising to show it to Truman, although there is no record of his having done so. The memorandum bore Ben-Horin’s name but was actually drafted by Benjamin Akzin, a longtime

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part to his lobbying, "official thinking on the problem is leaning more and more towards a solution by resettlement."<sup>79</sup> Eban, too, believed that "remarkable progress" had been made via the Hoover project.<sup>80</sup>

Ben-Horin's optimism was further buoyed in June, when he met with Clarence Pickett, executive director of the American Friends Service Committee, whom he sought (unsuccessfully) to enlist as one of the leaders of the public committee to promote the Hoover plan. Pickett, who expressed sympathy for the plan, relayed to Ben-Horin the news that the State Department had decided that "a working group would be appointed which would prepare plans for the resettlement of the Arab refugees." Pickett, together with other church representatives and a number of oil company executives, had attended a preliminary State Department conference on the subject on June 15 and reported to Ben-Horin that Hoover was one of three prominent Americans' whose names had been suggested to chair the "working group."<sup>81</sup>

In fact, however, either Pickett misunderstood what was said about Hoover at the State Department conference, or Ben-Horin misunderstood what Pickett relayed to him, because the belief that Hoover was State's preference for the post was just wishful thinking. The "working group" project, directed by the State Department's Coordinator of Palestine Refugee Matters, George McGhee, was meant to be a full-scale survey mission that would conduct on-site investigations of resettlement possibilities in the Middle East. Hoover "was never seriously considered," according to McGhee, because "at his age [75], he would not have been able to undertake such a strenuous task."<sup>82</sup>

Another reason why McGhee and his colleagues decided to

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leader of the Revisionist Zionists who was working alongside Ben-Horin on the staff of the AZEC. See Ben-Horin to Herlitz, June 6, 1949, 3037/11, IMFA, and Ben-Horin to Silver, June 2, 1949, AHS.

79 Ben-Horin to McDonald, June 24, 1949, EBH, A300/47, CZA.

80 Eban to Ben-Horin, June 24, 1949, 3037/11, IMFA.

81 Ben-Horin to Eban, May 16, 1949, 3073/11, IMFA; Pickett to Ben-Horin, May 11, 1949, "Individuals-Eliahu Ben-Horin," American Friends Service Committee Archives (hereafter AFSC), Philadelphia; Ben-Horin to Pickett, May 18, 1949, "General Administration-Foreign Service-Palestine," AFSC; Ben-Horin to Herlitz, June 6, 1949, 3037/11, IMFA; Ben-Horin to Hoover, June 7, 1949, EBH, A300/24, CZA; "Journal of Clarence Pickett, 1949-1950," entry for June 15, 1949, AFSC; Colin W. Bell, "Report on Meeting at New State Department Building, Washington, June 15, 1949," Country: Palestine-U.S. Government, State Department, AFSC.

82 George C. McGhee, telephone interview with the author, Feb. 23, 1989; George McGhee, *Envoy to the Middle World* (New York: 1983), p. 41.



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bypass Hoover was that the former president's entire conception of how the Middle East conflict should be resolved clashed with the State Department's approach. While Hoover envisioned a mass resettlement program that would surely take years to implement, senior State Department officials were convinced that there would be "a political crisis in the Near East" unless the U.S. took immediate action to alleviate the plight of the refugees.<sup>83</sup> The State Department regarded the Arab world as "an area of vital strategic importance, a communications center, and a major source of petroleum" which had become "a vulnerable area for Soviet exploitation, and the presence of 700,000 destitute, idle refugees provides the likeliest channel for such exploitation."<sup>84</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense seconded this view and recommended that the U.S. "contribute to the relief of these refugees because of the importance of improving relations with the Arab states in view of their strategic importance."<sup>85</sup>

By mid-summer, George McGhee was warning Secretary of State Acheson that if America failed to intervene, there could be "widespread starvation among the refugees, attended by further deterioration of present conditions of unrest which would be exploited by communist and opportunist elements and would gravely endanger the security of the Near East."<sup>86</sup> State was looking, then, for speedy relief, and American and British officials estimated that it would take more than five years, and possibly as much as ten years, until Iraq would be suitable as a site for resettling large numbers of refugees.<sup>87</sup> The man who was chosen to head the Economic Survey Mission to the Middle East,<sup>88</sup> Gordon Clapp, adhered closely to the State Department view; he led a two-week mission to the Middle East in the autumn of 1949 which concluded by recommending a program of short-term work relief for the refugees rather than their permanent resettlement.<sup>89</sup>

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83 Satterthwaite to Acheson, March 1, 1949, 867N.48/3-149, NA.

84 "Palestine Refugees" policy paper (apparently authored by George McGhee), March 15, 1949, 501.MA Palestine/3-1749, NA.

85 *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948, 5:1479.

86 McGhee to Acheson, July 13, 1949, 501.BB Palestine/7-1349, NA.

87 McGhee to Ethridge, May 3, 1949, George C. McGhee Papers (hereafter GCM), Special Collections Division, Georgetown University Library, Washington, D.C.; Memorandum of Conversation, "Meeting re Arab Refugees," April 13, 1949, 867 N.48/4-2149, NA.

88 For details of the selection process, see McGhee to the Acting Secretary, June 3, 1949, GCM, and McGhee to The Secretary, Aug. 2, 1949, GCM.

89 *NYT*, Dec. 21, 1949, 21. Ironically, when Israeli officials met with Clapp in October and argued in favor of resettling the refugees in Arab countries, Clapp

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Hoover's plan for resolving the Palestine conflict combined his genuine sympathy for refugees with what the historian Joan Hoff-Wilson has called Hoover's "commitment to find apolitical,

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replied that "resettlement as [a] solution had been made next to impossible even to discuss with the Arab States, in fact because Israelis had identified it as their proposal." Clapp may have been referring to comments by Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Shertok endorsing the resettlement idea, which appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*. See Clapp to Acheson, Oct. 13, 1949, 501.BB Palestine (E)/10-1349, telegram, NA; Anne O'Hare McCormick, "Shertok Favors Israeli Aid to Resettle Arab Refugees," *NYT*, January 17, 1949, 1; Anne O'Hare McCormick, "Israel Speeds Resettlement of Areas Left by the Arabs," *NYT*, January 18, 1949, 1.

Ben-Horin continued to promote the Hoover plan even after budget cuts compelled his dismissal from the staff of the AZEC in December 1949. While searching for permanent employment (the versatile Ben-Horin worked, for varying periods, as director of economic information for Israel Bonds, as a field underwriter for the Mutual Life Insurance Company, and as a freelance journalist) Ben-Horin went out of his way to say a good word for the Hoover plan — in essays he wrote for Zionist journals, in his "Middle East Cockpit" Column for *The Reconstructionist*, and in unsigned editorials he authored for *Congress Monthly*, the publication of the American Jewish Congress. In 1959 Ben-Horin tried unsuccessfully to establish a "Committee For an Arab Refugee Solution." The draft proposal for the Committee — which never left the drawing board — envisaged Hoover and Truman as honorary chairmen, James McDonald as chairman and Ben-Horin as executive vice-chairman. See Box 62: Binder "AZC Executive Committee Minutes, 9/12/49-9/23/52," AZEC; "Committee For an Arab Refugee Solution-Memorandum by Eliahu Ben-Horin," May 15, 1959, EBH, A300/5, CZA.

James McDonald's enthusiasm for the Hoover plan likewise persisted long after the plan had departed from the realm of serious public consideration. "Years ago, long before other American leaders, you foresaw the need to shift Arab settlers from Palestine to Iraq . . .," the former ambassador wrote Hoover in 1951. "Now anyone can see how advantageous such a move would have been to all concerned." Five years later, McDonald authored a 950-word letter in the *New York Times* advocating a slightly amended Hoover plan as the solution to the ongoing plight of the Arab refugees. See McDonald to Hoover, May 22, 1951, File: Hoover, JGM; *NYT*, March 4, 1956, 4:10.

The only attempt to actually lure Hoover himself back into the public debate over refugee resettlement was made in late 1951 by Freda Kirchwey, editor and publisher of the liberal weekly *The Nation*. Kirchwey invited Hoover to join an ad hoc group of dignitaries who endorsed a memorandum to the United Nations on the refugee question. It advocated a resettlement solution similar to Hoover's and quoted the original Hoover plan as one of its supporting documents. Hoover declined, citing protocol: "I do not think it would be appropriate for me to make recommendations to the United Nations," he wrote Kirchwey. The memorandum was submitted to the U.N. without Hoover's endorsement. See Kirchwey to Hoover, Nov. 28, 1951, Kirchwey to Hoover, Dec. 4, 1951, and Miller to Kirchwey, Dec. 7, 1951, all in PPS-Palestine, HHPL.

Hoover's lone public reference to the refugee issue after 1949 was made in 1958, when he was asked to send a message to a meeting of the American Committee to Benefit Arab Refugees. The pro-Arab organization had appar-

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economic solutions to complex foreign problems.”<sup>90</sup> The plan appealed to American Zionist leaders because it offered them an opportunity to have a prominent non-Jew advocate policies that they privately admired but feared to endorse in public. It appealed to Israeli leaders because it offered them an avenue of influencing American opinion on an issue of crucial importance to the fledgling Jewish state.

Arab leaders, for their part, regarded the Hoover plan as confirmation of their worst fears about Zionist intentions. Iraqi newspapers denounced it as a “devilish” conspiracy by the Jews and the Americans to uproot Palestine’s Arabs.<sup>91</sup> Privately several of the Arab regimes hinted that they were willing to cooperate in a resettlement program — but Transjordan was only referring to the handful of refugees who did not want to return to Palestine,<sup>92</sup> while the offer by Syrian Prime Minister Hosni Zaim to accept 250,000 refugees was conditional on the surrender to Syria of the “panhandle of Palestine, part of eastern Galilee and Western Galilee to Acre,” that is, a substantial portion of northern Israel.<sup>93</sup> In any event, the inherent instability of the Arab governments militated against the realization of so controversial a policy. Even if Hosni Zaim, for example, was serious about absorbing Palestinian refugees, was his signature worth the paper it was written on? Three months after Zaim made his proposal about accepting refugees he was overthrown and executed by political rivals who expressed no interest in absorbing refugees. A more intriguing proposal was made by the prime minister of Iraq, Nuri as-Said. On May 9 he told the U.S. ambassador in Baghdad that he would consider the idea of a “voluntary exchange on pro rata basis of Iraqi Jews for Palestine Arabs.”<sup>94</sup> But Nuri’s tentative feelers could not suffice to set wheels in motion.

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ently expected the former president to merely express sympathy for the plight of the refugees and recommend donations to their cause. Instead, Hoover took advantage of the opportunity to recall his 1945 plan for settling the refugees in Iraq. “In those areas these refugees could be settled on productive lands and among their own race — and only bus transportation distant,” Hoover declared. “I know of no other real solution.” See “Remarks before the American Committee to Benefit Arab Refugees,” November 17, 1958,” PPS-Arab Refugee Relief, HHPL.

90 Joan Hoff-Wilson, “A Reevaluation of Herbert Hoover’s Foreign Policy,” in Martin L. Fausold, ed., *The Hoover Presidency: A Reappraisal* (Albany, N. Y.: 1974), p. 169.

91 Ben-Horin to Hoover, Nov. 27, 1945, PPS-Jewish-Zionist, HHPL.

92 Stabler to Acheson, May 1, 1949, 501.BB Palestine/5-149, NA.

93 Ethridge to Acheson, May 9, 1949, 501.BB Palestine/5-949, NA.

94 Crocker to Acheson, May 10, 1949, 867N.01/5-1049, NA. Nuri later men-

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What was required to implement anything resembling the Hoover plan was a commitment by the United States government to see it through “in disregard” — as Eliahu Ben-Horin put it — “of the wishes of this or that uncooperative community.” But as we have seen, State Department policymakers were strongly influenced by what they saw as the value of close relations with the Arab world. Ben-Horin’s one-man lobby was, in a sense, pitted against the persuasive power of oil interests, the strategic value of the Arabian peninsula and U.S. fears of Soviet expansionism.<sup>95</sup>

The Hoover plan failed primarily because it was rooted in assumptions that ignored political reality. Hoover’s expectation that the economic advantages of relocating to Iraq would suffice to lure Palestinian Arabs from their native villages seriously underestimated the extent to which Arab nationalist sentiment had spread in Palestine. It also ignored the fact that some of the Arabs in Palestine were recent arrivals from other Arab countries who were prospering thanks to the Jewish development of Palestine and were therefore unlikely to consider uprooting themselves. Hoover’s hope that underpopulated Arab states would welcome an influx of peasant laborers also failed to take into account the determination of the Arab leaders to resist any plan that might benefit Israel.

Most of all, Hoover was relying on “the Great Powers” to implement his vision of a “solution by engineering instead of by conflict” at a time when those “Great Powers” had very different ideas about the Arab-Israeli conflict. Washington was too anxious about cultivating friends in the Arab world to consider coercing Iraq into absorbing 700,000 refugees. London, for its part, regarded the notion that lay at the heart of the Hoover plan, “that the problem in Palestine is fundamentally an economic rather than a political one,” as an “incorrect assumption.” Furthermore, British officials were convinced that it would be at least “six to

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tioned the idea to Gordon Clapp when the Economic Survey Mission visited Baghdad. See *NYT*, Oct. 16, 1949, 29; *NYT*, Oct. 18, 1949, 15; and *NYT*, Nov. 5, 1949, 6. For an assessment of Nuri’s motives and the circumstances surrounding the proposal, see Rees to Levy, Nov. 9, 1949, “Iraq-Government & Press, ’49-1951-1952,” FAD-1, Record Group 347, American Jewish Committee Archives (hereafter AJCA), YIVO Institute, New York, and Shuster to Slawson, Nov. 23, 1949, “Iraq, General 1945-1950,” FAD-1, Record Group 347, AJCA.

<sup>95</sup> “Palestine Refugees” policy paper (apparently authored by George McGhee), March 15, 1949, 501.MA Palestine/3-1749, NA.

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ten years” before Iraq could be readied for a large influx of refugees.<sup>96</sup>

In the postwar atmosphere of European population exchanges, the idea of a Palestine-Iraq exchange seemed entirely realistic to Hoover and his American Zionist sympathizers. But whereas population transfer may have suited the Allies’ political and military interests in Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary, it was a method of conflict resolution that did not coincide with the Great Powers’ interests in the Middle East. Ultimately, Hoover’s plan was less a missed opportunity to resolve the Arab-Zionist conflict than it was wishful thinking based on a misreading of the super-powers’ intentions in the Middle East.

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96 Shuckburgh to Norman, Feb. 5, 1938, CO733/333/75156/35, PRO; Memorandum of Conversation, “Meeting re Arab Refugees,” April 13, 1949, 867N.48/4-2149, NA.